

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
6:35-40

35. And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes on me shall never thirst. 36. But I said to you that ye also have seen me and do not believe. 37. All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and he who comes to me I will by no means cast out. 38. For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. 39. And this is the Father's will who has sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. 40. And this is the will of him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes on him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

35.--[*Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life.*] In this verse our Lord begins to speak in the first person. Henceforth in this discourse, we hear directly of "I" and "Me" no less than thirty-five times. He drops all further reserve as to His meaning and tells the Jews plainly, "I am the bread of life"--the true bread from heaven, the bread of God which, coming down from heaven, gives life to the world.

The "bread of life" means that spiritual bread which conveys life to the soul; that living bread which does not merely feed the body, like common bread, but supplies eternal sustenance and nourishment to the eternal soul. It is like "the water of life" (Rev. xxii.17) and "living water" (John iv.10).

The reasons why Christ calls Himself "bread" appear to be such as these. He is intended to be to the soul what bread is to the body--its food. Bread is necessary food. When men can afford to eat nothing else, they eat bread. It is food that all need; the king and the pauper both eat bread. It is food that suits all; old and young, weak and strong, all like bread. It is the most nourishing kind of food. Nothing does so much good and is so indispensable to bodily health as bread. It is food that we need daily and are never tired of. Morning and night we go on all our lives eating bread. The application of these various points to Christ is too plain to need any explanation.

One great general lesson is doubtless intended to be drawn from Christ's selection of "bread" as an emblem of Himself. He is given to be the great supply of all the needs of men's souls. Whatever our spiritual necessity may be, however starving, famished, weak, and desperate our condition, there is enough in Christ and to spare. He is "bread."

Rollock remarks that as soon as the slightest spiritual desire is manifested by anyone, however ignorant and weak, he should be at once directed to Christ. It is what our Lord Himself did. As soon as the Jews said, "Lord, evermore give us this bread," He cried, "I am the bread of life." He never "quenched the smoking flax."

[*He who comes...never thirst.*] The words "comes" and "believes" in this sentence appear to mean very nearly one and the same thing. To "come" to Christ is to "believe" on Him, and to "believe" on Him is to "come" to Him. Both expressions mean that act of the soul whereby, under a sense of its sins and necessity, it applies to Christ, lays hold on Christ, trusts itself to Christ, casts itself on Christ. "Coming," is the soul's movement towards Christ. "Believing" is the soul's venture on Christ. If there is any difference, it is that "coming" is the first act of the soul when it is taught by the Holy Ghost, and that "believing" is a continued act or habit which never ends. No man "comes" who does not believe; and all who come go on believing.

When our Lord says "shall never hunger" and "shall never thirst," he does not mean that a believer in Christ shall no longer feel any need, emptiness, or deficiency within him. This would not be correct. The best of believers will often cry, like St. Paul, "Oh, wretched man that I am!" (Rom. vii.24.) The man who "hungers and thirsts after righteousness" is blessed. (Matt. v.6.) What our Lord does mean is that faith in Christ shall supply a man's soul with a peace and satisfaction that shall never be entirely taken from him, that shall endure forever. The man who eats and drinks material food shall soon be hungry and thirsty as ever. But the man who comes to Christ by faith gets hold of something that is an everlasting possession. He shall never die of spiritual famine and perish for lack of soul nourishment. He may have his low feelings at seasons. He may even lose his sense of pardon and his enjoyment of religion. But once in Christ by faith, he shall never be cast away and starved in hell. He shall never die in his sins.

(a) Let us note in this verse how simple are the figures by which our Lord brings His own sufficiency within the reach of man's understanding. He calls Himself "bread." It was an idea that even the poorest hearer could understand. He that would do good to the poor need never be ashamed of using the simplest and most familiar illustrations.

(b) Let us note that faith is a *movement* of the soul. Its first action is "coming" to Christ. Its subsequent life is a constant daily repetition of its first action. To tell people to "sit still and wait" is poor theology. We should bid them arise and come.

(c) Let us note that coming to Christ is the true secret of obtaining soul satisfaction and inward peace. Until we take that step, our consciences are never easy. We "hunger and thirst" and find no relief.

(d) Let us note that true believers shall never be altogether cast off and forsaken of God. The man who comes to Christ shall "never hunger nor thirst." The text is one among many proofs of the perseverance of the saints.

(e) Let us finally note how simple are the terms of the Gospel. It is but coming and believing, that Christ asks at our hands. The most ignorant, the most sinful, the most hardened, need not despair. They have but to "come and believe."

