

Jesus - Millenium Man (3)

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Date: 19 January 2000

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[0 : 00] I pray that you will open this word to us tonight, write it on our hearts by your spirit that we may be doers of it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

Amen.

[2 : 43] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. the lake, the opposite side. And indeed, ironically, on the opposite side of where there's a church today to commemorate the feeding of the 5,000. So those of you who are in Israel, don't get too confused by that. It seems that the miracle actually happened on the Golan Heights side.

It's called the Sea of Galilee, although probably by Jesus' day, it was beginning to be called the Sea of Tiberias. Tiberias was a Roman city built by Herod Antipas from about 17 AD onwards, that is in Jesus' teenage or early adult years. And it seems that gradually the lake or sea became known as the Sea of Tiberias rather than the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. That may refer back to chapter 5, to the miracle he did, but that was in Jerusalem. It may well rather be that he's performed various other signs up in Galilee. In John's Gospel, John is not very concerned with what Jesus does in Galilee. The wedding feast at Cana and this miracle are almost it. John's emphasis is much more on Jerusalem, which is almost the opposite of the other Gospels. So we've got to expect that in John and the other Gospels, there's going to be a difference of content because there's a difference of geographical concentration. It seems that Jesus has sailed across the lake, we pick that up from the end of the chapter, and the people, the crowds who are with him, perhaps at Capernaum, which was his base, have walked along the north shore of the lake. It's not all that far, but it may have taken a couple of hours or an hour and a bit or something like that, to where Jesus has gone. That shows their eagerness to follow him, eagerness to see miracles, maybe to receive miracles, maybe it's a sense of puzzlement about who this is and what he's doing.

On their arrival, presumably, Jesus, or at least on his arrival, but Jesus goes up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. For a rabbi to sit down, it was the way they would teach, maybe it's just having a rest, but presumably he's gone up into the foothills of the Golan Heights, probably a relatively steep climb. And then we're told, as a sort of aside, but not unimportantly, the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. Now there are various festivals. Next week, in chapter 7, we'll see one of the other key festivals of the Jews of Jesus' day, the Feast of Tabernacles.

But the Passover seems to have been one of the most important, if not the most important. And in fact, the little aside here is a clue for us. Because what happens in this miracle, and in the teaching that follows it, is set with the Passover as its background. And we'll see ways in which that's important as we go through this chapter. Incidentally, because it's the Feast of the Passover, it's presumably one year, maybe two or more, since the events of John chapter 2, which also was a Passover event. And of course, it seems to be perhaps one year before Jesus died, because that also occurs at the Feast of Passover. Indeed, in John's Gospel, a lot of the things that Jesus does happen at the time of feasts, like next week again, we'll see. We'll say more about the feasts next week. But the Passover, putting it simply, commemorated the event of when the Israelites under Moses left Egypt. Miraculously, through the daubing of blood on their doorposts, the sacrifice of an animal, and then the parting of the Red Sea to go into the wilderness, and God fed them in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. They're the key background events. Not only that, in Jesus' day, the Passover, indeed all the feasts, were times of nationalistic fervour. We can't really say that Australia Day conveys much nationalistic fervour in our country. Maybe July the 4th is a bit of a better example. Maybe is it the commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne in Northern Ireland is a better example. That is not just a sort of nice time for a celebration, but actually there's quite a deal of nationalistic fervour going on. So we've got to bear that in mind as well. And there was an expectation amongst some Jews that when the Messiah came, it would occur at the time of a major festival.

You may even know that to this day, as the Jews celebrate the Passover festival, they will often leave an empty seat for Elijah, who they believe will return either as the Messiah or as the forerunner of the Messiah. So that's part of that sort of background. The crowd have come. Jesus looks up.

[7 : 47] He sees them coming toward him. And Jesus said to Philip, where are we to buy bread for these people to eat? That's a puzzling question because we're not even told that they're hungry. There's no expectation that Jesus ought to provide food for them, though no doubt they've walked for, I'd say, at least an hour. And so they could well be hungry and thirsty. He perhaps asks Philip, because we know from chapter one that Philip's from Bethsaida, which is on the very north tip of the lake. So it would be fairly close to where Jesus is here. Maybe it's the closest town in that time. But Jesus isn't stumped.

