

Small Group Guide – Week 42 Life-Saving, Soul Satisfying Faith

The Church at Brook Hills

October 18-24, 2010

John 6

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God’s Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

John 6

Jesus Christ entered the world to glorify God by dispensing the gift of eternal life to all who would believe in His person and trust in His work. In order to induce the faith that produces eternal life, Jesus ministered to people through signs and speech en route to dying on the cross as the Lamb of God (1:36). He paved the way for people to know that the One who died on the cross was God in the flesh, ruler of all, and the king of a new kingdom. To that end, Jesus performed signs and explained the revelatory intent of those signs. His words and His deeds complemented one another in the ministry of revealing His messianic identity. We need a proper understanding of Jesus’ works as signifiers of His person. It is faith in Christ that allows us to be a part of his kingdom. John 6 teaches that such faith is both life-saving and soul-satisfying.

The Message of the Miracle

Study the Text . . .

In vv. 1-15, Jesus feeds about five thousand people with five barley loaves and two fish. The next day the same multitude followed Jesus across the sea and into Capernaum (vv. 22-24). Jesus then took the opportunity to clarify the message of the miracle (vv. 25-51). The sign met an urgent physical need. However, the sign’s purpose was to reveal Jesus as God’s appointed Messiah. He was not seeking merely to meet an urgent, yet temporary, need of physical hunger but the urgent, yet eternal, need of spiritual famine. He used the miraculous provision of physical food as an illustration of God’s miraculous provision of spiritual life. Ultimately, through performing the miracle and subsequently explaining the miracle, Jesus Christ reveals that He is more necessary for life than food.

On the next day, a large crowd of people pursued Jesus, but they did so not because they wanted Jesus but because they wanted His gifts. They wanted the miracles but not necessarily the One to whom the miracles pointed. Throughout John’s Gospel, miracles are often referred to as “signs.” All signs point to something beyond themselves. The crowd, however, was so focused on the sign that they failed to see the one to whom the sign pointed (v. 26). They preferred full stomachs instead of eternal life. An interesting comparison can be found between the crowds of John 6 and the people Paul rebukes in Philippians 3:19 whose “end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

Ironically, the people believed the Messiah’s ministry would be accompanied by signs from God (v. 30). But, again, they were more interested in seeing signs than seeing the Savior. They refer to Moses and the miraculous provision of food for the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings (Ex. 16). Jesus dismissed the people’s tendency to credit Moses for that miracle by identifying His Father as the one who provided for their needs (v. 32). Just as the Father sent the bread to care for the temporary needs of His people in that day, He has now sent His Son, the Bread of Life, to care for the ultimate needs of the world.

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- What is the ultimate purpose of Jesus' signs?
- After seeing the sign, what did the people say about Jesus? (v. 14)
- Why did the multitude follow Jesus? (v. 26)
- What did the miracle reveal about Jesus' identity? (vv. 35, 41, and 48)
- How was Jesus' miracle more spectacular than Moses'? (vv. 49-50)
- Why did the people stop following Jesus? (v. 60)

Group Discussion

- What is the point of a sign?
- Jesus' miracles are referred to as "signs", what does Jesus' sign point people to?
- What does it mean for Jesus to be "the bread of life"?
- Why did the multitude seek after Jesus in verse 26?
- Do we want Jesus' provision more than his person?
- What does it look like to desire Jesus above and beyond His gifts?

Life-Saving Faith

Study the Text . . .

The Gospel of John was written "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). Faith and life are inextricably linked throughout the book and provide a primary theme of John's Gospel. Believing in the person and work of Jesus Christ produces life. John makes this clear from the very beginning of the book by identifying Christ as our original life-source: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was *life*. And the *life* was the light of men" (1:3-4). In today's text, he also identifies Christ as our eternal life-source: "Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to *eternal life*, which the Son of Man will give to you" (6:27; see vv. 33, 40, 47, 54, 68).

In John 17:3, a definition for eternal life is provided: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." The phrase "to know the one true God" is in keeping with the Old Testament concept of intimacy such as when a man "knows" a woman in the marriage bed. Eternal life provides people with an affectionate relationship with God. In this sense, faith in Christ reverses the result of the fall that marked our relationship with God by an estranged animosity (cr. Ephesians 2:1-3). The eternal life that faith in Christ provides replaces estranged animosity with intimate communion.