Luther, quoted by Besser, remarks on this verse: "These are indeed dear and precious words which it is not enough for us merely to know. We must turn them to account and say, Upon these words I will go to sleep at night and get up in the morning; leaning upon them will I sleep and wake, and work and travel. For though everything were to go to ruin, and though father and mother, emperor and pope, princess and lords, all forsake me, though even Moses could not help me and I had only Christ to look to, yet He will help me. For His words are sure, and He says, 'Hold fast by Me; come thou to Me, and thou shalt live.' The meaning of these words is that whoever can believe on that one Man who is called Jesus Christ, shall be satisfied and cannot suffer either hunger or thirst."

36.--[*But I said...do not believe.*] It is not quite clear to what our Lord refers in this verse when He says, "I said." Some think that He is referring specially to His own words in the 26th verse: "Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles," etc. Others think that He refers generally to the testimony He had frequently borne against the unbelief of the Jewish people in almost every place where He preached.

It seems to me most natural to connect the verse with the saying of the Jews in the 30th verse. They had there said, "What sign do You show then, that we may see and believe You?" Why should we not suppose our Lord, in this verse, to take up that saying and reply, "You talk of seeing and believing; I tell you again and have long told you, that ye have seen Me and yet do not believe"?

The connecting link with the preceding verse appears to be something of this kind: "I am quite aware that I speak in vain to many of you, of the bread of life and of believing. For I have said often, and now say it again, that many of you have both seen Me and my miracles and yet do not believe. Nevertheless, I am not discouraged. I know, in spite of your unbelief, that some will be saved."

The unbelief of human nature is painfully exhibited in this verse. Some could even see and hear Christ himself, while He was on earth, and yet remain unbelieving! Surely we have no right to be surprised if we find like unbelief now. Men may actually see Christ with their bodily eyes and have no faith.

37.--[*All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me.*] The connection of this verse with the preceding one seems to be this: "Your unbelief does not move Me or surprise Me. I foresaw it and have been aware of it. Nevertheless, your unbelief will not prevent God's purposes taking effect. Some will believe though you remain unbelieving. Everything that the Father gives Me will come to Me in due time, believe, and be saved. In spite of your unbelief, all my sheep shall sooner or later come to Me by faith and be gathered within my fold. I see your unbelief with sorrow but not with anxiety and surprise. I am prepared for it. I know that you cannot alter God's purposes; and in accordance with those purposes, a people will come to Me though you do not."

Luther, quoted by Besser, supposes our Lord to say, "This sermon shall not on your account be of none effect and remain without fruit. If you will

not, another will; if you do not believe, yet another does."

The English language fails to give the full sense of the Greek in this sentence. The literal meaning of the Greek is not "all persons whom the Father gives shall come," but "everything--the whole thing." It is not a masculine plural, but a neuter singular. The idea is either, "that whole mystical body, the company of my believing people, shall come to Me," or else "every single part or jot or member of my mystical body shall come to Me, and not one be found missing at last."

We learn from these words the great and deep truth of God's election and appointment to eternal life of a people out of this world. The Father from all eternity has given to the Son a people to be His own peculiar people. The saints are given to Christ by the Father as a flock, which Christ undertakes to save completely and to present complete at the last day. (See John xvii.2,6,9,11,12; and xviii.9.) However wicked men may abuse this doctrine, it is full of comfort to a humble believer. He did not begin the work of his [own] salvation. He was given to Christ by the Father, by an everlasting covenant.

We learn from these words the great mark of God's elect whom He has given to Christ. They all come to Christ by faith. It is useless for anyone to boast of his election unless he comes to Christ by faith. Until a man comes humbly to Jesus and commits his soul to Him as a believer, we have no dependable evidence of the man's election.

Beza remarks, "Faith in Christ is a certain testimony of our election, and consequently of our future glorification."

Ferus says, "Cleaving to Christ by faith, you are sure of your predestination."

We learn from these words the irresistible power of God's electing grace. All who are given to Christ shall come to Him. No obstacle, no difficulty, no power of the world, the flesh, and the devil can prevent them. Sooner or later they will break through all and surmount all. If "given," they will "come." To ministers the words are full of comfort.

