



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 6: 22-33

Spring 2022

"Religious Rock Rolling"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Seth. That's a good introduction to our text this morning, which is John chapter 6, verses 22 through 33. To review for just a moment, two miracles have happened in this sixth chapter. The first was feeding a multitude in the wilderness, 5000 plus, maybe 20,000 people, with a few loaves and fishes—that was the public ministry. Then there was the private ministry of the Lord coming to His disciples in the storm at night, walking on the water. And then “immediately”, as He got in the boat they were at their destination.

Well now we're at the next morning, and that's how verse 22 begins,

<sup>22</sup>The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but *that* His disciples had gone away alone. <sup>23</sup>There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. <sup>24</sup>So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. <sup>25</sup>When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You get here?”

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. <sup>27</sup>Do not work

for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?”<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”<sup>30</sup> So they said to Him, “What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?”<sup>31</sup> Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.’”<sup>32</sup> Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.<sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.”

John 6: 22-33

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together.

*(Message)* In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was king of Corinth who cheated the gods. His punishment was to roll a rock up a hill, only to watch it roll down again, and repeat that forever. He was condemned to an endless existence of meaninglessness and useless labor.

Fortunately for Sisyphus, he's a myth. But for a lot of people, that's a fitting description of their daily lives, what Solomon called life “under the sun”, laboring by the sweat of their face day after day until they go to the grave.

It probably describes many in the crowd that Jesus fed loaves and fishes in John 6; poor people, oppressed people, who labored hand-to-mouth, paycheck-to-paycheck—but were given a banquet, a feast, on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. They wanted more of that.

Jesus told them, "Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life." (vs27a). And that gets to the real problem in life—and the heart of this passage. It's what we could call, ‘Religious Rock Rolling’, endlessly laboring for

righteousness that isn't gained by endlessly laboring, and working, and working, and working. That's useless labor.

The good news is, there is useful labor that gets eternal life, that gets eternal rest. Jesus spoke of it in the synagogue in Capernaum. That's where the crowd found Him the morning after He fed them.

They'd spent the night on the east side of the sea. When they woke they were wondering what Jesus would serve for breakfast—maybe pancakes? They were surprised to find He was gone.

They saw the disciples leave in a boat without Him and had seen Him go up on the mountain to pray—but now He was gone. How? They didn't know but they set out to find Him. Other boats had come over by morning from Tiberias, so the crowd boarded them and crossed over “to Capernaum seeking Jesus”, John says. (vs24b). Those are beautiful words. It's good to seek Jesus. Isaiah said, "Seek the LORD while He may be found." (Is 55:6). So did Jeremiah. But in Jeremiah 29, God said, "...search for Me with all your heart." (vs13).

It's clear from the Lord's response, when the crowd found Him, that their hearts were not right. They said in verse 25, "Rabbi", (just *rabbi*), "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Well, He could have answered, 'Oh, about five in the morning. I walked over on the water through the storm, trampling the waves down as I walked...another miracle.' He didn't do that; He knew that would not have been useful at all with this crowd.

Instead, He spoke to their motive for seeking Him, "Truly, truly I say to you, you seek Me not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled." (vs26). He knew their hearts.

He knows all things. Back in chapter 2, (vs24), we are told, 'He knows what is in man.' They appeared eager to honor Him, they were seeking Him—but He knew why. He knows what's in our hearts right now. He knows our motives. And so He didn't waste time speaking to them about miracles. They'd already rejected the great miracle of the feeding the day before. They saw it as a miracle. They recognized that He had done signs earlier than that—but they failed to see the significance of them. They didn't perceive

the spiritual meaning; they'd only seen a material phenomenon. They concluded He could fill their stomachs and He could make life easy: no more laboring day after day toiling for their bread. He could make life comfortable—that's what they were seeking.

The association they should have made with the meal that they were fed, (especially since, remember, it was the time of Passover, and they were to think of all of the events gathered around that great event), so at the time of Passover, they should have been thinking in terms of the feast that God gave Israel when He brought them out of the iron furnace of Egypt and led them through the wilderness—and fed them manna from heaven, day after day after day. The lesson, and the meaning of this sign, is the LORD who gave that manna from heaven was also with them by the sea and miraculously giving them bread. He is the Lord God who gives life, eternal life. But they missed that. Their minds could not go beyond the material. Their hearts were set on earthly things and making their existence better.

I think we see a lot of that in churches today. I don't listen to a lot of preaching on the radio but I do periodically. Often when I'm coming to church I hear different men preach; and they do a very good job of communicating what they're seeking to communicate.