In vv. 52-56, Jesus uses shocking and offensive metaphors to portray the close communion with which believers are to have with Him. Eating Jesus' flesh and drinking Jesus' blood here is not specifically tied to the ordinance of Holy Communion, but His words do seem to anticipate that practice where local churches will gather and symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood (1 Cor. 11:23-32). Here, however, the phrase most immediately parallels Jesus' appeal for people to come to Him and be saved through His atoning death on the cross and be satisfied through abiding in Him (v. 56). This kind of life contrasts with the life of the religious leaders who oppose Jesus. Because they do not receive Jesus as God's appointed Messiah, Jesus says to them, "I know that you do not have the love of God within you" (v. 42). By rejecting Christ, their lives

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continue to be marked by an estranged animosity rather than intimate communion. Such estranged animosity will carry them into a Christ-less eternity.

- How many times is eternal life mentioned in this passage?
- How many times is faith referred to in this passage?
- How do people come to believe in Jesus Christ? (v. 44)
- What does it mean for God to “draw” a person to Jesus? (this is the same word used in 2:8; 4:7, and 12:32)
- What promise is made to those who believe in Jesus in verses 35, 40, and 54?

Group Discussion . . .

- What does it mean to be estranged from God?
- What does it mean to do “the work of God”? (v. 29)
- What does it mean to “believe in Christ”?
- Why is faith necessary to be reconciled to God?
- What effect should verse 44 have on our faith?
- How have you experienced God drawing you to Jesus?
- How do verses 38-39 speak to the security of your salvation?
- How should we respond to God in light of saving and securing us?

Soul-Satisfying Faith

Study the Text...

Not only is faith in Christ life-saving in that we will be raised in the last day, faith in Christ is also soul-satisfying. Sometimes we wrongly think that eternal life is just a future reality. What John teaches throughout His Gospel is that eternal life is not just something we are waiting to experience at some point in the future. Instead, eternal life has crashed into the present with the inauguration of God’s kingdom. Eternal life is not as concerned with the length of one’s life as it is the quality of one’s life as it is lived in affectionate communion with God. We do not have to wait to enjoy God one day after we die or after Jesus returns. We can enjoy Him by knowing Him right here, right now. J. I. Packer writes, “What makes life worthwhile is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance and this the Christian has in a way that no other person has. For what higher, more exalted, and more compelling goal can there be than to know God?” (*Knowing God*). In the process of getting to know God, our souls are satisfied. This is what Jesus is getting at in verse 35. Coming and believing in Jesus should be a constant occurrence in the lives of those who trust in Christ.

The privilege and opportunity we have to find in Christ all that we need is threatened by many things. Rather than feasting on the Bread of Life, we are tempted to feast on other foods. Jesus knows this better than we do which is why he instructs us not to labor for food that perishes but to labor for food that endures to eternal life (v. 27). In other words, rather than investing in earthly pleasures and pursuits, invest in the eternal pleasure of pursuing God.

C. S. Lewis recognized the futile tendency people have toward settling for less than what Christ longs to provide. He writes, “Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the

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staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased" (*The Weight of Glory*). In today's passage, Jesus promises to satisfy our souls. He will quench our spiritual hunger and thirst as we eat of His flesh and drink of His blood. In other words, He does this for us as we commune with Him.

Not everyone is willing to look to Christ with life-saving, soul-satisfying faith. The majority always seems to reject what Christ offers. In vv. 60-70, the crowds refuse to believe in Christ because they did not understand the message of the miracle. Jesus then attributes faithful responses to His message and ministry to the Holy Spirit (v. 63). Many people turned away from Christ, but Peter and the faithful disciples who remained recognized the futility of seeking eternal life anywhere other than in Jesus, God's appointed Messiah.

- Why did the people turn away from Jesus? (vv. 60-70)
- What was so difficult about the message of Jesus' miracle?
- Make note of all the present tense verbs peppered through this chapter.
- Compare what Jesus says about giving eternal life to those God gives Him with what He prays in John 17:1-8.
- Compare also Nicodemus' oblivious response to Jesus' teaching on the new birth in John 3 with how the people interact with Jesus in verse 52.
- What is the role of the Holy Spirit in producing life-saving, soul-satisfying faith?

Group Discussion . . .

- What kinds of "food that perishes" do people labor for?
- Why do we tend to settle for "food that perishes" rather than the "food that endures to eternal life"?
- Why is the flesh useless when it comes to exercising life-saving, soul-satisfying faith in Christ?
- Why is Holy Spirit necessary? What other texts in John's Gospel speak of the Holy Spirit's role in the salvation and satisfaction of God's people?
- How can we practically seek the food that endures to eternal life?