

## John (Part 11)

The Impossibility of Satisfying a Spiritual Need with a Physical Solution

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Given 02-Dec-86; Sermon #BS-JO11

We are going to continue right on through the book of John. As is my habit, I am going to just review a little bit before we get back into chapter six. You will recall that when I was giving the background for the book of John I said that there was a way that the book of John could be put in outline form, and when we began chapter five I could have reminded you that we were into the third major section of the book of John. It could be titled, "The Reaction of Belief and Unbelief," because through John 5 and on into John 6—all the way up to the last verse of John 6—there are very interesting studies on the reactions of the crowds to Christ, as well as the reaction of those who believed in Him.

We have already gone through some of those in chapter five, and we are going to see more of them as we continue through chapter six. In both cases, the crowds that were listening to Him reacted in a negative way to what He had to say. The reasons were somewhat different in both chapters, but it all added up to the same thing: there was a rejection of Him and the message that He had for the people.

In John 5, He was in Judea, and there He was rejected on the basis that He was not following the scriptures. The actual incident involved the healing on the Sabbath day, and what resulted was that Jesus made a stand, proclaiming Himself to be the Messiah. He did, in His very words, say that He was equal with God. He did not claim equal authority with God, but He did claim that He was God. They rejected that because they said that He had broken the Sabbath. Of course, God would not break the Sabbath—that was their reasoning—but actually what had happened was He had broken their *traditions* regarding the Sabbath, but He had not broken the Sabbath.

I wanted to go back to this because I think that it is of some importance to you and me to understand what a powerful effect a tradition has on you and me. We are coming up once again on Christmas, and Christmas is traditional, and it is a very difficult thing for some people to break away from. I know that when my wife and I came into the church, this was one of the things that affected my mother the most—that we would no longer be meeting together with the family on Christmas day, having a meal with them, exchanging gifts with them. She had a very difficult time accepting that.

Of course, we could understand that—we were not trying to force our beliefs on her. But I also know that despite the fact that those of us who are in the church believe that Christmas is of pagan origin, it nonetheless still has a very strong effect on us. There is

quite an appeal to it and we have to recognize that the appeal is there. But the same appeal is in a very great number of other things involving tradition.

**I Peter 1:17-18** And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear [that is, with deep respect—honoring God]; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers.

I want you to notice what we were redeemed from: *aimless conduct received by tradition*. We are born into a ready-made world, and it is the only thing that we know as we are going up, so the things that are done here in our culture become part and parcel of what we are. We conduct our life according to the beliefs that we have had inculcated in us from babyhood. It is as natural as growing up.

I will give you a simple illustration of how deeply ingrained tradition is, and how difficult it is to break away from it. My wife and I spent seven and a half years in the deep South. Do you know what we found out while we were there? Those people do not—they do not—sit with their children and teach them to talk like that. Those children learn that drawl just by listening. They do not consciously try to learn it, and nobody consciously teaches them. It just becomes part and parcel of what they are—it becomes a part of their personality.

My wife and I grew up in Pittsburgh, and I know that my voice has been somewhat modified by living in other parts of the country. Every time we talk to someone back there, whether it be my mother or my wife's sister, we can hear the Pittsburgh twang—everybody back there talks through their nose. I did not grow up having my mother and father teach me that way of speaking. It just became part and parcel of my personality.

The same thing goes for those people in New York City who have a distinctive twang to their voices; those people in Boston—nobody sat down and taught Ted Kennedy how to talk like that.

This principle is something that has a very powerful effect on us, because we are a big conglomeration of thousands—maybe tens of thousands—of attitudes that we have just simply absorbed from the time that we have been babies. What has it produced? Peter here calls it "aimless conduct received by tradition." If we are ever going to be converted, it is going to be because our conduct is no longer aimless, but our conduct is

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based upon—has its roots in; is founded upon—the foundation of God's Word, and we are consciously trying to overcome because we are evaluating everything in our life. Your drawl, or the twang in your voice, is not all that important. But there are maybe ten thousand attitudes that need to be examined. Are they right, or are they wrong?

Jesus was talking back here in the book of John about something that is far more serious. If you go to the book of Mark, to a scripture that really every one of us is aware of, Jesus points this out in a far more serious situation. Remember He was speaking to the scribes and the Pharisees here, who were the political and religious leaders of the community.

**Mark 7:6-8** He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—

The real foundation of their lives was not in the Word of God. Here they were representing themselves as God's servants. They had set themselves up as the teachers of the people—the ones who were the guides. Jesus later called them "blind guides" in Matthew 23—He said, "Blind guides and hypocrites," and if the blind lead the blind, where do they end up? They both end up in the ditch.

