

John 6:24-35
Only Then or Now Too?

August 2018

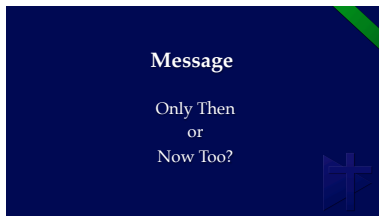
John 6:24-35

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” 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. ²⁷ 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.” ²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” ³⁰ So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?” ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³² Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.” ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

Introduction:



Is your faith in God about:-

- what happened in the past
- what is happening now, or
- what is going to happen?

Christianity, as faith in Jesus Christ being the central figure of God's purpose and involvement with humanity and the world involves all three.

Christ has died
Christ is risen
Christ will come again

Yes, it's possible to only focus on the past.

We hear the stories about what God did in the past especially his wondrous works and that is drawn on for present encouragement.

That is entirely valid but, but!

Christianity as Jesus launched it is not meant to be primarily about the past.

Jesus makes that point in a very elegant way today.

Appreciating this is going to involve a short lesson in Hebrew.

Text

As happens elsewhere in John's Gospel. Jesus is making a great claim about himself and the conversation around this is confused.

For those who like clear coherent conversations Jesus as reported in John's Gospel is going to disappoint. One has to really ponder the poetic language and join the dots to understand what Jesus is saying.

In John chapter 4 this was also the case with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob on the theme of the living water that Jesus was bringing. Today in chapter 6 it is so again as Jesus works to shift people's focus from bread that filled their stomachs to the bread of life that he himself represents.¹

The passage ends with Jesus making an 'I AM' claim to people who have his full attention but more likely than not do not understand:

³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Incidentally Jesus does not seem to apologize to people over this.² We reading this have a better chance of understanding than those who first heard.

Within this discourse various people engage Jesus over what he is saying. Various views and persuasions try to understand or embarrass Jesus.

Here are the questions people asked:

- "Rabbi, when did you come here?" (v.25)
 - - simple and factual
- "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" (v.28)
 - - seeking instruction
- "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?" (v.30)
 - - seeking credibility.

This credibility question had a context which was recalled:

"Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" (v.31)

This is typical thinking in a culture that reveres the past.

The great ones were our ancestors. They did great things that we can be proud of and we cannot hope to match them so the faith community reveres the great ancestors and celebrates their walk with God.

This is behind the ploy of the woman at the well who referred to Jacob -a common ancestor- who had provided water in the well he had dug. Surely this dusty Galilean was not claiming to surpass him.

The mindset is also heard in John the Baptist's strange remark that one is coming after me who is greater than me because he was before me.

The point to note is that Jesus does not buy into this. He is not cornered or limited by the stories and legends of great ancestors and God's wonders worked through them. He surpasses them all and is making statements that let people know this. The past is all a lead up to him and this moment.

The third question asked of Jesus was for a sign or: "Do something that only heaven could do."

The standard for this was set as being the way God provided bread through Moses.

To make this point his questioners quoted scripture.

To set the bar for a sign in the provision of bread they quote from

¹ Bread here represents the basic food of life or what regularly sustains us. You may consider rice or meat as basic food rather than bread?

² Some may think that strained communication is the responsibility of the one presenting but I see no evidence that Jesus accepts responsibility for people not understanding what he says.

‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’

This comes from Exodus 16:15

And Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

But, The story is phrased in various ways throughout the Old Testament so well known. ³

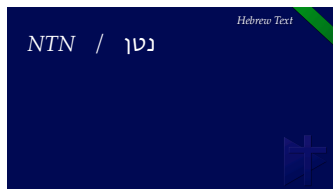
The way Jesus responds to this is amazingly smart and clever.

The conversation now gets very interesting:

³² Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

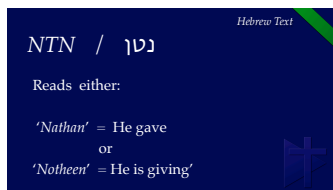
At this point Jesus is engaging in rabbinical exegesis we need to read some Hebrew to appreciate that.

The Hebrew language in Jesus’s day and for 500 years afterwards was written as a string of consonants. There were no vowels and no breaks in the words.



This meant that the reader had to decide some things about the basic words. In this case the verb for giving had to be assigned a tense. The basic three letter word נתן / NTN could be read as ‘He gave’ or as ‘He is giving’. ⁴

600 years later this would be formalized with pointing. This was a system of symbols that specified the vowels thus specifying the precise meaning.



So those questioning Jesus had read נתן / NTN as ‘He gave’ and Jesus read it as ‘He is giving’

That's the difference between past perfect (completed) tense and present continuous tense.

That would sound out like ‘Nathan’ and ‘Notheen’ - same consonants, different vowels.

Jesus expressed his present continuous reading of נתן / NTN by saying:

³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

It seems that those engaging Jesus here we impressed if not convinced. They said:

“Sir, give us this bread always.”

Wow!! They want the bread of heaven now and are asking for it.

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

³ Exodus 16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test whether or not they will follow My instructions. Exodus 16:15 When the Israelites saw it, they asked one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. So Moses told them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. Numbers 11:8 The people walked around and gathered it, ground it on a handmill or crushed it in a mortar, then boiled it in a cooking pot or shaped it into cakes. It tasted like pastry baked with fine oil. Nehemiah 9:15 In their hunger You provided bread from heaven; in their thirst You brought water from the rock. You told them to go in and possess the land which You had sworn to give them. Psalm 78:24 He rained down manna for them to eat; He gave them grain from heaven. Psalm 105:40 They asked, and He brought quail and satisfied them with the bread of heaven.

⁴ And possibly “He will give.” too?



This is the climax of this discourse. It is not present and personal.
What can you say after this?

Application.

So what might this mean for us here today?

I suggest it tells us

- It's all about Jesus and receiving him as life from God.
- God is giving us bread in daily installments.
- Our faith is centered on what God is giving now, today as the past and the future bear witness.
- We are not just here paying tribute to the past or meeting in hope for the future.
 - Now is the acceptable time

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2 (ESV)

God is wanting to give us himself as bread now, today!

We are not just here to remember when he did it last.

We are not just here to anticipate receiving grace and salvation in future.

Jesus is saying he is being given as the bread of God today.

Similarly: this church should not just be about remembering what God did in the past but more about what God is doing today.