

July 31, 2022 Doing The Work Of God John 6:25-40

We are not unlike the people who followed Jesus in the crowds that gathered to hear HIM and see HIM in Galilee. They are motivated by a genuine concern to do what God wants of them. They are not asking, does God exist? Or is God real? Or how do you know that God is real. These people that we read about in the New Testament are way beyond that question. What they want to know for the most part is “what am I supposed to do?” And, “How do I get it right?”

Barbara and I almost always shop for groceries together. For the most part, she chooses what goes into the cart, and I carry the bags, stow them in the car and do the driving.

And again, most of the time we work from a list. If I am sent by myself, there is always a list! I cannot be trusted to get it right by memory alone. To me, it seems that is the mentality of a lot of the people of whom we read in the New Testament and the Gospels: they go at life much as I do. They want a list so that they can get it right. You check off or stroke through the errands on the list as you accomplish them. That way you don't miss something that is important. Right?

The Pharisees had a long list. Do everything the Law in the Old Testament requires. There are not just 10 commandments in the Law, there are hundreds of them. I could not tell you the number if you asked me. There are lots, and lots, and lots.

So having crossed the Sea of Galilee, that's the lake, mentioned here in JOHN 6, having witnessed the feeding of the 5,000, back there, on the other side, having participated in that miraculous meal, they do not ask "How do we know God is real?" To them it is obvious that God is. They ate and they have full stomachs, in a place where there are no Miracle Marts, Walmarts, Independent Grocers, or No Frills Stores.

When Jesus asked the disciples, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Phillip answered, reflecting his conviction that the task was impossible, "Eight months wages would not buy enough for each one to have a bite?" The KJV says, "for each one to have a little." Phillip is saying, "We can't feed a crowd like this. It's impossible." And yet, as John reflects back on the circumstances and his memories of the time and the place, he says, "Jesus already had in mind, what he was going to do." (John 6:6) And Peter's attempt at an answer, was, "There is a boy here who has 5 small barley loaves and two fish."

We know what Jesus did. HE gave thanks, which means HE prayed, and HE got the disciples to distribute the food. And when the food had been eaten, and everyone was satisfied, John tells us, they gathered 12 baskets of leftovers. That's 11 and 3/4s more baskets of food than they started out with. John comments that Jesus said, they were not to waste any of the food. This crowd had seen an act of God. There is no

one asking, “can miracles happen?” Or “Does God actually exist?”

So it is in this context of expectancy and faith that the question is asked, “What must we do, to do the works that God requires?” I have no doubt that they expected Jesus to give them a list. If it were a modern story in a modern lecture theater, I picture the audience poised, pens at the ready, an ample supply of paper at hand. The surprise is that Jesus tells them one thing. Just one. And yet that one even, caused grumbling and doubt in the end. On the part of some.

Jesus answered, “The work” (singular if you will notice) “of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” It is a huge challenge. A hard job to do. For all that had happened back there on the other side of the lake, the one question they asked of Jesus at that point was this: “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?” And the KJV confirms they repeated the question. What will you work? And they went on to grumble which means they did not like the answer. It appeared too easy...to simple...there has to be more. Right?

The times we are living in, and our own experience makes the point. This one thing is hard enough. “The work of God is this: to believe the one he has sent.” If we are really concerned about eternity, if we really want to live and not die, which really means, if we really want to live, even though we die, there is only one thing God demands of us. Wants of us.

Requires. There is one commandment to keep. “To believe in the one he has sent.”

It is amazing how the mind of man works. Mankind. All of us, Men, women and our offspring. Jesus did not say to them “all you have to do is believe in me.” But they instinctively made that connection. They were there. There were no great supplies of food ready to hand. A boy’s lunch. A prayer on the part of Jesus giving thanks, and they all ate and were filled and 12 baskets of leftovers not to be wasted and left behind. But they say, “Give us a sign. Do a miracle so that we will know you really are the ONE.

I keep saying these people in the crowds are not all that different from us, and we are not all that different from them. We have faith, but man do we need help with our unbelief! It is easier to question Jesus authority, that it is to obey HIM. To submit to HIM. And please notice I am saying, this is not about submitting to the church, or the preacher, it is about submitting to God as we meet HIM in Jesus Christ. Suddenly we would rather argue, rather than cope with the truth.

“Believe in the one he has sent.” All the stories in the Bible. All the testimony we have heard about people being touched by the Lord God Almighty. Prayed over in the name of Jesus, that name which is above every other name. We have laid on the hands and heard the words and seen the results. And still we resist. And do take heart...there is a degree to

which I am preaching to me. Submission to Jesus Christ as Lord does not come easy to us.

When Rebekah was a toddler, having barely learned to talk. We would say as parents, “Let me do that for you.” Putting on a shoe, or tying a lace. And she would get red in the face and she would shout as loudly as she could, “I do it myself.” Too often we would rather not get it done at all, than accept that it can be done for us by someone else. In the matter of doing the work God wants us to do, submitting to the reality that Jesus does it best and does it for us. Jesus saves. It really does come down to this. Believe in the one whom God has sent. At one and the same time, it is that easy, and that profoundly difficult. Letting go and letting God.

They grumbled that Jesus said he was the bread of life. “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, “I came down from heaven?” It is an old, old question. How can HE be human and divine at the same time? We are tempted, and I repeat, we are tempted by our unbelief, especially, when we are feeling the pressure of our circumstances in the world, with the world looking on and listening.

If the question is indeed, how shall we do the works of God, the answer is, “This is the work of God: to believe in the one he has sent. Jesus is the ONE.

Let us pray;

Heavenly Father you gave us minds to understand YOUR word and the world YOU created. Help us to be humble enough to accept what you have offered in recognition of who YOU really are. Help us to be submissive as you seek to lead us where we should go and to do what we should do. As you have promised. Raise us up at the last day. In Jesus name we ask.  
Amen