What He was saying here was that the basis of their conduct was tradition, and that their traditions were not the same as the Word of God.

Back here in the book of John, the Jews accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath, and their judgment was based upon the traditions that the Jews had established regarding the keeping of the Sabbath. It was not the Word of God.

I think of all the movies I have seen in my life, the one that has had the single greatest impact on me was "Fiddler on the Roof," because it was dealing with this situation. Tevye had deeply ingrained in his mind the traditions of his people. We can look upon those traditions as being wrong. They were not really founded in the Bible, but nonetheless they were traditions that were part and parcel of His life. They were part of his personality. When his first daughter married somebody in defiance of the matchmaker, Tevye's head was left spinning. He did not know what to do about it. She wanted to marry somebody that she chose, and somebody that she loved, rather than follow the tradition that had been in their community for ages and ages. So she broke

away from it and married the poor tailor instead of the rich butcher.

Then the second daughter comes along, and she wants to marry the revolutionary. So she goes off, following her heart, and goes off to Siberia. You could see that Tevye felt for her—that his heart was kind of in a way with her—but still he could not fathom somebody breaking away from the traditions that they had held. Finally, the third daughter—horror of horrors—married the heathen Russian, and in a Russian Orthodox Church, no less. So he had to do what he felt was the only thing that he, as a Jew, could do, and disfellowship her from the family.

I try to apply the principles there to my own life and my life in the church—and try to think about how much tradition means to me. Am I willing to break away from those traditions that are part of my personality? How does God think about my traditions? Am I going to allow my traditions to keep me from obeying God?

Of course in the movie, Tevye could never make up his mind, so he went along mumbling to himself, "Now, God, this is the way I look at it. On the one hand.... But then on the other hand...." He could never make up his mind about what was right.

We have an infallible guide in the Word of God as to what traditions ought to be followed. I hope that you are thinking about what you permit yourself to do, and that your conduct is not aimless, because if we are following the traditions of men, it may result in a failure to grow to our capacity because we are kind of wandering around, even if what we are doing or permitting ourselves to think about or have attitudes toward are not essentially evil, but they may not be all that good either.

We have broken away from some of the more obvious things that are part of the tradition of men, as in Christmas, Easter, or Halloween. But please understand: there are many, many other traditions.

The reason I bring that up is because here in the book of John, in chapter 5 especially, we see there that those traditions were so powerful that the Pharisees rejected God in the flesh, and they held to their own traditions regarding the keeping of the Sabbath. It led them to argue with their very Creator. Even though He gave them proofs of His Messiahship, they still rejected Him on the basis of their own reasoning.

I showed you that one of their major problems—the reason they rejected Christ, even though they had the Scriptures—was that even though they studied the Scriptures, they were looking for arguments to support their own traditions. Is that not what people do with Christmas? They look in Luke 2, and they look in Matthew 3, and they see these

scriptures about being born in a manger, and they see these things about the wise men, and about the star overhead, and they come up with things "in the scriptures" to support their ideas regarding it—and it does not fit. When we honestly look for truth in God's Word, the Christmas traditions do not fit. But it seems to make no difference in many cases, because people shrug their shoulders and say, "What difference does it make?" I hope it does make a difference to you.

One of the things He is showing us here in John 5 is what a powerful effect tradition has on people—that they were rejecting the Word of God in the flesh, or on the pages of this book, based upon their own reasoning. And the reasoning comes from human tradition.

When we get into chapter 6, we have Him back up in Galilee again. This time the people again reject Him, but it is on a somewhat different basis than just the traditions of men. I am going to begin in John 6:1 again and just review the first 12-13 verses before we go into the rest of the chapter:

**John 6:1-5** After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"

You will recall, as I was going through here, I pointed out to you three personalities that appear in this particular story, one of which was Philip. Philip was from that area. If you look back in John 1, it mentions that he is from Bethsaida. So it seems on the surface that it was natural for Jesus to ask Philip, "Where can we get food?" because if there was anybody among the disciples who might know some of the resources in that area, it would probably be Philip.

But it says in verse 6, "But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do." Christ does test us. Why did He test Philip? Why did He not test Peter? Why did He not test John?

I mentioned to you as a possibility that not only was Philip from this area, but we can also see by putting together this account with what it says about Philip in John 14 that he is the one who said, "Lord, show us the Father." Jesus responded with, "Have I been with you so long, and you do not know the Father?"—almost kind of incredulous. It gives

one the idea that Philip was not the swiftest of the disciples. I do not mean in any way to denigrate his capabilities. I think the scripture also shows that he was a very solid individual—dependable and stable—but he apparently did not have the leadership capabilities of, say, a Peter, James, or John. The question is directed at him: "This He said to test *him*"—that is, Philip.

