

The Bread of Life

by J.C. Ryle

J.C. Ryle's sermon emphasizes the necessity of God's grace for belief in Christ as the Bread of Life, highlighting human responsibility in accepting salvation.

Scripture: John 6:44, John 6:51, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Grace", "Salvation"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the profound truths found in John 6, where Jesus declares Himself as the 'living bread' that grants eternal life. He explains that many struggle to accept Christ due to His humble origins, and that true belief requires the drawing grace of God, as human nature is inherently resistant to faith. Ryle highlights the necessity of acknowledging one's own corruption and the need for divine grace to come to Christ, stressing that while man is morally unable to believe without God's intervention, he remains responsible for his own soul. Ultimately, Ryle underscores that Christ's sacrificial death offers redemption for all mankind, inviting everyone to partake in the eternal life He provides.

Transcript

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." (John 6:51)

Truths of the weightiest importance follow each other in rapid succession in the sixth chapter of John. There are probably very few parts of the Bible which contain so many "deep things" as this chapter. For one thing, we learn that Christ's lowly condition was a stumbling block to the natural man. We read that the Jews said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I came down from heaven?'" Had our Lord come as a conquering king, with wealth and honors to bestow upon his followers and mighty armies in his train, they would have been willing enough to receive him. But a poor, lowly, and suffering Messiah was an offense to them.

"Jesus therefore answered and said to them, 'Do not murmur among yourselves.'" This seems a mild hint that they need not waste their time in murmuring. It neither surprised our Lord nor discouraged him. It is as though he said, "Your murmuring is only what I am prepared to expect. I know what human nature is; I am not moved by it. Think not that your unbelief will shake my confidence in my divine mission or prevent my saying what I do. I know that you cannot naturally understand such things I am speaking of, and I will proceed to tell you why."

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." The precise link to this sentence is not very evident. I believe it is something of this sort: "You are murmuring among yourselves because I speak of coming down from heaven; and you are making my apparently low origin an excuse for not believing on me. But all the time the fault is not in my sayings but in your lack of grace and your unbelief. There is a deeper and more solemn truth to which you seem totally blind, and that is man's need of God's grace in order to believe on me. You are never likely to believe until you acknowledge your own corruption and ask for grace to draw your soul to me. I am aware that it needs something more than argument and reasoning to make anyone believe in me. Your unbelief and murmuring do not surprise me or discourage me. I neither expect to see you nor anyone else believe until you are drawn by my Father." Our Lord's intent was not to excuse the unbelief of his hearers. He rather desired to magnify their danger and guilt, and make them see that faith in him was not so easy an affair as they supposed. It was not knowledge of his origin alone, but the drawing grace of God the Father which they needed. Let them awake to see that and cry for grace before it was too late.

Our Lord lays down the great principle "that no man whatsoever can come to Christ by faith, and really believe in Him, unless God the Father draws him so to come and inclines his will to believe." The nature of man since the fall is so corrupt and depraved that even when Christ is made known and preached to him, he will not come and believe without the special grace of God inclining his will and giving him a disposition to come. Moral persuasion and advice alone will not bring him. He must be "drawn." This is no doubt a very humbling truth, and one which in every age has called forth the hatred and opposition of man. The favorite notion of man is that he can do what he likes--repent or not repent, believe or not believe, come to Christ or not come--entirely at his own discretion. Man likes to think that his salvation is in his own power. Such notions are flatly contradictory to the text before us. The words of our Lord here are clear and unmistakable and cannot be explained away.

We must carefully remember that it is moral inability and not physical inability that Christ speaks of. We are not to suppose that any man can have a sincere and hearty wish to come to Christ and yet be prevented by some mysterious impotence. The impotence lies in man's will. He cannot come because he will not come. There is an Old Testament sentence which throws much light on the expression before us. It is said of Joseph's brethren, that "they hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him." Anyone must see at a glance what this "could not" means: They could not because they would not.

These things, no doubt, are deep and mysterious. By truths like these God proves the faith and patience of his people. Can they believe him? Can they wait for a fuller explanation at the last day? What they do not understand now they shall understand hereafter. One thing at any rate is abundantly clear, and that is man's responsibility for his own soul. His inability to come to Christ does not make an end of his accountability. Both things are equally true. If lost at last, it will prove to have been his own fault. Christ would have saved him, but he would not be saved. He would not come to Christ that he might have life.

"I am the living bread." Here our Lord distinctly proclaims to the Jews that he himself is that "bread of life," that soul-satisfying food, the true bread, the bread of God. He had awakened their curiosity by speaking of that bread as a real thing, and a thing worth their attention. He now unveils the whole truth to them and tells them plainly that he is that bread. "If you ask what it is, and where it is, you have only to look at Me."

When our Lord says, "I will give my flesh for the life of the world," I believe he means, "I will give my death to procure the world's life. My death shall be the ransom, the payment, and the redemption money by which eternal life shall be purchased for a world of sinners." I can see only one meaning in the word

"world." It means all mankind. Christ died for all mankind, not for the elect only. That all the world is not saved is perfectly certain. That many die in unbelief and get no benefit from Christ's death is certain. But that Christ's death was enough for all mankind, and that when he died he made sufficient atonement for all the world, are truths which, both in this text and others like it, appear to my mind incontrovertible.

Let us note what a full and broad offer Christ holds out to sinners: "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever." Happy would it be for many, whose whole hearts are set on eating, drinking, and feasting their poor perishable bodies, if they would but look at these words!

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