

John 6: 1-21 What Happened to the Crowd? 29/7/12 Rev. Vincent Gardner

In John 6 a large number of people begin a journey with Jesus. They have experienced His goodness. They are among the 5000 men plus women and children who enjoy loaves and fishes courtesy of the King of Kings. Can you imagine the excitement they felt when Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes?

What an experience! They had already heard Him speak as no man had ever spoken. They had already seen Him heal the sick and deliver the oppressed. They were thrilled at what Jesus has done and eager to see what He will do next.

I. Excited Crowd.

They are so excited they want to make Jesus their king. He must be their king. They will insist that he lead them as king. Notice what they are saying in verse 14, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come..." Moses had prophesied that God would raise up a prophet like himself to lead God's people into liberty. Deut 18:15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."

Surely this is the Messiah. Surely this is the One we have been waiting for. Surely Jesus will free us from the tyranny of Rome, just like Moses freed Israel from the tyranny of Egypt. This is exactly what we need. Their Excitement is based upon what?

To some extent it was based upon what they had already seen Jesus do—the healings, the miracles, the feeding of the five thousand. But mostly their excitement was based upon what they EXPECTED Jesus to do for them. If you've got a leader who can supercede the laws of nature— if you've got a leader who can heal sick bodies and multiply food supernaturally, you've got a good start toward great success. Life could really get good under Jesus' leadership.

It's a wonderful thing to be excited about Jesus. Every one of us should live with a sense of expectation and anticipation of God's goodness. God is good—all the time. He is a good God and it is His good pleasure to give us the kingdom. But the assumptions behind the excitement are crucial. If I am excited about becoming a millionaire this afternoon at 1:00 o'clock, that is good cause to be excited. But if that excitement is based upon a false assumption then what is going to happen? If I have assumed that Donald Trump is sending a representative to give me a million dollars this afternoon and if Donald has no intention of doing any such thing, how am I going to feel this evening?

This crowd is excited—but their bubble is about to be burst. Their excitement is based upon

some false assumptions about Jesus—the assumption that Jesus has come to be their political leader, the assumption that Jesus has come to make life easy for them, the assumption that Jesus has come to give them what they want.

How does Jesus respond to their excitement? First, he sends the disciples away. Why? Because they are vulnerable to the influence of the crowd. They too want Jesus to be a political activist. They too want to move from the bottom of the social ladder to the top. They too want earthly power and influence. That will be evident when the mother of James and John makes her request that each of her boys sit on the right and on the left of Jesus. The disciples' response to that request and the disciples' The argument over who will be greatest in the kingdom give us a glimpse inside their minds. For their own good Jesus sends them across the lake away from all this excitement.

Then, instead of seizing the momentum of the crowd, Jesus withdrew to the mountain by himself. This crowd saw Jesus send the disciples away on the only boat to the other shore. They knew Jesus had not gone with them. They did not know about Jesus walking on the water and rescuing the disciples in the storm. They did not know about how the boat miraculously, immediately arrived at the other side as soon as Jesus joined the disciples.

Eventually the crowd got into boats in search of Jesus. They are looking for Him everywhere. "How, Jesus, are we going to make you our king when we can't even find you? It is a good thing when people search for Jesus. I'm glad for every person sitting in a church this morning. But if there is one thing this chapter teaches us it is this—why we are there searching for Jesus is also important. These people were not apathetic. They were passionately and aggressively trying to find Jesus. They are an excited crowd. You and I would like their church services—lots of energy in the air, lots of enthusiasm, lots of expectation.

When they find Jesus they ask Him a question. It's not exactly the question they want to ask. They want to ask, "Why did you leave?" They want to ask, "How in the world did you get over here without a boat?" But instead they ask a safer question—one that might yield the answers they seek without much risk. John 6:25, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

If you look closely at verse 26, you'll find that Jesus didn't even bother to answer that question. Instead Jesus addresses the much more important issue—the issue of why they were seeking Him in the first place. "...You are looking for me, not because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." You are excited about all the wrong things.

You are seeking me for all the wrong reasons. I gave you a miraculous sign. Within that miracle was a message about who I am. You totally missed the point.

In December 1903, after many attempts, the Wright Brothers were finally successful in getting their "flying machine" off the ground. Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine back home in Ohio. "We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas." Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, "How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas." He totally missed the big news! Man had flown!

Jesus has given the sign of the provision of bread. It was a revelation of Him as the Bread of Life. It was a revelation of Him as the spiritual provision every person needs. It was a revelation of Him as the compassionate Messiah that He is. But these people were blind to the true message. They had preconceived ideas of what God through Jesus should and would do for them. They were very busy trying to push Jesus into the mold they had prepared for Him.