What was the reason for the test? I thought of this during the past week: It may have been to show Philip where he had a weakness. Maybe He was trying to get Philip stirred up. Maybe Philip needed to put himself out a little bit more—to stretch his mind. Maybe Philip was fearful about taking some of the leadership that maybe he should have.

If he were familiar with this area, maybe Philip should have taken the initiative to begin to find food. But he did not. He just held back. I do not know. These are just speculative things, just trying to think about the personality of the apostles. But He did seem to single Philip out. Philip gave an answer that he felt the condition was hopeless, because his answer was, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them." According to what I have read in commentaries, they feel that is probably about half a year's wages for a laboring man. His response was probably the response that about 99% of us would have given.

In verse 8, the next personality is Andrew. I mentioned to you that although Andrew is not mentioned all that frequently, it does show Andrew to be one who had more resourcefulness than Philip shows. Andrew brings something to Christ that he had gotten from a boy. He shows a bit of resourcefulness. At least he was thinking—he was trying to be helpful. Maybe even at the back of his mind he was thinking, "Well, maybe there is something that *can* be done with this little amount." I do not know. But he, too, showed that even though he brought a little bit, he was not too sure that that offering was going to be very much.

The third personality is the boy. It hardly seems likely to me that Andrew would spy a boy in the crowd and go over and grab the five loaves and two fishes from him. It seems more likely to me that the boy offered them—that he kind of saw what was going on, and maybe heard Jesus' question, and he made an offering of what little he did have, knowing that Andrew was part of Christ's company. It looks like he said, "Here is a little bit—maybe this will help."

I think that there is a great lesson there. The lesson to you and me is that every single one of us has an inferiority complex. I know that every single person here has asked himself, "Why has Christ called me? What do I have to offer?" We feel of ourselves as though we are little more than a warm body. We might even go to the extent of saying,

"Well, I pay and I pray....I give God His tithe, and I pray for the work every day, but what more is there?"

The lesson that is contained here is that God knows what He is doing. That is what it says: "He Himself knew what He would do." So when He called you and me, despite the limited amount that we are able to offer Him, He was well aware of that little amount whenever He called us. He was not calling us for what we *were*, but rather for what we can *be*—with the understanding that what we do have to offer, combined with what He is able to give us, is more than sufficient for us to do the job that He has for us to do.

This fits right in with I Corinthians 1:26:

**I Corinthians 1:26-29** For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

That is the part that is important to you and me. We have to understand that God does not make mistakes. Please do not limit His ability to work through you. He has called you, and what He is able to give you by His Spirit, combined with that little bit that we have to offer, is plenty more than is needed to do the job that He has called you to do. You and He together are *more* than enough.

We are intimidated by the possibilities of what we might have to do—and that is good. We will never be able to glory. We will never be able to say, "I did it by my strength." We will never be able to say, "God called me *because* I had a great voice", or "...because I was so intelligent", or "...because I had all of this that I was able to give to Him."

So five loaves and two fishes stretched out to feed, at the very least, 5,000. So you see, God has given us a lesson about how He is able to multiply the little that we are able to offer. So if we can offer Him a little, by His power a very great deal can be produced.

As I mentioned to you last week, if there were an equal number of women and children—I mean if the children and women together equaled the number of men—that would still be 10,000 people that He filled from five loaves and two fishes. That ought to be very comforting to you. We never have to worry about being able to do what God

appoints us to do. It can be done.

**John 6:10** Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

There is a lot of common sense in that. It is just a little thing. But as long as people are on their feet, what are they going to do? They are going to move around. They are going to jostle one another. They are going to be getting in one another's way. So when He told the disciples to make them sit down that brought order to everything so that there could be peace, there could be calm there. It says that there was much grass in the place. They did not have to worry about sitting in the mud or in the sand or the dust. There was plenty of grass.

**John 6:11** And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks. . .

It is interesting that when they sat down, it brought order, and everybody was able to hear Him give thanks, too. He did not give thanks in the midst of a lot of confusion, but He was able to do that, and people were able to hear.

**John 6:11-12** . . . He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled. . .

That is interesting, because I have read in commentaries where some have tried to pooh-pooh this miracle and say, "Well, it was a sacramental meal." What they mean by that was that everybody got a little tidbit. They got a little cracker, and they got a little tiny flake of the fish. But it says "*they were filled*".

