

CHRIST-WHO IS THE BREAD OF HEAVEN

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Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger: and he that believeth on me shall never thirst (John 6:32-35).

"Within the scope of John's gospel may be discovered Christ's claim to be equal with God. The ego eimi, the I AM, the name of God continually makes an appearance, but it is worthy of note that on seven different occasions, the Lord expanded the challenging title. If the Christian life be a pilgrimage through time toward eternity, these verses reveal the requirements for the journey.

(1) 'I am the bread' (John 6:41). This supplies the strength which every Christian requires as he journeys toward the celestial city.

(2) 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12). There is no guarantee that the Christian will always live in sunlight. 'Days of darkness still come o'er me, Sorrow's paths I often tread.' Light from the Lord will shine on the path, for He walks at our side.

(3) 'I am the door' (John 10:9). This is the access or means of entrance to the royal highway. It is not possible to begin unless one enters at the appointed place.

(4) 'I am the good shepherd' (John 10:11). Sometimes the journey leads through enemy territory. It will be necessary to wrestle against principalities and powers. Occasionally the dangers may be great but the staff and rod of the Shepherd guarantee safety.

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(5) 'I am the resurrection, and the life' (John 11:25). This supplies the needed power for the journey. Sometimes men grow weary, but 'they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.' Resurrection life may be known throughout the entire pilgrimage.

(6) 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6). We shall never get lost if we stay close to Him for He is the way. We shall never be confused if we listen to His advice, for He is the guide.

(7) 'I am the true vine' (John 15:1). We shall neither starve nor waste time on the journey. The Bread will feed us. The Vine will fill us with divine life. Constantly pilgrims will bear fruit to His glory. The walk to the Celestial City will not be burdensome, but a joyous experience of union with Christ."

It would be difficult to decide which of the preceding claims is the most important. They are all simple to understand, concise in meaning, and invaluable to faith. Nevertheless, "I am the bread of life" has made an irresistible appeal to the uni-

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versal church. It expresses the heart of the Gospel.

Proposition One:

Bread has to be prepared ... it does not grow on trees

The Lord said: "I am the bread of life which came down from heaven." His listeners were astonished and replied, "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat" (John 6:31). When Jesus compared Himself with the manna which fell in the wilderness, His adversaries became angry. The food eaten by the children of Israel did not provide immortality. The people who forfeited their opportunity to enter the Promised Land died in the wilderness. The Hebrews were advised to gather what was needed daily, and although it satisfied their hunger, it did not supply everlasting life.

The Savior claimed to be the true bread, and said, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." The Jews could neither appreciate nor

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understand such teaching, for Jesus was declaring His preexistence. He was in heaven before coming into the world. Unlike the manna which was available to the twelve tribes, the true bread from heaven enabled people to live eternally. Unfortunately, the people rejected the claim of the Savior and lost the greatest opportunity God could offer.

Bread had to be prepared, for it did not grow on trees, vines, nor any other plant. It came into being when wheat or corn was transformed into flour. Someone saw the need of sustaining life and began baking. Customers who now purchase supplies pay little attention to the work necessary to produce bread. They are content to see, purchase, and eat it. If bakers went on strike, a national emergency would be forthcoming, for bread is necessary for every person in the world. Without it, people die.

The coming of Christ to earth was not an accident. He was the center of a plan conceived in the mind of God before time began. The Almighty knew that a special corn of wheat would fall into the ground and die and make possible the food which guaranteed immortality (see John 12:24). It took all the resources of heaven to provide the Bread of Life. It was planned in the eternal ages when the Word was with God (see John 1:1-2). It seems miraculous that what took so long to produce may be received in a moment. People who partake of it never die.

Proposition Two:

Bread can only be offered for a limited time

The children of Israel were warned that the manna collected each morning would last for one day. That which was gathered on the eve of the Sabbath would last two days. The fact that it was perishable prevented needless greed (see Exod. 16:20). It was remarkable that in spite of the instructions given by Moses, the people were disobedient and, as a result, suffered. God was trying to teach opportunities do not last forever. He provided manna, but they were expected to gather it. There are some things that the Lord will not do for His people.

