

Notes on John 6

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John 6 is another wonderful example of salvation being announced by the Lord (Hebrews 2:3). The famous miracle of feeding 5000 is overshadowed by the message of Christ Who came down from heaven to be the Bread of life. It is typical of John to stress the significance of a sign more than the sign itself. Those who glory in miracles as the main thing in the powerful working of God and then pay little attention to the gospel, lack the emphasis of the Holy Spirit Who led John to write as he did. The gospel is not found in what Jesus did in feeding people but in Who it is Who gave His flesh for the life of the world (v.51). In the few signs John chose, he never wavered from his purpose to convey that *“Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in His name,”* (20:31). Jesus is as capable of giving eternal life as He was at feeding the five thousand with the lunch of one boy and having more food left over than they had at the beginning.

This chapter is set on the Golan Heights on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. This account includes public ministry and private times with His disciples. Jesus had chosen a secluded place, but the crowds, knowing where He was, followed Him. John has provided considerable detail in this chapter of people moving from one place to another. Jesus, His disciples, and the crowd all arrived in Capernaum in different ways. The Apostle was determined to keep a connection between the miracle on one day and the serious dialogue on the next.

In John 6, even as people are hearing the gospel, Christ teaches about their response to it – a response of faith or of a resistance sinners cannot overcome on their own. This chapter elaborates on the two responses of the Prologue: *“His own did not receive Him,”* while on the other hand, others believe because they were *“born of God”* (1:11-13). In John 6 the Lord Jesus linked the doctrines of election, calling, and perseverance, with the inability of the sinner to believe. None of those words were used, but the concepts are taught. In Jesus’ ministry the time promised in Isaiah 54:13 had arrived. Sinners believe only as a result of the Father’s intervention. In the same context, many thought to be “disciples” left Christ because they could not accept His claim that He had come down from heaven. The real Messiah was an embarrassment to them.

This is the longest chapter in this Gospel, with only two explicit OT references: the quotation of Isaiah 54:13 and mention of the manna in Moses time in Numbers 11. (See Psalm 78:23,24). Another OT parallel is not explicit, but the feeding of the multitude has parallels to the time of Elisha. Since some thought that Jesus was a prophet (v.14), John may have intended to show that Jesus’ ministry is a greater working of God than in the days of Moses and Elijah/Elisha. Both of those times in the history of Israel were periods when God worked by miracles. Jesus is greater than those prophets. He really is the One Who has come down from heaven. He is the ultimate provider; in fact, He is Himself the food His people need.

The time of John 6 is close to the Passover. At the next Passover, the Lamb of God would be sacrificed on the cross, so that He might be for us the true Bread from heaven. By eating His flesh and drinking His blood we may have eternal life. The Living Bread from God could only give us life by giving up His for the world (v.51). At this one, the second last Passover for Jesus on earth, He spoke again of the offering He would make one year later.

Feeding the Five Thousand For other references to feeding the five thousand and some related events, see Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44 and Luke 9:10-17. Mark gives the most detail; Luke wrote the most condensed version. This is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. Only John provides Jesus’ words about the true Bread from heaven.

6:1-3 In the year following chapter 5, in the spring close to Passover time, while the grass was green (Mark 6:39) – not yet burned by the summer heat – Jesus and His disciples went by boat (see Matthew 14) to a solitary place to get some rest (Mark 6:31,32,35). The crowd walking around the side of the lake arrived before they did! (Mark 6:33) They had seen Jesus heal the sick. Jesus sat with His disciples; the crowd drew near spoiling their efforts to have some rest, and He began to teach them.

6:5,6 In the John account, Jesus asked where they might buy bread for the crowd; in the Synoptics, when it was getting late, the disciples suggested that Jesus should send the crowds away so they could buy food. Philip was from nearby Bethsaida (1:44); the Lord asked him where they could buy food. Presumably Philip would know the food sources there better than the others. They would have a serious problem to get enough food from a distance and they all knew the cost would be great. The Lord knew what He would do, but this tested Philip, and it also set the picture more clearly that this was a major miracle, observable to the multitude.

6:7-9 In all four Gospels there is a protest re the difficulty of providing food for so many and of what little food they had available. Only in John do we have the detail that the loaves and fish were small, and that the bread was from barley, a cheaper grain that poor people ate. The questions and conversation about food made certain that all knew in advance that the supply was meager. It was time for the miracle, but a miracle that will picture salvation is a clearer, more beneficial miracle if we have been made to see that there is no other way a need can be met than through Christ.

6:10,11 Jesus ordered the people to sit down, and the seemingly needless detail of their sitting in groups of fifties and hundreds is included. (See below for more on this.) The number was really huge because the five thousand (an obvious case of giving a round number) were adult males. Matthew 14:21 adds that there were also women and children; which increases the number who ate considerably. Just where the miracle happened, whether in the Lord's hands or his apostles as they handed out the food, the Scripture does not say. The miracle may have continued in the way the widow's oil flowed in 2 Kings 4:1-7.

