

25. PLEASE SIR, I WANT SOME MORE (6:22-27)

In our text this morning, we read of the people of Israel searching for Jesus, and when they find Him, Jesus exposes the true nature and purpose of their search. Let us study the passage and see what it reveals about the hearts of the Jews and how it applies to us today.



THE NATURE OF THE MODERN CHURCH

Every year, Lifeway conducts research on what are the largest churches in the United States. They survey the approximate 80,000 churches in the country and then compile a list of the 100 largest churches based on weekly attendance. The church at the bottom of the list has an average weekly attendance of around 6,400 people, while the church in the number one position, Life Church in Oklahoma, has an average weekly attendance of 85,000 people.

Africa is no different, with the largest church building on the continent being The Faith Tabernacle in Nigeria that seats 50,000 people. In South Africa, the largest church, although not confined to a single building or location, is the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) that boasts a membership of seven million. Following them is the Christian Revival Church which boasts 30,000 members across its sites, with their Bloemfontein campus alone boasting 7,000 members.

Those figures can lead one to think that these churches are doing something right to draw such crowds and can tempt one to become a little disheartened when one's own congregation is much smaller. However, just because something is popular does not mean that it is healthy, right, or biblical. Paul's warning to Timothy is very pertinent and applicable to the churches on this list, as many fit the following description of its members and the churches' theology:

“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2Ti. 4:3-4).

This does not mean that there are no believers in these churches, however, if there are some warning signs that things are not as they should be. At least four trends of false doctrine is being taught in these churches that tickles itching ears of those who have turned away from the truth.:

1. Health, wealth, and prosperity gospel: The pursuit of physical healing and material prosperity.
2. Seeker-sensitive movement: The desire for more exciting services and a wider range of activities to entertain them.
3. Emergent church movement: The focus is on social connections and a community of faith that's based on experience and not on Scripture.
4. Woke movement: An emerging movement that focuses on equality and social justice based on Marxist ideology rather than Scripture.

Unfortunately, the world looks at those churches and the things that are happening within them and concludes that all churches are the same (e.g. rich churches and pastors or churches that look just like the world). This has even had a knock on effect on churches that seek to be biblical, as they are labelled

either by the world as just like the majority of churches on that list, or by those in the churches on the list as too reformed or conservative.

At the heart of the problem, is that many people who seem to be seeking Jesus, either do so for the wrong reasons, or seek a Jesus who is not the Jesus of the Bible. Our current text is a perfect illustration of this and forces us to answer the question, “Why do I follow Christ?”



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Consider what it was that first drew you to Christ/Christianity. What need or desire were you looking to have filled. Be honest.
2. Consider where you are in your walk with the Lord today. Are you seeking Him for the same reasons or have they changed? Be honest.



TWO WAYS THAT PEOPLE SEEK FOR JESUS.

John 6:22-27 simultaneously presents two ways that people seek for Jesus, with false motives that lead to destruction, contrasted with authentic motives that lead to eternal life.

Although there are several nuances to the false motive, it can be summarised as the desire for Effortless Living. This first appears back in verse 15, “*Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself*”.

After Jesus fed the five thousand, the people want to make Him king of Israel. It is safe to presume that this motive continues the next day as they search for Him in verses 22 to 24. Jesus feeding the people, unfortunately, causes them to see Him as someone who potentially has the power to remove the Roman oppression that they are under. They do not just want someone to provide them with a meal, they want more. Initially after the feeding it appears that all 5,000 men want to make Jesus king, however, as we see in verse 22, several of them wait for Him till the next morning. How many is not stated, but it could potentially be a high number. But Jesus sees their incorrect motive of wanting to make Him something that He is not meant to be – a political king who removes their oppressors – and so manages to escape from them.

This seeking a political leader is similar to liberation theology of the modern church – a theology that developed in the 1960s that seeks the liberation of certain groups of people from political and economic bondage. For them, helping and supporting the oppressed is not enough, rather one must be committed to social movements, including revolutions, violent protests, even the overturning of various structures of society. Liberation theology uses Marxist ideology as its basis and seeks to change traditional Christian theology to suit that ideology and to understand the Bible in terms of the world rather than the other way around.

The Exodus is often used as a picture of a nation or people being freed from political oppression, with the Jews representing the oppressed, the Egyptians representing the oppressors, and the Exodus itself as the picture of the liberation of the oppressed.

