

Jesus Speaks to the Jews

John 6:41-58

In the June 99 issue of Smithsonian Magazine, there appeared an article entitled "PASCAL'S WAGER." In the article, John Ross discussed a theory a mathematician had about God. I quote from the article:

"He [Pascal] asked: "God is, or he is not. Which way should we incline?" Reason, Pascal thought, could never establish definitively whether God exists. For Pascal, believing in God could have two outcomes, depending on whether God exists. If God doesn't exist, nothing will happen to the believer. If God does exist, the believer will be blessed with eternal salvation. The nonbeliever also faces two possible outcomes. If God doesn't exist, he will suffer no consequences. If God does exist, the nonbeliever will face eternal damnation. The nonbeliever faces either no consequences or hell; the believer looks at no consequences or heaven. Faced with heaven or hell, Pascal reasoned, it makes sense to open oneself to faith. While later philosophers have criticized the wager for both its premises and its cynicism, Pascal's logic [according to Ross] remains solid."¹

Simply put, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by believing. Is that why I believe? NO! I believe because the scripture has, as JB Phillips put it, "a ring of truth." But Pascal's wager makes me ask, "Why would anyone not believe?"²

God's Word tells us, "*If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*" (Romans 10:9 NAS).

Christ tried to get this message across to the Jewish people of His day, as we read in the passage we are considering today, John 6:41-51 NAS:

41 Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." 42 They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 "It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and

¹ Smithsonian, June, 1999 p.133.

² Wilson, Jim. *Fresh Illustrations*, "Faith"; Word Search 7, 2006.

learned from the Father, comes to Me. 46 "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. 47 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. 48 "I am the bread of life. 49 "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

Jesus must have been wondering why the Jews here would not believe. Surely they had seen enough to satisfy the most reluctant skeptic. But as usual they did not want to believe in anything that would be in conflict with their preconceived ideas. They had not heard of "Pascal's Wager." Let us now take a closer look at what is going on here.

John 6:41-42 NAS:

⁴¹ *Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven."*

⁴² *They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?"*

Bread was the primary food of people in Bible times. It was made from a variety of grains, often mixed with lentils or beans. The "loaves" were baked flat, about a half inch thick. In the Bible, bread is symbolic as the sustainer of physical life. Thus Jesus' quote: "Man does not live on bread alone" (Matthew 4:4) leads us to believe that human beings require more than physical food for their overall general well-being. And the prayer: "Give us today our daily bread," is an expression of dependence on God to meet all our needs for life in this present world.³

It is lucky for these folks that they were not talking to me instead of Jesus. Because by this time my patience would have been shot. They seem to delight in drawing on any objection they can in order to deny Jesus' deity. He not only proved that deity to them by the miracles He had performed, but had also given them all these promises of salvation, eternal life, and Heaven if they would simply believe what they had been shown to be true in God's Word in their own Old Testament. What might have been controlling their thinking to keep them from accepting the truth?

Satan is a most capable adversary and he has the ability to deceive even the most intelligent people. Even in the light of overwhelming evidence he can convince people that the truth is a lie and that a lie is the truth by appealing to those things that are most important to the person he is working on. For example, if you have been taught all of your life that people of German descent are evil and responsible for all the world's

³ Richards, Larry ; Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Teacher's Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1987, S. 720.

problems, you will very likely be prejudiced against and have a distrust of people who have a German heritage.

Under those circumstances suppose that one day a friend calls and invites you to come to his church to hear a man speak who is quite famous for his ability to reveal the truth of the scriptures. Even though you are not a Christian, you are somewhat curious about what the Bible has to say and you agree to go.

As you sit with your friend in his church, someone up front rises to introduce the speaker. When you hear that his name is Heinrich Von Schnitzeldorf and he begins to speak with a German accent, you are immediately turned off. It will not matter from that point on what he has to say because your anger and resentment toward this man will take over your every emotion. There is nothing he could say that you would not find a good reason to disagree with and you will be ready to distort his words in whatever manner you must to make him look bad. You will leave hating his message as much as you now hate him. We suggest that this was the same basic frame of mind of the Jews here in John 6.

As a matter of fact, based on what Jesus says in verses 44 and 45 of John 6, these Jews probably did not have a faith relationship with God either. Their god was their own power and position and thus they were not drawn to Christ by God. We believe that is exactly what is meant here. Anyone wanting a relationship with Christ must come to the Bible with an open mind putting aside any pre-conceived ideas they might have about the Christian faith. Anyone desiring to know God must approach God with a willing mind and heart.

