

John 6:22-65 • Six Earthly Questions

Introduction

[Note to Small Group Leaders: The lesson's overall length is longer than normal.]

Regardless of our background or where we come from, each of us is ultimately faced with the dilemma of what we are going to do about Jesus Christ. Some will outright reject Him, some will try to ignore Him, and others still try to accept Him on their own terms. Everyone is drawn to Christ (Jn. 12:32), but not everyone sticks with Him. (Mt. 13:1-23) In this series of exchanges between Jesus and people who have come to Him, we are presented with the teaching of what it means to “believe”. In the historical context of the day, the Jews had difficulty jettisoning their religious baggage and presuppositions about the Messiah; for every generation since is the difficulty of forsaking one's own burdens of disbelief in exchange for the truth. It always comes down to whether we will live by His terms or cling to our own.

²²The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples had gone away alone. ²³There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. ²⁵When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You get here?”

²⁶Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.”

[Read v.22-27]

Q: Did all of the 5,000+ who were miraculously fed follow Jesus to Capernaum?

A: The fact that it states there were “*other small boats*” implies that only a part of the crowd actually sought Jesus. It is likely there were three general responses by those who experienced the miracle: some went home, some stayed to see what Jesus would do next, and some left to seek out Jesus.

Q: What is ironic about Jesus' answer to their question to the mystery of how He got there?

A: He instead responds with the answer as to why **THEY** are there and for what purpose.

Q: What is particularly telling about how far apart the crowd is spiritually from Jesus? How is this revealed by the title they use to address Him and the title He uses in response?

A: They address Him as “*rabbi*” (v.25)—an earthly teacher, but He responds to them as “*the Son of Man*” (v.27)—the heavenly Messiah. This shows they do not yet actually believe and He therefore challenges them thus.

Q: How was this actually a typical, repeated response to Jesus?

A: We have seen it initially in both those who would eventually reject Jesus and by those who would accept Him. It was the same situation with Nicodemus, who acknowledged Jesus as a rabbi who performed miracles, but still fell short of complete spiritual understanding and belief.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

— John 3:1-2

Q: But what is the chief difference between the attitude of the crowd vs. that of Nicodemus?

A: The crowd's interest degenerated to the level of food, an indication they were far more interested in fulfilling their own desires and meeting their own needs than attaining to God's. They valued earthly things over heavenly.

Q: How does Jesus define the issue?

A: There are two kind of foods: food for the body “*which perishes*” and food for the inner man “*which endures to eternal life*”. What they needed was not food which only sustains an earthly life, but Christ who provides eternal life.

*“Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight yourself in abundance.
— Isaiah 55:2*

Application: *There is a vast difference between those who attend church in order to have their felt needs met in order to live this life, and those who seek Christ with their eyes set on His work beyond the limits of this life.*

[Read v.28-29]

Q: Why would the people think that Jesus had told them they had to work for their salvation?

A: In v.27 when Jesus said, “*Do not work for...but for...*”, which they took to mean as being in line with the strict legalistic traditions of Judaism as they had been taught, that salvation came through their works.

Q: In the previous section they were at odds with Jesus in that they acknowledged Him simply as “Rabbi” rather than the messianic “Son of Man”. How are they now in agreement with Him?

A: They both ask and receive acknowledgment that the issue is “*the works of God*”.

Q: Although they agree on the question, how are they at odds concerning the answer?

A: It is not a lifetime of earthly works as they had been taught wherein they thought they needed to do something to merit eternal life, but only the one work was required, to believe in Jesus the Messiah.

Application: *We do good works because we **are** saved, not to **get** saved.*

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

— Ephesians 2:8-10

Application: *When a person believes on Christ they are not effecting a good work which earns them salvation because it what God does in response to our faith that counts.*

[Read v.30-33]

Q: Why should we not be surprised that they requested a sign?

A: Paul tells us that this is a characteristic at the core of Jewish culture and society.

²⁸Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?”

²⁹Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

³⁰So they said to Him, “What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.’”

³²Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly,

I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.”

For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,

— 1 Corinthians 1:22-23

Q: So did they bring up the miracle of the manna just because they had just been fed?

A: Although this cannot be discounted as a major factor, we must also consider that a common teaching by the rabbis of the time was that when the Messiah came, He would duplicate the miracle of the manna as part of the fulfillment of the promise that He would come in the character of Moses.