I have seen this many times in people's lives—excited about Jesus—not the real Jesus but the Jesus they have assumed. It is a very unstable form of excitement. So Jesus confronts it. He addresses their motive for following Him. Jesus always does that in our lives one way or another. It may come through a sermon like this. It may come through the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit during a time of personal prayer and devotion.

It may come through some event in our lives that challenges our faith—an event in which God does not behave the way we think He ought to behave.

But Jesus will not lead us based on false assumptions. When Jesus began to address these false assumptions, they became the

II. Grumbling Crowd

Their first question was rather benign. Verse 28, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" "OK, Jesus what do you want us to do? We want you to be our king. How do we get this show on the road?" The answer was not what they expected. "The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent." They were believing in the Messiah they had conceived, not the One the Father has sent.

The Sent One is standing before them revealing Himself as He truly is. If they will accept Him as He really is, if they will abandon their own agenda and allow Him to truly lead, if they will place all their trust in Him and simply obey Him because of their confidence in Him, everything else will fall into place.

I think I hear the conversation becoming a bit strained in verse 30, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?" They have just experienced one of the greatest miracles ever recorded in human history. That did not satisfy them. Now they

are putting demands upon Jesus. Now they suggest to Him what He needs to do to convince them.

“Moses gave our forefather manna in the wilderness! Can you match that? ”

It was commonly assumed by the Jews at that time that when Messiah would come he would give manna like Moses did. In their writing (2 Baruch 29:8) it was written, “It will happen...that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years.”

So, Jesus, this is what you need to do to get us to follow you, make manna come down.

Have you ever tried to make Jesus do something so you will follow Him?

He is full of grace and sometimes He will accommodate our frailties. But Jesus has already done everything He needs to do to prove His love to us and to expect us to follow Him.

“Greater love has no one than this, that He would lay down His life for His friends.”

Jesus laid down His life on the cross for you and me. He voluntarily took the punishment for sin that each of us deserves. He has nothing else to prove. No miracle, no answer to prayer can compare to that demonstration of love toward us. It is on the basis of that sacrifice and the miracle of His resurrection that He expects you and me to believe on Him.

So Jesus corrects these people on a couple of crucial points: First, God was the one who gave you the manna, not Moses. Moses was simply an instrument in His hand. Second, My Father, who is God, has now sent you the true bread from heaven.

They are still on this “What’s in it for me track”. So, they answer Jesus, “Ok, then from now on give us this bread.” Do you realize what it would do for your personal budget to not have to buy any food? Food was an even more significant part of the budget for these people. These guys are thinking of how easy life would be if the food budget were just provided miraculously.

They are trapped in a materialistic mindset. Jesus is offering them something eternal—something of more value than anything in this world. But they are so caught up in their own materialistic world that they cannot seem to hear it. Karl Marx said that religion was the opiate of the masses—something to keep the poor happy and ignorant of their economic oppression. But for these people the opposite is true. It’s actually materialism that’s their narcotic; materialism has deadened them to their spiritual state.

Here is the revelation that they must receive—John 6:35, “Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life.” In the book of John, Jesus uses the term “I am” to declare His deity and to reveal Himself to the people. It is the same term Moses heard from the burning bush. Jesus is using bread to illustrate Himself as the giver and sustainer of spiritual life.

Just as bread, especially in that culture, sustains physical life, Jesus is sent down from heaven as the bread that gives and sustains spiritual life. Rather than embracing Jesus’ correction of their understanding of Him, they begin to grumble. They grumble because he said that He came down from heaven—verse 41.

“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He say, “I came down from heaven?” Again they are operating out of false assumptions about Jesus. They assume Joseph is His father. But Jesus was not conceived by Joseph. God is Jesus’ Father.(17)

They are beginning to draw back from Jesus. Even when Jesus clarifies His statement significantly—even when Jesus contrasts Himself as the bread from heaven to the manna in the wilderness— still they don’t receive His correction. The manna in the wilderness only sustained physical life and only did that for 40 years. Those people still died. In contrast, Jesus offers eternal life to all those who partake of Him.

“Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from God.” “In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God and the word was God” John 1:14 “The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

Jesus specifically tells them in verse 51, “...This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” The cross is clearly in mind when He says those words—“my flesh...which I will give for the life of the world.”

Now the grumbling crowd is becoming the

III. Offended Crowd

They begin to argue among themselves. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Notice, in verse 52, they are no longer calling him Rabbi, and they are certainly not calling him Lord— “this man”, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

Jesus is communicating a spiritual truth about Himself using the metaphor of bread and now his own body. They are carnally minded and can only think in terms of the physical.

