

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Coming to the Bread of Life

by Dan Trygg

“Jesus answered them and said, ‘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 shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal.’²⁸ They said therefore to Him, ‘What shall we do, 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 They said therefore to Him, ‘What then do You do for a sign, 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 therefore 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.”

John 6:26-33

The morning after the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the crowd was looking for Jesus, but He was nowhere to be found. Crossing the Sea of Galilee, they came to Capernaum, searching for Him. They had been so impressed with the miracle, ...and **they were expecting Jesus to *continue* to do such things for them.** Instead of complying with their wishes, the Lord confronted them with their small-minded selfishness (vs. 26). They could perceive no farther than their full bellies. **They missed the real point of the experience, they missed the fact that a sign is meant to point the way to something else.** Not only did He feed them with bread by God’s hand in the wilderness, **He Himself was the Bread from God having come down from heaven to give life to the world.** The remainder of chapter six is the teaching of Jesus which is meant to provoke His listeners (and us) to probe a little deeper into Who He is as the Bread of Life, and what that can mean for us.

“Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life” (vs. 27) -- This sets the stage. The word translated as “food” means “eating”, or a “meal”, not just the food at the meal. **Jesus is saying that there is a deeper level of eating than what they have experienced, ...one that produces eternal life.** “...which the Son of Man shall give to you...” -- Jesus is referring to Himself by His favorite messianic title. **Note the claim: He is the One who gives eternal life.** “...for on Him the Father, *the* God, has set His seal...” – Jesus’ credentials for His claim come from God.

“What shall we *do*, that *we* may work the works of God? (vs. 28) -- What do we have to do to get this meal?

“This is the work of God, in order that you believe in Him whom He has sent (vs. 29) -- Just believe into/unto Me. Note that **God works in order that you may believe.** Without the working of God, it will *not* happen; *BUT* the text comes short of saying that God will absolutely *cause* belief. **Faith becomes a possibility because of God’s working.**

“**What do you do for a sign, that we may see, and believe You?**” (vss. 30,31) -- **Had they not seen enough?** “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness” -- They *do* want more bread! “...as it is written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.’” – This is a good example of manipulating Scripture toward your own ends. **Jesus had called them out already. All they wanted was a free bread supply.**

“...not Moses..., but My Father...” (vs. 32) – **Jesus corrects them. God gave them manna, not Moses.** It is important to get the focus in the right place. Jesus continues to call God His own Father (cf. 5:18). “...who gives you the true bread out of heaven” – Notice the present tense. **Jesus begins to shift from literal bread to a spiritual lesson.**

“...the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world” (vs. 33) -- **Two characteristics of this heavenly bread: (1.) its source or origin is heaven, not earth; and, (2.) it gives life to the world.**

“Lord, *evermore* give us this bread” (vs. 34) -- He definitely has their interest. This is really what they have wanted all along, for Jesus to *always provide* for them, so that they would not have to work.

“**I am the bread of life**” (vs. 35) -- **This is the first of seven “I am” sayings** that John records as part of his attempt to help us come to know who Jesus is (20:30,31). **These “I am’s” differ from the “I am” absolutes that we saw in 4:26 and 6:20, in that these claims all have predicates,** i.e., their structure is “I am ...(something)”. These predicates reveal more of how Jesus saw Himself functioning in relation to us. **They are definitely claims that separate Him from the rest of humanity, often with a clear messianic or Divine precedent in the OT.** “...he who comes to Me shall not hunger; and he who believes in Me shall not thirst...” -- I think that **the nuances of the Greek are important here.** First, each clause begins with a participial phrase, which emphasizes the ongoing action of the people. It would be “the (one) coming”, or, “the (one) believing”. The Lord is not making a statement about people who come once, or who believe at one given point of time. **He is referring to people continually coming,** or what those *in the process of coming* will find. **Second, the last part of each clause is very emphatic in the Greek,** “not

never might he hunger (at a point in time)” and, “not *never* will he thirst *ever*”. (Greek “stacks up” negatives to communicate *emphasis*. They do not cancel each other out, as the “double negative” phenomenon we have in English.) **Finally, what is clear in both languages is that the focal point of these incredible promises is Jesus Himself.**

“But...” -- The Greek is a conjunction of contrast, “*rather*”. “...*you* have seen Me, and yet *do not believe*...” (vs. 36). Jesus is saying that **they are not like the ones who come and receive the benefits He has spoken of**. Why? They *have observed the signs* which He has done (vs. 26), but they have *not entrusted or committed themselves to Him*. **They are looking for a Christ-king figure, but only for their own ends. They are not interested in doing as He says; they want Him to do as they say!** They “believe” in Jesus for what they think they can get from Him. Their knowledge of Him does not lead them to truly trust in Him. *Seeing is not always believing. Believing is NOT simply recognizing or acknowledging truth; it is responding to truth with yieldedness and obedience!*

