



Office of the President
3015 Ave K NW
Winter Haven FL 33881
863.299.4084

PRESIDENT'S LETTER - FEBRUARY 06

"So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD." (Deuteronomy 8:3)

The theme of John's Gospel is that the Word became flesh and tented among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father full of grace and truth. In John 6, we see what happened when Jesus revealed His glory as the Son of God and the Messiah-King in connection with "bread."

The sixth chapter of John's Gospel is pivotal in understanding how Jesus ended up at the cross rejected by God's own chosen people. We read in the first part of this chapter how a crowd of over 5,000 people followed Jesus out into the wilderness on the other side of the Sea of Galilee "because of the signs which He performed on those who were diseased." They saw in Jesus' miracles an answer to their immediate problems. When there was no food for a group of this size, Jesus revealed His power to provide for all their needs by feeding the multitude with five barley loaves and two "small" fish. When everything was said and done, there was more left over than what they had started with - twelve baskets of crumbs and leftovers.

The reaction of the crowd was predictable. When Jesus did not give the people what they wanted, the majority of people rejected Him and no longer followed Him. They saw Jesus only in terms of what was in it for them. Jesus did not exploit these "signs" because He knew that people would come to Him only for these miracles. It is with sadness that we read, (John 6:15) "Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone." They wanted Jesus to be a "Bread-King," i.e, a Messiah who would drive out the Romans and provide them with everything they would need or want. The people wanted some of this "bread." A "Bread-King" would be like a credit card that you never have to pay.

When reality set in and these people found out what kind of a Messiah-King Jesus would be, we read, (John 6:66) "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." Today also people want a "Bread-King" and immediate gratification of their earthly needs and desires. Most religion today is "here and now" (relevant) with the promise of wealth, success, healing, and the good life. Our people are influenced by the "church growth" thought process which stresses meeting people's felt needs. People want a "bread" church.

Jesus tried to get the Jews to understand that God does not want to simply fill our bellies and give us what we want. The will of Jesus' Father would lead Him to the cross. (John 6:40) "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." Jesus is the Bread of Life. Jesus tried to turn their attention away from the bread of this world to the spiritual Bread that satisfies their deepest needs.

The “manna”- bread that fed the Children of Israel was not the answer. The people of Moses’ day ate this manna, and they died. The bread of this world is just a temporary fix. The things of this world perish in the very using. As Solomon reveals in Ecclesiastes, everything in this world is vanity, useless or empty, because of death.

Jesus would lead them a step further. He tells them, in effect, “You were impressed that I was able to feed you with nothing. I have something even more impressive to give you. I have bread that if you eat of it you will never get hungry again and you will never die.” Jesus was, of course, talking in spiritual terms. For Jesus is the Bread of Life.

Jesus, like the manna, came down from heaven. The Jews understood that Jesus was claiming to come from God, Who was His Father. This was always the sticking point and the stumbling block. (John 6:42) And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

Jesus was the “living” bread. Anyone who ate of Him would never die. Jesus came to give everlasting life to those who ate of Him. In spiritual terms “eating this living bread” meant believing in Him. (John 6:51) "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

Jesus was not talking about cannibalism, physically eating His flesh. Jesus was trying to get across the point that He had become flesh and blood so that He could take our place and die for the sins of the world. Eating His flesh and drinking His blood refers to partaking of Him, believing in Him. These verses do not directly refer to communion although communion is part of partaking of Jesus. They refer to faith. (John 6:47) "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life." Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life and Jesus will raise him up on the last day.

The world labors for the bread that perishes. Its entire existence consists of getting and trying to hold on to things which cannot last nor bring real happiness and security. Many come to Jesus simply for signs, for healing, for bread, for the things and glory of this world. We encounter those who no longer follow Jesus when He won't give them what they want. Only the Holy Spirit can open your eyes and your members' eyes to see Jesus as the Bread from Heaven who gives us eternal life through faith. Jesus promises, (John 6:57) "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.

The reaction to your Gospel ministry is no different today than it was in Jesus' own day. (John 6:66) "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." It is a miracle of the Holy Spirit and faith that we have people who in spite of all of the temptations of this world still say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Lord Jesus, teach us to treasure and appreciate these words of eternal life that have been entrusted to us. Lead us into the season of Lent with the conviction of faith that we have something worth having and laboring for. Rejoice in the privilege of being in this public ministry in these last days of sore distress. We live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of our Savior-God. We do not live by bread alone, but we live by the Bread of Life.

May you feed on the Bread of Life,
John Schierenbeck