Incidentally, the commentaries say that these fish were probably fish from out of the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee swarmed with a sardine-like fish, which meant it was probably about 4-6 inches long at the very most. These fish were renowned over the whole Eastern world there because they were pickled.

I just happened to think of this: do you suppose that every fish that was multiplied out was also pickled, or were only the original ones pickled? I think that they were probably duplicates of what the boy gave, and they were all pickled just like the pickled fish that

the fellow gave to Andrew, and Andrew took to Christ.

Another interesting thing: when they were all done, Christ made them gather everything together so that nothing was wasted. I bring this up because we are watching God in action. God gave those people enough so that they were filled to the full. Yet even though they were filled to the full, He would not allow anything to be wasted. So He gathered together everything that was left, and there were twelve baskets left, which meant probably—this is an assumption—that each one of the disciples then had a basket, and they filled their basket.

It is a far cry from what we see in the United States. Maybe you and your family in your meals at home are very careful that nothing is wasted; that you ladies cook what is sufficient for that meal and maybe a little bit more, and what is left over you gather up and use in another meal as part of leftovers. That is really as it should be.

It is really a somewhat sad commentary to see how much food is wasted in restaurants. I know that we could make the "well I paid for it" justification, and that is true. But it just makes me cringe. I do not know what restaurants do with the food; maybe it comes back out again. I do not know. I hardly think that is done. Maybe somebody in the back saves it and uses it for something else. Maybe it goes into dog food or cat food. I really do not know. But I think that it should be a part and a parcel of our character—part of our makeup—that we waste as little as we possibly can; that we be generous in our service to others, in our gifts to others, and even though generous, nothing gets wasted and as good a use is made of what God provides us as we possibly can do.

**John 6:14** Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did. . .

Here is that word again—"the sign". This is the fourth of the signs. Really, these things in one sense are parables that are acted out. The participants in them are live. Remember what I told you: A sign is something that identifies. A sign is something that describes. A sign is something that gives direction. It points toward something, and these signs are pointing toward some aspect of God's nature—some aspect of identifying Jesus as Christ and describing Him as God. It is showing us what God is like, and how He will act all the time.

So we see here, at the very least, that it is His desire always to add to our own abilities that we bring to Him. He will add far more to what we are able to bring to Him, so that we will accomplish what He has given us to do. It is a sign that He will be generous. It is a sign that He is economical, though, in what He does, and that He does not waste

anything.

You can read back in Proverbs and Psalms that the heavens were set out there with discretion. Everything is in balance. There is no wasted time or energy in anything that God has done.

The sign to these people was that "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." That is the way that they interpreted what they experienced there. They were, of course, referring to what we now know of as Deuteronomy 18:15, where Moses talked about "that Prophet."

We are going to see, as we go through this next series of verses, their reaction to identifying Jesus as "that Prophet." Remember I told you about this section being about "belief and unbelief," or those who believe and those who do not believe. Their reaction was to make a material application of what occurred, and to make Him King.

**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.

Why were they so eager to support Him? That is the question. We are going to see the answer to that unfold. The basic reason is this: because He was giving them what *they* wanted. In this case, it was food. In another case, it was healing.

We need to ask ourselves a very serious question: Are we any different from these people? We are going to see that their desires were carnal—they were material. I hope that we are different. When we want forgiveness; when we want our minds cleared of guilt; when we want healing; when we want strength; when we want peace; when we want hope—then there is *nobody* in the world more wonderful than Jesus Christ. These people wanted to make use of Him *for their own ends*.

When we repent—when we get baptized—are we unconditionally surrendering to Christ, or are we getting baptized just to *receive* something from Him?—forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, eternal life, access to the promises, access to God the Father in prayer? That is why repentance is so hard, because repentance is unconditional surrender to God. It is a giving of ourselves to Him—not a surrender to *get* something, but a surrender on *no terms* at all. Not a surrender to get something, but just to give ourselves to Him.

That kind of repentance God will honor. This is why David in Psalm 51 said, "Against

You and You only have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight. Therefore"—now I am paraphrasing this—"You are justified in your sentence, and clear in Your decision." What David said to God was, "Whatever You choose to do, I know that it will be right."

So if God wanted to strike David with a horrible disease, if He wanted to plague him or the whole nation because of David's sin, if He wanted to thunderbolt him to death—David was not bargaining in any way. It is one of the reasons why there in II Samuel 24, when David sinned—when Satan moved him to number Israel, and a plague began to come on Israel, and God told David to choose and He said, "Which curse do you want?"—David would not speak.

There is no bargaining with God. That is why Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 5, "When you go into the sanctuary of God, you better be more ready to hear than to speak, because God just might require of you what you vow to Him."

