

The Bread of Life

John 6:35-71

by Leon Barnes

Seven times in John's gospel account Jesus is recorded as saying, "I am. . . ." John 6:35-71 is the first. These seven statements are Jesus' autobiography. They are His own explanation of what He is all about. This declaration is given against the background of His miracle of feeding the five thousand and the people's clamor for Him to give them a sign comparable to Moses' feeding their forefathers in the wilderness with manna. It marks the transition in Jesus' ministry. Up to this point, crowds have gathered around Him. This chapter will record many leaving, never to return.

Chapter 6 is John's only record of the two-year middle span of Jesus' ministry. It will conclude with the great confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi.

I. THE DECLARATION: "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE. . . ."

Bread sustains life. It stands for all food. Without it we cannot go on. Life means more than physical existence. The spiritual life is included too. It is a new relationship with God, involving trust, intimacy, obedience, and love. It is a relationship only made possible through Jesus. "No one comes to the Father, but through Me" (14:6). If we come to Christ by faith, the results in our lives will be satisfaction and fulfillment. We will never hunger or thirst again.

But how do we take of this Bread of Life? Jesus said, "Eat My flesh and drink My blood" (6:55, 56). This seems like a strange statement to us, but if we had lived at that time we could have understood much easier.

In ancient sacrificing, the animal was seldom burned entirely. A token part was burned on the altar, another part was given to the priest for food, and another part was given to the

worshipper so he could feast with his friends within the temple precincts. They believed God Himself attended the feast, and since the animal had been offered as sacrifice, God was in the meat. Therefore, the worshipper, in eating the flesh, was eating God. When they left the feast they believed they were God-filled. Thus, Jesus is declaring that we must take Him into our very being. The partaking of the Lord's Supper should remind us of this presence and commitment.

II. THE REACTION: REJECTION AND SUBMISSION

The Jews' Reaction

The Jews' reaction to Jesus' claim was not good. They murmured and grumbled about it (6:41). They judged Him by human values, not eternal standards. They made comments like, "How can He say He came down from heaven?" and "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" They could not believe that a carpenter or the son of a carpenter could be God's messenger.

They also quarreled among themselves (6:52). They became so engrossed in their own arguments, it never occurred to them to find out what God's will was. They needed to listen rather than speak. They ended up rejecting the Bread of Life.

The Disciples' Reaction

The disciples declared this to be a "difficult statement" (6:60). The word *difficult* does not mean "hard to understand" but "hard to accept or tolerate." The degree of commitment demanded was hard to accept. Time and again the reason men reject Christ is not intellectual difficulty but the height of His demands. He demands a total surrender to Himself as the final

authority. He demands a moral standard wherein only the pure in heart see God.

Some of the disciples defected when they heard this (6:66). They were "fair weather" disciples. Everything was fine as long as Jesus was popular. But when the Cross began to loom into view, they wanted no part of it.

One disciple, Judas, deteriorated (6:70, 71). He had started with so much promise, yet ended a traitor. In the painting of the Last Supper, the same man is painted as Jesus and Judas, only several years apart.

But the other eleven were determined (Mat-

thew 16:13-16). They knew there was no other alternative. When Christ asked if they wanted to go away also, Peter answered, "To whom shall we go?" (6:67, 68). There is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12). Christ alone had the Words of Life. Peter's loyalty was based on a personal relationship with Christ. There was still much he did not understand. He was as puzzled and bewildered as anyone, but he knew Jesus. Jesus is the Christ.

CONCLUSION

What is your reaction to Jesus as the Bread of Life? Will you be His true disciple?

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