

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
6:22-27

22. The following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which his disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but his disciples had gone away alone-- 23. however other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks-- 24. when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. 25. And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here? 26. Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say to you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled. 27. Do not labor for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give you, because God the Father has set his seal on him.

22.--[*The following day, etc.*] In this and the three following verses, we have an instance of the extreme minuteness with which St. John describes all the particulars connected with any of the miracles of our Lord which he records. Here, for example, he tells us that our Lord's remaining behind and not accompanying His disciples when they went into the boat, was observed by the multitude; and that, nevertheless, they could not find our Lord the next morning and were puzzled to account for His being found at Capernaum when they got there. All these little things help to prove that the circumstance of our Lord's joining the disciples was something miraculous and cannot be explained away, as some Rationalists pretend to say. In particular, the question "When did you come here?" (ver. 25) is plain evidence that the multitude did not think it possible for our Lord to have walked along the shore, as some modern writers suggest, and did not understand how He got to Capernaum, except in a boat.

In each of the seven great miracles recorded by St. John, this fullness and minuteness is very noticeable. Had he been inspired to relate as many miracles as we find in Matthew and Mark, his Gospel would have been fifty chapters instead of twenty-one. Writing long after the other Gospel writers and at a time when many who witnessed our Lord's miracles were dead, there was a fitness and wisdom in his supplying the abundant particulars which characterize his descriptions.

[*The people who were standing on the other side of the sea.*] This means the multitude, or some of them, whom Jesus had fed on the northeast shore of the lake, and whom the disciples had left standing near the banks when they embarked before our Lord sent them away. Matthew and Mark both mention that our Lord first made the disciples embark, and *then* sent the multitude away and retired to the mountain to pray.

[*However other boats came, etc.*] This verse either means that other boats

came from Tiberias the morning after the miracle of feeding the multitude, which were not there the evening that the disciples embarked, or else it means that there were other boats from Tiberias not far from the place where the miracle was worked, though they were not actually at the spot where the disciples embarked, except their one boat. The verse is carefully inserted parenthetically in order to account for the multitude following our Lord to Capernaum. Had it not been inserted, the infidel would have asked us triumphantly to explain how the people could have followed our Lord when they had no boats! We need not doubt that every apparent discrepancy and difficulty in the Gospel narrative would equally admit of explanation if we only knew how to fill up the gaps.

[*After the Lord had given thanks.*] This is purposely inserted to remind us that it was no common eating of bread that had taken place, but an eating of food miraculously multiplied after our Lord had blessed it.

24.--[*When the people.*] There is no occasion to suppose that this expression means the whole five thousand whom our Lord had fed. For one thing, we are distinctly told that our Lord "sent them away," and the greater part probably dispersed and went their way to their homes, or to Jerusalem to the passover. For another thing, it is absurd to suppose that so large a multitude could find boats enough to convey them across the lake. It evidently means the remaining portion of the multitude, and probably included many who followed our Lord about from place to place wherever He went in Galilee, without any spiritual feeling, from a vague love of excitement and in the hope of ultimately getting something by it.

[*They also got into boats.*] This means that they embarked in the boats which came from Tiberias and crossed over the lake.

25.--[*And when they found...sea.*] The place where they found our Lord was on the northwest side of the lake of Galilee, on the opposite side from where the miracle of feeding the multitude was worked. The precise spot, however, where they found Him is a point which it is not very easy to decide. Of course, if we read the discourse which follows as one unbroken discourse (all spoken at one time without breaks or pauses, except such as arise from the remarks of the people who heard our Lord), there can be no doubt where our Lord was. The 59th verse settles the question: "These things said He in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum." But if we suppose a break at the 40th verse (where the Jews begin "to murmur") and a short interval before the discourse was resumed, it seems highly probable that the crowd found our Lord at the landing place of Capernaum or just outside the city--that the discourse began there and continued up to the 40th verse--and that then, after a short pause, it was resumed "in the synagogue of Capernaum. It certainly does seem rather abrupt and unnatural to suppose the crowd landing at Capernaum, going up to the synagogue, and *there* beginning the conversation with the question, "When did you come here?"

[*When did you come here?*] The question evidently implies surprise at finding our Lord, and inability to understand how He could possibly have got to Capernaum if He did not go in the boat with His disciples. It is a question, be it remarked, to which our Lord returned no answer. He knew

the state of mind of those who asked it and knew that it would be of no use to tell them when He had come or how.

Wordsworth's idea that there is a mystical reference in this question to the manner and time of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper appears to me very fanciful and far-fetched.

