

Maintaining Good Health (Part 8)

Bread of Life

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In the last message that I gave on this subject we broached the Bible's parallel between physical and spiritual eating. As a result of that, we read such verses as Jeremiah 3:15 where God says:

Jeremiah 3:15 And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.

This is in the form of an appeal from God that, if His people would turn themselves to Him in repentance, then He will supply leaders who will supply them with good things to feed the mind.

Back in the New Testament, we find another one.

Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He has purchased with His own blood.

This is an admonition from the apostle Paul to the local church elders, to provide good spiritual food for those that they were ordained to pastor.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, and allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna 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 out of the mouth of the LORD.

Verse 3 connects the trials that we go through as being directly from God. The trials' purpose is to *feed our minds* with the certainty that what goes into them either enhances or destroys life. This verse is very confirming that leading a good life—an abundant life—is also dependent upon one's spiritual, mental, and physiological base. These are elements of the mind; and they determine one's outlook, one's goals, and how one reacts to and copes with the many vicissitudes one encounters during life.

We find here that God actually directly leads us into many of them as a combination teaching tool—first, in order that we will experience them and have certain characteristics develop as a result; and second, to test us (to see where we stand, and how we cope).

Again, back in the New Testament, we also saw that one does not come to an abundant life in this life without a sound mind.

II Timothy 1:6-7 Therefore [Paul writes] I remind you stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

The Spirit of God is the spirit of a sound mind; but it is not in us, by nature. It is given as a gift. The implication from this verse is that, until we have the Spirit of God, our mind is nowhere near as sound as it needs to be. It is not sound like God is sound. In one sense, as I heard another minister say one time, the Spirit of God is the missing link that enables man to understand his origins a lot better.

Now we will go back to another scripture in order to give all of these a measure of review.

John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I [Jesus] speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

The word "life" here is interesting. It implies a quality *beyond* what is, by nature, available to mankind. We are going to see this in a little bit more detail later on in the sermon. Right now we just want to notice that in these two scriptures we have a firm basis connecting God's pure Word—with its wisdom and its guidance—as the solid foundation of sound-mindedness, and thus the abundant life.

As we were finishing the previous sermon, we saw that the Bible uses *milk* in three contexts: one by Peter and two by Paul. Peter used it as part of an illustration encouraging and admonishing us seek God's Word with the same kind of determined energy and sense of need that a baby seeks milk in order to be nourished. However, Paul said to the Corinthian church:

I Corinthians 3:2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now are you are still not able.

There, in Paul's first usage of the term, he embarrassingly used *milk* to indicate elementary instruction as all that the Corinthians could handle. But we are going to be spending a bit more time in his second usage of the word *milk*, where Paul repeats this image.

Hebrews 5:11-14 Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

In these two references, *milk* represents elementary instruction—and *solid food*, advanced doctrine. The first use (in I Corinthians 3) revealed the embarrassing immaturity that required the people to be fed like babies. And that immaturity was producing the strife and the factions within the congregation—proving that the people were more carnal than they were converted.

The Hebrews account is more complex and serious in that the people had been more mature in the past—but they had *regressed*. These people were going backwards rather than forward. At the beginning of chapter 6, Paul gives an indication of how far they had slipped.

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

In chapter 5, he said that they did not even understand the first principles of the oracles of God. That is where they stood.

Good health, whether physical or spiritual, is *not* "a given" in life. It cannot be taken for granted that they will always be there. Like everything else in life, they must be worked for. They must be dressed and kept, or the second law of thermodynamics will kick in; and they will regress toward a state of randomness.

The Hebrews account presents a situation vaguely similar to elderly people becoming afflicted with dementia. The result was that they were drifting aimlessly, and becoming spiritually hard of hearing. But there is an additional insight here, regarding an insufficient spiritual diet—because what Paul says contains a pretty strong rebuke. Paul told these people that their problems were directly related to being *lazy*.

The word "dull" (which appears in verse 11, "seeing you are *dull* of hearing") is actually more closely related to the English words sluggish, slothful, or lazy. And it is translated that way in Hebrews 6: 12—where he says, "That you do not become *sluggish* ." That word "sluggish" is the same word that is translated "dull" in Hebrews 5:11.

These people were not putting forth the effort to *think upon* what was being taught them. At best, they were merely accepting. But the fact that they were not using what they heard was proof enough for Paul to understand that they were not thinking through the seriousness or the practical applications of what they were hearing. In other words, they were not assimilating what they heard; and the result was a lack of faith.