Was it that they could not get themselves to accept the fact that someone could be greater than Moses? Not even the promised Messiah? Were they simply not able to accept the fact that this son of a carpenter could be greater than their highly esteemed Moses? Their problem was so clearly identified by Jesus back in John chapter five. Remember that these Jewish leaders were the power behind the Jewish religion. If they now accepted this Jesus as the Messiah, they would not only have to relinquish their positions of authority but would have to admit to being fools and hypocrites as well. What do you suppose that would have done to the prestige, wealth, and power they derived from their high offices? They certainly did not want to give that up to someone who had come along and told them that they were making a mess out of the Jewish religion by teaching false doctrine.

They were like many church leaders today who consider themselves capable of changing the original doctrine on which God established His sovereignty, first over the Jews and then over the Church through Jesus Christ. No one is justified in doing that. And anyone who messes around with the original meaning of God's Word is going to experience a much hotter Hell than those who just refuse to believe Him. And how do I know that? There are several passages in Scripture that tell us that, but let us look at just one.

Revelation 22:18-19 NAS:

18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book:

*if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;
19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.*

Their refusal to accept the truth was grounded in their pre-conceived opinions, pride, obstinacy, self-conceit, and a deep-felt contempt for Jesus. Sometimes our own self-will can cloud our judgment and force us to make disastrous decisions. These Jews were in the process of doing just that. After all, the prophets throughout the Old Testament had predicted many things about Jesus' arrival on this earth and about His ministry. That as well should have been additional proof for them. How blind can people be? How tragic for the human race that so many are willing to take the broad road. Some people will stop at nothing to preserve whatever material possessions they have. Here, they tried fabricating a position that made it sound impossible that Jesus could be the Son of God. How could He be the Son of God when everyone knew Him to be the son of a poor carpenter and his wife, Joseph and Mary? But Jesus wants them to have yet another opportunity to accept the truth.

John 6:43-47 NAS:

⁴³ *Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves.*
⁴⁴ *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.*
⁴⁵ *"It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.'*
Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.
⁴⁶ *"Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.*
⁴⁷ *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.*

Their continual refusal to accept Jesus' words simply confirms what Jesus is telling them. A person can give the truth over and over again to an unbeliever, but they will not be able to bring that person to a belief in Christ and the salvation that goes along with it. That can only be done by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the only force that can bring a person to salvation. So, as verse 44 states, only God can draw them to a place of acceptance where His grace will allow for Christ to raise them up on the last day. We have to imagine that Jesus is simply telling them that if they do not believe what He is saying, they are refusing to accept the guidance that God has given them. How could they believe God and God's Word and not believe in Jesus?

People are so caught up in sin and unbelief that unless God draws them (verse 65), they are hopeless. Do you remember what we discussed earlier about how God designed us to be seekers after Him? Romans 1:19-20 NAS:

¹⁹ *because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.*

²⁰ *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*

He has given us all the ability to seek after Him, and if we do that He will point us to Christ. Jesus said, “I . . . will draw all men to Myself” (John 12:32). Those who will be saved will also be resurrected (John 6:39-40).⁴

Jesus then explained in detail how the sinner can come to God: It is through the truth of the Word (John 6:44–45). If one follows God’s leading to seek Him, God will then draw them toward Jesus by His Word. It is through the teaching of the Word that God draws people to Jesus. We just studied in the last chapter, John 5:24: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” The unbeliever hears, learns, and comes as the Father draws him through the Word of the Holy Scriptures. It all depends on whether that person is willing to follow the instincts they know to be right.

This was basically the same message Christ gave after He had healed the paralytic (see John 5:37–40). The crowd wanted to *see* something, but their real need was to *learn* something. It is by the Word that we see God and receive the faith to come to Christ and trust Him. Paul writes in Romans 10:17: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” (NAS)

When Jesus called Himself “***the Living Bread***,” He was not claiming to be exactly like the manna. He was claiming to be even greater! The manna only sustained life for the Jews, but Jesus *gives* life to the whole world. The Jews ate the daily manna and eventually died; but when you receive Jesus Christ within, you live forever. When God gave the manna, He gave only a gift; but when Jesus came, He gave Himself. There was no cost to God in sending the manna each day, but He gave His Son at great cost. The Jews had to eat the manna every day, but the sinner who trusts Christ once is given eternal life.⁵

Most Jewish people believed in both human choice and God’s sovereignty.