6:12,13 They all had enough to eat. This is unlike the Lord's Supper where the purpose is to partake not to satisfy one's physical need for food. The picture is of the Lord providing a bountiful supply, more than enough for all. It fits well the eschatological view of no poverty and no other lack. What happened on the side of a hill was a small foretaste of the tree of life bearing (notice the number!!) twelve crops of fruit (Revelation 22:1,2). Isaiah predicted Messiah's care for His redeemed people: "*They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. They will neither hunger nor thirst...*" (Isaiah 49:9,10). And this favor would come in "the day of salvation" (Isaiah 49:8) in the first coming of Christ (2 Corinthians 6:2).

It is difficult to know with certainty what significance may lie in some of the details. It is a fact that the leftover bread – apparently all the fish was eaten – was to be gathered up. Would it be so bad to leave a morsel of bread not needed in the grass on the side of a hill? The issue is not to prevent littering. *Gathering* is prophetic imagery for the retrieving of a scattered people one by one. Isaiah speaks of a future salvation of those perishing individuals who were being saved, would be picked up one by one.

In that day the LORD will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem. (Isaiah 27:12,13).

No one would ever go to such an extreme but God. Jesus said, "*Gather... let nothing be wasted.*" His orders on the side of that hill are analogous to the Father's will that Christ must *not lose even one* of all the perishing souls the Father had given to Him (6:39). Jesus later spoke of sheep He had not yet gathered: "*I must bring them also,*" (John 10:16). On the very day and on that same hillside when their boat reached land, Jesus "*saw a large crowd; he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things,*" (Mark 6:34). Picking up pieces of small (v.9) leftover barley loaves is a parallel to Christ saving individuals one by one. The fact that Jesus told His disciples to pick up the pieces may be a foretaste of the Great Commission.

There must be some reason that all four Gospels report that the number of baskets gathered was twelve. Since the Son of David is the King of Israel, it is significant that He had twelve apostles. He was heir to the throne over all twelve tribes. After Judas' defection it was *necessary* (Acts 1:21) to bring the number of apostles back to twelve. In the New Jerusalem the twelve gates are the twelve tribes of Israel, while the twelve foundations have

on them the names of the twelve apostles (Revelation 21:12-14). Christ builds His church by saving/gathering from all nations. These Gentile aliens unite with the house of Jacob (Isaiah 14:1) when the nations rally to Him. This rallying or coming (v.35) happens when God gathers in His remnant (Isaiah 11:10,11) and draws them (v.44). This collecting of His elect from all nations far exceeds the small rally in Galilee when a few thousand found where He and His disciples had gone for a break. In John 6, a number count of the men is given; in the coming day, the number will be so vast no man can count them (Revelation 7:9). After some reflection on other Scriptures,¹ we may conclude that twelve baskets of gathered up morsels illustrate believers coming to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:22-23).

The Parallel of Elisha Feeding a Hundred In 2 Kings 4 a feeding by Elisha has remarkable similarity to feeding the five thousand in John 6.

A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. "Give it to the people to eat," Elisha said. "How can I set this before a hundred men?" his servant asked. But Elisha answered, "Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: 'They will eat and have some left over.'" Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD. (2 Kings 4:42-44)

1. Only in John does it report that the loaves were barley, 6:9.
2. The small size and exact number of loaves is part of the narrative.
3. The instruction to eat is at Jesus' initiative, 6:5,6.
4. A response of unbelief from Elijah's servant follows, 6:7-9.
5. The number one hundred appears in Mark 6:40.
6. The word for *servant* in the LXX of 2 Kings 4:43 is not the usual word for *boy* in the NT; the word for *boy* in John 6:9 is the same as in 2 Kings 4. In the NT that noun is found only here in John 6.
7. They had food left over. The small amount of food became more than enough.

6:14 Such details indicate that John probably had 2 Kings 4 in mind when he wrote. (See the footnote for 6:12,13.) There is another weighty parallel with 2 Kings 4; after seeing such a sign the people began to say, *"Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."* Jesus had fed many in a way that Elisha had. I think the details John gave were meant to show that a greater than Elisha was here. (Note *greater* three times in Matthew 12:6,41,42.) John wrote of "greater things" three times (1:50; 5:20 & 14:12) and "greater" for comparing persons seven times (3:30; 4:12; 8:53; 10:29; 13:16; 14:28 & 15:20). Just as the women once sang, *"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands,"* (1 Samuel 18:6,7), though Elisha fed a hundred on little, Jesus fed thousands on less!

Jesus was the promised prophet (Acts 3:22,23; 7:37). But it was a mundane hope to desire of Christ that He might be a source of food that spoils (6:27). His miraculous sign was to support a greater claim – He was the true bread (in contrast to manna) from heaven. They were right to think of Him as the Promised Prophet, but wrong to want Him as a prophet of their preference.