This is the very reason the word *faith* appears so frequently in the book of Hebrews. The lack of faith then lead to *faithlessness*, which is disobedience. Faith was touched upon once in chapter 3—where *unbelief* is equated by Paul as *disobedience* (as if they were one and the same thing). Again, at the beginning of chapter 4, where he clearly states that Israel failed because what they heard and what they saw (in Egypt, coming out of Egypt, and in the wilderness) was not mixed with faith. In chapter 6, it is mentioned three times towards the end. In chapter 10, it is again mentioned three times. In chapter 11, it comes into full bloom and dominates the entire chapter. And then it appears again in chapters 12 and 13. These people had lost their faith because they were too lazy to think through the things that were being taught them. And the result was *faithlessness*.

There is more to faith than merely hearing the sound of the words. It takes some effort for them to be assimilated, so that faith is produced. These people were not making the effort needed because their minds were on other things. (That is another story, which will require an entire sermon.) Their minds were on other things, and the result was that they were not really hearing.

The rebuke in Hebrews is far, far more serious than the one in I Corinthians 3—because these people were older in the faith, and they had frittered away a large amount of time that could have been spent on *growing*.

There can be no doubt what Paul was attempting to do here. He was attempting to shame them, to embarrass them, to shock them into a realization of how far they had slipped by calling these grown people "infants"—although, undoubtedly, some of them were quite elderly. He goes so far as to tell

them that they were unacquainted with the teaching about righteousness. Can you imagine that? Some of these people were probably in the church twenty—maybe even up to thirty—years by this time.

As far as men have been able to determine, Hebrews was written no later than 67 AD. It is thought to be somewhere between 62 and 67 AD. You know just about when Christ's resurrection took place. So some of these people might have even been eyewitnesses of that, or converted shortly after—in the thousands who were converted immediately after Christ's ascension and after the day of Pentecost.

So, like an infant, they did not even understand the difference between right and wrong in many situations. That is what it means. Righteousness is the teaching about right doing, and it is that characteristic that defines *immaturity*. And an infant must be instructed and chastened, by his parents, until he understands.

Let us not forget that I am running a parallel here that exists in the Bible between (1) the physical eating and good health, and (2) the spiritual eating and good health. One of the things that this section shows us, is that a poor spiritual diet results in one being spiritually weak—just as surely as a poor physical diet works to destroy a person's physical vitality.

These people were paralleling, in their spiritual life, what so many do in their physical life. Many know very well what is good to eat and what is not good. But they lazily pursue foods of poor quality—or even foodless foods—disregarding the fact that sooner or later that carelessness is going to catch up with them in the form of poor health. So the implication here is that growth requires a *good health program*—physically or spiritually.

What these people were doing was a spiritual form of "you bet your life." It is very easily seen through these images that a person can be in good spiritual health and then lose it—through laziness. "A dog returning to its vomit" is the graphic way in which Peter put it. They had the pure food at one time, but through negligence (or whatever) they lost it. The book of Hebrews is written about a whole group of people who should have known better, but they were drifting away.

An adult needs solid food, actively used, for spiritual nourishment. That is what Hebrews 5:14 says—that "*solid food* belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of *use* have their senses *exercised* to discern both good and evil."

We are going to continue this parallel, but we are moving into a bit more specific area regarding growth and healing. I want to go back to I Peter 5. This focuses most specifically on the ministry, but it is indirectly pointed at everybody.

I Peter 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain, but eagerly.

The the English word "shepherd" embraces all the things that a shepherd would do in relation to feeding a flock of sheep. It includes guarding and protecting them, caring for their health, leading, guiding, and feeding. All of these are embraced within the notion of promoting growth, and healing as well. A pastor's job is to promote growth in the flock by *feeding the minds* of those in the flock through a wide variety of ways—including sermons, counseling, published materials, examples, Bible studies, and correction when appropriate.

Now turn with me back to John 21. We just heard from Peter in I Peter 5, and this time Peter is the one, who is hearing from Christ.

John 21:15-17 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again the second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, Do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him a third time, "Simon, son of Jonas, love you Me?" Peter grieved because He said unto him the third time, "Do you Love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, you know all things; You know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

These verses are even a bit more specific regarding a pastor's responsibility. We are all familiar with Jesus' use of different words for "love" within these verses. But probably we are unfamiliar with the fact that He used two different words for feed and three different expressions for the words "lambs" and "sheep."