The argument here stresses that those in relationship with the Father will recognize Jesus; those who do not recognize him do not know the Father either.⁶

⁴ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:296.

⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 6:22.

⁶ Keener, Craig S. ; InterVarsity Press: *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*. Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1993, S. Jn 6:44.

John 6:47-51 (NAS):

⁴⁷ *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.*
⁴⁸ *"I am the bread of life.*
⁴⁹ *"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.*
⁵⁰ *"This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.*
⁵¹ *"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."*

"Truly, Truly" or "I tell you the truth," (verse 47) appears for the third time in this passage. The phrase occurred previously in verses 26 and 32, and will appear again in verse 53. In referring to a person who believes in this verse, Jesus is speaking of one who continually trusts in Him. That is how we can define a believer. One who continually and unceasingly trusts in Jesus. Such a person has eternal life. Do you trust in Jesus? If you do you are guaranteed eternal life. If you do not trust in Jesus, you do not yet have eternal life and will not have it until you do trust in Him. For He is your one and only hope.

Jesus then tells them, "*I am the bread of life.*" This is not the first time Jesus has tried to get them to understand this. Immediately after Jesus had performed the miracle of feeding 15,000 to 20,000 people with five loaves and two fish, He said to the crowds following Him in

John 6:26-40 (NASB):

²⁶ *"Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.*
²⁷ *"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."*
²⁸ *Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"*

²⁹ *Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."*

³⁰ *So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?*

³¹ *"Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'"*

³² *Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.*

³³ "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."

³⁴ Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."

³⁵ Jesus said to them, "**I am the bread of life**; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

³⁶ "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.

³⁷ "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

³⁸ "For **I have come down from heaven**, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

⁴⁰ "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

Do you see how important it is to Jesus that they understand this message? He keeps trying to make them understand again and again that He is the source of eternal life yet they are not capable of seeing beyond the material. He therefore goes back to the comparison of the manna that God provided to keep the Israelites alive when they were wandering in the desert for forty years under the leadership of Moses. This manna provided for their temporary daily physical sustenance. Each day God would provide a new supply of food to keep them alive for another day. But ultimately they all died. They died because the bread they were provided could only sustain physical life. Jesus is telling them that He is a different kind of bread, the *Bread of Life*.

When a person believes and trusts in Him, they will live forever. Jesus is not suggesting that they literally eat His body. Eating this living Bread is a figure of speech which means to believe in Jesus. To eat (believe) this Bread provides eternal life.

But Jesus also wants them to know that not only is God providing the Bread (Jesus), but Jesus is also willing to give Himself: "*the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.*"

Salvation and eternal life comes because of the sacrificial death of the **Lamb of God**. Back in chapter one John wrote: "*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29 NAS). As the result of Jesus' sacrificial death, eternal life was given to the world, and there are many additional verses in Scripture that confirm this truth. Let us look at just a few of them:

John 3:17 NAS:

¹⁷ *"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."*

After the Samaritans had spent two days with Jesus, they had this to say:

John 4:42 NAS:

⁴² *and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."*

Matthew 20:28 NAS:

²⁸ *just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Galatians 3:13 NAS:

¹³ *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us."*

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 NAS:

¹⁴ *For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;*
¹⁵ *and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.*

Romans 5:8 NAS:

⁸ *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Jesus has advised this multitude of people in Galilee of the essence of His atoning death for the sin of the people of the world and the need for them to believe Him and trust what He is saying so that they might have eternal life. Only those who accept His death on their behalf can be given this gift of eternal life by the grace of God. The substitutionary death of Jesus is a key doctrine in John's Gospel. Jesus died for all.

John 10:11,15 (NAS):

¹¹ *"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*

¹⁵ *even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.*

1 John 2:1-2 NAS:

¹ *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;*
² *and He Himself is the propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.*

Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20 NAS:

²⁰ *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*

Is there any doubt in any one's mind what the Bible has to say about salvation and eternal life? If there is we will stop right here and discuss this until everyone is certain.

Now before going further there is something we must discuss because it has been misleading people for centuries. It is also something that is going to make some people uncomfortable. But it is not the purpose of God's Word to always make people feel comfortable. Nor should it be the purpose of the Church to always make people feel comfortable. In fact it is in one's best interests to feel uncomfortable if they are living with a lie, especially if that lie is going to lead them directly to Hell.