The modern Woke movement that is making inroads into the church is similar in its theology, as it too adopts Marxist ideology and attempts to blend it with the Bible. It is true that the church needs to address oppression and inequality, but it should be a natural outworking of Christian love and never the reason why one seeks Jesus. He did not come to liberate us from our enemies, but to pay the price for our sin that we can not pay. If liberation is one's only motive, one will soon be disappointed, because coming to Christ does not always result in liberation from our enemies.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. What other false doctrines in the church do you know of that promise some reward from Christ that is not taught in Scripture? What kind of Jesus do these false teachers present?



However, there is more to this. In verse 26, Jesus says to 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”*. We have seen already that the people wait around to see if they could spot Jesus the next morning.

Verse 22 tells us that as the new day dawns, the crowd that remains realises three things and come to a conclusion. They realise that there had only been one small boat, the disciples left in that boat the night before, but Jesus had not gone with them. So, they conclude that Jesus must be in the area, perhaps still up in the hills above the sea.

Verse 23 adds another fact that is easy to miss the significance of, *“Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks”*. Tiberias is on the other side of the lake towards the south west. Who these people are, we do not know, but they have obviously heard that Jesus is in the area and perhaps even of the feeding the night before, and so they come in search of Jesus themselves, and probably with the same motives.

Tiberias was commissioned by Herod Antipas about five years earlier, and he named the city in honour of the Roman Emperor, Tiberias Caesar. However, Herod went against Jewish law and had the city built on top of graves, some of which were disturbed when they laid foundations. For this reason, strict orthodox Jews did not go to Tiberias as they considered it to be an unclean city. This means that the boats that came from here, and the sailors who sailed them, would have been considered unclean and therefore, no clean Jew would ordinarily have considered climbing aboard one of these boats. However, in verse 24 we see that they do indeed climb aboard and travel to Capernaum hoping to find Jesus.

So here we have people who consider themselves clean willing to become unclean in search of Jesus. The world may consider this commendable, as if to lower oneself for their benefit, but in reality it shows how people are willing to put aside their holiness for the sake of a selfish or common interest. This should never be, especially for Children of God.



But why go to Capernaum? Well because it is the town that Jesus chose as His base of operations in the area. So these people understandably conclude that Jesus has gone there, even though they do not know how or when, as their question of Him in verse 25 suggest, “*Rabbi, when did you come here?*”

According to verse 59, they find Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum while He is teaching the people. Now the foundations of this synagogue are still visible today and the building is not big enough to hold a multitude of people. Given that Jesus is already teaching in the synagogue, it is probably quite full already, and so when these people arrive from across the Sea, along with the curious onlookers from Tiberias, there is very little room left inside. So perhaps they gather at the door, or in the street outside.

What is interesting is how Jesus begins to answer their question in verse 25. It would have been an impressive answer for them if Jesus had to have said to them, “I walked across the lake in the middle of the storm last night, climbed into the boat when I reached it, and then I instantly transported it several kilometres to land”. However, Jesus does not tell them any of it. In fact, He does not even answer their question.

But why not tell them? Simply because He wants to deal with a bigger question that needs to be asked of them, that is, “Why are they searching for Him?”. So Jesus confronts them in verse 26 with, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves”. To put it another way, He is accusing them of only seeking Jesus because He satisfied their hunger. This is not the answer they are hoping for because it challenges their motives for seeking Him.



NOTE: The Greek word translated here as you “*ate your fill*” directly translated means, “to give fodder to animals”. So quite literally Jesus is accusing them of having eaten like beasts of the field and that now they seek Him only to satisfy their stomachs again.

Although it may seem surprising that these people who heard Jesus speak of the kingdom of God and saw Him perform signs the previous day could still have such a worldly and selfish attitude, the same is still true today. Many are no different to these people as they chase after so-called revivals and mighty moves of God, hoping that He will solve all of their problems or heap blessings on them. What is worse though, is that unlike the Jews back then who did not yet have the full revelation of Christ and Scripture, people today have the full revelation of God in the Bible, so are without excuse. They too miss the signs that are right before their eyes in the written Word of God.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Apart from what has already been mentioned in this study, what other things do people chase Jesus for today?
2. Consider the consequences in people’s lives if/when they do not receiving those things from Jesus. How do you think this will affect what these people and the world will consequently about Jesus and the church?



A STARTLING CONTRAST

Jesus brings in the contrast in verse 27 and says, *“Do not labor 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”*. We all understand the short life-span of the food we buy. That is why we check the sell by and best before dates on everything. Yet here we have possibly thousands of people clamouring around this synagogue door for another free lunch – for food that is going to perish. They strain after something that is not going to sustain or fulfil them in the long term, yet they continue to ask, “Please Sir, I want some more!”