In verses 15 and 17, the word *feed* means "fodder, to graze"—thus narrowing down a pastor's responsibility to feeding only. But in verse 16, He used the same broader term used by Peter (in I Peter 5:2)—thus showing a wider responsibility.

Now, the first term translated *lambs* in verse 15 (of course, meaning those who are part of the flock) indicates young and immature Christians. They are like children, who have a lot of energy and might be quite enthusiastic, but who also need a great deal of attention—and, maybe, in the form of correction.

Sheep in verse 16 are what I will call normal, converted people—older in the faith. But, even so, they might have (like normal sheep have) a weakness for wandering. All of us fit into that category, to some degree; because that is what we do, by nature, as well. We wander.

The third form, which appears in verse 17, is the same word that is used in verse 16. However, it has a diminutive attached to it—like "little sheep." Most commentators think that this indicates people in need of tender encouragement. That is, people who need to be bucked up. They do not fit the category of a lamb who is new in the faith. They may have been 'in the faith' for quite a while. But they are not the most stable in the congregation. Rather, they are people who need frequent encouragement to help them along.

Overall, in that three verse section there, He seems to be saying that it is the pastor's responsibility to meet the spiritual needs of *all* in the congregation—even as a shepherd of real sheep would have to attempt to meet the needs of all the sheep in the flock out in the fields. But do not forget that we are dealing here with a biblical symbol, in which "sheep" is used to indicate Christians. Like all symbolism, it carries only so far and then it breaks down. "Sheep" breaks down because, unlike Christians, they do not have *personal responsibility*. Christians do! Christian sheep cannot let the pastor carry all the load of their spiritual feeding. The reality is that Christian sheep have a major responsibility, on their own, to seek their own spiritual nourishment—with the pastor seen primarily, but not limited to, as a guide.

Here the sermon is going to take a bit of a turn. Earlier I showed that Jesus talked about spiritual food and its energizing power. "The words that I speak to you are Spirit, and they are life." That is, they

energize life and move us toward the right kind of balance in our lives. As we move along, following His teaching, an interesting turn takes place. By analogy, He becomes the *spiritual food* to His followers.

This dovetails beautifully with what He said when He said, "The words that I speak to you are Spirit, and they are life." Remember that He *is* the Living Word of God! What He says about us having to eat Him, fits into this area. We are going to see this in John 6:26. After feeding the 5,000 from one boy's lunch and the miracle regarding the multiplying of the food for those who were sitting there listening, *spiritual nourishment* becomes the springboard for a lesson on where the Christian should go to receive good spiritual nourishment for the mind.

After Jesus perceived that people sought Him out primarily to be physically fed again, He understood that they had not properly understood what they had witnessed before. They did not understand the miracle as identifying Him as the Messiah, but merely as a means for getting food. And so here they were, again, hungry. There is a lesson in that, because physical things—from food, to any other thing that you can think of—will *never* fulfill this search, this yearning, that we have in us for something better than that. It will always leave us wanting more.

John 6:26-27 Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

Right off the bat, Jesus cautions those who were there. And, incidentally, we do not find out until the end of the chapter that there was a mixture of people there. There were (1) opponents, enemies in one group. There were (2) disciples, people who were following Him and listening to Him. And then there were (3) The Twelve, who represent the inner group—the inner core, an advanced group of disciples or learners. So we are dealing with three categories of people here.

The first thing He does is to caution His disciples about getting the wrong emphasis in life. He has to do this, because that is very easily done. But in its theme, this section fits directly into Deuteronomy 8:2-3—where it is written that the trials of the wilderness were designed to show man that man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word of God.

In Deuteronomy 8, the fact that life has a psychological aspect to it is merely stated. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *words* as well—stating that there is a psychological aspect to life—but there is little or no indication of which is more important: the physical things, or the spiritual things. What Jesus makes very clear in John 6 is that *what goes into the mind* for processing and assimilation is *exceedingly more important* than what goes into the stomach.

If we are going to have a fulfilling, satisfying, abundant life—there is no doubt as to which is more important. The quality of what goes into the mind is going to be the major factor that determines the quality of life. The first thing that He does here is to emphasize that we should strive, labor, work for the food that endures (that is, that *satisfies*) forever.