They're good 'preachers', but I would characterize the preaching that I hear as 'therapeutic preaching.' It's about fixing people's attitudes and behavior; it's about human relationships and how to live well. There's very little in it about the Lord God: about His glory and grace; about man's separation from Him; about the cross; about reconciliation and everlasting life.

People today are happy to settle for the temporal—like physical bread, as opposed to what the Lord really has to offer.

The Bible, I should say, is filled with proverbs and good counsel on how to live day by day and how to have correct and good relationships with others. But wisdom, as the Proverbs state, and as Solomon wrote in Proverbs 1, verse 7, begins with, "The fear of the LORD...", with submission to Him and a life lived with Him and for Him to His glory.

Jesus will later say in His prayer, (and I often repeat this), John chapter 17, verse 3, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent." It's as we know Him personally and factually, doctrinally, that we will love Him and gladly serve Him and serve others. Sacrifice ourself for others rather than live to satisfy self—like this crowd with the appetite.

And so Jesus gave them counsel in verse 27. "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." In other words, 'Don't be shortsighted. Don't live for the here and now. Don't spend your life on what is temporal, on benefits that don't last. Labor for what is permanent, for what is eternal!'

Now His directive, "Do not work for the food which perishes..." doesn't mean 'Don't work.' I probably don't need to tell you this, (I'm sure I don't), but the Bible condemns laziness. Paul told the Thessalonians, a people that he loved, he told them, 'If they will not work, then they won't eat.' (2Th 3:10). Work is necessary. Work is good and godly; and so we need to do that. We need to labor. He's not denying that. And I would add this, that it's good for a person to enjoy the fruits of his or her labors. Nothing is wrong with that. Paul, in fact said, 'God has richly supplied all of this', (all good things), 'for us to enjoy.' (1Tim 6:17). And we ought to enjoy the good things He's given us and appreciate that.

But Paul also warned the rich in the same verse as that which states God "richly supplies us with all things to enjoy", 1 Timothy 6:17, that the rich are not to "fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches", —they're not to live for this world. Now that's true for everyone. That's true for the rich and poor alike.

This world is perishing. John said, in 1 John 2:17, "It is passing away," *present* tense. Presently, right now, it's on the way out. All its good things are on the way out; all of its good things and blessings, (which are blessings), are temporal. That's what the Lord is warning against. Laboring only for the 'things' of time—to the neglect of eternity.

These people had their hearts set on the world, on physical comfort, on a life of ease, material welfare—and didn't see beyond that. That was their idea of 'the kingdom'—a free lunch and a full stomach. And so the Lord said, "Do not work for the food which perishes..." Instead, he said, Work, labor "...for the food that endures to eternal life." (vs27). 'Labor for the food that feeds the soul rather than what feeds the body.' And that's only found in the Son of Man, Christ Himself. And to those who seek it, He promises that He would give it to them.

He later reinforces that in verse 37 when He says, "The one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out." Those who seek Him find Him, (who seek Him rightly), and will never be cast out. And He can do that: Receive them, and have the authority to receive them and keep them. He can do that because He says, 'He is the one on whom the Father has set His seal': The one on whom the Father has given His official approval. The approval that has been demonstrated already to these people, and to numerous people, with His miracles, with His teaching, and His character. Everything about the Lord's life demonstrated that He was approved of and appointed by God to give life.

Now that's the message of grace. Christ *gives* eternal life, just as He *gave* that crowd bread. They didn't labor for it, they didn't even ask for it. And the life that Christ *gives* is that it is *given*—it is a *gift* to the believer, the genuine seeker.

But the Jews didn't perceive the notion of grace in anything that He was saying. They heard the word '*work*', and thought of eternal life in terms of that. They thought of it as reward for their hard labor, for their good works. And so they asked, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" (vs28), which is the way people naturally approach this whole issue of salvation, of eternal life. They think they can earn it if they can gain God's approval. And they answer the question in various ways. Some say, 'Well, you obtain eternal life through moral achievement; doing good to others, living an honest life. That's the way you get to heaven, doing the best you can. God's fair, and He accepts that.'

Others find the answer in formal religion; in ceremonies or rituals: 'You must join the church', 'You must be baptized', 'You must take the Eucharist, confess to the priest', and so on. That's called *sacerdotalism*—that's the technical term. It means 'salvation by the sacraments'.

Look, there are different answers in regard to the details. But really, they are distinctions without a difference because in each case the answer is, 'Man earns salvation through personal effort.' That's natural religion.

