

**John:  
That You May Believe — Studies in John's Gospel (12)  
Questions and Grumbles**

**John 6:25-72**

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Turn with me to the gospel of John chapter 6 beginning at verse 25. Jesus has just walked on the Sea of Galilee over to Capernaum. The folks who had gone to the eastern shore of Galilee have now made their way back to the northwestern shore hiring water taxis, perhaps, in order to do that. Since Jesus had been left on the other side, they are surprised to find Him here in Capernaum.

And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did you get here? Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.” Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” They said to Him, “What then do You do for a sign, that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.’” Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. “For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life: he who come to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. “But I said Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. “For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that of all that He has given Me I lost nothing, but raise it up on the last day.’ “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.” They

were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves." "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God' He has seen the Father. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. "I am the bread of life. "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." Then the Jews began to argue with one another saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. "He who eats my flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. "This is the bread which came down out of heaven, not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever." These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

Let us pray.

*Our Father in heaven, we pray now for Your blessing as we turn to Your word and this particular passage, that may we see Christ in all of His glory. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

If you've ever been to the synagogue in Capernaum, you'll recall what it looks like. It is a beautiful site. The remnants of the synagogue are still there; archaeologists believe that at least a part of the floor that you can walk on actually belongs to the time of Christ. That's where we are; on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. This was a synagogue that had been donated by a wealthy centurion. And here in the synagogue of Capernaum, Jesus begins this somewhat convoluted discussion about the bread of life. It's been brought about because of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. After that miracle, Jesus had sent the disciples to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee and crowds had made their way along the shore. The disciples had gone in a boat but crowds had gone along the shore. Then they were sent back to Capernaum and they had been caught in a storm. Jesus, who had been left on the other side walked towards them, calmed the storm; the disciples and Jesus now find themselves in Capernaum.

These crowds of people—some of them are believers, many of them are not—

they've seen the miracle of the loaves and fishes and they want to hear more; they hire water taxis to get them to Capernaum. They are surprised to find Jesus there. They ask Him this question: "How did You get here?" But Jesus doesn't answer that question. In fact, they are nonplused by the answer that He gives them; He goes for the jugular. He says to them, "You're not seeking Me because you have genuinely seen the truth of the miracles that I have performed. All that you have seen is something that has appealed to your eyes and senses but the truth of it all—the real meaning and significance of it all hasn't dawned upon you."

All excitement about Jesus isn't necessarily truly spiritual in character. They were fascinated by the spectacle that they had seen, but they were blind to the truth and the reality of the person of Jesus who was standing in their midst.

Now Jesus enters in to this narrative about the bread of life and this wonderful pronouncement, "I *am* the bread of life." And I want to look at it, picking up three particular verbs that occur in the course of this narrative which I hope will help us catch the thread and the discourse and the interchange between Jesus and this crowd of people.

## I. Asking

In the first place in verses 25, 28, and 30, you'll see that they are asking Jesus a series of questions. The New International Version uses the verb *to ask*. In your pew Bibles I think it is *they said*, but it's a question that they are putting to Jesus. What is it that Jesus is saying about Himself that evokes these radical responses from men and women who are apparently accustomed to sitting in a place of worship? Remember, they are in a synagogue. They've come with a question about how He had got there. And He virtually ignores that question. He is able to tell the difference between that which comes out of our lips and our mouths and that which truly resides in our hearts. He is able to tell what the true and deepest questions really are. You've focused your attention, He says to these people, on bread that will pass away. Labor instead for that bread which lasts for eternity. They were concerned about trivial superficial things—the material things of this world. They wanted someone who could provide bread for them every day, but they weren't focusing on the truly significant issues. "Are you focusing on what will enable you to live forever?" Jesus asks. Jesus says to these people, the question you really should be asking is, "How can I attain that bread which lasts forever?" How can I feed upon that bread that will enable me to live forever?

You notice in the discourse that they have the impudence to stand above Him. They say to Him, "Moses could feed a million people for forty years. Why should we believe in You?" And He corrects their interpretation of the Bible. It wasn't Moses that had brought bread to a million people; it was *God* who had provided that bread. His point to these people was to say, "You've *missed* the whole point." You study the Scriptures but all you see are divine regulations; you don't

see Me. You don't see the One to whom the Bible is pointing. He is saying to them that they don't understand the Bible because the Bible is speaking about Christ. Augustine likened the Old Testament to a darkened room with only barely the light of a candle. All the furniture was there but you could *barely* see it. Calvin, alluding to Hebrews 8 and 10, likened the Old Testament to the sketch that an artist might make, at best some resemblance to the final painting, but it's just an etching, it's just a sketch. McCheyne says about the Old Testament that it is like the difference between the bride just before the wedding and the bride after the wedding when the veil has been removed. Oh yes, you can see a little through the veil and you can tell it is so and so, but when that veil is lifted and you can see the beauty of that bride. My best and favorite illustration is Lloyd Jones' who says that the Old Testament is like a man who is standing before a wall and he jumps up every now and then, and just for a micro-second he can just glimpse what is on the other side of the wall, but he keeps landing back down again. These people were only interested in the things of this world. They were laboring for bread that perishes.