It does not show it too clearly in the English of verse 27. It merely says, "do not labor." But in the Greek it is written in the present imperative; and it is a very strong declaration by Jesus, that is equivalent to "Stop working!" (I hope you get the point.) He wants to grab people's attention about how important it is to follow through with what He is about to tell them. Of course, we understand

that He does not mean that we should stop working entirely. Rather, He is putting emphasis on this to help us understand how much more important what goes into the mind is than what goes into the mouth.

What He is talking about here is potential, because merely reading God's Word and putting it into the mind is not enough. There are other factors that must be combined with that action, because its effectiveness, that is, the effectiveness of the Word of God, does not happen like magic. It must also be believed! We can "hear" and not "believe." Just hearing the words does nothing, *unless* it is believed. Also, it is a very great help if it is not only believed but it is also put into action. That reinforces the believing.

Jesus then added, "which the Son of Man will give you." In other words, He is saying: "Work for the Word the Son will give you." That is what we turn our attention to. Now the people who were standing there and listening had no more understanding about what Jesus was talking about than the woman at the well, when He was talking about "I can give you water that you'll never thirst anymore." Like her, they gave what He said a completely physical setting. But at least they understood that what He was talking about had work involved in it.

John 6:28-29 Then said they to Him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

Jesus' reply has two possible answers. One is that God is always working to produce faith in His people, so that they can properly use their *free moral agency*. The second one that I am going to give you is the primary one, because they asked what *they* had to do. Jesus replied that godly work—for the individual—is believing in (or on) Him as Messiah. What this is inferring is that faith itself is a work! There is labor involved in faith.

Some (especially evangelical Protestants) object to this, because they feel that this creates a "works" salvation. But their objects are really just so much sound and fury, without biblical substance—because Jesus made it abundantly clear (saying at least a dozen times, in different ways) that salvation is by grace. The Scripture cannot be broken. This is not a contradiction. But in the biblical sense, merely believing or agreeing with God on some biblical doctrine is—of itself—no better than being dead. "Faith without works is dead," James said.

Dead things produce nothing, because nothing is working to produce anything. This is why Paul, in Hebrews 3, can use *unbelief* and *disobedience* interchangeably. In other words, if a person merely agrees, he merely has a preference; and works will be, at the best, inconsistent and sporadic. But if a person has *living faith*, he will be convicted—and "works" will follow.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, . . .

Everybody knows that *grace* is a gift—a freely given gift. But *faith* itself is also a gift. That almost seems like a contradiction to what I said before (that *faith is* a work), but faith itself is a gift as well.

Ephesians 2:9-10 [We are saved] . . . not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

I think a simple illustration will help you to understand. If you will, for the sake of the illustration, consider yourself as the roots of a tree. The roots of a tree do a tremendous amount of work on behalf of producing the fruit of the tree, and also in keeping the rest of the tree alive and producing fruit. They draw moisture and nourishment, in the form of minerals, from the ground. They process them, to some degree; and then they pass them on to the rest of the tree. However, the roots could do none of that unless the minerals and the water were freely given and, therefore, available to them to do the work.

And thus it is with faith. In like manner, faith is a gift—like the water and the minerals—freely given of God in order to produce certain works. Like the roots, we have a measure of control because we have a part to play. We must work to truly believe and, therefore, use what has been given—and thus produce the *fruit of the Spirit*. Faith is at one and the same time both a *gift* and a *work*. This is why Jesus said what He did, in verse 27—"which the Son of Man will give you." Faith is a *gift* from Him. Without it, no works would be produced.

But the faith is not produced in us—it is not magic—until we *believe* the words that He teaches us. And believing the words sometimes requires a great deal of work. We do not 'get it' right off the bat. That is, we do not get the meaning of the words. So, what do we have to do? We have to meditate on them, turn them over in our mind, work them back and forth, make comparisons. Ask questions—like "Where is this headed?" "What is it going to do?" "Is it going to be of value to me?" "Is it really part of the work of God?" And so on and so on.

What if you just hear something, and then do not? That is, like the Hebrews, you lazily do nothing with it. Will faith be produced? No, it will not! And, as we are going to see, that is what the bulk of these people in front of Jesus were doing. They were hearing the words, but they did not believe them. They did not even believe that He was the Messiah. So faith is a very nourishing *food for the mind*. It is necessary for psychological soundness and, therefore, an abundant life. But it will not be there *unless* we work to assimilate it through believing the words.