Jesus is saying, look, I don't know, Philip, where to buy bread. You know the shops in Bethsaida. What do you recommend? He's not saying that. We're told in verse 6, he said this to test him. For he himself, Jesus knew what he was going to do. He's testing Philip. That's a neutral term, but it's actually not insignificant. Because going back to the events that the Passover commemorated, and also the background to what happens later, if you remember, Israel in the wilderness were fed manna from heaven. We'll see that that's important later. And we're told in Deuteronomy 8 that it was to test them, to humble them, so that they knew that it was God. So here comes the same idea of testing with a similar or parallel context. Philip answered him, six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little. One denarius is a day's wage. I think it's more than that.

It's 200 denarii, so it's even more than six months' wages, technically. It wouldn't get them enough to eat. Philip, of course, in a sense, fails the test because he has no idea, really, what Jesus is on about here. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, there is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?

It's almost a ludicrous comment, isn't it? I mean, why even bother if you're trying to feed 5,000 plus people to say, look, there's a boy here with a few loaves and fish. I mean, it's like trying to pay for a house and starting off by emptying the piggy bank on the side of the kitchen shelf. I mean, you're never going to get there. Loose change, really. So it's a strange sort of comment.

Now, barley loaves were the poor people's food. They were probably a little bit like our scones. They were not big. And maybe the reference here reminds the Jewish readers of this gospel of a miracle of Elisha back in 2 Kings chapter 4, where Elisha miraculously feeds people using barley loaves from a boy. Jesus' miracle, we'll see, is even greater than that. Typically in John, Jesus is greater than everything in the Old Testament. And I think there's just a vague allusion back to Elisha's miracle here. We're told that there's green grass where the people sit down. It's hardly the desert. It must be an eyewitness account. It doesn't seem to serve any purpose apart from the fact that it was green. So there's a sense of reliability here, an eyewitness account to what's going on. And we're told that there were about 5,000 in all, although in the parallels in Mark and Matthew and Luke, it seems to be 5,000 men and the women and children aren't numbered. And maybe John is just counting the men here. That would not be atypical of that sort of society. So Jesus took the loaves, astonishingly. You must wonder what his disciples were thinking. Maybe some of them were thinking, oh, he's going to show up Andrew for being so silly in referring to them and show Andrew just how far you can get with a few loaves and fish.

[11 : 59] But Jesus took the loaves and when he'd given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. Some people say, well, it reminds us of the Lord's Supper when Jesus took bread and broke it and gave thanks and so on. But it's not meant to be, I think, an allusion to that because it would be typical of a Jewish meal that you would take the food, you'd give thanks to God or bless God, and then you distribute the food. It's pretty standard sort of language. But they ate as much as they wanted. There is no doubt that this is meant to be read as a miracle. And we're not told how he did it. But how he did it doesn't matter because what does matter is why he did it, which is what I hope we'll see by the end of this study tonight. When they were satisfied, they'd had enough. They're full. They're not just being polite.

Jesus told his disciples, gather up the fragments left over so that nothing may be lost. That would be very typical of Jewish custom to make sure that every fragment was gathered up. Not a legalistic thing about every crumb, but you wouldn't leave bits and pieces lying around.

So they gathered them up. And from the fragments of the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten, they filled 12 baskets. Now remember that a barley loaf is maybe like a scone or a bread roll in our size. You wouldn't even fill 12 baskets with the original five barley loaves. That's meant to be plain for everyone to see. Some say that the 12 baskets must be significant.

12 standing for the tribes of Israel or something like that. Every gospel recording this miracle makes a point of it being 12 baskets. It's hard to know quite what the symbolism would imply. I mean, it may be fair to say, well, there's 12 tribes of Israel, but it doesn't seem to serve a purpose other than saying it was 12. And I guess that if you're seeing a miracle like this performed, and all you've done is start off with five barley loaves, and you end up with 12 basketfuls, you would remember that they were 12. Because it was such an astonishing miracle. Just like at the end of this gospel when there's a miraculous catch of fish and there's 153 fish, I don't think it's a symbolic number. Any fisherman would know that if you had a good day and caught 153, you'd remember it.

So I think the 12 is just how many there were, probably. So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves left by those who'd eaten, they filled 12 baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.

[15 : 09] The prophet is the one expected in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 18 and the end of the book. The one like Moses, who Moses predicts God will send one day. And at Moses' death, the writer records at the end of Deuteronomy, that to this day there has not been the prophet like Moses yet to be expected. But he's coming.

That's their expectation. It's pretty close to being an attribution of Jesus being a Messiah. It's a very strong statement about Jesus' greatness, that this is indeed the prophet.

Not like the woman, remember last week, that could this man be the Messiah when she went back to her village? This is a bit stronger than that, a bit more positive. This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.