Do you know the author Jack Higgins? He's a world-famous author and one of the leading novelists of our time. I know him because he was born in Belfast. Go to Amazon.com and put in Jack Collins, and you'll see 90 or 100 references to books he has written—he's a multi millionaire. He lives on one of these channel islands; I think its Guernsey, a tax haven. Jack Higgins is not his name; it's a pseudonym. He was asked just fairly recently what he wished that someone had told him when he was younger. Here's a man who has everything and lives on an island off shore to keep the money that he has because he's got so much of it. And do you know what he said? He said, "I wish someone had told me that when you get to the top, there's nothing there." Isn't that incredible? Jesus is saying to these people, you're laboring for that which perishes; labor for that which endures to eternal life.

What is the greatest question that we could ask ourselves tonight? What's the greatest question that you can ask tonight? "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" That's the greatest question—a question that concerns every single one in this room tonight. Maybe you're not even listening, maybe you've fallen asleep, maybe you have absolutely no interest in this sermon of this service but it's the greatest question you could ask yourself. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

What is the one thing that is necessary to enable me to live forever in the presence of God? And the answer that Jesus gives is to have Him as the bread of life. "Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life." What does that mean for many of us here? Let me put it this way. What does this mean for a Christian stockbroker? We've got a few of them here. What does this mean for you? You've watched the markets and they've tumbled. What does this mean for you, when Jesus says, "Don't labor for that which perishes, but labor for that which endures to eternal life." What it means is that you do not labor for the food that perishes, you do not fret that somehow your

entire life has become jeopardized because the material things of this world are collapsing around you. Your joy isn't destroyed by it. Your peace isn't destroyed by it. You're not working and laboring for the food that perishes. Your goal is to enjoy Christ, and to be exalted in the way that you work.. The Christian stockbroker will say, in the face of a falling market, "The main food that I want from this job is still there, because my hunger, my deepest hunger, is to know the goodness and grace of Jesus Christ residing within my soul."

## II. Grumbling

Jesus responds to these questions that are put to Him. Turn to verse 41, and you'll see another verb, the verb *grumbling*. The Jews are grumbling. They're grumbling because some of the things Jesus now says are hard things. They're difficult things, they're extraordinary things. He says, for example in verse 37, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me, I will never cast out." There is a giving on the part of the Father, there is a coming on the part of men and women, there is a receiving on the part of Jesus Christ. "This is on the crest of the wave of God's sovereign grace that the free overtures of the gospel break upon the shores of lost humanity," John Murray says. It's a beautiful, beautiful sentence. Jesus has two conditions of men and women in mind when He says this. He's speaking to unbelievers, yes. He's speaking to those who have never labored for the bread that endures to eternal life. All they live for is the things of this world. All they live for is that which they can see and handle and touch and taste. That's all they live for. And they think now that they've seen in Jesus someone who will make life just a little bit easier for them. And He's saying to them, He's emphasizing to them, if they're ever going to know this bread that endures to eternal life, that that salvation is a sovereign work of almighty God. He's speaking to unbelievers.

But He's speaking also to believers, He's speaking to His disciples, and He's reassuring them, He's giving them confidence, He's saying to them that because salvation is a work of God from beginning to end, we can rest in the assurance that having begun a good work he will complete it unto the day of Jesus Christ. Unless, you see, unless there is a work of divine spiritual renewal, none of us would ever come to Christ. And what Jesus is saying to these Jews who are grumbling at what He is saying, 'You know, the greatest thing that you need, is to be humbled. The greatest thing that you need is to be brought down in the estimation of yourselves and your own ability. Because you have to understand this: that there is absolutely nothing that you can do to save yourselves, apart from the sovereign grace of almighty God. You cannot by your own unaided strength come to Me, and you can't even enjoy the bread that endures to eternal life apart from the drawing of My Father.'

Do you see how humbling a message that is? That they've been reduced and reduced and reduced and reduced so that they say, "Nothing in my hands I bring,

simply to Thy cross I cling. Naked come to Thee for dress, helpless look to Thee for grace. Foul I to the fountain fly, wash me Savior or I die.” You know, there's another version of that. It goes like this: “Something in my hand I bring, also of the cross I sing, I've always tried to look my best, slightly flawed I pass the test, God I'm sure will not pass me by, if I but try and try and try.”