6:15 The Lord's people had a different model of prophet in mind and also a different model of what kind of king was needed. They did not think the Messiah had to be a priest as well, though Psalm 110:1&4 showed He would be both. This failure to grasp their need of a Savior from sin, meant that they had a very distorted view of the ministry of the Messiah. The Lord knew they wanted to make Him king, and He knew what kind of king. By slipping away He did not cooperate with their intention. It was Passover time (v.4). Within this long narrative, Christ made plain the kind of ministry He will have. He would give His flesh to bring life to the world (6:51). As a Warrior King He would rescue His own from the tyrant Satan. He would rescue from sin and this rebellious

¹ I suggest that we may do with Scripture what the disciples did in John 2. They reviewed in their minds many times what Jesus did and said on the occasion of cleansing the temple in John 2:22. According to 2:17, they remembered something written in Psalm 69 and saw that the action of Christ was consistent with what they read there. This is a handling of Scripture that is capable of abuse, but it is also a handling of Scripture found in Scripture. I urge my readers to read my remarks about gathering leftover bread into twelve baskets cautiously.

world. The Roman oppressor was not the ultimate problem. Christ would go to the cross in order to have a kingdom of redeemed people. He did not fit the people's yearning for a Messiah.

6:16-21 Jesus had withdrawn out of sight of all. He went up the side of mountain to pray (Mathew 14:23). The disciples left by crossing the Sea of Galilee. They had arrived by boat (Mark 6:32,45) and used the same one for the trip back. The crowd saw that Jesus was not in that boat, but they knew it had headed in the direction of Bethsaida (Mark 6:45). That night during a storm (and blown off course), Jesus came to join them by walking on the water. This miracle was a private manifestation of the glory of God. No one saw it but His own disciples. It showed His authority over nature (Matthew 14:33). Usually an appearance of the Lord or an angel caused fear; often the Lord's initial word to His people was "Fear not". He settled their hearts by identifying Himself as "I AM" – words that express the Name of the Lord. Though some distance from the shore (Matthew 14:24); they arrived on land immediately. This may be another part of the miraculous events of that night. Often in times of trouble, Christians have remembered that their Lord walked on water (and stilled an angry sea, Mark 4:35-41). It brought comfort that night and many more since.

6:22-25 Perhaps John chose to fill in these details of travel to show how eager the crowd was to locate Jesus. John continued the narrative into the next day. The feeding of one day was the setting for the conversation on the next. Looking for the disciples, they found Jesus. Knowing He had not left with His disciples, they were curious how He had arrived in Capernaum (6:59) so quickly. Since Capernaum was Jesus' residence, it was natural to find Him there (Mathew 4:13; Mark 2:1) even though the boat had landed elsewhere (Mark 6:53). His reply was about why they were looking for Him, not when He arrived or how.

John calls the location where the five thousand were fed, "*the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.*" This is part of a great Christian tradition of grace before meals, a "blessing" not of the food but to the Lord (as in Psalm 118:26) for His blessing of provision (Deuteronomy 7:13). This brief remark is the first place in this Gospel where Jesus is called *the Lord*.

6:26-27 At this point the narrative changes. With another "truly, truly," the Lord revealed their real motive for seeking Him. Their interest was their stomachs. (The previous day the Lord showed that He too cared about stomachs.) That feeding was a great sign; they should have sought its significance by seeking to know Who Jesus was. Man likes to transform God from Savior to servant. The gospel is directed to our real need, not to temporary convenience. Just as Jesus talked with Nicodemus of different kinds of births, and with the Samaritan woman of different kinds of water, here we have different bread, but the bread they wanted would spoil.

Christ said there is food that lasts forever, so their work (i.e., their seeking & efforts) should have been directed that way. Yet no further work or effort was necessary. Eternal life is a gift from Christ (Romans 6:23). Just as there is one way only to the Father, there is one channel of salvation from the Father to feed man's spiritual need. The officially appointed and designated Person for this is the Son of Man. So eternal life is a free gift, and we must come to Christ to receive it.

6:28,29 Jesus describes their efforts to secure more free food as *work*. They had rowed across the Sea of Galilee to find Jesus. Maybe they worked hard to get there. Receiving eternal life as a gift is not something they expected, but working to gain a benefit was natural to their thinking. Nothing in us understands the grace of God; we must learn it in the gospel. Their question reveals their expectation that they needed to meet God's requirements on their own. Jesus corrected their notion of merit by using their word *work* in His reply. To receive life entailed for them no work at all. They needed only to believe. The benefit is a gift, and it is received not by a faith that works to gain, but a faith that simply receives. What work is involved in believing in the One God sent? None!

Salvation by works? Strong objection is proper concerning those who would take **6:28,29** as a way to support that justification is by a way that includes our works. (That is not what James 2 was teaching either.) This false handling of John 6:29 not only goes against many clear Scriptures, it fails to see how Jesus turned the word *work* around. A man might say to a friend, "How much do I owe you for the basket of apples?" A reply "you owe me nothing" is clear. But the same message could use the word *owe* a different way. The reply could be, "All you owe me is to take the apples as my gift and enjoy them with your family." That response means nothing is owed, even though the word is used in reply.

Those who look for ways to turn the grace of God into moralism are eager to find arguments for their error in the Bible. They are false teachers and we must be aware of arguments that are destructive of the gospel.

6:30,31 The crowd linked their preoccupation with signs to an implied promise that they would believe if Jesus would just do another one. It was typical of the Jews to seek signs (1 Corinthians 1:22) though they had more than enough of them (John 7:31; Matthew 11:20-24). The significance of signs was resisted by their leaders (Matthew 12:22-24), and still the people asked for more! In the early history of Israel, they had seen what the Lord did and yet they did not believe (Psalm 95:9; Numbers 14:21-23). The odd request for another sign came from people who had seen Jesus feed five thousand from one boy's lunch the day before! (Note in Mark 6:53-56 that close to this time, Jesus continued to perform other miracles.)