John Stott called it, "The religion of the man in the street today." Go out on the street, take a survey; 'How does one obtain eternal life? What must one do to be saved?' And you'll get those kind of answers; 'You got to work at it.' 'You got to be a good person.' 'You got to do *this* or *that*.'

And that's what the rich young ruler thought when he came to Jesus with his question. He's the typical man. He's 'the man in the street': "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" (Mat 19:16). He already thought that he'd done pretty well. He told the Lord that 'He kept the Law from his youth up.' (Mark 10:20). But even so, as confident as he was in himself and in his deeds, he felt there was something more to be done. He wasn't really satisfied; the work wasn't really finished. He wanted some final work, some great deed he might do that'll put him over the top. So he asked, "What good thing shall I do?"

That's the way religion works. Always 'rolling the rock up the hill'. Never finished. Salvation is never certain. There's always the question, "What more?"

And that's what this Jewish crowd was asking Jesus, 'What shall we do so that we may work the works of God?' It's endless. That path is endless. Works, upon works, upon works. But Jesus wasn't endorsing salvation by works or Law keeping. Just the opposite, He was inviting them to receive God's *gift*—to rest in God's grace.

Now He did tell them to work: work, labor "for the food which endures to eternal life." (vs27b). It's the language that the Lord may have adapted to His crowd to encourage it to earnestly seek salvation. They were seeking Him but for the wrong

reasons, and not correctly—not according to truth. And so He may have been using this language to tell them to be earnest in this seeking, not half-hearted: 'Seek the truth!'

But then, in verse 29, the Lord did explain to them the meaning of *work*, or *labor*. "This is the work of God," He said, "that you believe in Him whom He has sent." (vs29). The work is to "*believe*", which is really not a work at all. In fact notice, the Lord replaced their *works*, plural, with a singular, *work*. The only work. 'Only one thing is necessary', is what He's saying: And that one thing is *faith*, that you *believe*.

Faith is an activity. But believing is something we do. It is an act of the mind and will, of understanding and volition. We're not passive in faith. It is actively trusting in Him. Faith of salvation is not just knowledge. It is knowledge: It's knowing the facts of the Gospel; it's knowing that Jesus is God's eternal Son who became man to become our Savior; and He is our only Savior because He is the one who died in the place of sinners; so that all who put their faith in Him are saved.

But it's not just knowing that, it's 'believing that it's true'. We have to know the facts, we have to believe that they are true—but that itself is not all there is to saving faith. There's that third aspect of *trust*, which is an act of the will. One of having confidence in and making a commitment to Christ. Faith, then, is very much an act, an act of understanding and resolve. It is active; but it's not meritorious. It is completely different from the works of the Law.

Paul makes that distinction plain in Romans chapter 3, verse 28 where he writes, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." Faith actively throws all of its confidence on the Lord. Faith actively throws away confidence in self and casts itself upon the person and work of Christ completely. It actively *receives* everything rather than *achieving* anything.

William Hendriksen illustrated the nature of faith from a tall oak tree and the way it draws its nutrients from soil. Its roots perform what he calls, "a well-nigh unbelievable amount of work in drawing water and minerals from the soil that nourishes the tree." Still he points out, "These roots do not themselves produce these necessities,

but receive them as a gift." And that's the same with faith. It receives everything from God as a free gift. No merit in that. It's been illustrated as an open hand that receives the gift. There's no merit in simply receiving a gift.

Now none of this is to say that works, good deeds, are unimportant. They are not. God does require works from us. He requires a holy life from His holy people, from His saints. We're all saints, if we're believers in Jesus Christ, meaning we've all been set apart for Him and for His life. Good deeds, works, fruit, is not optional. That will be as natural to us, though, as the oak tree putting out leaves is natural to it when it draws these nutrients from the ground. Works, fruit, are inevitable in the life that's joined to Christ. And that's what the saved inevitably strive for. It's within us to seek that. We have the life of Christ within us. And so we will produce that life. It will be produced in us.

But that's not a condition of salvation. That's a consequence of salvation. Works follow naturally in a person who has spiritual life coursing through him or her, just as the life in the tree naturally produces the leaves and the fruit of that tree.

But faith in Christ is the first act of the soul that God requires of a person. Until then, a man is lost, and his works are of absolutely no value—fruitless effort. Isaiah put it very starkly, very clearly, vividly, when he called all of our good deeds just “filthy rags”. (Is 64:6). That's how God sees them. They can't earn us anything.