[He who comes to me I will by no means cast out.] These words declare Christ's willingness to save everyone that comes to Him. There is an infinite readiness in Christ to receive, pardon, justify, and glorify sinners. The expression, "I will by no means cast out," implies this. It is a very powerful form of negation. "So far from casting out the man that comes to Me, I will receive him with joy when he comes. I will not refuse him on account of past sins. I will not cast him off again because of present weaknesses and infirmities. I will keep him to the end by my grace. I will confess him before my Father in the judgment-day, and glorify him forever. In short, I will do the very opposite of casting him out."

The distinction between the language of this clause of the text and that of the former clause should be carefully noticed. They who "shall come to Christ" are "that whole thing" which the Father gives. But it is "each

individual man" that comes, of whom Jesus says, "I will by no means cast him out."

To "cast out of the synagogue," to "cut off from the congregation of Israel," to "shut out of the camp," as the leper was shut out (Lev. xiii.46), were ideas with which all Jews were familiar. Our Lord seems to say, "I will do the very opposite of all this."

A. Clarke thinks that the idea is that of a poor person coming to a rich man's house for shelter and relief, who is kindly treated and not "cast out." But may we not suppose, after all, that the the latent thought is that of the man fleeing to the city of refuge according to the law of Moses, who, once admitted, is safe and not "cast out"? (Num. xxxv.11,12.)

We learn from these words that the one point we should look to is "whether we do really come to Christ." Our past lives may have been very bad. Our present faith may be very weak. Our repentance and prayers may be very imperfect and poor. Our knowledge of religion may be very scanty. But do we come to Christ? That is the question. If so, the promise belongs to us. Christ will not cast us out. We may remind Him boldly of His own word.

We learn from these words that Christ's offers to sinners are wide, broad, free, unlimited, and unconditional. We must take care that we do not spoil and hamper them by narrow statements. God's election must never be thrust nakedly at unconverted sinners in preaching the Gospel. It is a point with which at present they have nothing to do. No doubt it is true that none will come to Christ but those who are given to Him by the Father. But who those are that are so given we cannot tell and must not attempt to define. All we have to do is to invite everyone, without exception, to come to Christ and to tell men that everyone who does come to Christ shall be received and saved. To this point we must carefully stick.

Rollock observes how close this glorious promise stands to our Lord's words about God's election and predestination. Election should never be stated nakedly and baldly, without reminding those who hear it of Christ's infinite willingness to receive and save all.

Hutcheson remarks: "Saints do indeed oftentimes complain of casting off, but they are the words of sense and not of faith. They may seem to be cast off when really it is not so."

38.--[*For I came...the will of him who sent me.*] The meaning of this verse appears to be as follows. "I did not become man and enter this world to do anything of my own independent will and volition, and without reference to the will of my Father. On the contrary, I have come to carry out His will. As God, my will is in entire harmony and unity with my Father's will, because I and my Father are one. As man, I have no other will and desire than to do that which is in entire accordance with the will of Him who has sent Me to be the Mediator and Friend of sinners." What the Father's will about man is, our Lord goes on immediately to state in the two following verses. One part of the Father's will is that nothing should be lost that He has given to the Son. That "will" Christ came to carry out and

accomplish. Another part of the Father's will is that everyone who trusts in Christ may be saved. That "will" again Christ came to carry out and accomplish. The verse before us and the two following are closely connected and should be looked at as one great thought. It was the Father's "will" that free salvation by Christ should be brought near and within the reach of everyone, and it was also His "will" that every believer in Christ should be completely and finally saved. To work out and accomplish this will of His Father was Christ's object in coming into the world.

The expression, "I came down from heaven," is a strong proof of the pre-existence of Christ. It could not possibly be said of any prophet or apostle that he "came down from heaven." It is a heavy blow at the Socinian theory that Christ was nothing more than a man.

39.--[*This is the Father's will who has sent Me.*] In this verse and the following, Christ explains fully what was the Father's will concerning the Son's mission into the world. It was that He should receive all and lose none, that anyone might come to Him, and that no comer should be lost. It is a cheering and pleasant thought that free and full salvation and the final perseverance of believers should be so expressly declared to be "the will of the Father."

[*Of all...lose nothing.*] Here again there is the same form of speech as in the 37th verse. Literally rendered the sentence would be, "that of the whole thing which He has given Me, I should not lose anything out of it." The "losing" must necessarily mean, that "I should let nothing be taken away by the power of Satan and allow nothing to come to ruin by its own inherent weakness." The general sense of the sentence must be, "that I should allow no member of my mystical body to be lost."

We have in these words the doctrine of the final perseverance of true believers. It seems hard to imagine stronger words than these to express the doctrine. It is the Father's will that no one whom He has given to Christ should be lost. His will must surely take effect. True believers may err and fail in many things, but they shall never finally be cast away. The will of God the Father and the power of Christ the Son are both engaged on their side.

