

July 3, 2011

Living Out The Gospel In Real Life

Bread and Grace

John 6:30 – 40

The gospel is like a brilliant diamond – there are many facets to it and you can look through any of those facets and see the brilliance and beauty of the thing displayed. And this morning in our text we are looking at just two of those – bread and grace. In this passage Jesus gives us the first of the seven great 'I Am' statements in the book of John that reveal the perfection and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and identify Him clearly with the triune God of the Bible. In verse 35 Jesus says plainly, "*I am the Bread of Life*". In John 8:12 He says, "*I am the Light of the world*". In chapter 9 He declares, "*I am the Door*". In chapter 10 He says, "*I am the Good Shepherd*"; in chapter 11, "*I am the Resurrection and the Life*"; in chapter 14, "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*"; and finally in chapter 15, "*I am the True Vine*". And He uses all these temporal, material things – bread, light, water, doors, shepherds, vines – to illustrate one thing – the beauty and brilliance of Himself. All of these things He created so that we might have some tangible thing to look at so that we might know what it means to believe on Him and be satisfied in Him.

He is the Bread of life – that is **He is the sustainer of all life that exists** – without Him there would be no life. He is the light of the world – that is, in Him all things are revealed and made clear. He is the truth – that is nothing can be truly known apart from Him – any truth that is true, is true only as it is seen through Him. He is the door – that is through Him is the only entrance into heaven – we cannot get there without going through Him. He is the good shepherd – that is we need someone to watch over and care for us because left to ourselves we'll wander aimlessly and most likely hurt ourselves – exactly like sheep. All of these word pictures point to Jesus as the end and sum of all things. And as we pointed out last week – every legitimate pleasure and satisfaction we enjoy in this world is designed by God to give us a taste for heaven and make us hunger for Christ. They are meant to point us to Jesus.

And here Jesus uses **bread** to point out spiritual realities that point to Him. Bread, or food, is necessary to sustain life, and just as we need to eat to live – we need the Bread of life that is Christ to really live. Without being awakened to the reality of this bread – we can only live shallow, unsatisfying, and desperate lives. And along with this picture of bread, which is necessary for life, Jesus points us to **grace**, without which we could never savor the bread. Christianity is the only religion that preaches the notion of grace, because just like bread grace is necessary. At a comparative religions conference, the wise and the scholarly were in a spirited debate about what is unique about Christianity. And many suggestions were offered but they all found counterparts in some other religion. Then C.S. Lewis walked into the room, sat down and took in the conversation, which had by now evolved into a fierce debate. Finally during a lull, he spoke saying, "what's all this rumpus about?" Everyone turned in his direction and someone finally said, "We're trying to find out what's unique about Christianity." "Oh, that's easy," answered Lewis. "It's grace." That ended the debate.

Let's look at the text: *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?"* John 6:30 Now we know the context here – these are the very same people that enjoyed a miraculous feast the previous day and came looking for Jesus to do the same thing the next day. And Jesus chastizes them for working for food that has no lasting value and challenges them to work for eternal food that gives eternal life. And they thought that when He said 'work' that they had to do something to earn this and asked Him what they had to do to do the works of God. And Jesus tells them – '**Believe in Him, the One whom God has sent. Believe in Me.**' You want food full of eternal life? Food that lasts and you don't ever go hungry anymore? Believe in Me.'

And their question then is 'How do we know you are the One? Give us some evidence of that.' Which goes to show that you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. These people already saw the sign – and they admitted that it pointed to the Prophet who was to come, and when He came He would feed His people with the bread of heaven. They just admitted that in verse fourteen – '*This is of the truth the Prophet who is to come into the world.*' But to their thinking, Jesus just did a one-off – and if He was truly the prophet, He would keep that bread coming: '*Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'*' John 6:31 In other words, 'If you are really who you say you are, you'll show us something spectacular.'

Unbelief always asks for a sign – and even when they get it, it doesn't do them any good – they still won't believe. Look how much good the manna did their fathers. They were miraculously fed, not just for one day, but for forty years! And still most of them died in the wilderness without entering the land. In fact Jesus has to remind them of this later in verse 49: *'Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness and died.'* John 6:49 If we build our hopes and dreams on miracles – if we will only believe in Jesus if He does something for us – we will never really believe.