26.--[*Jesus answered, Verily...to you.*] This solemn expression, as usual in St. John's Gospel, introduces a series of sayings of the deepest importance. They very first was a sharp and cutting rebuke of the carnal-mindedness of those whom our Lord addressed.

[*Ye seek Me...miracles...filled.*] This was a severe saying and one which He, who knew all hearts and read all secret motives, could say with peculiar power. It is a sad exposure of the true reason why many followed our Lord, both on this occasion and on others. It was not now even desire to see miracles performed, as it had been the day before (see v.2). These, after a time when the novelty was past, would cease to astonish and attract. It was a lower and more carnal motive still; it was the mere wish to be fed again with loaves and fishes. They wanted to get something more out of our Lord. They had been fed once, and they would like to be fed again.

The poor, mean, and carnal motives which induce men to make some religious profession are painfully exhibited here. Perhaps we have but a faint notion how little the reasons of many for coming to public worship or communion would bear sifting and examination. We may be sure that all is not gold that glitters, and that many a professor is rotten at heart. It was so even under our Lord's ministry and much more now. Augustine remarks how seldom "Jesus is sought for the sake of Jesus."

Our Lord's perfect knowledge of the secret springs of men's actions is strikingly exhibited here. We cannot deceive Him even if we deceive man; and our true characters will be exposed in the day of judgment if they are not found out before we die. Whatever we are in religion, let us be honest and true.

To follow Christ for the sake of a few loaves and fishes seems miserable work. To some who know nothing of poverty, it may appear almost incredible that a crowd of people should have done it. Perhaps those only can thoroughly understand it who have seen much of the poor in pauperized rural parishes. They can understand the immense importance which a poor man attaches to having his belly filled and getting a dinner or a supper. Most of our Lord's followers in Galilee were probably very poor.

To deal plainly with people about their spiritual condition and faithfully expose their false motives, if we know them, is the positive duty of ministers and teachers. It is no kindness or charity to flatter professing Christians and tell them they are children of God and going to heaven if we know that they only make a religious profession for the sake of what they can get.

Wisdom and discrimination in giving temporal relief to the poor are very

necessary things in ministers, and indeed in all Christians. Unless we take heed what we do in such matters, we do more harm than good. To be always feeding the poor and giving money to those who make some profession of religion is the surest way to train up a generation of hypocrites, and to inflict lasting injury on souls.

27.--[*Do not labor...set His seal on Him.*] This verse is peculiarly full of instructive lessons. (1) There is something *forbidden*. We are not to labor exclusively or excessively for the satisfaction of our bodily wants, for that food which only perishes in the using and only does us a little temporary good. (2) There is something *commanded*. We ought to work hard and strive for that spiritual food--that supply for the needs of our souls which once obtained is an everlasting possession. (3) There is something *promised*. The Son of man, even Jesus Christ, is ready to give to every one who desires to have it that spiritual food which endures forever. (4) There is something *declared*. The Son of man, Jesus Christ, has been designated and appointed by God the Father for this very purpose, to be the dispenser of this spiritual food to all who desire it.

The whole verse is a strong proof that however carnal and wicked men may be, we should never hesitate to offer to them freely and fully the salvation of the Gospel. Bad as the motives of these Jews were, we see our Lord, in the same breath, first exposing their sin and then showing them their remedy.

The figure of speech used by our Lord, which supplies the keynote to the whole subsequent discourse, is a beautiful instance of that Divine wisdom with which He suited His language to the mental condition of those He spoke to. He saw the crowd coming to Him for food. He seizes the idea and bids them labor not for bodily but spiritual food. Just so when He saw the rich young man come to Him, He bade him "sell all and give to the poor." Just so when the Samaritan woman met Him at the well, as she came to draw water, He told her of living water. Just so when Nicodemus came to Him, proud of his Jewish birth, He tells him of a new birth which he needed.

When our Lord said "do not labor for the meat that perishes," we must not for a moment suppose that He meant to encourage idleness and the neglect of all lawful means in order to get our living. It is a kind of expression which is not uncommon in the Bible, when two things are put in comparison. Thus, when our Lord says, "If any man come after Me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children, etc., he cannot be my disciple," we see at a glance that these words cannot be taken literally. They only mean "If any man does not love Me more than father," etc. (Luke xiv.26.) So here the simple meaning is that we ought to take far more pains about the supply of the needs of our souls than of our bodies. (See also 1 Cor. vii.29; 2 Cor. iv.18; 1 Sam. viii.7; John xii.44.)