But the Lord was talking to people who didn't understand this, didn't understand Him. And that becomes clearer as chapter 6 unfolds. In fact, they didn't want what the Lord was offering; they wanted something very different. And that raises a problem, as we think about this. And that is, how do people believe who don't understand the Gospel of salvation, don't even want it, and in fact are hostile to it? That's the natural man. How do people believe who will not believe?

Well Jesus answers that here when He calls faith, “the works of God.” (vs28b). Now it is ‘God's works’ in that it is what pleases Him. The author of Hebrews wrote, in

Hebrews chapter 11, in verse 6, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." So faith is necessary. It's what God wants from people.

But still, it's hard. Actually faith in Christ is the hardest work there is. It's impossible in man's or woman's own strength. People will not, in their own pride, confess their guilt and failure, their own helplessness and need of a Savior. Humanly, people will not and cannot believe. They don't want to. It's contrary to their nature. Faith is, first of all, a gift of God.

Later, in verse 44, Jesus will say, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." If these things seem hard for you to grasp and to accept, just wait till we get into the rest of chapter 6. The only way for a person to see his or her need of the Savior, and to lay hold of Him, believe in Him, is by the sovereign grace of God; by the work of the Holy Spirit—the source of spiritual life and light and energy. Only by His power is the sinner able to see himself or herself as a sinner, and cast himself upon the Savior.

And the need of that grace for this crowd is evident from its response to His words. They understood that He was telling them to believe in Him as the one sent from God because in verse 30 they ask for a sign as proof, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see and believe You?" Then they say in verse 31, "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.' " That's a quote from Psalm 78, and in their minds the 'he' of the Psalm, is Moses.

They wanted Jesus to do the same miracle—rain down bread from heaven. Some of the later rabbis taught that; 'When Messiah came, that He would duplicate the miracle of giving manna, as was done in the days of Moses.' And that idea may have been popular in Jesus' day—and it may be behind this request: 'Well, if you're the Messiah, then you must do the things that Moses did.'

Still as you contemplate this, you would think that this miracle they had witnessed the day before, (the feeding of 5000 people, feeding what some calculate to be 20,000 people with five loaves and two fish), would have been sufficient proof for

them. They wouldn't need to be asking for this further miracle for they had just seen an amazing thing.

But it wasn't enough; they wanted more proof. They didn't make the connection between the miracle of the loaves and the fishes with the miracle of manna in the wilderness. We are amazed at their spiritual dullness and demand. At least if we reflect on this at all, we're amazed at it.

But what should really amaze us, though, is the Lord's patience in all of this. In fact, we see that all through this lengthy chapter, as He takes the time to talk to them and deal with all of the issues they're dealing with.

An expression commonly used today is taken from 2 Corinthians 11:19, which is, "suffer fools gladly." Paul was criticizing the Corinthians for tolerating the foolish while not listening to the wise; 'they suffer fools gladly.' Well, the Lord was willing to suffer fools for a while, and instruct them, patiently, but would not yield to their demand and be manipulated to do miracles on command. He's the Lord God of the universe. He did what He saw His Father doing and followed the Father's will—not the will of the crowd. They didn't need any more proof of His identity. They needed to believe. They needed to trust in Him.

But they really wanted someone different from Him. They wanted a king to freely fill their stomachs and give them a welfare state. And they were telling Him to, 'Start doing that if He wanted their allegiance.' If He'd done that, He might have gotten their allegiance but He would have supported their error as well. He refused.

Instead, His response was first to correct them, and then give them instruction. 'It wasn't Moses who gave their forefathers bread in the wilderness, it was God', He told them in verse 32. And He, (God), was still giving it, "It is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven." He stated that in the *present* tense. The Father *is* still giving bread. Not material bread, not physical bread like manna—something better, something infinitely better, what He calls "true bread."

He expands on that in verse 33, "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." What "comes down out of heaven" is Christ Himself. He is the true manna. What that ancient manna, in the days of the Exodus pictured—it is He.

He would go on to say, "I am the bread of life." (Jn 6:48). And He's far superior to the bread that the people ate in the days of Moses. It could feed and satisfy the body for a day; the Lord Jesus satisfies the soul forever. The bread of Moses' day was only for the nation Israel. But the Lord Jesus had come to give life, He said, to the world. To the world in all of its parts; to the Gentile as well as to the Jew; to the European as well as to the Asian and the African—to the world in all of its parts.