John 6:30-31 Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will you perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

When Jesus replied, what He said was this:

John 6:32-33 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

What I am going to do next is that I am going to paraphrase (1) what they said in the way of a question and then (2) I am going to paraphrase what Jesus said back to them. I will take it out of the King James English and put it into something a little bit more modern.

They said: "If He is greater than Moses, let Him perform a sign greater than that which Moses did when he gave Israel bread straight out of heaven." Now, they asked this because they did not believe that He was the Messiah. And this is what Jesus came back with: "Moses was merely God's agent, who gave directions to the people as to the manner in which the manna was to be collected. My

Father in heaven is the real Giver. But even if Moses is considered the giver, it remains that he did not give you the real bread from heaven. The Father is right now giving you the Bread out of heaven. I am the real Bread of Life."

It is right here that Jesus makes the first fairly clear statement that He is the One who is to be ingested and eaten. "*I am the Bread of life.*" He is inviting them to eat Him. It is also abundantly clear to us that Jesus understands all of this to be understood *spiritually*, including the word "life." *Life*, as Jesus meant it, is *as God has lived from eternity*. But, in and through Christ, we are able to share in it if we will "eat" *Him*—that is, *The Bread of Life*.

John 6:34-35 Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

Here He very clearly identified Himself as the Bread of Life. I am sure that He repeated it with a few different words than what He said in verse 33, because they were still misunderstanding the application that He was making. His declaration here—that He is the Bread of Life—is that He is the only permanent satisfaction for the human desire for life, and that attainment of this satisfaction hinges on *belief*. That is, *a commitment to Him on the basis of trust*.

Now, if you connect this thought with what He said in verses 26-29, it is clear that it is *through faith*—which enables an intimate union with Him to be established—and by *assimilating Him spiritually* (as physical bread is assimilated physically) that man attains to eternal life. Jesus did not mean that manna had no physical value; but rather that it was not the means of sustaining spiritual life. Nothing physical can do this! Physical things may please us. They may even exhilarate us. But they can give no lasting sense of well being.

This believing is a deep-seated *commitment*. This is stated in an interesting way in verse 35 [of John 6]. "And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life: He who *comes to Me*." What He intends that we understand of this is: It is "coming to Him" as one knows, and knows that he knows, that he has nothing and that he needs everything for the kind of life of which Jesus speaks; and Jesus is the only One who can give it. One having that kind of commitment will turn to Him for everything (like a plant turns toward the sun), knowing that without Christ we can do nothing.

It is not just somebody who says, "Oh, I believe. I accept Jesus Christ as Savior." There is much more to this than is on the surface of those words. And what I am telling you is brought in from other areas of Scripture where this is gone into much more deeply.

John 6:36-37 "But I [Christ] said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will in by no means cast out."

Jesus understood that those who were standing, or sitting, there before Him did not have the kind of faith that He was speaking of—so that they would come to Him like a plant turns to the sun. Therefore, there was no commitment in them. So, in these two verses, He makes His first step towards a clear statement in this context. Only those who are given to Him by the Father can have this *faith* and *commitment*. He is coming to the place where He is going to make that famous

statement (in John 6:44)—that no man comes to the Son except the Spirit of the Father draws him. "And I will raise him up at the last day." This is just a little preview of who is going to "come" (there in verse 37).

John 6:38-40 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. 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."

These three verses are one of the most comforting and encouraging of all of the promises in the Bible. He begins with that last phrase in verse 37, "I will by no means cast out." Then continuing on through verse 40, He promises—on His word, His promise—to follow through in fulfilling the Father's will. That He will guard and that He will preserve *those given to Him* to the very end. He virtually guarantees the salvation of the saints! He is virtually guaranteeing a calling that cannot be revoked; a foundation that cannot be shaken in any way; a seal, a promise, a confirmation that cannot be broken; and a life that cannot perish. This is God's promise through Jesus Christ to everyone who *sees* the Son.

When Jesus says "I," it is again very emphatic. "*I will do this!*" And, again, some translations—in order to give a sense of the emphasis—say, "I Myself." They double the pronouns, in order to help us understand how dogmatic He was in saying what He did.

John 6:41-44 The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." 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 therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. No man one come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."