When they asked for a sign, they even suggested the kind He might do for them – a sign connected to food! (See v.26.) They appealed to the time of Moses when God gave manna from heaven. Their ancestors still died in the desert (v.49) after eating bread that could not give eternal life.

6:32-34 God had given the manna centuries before. Jesus in His "truly, truly" statement said His Father was giving the true bread from heaven ("gives" is present tense). The same Provider was at work as in Moses' day, but the later bread was far greater. This was the Bread of God. By saying *true* Bread, Jesus distinguished Himself from mere manna. Elsewhere in John, He is the *true* light, different from teachers who deceive. He is the *true* vine, unlike corrupt Israel that failed to produce good fruit (Jeremiah 2:21). Jesus said this bread from God was a "he," a person! They misunderstood clear words, hoping for a continuation of yesterday's bread. Christian ministry often requires much repetition because of much misunderstanding.

John 6:35-48 From here on Jesus switches to *I* and *Me*. I am the Bread of Life is the first of seven I AM statements that follow with a noun, such as I am the gate, the Good Shepherd, etc. (See 8:12; 10:7,9; 10:11,14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1,5.) He does use *I am* in other ways as in 8:58 and v.20 above. "I am the Bread of Life" appears four times (vv.35,41,48,51). The metaphor of bread that must be eaten is clearly a matter of believing in Christ. When it is even more emphatic later as in v.54, it is still a metaphor for faith in Christ.

This section has gospel appeal to believe, and explanation of why men do not and why they do! The narrative includes the grumbling and reasoning of unbelievers. In John 5 the unbelievers were in Jerusalem; here they are Galileans in the part of the world where Jesus grew up and was better known. Predestination does not depend on a human response. It is the foundation of much that appears here. Election is coupled with the certainty of Christ obeying His Father and accomplishing His assignment. This passage gives the believer great assurance of salvation. Jesus promised a future physical resurrection for each of His own, and affirmed that He will never throw out or somehow lose even one the Father had given Him to save. This is one of the most doctrinal sections in the Gospels and even the entire Bible. Though it speaks of matters controversial in evangelical circles, such disagreement need not be. The solution for election and human responsibility is to accept what Jesus said in plain language, as He taught from Isaiah 54:13 that people only come if the Father has taught them. Theology should always be based on what God says in the Bible, not on what we expect or think.

6:35 The Lord stated frankly in this famous verse that He personally is all that He had just described in vv.27,29,32,&33: the true Bread of God sent down from heaven to give life to the world. With the other bread He fed 5000, but here He speaks of a different kind. Later Jesus will use words like *eat* and *drink*. In v.35 the

metaphor is simply that He is the bread to which men must come. Coming means the same as believing. For the forgiveness of our sins, we come not to bring but to receive.

How to take “*I am the Bread of Life*” and how not to take it! We must not stretch the Lord’s promise beyond what was meant. To be relieved of hunger and thirst is having the promised life in contrast to spiritual death mentioned in 5:24. Jesus did not promise a painless life of ease, that is, not yet. Persons belonging to the Lord often expressed their anguish in the psalms (see Psalm 38). We are not immune to temptation, yet when we believe in Christ we are immediately delivered from ever being cut off from the life God has begun in each of His children (1John 3:9). The sincere language of knowing God (John 17:3) and calling Him “Father” (Galatians 4:6) in every circumstance is the evidence that God has given life. Suffering will be with us until the Coming of Christ (1Thessalonians 3:2-4). Hungering and thirsting for righteousness within (Matthew 5:6) is good for us! Patiently waiting for a new heaven and new earth is normal yearning for the child of God (2 Peter 3:13).

The soul of man starves for real life. He senses that there must be something better. The world and nothing in it satisfies the soul. It is poisonous bread. When Adam and Eve sinned they lost fellowship with God, but in God’s saving grace the Lord Jesus is the True Bread God gives to each one reconciled to Him. He is the One Who satisfies our hearts. He is our hope of acceptance by God; His blood is the basis of our forgiveness. His righteousness as a man under the law is the entire reason God declares the one believing in Him righteous. Every believer is united to Him, the Head of the Church, and in His church to each other. He intercedes for us in heaven. He loves us and cares for us and will never forsake us. He will return to take us to be with Him forever. Christ, the Bread of Life, is our life and in Him the hunger of our empty souls is satisfied now and forever.

6:36 They wanted a sign they could see in order to believe. The Lord said they have seen Him, but still they did not believe. This ought to show that there really is something very wrong in the human heart. Believing does not depend on how clear the message is or how pure the messenger. They had Christ face to face, and still they did not believe.

6:37 The Lord shows no sense of discouragement. He never argued that He did the most He could but it was of no value. He knew the human heart (2:24,25). He also knew the plan of God and the promise made to Him. Thus He said, “All that the Father gives me will come to me.” The Father has already given a people to Christ. The word ‘all’ is singular, so He spoke of a group. In spite of unbelief, Jesus knew He had a promise from the Father. A covenant has always existed between the Father and the Son. This covenant includes the salvation of sinners. It also includes who shall be saved. The doctrine of election delivers from discouragement because it assures us of certainty that God is executing His plan.