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. John 6:32 First of all, Jesus says, you give Moses too much credit – he didn't do anything – My Father is the one who fed you. And yes that bread was from heaven – but it wasn't the true bread. Manna only pointed to the real thing that was coming. Your fathers were supposed to have eaten that wilderness bread, looking forward to the real bread that was coming. That was designed to whet their appetite for the real thing. Sure the manna was supernatural – but it was temporary – it couldn't sustain life indefinitely – it had no eternal value. That is the trouble with miracles – they don't last. And ultimately, **unless they lead you to Jesus**, they have no eternal value. Think of it. Remember the man who was healed by the Pool? There was no evidence of faith in Christ on his part – Jesus just miraculously healed him and His final words to him were, 'Stop sinning so that nothing worse may happen to you.' in other words, 'Let this miracle of physical healing point you to the real miracle of spiritual healing. Let it lead you to eternal life'.

Moses said the same sort of thing to the Israelite in the wilderness about the manna: *"He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.* Deuteonomy 8:3 The manna was not only meant to nourish them physically – but it was supposed to point them to God as the source of life. And here Jesus says much the same thing to the crowd: *"For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."* John 6:33 In other words, 'I fed you with bread – but don't look at the bread – look to Me!'

But again they didn't see it. *Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."* John 6:34 Someone once said, **'There are none so blind as those who will not see.'** They looked at the miracle and saw bread – they looked at Jesus and saw a miracle worker – but they missed the real bread. *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.* John 6:35 If you want bread – you have to come to Me. If you want your hunger satisfied and your thirst quenched – come to Me. God created us with the capacity for hunger and thirst, not so that it would terminate on us but instead remind us that He is the bread of life and the living water. Every time we eat, we should consciously meditate on and savor the truth that Christ is our true bread and drink. The fact that we need to eat and drink to live should awaken our senses to the truth that we were created to be only fully satisfied in God. ***What food and water are for the body, Jesus is for the soul.***

When Jesus says that if we come to Him we will never hunger or thirst again, He does not mean that we won't ever have to eat or drink again. What He is saying is that if we eat the bread of life, and drink the living water, that we won't hunger and thirst for all those things that were never able to satisfy in the first place. He is saying that our appetite for the real thing will be sharpened and our appetite for the symbol will be dulled. He is saying that this bread will always be there – you will never lack what you need – I will be for you everything you need – I am El Shaddai, the all-sufficient One.

The crowd ate the miracle bread and were still hungry – and they still didn't get it. Jesus tells them, *"But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.* John 6:36 That is a curious statement. On one hand, He talks as though He expected them to believe – and yet here He tells them that even though they saw and heard the truth of the miracle – He knew they still didn't believe. What is He saying?

What He is telling them is that just as the Bread of life is vital – just as their deepest need is not Wonder Bread but heavenly bread – **grace is necessary** for them to even begin to understand about bread. Listen to what He says, *"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.* John 6:37 He is saying some very important stuff here. First of all, to eat this bread requires a man to come to Christ. But the condition for coming to Christ is not first of all dependent upon us. He is saying that our coming to Christ as the Bread of Life is dependent first of all upon the Father's giving. ***All that the Father gives Me. Faith in Christ is dependent upon the God the Father.*** Real, lasting, eternal faith in Christ is given first to us by God. And the fact that anyone comes to God is entirely due to His marvelous winning grace.

Many people stumble on this point and I am praying for you that you won't stumble this morning. This is one of those hard sayings of Jesus that seem not to be very tasty on the outside, but are amazingly sweet on the inside. **The reason the crowd didn't get it was because the Father didn't give them.** Now I am not making something up here – this is the text and we have to deal with it. Jesus is telling them to come to Him to get the bread of life – come to Him for salvation – and they weren't coming. Because He says, *I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.* To come to Him is to believe in Him and they didn't believe. And Jesus says **that is because** the Father had not given them to Him. They were not among the given. And our first response to this is indignation at the unfairness of it all. What do you mean they are not among the given? Are you saying that God chooses some and not others? Yes, I am saying exactly that – because that is what the Bible teaches.