Their response to that is that they were about to take him by force and make him king. Jesus knows that that's what they're about to do. Another example, I suspect, of his superhuman knowledge as we saw last week.

But Jesus doesn't want to be a king by kidnap. Ironically, he's already a king. That was announced back in chapter 1, verse 49. What the people have got wrong here is the nature of Jesus as the prophet and the king.

[16 : 44] They acknowledge that he seems to be the Messiah in effect, although they don't use that word here. And certainly in Jewish expectation, there would be a combination of ideas that the prophet and the Messiah or the king would all be the same or could all be the same person when the Messiah comes.

But no doubt these people, thinking in terms of Moses bringing people out of Egypt, are thinking in terms of somebody to deliver us from Rome. What Jesus has done has reminded them somehow, in the context of the Passover, remember, of Moses.

Moses feeding the people in the wilderness manner. Moses, at the time of Passover, Moses bringing people out from an oppressive regime. So probably, these are people who want to not only make Jesus king by force, but also having made him king by force, then using force, get rid of Rome.

And we know there were lots of Jews like that, though the Jews disagreed amongst themselves about how the Messiah will come and get rid of Rome. But the group called the Zealots were people who, by and large, were prepared to take up arms to get rid of Rome.

They were the ones who, in the end, died suicidally at Masada in 73 or thereabouts AD. They're wanting a rescue from Rome, but they're wanting the wrong type of rescuer.

[18 : 17] And that's why Jesus evades them and goes back up into the Golan Heights in verse 15. I think, as a reader of John, we're meant to see this as little ironic, because we know that Jesus is the king already.

He was announced that way. But his kingship will be manifested through the cross. And any attempt to make him king without the cross, Jesus avoids assiduously.

Then we move into something, if you excuse the expression, completely different. We'll come back to the feeding of the 5,000.

But now we get what's usually called Jesus' miracle of walking on water. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea. Presumably, Jesus might still be up the mountain.

We know that he went there by himself, verse 15. The disciples perhaps have given up on him. It seems that it's out in the country. They don't have a place to stay. Night's come. Time to go home.

[19 : 23] Jesus can look after himself. Where he's gone, we don't know. So off they go in their boat, presumably back to Capernaum. Or we're told that they go back to Capernaum.

It's now dark. Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. Fairly common there. Remember that it's several hundred feet below sea level.

And so the change of air temperature with mountains on many of its sides, but valleys in different places, could mean a quick and sudden storm would easily arise there, even today.

When they'd rode about three or four miles, the length originally was 25 or 30 stadia. So it's apparently 2.87 miles to 3.45 miles.

They saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat. And they were terrified. The distance they've gone precludes the possibility that they're right next to the shore and what they see is actually Jesus walking by the water, not on it.

[20 : 31] But there are plenty of people who try to rewrite this as by the water. It technically is a possibility for the words and the preposition, but the context makes it clear that it's on the water.

The disciples are terrified, not by the storm, ironically, after all some of them are fishermen, but they're terrified by the fact that Jesus is walking on the water. You wouldn't be terrified if you just saw him walking on the shore.

But he said to them, it is I, do not be afraid. Literally, I am. Do not be afraid.

Now sometimes people make a lot out of that initial I am. It's the name of God in Exodus 3. And in John's Gospel, often Jesus says I am or I am something.

But to be honest, if you were going to say to these people in the boat, it's me, or it's I technically, is how we should say it, this is how you'd say it.

[21 : 30] So to say that it's sort of got a veiled hint of claiming to be God is probably going a little bit far. Having said that, he says, it is I, do not be afraid.

And that is a common exhortation of God to others in the Old Testament. Maybe put together, there is just a hint that Jesus is claiming to be, if not divine, on that path or in that direction.

Then they wanted to take him into the boat and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going. I think we're meant to see that as a miracle too. It's not just that this happened to be right at the time they arrived at Capernaum, but somehow miraculously, not only Jesus walked across the water, but as he went to get into the boat, or rather they tried to get him into the boat, they're there.

It's not an illusion. We'll see that the people's reaction in the next paragraph makes it clear that it's not just that Jesus walked back along the shore. There's something peculiar going on here.

In the context of the Passover, maybe, maybe this walking on water is recalling the Red Sea parting and Israel coming through Egypt into the Sinai Peninsula.

[22 : 52] It is a miracle, but there's not a lot of discussion about it. That is, Jesus doesn't then go on and explain it. But in its context, embedded in not only the feeding of the 5,000, but the discussion about the feeding of the 5,000, all of which is in the time of Passover, which commemorates leaving Egypt, I think maybe that that's part of the significance.