And today, many misunderstand this passage. A number of heathen groups, including Muslims, hold it against us because they read cannibalism into Christ's words: *Eat His flesh and drink His blood*. The other night in the presidential debate Rudy Guliani said that Jonah being swallowed by a whale was "allegory." Yet, if you look at the context of the Book of Jonah, the people of Ninevah were real and their repentance was real. The story of Jonah is not allegory. But here in John 6, Christ is using vivid symbolism to make His point about how His death on the cross is all we need to obtain and sustain our heavenly (eternal) life. He shed His blood so that our sins could be forgiven. So He gave us an enduring symbol of wine or grape juice to recall regularly the source of our eternal life, as we will do later in this service today. In no way are Christians cannibalistic when they partake of Communion. They are using symbolism. But there is also another source for this misunderstanding.

Now I have a number of dear friends who are Catholic and I know that many of them have accepted the truth about Jesus that we have just studied, and I have no doubt that I am going to see those people in Heaven. However, the Catholic Church teaches a false doctrine about the verses we have just studied. Like these Jews in these verses the Catholic Church has misinterpreted what was said here. The Jews continued to bicker over how this man, Jesus, could claim that they should literally eat His flesh. They could not see the deep meaning in these words. All they could do was pick apart anything Jesus said just as shallow people in today's world do nothing but gossip, criticize, and indulge themselves whenever possible without ever really thinking seriously about anything.

Now remember that when Jesus spoke these words in John 6, the Lord's Supper was still more than a year in the future, so there was no connection between what was said here in John 6 and the Lord's Supper. However, the Roman Catholic Church has made such a connection and in the sacrament of Holy Communion they maintain that the bread actually becomes the flesh of Christ, and the wine actually becomes the blood of Christ. They make this claim in connection with Jesus' words in John 6:53-54 NAS:

⁵³ *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.*

⁵⁴ *"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*

This doctrine is referred to in the Catholic Church as **transubstantiation** and is misused by the Church and misunderstood by those Catholics who for one reason or another do not know any better. The Catholic Church teaches that if this sacrament is performed for someone on their death bed they will go to Heaven because they have satisfied Jesus' words in John 6:53-54. This is a misrepresentation of God's Word and it could cause someone to continue in a life of sin thinking they could be assured of Heaven and eternal life if they took holy communion just before they died. Imagine the shock of finding yourself in Hell one second after you die, having been administered this sacrament by an ordained priest of the Catholic Church. God will not treat kindly those who promote this false teaching. In fact I would not want to be standing anywhere near them when the trap door is activated.

What could one understand eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood to mean? Well, just as our body benefits physically from eating and drinking the right things, we can benefit spiritually and emotionally, and yes even physically by partaking of Jesus and the benefits faith in Him will provide us. He can provide us nourishment through comfort and support in our prayer life. Through the reading of His Word and daily prayer He can work miracles in and through us, and those are only a few of the many, many benefits that come through consuming all that God brings to our table.

The manna that God provided for the Israelites is a literal representation of Jesus as the "living Bread." When God's people were wandering through the desert wilderness, there was no food supply anywhere. It was necessary for God to provide for them supernaturally. So He miraculously made this manna appear on a daily basis. It was undoubtedly God's intention to also teach the people something about this manna and their relationship with Him. No one was allowed to gather more food off the ground than they would need for a single day. So they had to be in continual dependence on God one day at a time. He was their only source of food and without His provision they would starve. Without faith they would die. Without faith they would have no hope.

Just as we Christians today wither away spiritually if we are spiritually anorexic. Sustenance for our souls comes from daily being fed by the Word of God, by conversing with our Lord in prayer, and by singing spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19). Christ told us, "Without Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5; see also Psalm 127:1 and 2 Corinthians

3:5). Our daily strength comes from the Lord Jesus and we must come to Him daily so that our souls can be fed and grow.

The Jews in this story we are studying in John 6 continually murmured and complained about Jesus claims. They knew both Him and His family. How in the world could He ever claim that God sent Him from Heaven? What about the miracle or perhaps miracles they had witnessed Jesus perform? What about the reality of His being the fulfillment of so many prophecies from the Old Testament prophets? Did they ever believe Jesus and call upon His name for salvation and eternal life? Well, we will see that as we continue in this chapter it does not look like many, if any at all, did. What a shame. Where do you suppose they are today?

What about you? Have you believed Jesus regarding eternal life. I hope so. If you have not, why not do it today and insure your eternity in glory? And if you have received Jesus as your Savior, are you coming to Him daily to be fed from His Word? If not, why not start today to do so.