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God was expressing truth relative to the true bread who later came from heaven. It was never His intention to compel allegiance. He desires it and will go to great lengths to obtain it, but the Lord never interferes with men's ability to choose. They may accept God's provided salvation or reject it, but remain responsible for their actions. People who postpone acceptance of Christ may one day discover they waited too long! When God said, "Now is the day of salvation," He did not mean tomorrow. When an opportunity is presented, people should take it and be grateful. A South African farmer complained about the poor quality of his soil and sold his farm for \$25,000. The new owner found and operated a gold mine and became a millionaire. God placed the gold beneath the rocky ridge, but man had to extract it. Opportunity often comes once, but seldom twice.

Proposition Three:

Bread is universally acclaimed ... it satisfies the hunger of all nations

It would be difficult to find a country where bread is not needed. Black bread may be obtained in Germany, white in America; brown throughout Europe, and gray in other countries of the world. It is called by different names, has varying shapes and sizes, but whatever the differences may be-it is still bread. People of all races need it, for in every country they become hungry, and without it die. A beggar may only possess a crust. A millionaire may own bakeries, but the fact that this commodity is essential is irrefutable. Bread is needed everywhere.

The Savior knew this when He instructed the disciples to go into all the world to preach the Gospel to every creature. He said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not, shall be damned." Baptism was the appointed method by which Christians testified they had received the Bread of Life. The New Testament churches knew nothing of unbaptized believers. When a man received Christ as his Savior, immersion always followed (see Acts 8:35-38). It is significant that when Mark wrote of salvation he

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mentioned faith and baptism, but when he spoke of a person being lost, he only mentioned faith. "He that believeth not shall be damned." Baptism was only an ordinance, evidence of obedience to the command of Christ. Unfortunately, certain sections of the modern church have rejected that teaching. Some even teach that without baptism, faith is useless. It cannot be overemphasized that water, whether it be applied by pouring, sprinkling, or immersion, cannot wash away sin. Only the precious blood of Christ can perform that miracle. It is wise to remember that bread cannot save nor sustain life unless it be received and eaten. Christ cannot help anyone unless He is received by faith into the human soul.

The Lord commissioned His disciples to go into all the world to preach the Gospel, for without the Bread of Life unevangelized people would suffer irreparable loss. A church that has no missionary program is not pleasing to the Lord. Closed hands are indicative of hearts not open to the leading of God's Spirit. The Bible says, "Give and it shall be given unto you." People who refrain from helping others invariably die poor!

Proposition Four:

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Bread sustains health and promotes growth

This was the most astounding sermon ever preached in the synagogue at Capernaum. It surprised many of Christ's followers and annoyed the regular worshipers who became angry when the Lord said:

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world (John 6:51).

The Savior explained the bread from heaven was His body which would be sacrificed for all nations. While He ministered in Palestine, the Lord, for the most part, only reached a limited number of people. After His resurrection, the Gospel was preached in every part of the world.

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It was difficult for the inhabitants of Nazareth to accept the Lord's claim that He had been in heaven before residing in Nazareth and had lived before Adam. The congregation must have thought he had taken leave of His senses. The Savior also indicated that the people who came to Him would return for additional supplies. The living bread would be so delightful that those who ate it would be unable to live without Him. When Jesus broke and blessed the small loaves supplied by a lad, there was enough for everybody.

I remember standing before a Christian leper in Central Africa. His testimony had helped to transform many tribesmen. I asked what was his favorite Bible story, and after a short pause he replied, "I like the story of the feeding of the five thousand. When Jesus broke the bread, there was enough for everybody-if they would take it."

1. Ivor Powell, John's Wonderful Gospel (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications. 1983).

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