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.

— Deuteronomy 18:15

Point: *They actually knew that an “attesting sign” of the true Messiah would be to supernaturally feed them, but failed not only to believe in the greater **spiritual** meaning of these things, but failed to believe in spite of seeing it **literally** fulfilled!*

Q: What is particularly ironic about the Scripture they quote to Jesus in v.31?

A: It is from Psalm 78, the whole context of which is a teaching about Israel’s historic unfaithfulness, that they failed to learn and put into practice the correct meaning of all the signs and miracle God performed on their behalf. They are replaying this very unfaithfulness and rejection of God’s Word once again.

Q: What indicates that they are spiritually divergent again in their thinking from Jesus’ teaching?

A: Jesus has to point out to them that Moses did not actually effect the miracle, but it was supplied by the Father, and God the Father is the actual source both in Moses’ time and now through Jesus.

Q: What do we know bread to be representative of throughout Scripture?

A: The Word of God, upon which Jesus will further elaborate shortly.

Q: So how is this a dramatic illustration especially in the comparison between Christ and Moses?

A: Through Moses God provided not just the physical bread of life, but the Word of God which was the spiritual bread of life which foreshadowed the true Word to come. Now “*the true bread out of heaven*” has been literally provided by the Father, the fulfillment of all which began through Moses.

For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

— John 1:16-18

Q: Why should the Jews of Jesus’ day have known the greater meaning of the manna as representing of God’s Word?

A: It was clearly explained as such in the Word given through Moses.

“He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.

— Deuteronomy 8:3

Q: What did Jesus plainly reveal about Himself?

A: He reveals His person as what we commonly refer to as the “Bread of Life”, a distinction which even in Jesus’ time could not be taken for anything short of announcing He is the Messiah. But He also added that that He not only “comes down out of heaven” to give life just to the Jews, but “gives life to the world”.

Application: *Although God is always faithful where our personal needs are concerned, earthly concerns are never to be pursued at the expense of the eternal. God’s provision is always focused on the greater goal of eternal life.*

[Read v.34-40]

³⁴Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.”

³⁵Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. ³⁷All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

Q: Why should their response not be entirely unfamiliar to us?

A: It is essentially the same response as the Samaritan woman who wanted the living water so she would not have to keep going to the well. (Jn. 4) These people wanted the bread so they would not have to work to maintain everyday life

Application: *Someone who desires Jesus only for the benefits He is able to give is not actually ready for salvation.*

Q: What are the two key words which are repeated in Jesus’ response?

A: “Come” and “believe”. These actions are inextricable from each other. The biblical definition of to “come” is the fulfillment of the biblical definition of to “believe” and vice versa. He will later end this sermon by linking “coming and believing” with “eating and drinking”.

Q: Why is v.35 a theologically significant verse where the Gospel of John is concerned?

A: It is the first of seven “I AM” statements recorded which are not found elsewhere in the Gospels. (See also 8:12; 10:7-9, 11-14; 11:26-26; 14:6; 15:1, 5) This is the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses by name. (Ex. 3:14) In the language and understanding of the day this could be taken as nothing short of a public declaration of being the Messiah.

Q: What is one of the major mysteries about the working of salvation revealed in v.37?

A: It involves **BOTH** divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The Father **gives** people to the Son, but they must **come** to Him. From God’s perspective there is no conflict in this and they are maintained with equal tension to each other.

Point: *Scripture teaches we should keep a tension between the divine and the human, not come down on one side or the other to make an “either/or” case.*

Q: How powerful is the hold and work of salvation within us?

A: According to v.39-40 not even physical death can deny or rob us of salvation!

Application: *The gift of eternal life is actually the fulfillment of their request to “always give us this bread”, provided the recipient biblically “comes” to the Son and “believes”—that is to be forever changed going forward by the application of His Word.*

[Note: For the sake of time, small group leaders may want to skip past this section or re-visit it at the end of the session.]

Q: How might we compare and contrast the manna to Christ?