As God parted the seas so Israel could walk on dry land, Jesus himself has now perhaps done something even more miraculous by walking on water and getting his disciples to the other side miraculously.

Well, then we move into the beginning of the discussion about what it means for Jesus to have fed the 5,000. It's now the next day. The crowd that had stayed on the other side of the sea saw that there'd only been one boat there.

They also saw that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. So they're thinking, well, how does Jesus get back to Capernaum? There was no boat for him.

And they must have known that he didn't walk back. Then some boats from Tiberias came near the place where they'd eaten the bread after the Lord had given them thanks. So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

[24 : 15] It's all a little bit vague, but it's clear that the people are puzzled by how Jesus has left their area. And when they get to Capernaum and find him there, somehow they know that he's there.

That's his base after all. They're puzzled about, when did you get here? Meaning really, how did you get here? In effect, that's in the next verses.

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, teacher that is, when did you come here? And Jesus answered them, very truly I tell you, you're looking for me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

That's their desire. Jesus uncovers their motives. They're keen to follow Jesus and find out what he's doing and be with him because he's just fed them miraculously. Their motives are wrong.

I mean, who wouldn't follow a free lunch? Jesus' question or comment to them is in effect, and in the verses that follow the same thing, they've seen the miracle, which John calls a sign, but they've failed to grasp what the sign signifies.

[25 : 29] Instead of seeing in the bread a sign, they saw only in the sign the bread. Their eyes are purely full of physical, materialistic sorts of things.

Jesus doesn't actually answer their question in the end. Now that question though, about when did you get here, and Jesus commenting, you're looking for me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves, sets the scene then for the discussion about the significance of the sign.

So in verses 27 to 34, we deal with the true manner. Jesus says, do not work for the food that perishes, that is just any physical food.

It doesn't mean the sort of perishable foods compared to tinned food, just means any physical food. But for the food, of course they didn't have tinned food there, just in case you think I'm being a bit dumb. I know that. But rather work for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

For it is on Him that God the Father has set His seal. He's rebuking them for their purely materialistic concerns. And of course the mixed misunderstandings here parallel really exactly what we saw last week with the woman at the well and the issue of water and living water that Jesus offered to give.

[27 : 02] The living water was for eternal life in 4.14. This is the food that endures for eternal life. So there's quite a lot of parallel between what we saw last week in chapter 4 and this week.

Notice that it is the food which the Son of Man will give you. You are to work for it, but the Son of Man will give it to you. Putting together two sides of fundamental Christian theology.

Grace, that is God's gift, but human responsibility to act aright in response, that is working for it in this case. Jesus uses the term Son of Man.

He wouldn't dare use the term Messiah, of course, here because it's too loaded an expression. Son of Man is a little bit more ambiguous. We've seen it a few times in this Gospel already. And it says that God the Father has set His seal on Him, which probably refers to His baptism.

The people, of course, misunderstand. What must we do to perform the works of God? Jesus' point was the goal of the work, not the work itself. The people are more concerned with doing something so they can get more food.

[28 : 11] They don't seem to indicate any doubt about their own ability to perform such work either. And they make no acknowledgement that Jesus had promised that the Son of Man would give them that food either.

Jesus' answer is, this is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent. Very straightforward.

That is the work that God requires of each of us, to believe in the one whom He sent. That's Jesus, of course. What is the work of God for us to do?

To trust in Jesus. Not that faith becomes a work, that is that we can boast in our faith, or trust, or belief. But that is what we're required to do, to believe, to trust.

It's not just an intellectual belief. In John, it's very clearly an act of trust, or dependence. And the tense that's used, called an aorist tense in Greek, Greek means that it's a once-off action.

[29 : 18] You've got to come to believe. He's talking about becoming a Christian, in effect. So they said to Him, in verse 30, what sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?

I mean, how outrageous to ask for a sign when they've just had a sign, and they've failed to see what it signifies. What work are you performing? But people don't understand at all, what's going on here.

They understand that Jesus is the one, they see that He's doing miracles, but they fail to see what the miracles are pointing towards. They just want another sign. Jesus says, our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness.

Fair enough comment, it's true. Under Moses, for 40 years nearly, in the wilderness, between the Red Sea and entering the Promised Land, God miraculously fed the Israelites with what was called manna from heaven.