This short verse contains two major reasons for confidence:

- Jesus remembered the Father’s commitment to Him: all He has given will come.
- Then He immediately speaks of His commitment concerning those who come: He will never throw them out. The picture is not of refusing to let someone in. The word means “to throw out.” Thus Jesus meant that those who have been taken in will never be lost.

This one verse reveals the confidence of the Son in the commitment of the Father, and the confidence of the believer in the commitment of the Son. It also speaks of the “all” group and the individual (whoever comes).

6:38,39 It appeared that Jesus was losing His audience. He impressed them when He fed them, but when He told them He is the true bread from heaven, they did not believe. This is not like a salesman *losing* a sale. Jesus had come to do His Father’s will, and He will finish whatever the Father had assigned. Thus He was to come to earth to save all who were given to Him, and He must not lose one. Jesus never fails in any assignment from His Father. Saving is not limited to winning their allegiance. They too may die, but since the saving gift is eternal life (v.27), it cannot be interrupted or limited by death. Their death will be reversed by a physical resurrection.

He repeats that He had come down from heaven (see v.33), though He knew this was objectionable for many to hear (vv.41,42). Giving a message from God is never improved by omitting what people object to. If we do that,

we might imagine a God with indiscriminate favor for all whether they believe or not. Then we would have a false God we cannot respect. It is our task to present the real Lord God by communicating what He says, even when sinners do not like it. If we revise God's message, we are not following the example of Christ.

6:40 The Father's will laid a duty on Christ to save and not lose those given to Him. Yet that duty could only be fulfilled if those given ones come! Their faith in Christ is necessary for their salvation. Yet the Father's promise assures that certain ones will without doubt come (v.37), thus to fulfill this, they must each be drawn, so that they will believe, so that the promise to Christ will be kept, and in saving them Christ will not lose even one. See below: [A Biblical Picture of Certainty](#).

The Apostle John had a rich vocabulary for faith. In John 6 it includes coming, looking, and eating. Each of these words have the sense of something done in order to receive.

6:41,42 Often in this Gospel, "Jews" means the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Here it may simply mean local Jewish people. Jesus said they did not believe (v.36); now the text gives their specific objections. They objected to what they thought was quite ridiculous. They knew who His parents were, and so disputed how someone could grow up in Nazareth and be a person who had come from heaven. Later in v.52, they rejected His word because they found something He did not mean to be absurd. They urged Christ for a sign like the manna in the desert. John shows that, like their ancestors in the desert, they too were grumbling in unbelief (Psalm 106:24,25).

How Does a Naturalist Think? Modern thought and the reasoning of unbelievers in John 6 are quite similar. Little effort is made to learn what God's Word is actually saying. Often the words of Jesus were twisted, as the paragraph above mentions. Further, they think something cannot be true if it makes no sense to them. (You cannot be from heaven if you grew up in Nazareth!) God's ways must not be higher or different from theirs. (See Isaiah 55:9.) The ancients did not question whether there was a God, but they sought to transform Him into their expectations. This exchanged the true God for a god without transcendence. Modern atheism allows for no god of any kind. In NT times they believed in little miracles of a believable proportion, yet they stumbled over the high mystery that God could really come down from heaven and become a man. Now modern man believes in no miracles at all. By assuming their desired position, they use the irrational argument that miracles cannot happen because miracles cannot happen. In this way they "prove" truth wrong without either truth or logic and end up losing both. As in that time long ago, when men grumble in unison (Jude 16) against the truth of God, they fortify their unbelief and provide mutual support on their journey to hell. Unless they have a birth from above, they will never see the kingdom of God (3:3).

6:43,44 Those disputing the Lord's words were captive not only to their ignorance of Christ, but to the nature of their hearts, which were hostile to God. Coming to Christ was not attractive to them. It was unnatural to them. They could not do what they would not do because coming to Christ is an act of the will, and they had no interest in coming. (See [Appendix 8C: Jesus Description of Depravity](#).) It would take God Himself to draw them to Himself. Christ is attractive, but to them He was not, so the coming (i.e., their believing, as in v.35) must be prompted and caused by the Lord Himself. The verb *to draw* is strong, used in James 2:6 of dragging a person into a court. When we are drawn to Christ, we are wooed by the power and love of God, or else we would never come at all. No one will or is able to come unless the Lord intervenes. If God draws anyone, that soul will come. God cannot draw ineffectively. The will of God for His obedient Son is that such a person would never be lost. Being raised at the last day is included in salvation.

6:45 The Lord shows that what He was saying was consistent with Isaiah 54. There it teaches that Israel will be enlarged with many children who will come to the Lord. They will form a new Jerusalem of precious stones and jewels. In a great contrast with their previous history (and those rejecting Jesus in John 6), these sons will be taught by the Lord (Isaiah 54:13). That is what they learn and so they enjoy peace. (See 1 Thessalonians 4:9). Jesus used the Isaiah text to show that the reason anyone comes is that God has been active to teach them, which is the same as drawing them to come. In the old creation that is finished, God said "Let there be light." In a new

creation that continues, God teaches sinners, making the blind to see the light of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:3-6). Those who are enabled to see, believe.