That is what is involved here. When Christ issues you and me a stern challenge for sacrifice—when He says to you and me, "I want you to bear your cross," or "I want you to do this service", or "to make this great effort for Me"—what is our attitude then? This that is required of us may be in the form of keeping commands, such as the tithing command—first tithe, second tithe, third tithe—or keeping the Sabbath, including the loss of a job because of the keeping of the Sabbath; or the keeping of the holy days; the dropping of Christmas; the dropping of Easter; the drawing away from one's family because of walking now to the beat of a different drummer.

When God begins to pattern our life according to His, and when we go to Him for healing, we know that His promise is that He will do it, and yet He says, "Not yet. Patience, My son." Or we tithe, and we are not prospered as quickly as we feel that we ought to be, or as dramatically as we think we ought to be, and months go by, and years go by, and we seem to be on a treadmill, and God is faithfully supplying the need, but not at the rate we would like. Do we then become resentful and depressed and unthankful for what we do have?

Why are we serving Christ?

These people wanted to *use Him to their own end*. They saw Him as a means of political gain. But when they began to see their hopes dashed, then comes the rejection process. The Jews in Judea rejected Him because they said He broke the Scriptures. Now the Jews in Galilee are going to reject Him because He does not fit *their* image of the Messiah. Where do you think they got that image? It was part of their *traditions*.

Traditions are important, and they need to be examined. We could even apply here the scripture in James 4 about, "whence come wars and fighting among you? Come they not hence from your own lusts?" So James says that these problems are arising because they are asking God amiss. They are asking God in order to consume on their own desires. They are using God toward their own ends. God will not respond to that.

Maybe our prayer is, "Lord, give me the strength to do what I want to do." Check yourself, and see if maybe your prayers are not going along those lines. Jesus had a struggle with this too. He prayed there, three hours running, in the garden of Gethsemane, because He was struggling with His own desire to not have to go through the crucifixion. At the end, of course, He conquered that desire through the power of God, and He said, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done."

So He understands the battle that we are going through, because He went through it Himself. We can help ourselves a great deal by understanding that we have nothing with which to bargain with God, and we are not to use Him toward our own ends. It is alright to ask Him for things, and He wants to give us our heart's desire. But we always have to understand that because of His love and because of His wisdom, it is going to be in *His* good time that these things will be given. What He wants us to do is to submit to His management of your life. That is where the faith comes in. It is certainly not wrong to ask God for these things. But it is wrong to expect Him to submit to our will.

**John 6:16-21** Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.

This is parallel to the accounts that are given in Mark 6 and Matthew 14. Each one of them adds a little bit more to the story, and John does not include here the time that Peter walked on the water. But nonetheless, it is John's account of this experience.

It is interesting that they left without Him. It is very likely that Jesus sent them on ahead and went back up into the mountains in order to pray. They started off, then, on their journey across the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee, incidentally, is noted for storms that sometimes arise. It is not a very big body of water, and that is part of the problem.

Because it is not very deep, and the winds are able to really roar off the hillsides around it, the winds have a very great effect on the surface waters.

So they were having a very difficult time. Apparently they had been rowing for hours, and were virtually standing still, expending all their energy. They were clearly frightened by the situation, if you put all three accounts together. They were not frightened just because they saw Christ walking on the water. They were frightened by the circumstances that they found themselves in: A small boat; they were familiar enough with the sea to recognize that they could be capsized; they were expending all of their energy, and not getting anywhere. They were virtually standing still, and yet apparently they felt the need to go on rather than just pull in to shore. Then we find Christ coming, and they get frightened. They thought they saw a ghost. Who can blame them, considering the situation they were in?

I wonder if there is not a lesson in here for you and me again. Maybe we do not literally see Christ as they did. You have to remember the circumstances, though—He was flesh and blood, and He was with them for 3½ years. But here they were in the midst of a frightening trial. They were expending all of their energy, and seemingly getting nowhere.

Have you ever been in the midst of something that was similar? Seemingly getting nowhere, in the midst of a trial, probably frightened, seemingly spinning your wheels, expending all your energy, and it looks hopeless. Well, the story shows us that as Christ drew near, they became frightened. Is it possible that in the midst of our trials that we also get frightened, even though Christ is near? We do not literally see Him. But you have to connect what I am talking about here with the rest of the story: when they invited Him into the boat, as it were, the problem immediately went away.

I never noticed that before. Twenty-six years in the church, and I never noticed until studying through this these last couple of weeks that as soon as He got into the boat, the boat was immediately on the shore. They did not even have to row the rest of the way. Did you ever notice that before? I never did.

