

## What work?

HN/SS 28/11/04 am

Reading: Exodus 16, Matthew 12:33f

Study: John 6:28-34

Psalms: 106:1-6, 106:7-9, 8:1-5, 9:7-11

As the students came late into the class the teacher looked at his watch and said ‘boys, do you know what time it is?’ They thought it strange that he was looking at his watch and asking them the time – was his watch broken. ‘No sir they replied, ‘we don’t know what time it is’. These boys from village India failed to grasp the sarcasm of the teacher and that he was in fact rebuking them for being late. His words went over their head – they were not on the same wavelength as we say!

Jesus was not speaking in colloquialisms that went over the heads of these people. He was speaking in simple straightforward terms. His words were not going over their heads – they were aimed at the heart. He was speaking of spiritual realities while these people were thinking in purely material terms. Give us food. Give us a sign – give us something we can **see** they demanded.

## **The Work of God**

These Jews had grown up being taught that they would obtain righteousness by obeying the law, by doing good works. Their whole thinking was orientated in this way. Jesus had introduced the term ‘work’ in this discourse telling them not to work for food *that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life*. Now they asked him what work it was that he was telling them to do. Was there something extra they should do to merit Gods blessing?

The rich young ruler came to Jesus with the same question – what must **I do** to inherit eternal life? (Luke 18:7). Many others came to Jesus asking the same thing. And many still come asking the same thing. What must I do?

Fallen man, full of pride wants to do something, wants to earn his salvation. Lord I have done this and that. I have not been as bad as others. I deserve to be recognised for my effort. If there is something else to do then I will do it – just tell me. The law of works is written on the sinful heart.

Jesus went along with their question that focused on themselves and on works. They had failed to grasp the idea of a gift – *which the Son of man will give you*. He said the work that God requires is for you to believe in me. Well he was not quite so direct – but they understood what he meant. He said *believe in Him whom He sent*. Jesus always tied himself with God the Father.

These people claimed to believe in God, they claimed to worship God. Jesus gave them no option but to believe in Him also if they believed in God – because as he said again and again he was sent from heaven by God the Father.

We must always be alert to any preaching of the gospel that does not give glory to the Triune God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. John's gospel is particularly attentive to the Trinity. Jesus is equal with God we learned from the previous chapter. Later he will tell about the work of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to send.

The work of God- note the singular – is to believe or have faith in His Son, in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Just one thing is required – to believe. Believe in the word of God – believe in the living word whom he sent into this world. It has always been like this – Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Jesus told these people who came to him 'believe in Me'.

### **A Sign**

As Jews these people were expecting the Messiah. They knew what Moses wrote – *The Lord your God will raise up a prophet like me from your midst* (Deuteronomy 18:15). Had they not just the day before called Jesus the prophet who is to come into the world. But then they wanted to make him king – an earthly king. Jesus slipped away – they had to go searching for him.

Still it is amazing that they should ask him for a sign when he had just fed over 5000 with only five loaves and two small fish. *What sign will you perform then that we may see it and believe you.* Will Jesus give them a sign? Why not? He could do another miracle and then as they said they would believe him. That would be wonderful. That is what he wanted – for them to believe.

But Jesus knows the heart of man. He knows that men who ask for signs are far from the kingdom of God. The proud and evil heart of unbelief was being manifested. The Scribes and Pharisees had asked him for signs before but he refused – *a wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign but none will be given to it* (Matthew 16:4).

The rich man requested someone to go from the dead to warn his brothers in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. What was the answer – they have Moses and the Prophets – if they do not hear them *neither will they be persuaded if someone rise from the dead.*

These people were so bold as to indicate what sign they wanted. They were so locked into their history and traditions that these things became the standard by which they would judge the works of Jesus, the Son of God. Moses gave our fathers manna to eat – thousands ate that bread from heaven for 40 years in the desert. It is written there in the Scriptures. Jesus would be hard put to do better than that they thought.

Jesus faced the problem that still confronts preachers of the gospel – dead teachers have more authority than living ones. Especially when people are challenged with the truth of

the gospel they love to refer back to the glorious past as if the past will somehow save them – remember the woman who asked ‘are you greater than Jacob?’

Oh my father or my uncle was a preacher they say. They may even be able to quote things he said. Jesus was confronting people who knew the Scriptures and the traditions of the fathers but did not see the Truth standing before them. Are there any in the church today whose confidence is in their heritage rather than Jesus Christ?

Boldness and blindness characterised the hearts of these people as it does many today. Still we find people demanding signs. If Jesus does this or that then I will believe. If he heals me or my child then I will believe. If I saw a miracle I would believe. Jesus can and does do wonders but not at the demand of mere men. If people approach him with unbelieving hearts then they will not believe even if someone should rise from the dead.

‘The plain truth is that it is want of heart, not want of evidence that keeps people from Christ’ (J.C. Ryle). The Jews had signs and evidences of Jesus Messiahship in abundance. The heavens declare the glory of God. The Bible is available for all in this nation to read. But people choose not to examine the evidence – ‘there is none so blind as those who will not see’.

### **True Bread**

Jesus replied with the solemn and serious words – amen, *amen, I say to you*. Jesus pointed them beyond the material to the spiritual. The God who gave bread from heaven through Moses now was giving them the true bread from heaven. The true bread, the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

See how Jesus was revealing spiritual truths from the works of wonder done by God in the past and even in the present through him. Miraculous signs that point to spiritual realities. This true bread gives life, eternal life not just life for 40 years. It gives life to the world not just the fathers in the desert.

Jesus faced the same problem with the Samaritan woman – you may remember- trying to get her to understand spiritual truths when all she could focus on was material things. He offered her living water and she thought he meant some spring that would never run dry or water piped to her house.

These people actually came to Jesus seeking more bread. Jesus now spoke of the true bread from heaven that gives life. They did not understand but in their blindness they asked *Lord give us this bread always* . Some suggest a note of sarcasm here but seems to be more like confusion and blindness. Sure they had boldly asked for a sign but bold and arrogant people are quickly confused and rendered speechless.

The Samaritan woman did come, in the grace of God, to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. Would any of these people do the same? We will see later. But in the meantime we have the most wonderful teaching of our Lord about himself as the bread of life sent down from heaven.

These people said that they would believe Jesus if they saw a sign. Note that believing Jesus is very different from believing in Jesus. The work of God is to believe **in** Him. Many people take the name Christian. They believe that Jesus existed and was a great teacher. Oh yes they believe everything that Jesus taught was wonderful and they try to live like taught – the ten commandments and the sermon on the mount and all that. But ask them do they believe in Jesus as the way, the truth, and life – the only way to the Father in heaven.

Ask them if they know Jesus as the bread of life come down for heaven – and if they feed on him in their hearts by faith. Will they know what you are talking about? I trust that you know what Jesus meant when he said I **am** the bread of life who comes down from heaven.

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