<p>A Biblical Picture of Certainty John 6 teaches certainty. There is no element of insecurity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. in the agreement between the Father and the Son, since the Father has given certain ones to the Son (vv.37,39) 2. whether the Father will succeed in drawing them 3. whether the Son will lose even one 4. whether the Father has approved of the Son and all He does (v.27) 5. whether death can deny the believer eternal life (v.39,40) 6. whether God's promises are reliable 7. whether eternal life is a gift (vv.27,32,33) 8. whether faith is all God requires for us to gain eternal life (v.35) 9. whether faith must be directed to Christ alone (vv.29,35). 10. whether those the Father teaches will come (v.45) 11. whether Christ will give His flesh and blood in death for the world (v.51, 53-56) and 12. whether that sacrifice will result in life (vv.51,54,57) for all the Father gave the Son.
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Many Scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit's work in the delivery of salvation in a person's experience. The prominent role of the Spirit in the new birth (John 3) is one example. Yet this text refers to the Father as the one drawing. Christ is involved in all of creation (1:3) because the Father worked through Him (1:3). Likewise the Father draws to Christ through the agency and activity of the Spirit. Like John 5:19, whatever the Spirit does the Father has done through Him. Thus the Spirit's fruit (Galatians 5:22,23) is from the Father's pruning, (15:2). The Spirit gives new life (v.63) and convicts sinners (16:8), so why does Jesus not say that the Spirit draws? I think the reference to the Father in 6:44 is intended to connect in this context to the Father's eternal covenant with the Son wherein He has given persons to the Son. Then in time, the Father executes His promise by bringing them to the Son. John 6 links the Father's promise made and to the Father's promise kept.

6:46-48 How does the Father teach (v.45)? No one has direct contact with the Father; He is known through the Son (14:6) Who makes Him known (1:18). Only Christ has seen the Father. The way the Father teaches is by the One Who is from God, the One Who speaks the words of God (12:49,50). He then states emphatically that the one who believes has everlasting life. Every person who hears Christ and accepts His testimony has been taught by God. By believing he certifies that God is true (3:33). Jesus concludes the section with the inclusio with which He began: I am the bread of life (vv. 35,48).

The Similarity of Isaiah 55 and John 6		
	Isaiah 55	John 6
How joined to the cross?	After the prediction of the cross in Isaiah 52,53	One year before the cross, but John 6 includes the giving of His flesh and blood
A meal	A banquet of the richest of food v.2	A meal of a poor man's food: barley loaves and fish, v.9
Cost of the meal	Come without money v.1	Meal free, v.7. The Son of Man gives better food, v.27. The Father gives the true bread, v.32
Invitation	All are invited to come vv.1,5,6,7	Work for food that does not spoil, that endures, which Christ gives, v.27. He who comes and feeds, lives.
Comparison of food	Why spend on what is not real? v.2. Come to me and live! v.3	This food spoils; your forefathers ate manna and died. The one who feeds on me will live, v.57
Covenant	The benefits of an everlasting covenant promised, as the Son of David is a leader and summons nations, vv.3-5	An eternal covenant is implied: the Father gave a people to the Son and delivers them as promised. Christ refused to be a king of their preference.
Gentiles	Nations not known are included	His flesh is not for Jews only, but for the world, vv.33,51

John 6:49-58 is a metaphor with much repetition. It must be viewed as a metaphor. Eating the flesh of a man who did not extend his arm or hand to be chewed on, is not what Jesus meant. Many think Jesus was referring to the Lord's Supper, feeding on bread and wine as the way literally to eat His flesh changed into bread. Jesus did not say this. John is the only Gospel *not* to mention the Last Supper. Just as some think the real meaning is baptism every time they see the word *water*, some think we ought to look for the communion service if there is a mention of eating. The far better approach is to take John 6 the way the Lord spoke these things. He began with *coming* to Him but did not at that point use *feeding* to illustrate believing (29,35). In the Prologue, receiving/believing is presented as the necessary response to Christ (1:12). In v.35 if a person believes he will not be thirsty. Jesus could have said that if one *drinks* he will not be thirsty, but in v.35 He did not. The Lord used the bread metaphor but not the feeding metaphor at that point. In this way, Jesus indicated for the rest of this conversation what He really meant by eating, drinking and feeding. In vv.29-48, the response emphasized is faith. Instead of speaking of the eating that happens in the Lord's Supper, in 6:49-58, the Lord actually focuses on the things the Lord's Supper brings to our attention: His flesh and blood sacrifice, and the resulting life from feeding on Him by faith. Every reference to the Lord's Supper in the NT uses the word *body* for the bread and never the word *flesh!* The Apostle John was certainly aware of this and here in John 6, he did not use the well-known, "This is My Body." The way John reported what the Lord said, and what Jesus said, simply stress the absolute necessity of believing in Christ to have life forever. Jesus was telling unbelievers in John 6 that what they needed was to believe in Him. He was not urging on them participation in a ritual.