By the time verse 41 is gotten to, the state of the emotions of those people (especially the enemies) had reached a place of dissatisfied, sullen, grumbling. That is why it says, "Then the Jews complained." They were grumbling among themselves. They were saying, "How can He be from heaven, when we know His father and mother?" This was done in Capernaum, not too far from Nazareth. So they were saying, "We have known Him from childhood. How does He expect us to believe him?"

You can see, brethren, that they were not taking this in. They were not believing it. They were not assimilating it as part of their very being. So what happened here is that Jesus ignored their grumbling—disbelief—and continued on with His teaching about working to save those the Father gave Him. He knew that these people could not get the commitment that was needed to really come to Him, because God was not drawing them. That is why He stated what He did.

This word *draw* is really interesting. I never realized this, until I prepared this sermon. He is saying, in effect, that the Father does not merely beckon ("Hey, come here.") or advise ("I counsel you to go in this direction."). Rather, God is *forcefully, powerfully drawing us*—pulling us toward Him. One commentator went so far as to say that it is an irresistible activity.

Just to give you an idea, if God draws somebody to Him—in order to work with them, or to have them work for Him—I want you to think of Jonah. He did everything in his power to get away from God and His calling. God even created a special fish. Jonah could *not* get away; and neither can you!

This same word is used, in other places in the Bible, in context that reveal a net full of fishes being dragged either in to a shore or on to a boat; of Paul and Silas being dragged into the Forum; of Paul being dragged out of the Temple; of the rich dragging the poor before judgment seats. And so He is saying that, from the beginning to the end of salvation, it is God and His Son, Jesus Christ—now our High Priest—that is the effective Power. And that Power is coming from above. You need to meditate on that. They are that determined to save us!

John 6:45-46 "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall be all taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and has learned from the Father comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father."

These two verses continue the theme. But here again, there is more here than readily meets the eye. This has to be understood, then, in its wider context. When it says, "They shall all be taught by God," He is not merely speaking of being "taught." This word is being used, in a sense, similar to the words *hearing* or *eating*. What He is speaking of here has to be understood in its wider context, because He is indicating the entire salvation transformation process.

God is always going to be teaching us! From the beginning of our calling until we are actually transformed into the Kingdom of God, *teaching* is essential to the entire process; and we will be being taught the entire way. And so teaching is being used for everything from *calling* to *transformation*—because teaching is the vital ingredient here on God's part. And what is it on ours? We have to *listen*. We have to believe it, and assimilate it. That is why we are disciples—because we are ever learning more and more about God.

So this section of this discourse began with Jesus saying—regarding anybody the Father gives to Him—that He will do everything in His power to save that person. Then He moved on to clearly establishing that it is the Father who begins the process with a powerful drawing. He then moves on here to include that transformation from the glory of man to the glory of God, which is also from God.

I want you to go with me back to II Corinthians 3, so that we can inject this here. This is where II Corinthians 3 belongs in this discourse in John 6.

II Corinthians 3:17-18 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding [or, reflecting] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory [of man] to glory [of God], just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The Spirit of the Lord is the creating agent, but it is God Himself who is the Creator—from beginning to end. He is assisted by Jesus Christ, our High Priest. Do they want to save us, or what? You had better believe it.

We have, in times past, put so much emphasis on what we do, and certainly we play a part in this. But the driving force in all of this is our Father in heaven. He is the one who is carrying all things forward; and "all" we have to do is *yield*. And that is hard enough.

Now, in these five or six verses, He thus encapsulates the entire salvation process within the word *taught* of God. Though driven from above, there is still human responsibility to do works of submission, but always the Bible shows God is in control. The human responsibility—*ourresponsibility*—is shown in the word *heard* (in verse 45). "Everyone who has heard."

Again, it is used in a much broader sense than just hearing a sound. It is being used like those other words.

Heard here encompasses, not just hearing the sound but also believing—and thus the producing of faith. So, again, through this word we touch on *eating the Word of God*. You might remember Romans 10:17—"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." That faith is only produced when that hearing is assimilated and believed and then put to use in the conduct of life.

John 6:47-51 "Most assuredly, I say to you, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 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."

The knowledge that one does obtain by listening—processing, believing, assimilating—results in the greatest of all blessings. "He who believes in Me has (already) everlasting life." And this *life* is the gift of Jesus Christ to those who have believed and have eaten Him. And that is why He said that He is the *Bread of Life*. This bread does what no other bread—even manna—can do. It imparts *spiritual life* and it banishes *spiritual death*.