When our Lord says "labor for the meat that endures," etc., I think He teaches very plainly that it is the duty of everyone to use every means, and endeavor in every way, to promote the welfare of his soul. In the use of prayer, the Bible, and the public preaching of God's Word, we are specially to labor. Our responsibility and accountableness, the duty of effort and exertion, appear to me to stand out unmistakably in the

expression. It is like the commands, "Strive, Repent, Believe, Be converted, Save yourselves from this untoward generation, Awake, Arise, Come, Pray." It is nothing less than wicked to stand still, splitting hairs, raising difficulties, and pretending inability, in the face of such expressions as these. What God commands, man must always try to obey. Whatever language Christ uses, ministers and teachers must never shrink from using likewise.

The "meat that endures to everlasting life" must doubtless mean that satisfaction of the cravings of soul and conscience, which is the grand need of human nature. Mercy and grace, pardon of sin and a new heart, are the two great gifts which alone can fill the soul, and once given are never taken away but endure forever. Both here and in many other places, we must always remember that "meat" did not mean exclusively "flesh" in the days when the Bible was translated, as it does now. The Greek word rendered "meat" here means simply "food" of any kind.

When our Lord says, "The Son of man shall give you the meat that endures to everlasting life," He appears to me to make one of the widest and most general offers to unconverted sinners that we have anywhere in the Bible. The men to whom He was speaking were, beyond question, carnal minded and unconverted men. Yet even to them Jesus says, "The Son of man shall give to you." To me it seems an unmistakable statement of Christ's willingness and readiness to give pardon and grace to any sinner. It seems to me to warrant ministers in proclaiming Christ's readiness to save anyone, and in offering salvation to anyone, if he will only repent and believe the Gospel. The favorite notion of some--that Christ is to be offered only to the elect, that grace and pardon are to be exhibited but not offered to a congregation, that we ought not to say broadly and fully to all whom we preach that "Christ is ready and willing to save you"--such notions, I say, appear to me entirely irreconcilable with the language of our Lord. Election, no doubt, is a mighty truth and a precious privilege. Complete and full redemption, no doubt, is the possession of none but the elect. But how easy it is, in holding these glorious truths, to become more systematic than the Bible and to spoil the Gospel by cramping and limiting it!

When our Lord says, "Because God the Father has set His seal on Him," He probably refers to the custom of setting apart for any specific purpose, and marking for any peculiar use, by a seal. So also deeds and public documents were sealed to testify their execution and validity and give them authority. So it is said in Esther: "The writing that is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse." (Esther viii.8.) The expression applied to our Lord in this place certainly stands alone, but I think there can be little doubt as to its meaning. It signifies that in the eternal counsels of God the Father, He has sealed, commissioned, designated, and appointed the Son of man, the Incarnate Word, to be the Giver of everlasting life to man. It is an office for which He has been solemnly set apart by the Father.

Parkhurst thinks that the word means "Him has God the Father authorized with sufficient evidence, particularly by the voice from heaven;" and he refers the sealing entirely to the testimony which the Father had borne to

the Son's Messiahship. This also is Suicer's view and Alford's.

Stier remarks: "This sealing is not to be understood merely of miracles, but of the stamp of divinity which was impressed upon His whole life and teaching." This is Poole's view and Hutcheson's.

It has been thought by some that there is a tacit reference here to the history of Joseph, and that our Lord meant that as Joseph was appointed to be the great almoner and reliever of the Egyptians by the king of Egypt, so He is appointed by the King of kings to relieve the spiritual famine of mankind. At any rate, it is an apt and suitable illustration.

The idea of Hilary and some others, that the expression "sealed" refers to our Lord being the "express image of the Father's presence," appears to me far-fetched and without foundation.

The last words of the verse would be rendered more literally, "Him has the Father sealed, even God." It almost suggests the idea that our Lord desired to prevent His hearers supposing that He referred to Joseph as His father. It is as if He said, "the Father I mean, remember, is not an earthly father, but God."

Rollock remarks on this verse that our Lord does not confine Himself to showing the folly of only seeking "the meat that perishes," but is careful to show the true food of the soul and to point out who alone can give it. He observes that this is an example to us in teaching man the Gospel. The remedy must be as plainly taught and lifted up as the disease. He observes, truly, that none can speak better of the vanity of earthly things and the glory of heaven than many Papists do. But it is when they come to the feeding of man's soul that they fail. They try to feed him with man's merits, the intercession of saints, purgatory, and the like, and do not show him Christ.

It is noteworthy that it was the remembrance of this verse which made Henry Martyn persevere in preaching to poor Hindoos at Dinapore in India. He had found they only came for temporal relief and cared nothing for his preaching, and he was on the point of giving up in despair. But this verse came across his mind. "If the Lord Jesus was not ashamed to preach to mere bread-seekers," he thought, "who am I, that I should give up in disgust?"