6:49-51 Earlier those who sought for another miracle referred to the manna from heaven. (Manna is the inclusio appearing here and in v.58). Jesus returned to the subject of manna and reminded them that their fathers died. The bread they ate in the desert did not give eternal life. That bread was only a type and not the real thing. Christ is the water of life not from a well (4:13,14). He was the Rock that believers in the wilderness drank from (1 Corinthians 10:1-5). He is the true bread; the manna that spoiled quickly was not. God wanted them to learn from manna that man does not live on that kind of bread alone (Deuteronomy 8:3). To eat of the true bread means that the one who partakes of Christ will not die. The promise of living forever begins immediately at the moment of faith. When Jesus said, *I am the Resurrection and the Life* (11:25), He claimed to bring physical resurrection, with Lazarus as an example. But 11:25 also speaks of never dying, because fellowship with Christ is not broken at death.

Christ is life for us, first because the son of God is God's answer to God's justice for our sin. The wages of our sin is death, and that death must necessarily fall on us directly, OR on a God-appointed Substitute. For God to give us the opposite of death, it is God Himself Who must be satisfied concerning our sin. So Christ is not bread in a vague sense. It is not by admiring or following Him that we gain life. He acted for us on the cross assuming our place and taking our death. Jesus in His flesh and blood has secured the blessings of eternal life for His people. His life was not taken from Him (10:17,18); He gave it. In His death we find life.

This concise statement says much: "*This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*"

- Jesus refers to what He will accomplish in His physical **flesh**. We are not saved by the influence of His love, but rather by His literal death in human flesh on a Roman cross.
- It was a sacrificial act: He would **give** His flesh.
- It was an act **for**, so it was on behalf of others, in their place.
- It was an act that obtained a benefit, **life!**
- Its very wide benefit was for the **world**. Thus the mission of the Messiah of Israel was not confined to Israel; in God's expansive grace He would bring life to the world.

6:52-54 The Jews rejected something Jesus was not teaching. The emotional tone has heated up. Arguing among themselves is not the same as asking Him with humility. They had seen a sign the previous day and on that day they even tried to make Him king, but now they reject what He has to say after He has told them He is from heaven and the Giver of life. Jesus emphasizes both how necessary He is to their life and makes clear that there is no other way. If they reject Him, they reject life. If they choose to partake of Him, they are guaranteed a resurrection to life.

Some find interpreting this metaphor difficult. Note carefully how Jesus repeats Himself. This helps very much. He says the same thing in different analogies: looking and eating:

- "... everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day," v.40.
- "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day," v.54.

6:55-59 Real food or real drink is true food, not literal food. As strange as His words sound to their ears, it is true that all genuine hope of life with the Living God depends on the flesh and blood of Jesus. This discussion happened in the synagogue in Capernaum, undoubtedly the place where Jesus went every Sabbath. It was incredible to them that the boy who grew up in nearby Nazareth in the home of Joseph and Mary was the bread of God from heaven.

The Living Father sent Him. The source of life is the Living Father Who has life in Himself (5:26). Since Jesus is the Only Begotten and has life in Himself from the Father, the one who believes receives life from Him. The Lord could have said the one who comes, or looks or believes. Because of the bread of the previous day, and the manna the Jews were so interested in, Jesus continued the analogy of food, by saying that the one who feeds on Him will live because of Him.

In this way Jesus declared both Who He was and what it is He does for believers. In many other places in Scripture the same things are taught with different figures. They chose to be like their forefathers who had manna but not life. Would it be unreasonable or terribly difficult to believe the man who fed 5000 men (plus women and children) with five barley loaves and two fish, and had twelve baskets of leftovers after all ate and were full? He should have been heard and believed. The One who came from heaven is above all. He testified to what He had seen and heard, but no one accepts His testimony!!! (3:31,32)

Usually eternal life is the stated result of believing, but in v.56 Jesus expressed the result as *remaining* in Him. This stresses the conscious obedience of the one who receives life in Christ. It is not a matter of mere existence or mere possession of this gift. A life of remaining in Christ is one of dependence and remaining in His word. The Lord stresses this subject in chapter 15. There another expanded metaphor is used: Christ is the true vine, and believers are branches that remain in Him. The Lord added that He too remains, though His remaining is not the same. He does not live a life of dependence upon us, but the active ministry of saving us.

John 6:60-71 The Apostasy among Jesus' "Disciples" Things are not looking very good! The Galileans don't believe and within His group of followers, Jesus is losing many disciples! Some today advise in such a situation that we ought to adjust the message. They might judge the blessing of God based on the reaction (or personal tastes) of unbelievers! Jesus did not. It is God's Word opened and the unseen work of the Spirit that together bring life. But not all accept that Word. The rejection of Christ and His word is not limited to these more remote (and unnamed) disciples. Unbelief is present even among the Twelve. At this Passover time, one year before Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus revealed that one of His close followers is a devil. This was no surprise to the Lord. Nothing is. He always knew of the betrayal that was coming and who would turn against Him. What some would consider a major setback, God had included in His great plan of redemption.