In this context it is bread, but you can replace that with anything in creation, for the natural order of things is to perish. Nothing in this world will last for eternity. Yes, people need food or money to survive in this world, but if that is one’s primary focus in life, if that is all that one seeks Christ for, one will soon be disappointed.

This is where the prosperity gospel fails people terribly. It promises to provide stability and security, when in the end it has the opposite effect. Across Africa it has led to occultic syncretism, unsound theology, greed, pride, stunted spiritual growth, and poverty. Yet despite the clear negative effects, people chase after prosperity anyway.

But what should they chase for instead? Jesus tells us in verse 27, *“for the food that endures to eternal life”*, that is, Jesus Himself.

Commentator, James Edwards wrote the following concerning the parallel passage in Mark chapter 6,

“The physical blessings of Jesus are not an end in themselves, but a fork in the road, one branch of which leads to Jesus’ saving purpose, the other to a false understanding of Jesus as simply a wonder worker”.¹⁰²

The signs that Jesus performs are meant to direct people to Him and are not to the signs themselves. However, people continue to pursue signs and wonders instead. To use Edwards analogy, They have chosen the wrong fork in the road. They want an effortless life, enjoying all the blessings and benefits that God can give, but do not truly want God Himself.

The sad reality is, although many may appear to be searching for Jesus, they are only really looking for any benefits He may provide, for thousands of churches around the world are filled with people like these Jews who are also only looking for Jesus to ease their lives.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Do you have family members or friends who pursue Jesus for the wrong reasons? What are they pursuing?

102 Edwards, James. 2001. *The Gospel According to Mark. The Pillar New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

2. What do you intend to do about their situation? (i.e. what practical steps would be helpful to turn them to Christ Himself instead of His blessings?)



TEST YOUR MOTIVES

But how can we know if our motives are authentic and will lead to eternal life? How can we know if we are following Jesus for the right reasons? Here are three questions to help you test your motives.

1. Are you pursuing Jesus for external prosperity, or eternal prosperity? In other words, are you seeking material blessings that are temporary or spiritual maturity that is everlasting? True believers understand that Jesus' provision is more spiritual than it is physical, and the physical things He does provide are a bonus. Another way to word the question is to ask yourself, "Whenever I pray, what do I ask for?" Because what you ask God for in prayer is an indication of what you value. And if your prayers are filled with more personal requests than praise and thanksgiving, it may be a sign that you're seeking an Effortless life rather than Jesus.
2. Are you seeking Jesus so you can live your best life now, or are you seeking the life that lasts forever? 2020 was a stark reminder for many people as to how fragile this life is. How many people affected by the deaths, losses, and closures of the COVID-19 pandemic were in churches promising them health and wealth. There is no point in seeking Jesus for the best life now, for that life can be taken away from you in an instant. Rather seek Jesus for that which has eternal benefit.
3. Are you seeking Christ Himself? Read the words of Paul in his letter to the believers in Philippi in Philippians 3:8-11. Here is Paul, a great man of faith, who achieved much in his life, yet he considers everything in his life as rubbish (literally "dung/manure" in the Greek) for the sake of knowing Christ, even though those things are gifts from God Himself. In comparison, the gifts are nothing when compared to the giver, Jesus Christ.

How different that is to how people think today, and how ironic that Paul even states that he wants to share in Christ's sufferings. This goes against everything that the modern prosperity gospel, liberation theology, woke, and the seeker sensitive movements teach today.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Read 2 Corinthians 11:24-27 and consider the sufferings of Christ that Paul was willing to endure. How does his desire to suffer differ to the popular teachings of the modern church?
2. How does Paul's desire to suffer challenge you in your walk with the Lord?
3. How does seeking the bread that does not perish motivate you in this?

So how did you do on the test? Why are you seeking Jesus? Are you concerned with the eternal prosperity of your soul? Are you seeking Christ Himself as the One who is the greatest and most valuable thing in life? If so, then that is a sign that you're pursuing Christ for the right motives and not for all the wrong ones.

But if you honestly have to say you did not do well on the test, then I plead with you, examine your heart. Feel free to approach one of the elders or a more mature Christian that you feel comfortable talking with and ask them to pray for you or to give you wise counsel. And personally call upon God and ask Him to correct your motives and to help you seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness.

In the weeks to come as we continue our journey through this chapter, Jesus is going to challenge all who claim to follow Him, both His twelve disciples, and us two thousand years later. And like the Jews you will you have to decide if you are ready and willing to continue to follow Christ and all that it means.