Is that where you are today? You're trying to be good, you're trying to do this, that and the other. You're coming to church, you're reading your Bible, you belong to all the right associations and clubs, you move in the circle of Christians because you're trying and trying and trying and trying to be good, and somehow or other, so that when you come before the bar of the justice of God, He will look down and see that you've just scrapped by. And Jesus is saying, “Unless the Father draws you, by a sovereign hand, you are dead in trespasses and sins.” You see, Jesus is deliberately crushing their pride. They're grumbling, and you can understand why they're grumbling. Salvation is absolutely all of grace or it is nothing at all. Salvation is a sinner saying, “I'm starving, I've got nothing to offer.” Lloyd-Jones once defined a Christian, and he was referring to Romans 3, of course, “A Christian is a man or woman whose mouth has been shut.” Isn't that a startling definition of a Christian? A Christian is a man or woman whose mouth has been shut. There is within each one of us, a gravitational pull toward self-justification. And Jesus is saying to these spectators of His miracles, “Unless My Father draws you, you can have nothing with Me.” He's humbling them, He's humbling them to the point where they will say, “Nothing in my hands I bring, nothing in my hands I bring.”

### III. Arguing

But there's another verb I want us to see in verse 52, and it's the verb *to argue*. “The Jews then argued, or disputed, among themselves. Because Jesus now begins to talk about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Now you understand He means that in a spiritual sense. “How can this man give us His flesh to eat,” they ask? I remember back in 1968, it was the summer, I was just a wee lad. I went to the local bookstore and I bought J.R.R. Tolkien's, *The Lord of the Rings*, and I devoured it. That's the verb I use, I devoured it. I could not put it down. Now you may say, “That's obsessional.” And I will agree with you. I'm on the border, I'm probably over. But you see what Jesus is saying here. “Unless you are obsessed with Me to the point that you eat Me.”

You know, you can't get more graphic language than that. “unless you come to the point where day-by-day-by-day you're life's dependence is upon eating Me, then you cannot have eternal life.” Unless you eat My flesh, drink My blood, you have no life in you,” Jesus says. He is the bread, which in the incarnation, has come into the world. We are to eat and drink in conversion, in ongoing communion with Him. It is discovering the issue that in Jesus Christ the heart cries of my soul are all met. Do not feed on the bread which perishes but feed on

that bread which lasts forever. You know, bread can get stale. You know that. I'm not talking about this bread that you get in the store in plastic bags that lasts for several weeks. I don't know what that is but it's not bread. Bread perishes within two days, three days; it's got mold on it.

Do you see what Jesus is saying? He meets our needs every day. I never reach a stage where I say, "He used to meet my needs but He doesn't do so anymore because I'm all grown up." Do you remember sherbet fountains? Only Andy McGowan will know what I mean by Sherbet Fountains. It was one of these candies that was full of a sugary sherbet sugary with a licorice stem through which you sucked all the sweet sherbet. I hadn't had one in thirty years and I was in Canada last year and I bought one. I saw it there in the store. It was from my childhood; I bought it and you know it was disgusting. Because I had grown up; I'd forgotten just how sweet and sickly it all was. You know, when you become a man you put away childish things, but I *never* grow tired of Jesus. I need Him every day; He feeds me every day. I dare not go one day without feeding on Him, without communing with Him.

I'm fascinated by the fact that in verse 59, suddenly in the telling of this story, John says, "Jesus said these things in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum." Why? He's been talking about some of the most difficult concepts like eating His flesh and drinking His blood and so on, and then all of a sudden John says, "Do you know He told this in the synagogue at Capernaum?" Why does he do that? Because John wants you to understand is that it is possible to be in a place of worship, in a place where the Scriptures are opened up on a daily basis, and yet not to understand anything at all about Jesus. You may be very religious, you live in the South. Of course you are religious. It's possible to be religious, it's possible to be found in the church, it's possible to be found in the precincts of where the gospel is preached and still be unconverted and still not understand what it means to feed upon Christ to eternal life.

There's that wonderful story of Jim Boice. Sorry, it's about a Scotsman. And he is making his way in a transatlantic crossing on a ship and he's frugal. He's bought his ticket. He sees the dinner, but decides that is not for him; he brings his own food. After awhile, the food gets stale and crusty, until the last day he goes to the dinner and then somebody says to him, "It was part of the price of the ticket." You can be sitting here tonight. You can be so close to the gospel that you could reach out your hand and touch it. That you're so close to eternal life—do you know what that means—eternal life, and yet miss it. We didn't read the section, but at the end of chapter 6, verse 66 says, "That many of the disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him." But Peter, dear, dear Peter. "Will you also go away?" Jesus says to Him. And do you remember the words of Peter? "To whom else will we go?"

Where in the world are we going to go tonight except to Jesus because He has the words of eternal life. Are you trusting in Him tonight? Have you put your faith

in Jesus Christ and in Him only for your salvation? Are you feeding on Him day by day? Because if you're not; do it tonight. Call upon Him while He is near. Do you remember what Jesus says in this passage before us tonight? "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." Doesn't matter what you've done; doesn't matter what sordid past you've had; doesn't matter how foul you're sins may be. If you come to Jesus, He will not cast you out. Let's pray together.

*Our Father in heaven, we thank you for Your Word. Bless it to us now, we pray and bless it as a word of converting power. For Jesus' sake, Amen.*

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