

Sermon- The Belief Test

Scripture: John 6: 22-40

After our Easter Celebration we return today to our journey through the Gospel of John. We are in the middle of John chapter 6 and to jog your memory the first part of John 6 over the previous two sermons we looked at Jesus feeding the 12,000 and immediately after that he performs a second miracle, walk on water. Now we have to remember that everytime Jesus defies the laws of nature, they are not simply miracles but miraculous signs. And it is very, very, very important for Jesus that the people get the meaning of the signs. And another thing to know is that when Jesus is teaching his people through these miraculous signs, like a good teacher, he is always building his teaching on his previous lessons to create a teaching unit. So most of chapt 6 is actually like one large teaching unit in which are embedded 4 smaller teaching units. We already looked at 2 of these smaller teaching units and today we are going to look at the 3rd unit. So when he did the feeding of the 12,000, he was communicating part 1 of his message related to his identity as one who was greater than Moses who provided Manna for the Israelites in the wilderness. Then when he walked on water, he was communicating that he is the great I AM. The one who walked on the original chaos and nothingness at the very beginning of time and created the universe from that nothingness. In today's teaching session, Jesus is going to actually weave the two previous identity revelation teaching units to establish, his first great I AM saying. "I am the bread of life". And believing this about Jesus is everything. So let's dive into today's passage, starting with the flow of the text first and then lets look at what Jesus wants us to understand from it.

Let's first, acquaint ourselves with what is going on in the story just after Jesus walked on water entered the boat and went to Capernaum. That night we can imagine Jesus and his disciples rest in Capernaum. The next day, you remember that vast crowd that Jesus fed? Many of them were still hanging about at the shore where they say the disciples get into the only boat there without Jesus and leave for Capernaum. These people still wanted to find Jesus, because you can't just let the goose that lays the golden eggs simply wander off right? So as they wait to see if Jesus would come back to that spot from wherever he went, they see that many boats come in to the shore, but none of them have Jesus in them. So they decide to stop waiting, jump into those boats and go straight to Capernaum. When they get to Capernaum, they find Jesus there and are quite surprised because they can't quite figure out how he actually got there since there. So they start by asking him that but then launch into a very interesting conversation with Jesus. Since this conversation is super critical, let me walk you through the steps of this conversation.

So first the people address, Jesus as Rabbi, and ask him when he got there?

Jesus is never interested in doodling around with the superficial things and likes to address the deeper issues and so he responds to their small talk with this really deep and hard-hitting response, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous sign. But Jesus is actually not being harsh, because he very patiently goes on to explain, "don't be concerned about perishable things like food. Spend you energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval."

To that, the people seem to give a very sincere response, “we want to perform God’s works too. What should we do?”

To that Jesus tells them this, “this is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.”

This seems very easy, very limited and very controversial. But when you give people a specific task, things become more clear in their minds and they put forward some conditions and justifications for their conditions “They answered, “Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What can you do? ³¹After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, ‘Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Jesus then replies “I tell you the truth, Moses didn’t give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. ³³The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”

They reply, “give us that bread every day”.

To that, Jesus presents them with this first, “I Am” saying. He tells them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But you haven’t believed in me even though you have seen me. ³⁷ However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. ³⁹ And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For it is my Father’s will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day.”

To that however the people reply with skepticism and disbelief saying, “Isn’t this Jesus, the son of Joseph? We know his father and mother. How can he say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

When you look carefully at this dialogue it becomes apparent what the people want from Jesus and what Jesus wants from the people. Let’s take a look.

When the people first come to Jesus, you remember how they address him? Rabbi. Because just a few verses at the end of the feeding miracle in verse 14 these same people were saying, “surely this is the Prophet with a capital P who we have been expecting.” From that exalted position, by the time you get to verse 25 they have already lowered Jesus back to a regular Rabbi. Why is this important? Because the lower the title of the person you are addressing, the lesser the power of this person over you and the lesser your obligation to obey, right? So these people lessen their obligation to Jesus and they then start a negotiation with Jesus. They make it very clear what they are after. They tell Jesus, Moses gave the people in the wilderness bread everyday. You are like Moses, you gave us bread once. We want you to give us bread every day. That is verse 34.