Now I want you to get hold of this because we run into this over and over in this gospel and you can't get away from it. What Jesus is talking about is what we call the **doctrine of election**. That is, before the foundation of the world – **God chose who would be rescued from the Fall and who would not, without respect to their having met any conditions as the basis of His choice.** All are guilty, all deserve punishment – no one deserves heaven – all deserve hell. All of our sins – all of our righteousness – means nothing in the face of God's choice. There are no conditions to election. In choosing whom He will choose – God does not look to anything in us to recommend us to His mercy. None of your reasons as to whether you are among the elect or not, hold any weight at all. The doctrine of election is grace in all its wonder. It is the power of God to do in us what we could never do, that is choose life apart from His empowering grace. **And all whom He chooses – will not fail to choose Him.**

But some of you are probably saying right now, 'What about all those people who are not among the elect? What about those who are not given? What about them?' But we forget to whom we are speaking. It's God – our Creator – to whom the lives of everyone on the planet that is living, has ever lived and ever will live is owing. This is He who said through the pen of Paul: *Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor.* 2 Timothy 2:20 In the Chronicles of Narnia, there is a scene in which Aslan – the Christ-figure, tells one of the girls: **'I tell you your story, I don't tell you anybody elses.'** And in the last chapter of this gospel, Jesus is talking to Peter and says, 'Peter, one day you are going die for my sake – they are going crucify you for the faith.' And Peter turns to John and says, 'Well what about him?' And Jesus says, 'If I decide to let him live, what is that to you? You follow Me.'

What is Jesus saying? Jesus is saying, 'Mind your own business'. You are not responsible for them – I am. You're talking about things above your pay grade – you're outside your level of competency here. You don't know what you're talking about. If you say to Jesus, 'I cannot accept the way you relate to me until you explain how you relate to everyone else' you've set yourself up in the place of God and refuse to bow to His sovereign will. We cannot know if others have been given to Christ by the Father – we can only know if we have. And that is the thing we need to grasp. It does us no good to argue for the disposition of others if we ourselves will not come to Him. In fact that very objection may be the roadblock to your own salvation. You are just using that to excuse your own unwillingness to come to Christ.

O but when, by the grace of God we come, we have eternal assurance. *'...and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.* First of all, the Father gives. Secondly, no one the Father has given to the Son will fail to come to Him. Thirdly, no one who comes will ever be lost. **That is all who have been truly born of God will never fall away from Him.** That is a rock-solid promise. Indeed that is the will of the Father, because Jesus says: *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.* John 6:38 The will of the Father is to give to the Son, to cause to come to Him, all those He purposed to come in the first place, and none who come will be lost. Talk about assurance of salvation! John Bunyan said of this particular text – *'This Scripture did also most sweetly visit my soul.'* We are brought to Christ by grace and we come to Christ by grace and we are kept in Christ by His grace. **The Father gives, we come, the Son keeps.**

From start to finish it is a work of stunning, overwhelming grace. If you have the faintest stirrings toward God, if you have the least inclination to come, it means that His grace is drawing you already. Don't worry about your neighbor or the guy in Africa you've never met. The same God that made you and made this universe and upholds everything by the word of His power, has a pay grade equal to the task. He loved us before we ever thought of loving Him. There is an old hymn that goes like this: *Tis not that I did choose Thee, For Lord, that could not be; This heart would still refuse Thee, Hadst Thou not chosen me... My heart owns none before Thee, For Thy rich grace I thirst; This knowing, if I love Thee, Thou must have loved me first.*

This is grace that is powerful, in the end, irresistible, and it is **grace that is lasting**. Listen to what Jesus says, *"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.* John 6:39 What this says is that everyone who comes to Christ for real, will be kept in His love until the end. **Genuine Christians are those that last, because grace is lasting**. You must understand the nature of grace to be assured here. The fact that the Father has given you to the Son is not owing to anything you did or didn't do. If you were never worthy of your salvation in the first place, if you were never deserving of grace to begin with, how could you ever make yourself unworthy of it later, how could you be less deserving further down the road? It is His job to not lose you.