If you look at the other accounts, they show that when they recognized Who it was, they immediately calmed down. Here is another thing: If we have the faith to recognize that He *is near*—if we really believe that He is with us in the midst of our difficulties—it is going to put us at peace, and then the problem is solved.

There are little vignettes like this to help us to understand. They story does not end there. Even though there may be a paragraph break in your Bible, it really does not end

there because it just goes right on over to the next section, and that next section has a great deal to do with what I am talking about in regard to this particular problem. We will get to that when we get to the verses.

**John 6:22-24** On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone—however, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks—when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

This is a flashback to try to fill in the gap between the days and how the crowd that Jesus fed the day before got to the other side. Basically it was like this: After the meal was over, and Jesus dismissed the people, the disciples went down and got into the boat, and the people observed them going away without Christ. But they continued to linger. So the next morning, not finding Christ, they began to think, well, maybe He had gone in the direction they had seen the disciples go off in.

As it happened, apparently at that time other boats arrived and they commandeered them (or whatever), got in them, and they went back to the other side of Galilee where they had seen the disciples headed, and assumed that Jesus had also gone in that direction. So John is explaining how the crowd got on the other side of Galilee.

Now they are back in Capernaum. If you can get the picture of the Sea of Galilee, the top of it looks like the top of a pear, the bottom is like the fat part on the pear, and Capernaum is on the southwest corner. Bethsaida is up on the northeast corner. (I am just giving you rough directions.) So they had to go across the Sea of Galilee in order to get to where Jesus was.

They did not realize at this time that Jesus had walked on water. They only knew that the disciples had gone away without Him. So they made some assumptions, and the assumptions were correct: that Jesus had somehow gotten to where His disciples were headed.

**John 6:25** And when they found Him on the other side of the sea [this is the west side of the Sea, where Capernaum is], they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You come here?"

They knew that the last time that they saw Him, He was on the other side.

I want you to notice that Jesus ignored the question. He did not answer it. That is interesting—why did He not? Did He just feel that this was no time for chit-chat? He could have said, "Well, I walked here." He could have said, "Well, I walked on the water here." I think He ignored it, though, because He wanted to stay away from something that He could see would be just a vain conversation—that it would be pointless, and there would be no real good reason that would come from His explaining that He had even walked there.

He goes right to the heart of their problem:

**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 will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

He, in effect, told them that "you cannot think about the spiritual because your minds are on the physical." Because their minds were on their stomachs—because their minds were on their own carnal, political aspirations of making Him a king, and also their own material wants (that is, their "food aspirations") and a life a prosperity and ease that it appeared to them that they could get from Him—He, of course, correctly saw that these were a revelation of their carnality. So the advice comes out that they should not work for food, but rather for the food which endures for everlasting life. It is just a way of saying that the emphasis in your life should be on that which is spiritual rather than on that which is physical. He is not saying that the physical is unimportant; He is saying that the spiritual is *more* important. It is a matter of emphasis.

He is, in a way, quoting what He had inspired Isaiah to say all the way back in Isaiah 55, where Isaiah made a very similar statement:

**Isaiah 55:1-3** "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an

everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David.

And on it goes. What follows in John 6 is a parallel to—it is an expounding of—that in which Christ makes Himself the central figure. It is as though He is saying, "I am the one who inspired Isaiah to say those things. Now you are confronted with the reality. What are you going to do with it?" Man has two kinds of needs: the physical, of course, and the spiritual. What we have to learn is that the physical can never satisfy spiritual needs.

It is interesting—at least I perceive this—that Christ was not overly concerned about the very unequal distribution of wealth. In one place He said very clearly, "The poor you will always have with you." It seems like an unfeeling statement, but it was really a matter of evaluating relative importance. That is really all it came down to. But He said, "Me, you do not always have with you. But the poor are always going to be here to be taken care of."

I give that just as an illustration to help you to understand that God is not overly concerned about the unequal distribution of wealth. If that is the way God thinks, then we also ought to think that way. What He is saying is that money is greatly overvalued—or the worth or relative value of money is greatly overvalued. What He is saying is that a poor person can actually have a better life than a wealthy person. It all depends on his point of view, his attitude, and how *he* values the physical things as compared to the spiritual.

So to me the conclusion is that the physical part (just get your mind off money) or the physical aspects of life are grossly overvalued by us. This is what leads to gluttony (at least partially), or to alcoholism. It leads to excesses in many, many areas of life.

II Timothy 3 is the section that opens up, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: men will be lovers of themselves," and so forth.