We have in these words abundant comfort for all fearful and faint-hearted believers. Let such remember that if they "come" to Christ by faith, they have been "given" to Christ by the Father; and if given by the Father to Christ, it is the Father's will that they should never be cast away. Let them lean back on this thought when cast down and disquieted--"It is the Father's will that I should not be lost."

[*Should raise...last day.*] We have in these words the Father's will that all Christ's members shall have a glorious resurrection. They shall not only not be lost and cast away while they live, they shall be raised again to glory after they die. Christ will not only justify and pardon, and keep and sanctify, but He will do even more. He will raise them up at the last day to a life of glory. It is the Father's will that He should do so. The bodies of the saints are provided for no less than their souls

The idea of some writers, which Bullinger mentions with some favor, that the "last day" means the day of each believer's death and the "raising" his translation in the hour of death to paradise, seems to me utterly destitute of foundation.

The words before us are a strong argument for the "first resurrection" as a peculiar privilege of believers. It is said here that believers shall be "raised again" as a special honor and mercy conferred upon them. Yet it is no less clearly said in the 5th chapter, verse 29, that "ALL that are in the graves shall come forth," both good and bad. It follows, therefore, that there is a resurrection of which saints alone are to be the partakers, distinct from the resurrection of the wicked. What can this be but the first resurrection? (Rev. xx.5.) It must, however, in fairness be remembered that resurrection is sometimes spoken of in Scripture as if it was the peculiar privilege of believers and a thing in which the wicked have no part. In the famous chapter in Corinthians, it is clear that the resurrection of the saints is the only thing in St. Paul's mind. (1 Cor. xv.) That the wicked will be raised again, as well as the righteous, is clearly asserted in several places. But it is sometimes a thing kept in the background.

40.--[*This is the will of Him who sent Me.*] These words are repeated in this verse to show that it is no less the Father's will that Christ should receive sinners than that Christ should preserve saints. Both things are alike the purpose and intention of God.

[*Everyone...believes..everlasting life.*] These words mean that "everyone, without exception, who by faith looks to Christ and trusts in Him for salvation, is allowed by God the Father's appointment to have part in the salvation Christ has provided." There is no barrier, difficulty, or objection. "Everyone" is the expression. No one can say he is excluded. "Seeing and believing" are the only things required. No one can say that the terms are too hard. Does he see and believe? Then he may have everlasting life.

The expression "sees the Son" in this sentence must evidently mean more than mere seeing with the bodily eyes. It is the looking with faith at Christ. (See John xii.45 where the same Greek word is used.) It is such a look as that of the Israelites who looked at the brazen serpent and, looking, were healed. (See John iii.14,15 and Num. xxi.9.) I believe that this was in our Lord's mind when He spoke the words of this verse. Just as every serpent-bitten Israelite might look at the brazen serpent and, as soon as he looked, was cured, so every sin-stricken man may look to Christ and be saved.

[*I will raise him up at the last day.*] These words are repeated, I believe, in order to make it sure that a glorious resurrection shall be the portion of everyone that only "looks" at Christ and believes, as well as of those who enjoy the "assurance" that they are given to Christ and shall never be cast away. The humblest believer shall be raised again by Christ at the first resurrection and eternally glorified, just as certainly as the oldest saint in the family of God.

Stier remarks: "This raising up at the last day, twice emphatically affirmed, points out to us the final goal of salvation and preserving power; after the attainment of which there is no more danger of perishing, or losing again that eternal life, which is now, the body being raised, consummate."

Let us mark what abundant comfort there is in this verse for all doubting, trembling sinners who feel their sins and yet fancy there is no hope for them. Let such observe that it is the will of God the Father that "everyone" who looks at Christ by faith may have everlasting life. It would be impossible to open a wider door. Let men look and live. The will of God is on their side.

Calvin remarks on this verse: "The way to obtain salvation is to obey the Gospel of Christ. If it is the will of God that those whom He has elected shall be saved, and if in this manner He ratifies and executes His eternal decrees, whoever he be that is not satisfied with Christ but indulges in curious inquiries about eternal predestination, such a person desires to be saved contrary to the purposes of God. They are madmen who seek their own salvation, or that of others, in the whirlpool of predestination, not keeping the way of salvation which is exhibited to them." -- "To every man, therefore, his faith is a sufficient attestation of the eternal predestination of God."