

The Good Life

This week's article comes out of my sermon preparation for August 11th. I have entitled it The Good Life as it echoes the declaration of Genesis; after God finishes creation, he declares it very good. You may ask what is meant by the good life? Our United States Constitution has a broad yet basic description of the good life. That description is life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are basic aspirations of humanity. It is provided for us in our law. God's good life is not found in our laws, it is found in the person of Jesus. The bread of life discourse is all about God's providence to deliver to us the good life. We are offered eternal life, freedom from the sin that binds us, and the love of God that is far superior to any happiness the world can bring.

The bread of life discourse is not some random theme John decided to put in his gospel of Jesus. It is woven into the very fabric of John's Gospel. In John 1:36b John the Baptist, upon seeing Jesus after his baptism, declares, "Behold the lamb of God!" The lamb of God points to the time when the Angel of Death passed over the people of Israel because they had put the blood of the paschal lamb on the lintel and posts of their doors. This was on the eve of their exodus and the beginning of the journey to a land overflowing with milk and honey, a description of the good life. In John 19:14a, we have these words, "It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour." The day of Preparation was the day the Passover lamb was to be slaughtered. It was to be done before the evening fell thus the comment of the "sixth hour". Jesus as the lamb of God was/is the paschal lamb. The paschal lamb was to be eaten at night and if any of it was left over it was to be burnt by fire. John the Baptist's declaration as Jesus as "the lamb of God", and Jesus as the paschal lamb slain on the eve of the Angel of Death going through Egypt, sets the scene for the bread of life discourse. Jesus is the lamb whose blood averted the destroyer and gave nourishment to the people for their journey to the promised land.

Our focus is John 6:35, 41-51. This is often seen as the third part of the bread of life discourse. John 6:25-59 contains the discourse of the bread of life. This discourse can be broken down into four subsections. These are: section 1 verses 25-34, here Jesus seeks to correct the crowd's thinking about the nature of miracles and their understanding of the Messiah; section 2 verses 35-40, Jesus lays out God's providence, his plan for the care of creation; section 3 verses 41-51, here Jesus focuses on how God will draw people into his providential care and how he will teach them and enables them to live in God's providential care; and finally section 4 verses 52-59, where Jesus teaches the full acceptance of God's providential care of creation. These sections build on one another through means of repetition and intensification. An example would be verses 37 and 44. These two verses speak of our coming to Jesus because the Father draws them to Jesus. Verse 37 says, "All that the Father gives me will come to me." Verse 44 reads, "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*" Verse 44 intensifies verse 37. John does this as a teaching tool to help us see the conclusion to which he is bringing us: That we are to take into us by eating the paschal lamb, who is Jesus.

The third section (vv. 41-51) begins with the murmuring by the Jews. In verses 22 and 24 the people are described as a crowd. In verse 41 John begins to separate the sheep from the goats. When John uses the term Jew, he is describing those who are in opposition to Jesus.

The Jews are murmuring because Jesus said in verse 38 that "I have come down from heaven." The nature of their objection is because they say they know where he comes from: "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he say now, 'I have come down from heaven?'" Once again, Jesus' authority is challenged.

Jesus' response is to warn them. He does this by saying that all who come to him are drawn by the Father. In saying this, he identifies them as not being of the Father like they claim. They do not know the Father or the words of the Father. Jesus has challenged their understanding of him and the very basis of their understanding of themselves. He has identified them as sinners, alienated from God, destined to die in their sins unless they let go of their righteousness. To put it another way, "But now the righteousness of God has been made manifest *apart from the law*, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith." (Rom 3:21-25a) Jesus is not only saying that they do not know who he is; He is saying they do not understand who they are. Additionally, they do not understand the scriptures which they claim to follow. As Jesus says, "they are blind guides". (Matt. 15:14)

They are not drawn to Jesus by the Father because they do not admit weakness. The Father draws us to Jesus by our weaknesses. One of our greatest weaknesses is a lack of love. God places this love in front of us that we may be drawn to Jesus. Therefore, John in the first discourse, on the need to be reborn, writes, "For God so *loved* the world that he gave his only Son...". (Jn. 3:16) In our weakness, we are asked to respond by believing, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. *I am the bread of life.* (v. 47,48) As stated by Paul, righteousness/eternal life comes in believing that Jesus is the Christ. This believing is more than intellectual ascent; it is consuming the flesh and blood of Jesus. In using the metaphor of eating, Jesus is pointing to the consummation of our union with God. "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me." (Jn. 17:22-23) This is why the Father has sent the Son that we may be in a perfect loving union!