**II Timothy 3:10-11** But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.

Look at that—here is God's apostle, certainly one of His chief representatives. If God were overly concerned about the physical—if He valued it as being something that was really worthwhile—do you think that maybe He would have had one of His two most

important representatives going through suffering, persecutions, afflictions, leaving him [Paul] for dead as a result of a stoning, shipwrecked, in jail for two years in Rome (at least in chains in his own private house)? He says, "Out of them all the Lord delivered me."

If the physical is so important, why does He not heal us? Answer that question for yourself. Why does He not heal us right away? Well, He is making *use* of healing. There is something more important than the healing.

**II Timothy 3:12-13** Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Why do evil men grow worse and worse? I will tell you why: It is a matter of cause and effect, and it is a major reason why we should not allow ourselves to be deceived into putting too much emphasis on physical things—whether it be money, whether it be sex, whether it be food, whether it be anything that is physical, whether it be good health. None of those things have within them the qualities to satisfy spiritual needs. But if a person is deceived into overvaluing the importance of the physical, since the physical *cannot* satisfy, what formerly "satisfied" will no longer satisfy, and then the person has to have *more* of the physical, and then *more*, and then *more*.

I will give you an example. A little bit of alcohol—at the beginning—gives a person a buzz, and he feels good. But the body soon adjusts, and it takes a little more to give him the same buzz the little bit did before. And the brain adjusts, and then he needs more, and then he needs more, and then he needs more.

When I worked at the mill, I worked with men who were such alcoholics that during the middle of the day, when lunchtime came, they had to run out onto 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Homestead and get themselves a couple of shots and beer, and then get back into the mill—because that was the only way that their brain could work and function steadily. They were so hooked on it that a dependence had been created, and they could not work without it.

God shows in Romans 1 what happens. He uses sex as an example. This is why people have to be careful of fornication—of sex outside of the God-designed laws. At first, fornication gives a person a pretty good thrill. But it is not designed by God to fulfill the spiritual longings within the person—the spiritual needs. The person is using it to try to find those things. Now, he does not realize that when he gets involved with it. But it is an

illicit use of the law of God, and it cannot satisfy.

The same thing happens with adultery. It, too, cannot satisfy the longings that a person has within him—this longing for fulfillment, this longing for peace, this longing for contentment, this longing for enjoyment. The first thing you know, once is not enough. Then it is twice. Then, you see, it begins to branch out to multiple partners. Then, God shows that eventually if we continue to follow the desire and have enough time and material and energy to go into it, it leads into all kinds of perversion with animals—you name it. Because it cannot fulfill the desire, the person has to go more and more into it.

Until he can bring that under control, he is its slave. He is slave to a physical thing. That is the kind of person God says will never be in His Kingdom. That is what He is talking about there in I Corinthians 6, beginning in about verse 9. That is what the problem is here in John 6. That is the principle that is involved in this.

Shortly after the time of Christ, Rome reached such a pinnacle of debauchery...those of you who heard Mr. Suckling's sermon there in Glendale a couple of weeks ago, when he was talking about how we in the United States have become so wealthy that we are losing all sense of proportion—well, Rome set the example of losing all sense of proportion as to what is *right*.

They actually—it is recorded in their own chronicles, in their own histories—made banquets of peacock brains. Do you know how small the brain of a peacock is? Do you know how many peacocks would have to be killed in order to provide a banquet of peacock brains? I mean, to provide one banquet, they would have to kill tens of thousands of peacocks. They lost all sense of proportion, because it became fashionable in Rome to get your kicks out of peacock brains. They had banquets of nightingales' tongues. Do you know how small the tongue in a bird is? See, they lost all sense of proportion, because it was the "going thing." Really strange.

Now, why? It is because of what Christ is talking about here. There was a tremendous longing within those people—a deep dissatisfaction with life. It was not producing what they thought life ought to produce, but they had no way to satisfy those longings, because it was the only thing that they knew—to turn to food and to drink and to unbridled sex.

Do you know that it is recorded—I do not know whether it is true, but I will give it for what it is worth—that for the first 700 years in the history of Rome, there was not one single divorce? But by the time of the apostle Paul, just after Christ—in the time of Seneca (he is the one who wrote about it, and he lived at the same time as Paul; he

was a contemporary of the apostle Paul)—that people were divorcing for any and every reason, and marrying six, eight, ten wives in the course of their life. It is the same reason: a tremendous longing; a tremendous dissatisfaction. But you cannot get it out of food. You cannot get it from sex. You cannot get it from alcohol. You cannot get it from money. It is a *spiritual* need that man has, and physical things are greatly overvalued. Even in the areas of health and healing, brethren, we have got to get the right approach on this.