6:60-62 Many disciples found His teaching disagreeable. When they ask who can accept it, this fits what the Lord said in v.44 concerning those who are unable to believe. In this Gospel, accepting a truth as true and coming to Jesus in faith, are very close ideas, sometimes even interchangeable.

Early in the chapter some Galileans were disappointed that Jesus would not be the kind of Messiah King they desired. When they hinted for more bread, He would not perform another miracle like giving manna from heaven. He then taught that the life of the world depended entirely on eating His flesh and drinking His blood. He repeatedly claimed (saying it eight times) that He had descended from heaven. Lastly, He compounded the

irritation of certain disciples by adding that He will return to where He had been before – an obvious affirmation of His pre-existence (1:15). Jesus denied nothing He had said earlier even though it was plainly offensive to them. In fact He added more not from a motive to upset them, but to make the issue more clear, with the effect that they were even more offended. Unlike the approach of so many today, Jesus' philosophy of ministry was not to teach people what they want to hear, but what God had given Him to say.

6:63 His next words *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing,”* relate to accepting or rejecting truth. Those who were offended that He said their lives depended entirely on His flesh and blood (v.53) could only believe if the Holy Spirit convinced them of the truth of Jesus' words. Left to themselves, their thinking was governed by their own ignorance of God. Flesh cannot attain to a different kind of life (3:6). Apart from the Spirit, man has as much hope of knowing God as he has of climbing to heaven. Salvation comes only when man bows like a child to receive truth from God. If he holds to his own vaunted wisdom, he will cut himself off from the Word of God. These words are the words of Jesus in the working of the Spirit. His words bring life, as Peter would soon affirm (v.68).

Thus the Christian philosophy of ministry is simple: the Words of the Triune God* given in the life-giving power of the Spirit are effective. This divine combination of God and His Word, joined with the Christian's witness, is all that is needed to accomplish the work of God on earth in every age and culture. *[In vv.62-65 the activity of all three Persons is present.]

6:63-66 The Spirit gives life, but since man's rebellion in the Garden of Eden, God has not given life to every soul, nor did He ever promise to do so. The great contrast is a terrible reality: The words of Jesus in their ears was of the Spirit, and they were life, yet some did not believe. This was always a burden in the Apostle John's mind (12:37). Unbelief happened in the presence of Christ and in the context of many miracles (see 12:37 again!). So, many supposed disciples left and one disciple in the Twelve never believed. The rule is always true: Only those who abide in His word are genuine disciples (8:31; 15:5,6).

The Great Defection This is a turning point in Jesus ministry. The Samaritans believed (chapter 4); the leaders in Jerusalem did not (chapter 5). Now the Galileans do not (chapter 6) and Jesus' ministry in Galilee is never mentioned again in this Gospel. Jesus had known from the beginning who would reject Him. And He explained their unbelief as so natural and so characteristic that they could not and would not believe without a direct intervention of God. They would come if the Father enabled them; otherwise, they would not. This is identical to saying that unless a man has been born of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (3:3-8). When Jesus said, “This is why I told you...” He showed that we need to grasp man's inability to believe even as we call upon sinners to do so. There is a dual activity: the internal, unseen activity of God and the visible, external witness of the Christian. (1Thessalonians 1:4,5). All the saving power is in the message, not the messenger (2 Corinthians 4:7; Romans 1:16). Unbelief is real; the defection was great; many left; the Twelve remained.

6:67-70 Would the Twelve leave too? Peter spoke for all of them, or so he thought. One unbeliever remained – Judas Iscariot. Some think he was from Kerioth; the place is not certain, but scholars point to a couple of possible villages outside Galilee. In all four Gospels the first mention of Judas includes that he would betray Jesus. Jesus did not name Judas at the point. John, writing later, could say whom Jesus referred to. Judas was an apparent disciple but a devil by nature. He was able to follow Jesus with his feet, but the Father had not enabled him to believe in his heart, and so he could only be lost. Just as many were offended that Jesus said He had come down from heaven, we need to be careful today that we are not offended with God's decision not to save all mankind. Apart from the grace of God, we too would turn against Christ as Judas did.

Christ chose Judas as one of the Twelve. God has chosen to work in a church that has both good fish and bad (Matthew 13:47-50) until the time of Christ's return. The “mixed multitude” (Number 11:4) and the true remnant known only to God (Romans 9:27-29) will continue till the final resolution. God knows those who are His (2Timothy 2:19); only in the end will we all know. Judas is typical of defection within the church. The Twelve

of v.70 are the continuation of the previous Twelve tribes of Israel. Scripture is clear that wolves within the church are a continuing threat (Acts 20:29). The situation is NOT that all went smoothly in Jesus' inner circles, but now later we have these terrible problems. The matter of apostasy in the church was in the past, is in the present and will be till the Lord returns (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Peter 2:1; 3:3).

Peter was a true disciple in spite of all his weakness! He meant his words. He knew of no other place to go, and no one else had the words of eternal life. In Matthew 16:16 Peter (probably speaking for the other believers) confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Here in John 6, He speaks again and uses for Christ one of the holy Names of God. He called Him *The Holy One of God*. This is the kind of language God used of Himself throughout Isaiah. There it is often "The Holy One of Israel" but at times it is simply "The Holy One" as in Isaiah 40:25.