

WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING IN LIFE?

John 6:22-29 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

One of the greatest mountains in Scripture is John 6:26-71. This sermon of Jesus is deep, and filled to overflowing with meaning and with mystery. The setting of this message is the morning after the miracle of Jesus using five barley loaves and two fish to feed 5,000 men plus women and children—20,000. We read, in John 6:22-24, “On the next day, the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that His disciples had gone away alone. Other boats from Tiberias/Capernaum came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So, when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum seeking Jesus.” It was time for breakfast, and the crowds had apparently spent the night lying on the grassy hillside where they were fed. If they could find Jesus, maybe He would feed them again. When the crowds took the uber ships from Tiberias, from the east side of the Jordan to the west side, Jesus knew why they were there. They weren’t back in Capernaum because Jesus had filled their hearts, but because He had filled their stomachs. Jesus knew that they wanted more food from Him.

Why are you following Jesus? Why are you in church today? What are you seeking to get from Jesus? Are you seeking financial security, a satisfying career, a happy family, or healing? The ultimate source of joy is found in God and God alone. David wrote in Psalm 16:11, “You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fulness of joy, at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Any other earthly thing we seek to satisfy the inner void in our hearts is like chasing soapy bubbles. We catch one on our bubble wand that we blow bubbles through, and a split second later, it bursts before our eyes. Jesus told His disciples in John 15:11, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” We find fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore when we seek God and God alone. A.W. Tozer in the “The Pursuit of God,” says, “Before a person can seek God, God must first have sought the person. We pursue God because, and only because He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit.” None of us can take credit for seeking God and finding Him.

The mystery of seeking God is deep. Paul tells us in Romans 3:11, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God.” Yet, Isaiah the prophet summons us to seek God in Isaiah 55:6-7, saying, “Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” Do you see the mystery in this seeking of the Lord? Jesus later said in John 6:44. “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” Yet we are summoned to come to Jesus and to seek Him diligently. We begin by seeking God for the mercy of His salvation and we keep seeking Him as born-again believers for the daily grace to live in a manner pleasing to God. It is our life-long quest. The prophet Hosea said in Hosea 6:3, “Let us know; let us

press on to know the Lord; His going out is as sure as the dawn; He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.” The apostle Paul sought to know the Lord better and better, and we should too. Paul said, in Philippians 3:10, “Oh, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.” In Philippians 3:14, Paul adds, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” A. W. Tozer, speaking of this mystery, wrote, “Come near to the holy men and women of the past and you will soon feel the heat of their desire after God. They mourned for God, they prayed and wrestled and sought for God day and night, in season and not, and when they had found Him, the finding was all the sweeter for the long seeking.” In these 8 verses of John 6:22-29, I find 3 questions God wants us to answer today that can change our lives completely.

ARE WE SEEKING JESUS FOR THE WRONG REASONS? (I.) Notice John 6:26. “Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you; you are seeking Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” The day after the feeding of the 5,000 begins in John 6:22 in a morning scene with all the people knowing Jesus didn’t get into the boat with His disciples, so they were looking for him all around. It appears the multitude spent the night camping out on the ground on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, just east of the mouth of the Jordan River spilling into the Sea of Galilee. I would imagine that the storm at sea for the disciples may have converted into some high winds on the shore where the crowds tried to sleep, in what may well have been a restless night. But at breakfast time, as the crowds assessed the situation, their looking for Jesus was fruitless. All the crowds knew for sure was that Jesus’ disciples got in the only boat at the beach, and Jesus went north, up the foothills, up the mountain to pray. John 6:24 implies that they searched the area for Jesus and saw He was not there. We read, “So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the boats, and went to Capernaum seeking Jesus.

Know for sure that private enterprise never started in our country. When this crowd needed to return, we read that many boat owners were thinking about providing a ride back home. Every marina in Tiberias must have seen the opportunity of having a ship uber service for the people to get back home. Soon the crowd was piling into boats from the west to get back to Capernaum. When they got to Capernaum, Jesus had arrived, ahead of them, which puzzled them greatly. We read in John 6:25, “When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You come here?” Jesus’ answer in John 6:26 was not a direct answer. He might have truthfully said, “I walked across the sea.” If He had said that, the crowd would again have sought to make Him king. Their thoughts would have been, “What a King He will be for us! He can keep our stomachs full and keep our boats afloat and never let us sink and He can walk on water.” Jesus would have nothing to do with such thinking. He would not go there. We read in verse 26 that Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” Jesus came not to give them bread, but to be the Bread of Life. Often God has to take physical bread out of our hands so that we will trust Him as our true Bread. Jesus came to change our

desires. If I asked you all, “Why are you following Jesus, what would be your answer? Jesus said these people were following Him because He filled their stomachs. They hadn’t followed Him because He had filled their hearts.