"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

Here is the cross before Jesus.(19) On that cross He will give His flesh and His blood for the salvation of humanity. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin."(20) Without the sacrifice of Calvary there is no salvation. Jesus will give His flesh and blood on the cross that we may have eternal life. But that sacrifice must be appropriated by faith. That's what Jesus means when He says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life..." The sacrifice must be received. God's means of salvation must be embraced.

There is nothing in this that is appealing to man's prideful heart. This is not what these people wanted to hear. They are repulsed by the very thought. Their law forbids the drinking of blood. They are not cannibals. But Jesus is not talking about a physical act of eating and drinking. He is speaking metaphorically. He is talking about a spiritual act of faith whereby we receive the sacrifice of the cross—we receive and assimilate into our spiritual being the life of Christ that is ours through the cross.

The cross is a stumbling block that cannot be ignored. Either one accepts God's provision and receives it or one is offended and insists upon his own ideas of what must be done to do the works of God.

Jesus is not specifically talking about the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, Communion—whichever term most familiar to you. But His message here looks forward to the same event that the Eucharist looks back to in remembrance.

It is all about Christ crucified. It is not about political power and social advantage. God may grant those things according to His purposes. He did so for Joseph and for Daniel. But following Jesus is about His Life—it is about a quality of life that is above the things of this world. "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" They were not saying they could not understand his message. They were saying we understand it but do not accept it. Of course, they were understanding it on a physical, materialistic level rather than on a spiritual level the way Jesus was saying it. But to put it bluntly, they did not at all like what they were hearing.

So, Jesus asked them the question, "Does this offend you?" They were no longer the excited

crowd. They were now the offended crowd. Verse 66 "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." They turn back from following the Lord.

When we follow Jesus for the wrong reason, when we're excited about Jesus but that excitement is based upon false assumption, what will happen? We may become offended when Jesus does not fulfill our expectations. Is Jesus fulfilling your expectations? Are those expectations based upon biblical assumptions or false assumptions? Over the years of pastoring I have seen many people become offended at God. I've been a little offended at Him at times myself. In most cases the problem goes all the way back to false assumptions—false assumptions about what my journey with Jesus is about, false assumptions about what God wants to do or is doing. That's why we need to be biblical when we call people to follow Jesus. We need to be honest about what it means to be a follower of Christ.

We may initially be drawn to the Lord because of the loaves and fishes. Maybe our early experiences are all about me and what I want and need. But if I follow Jesus just for the loaves and fishes, if I follow Jesus with only a thought of "what's in it for me", I have missed something very significant. Christianity is not about using Jesus to fulfill all my carnal desires. It not about getting God to give me more stuff and make life more pleasant. That is a byproduct of our relationship with the Lord. It is not the objective. We don't need loaves and fishes, we need the great "I am".

We need the Bread from heaven. We need Jesus! It is all about receiving Him and the love relationship that follows. Jesus turned to the disciples in verse 67 and asked a question, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" He anticipated their answer but the question had to be asked.

When the going really get rough, Peter's answer is a powerful truth to remember. When my faith has been most shaken, I hold to those words, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

We may not understand the circumstances we are experiencing. We may not understand why God is allowing us to go through what we're going through. We may be tempted to toss in the towel and give up. But the truth is there is no place else to go. Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. If I turn to the world, I will come up empty. If I turn to things (material

gain) I will not be satisfied in my soul. If I turn to sensuality and pleasure, I may enjoy it for a season but it will only lead me into bondage. Where can I go but to the Lord?

When it got rough, the apostles did not leave. They did not leave because they were there for a different reason than the crowd. They were not following Jesus for the fishes and the loaves. They were not following Jesus for material gain or for social prestige. They followed Him because they knew He has the words of eternal life. Down deep, with the exception of Judas, they were following for the right reason.

You may be going through a severe testing of your faith at this time in your life. We don't always know what one another are going through. But it is my prayer that when the going really get rough—we will not be offended, we will not turn back from following the Lord.

We will realize as Peter did—where else can we go? Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. There is no place else to go. When you're happy go to Jesus and rejoice in His goodness to you. When you're sad and discouraged, go to Jesus because He alone has the words of eternal life. Never turn back. No matter how perplexed you are with life's circumstances. No matter how badly you may feel you have failed. Go to Jesus. There is no place else to go.

The old song that my great grandmother used to sing said it well, "I will arise and go to Jesus, He'll embrace me in His arms, In the arms of my dear Saviour, Oh, there are ten thousand charms." Especially to that one who is discouraged, Jesus opens His arms to you and says—come and receive My grace—come and receive My strength. Instead of trying to earn my favour, instead of trying to understand My workings, come and trust me with it all. -To that person who feels guilt and shame—Jesus says come to Me today and I will receive you. To that one who is tempted to turn back from following Jesus, He asks you the same searching question He asked Peter, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" May we respond this morning as Peter responded—with a renewed commitment to follow Jesus?