

Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth has begun a dramatic public ministry in the towns and villages around Galilee in Northern Palestine. It turns out He's a gifted public speaker, preaching in the synagogues and homes and even the open air. He has been announcing that God's Kingdom is near and to Jewish minds this can mean only one thing – the Messiah King promised centuries before by Old Testament prophets was coming with divine authority to bring restoration to God's people Israel.

This Jesus backs up His message with profound miracles! Many people have been healed from all kinds of serious illness. Others have been released from bondage to evil, destructive addictions.

And people are naturally asking questions. Is Jesus Himself the promised Messiah? Or is He another powerful forerunner like John the Baptist? Should the crowd go ahead and crown Him King by popular vote? Should they wait for someone else?

Jesus on this occasion modestly avoids their clumsy attempt at king-making. He knows His path will lead not to a palace but to a cross. His mission will establish God's Kingdom by dealing with that which hinders it most – human sin. At Calvary He will atone for the sins of the world that whosoever believes in Him as Saviour and submits to His rule will not perish but taste life in the fullness of God's grace.

So while He refuses any earthly majesty He continues to speak of and demonstrate the true nature of His Kingdom. Observe in this chapter:

1. Another preview of Kingdom glory.
2. Another identification of the heavenly King.
3. Another promise of Kingdom provision.
4. Another challenge to world-be subjects.

Jesus has already spoken to the crowd the good news of God's grace and redeeming love. God is not just the Almighty, holy Judge people might fear or resent. Jesus presents Him as a loving Father, kind and desiring to forgive. This is born out in the healings and exorcisms. Here is a preview of heaven and the resurrection day when there will be no more sickness or disability. No more sin so no more consequence. No more fallen nature, no more death. No more binding evil influence.

And here's another wonderful glimpse of the future – no more hunger. Jesus multiples one boy's lunch snack to feed a hungry crowd. That crowd is larger than ever in the world today with billions lacking sufficient food and going to bed hungry tonight.

But on this occasion Jesus gave people to hope in a better world to come where everyone will eat and be satisfied with food to spare. This is the kingdom in which we Christians belong. We are to practice its values of caring and sharing. We live in anticipation of its coming in fullness.

Let's realise also that when Jesus feeds this large crowd in John 6 it's another indication of who He is. He is identifying Himself as the King, the Son of God. Who else can do this? Who can multiply a little to create enough food for the masses? Only the One Who does it every year through seedtime and harvest, Who gives the sun and the rain to cause crops to grow that human beings all over the globe may have bread for our tables!

The Lord God provides our daily bread, so this miracle clearly identifies Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Son of God.

However, when the crowd turn up next day the mood seems to have changed somewhat. Perhaps disappointed at His sudden disappearance the day before the people seem less interested in Jesus Himself and more motivated by the thought of another free meal!

We might sense some sadness, some disappointment in Jesus' words as He urges these folk to look deeper, to seek more than things which are temporary and passing, to desire to know the Giver rather than just be preoccupied with the gift.

Yet we also find here the most gracious promises and assurances. He says, 'I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will never go hungry ... whoever comes to me I will never drive away ... everyone who looks to [God's] Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life and I will raise Him up at the last day'.

The King from Heaven generously provides for His people all we need for this life and the next! Our trust is in One Who gave Himself completely on our behalf.

Now bread is universal food. Our bodies need it, but we also enjoy its taste. Similarly, Jesus is the Saviour we need. His the grace to save and renew us and make us fit for the Kingdom of Heaven, but His loving friendship is also the sweet food that our souls desire. Knowing Him delights and satisfies our spiritual hunger.

But let's notice finally in this reading another challenge to would be subjects in God's Kingdom. Believing in Jesus implies following Him daily, eager to learn and obey as disciples. John 6 has a mixed, bittersweet ending in which the crowd melts away, most unwilling to commit themselves to Jesus on His terms. They'll accept food and healing but aren't willing to change their ways or identify with a suffering Messiah.

Jesus turns to His 12 disciples and asks, 'You do not want to leave too, do you?' whereupon Simon Peter gives this poignant answer: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God!'

Here is our challenge. To whom shall we go? Who else is there? Other heroes often try and copy Christ but none come close. Other religions and philosophies have commendable thoughts and aspirations but none can offer eternal life.

Have we got to where Peter is at here? He doesn't fully grasp it all yet, he's still learning but he's seen enough to convince him that for all that really matters he needs to be with Jesus.

Do we recognise this? Are we willing to follow Christ closely, even if the crowd seems to be drifting in other directions?

We need to decide firmly about this. We need to come to Jesus, believe in Him and follow Him, whatever that may entail.

Because in the end of the day He, and He only, is the Bread of Life.

Amen