Jumping ahead to John chapter 10, where we will get this particular teaching in an even more powerful way, Jesus says, 'I am the Good Shepherd and My sheep hear My voice and they come to Me and no one can take them out of My hand.' **A shepherd's job is not to lose any of the sheep** – of course they lead them and take them to green pastures and protect them from wolves – but mainly they protect them from their own stupidity. By the way, this is one of the great insults of history when Jesus compared His followers to sheep. Have you understood that yet? Sheep are argueably one of the dumbest animals on the planet. Have you ever been to a circus? If you have, you've probably seen trained bears, trained lions, trained dogs, trained elephants. But what you've never seen are trained sheep. Sheep don't train well. Sheep are stupid. If you hired a shepherd and he came to you at the end of the day and said, 'Well I only lost three sheep today, but none to wolves. Just three that sort of wandered over a cliff, but they did that on their own – not my fault!' What would you say? You'd say, 'Why do you think sheep **need** a shepherd, you ninny!?' They need a shepherd because they're not that smart – they will vigorously pursue things that will kill them. And Jesus is a Good Shepherd – and a good shepherd doesn't lose any sheep.

There are those who would say, 'Well it may be true that He can't drop you – but you could sure jump out of His hands.' Have you been listening? No, you can't! He loses **none** – all the way to the end – and beyond! He's the Good Shepherd. Others would say, 'Well then, if it's true that none are lost once they are in His care, if you can't fall away, then why is the Bible full of warnings telling you to be careful how you walk, to watch out that you don't fall away? The Bible doesn't say that you can't fall away, **it says that your Shepherd won't let you!** Anyone that has experience with a small child can follow this. If your five year old comes to you and asks to play out on the front lawn near the street, you might say, 'Okay, but don't you dare step foot in the road.' Even though you are inside and he is outside, you keep your eye on him. Why? Because you know that if he gets into the street he can get run over by a car and you have no intention of letting that happen – even though you warned him. Well, why the warning, you say? The warning is there for the child's sake – you want him to grow and mature and develop into a responsible adult that has internalized the warning – you have no intention of letting them get run over by a car. All the warnings in the Bible serve two ends: To keep the faithful, faithful – and to awaken faith in those who have none.

Others might object by saying, 'If it's really true that you cannot be lost, that you cannot fall from grace – then you can live any way you want – there is no incentive to live a holy life is there? How do you answer that? The answer is very simple. If you have in truth come to Christ, if you've tasted the Bread of Life and have been staggered by grace – **then living any way you want is not even an option**. You wouldn't want to and your Good Shepherd wouldn't let you. If I gave you the option of eating a piece of red velvet cake this morning, or a plate of monkey brains covered with slugs, which would you choose? I think you'd choose the cake – I know I would. The problem with monkey brains and slugs is that I can't want it. To say that the doctrine of election means that we can now live any way we choose without regard to Christ is ludicrous. Why? Because if you really know Him, your wantier has been irrevocably altered. You are not hungry for other stuff. But if you know that you are safe and secure in the arms of Christ, if you know that you are forever His and cannot be lost, and then you find that you somehow lose your incentive to live a godly and moral life – then you were not really His at all were you?

Jesus says that all that the Father gives Him will come to Him and will never be lost. And then He says: *"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."* John 6:40 And here is the human side of God's sovereignty: The Father gives to the Son – and we **must** believe in Him. The Father's giving does not cancel out our believing. It does in fact empower our faith – and yet the responsibility is clearly on us. What this says is that today if you hear His voice – respond. If you have any faint glimmers of desire toward God – if you feel your heart stirred by the Father's embrace – if you hear Jesus saying 'I am the Bread of Life – taste and see that I am good', then you must respond and believe in Him. Come and get the Bread of life this morning and know the wonder of His grace.

Our gracious heavenly Father,

How we thank You this morning for Jesus, the Bread of life. He is the One who satisfies our hungry souls and quenches all our thirst. Forgive us Lord for working for the bread that does not last and cannot satisfy the hunger and thirst You made our souls to have for You. May we taste and see that the Lord is good today and grant that every enjoyment of the riches of Your grace in all that You provide for us, turn our faces to Christ to savor and delight and revel in this evidence of Your great love for us. Let Your great and lasting grace empower us to come to You, banish our fears, lure us into Your presence, help us to see and confess our sin and find that there is mercy with You and exceeding riches in Your kindness through Christ. Grant us to know and experience Your eternal keeping power for those who come to You, so that we might truly be those who delight in God through Jesus Christ and live to spread His joy through the gospel to all people we pray, in the mighty, saving and keeping name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.