Ok let’s look at the other side of the dialog. What does Jesus want of these people? Look at verse 26. The first thing Jesus tells them is, you saw me do the feeding miraculous sign. You people are only interested in the food. What I want you to really do is not focus on the food, but really try and understand the miraculous sign. And the meaning of the miraculous sign is that the one who multiplied the fish and the bread was way bigger than a regular Rabbi. He is in fact the “Son of Man”, the one who has the approval of God the Father Himself and the one who can give you eternal life. And eternal life is a way bigger deal than just physical bread so you folks should be focusing your energy on trying to understand what you need to do to get this eternal life that the Son of Man can give you, and not just be

running after bread that can get stale in no time. Jesus, is very patient with these people. The folks listen, suddenly they seem to get a glimpse of what Jesus is talking about and so they put forth a serious seeker question, "what must we do to perform God's words?" Now that they have Jesus attention, Jesus tells them in a super clear and concise manner. "This is the only thing that God wants you to do: believe in the one He has sent. In just 7 words Jesus summed up what humanity has been struggling to do for for thousands. What is the one thing you can do that God wants you to do? Believe in the one he has sent. And here is the thing folks. These 7 words can be as simple or as complicated as you want to make it out to be. Because the folk that Jesus was talking to, are so focused on their own bellies that instead of doing what Jesus asked them to do and thing about the true meaning of the sign that Jesus had already performed, they had the audacity of trying to trick Jesus or pressurize Jesus into doing the feeding miracle again by telling him, if you want us to believe, do a miraculous sign again. Because Moses was doing the miracle every day in feeding the people, so if you are like Moses, you should be able to do the miracle every day Jesus. I don't know about you but when I read this, it makes me angry inside at these people. Who do they thing they are, making these kinds of demands on Jesus. Jesus is trying to explain who he is and he just did a spectacular miracle and all they can do is ask for an encore? If Jesus a performer sent to entertain them and cater to the whims of these people? But Jesus does not get angry at these people but very patiently and plainly reveals his very first I AM saying to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. And then he elaborates on that concept by saying that, there are some people whom the Father has given into Jesus hands. Those people Jesus will never reject and in fact they will be raised on the last day to go on to life an eternal life.

So, Jesus does not fall for the pressure to do the miracle again. He in fact makes it very clear that that feeding miracle was to point to them that he was sent by God the Father as the great I AM. The I AM who is the bread of life, the one who can give then not just 3 or maybe 5 hours of life from a loaf of bread but the one who can give them the everlasting joy that comes from eternal life. And all they had to do was believe that Jesus was who he said he was, after carefully examine his words and the miraculous signs that he performed in their presence.

These people of course don't believe and our passage ends in a very strange place with the people saying simply, isint this just Jesus, son of Joseph. We know where you live! like our Joseph would say. So how can he say he came down from heaven. In spite of everything that Jesus has done and said, by the time we gt to verse 42, Jesus has been reduced simply to son of Joseph who lives in 42 Small street, Bethlehem. The one thing Jesus wants from them is to believe who he really is. The one thing he gets is disbelief.

Having said that, some people in our culture today wonder at the whole merit of focusing on believing the right thing. Ok by some people I mean our denomination at every level: local, conference and national. And the controversy as you know is the very definition of marriage and the standards of ordination. And this is one of those topics that, no matter how much clarity there is in scripture, there are some people who want to believe what they want to believe. And so after going at it for a few years, there is a desire to simply give up the fight and give in because the whole culture in moving towards accepting all kinds of sexual behaviors. And if we don't change with the times, some think the whole denomination will start looking like an organization that is stuck in the past at best and in the worst case scenario not accepting the new definitions of marriage and ordination standards could result in persecution by lawsuits, imprisonment and financial bankruptcy. So given the dangers some people say things like, statements of faith divide us so we should simply focus on what we have in common and go

beyond belief to simply finding common ground. Others say, there are equally of perhaps even more important questions than the question of what we believe. Perhaps we should focus on questions like “what is God doing in our midst to further the kingdom, or what do we hope to leave the next generation of believers to build on. I think these are all important questions, but if you look at our passage today, Jesus seems to say, if there is one thing God wants you to do, it is get your belief in Jesus right. Everything flows from that.

Now you might say, that seems to be really narrow as well because look at the Pharisees, Did they not get their beliefs right, and still they ended up so wrong in that they were so focused on their theology of the one God that they just could not see that Jesus was sent by God. Is not focusing just on believing the right thing close you off from the possibility of seeing something outside our believe system to the point that we could miss Jesus if he walked in front of us in broad day light?