So again He adds that He is the *Living Bread*. The implication is that He lived in the past, He was living in the present, and He will live in the future. And so this Bread cannot be merely tasted. It must be eaten so that it can be assimilated into us, and we can begin living life in Him and He in us.

Now until here, Jesus has been insisting that He—not manna—is the true *Bread of Life*. Now another new thought is added—that this Bread is going to give His flesh in order that the world may live. The point in this is that we cannot have life, of which He speaks, without also eating, accepting, assimilating, and believing in His vicarious death for us in the crucifixion. The Father gave the Son. The Son gives Himself. And apart from that voluntary sacrifice, Christ ceases to be "bread" for us in any sense at all. It is that serious. It is that important.

John 6:52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"

Jesus had clearly said that He wants men to eat His flesh, and that is the way the Jews interpreted His saying. And so they, again, give it a strictly literal sense; and they got to wrangling among

themselves over it. What this does is that it reveals the utter impossibility of those who do not believe to come to Him. They never will, because they will never understand the mysteries of salvation. They are ever ready to scoff, and that is what they were doing.

John 6:53-58 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father has sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats of this bread will live forever."

Jesus did not back down in the face of their scoffing (there in verse 52). In fact, He makes His statement about eating even stronger, by adding that we must also drink His blood. He moves from something that seems foolish to them, to something that is outright absurd to them. They were Jews. They understood the Old Testament, at least to some small degree. At least, they had some parts of it memorized. They knew what it says in Leviticus 17:10-11—that you are not supposed to drink the blood, because of the life thereof. So they knew those things.

But they still should have understood that He was not speaking literally about drinking the blood coursing through His body. If they knew Him from His youth, they should have known by the example that He set that He was the most law-abiding person that they had ever witnessed.

What Jesus meant was this: "He who accepts, appropriates, and assimilates My sacrifice as the only ground of his salvation remains in Me and I in him." That is why He said, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." As physical food and drink are offered and accepted, so also is Christ's sacrifice offered and accepted. As the body assimilates the physical, so the sacrifice is assimilated by the mind of the believer. And as the body is nourished and sustains physical life, so the sacrifice nourishes and sustains spiritual life. That is what it says in verses 57 and 58.

Now the reactions of the Jews before Him are clearly stated in all of the preceding verses. What is not stated until now, in verses 60 and 61, is:

John 6:60-61 Therefore many of His disciples, when they had heard this, said, "This is a hard saying. Who can understand it?" When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you?"

The interesting thing about this is, of course, that this was His disciples. It was a hard message for them to accept.

John 6:62-64 "What then if you should see the Son of man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit that who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe . . .

He was speaking to His disciples. They did not believe what He was telling them.

John 6:64-66 . . . For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been given to him by My Father." From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

Let me put that into, again, a little bit more modern language. He said, "If you see the Son of man ascending to heaven, will that not prove to you from where I came; and, therefore, provide authority for the words that you have heard?" Remember that this is being said to His disciples. He tells them: "My flesh cannot benefit you. Stop thinking that I was literally asking you to eat and drink My flesh and My blood. It is My Spirit, My person, in the act of sacrificing Myself that bestows and sustains spiritual life—even everlasting life." He tells them: "The words that I have spoken to you are *full* of My Spirit and, therefore, My life."

You see, unbelief was at the root of their problem, and that is why they could not understand. Jesus knew from the beginning of His ministry that it would be this way. And, therefore, unbelief was to be expected; because faith is a gift of God and it is not given to all men. God has given *us* a precious and wonderful gift—the ability to believe—in order that through this faith, a relationship is established whereby we are transformed into His image. The evidence that we possess this gift is that *we understand*, and that *we yield in obedience* in order that the transformation can take place.

Our responsibility is to believe; and, if we do, the works will follow. Sometimes believing does not come easily, because our minds are already full of so much information. And that misinformation battles against the truths of God. But faith itself is a work, in that it frequently requires work—mental work—to process raw knowledge into firm conviction. And when it becomes a conviction, it has been assimilated and becomes usable.

I think that this is a good place to stop. I think that I have one more sermon on this subject. In that sermon, I think it will primarily get back to the physical food once again.