

The Bread of Life

by Hendrik Joubert

When my mother found it necessary to discipline my oldest brother as a young boy he would remorsefully *confess* his guilt and expressed his appreciation for the fact that she now *has* to punish him, but asked her to please kiss him and tell him that she loved him **before** she spanked him so he would know she still loved him. This amazing awareness helped him escape his punishment; until it became obvious that he was being manipulative.

Through **Matthew** we learn that the Lord Jesus *was moved with compassion* for the great multitude that followed Him. **(14:13)** **Mark** tells us that the Lord had *compassion* on the four thousand who continued with Him three days and had nothing to eat. **(8:2)** In the shortest verse in the Bible we learn that *Jesus wept* **(John 11:35)**, and **John** adds that He *groaned in Himself* **(11:38)** over the death of Lazarus; even though He was about to raise him from the dead. There are many other passages revealing the love necessary for Him to lay down His life to save sinners; however there are also passages which reveal the fact that Jesus would not be manipulated by unrepentant men who attempt to patronize Him.

One such an occasion, illustrating man's manipulative nature and the sad conclusion, may be seen in **John chapter 6**. The chapter starts out with John telling us that the Lord had a great following as a result of the *signs which He performed on those who were diseased*. **(1:2)** At this time He fed the 5000, the occasion where **Matthew** mentions the *compassion* He felt for the crowd. **(14:14)**

From what we read in **John 6:6** it becomes obvious that the feeding of this large crowd was not a thoughtless act to merely take care of the physical needs of the masses. Jesus knew He was going to perform the miracle, however He tested the awareness of one close to Him of the power the Son of God had; Phillip's faith in the ability of God not only to supply the needs of the people at its most basic level, but more importantly to provide the *food* which would set them free from their sin. From the subsequent events it seems he, as well as the rest failed the test. When He asks the twelve if they too would leave Him, it is Peter who declares that He is the only source of *the words of eternal life*. **(6:67-68)**

The Lord feeds the multitude in the most amazing way resulting in the following conclusion: *"This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."* **(6:14)** After Jesus took care of their most basic carnal need the people was ready to make Him king *by force*; however the Lord anticipated the action and *departed again to the mountain by Himself alone*. **(6:15)** Sadly there are many in our day and age who insists that the Lord return to set up a physical kingdom and for Him and His servants to engage an unbelievable battle, effectively *accusing* Him of failing in this mission the first time. However, the Lord says: *"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight..."* **(John 18:36)**

John then records the Lord's refusal to continue supplying their physical needs, offering to rather give them *the bread of life*, suggesting they *not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life*. **(6:26-27)** Their physical emphasis prevented them from understanding their need and the Lord's willingness to take care of this need. The masses turned on Him when the spiritual application of the feeding was made.

Even today many seem to emphasize the material blessings as they preach a *health and wealth gospel*, rather than the fact that Jesus died upon the cross to save those who are willing to repent and wholly submit to Him for forgiveness. The level of commitment is captured in these words: *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.* **(6:53)**

This degree of commitment is arresting and causes many to appeal to the love and the grace of God in an effort to escape. The grace of God is not merely an abstract concept suggesting that one gets much for nothing; His grace is contained in a doctrine which *instructs*, or *teaches* us *that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.* **(Titus 2:11-12)**

The level of commitment is also obvious from statements such as: *He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.* **(Matthew 10:37-38)**; *But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."* **(Luke 9:62)**

Again, statements such as these are threatening and cause us to make others feel badly about focusing our attention on our responsibility to *count the cost* of being a true disciple. **(Luke 14:26ff)** In addition we attempt to patronize God by emphasizing His love and His grace for *poor undeserving sinners*; suggesting that if we were to obey Him we would be working for, and therefore deserving our salvation. This illustrates a lack of awareness of just how terrible each of our sins is: ***So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'*** " **(Luke 17:10)**

Sinners are not to disregard His commandments in the name of love and grace; they have to obey from the heart **(Romans 6:17)** all He says for us to do, realizing that it is what we are supposed to do anyway. Because of the *strict* words of Jesus ***many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more, (6:66)*** causing Jesus to ask even the twelve: ***"Do you also want to go away?" (6:67)***