“All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me” (vs. 37) -- The Greek word for “all” is in the neuter form, meaning that Jesus is referring to “things”, more than people alone. The verb, “gives”, is present tense, meaning “He does give” or “He gives (and *is* giving)”. The word translated as “shall come” is not the usual word for to come or go. This word means more “to be present”. **The phrase would be better translated, “Every (thing) which the Father does give to Me shall be present with Me”.** Some Calvinistic interpreters attempt to find the doctrine of irresistible grace or election here, but such an interpretation cannot really be supported by this verse. The point of the verse is restated in vs. 39, “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all (*everything*) that He has given to Me, I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day”. “...and the one who comes to Me I certainly will not cast out.” -- **Jesus shifts from neuter to masculine. Now He is talking about people who come to Him.** The Greek is emphatic, “...not never will I cast out (him) outside”. Jesus will *not*, for any reason, *reject anyone* who genuinely comes to Him. **These verses are not about how one comes to Jesus** (some would imply that they teach that the Father *assigns* certain people to Jesus), **rather they teach the guarantee that those who are Christ’s will always be His.**

Jesus states once again the idea that He has come to do the Father’s will, not His own (vs. 38; cf. 5:30). His work is dependent upon the Father’s desire. Note what the will of God is here in this context -- vs. 39,40. “...that everyone who *beholds* the Son and *believes* in Him, may have eternal life”. **This is the Father’s will, to give eternal (age-type) life to those trusting in, or committed to, His Son.** Note that **it is not enough to perceive the truth about the Son, ...one must also believe, or trust in, Him. Knowledge is not sufficient to save.** The verbs in the first part of the sentence are participles (‘-ing’ words), “...the (one) *beholding* the Son and *believing*...”. This emphasizes an ongoing process. The verb in the last part describes *a possibility* that *could* take place at a point of time, if the person truly has faith, “...he might have/possess eternal life”. “...and I Myself will raise Him up on the last day.” **Eternal life, though it begins now as a present possession, must include a physical resurrection. The Bible knows nothing of a “spiritual resurrection”.** Though somehow it is changed, it is the *body* that is raised (I Cor. 15). Jesus claims that He will personally raise individuals from the dead at the end of the world.

The Jews react against Jesus’ words. They cannot put together how He could have come down out from heaven, for they know His parents (vss. 41,42). In Jesus’ response, He says, “**No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws Him...**” (vss. 44). The first part is clear, “No one is able to come to Me”. The next phrase is interesting, “if ever the Father... might not draw/attract/drag him (at a point in time)”. Though the word translated as “draws” (Gk., *helkō*) *can* mean *to violently drag* (e.g., Acts 16:19; Jas. 2:6), it tends more often to refer to the more subtle action of *drawing up* a net in order to close it, or *bring it near* (Jn. 21:6,11 - Note that a different word [*surō*] is used in vs. 8 for the action of *dragging* the net behind the boat.). **This word also had a figurative meaning of attracting or drawing by inward power.** It was used in the Septuagint translation of the OT in Song of Solomon 1:4 and in Jer. 31:3. It also occurs in Jn. 12:32 and 18:10. **The reason to go into all this detail is to point out how easily one’s preconceived ideas regarding God’s role in “drawing” people to faith could color how we understand this word.** It is *not* a good word to use to establish a case theologically, because it can be employed in such varying ways. We must rely *more heavily on the context*, than simply the dictionary, to help us understand what this word means *here*. The minimum that we can confidently say is that **unless there is some activity on God’s part to somehow enlighten us or predispose us to faith, humankind would remain powerless to come to Jesus. This probably implies at least unawareness of spiritual truth on our parts, and possibly as much as a moral predisposition against truth.** The former would require *education*, the latter a spiritual *transformation*. Does the context help us?

“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be *taught* of God.’” (Vs. 45) -- Sounds like spiritual *education*. Cf. Isa. 54:13. **Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.** -- Parallels vs. 40. *Hearing* is a part of the education process, *learning* is a response of our wills to what we are made aware of. Jesus says *both* are necessary. This is consistent with the OT view: **God instructs; we choose.** He doesn’t tinker with our wills, though He *does* appeal to us and attempt to educate us. He leaves the choice to us. Cf. Deut. 31:12; Job 36:5-12; Ezk. 18, 33.