And the life He gives is everlasting. Those who ate the manna in the wilderness died in the wilderness and were buried there. And many were lost forever. But those who eat the bread that Christ offers live forever. In John's Gospel, 'eating' is *believing*. And He was again inviting them to believe in Him and have eternal life—just as they freely received the bread on the east side of the sea when He broke it and gave it to them the day before. What He was offering them was a far, far greater Messiah than the one they were seeking—which was merely material and earthbound. He was telling them to seek the heavenly and eternal.

And that's the message for us, as well. God's will for us is that we seek eternal food. "Do not work for the food which perishes," He said, "but for the food which endures to eternal life."

So what are you seeking? What are you working for? Food that perishes? A bigger house, a nicer car, a promotion? There's nothing wrong with any of that. Those are all good things. And God is a good God who gives good gifts, and He supplies those things. There is nothing wrong with seeking those things and working for those things. But they are temporal. They don't last—you know that. And working for them is like rolling a big rock up a hill. It will roll back down, and you've got to resupply yourself and keep working for those things if that's what you think is going to satisfy. They don't

satisfy, not ultimately. We know that, but the person that chooses that, that's the life that's going to be one of this kind of rock rolling.

Christians, (and I'm addressing a word to you as believers), Christians can get easily distracted by the things of the world and begin to really desire those things at the expense of the best: 'Good things' at the expense of the 'best things'. And the pull toward that is very strong; we all feel that, continually. It takes wisdom to deal with it. Really, it takes clear spiritual vision.

The crowd Jesus fed didn't have that vision, didn't have that understanding. The most surprising statement in this passage, to me at least, is in verse 30, "What do You do for a sign so that we may see and believe You?" You think, how can they be so dull? He just fed them miraculously less than 24 hours before, and that wasn't enough for them. They needed more to believe in Him.

They didn't recognize the truth. They didn't recognize the importance of what they'd seen. They didn't understand the meaning of it.

Well, we can do the same. We need what Paul prayed for the Ephesians. He's praying, in chapter 1, verse 18, for genuine believers. He's praying for the elect, as he'll describe them in the next chapter in Ephesians, chapter 2. And his prayer for them was that God would 'enlighten the eyes of their heart'. Christians, the born again, need that every day. We will see the obvious in Scripture and miss it—and live in error and seek wrong things for the wrong reasons unless the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual sight—enlightening us and empowering us.

It's a way of saying to you, 'We are dependent on the Lord every moment of our life. The fact that we're 'born again' doesn't free us up to live on our own, in our own strength. We are in Christ and we draw our strength and life, we draw understanding, our knowledge from Him. So we need to ask the Lord daily to enlighten us that we will know the hope of His calling, the riches of our inheritance, the surpassing greatness of His power, and live in that power, and with that hope, and live fruitfully every day.

But to have the power of God and the hope of eternity a person must first believe in Christ, trust in Him, commit oneself to the Son of God, the Savior of the world. That's all one must do. It's all one can do. And we can do it only by the grace of God.

You may be religious, you may be earnest in your religion, you may be a monk, you may be a Pharisee, you may be some person dedicated to all the rituals and all of the works you think are necessary. But if you are trying to gain God's approval and acceptance by works, then you are doing no more than rolling a big rock up a hill—that will roll back down and crush you. You're accomplishing nothing.

Christ has done it all! He's finished the work of salvation on the cross where He bore the sins of sinners fully and completely, suffered the punishment for them, paid for them fully in His own death as our substitute. The historical proof that He has finished the work is He was bodily raised from the dead. That's the real sign of God's acceptance and approval and appointment of Him. He raised Him from the dead, and He ascended into heaven, and He sat down at the Father's right hand. He sat down, because His work is finished.

Stop rolling rocks. Come to Christ. Trust in Him, and in doing that live forever, because He gives eternal life to everyone who truly seeks Him.

May God help you to do that, and help all of us to continue seeking the Lord, and seeking to live for Him and to know Him better.

Father, what a great truth it is that there is a rock for us. It's not one that we have to roll up and down a hill, as in performing works that never really achieve anything. No, our Rock is Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't roll anything. We simply "Hide ourselves in Him", as Toplady put it. Hide in the cleft of the rock. Hide in Christ, in His wounds as it were, because they paid for our sins and cleansed us. So we give You thanks.

Someday, as believers in Jesus Christ, we will soar to worlds unknown, and we have been rescued from the judgment seat, to be embraced by the Savior, forever. We thank You for that and pray Your blessings upon us now.

The LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

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