1. The manna came from heaven at night; Christ came from heaven when men were in darkness.
2. The manna fell on the dew; Christ came, born of the Spirit of God.
3. The manna was not defiled by the earth; Christ was sinless, separate from fallen man.
4. The manna was small, round and white to reflect Christ’s humility, eternalness and purity.
5. The manna was sweet to the taste; Christ is sweet to those who trust Him and put His Word into practice.
6. The manna had to be taken and eaten; Christ must be received and appropriated by faith.
7. The manna came as a free gift; Christ is the free gift of God to the world.
8. The manna was sufficient for everyone; Christ is sufficient for all.
9. If someone did not pick the manna up, they walked on it; those who do not receive Christ reject and walk on Him. (Heb. 10:26-31)
10. The manna was wilderness food to sustain during the journey to the Promised Land; Christ is our food for the pilgrim journey to heaven.
11. Other examples?

⁴¹Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.”

⁴²They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven’?”

⁴³Jesus answered and said to them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.”

[Read v.41-51]

Q: How does their reaction to Jesus mirror the exact reaction Moses experienced in his time?

A: They are now “grumbling”. (v.41) [See the Book of Numbers which could easily be re-named to the “Book of Grumbling”.]

Q: How do we know that the issue they are unhappy about where Jesus is concerned is His claim to be the Messiah the Son of God?

A: It is very clear in v.41-42 that they understood precisely that the meaning of “I am the bread that came down out of heaven” is a claim of nothing less than deity. This issue is so important that Jesus repeats this assertion five times in the course of this sermon. What is really at issue here is faith.

Application: *The first and foremost issue where Jesus is concerned is always whether He is accepted or rejected as the Messiah; everything else a person believes about Jesus, His life and Word flows from this.*

Q: How might this be ironic in light of how this section of Scripture began?

A: Both then and now they have a question about where He came from.

Q: What is the problem with their determination that their knowledge of Jesus’ earthly heritage precludes the possibility of His being the Messiah?

A: They thought they knew Jesus and where He came from (see also Mt. 13:53-58; Jn. 7:40-43) and associated Him with Nazareth in Galilee. Had they investigated the matter (as other Gospel writers did), they would have discovered he was only the **legal** son of Joseph as Jesus was born of a virgin (Lk. 1:34-38) and in reality born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of Scripture.

Application: Every person must investigate for themselves who Jesus is based on what Jesus testifies to in His Word and not according to what others have to say about Him. Just as it was at His first coming, there have always been those throughout every age of history who try to redefine Christ and depend on their adherents' blind acceptance of their interpretation of facts which are never supportable scripturally. If you accept by faith that He **IS** the Messiah, then you must accept by faith all that follows in His teachings.

Q: How does Jesus explain how the sinner can come to God?

1. (v.44-45) The sinner is drawn by the Father through the truth of the Word.
2. (v.45) This quote from Is. 54:13 confirms that God draws people to the Savior through the Word.
3. (v.46) The sinner, having heard and accepted the Word, is saved by faith. (Rom. 10:17)

Application: The biblical definition of "faith in Christ" cannot be separated from faith in God's Word. People can say they "believe" in Jesus the person or even as a deity, but such assertions are nullified if the claimant does not prove that belief by believing in and practicing the Word. The crowd wanted to **see** something, but their real need was to **learn** something.

Q: What is significant about Jesus' claims about Himself as the "living bread" and the manna of the Old Testament?

A: He was not claiming equality, but to be even greater! [Note: This is the theme of Hebrews, the Old Testament was "good", the New Testament is "better".]

1. The manna only sustained physical life for a generation of Jews; Jesus gives life to the whole world.
2. Those who ate the manna eventually died; those who receive Christ live forever.
3. God gave the manna as a gift; Jesus gives Himself as a gift.
4. There was no cost to God to send out the manna each day; God sent His only begotten Son at great cost.
5. The Jews had to eat the manna everyday; the sinner who trusts Christ **once** is granted eternal life.

Q: How is Jesus reflected in the very mystery of the manna?

A: The word "manna" means, "What is it?" (Ex. 16:15), a mystery to those who witnessed it just as Jesus was a mystery to those who saw Him. Of course, it is only a mystery to those who would not accept either by faith.

Q: How does Jesus conclude His answer to their question?