If we have the wrong idea about healing, then are we not using God for our own ends? We are trying to get something physical from Him in order to satisfy our own desire. I will tell you, this is where spirituality is at—to be of one mind with God and His purpose, and recognize that all these physical things are good—they are good enough—but they are a means to an end. They are not the end; they are a means to an end. They are to keep us going in order for us to learn what is really of value. What are of value are those eternal, spiritual things.

So Jesus said, "Do not labor for the food which perishes." He is not saying we should not work. He is just telling us to prioritize things properly. It is a matter of attitude. From the time that we have grown up, tradition has taught us to put the emphasis on that which is physical. We tend to value people according to their wealth. We tend to value people according to the way that we can use them, or the things that we can get from them. On and on it goes. It is part of our attitude because we have been victimized by Satan.

So He says what we need to put the emphasis on is the food which endures to everlasting life. "Fear God and keep His commandments, because this is the whole man." That was Solomon's conclusion.

He tells us where the source is: the Son of Man. He tells us in John 15, when we get there, "Without Me you can do nothing." He does not mean that we cannot build automobiles. He does not mean that we cannot create banks. He does not mean that we cannot even create nations. What He means is that if we are going to fulfill God's purpose for us within His work, we cannot do it without Christ. He is the spiritual source that we have to go through, "because God the Father has set His seal upon Him."

What He is saying here is that "What I am saying is authenticated by God"—see, the seal, like they used to have on the rings.

Well, they came right back and said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" (John 6:28). Now, pay attention to verse 29:

**John 6:29** Jesus answered and said to them, "***This*** is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

I will bet, if I were a betting man, that most of us would not think of faith as being a work. Why would Christ say that this is the work of God to believe in Him whom He has sent? I am going to tell you why: because everything we do is done because this is what we believe. That is why I began this Bible Study the way I did. We may not even realize why we do things the way we do—because it has been put in there from the time that we are born. It is part of the tradition of the culture in which we were reared. But we do things because that is what we believe.

I do not mean that we have to consciously go through the thought, "I am doing this because I believe that it is right." I am saying that what we do, we do because this is what we believe.

What Christ is saying here is this: Since faith is the foundation—it is the fountain; it is the source—of everything that we believe, the important thing is, what is the source of our beliefs? Is it tradition, or is it Christ? If it is Christ, then we are on the right road. That is why He said, "You have got to believe in Me"—because He *is* the Word of God, in the flesh.

Do we believe God, or do we believe men? That is just another way of saying, "Do we believe God or do we believe tradition?" I can say that on authority because that is what Peter said: "this tradition we have received from our fathers"—who are men.

So what this means in practical fact is that through the course of our Christian experience, we have to bring everything under the scrutiny of God's Word to see whether what we believe has its basis in truth, or whether it is just tradition. The Word of God is the foundation of knowledge. The foundation of this world is in Adam and Eve—men; the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. That is what we have grown up in.

So the key thing in our life is that whether we are going to be successful in growing, in being converted, depends on what we believe. Everything has to be examined, and that is a time-consuming operation. That is why conversion is a process, and that is why we hear sermons, Sabbath after Sabbath. That is why we have Bible Studies. That is why we encourage you to talk to God every day, and to study God's Word every day—because His Word has to become the foundation of our thinking processes, the things that govern our attitudes.

Everything eventually has to be tied in to the Word of God, so that we can become the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So in a sense we become the spitting image of Jesus Christ—who was the Word of God. When we are that way, it is going to be awfully hard to sin, because our attitudes will be like His, and because everything we believe will be what Christ believes. That takes a lot of time, and God gives us time.

Above all, the single most important thing is our attitude—that by the end of our life, God will see that our attitude is, regardless of our lack of knowledge, that we are always going to go in the direction of His law—that is set in our will. Even though we do not know everything, and even though every belief has not been uncovered (as to whether it is of the tradition of men or from God's Word), He can see and He is assured by our attitude that when push comes to shove, we are always going to go in the direction of His law. We are converted—we will always make the choice to go in that direction. It is not essential that we learn everything. But it is essential that God see that our will is absolutely set to believe Him, and to go in that direction—the direction of His Word.

One final thing and that is that we do not tend to think of belief or faith as a work, but it is because belief colors every aspect of life and determines its quality, and it determines its results. That is what God is interested in—its quality and its results. We are going to see that as we go along in this chapter. God is very concerned about what we believe because since belief colors every activity of life, it determines life's quality and life's results—and that is what He is interested in. So the crux of Christian faith is believing in Christ.