Jesus knew they were hungry again and they wanted more physical food from Him to eat. I would suppose most of us would answer our reason for following Jesus as, “I love Him, because He saved me, and I want to honor Him and serve Him with all of my life.” Yet, I ask us to think twice. How do we respond to Jesus when He doesn’t give us what we want and ask for, when fiery trials strike and persist, when one of our children is sick, when one of our loved ones die, when our false accusers get away with it, and the dark clouds around us never lift? Are we willing to follow Jesus even when life is dismal, hopeless, and it shows no signs of improving? How many of you have heard of Annie Johnson?

Annie Johnson was born on Christmas Eve, 1866, in Vineland, New Jersey to a young couple, Eldon and Jean Johnson. The couple said Annie was their greatest ever Christmas gift. Her mother Jean, died at the age of 23 in 1869 when Annie was 3 years old. The father, Eldon took the children to board with the widow of an old army comrade who had been killed in the Civil War. It was not a happy arrangement. The woman had two children of her own and her means were very limited. During the next two years the Johnson girls added to the cares of that family. They were evidently unwelcome and unwanted. A teacher came into the picture, Susie Flint, whom everyone called Aunt Susie. Aunt Susie Flint lovingly adopted Annie and her sister when Annie was five. Eldon Johnson willingly parted with his girls because of his own sickness with an incurable disease, and because Aunt Susie was a Christian, a Baptist and he wanted his daughters raised for Jesus. Eldon Johnson died shortly after their adoption. Then Annie herself became very sickly, though she is well known for cheerfulness and optimism. She always looked on the bright side of life. In the home of Mr. and Mrs. Flint, Annie was converted to Jesus in a Methodist revival meeting in New Jersey.

Annie Johnson Flint graduated from college and taught school for three years, until her rheumatoid arthritis progressed so rapidly. she could no longer work. Within two years, Annie was bedfast at age 27 for 39 years until she died at age 66, all those years incapable of walking. If that was not bad enough, in her later years, Annie lost control of her internal organs, was incontinent, and had to live as an infant child, cared for in diapers. She slept on seven pillows to cushion her body to try to lessen the agony of her bed sores. For a few years, Annie sat at the piano, played and composed countless hymns and poems, until she could not write any longer. Then she persevered in writing by tapping the manual typewriter with her knuckles. Out of her agony and pain, she wrote with a withered hand the words we have in our hymnal, “He giveth more grace, when the burden grows greater, He sendeth more strength when the labors increase, To added affliction, He addeth His mercy, To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace. (2) When we have exhausted our store of endurance, When our strength has failed ere the day is half done, When we reach the end of our hoarded resources, Our Father’s full giving has only begun. Chorus: His love has no limit, His grace has no measure, His power has no

boundary known unto men, For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth, and giveth and giveth again.” Beloved, Annie Johnson Flint didn’t love Jesus because He could get her out of bed and restore her health. She loved Jesus because He saved her from sin and kept her singing until He took her Home at age 66.

This multitude following Jesus missed the true significance of Jesus’ miracle. The miracle of the multiplied bread and fish was to turn them to Jesus as their Messiah, who would satisfy their spiritual hunger for time and eternity. Yet, instead of seeing in the bread the sign, they had seen in the sign, only the bread. Their minds were on the material and the temporal, not on the spiritual and the eternal. They wanted their stomachs full, but they weren’t seeking Jesus for eternal life. They had no sense of their sin or their need to be reconciled to God. They sought Jesus only for what He could do for them materially. They wanted Jesus to become their Alladin’s Genie to get what they wanted from life, not as their Savior from sin to satisfy their soul, whether rich or poor, living in poverty or even in a prison cell.

