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THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

CHRIST THE LIVING BREAD

Golden Text — I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. John 6:35

THE LESSON AS A WHOLE Approach to the Lesson

In the chapter containing this week's lesson we have a remarkable example of how John uses the miracles of Jesus. They are not just incidents but "signs" (John 2:11; 20:30). Here John relates how the Lord Jesus Himself took up the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-13), and made it the basis of some of His most profound teaching.

The excitement of the crowd was so great, gripped as they were with a mob impulse to make Jesus their king, that our Lord sent the disciples over to the west side of the lake while He handled the multitude, inducing them to separate and then retired to the hill alone. Compare Mark 6:45 with John 6:15, 16. Later that night He caught up with His disciples as they struggled against wind and wave. The storm was His pathway to them.

The next day found the multitude in a different frame of mind. Still excited they sought out Jesus, not to be taught, but to be fed. If He could feed them one day, why not always? Had not Moses fed their fathers for forty years in the wilderness? So they were after a continuation of the loaves and the fishes. Jesus, knowing their hearts, challenged them with their low, materialistic motives (v. 26), and called them to higher pursuits. He told them that He had better bread for them, what it would cost Him to provide it for them (v. 51), and what it would do for them (vs. 50, 51), and how they might obtain it (v. 35).

Much controversy has raged around some of the teaching of this chapter, just as it stirred to strife the Jews who first heard it (v. 52). The Roman Church has made verses 53-56 the support of their teaching on transubstantiation, or the turning of the substance of the bread and wine of the Communion into the substance of the flesh and blood of Christ which is just another form of materialism. We who are evangelical in outlook rejoice in the spirituality of the teaching of the chapter taking verse 63 as the basis of our interpretation. This passage is not an exposition of the Lord's Supper, but this passage and

the Lord's Supper teach the same lesson—that Christ in His sacrifice is the life and sustenance of His people.

Verse by Verse
John 6:48 — "I am that bread of life." Compare verse 35. The contrast is with material bread which cannot give life.

Verse 49 — "Your fathers did eat manna . . . and are dead." What sustains the body does not preserve even the life of the body indefinitely; much less can it give to the soul. That entire generation which received the manna died in the wilderness.

Verse 50 — ". . . the living bread . . . that I will give is my flesh . . . for the life of the world." Notice the sacrifice involved in bringing this life-giving bread to men. It meant Calvary. Notice, too, that the provision is for more than the Jews — it is "for the life of the world."

Verse 52 — "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Not perceiving that Jesus was applying the figure of the physical to spiritual realities, the Jews were utterly confused.

Verse 53 — "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." Instead of lessening their confusion, Jesus added to it by introducing the thought of drinking His blood which viewed physically, was both repugnant and illegal. See Leviticus 17:10-11. It is just because "the life . . . is in the blood" that we who have no life need the blood of Jesus.

Verse 54 — "Whoso eateth . . . and drinketh . . . hath eternal life; and I will raise him up . . ." Partakers of Christ are partakers of His life, which is eternal life. Notice the added promise of resurrection. Compare verse 40.

Verse 55 — "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." The margin of the A.S.V. reads "true meat and true drink" which conveys the sense more vividly. The spiritual is the ultimate reality.

Verse 56 — ". . . dwelleth in me, and I in him." Eating and drinking of Christ means "abiding" life as well as eternal life. It seals a blessed, personal relation with Christ.

Verse 57 — ". . . he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." In the mystery of the Godhead, the Father is the ground of the being of the Son. In the Incarnation this dependence took on the new meaning and by it Christ became the source of life to all who believe.

Verse 58 — ". . . not as your fathers did eat manna . . . he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever." More insistence on the contrast between material bread, even when supplied from Heaven, and the "true bread."

Verse 59 — ". . . the synagogue . . . in Capernaum." All this was the sequel to the feeding of the five thousand on the eastern bank of the sea of Galilee. A synagogue in Capernaum has been unearthed and is believed to be the one in which Jesus spoke these great words.

Verse 66 — "Many of his disciples went back . . ." The teaching proved too much, not only for the unbelieving Jews but for some who had assumed the role of disciple.

Verse 67 — "Will ye also go away?" There is real sadness in the question. At the same time it was a test and a challenge.

Verse 68 — "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." As usual, Peter is spokesman. Compare Matthew 16:16. There is tremendous logic in his statement.

Verse 69 — "And we believe and are sure that thou art Christ, the Son of the living God." Another version of the great confession. Believing leads to knowledge.

The Heart of the Lesson
"Man shall not live by bread alone," said Jesus to the Tempter, quoting from Moses (Deut. 8:3). This great principle He applied to Himself when tempted to use His divine powers for personal gratification. Now He applies the same principle to the Jews, whose stomachs he had filled the day before, and who liked the feeling and wanted it to continue indefinitely, as they rather broadly hinted when they said, "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert" (v. 31).

Perishing meat simply sustains perishing life for a season. Imperishable meat bestows and sustains imperishable life, and this is what Jesus offered (v. 27). Several things He says about this imperishable and life-giving food:

1. It is the gift of God the Father (v. 32).
2. It is a person come down from Heaven (v. 33)
3. It is Himself (vs. 35, 48).
4. It is His flesh, given in sacrifice (v. 51.)
5. It is given in conjunction with His blood (vs. 53-56).
6. It gives eternal life (v. 54)
7. It assures resurrection in the last day (v. 54)
8. It secures a life of communion with Christ (v. 56)

Tabulating these things seems a cold way of dealing with such vast and grand truths. But meditate on each of these in turn, and while you muse, the fire will burn (Psa. 39:3.)

What perverse creatures we are, that the grandest truths should affect us so adversely! Two reactions of the Jews are noted, and two of the disciples. The Jews "murmured" (v. 41), and the Jews "strove among themselves" (v. 52). Many of His disciples said, "This is an hard saying" (v. 60), or rather "a repulsive saying." Again "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (v. 66). The Gospel has a way of forcing people to show themselves for what they are. If men refuse it, their real enmity to God breaks out into the open. It also has a way of sifting those who profess to be followers of Christ: When its lofty standards and its profound spirituality and its heavy demands appear, those who are not wholly committed to the Lord Jesus are offended and begin drifting away. There is a sadness in Jesus' question to the Twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Happy are they who, with Peter have so learned Christ that every new revelation of Him only binds them closer to Him. Who would exchange "the words of eternal life" for the poor philosophies of men?

Young people always seem so silly right after you've ceased being one.

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