

Aug 9, 2015 – John 6:35-51 (OT: 1 Kings 19:1-8 Epistle: Ephesians 4:17-5:2)

We Simply Have Salvation by Believing in Jesus, the Bread of Eternal Life

There is a riddle that goes: “What is greater than God, more evil than the devil, rich people need it, poor people have it, and if you ate it, you should surely die?” Children often get the answer right away, whereas adults usually struggle to figure it out. A child answers the first question without much thought and discovers that that answer fits everything else. Adults, on the other hand, make it too complicated and try to find something that answers each part all at once. The answer, of course, is nothing. Nothing is greater than God or more evil than the devil. Rich people need nothing and poor people have nothing. And if you ate nothing, you would surely die.

The words of Jesus in our Gospel reading are kind of like that riddle. They really are simple and straight-forward. The problem is that we often want to make salvation more complicated than it really is. We have trouble believing that it really is as simple as Jesus here says. Jesus said: “*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life*” (v. 47). Jesus calls Himself “*the bread of life*” (vv. 35, 48) and says: “*If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever*” (v. 51). That’s pretty simple. We simply have salvation by believing in Jesus, the bread of eternal life.

Jesus spoke these words to the Jewish people who had come to Him in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:59). This was the day after He had feed the five thousand from the five loaves and two fish on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. They wanted Jesus to continue to give them bread, even to the point of wanting to make Him their earthly king (John 6:15, 34). Here Jesus explains that He is the bread that they want and really need – He is “*the bread which came down from heaven*” (v. 41).

But the Jews had trouble with these simple statements and they “*complained about Him*” (v. 41) and asked, “*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’*” (v. 42). They could not believe what Jesus said because they only saw a man standing before them. Even though He had miraculously feed them the day before, they could not believe that He was anything other than the earthly son of Joseph and Mary. As Jesus told them, “*You have seen Me and yet do not believe*” (v. 36).

And there is good a reason for this. As simple as salvation is, none of us by nature can believe in Jesus or come to Him. As Jesus says here: “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*” (v. 44). We simply cannot decide to believe in Jesus. It is not something that we are capable of doing. The Father must drag us to Jesus, because we are dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). In fact we are often worse than dead: we actively resist and rebel against God. The word translated here as “draw” is also used for pulling a net through the water to catch fish and for dragging someone to court or out of a city. If you have ever tried to bring a cat or dog to the vet, you get a picture of what Jesus is saying here – you get a picture of how we are when God drags us to Jesus to be brought to life.

As Jesus says, we must be taught by God. His Spirit must enlighten our hearts through God’s word, and bring us to faith. Only when we have heard and learned from the Father will we come to Jesus (v. 45).

Jesus explains what it means to hear and learn from the Father when he says, “*Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father*” (v. 46). Only Jesus has seen the Father. He is the one who is from God. He is the one who is the Word of God. When we hear and listen to Jesus, we hear and learn from the Father. Jesus did not come to do His own

will, but the will of the Father who sent Him (v. 38). The Father's will is for Jesus to receive all those whom the Father has given Him, to lose none of them, and to raise them up on the last day.

In the previous verses (which we read last week) these Jews talked about the manna with which God had fed the Israelites when He led them out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land (John 6:31). They wanted Jesus to do something similar, to provide such a miraculous sign. Evidently multiplying the five loaves and two fish to feed the five thousand was not enough.

Jesus reminds them that their fathers "*ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead*" (v. 49). The manna, as miraculous as it was, was just earthly food. It could sustain the Israelites physically for a while, but only for so long. It did not bring them true life. It could not bring them eternal life. The same was true of the bread with which Jesus had just feed the people. It was earthly bread that would only sustain the people for a moment.

But Jesus is much greater. What He gives is so much more than earthly bread. He, Himself, "*is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die*" (v. 50). "*If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever*" (v. 51). Jesus explains that the bread that He gives is His flesh which He "*shall give for the life of the world*" (v. 51). Jesus is referring to His death on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. He gave His life for your life so that your sins are covered and you have now passed from death to life (John 5:24).

As I said, a child can understand these words. A child knows that one must eat to live. When Jesus says that He is the bread of life, they understand that He is the only way to everlasting life. It is only through Him that we have true life. Without Him, we will die, just like those who ate the manna in the wilderness.

Adults have a harder time with Jesus' words here because we ask "How?" "*How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?*", which is what the Jews ask in the next verse (v. 52) (which we will read about in next week's Gospel lesson). If we find Jesus' words here difficult it is because we, like the Jews, often have trouble seeing beyond the earthly. We, too, think of physical bread and physical eating.

In the first verse we read Jesus said, "*I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst*" (v. 35). Do you believe that? If we think of physical hunger and physical thirst, probably not. We still get hungry and thirsty. But Jesus isn't saying that He is physical bread, nor is He talking about physical hunger or thirst.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled*" (Matthew 5:6). That is the hunger and thirst that Jesus is talking about here – the hunger and thirst for righteousness. It is spiritual hunger and a spiritual thirst that we cannot satisfy ourselves. We cannot satisfy it with earthly possessions, money, or even good works, no matter how hard we try. It is a hunger and thirst that only Jesus can satisfy, because through believing in Jesus, His perfect righteousness and holiness is given to you and counted as your own.

When we look at our lives, we see that we fall short of the perfect righteousness that God requires. The solution is not to try harder, to try to do better, but to turn to the bread of life. There is no spiritual need that Jesus cannot and does not fill. When you are troubled by your sins, turn to Him for forgiveness and He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Jesus is our peace. He gives you peace with God. He gives you peace of mind whatever you may face, and He gives you peace when your conscience accuses you. He is the assurance that God loves you. He gives you eternal fellowship with God. Jesus fulfills all your spiritual needs so that you will

never hunger and never thirst, for you have all the righteousness you need: the righteousness of God from God.

Listen to all the things that Jesus promises you in these verses: “*the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out*” (v. 37). Jesus’ arms are always wide open to receive you and welcome you. He will never turn you away when you come to Him. “*Everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him [has] everlasting life*” (v. 40, 47). You have eternal life through faith in Him. And Jesus will raise you up on the last day (v. 39, 40, 44).

Three times in these verses Jesus says that He will raise the person who comes to Him on the last day. This must be something that Jesus really wants us to remember. These words teach us some important truths.

First of all, it is the Father’s will that Jesus not lose any that are given to Him and that He raises them on the last day. God’s wants you to have eternal life. He wants you to spend eternity with Him. He wants you to be raised from the dead.

Second, it is Jesus who will raise you on the last day. It is not something that you have to do yourself. Your life is in His loving hands, and no one can snatch you away from Him (John 10:28). Your resurrection is assured because it will be done by the one who Himself has risen from the dead and conquered death.

And finally we see that your resurrection is not something that you earn or qualify for. Jesus said that He will raise all those whom the Father has given Him (v. 39). He will raise those whom God has drawn (or dragged) to Him (v. 44). Jesus will raise “*everyone who sees [Him] and believes in Him*” (v. 40). Again, this is not something we can do ourselves, but Jesus makes Himself know to us and leads us to believe in Him through His word and by the Holy Spirit working through His word (Romans 10:17). Salvation is a gift given to you from God. It is not from ourselves. It is not by works, so we cannot boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

It is really that simple. Jesus here most assuredly tells you: “*He who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life... if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.*” May God grant that we take Jesus at His word and simply believe in Him, for He is the bread of eternal life who will raise us up on the last day. Amen.

Rock of Ages Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.GrandRapidsLutheran.org

Pastor Peter T. Evensen

616-322-9167 (cell) – peterevensen@icloud.com