Beloved, in our self-saturated lives in America, many gurus have arisen in Jesus’ name to tell us God is out to help us with all things physical. We are told God will turn any flab we have into rock hard muscles. If we have financial woes, God will unlock the vault of heaven and give us riches. If we are sick, God will heal us always and give us a clean bill of health. God isn’t after disciples out to use Him. John Piper preaching in the Louisiana State Prison--Angola Prison in 2009, said to the prisoners, “The main export from America to third world countries today is a theology that God wants to multiply our stuff. Get the car. Get the gold watch. This is what Jesus is for. This is demonic theology.” I call us renounce this health/wealth theology being preached across America. Read Matthew 7:21-23. Secondly,

ARE WE UNDERSTANDING THE TREMENDOUS POWER IN JESUS?

(II.) Notice John 6:25. We read, “When they found Jesus on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” This may seem unimportant, but I want to go back to the crowd’s question. There are more miracles here besides the feeding of the 5,000; Jesus walking on the water, and helping Peter do for a few moments, Jesus controlled the emotions of His disciples instantly changing their emotions from panic and fear to gladness. Jesus can bring us to tears with conviction and then instantly dry our tears with His tender forgiveness. Jesus can conquer space, the earnest desire of modern man. When He got into the boat, the boat was instantly at the shore-John 6:21. Do we really understand Jesus’ power. Mary Slessor was a missionary in Africa, in Nigeria in the 1880’s and 90’s. She was mightily used of God to lead savage chiefs to Jesus who then God used to bring whole tribes to the Lord. Visitors from England visited Nigeria. They saw this weak woman and could not get how Mary Slessor could have been so used. They spoke with one tribal chief. He rebuked them saying, “You have evidently forgotten to take into account this woman’s God.” Have we grasped and understood who we have in Jesus? Thirdly, there is one last question.

ARE WE WORKING BY FAITH FOR THE FOOD THAT ENDURES TO ETERNAL LIFE? (III.) Notice John 6:27-29. “Do not work for the food that

perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom he has sent.” Jesus was telling them that earthly, physical food and pleasures will never fill the void in our hearts. This crowd as millions today were after a salvation by works mentality. This crowd as many today had been laboring, working, working to seek Jesus, to have Him, because they saw Him as useful to them. Jesus tells them to quit seeking Jesus in this way. The Bible commends hard work, and we are commanded to provide adequately for our family. (Colossians 3:23 and I Timothy 5:8) God doesn’t condemn us for having riches, but he warns us of riches’ dangers. (I Tim. 6:8-19.)

Jesus is giving us a contrast between striving to work, work, to make money to buy food to fix and eat and get hungry and buy more food—the cycle never ends. Jesus said in Mark 8:36, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose or forfeit his own soul?” In the parable of the rich man planning to make bigger barns, Jesus said that it is a huge mistake to keep putting food on our table and neglect working for the “food that endures to eternal life.” But note that Jesus is sharing an irony here because He calls us to work for this enduring food and yet, at the same time, He said this enduring food--the Son of Man gives to us. Jesus said in Luke 13:24, “Strive to enter through the narrow door.” This work is not plural, works, but the work of faith. Jesus answering their question of what shall we do, said, “This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

Paul tells us in Romans 4:4-5, “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due. And to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.” Jesus is speaking of us laboring for the message of life, not for everlasting life itself, which is a free gift. Only one work is needed—the work of faith, which is a gift from God, this one needed thing is faith/believing in Jesus. This labor is to stop working or laboring. This labor is to stop working for salvation and trusting Jesus.

Jesus freely offered Himself to them and to us. He added in verse 27, “For on Him (Jesus) God the Father has set His seal.” The sealing came from the Father at John’s baptism of Jesus, also, by Jesus’ testimony of Himself, and by the scriptures that the Jews revered. Jesus has shown us faith is a work that is totally different from any righteous act of ours. We trust, but God kindles that trust in us as His gift. This work of faith in us is the only thing that endures for eternal life. Jesus knows our motives, why we are seeking Him. We have no other righteousness than what we receive as a gift from Christ. Seek Jesus for the right reason. We all need His eternal food—the bread of life. Seek Him by the right route, by the work of God’s faith in us, not by works of the flesh. Seek Him through the right relationship personally with Jesus. I call us to labor for the Bread that endures to eternal life. It’s the Son of Man’s free gift. Love Him. Fall in love with Jesus’s eternal bread—Himself. Fall in love with Jesus. Get to know Him better. Trust Him now. Seek Jesus to be born again. Our seeking eyes are blind, unless God Almighty opens our heart to see Jesus as our treasure so we can say, My Lord and my God. Amen.