A: He refers to His flesh and the fact that He would give it for "the life of the world", not just Israel. (v.51)

Observation: John will document Jesus referring to His flesh six more times before the entire dialogue is concluded. The substitutionary death of Christ is a key doctrine in this Gospel:

- Jesus would die for the world. (Jn. 3:16; 6:51)
- Jesus would die for His sheep. (Jn. 10:11, 15)
- Jesus would die for the nation. (Jn. 11:50-52)
- Jesus would die for His friends. (Jn. 15:12)

He is the sacrifice not just only for our personal sins, but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 Jn. 2:2)

Application: The first and foremost issue where Jesus is concerned is always whether He is accepted or rejected as the Messiah in accordance with God's Word; everything else a person believes about Jesus, His life and Word flows from this.

⁵²Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"

⁵³So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. ⁵⁴He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. ⁵⁶He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. ⁵⁸This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."

⁵⁹These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

[Read v.52-59]

Q: At first they were seeking Jesus, then they were grumbling about Him. What is happening now?

A: The word here rendered "argue" in v.52 actually describes striving or physically contending with someone in a private quarrel. (Example: Acts 7:26) They are no longer arguing only with Jesus, but are now engaging in the worst possible physical argument among each other as to the issue of Jesus' declaration.

Point: It is not at all unheard of to see physical reactions over the Person and deity of Christ. As Jesus Himself said, "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division..." (Lk. 12:51) Those who accept Christ can expect such from those who reject Him.

Q: Why might this reaction betray that they are still not receiving the greater spiritual meaning behind Jesus' teaching?

A: It is very possible that because Old Testament Law prohibits eating human flesh or any kind of blood, they are treating a spiritual truth all too literally. (Gen. 9:3-4; Lev. 17:10-16; 19:26) We have already seen this behavior repeatedly in John's Gospel leading up this point:

1. Jn. 2:19-21: The people mistaking the "temple" Jesus spoke of as the literal temple instead of a reference to His body.
2. Jn. 3:4: Nicodemus' mistaking second birth as a literal birth.
3. Jn. 4:11: The Samaritan water mistaking living water as something literally coming from the well.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

— 1 Corinthians 2:12-13

Q: What is the greater spiritual meaning of Jesus' teaching?

A: It might be rendered something like, "Just as you take food and drink within your body and it becomes a part of you, so you must receive Me within you innermost being so that I can give you life".

Application: A sure sign of unbelief is the steadfast refusal to move beyond the earthly and physical to the heavenly and spiritual.

[Read v.60-65]

⁶⁰Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"

⁶¹But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? ⁶²What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? ⁶³It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit

Q: We have seen a change from seeking to grumbling to fighting. Where have we arrived in the process?

A: Departing.

As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

— John 6:66

and are life. ⁶⁴But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. ⁶⁵And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”

Q: How does Jesus describe their spiritual problem?

A: “Does this cause you to stumble?” (v.51)

1. Some “stumbled” over the fact that He came down from heaven—that He is, indeed, the Messiah.
2. Some “stumbled” over the fact that to be saved we must eat His flesh and drink His blood—His is the fulfillment of the Law.
3. Most “stumbled” because even though Jesus explained that His language was figurative and spiritual (“...*the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life*”) they could not see beyond the literal.

Q: Why should the people of Jesus’ time, especially the religious authorities, have understood the concept of receiving God’s Word into one’s inner being?

A: It is exactly what was foretold in Jer. 31:31-34 about the New Covenant to come through the Messiah, that “*I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it...*”

Q: How does this teaching provide a scriptural definition for both “belief” and “unbelief”?

A: Just as “belief” is defined as putting Christ’s Word into practice and living a changed life forever going forward, “unbelief” is the refusal to put His Word into practice.

Application: *The Bible always teaches not to be a “listener” but a “doer”. The biblical definition of someone who “listens” is the one who actually puts the Word into practice.*

Overall Application

“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

— Luke 14:27-33

This passage of Scripture provides what we might call a much more detailed explanation of the Parable of the Sower. We are provided a picture of how everyone is provided an opportunity to come before Christ and how everyone will ultimately make a decision for or against based on what they do with His Word. Some are infatuated for awhile with what they see, but ultimately, as Jesus explained it, everyone must “calculate the cost”.

As with all things scriptural, it always comes down not to a test of knowledge, but of faith, which biblically is defined as not just hearing the Word, but putting it into practice.