

*John 6:41 At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"*

*43 "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. 44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."*

Dear Friends in Christ,

### WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS?

A few days ago my son, who is a Green Bay Packers fan (one of my parental failings), excitedly shared a news headline. It was about Jordy Nelson. In case you don't follow football, Jordy Nelson is a wide receiver for the Green Bay Packers. Last year he went to the Pro-Bowl. He also signed a contract for \$9.75million a year (about \$27,000 per day). But that wasn't the headline. The headline was that Jordy spends his off-season working on the family farm as much as 12 hours a day. My son instantly knew that this guy is worthy of respect. He couldn't put it into words, he just knew it.

We love to see people who don't forget where they come from. We love to see people who accomplish great things, and yet who count themselves ordinary people. Stories like that are a welcome relief from the headlines of crime and corruption. People who succeed with humility, they seem to validate the rest of us who aren't superstars.

#### I. An Outrageous Claim

Now I have a story from the other side, the not so humble side. Long ago there was a guy who lived in a country ruled by tyrants. The people of that country wanted to make one of their own their king—sort of a rebel leader. At first that man refused. The people were disappointed. In his very next public appearance the next day, he said that being king wasn't good enough for him. He wanted more. He seemed quite the opposite of a wealthy superstar working on the family farm. He claimed that which only God could claim. Amazingly, part of his speech has been preserved for us. Let me read some of his speech: ***"I am the bread that came down from heaven."*** Yes, I am talking about Jesus!

You might remember from our sermon a couple weeks ago that after Jesus fed thousands of people from a lunch box, that they wanted to make him king. He refused.

We usually take that as a sign of Jesus' humility. We think, "Jesus is such a humble man and friend of ours that he wouldn't want to be a king!" This can especially happen to me as a pastor. I have read and heard this story so often that I fail to realize how outrageous Jesus' words were. He said, ***"I am the bread that came down from heaven."*** If I had been a non-believer in the crowd I would have been thinking, "Being king isn't good enough for you, huh? You're not a loaf of bread, you're a fruitcake."

We respect people who are humble. We have *great* respect for *great* people who stay humble. But people who have, as we may call it, a "God complex", we have no time for people like that. I mean, people who think they are God's gift to humanity really get under our skin.

Sometimes we can wonder why more people don't pay more attention to Jesus. Well, make yourself a member of Jesus' audience. Put yourself in the Jewish town of Capernaum, and listen to the guy you went to grade school with, whose dad made the table and chairs in your kitchen. Listen to that guy tell you, "Being king isn't what I am after. I want you to worship me." It doesn't matter if he could do some amazing things. Very likely you would say what the people around Jesus said, "***Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?***" (41).

There is something unreasonable about Jesus' claims. We need to remember this point. We cannot boil down all of Jesus' words so that they are palatable to human reasoning.

When you accept the Bible as a historical record, you are left with a dilemma. C. S. Lewis said it this way, "...the really foolish thing that people often say about [Jesus is]: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil... Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."<sup>1</sup>

The people before Jesus understood exactly what he was saying. They had seen the miracles he performed. But they could also, truthfully, say, "***Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?***" What if your childhood friend should one day declare that he is God's gift to this world? What if a co-worker said it? What if your pastor said it? We would give them one, "Not funny," and then walk away or lay into them. But Jesus made those claims and he wouldn't lay off. "***I am the bread from heaven... I am the bread of life... I am the living bread... If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.***" No wonder we hear that the people were grumbling. The guy they thought would make a great king is turning out to be a lunatic.

Which is exactly why so many people of the world do not acclaim Jesus as their Savior. His words are outrageous. This is where faith comes in.

## II. A Claim that Requires Faith

If you ever take a tour of a cave, like Mammoth Cave, usually part of the tour is to take you down into the depths of the cave and then turn out the lights for about one minute. It is eerie. Darkness is so complete you can feel it. Hundreds of feet below the ground, a mile or two away from the opening. If you had to get out of there on your own without light – well, you wouldn't make it.

As Jesus talked to the crowd, he knew that the natural human relationship to God is that of a person deep in a dark cave. In Catechism Class, when we study the Creed, the part that says, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life," we memorize an explanation to those words. The students memorize this: "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel..." Many tell us to "Choose Jesus," to "Make Jesus the Lord of your life." Those words, "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing, believe in Jesus Christ" are in exact agreement with the words of our text: "***No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.***" We require God to step into our darkness. His message does not make sense to our natural reason. A man who claims to be God? That God would condemn us for every little sin we commit? That the only way to avoid that punishment is believing that one man died on a cross to pay for our sins? None of it makes sense.

As those people had their objections to Jesus, so we by nature have our objections to Jesus. Which is why Jesus is so patient with these people and all people. He realizes that his claim is beyond belief. So Jesus teaches them, "***No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.***" He tells

---

<sup>1</sup> (Mere Christianity, *The Shocking Alternative*, p.52)

them to stop listening with worldly ears, and let God speak to them.

Maybe this is unreasonable, in an age of the 5 second attention span, but I encourage you to read some of the books of the Bible. If I were to encourage you to read the entire Bible, that would be frightening. Most Bibles come out around twelve hundred pages, and they don't even have pictures. But try taking one book of the Bible. Try one of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Luke is the longest with only 42 pages. You could read it in an afternoon. Or if you spent 10 minutes an evening, it would only take a couple weeks. I say that because when you read these historical records of Jesus' life, you become aware of the passage of time. Jesus spent months and years with people. One thing you always feel with Jesus is his patience. He gave people time to hear his claims to being the Son of God. He compared faith to a seed. A seed does not sprout, grow, bear fruit and wither in a day.

The words that Jesus chooses to use in our reading bear that out. He says, ***“No one can come to me unless the Father...draws him.”*** God works patiently to bring us to faith. Like a fisherman who can take hours to land a large fish, ***“The Father... draws him.”*** And even then, people can resist God's drawing. Even Jesus, after he had proclaimed the Gospel, had only a couple hundred followers at the end of his ministry – and he did miracles and raised the dead! So don't be discouraged when you share God's Word and it doesn't immediately bear fruit! God's word is working.

More importantly, rejoice that God has worked faith in you. The natural animosity you and I feel toward God has been overcome by his patient love. Now we too believe in the Bread of Life.

### III. A Claim Which Is the Only Answer

There is a sentiment out there, regarding faith, which we need to guard against. It is the “Just believe” idea. You see it in books (e-books, paper books), it is glaringly obvious in most of the movies we watch. I have seen it on the side of a cereal box on my kitchen table. A marquee sign in front of a local school says it. It says, “We believe.” That is all it says. “We believe.” “You believe what?” Well, that is the point. The slogan of our day is that faith is more important than the content of faith. You can fill in that blank with whatever you want. But when it comes to religious things, Jesus never left that blank blank. He always filled it in. ***“I am the bread of life.”*** *“He who comes to me will never be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty”* (35). Jesus tells us what we are to believe, and there is only one right answer.

Jesus is not one of many names that you can put in the blank behind “We believe \_\_\_\_.” This is why we confess our faith in the words of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds every week. Jesus has told us that there is something specific to believe. And that is what he says in the last verse: ***“I am the living bread that came down from heaven... If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”*** (51).

Thank God that He has put the gift of faith in your heart. Thank God that you accept Jesus as the Bread of Life. Thank God that Jesus' promise will be realized in you, ***“If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”***

Now let us share that message with those around us – even if Jesus' claims appear outlandish to other people, remember: It has never been otherwise, even to those who heard Jesus with their own ears.

Who does he think he is? He told us, ***“I am the living bread that came down from heaven.”*** Amen.