Literally, the word manna means, what is it? Because the Hebrews didn't know what it was. People try to guess what it is as being something to do with some plant, or bird, or animal, or something, but it was a miraculous food in the sense that it came each morning, and it would only last a day, apart from the stuff that will arrive, I presume, Friday morning, and that would last for two days, so that you didn't have to go and work and pick up some more on the Sabbath day.

[30 : 41] It's clearly miraculous food, but it's only physical food. It only sustains physically in the wilderness. Jesus said, or the people say, our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness.

That's the miracle that's in their mind. It's Passover after all. As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. A fairly clear sort of statement referring to Moses.

The irony of the quote is that it comes from Psalm 78, which is a psalm which is a sort of parody of Israel's history, highlighting Israel's faithlessness.

So the context of the psalm is he gave them manna to eat, and he did this, and he did that, God or Moses acting graciously for the people, miraculously providing, but they refused to believe.

They grumbled. They complained. That's what the psalm is on about. So there's actually quite an irony in the fact that here are unbelieving Jews quoting a psalm about their ancestors' unbelief.

[31 : 46] I think it's ironic, certainly, maybe even amusing. What they seem to be saying, though, they don't understand the irony or fail to see it, is that we think Moses was pretty good.

He miraculously fed the nation, not just 5,000, for 40 years, not just once, with bread from heaven, not just barley loaves.

So if you think that you're the prophet or the Messiah or somebody special, and we're beginning to think you might be, come on, you've got to prove it more to us. You've done one thing that indicates some sort of link with Moses, but he still outscored you so far.

I think that's sort of their challenge in this verse, in verse 31. The expectation when the Messiah would come, some said, was that he would rain down manna from heaven.

It's not in the Old Testament, but it's in the Jewish writings preceding Jesus, but in what's called the Intertestamental Period, in 300 BC to the time of Jesus. Jesus' reply, in a sense, analyzes the quote, he gave them bread from heaven to eat, and shows them that he is indeed greater than Moses.

[33 : 10] See what he says then in verse 32. Very truly, that's a solemn statement, you must pay attention to this. I tell you, it was not Moses, but God.

So that's the first point of challenge. You think Moses was pretty good, but it wasn't Moses, it was God who provided the food in the wilderness, not Moses. Secondly, it was not Moses who gave you, but it's my Father who gives you.

The act of Moses is past, done, but God still gives, present tense, ongoing, continuous tense. And not only that, but the third thing is, that Moses gave you the bread from heaven, but it's my Father who gives you the true bread, from heaven.

You see, it's not about barley loaves, it's about the true bread. And the true bread, is even better than the manna, in the wilderness. Yes, maybe you could say that the manna is better than the barley loaves, but the barley loaves are pointing to something even better than the manna.

The true bread from heaven, which the Father now gives, present tense. Jesus is not dismissing the manna, he's not ridiculing Moses, but he's pointing them in the direction of the sign that points to him as being greater than Moses.

[34 : 43] What is this true bread then? For the bread of God, is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life, not just to 5,000, not just to the nation, but to the world.

They said to him, sir, give us this bread always. Of course they would, just like the woman wants the living water always. The bread of heaven, is a person, is really him, who comes down from heaven.

A masculine, probably, rather than a neuter. It's a person. Of course it's Jesus himself. You see the issue is not that God provides true bread, or even that Jesus provides true bread, but that Jesus is the true bread.

That's the point of the argument so far, and Jesus says it absolutely straightforwardly in verse 35, I am the bread of life. Seven times in John's gospel, Jesus says something like this, the I am sayings, they're often called, I am the bread of life in this case.

This is the first of them in John's gospel. Later on he'll say, I am the light of the world, I am the gate, I'm the good shepherd, I'm the true vine, I'm the resurrection and the life, I'm the way, the truth and the life.

[36 : 00] This time the first one is, I am the bread of life. So it's not about Jesus giving bread, it's about Jesus giving himself. He says to underscore the point of absolute satisfaction.

And notice really what he's wanting people to do, to come to him, to believe in him. That's the point of it all. So when he talks later on about eating bread and feeding on his flesh and so on, what it means is, we've already been told, it means to believe in Jesus, to come to him.

And again it's an aorist tense, meaning a once off action. It's not talking about the ongoing belief of a Christian, it's talking about becoming a Christian. That's the issue.

I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. And that's true.

Although, exactly what he's referring to is a bit unclear because he says that in chapter 5, similarly, to Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, not Galilee. But maybe he said the same sort of thing already, but it's not recorded here.

[37 : 14] Everything that the Father gives me will come to me. And anyone who comes to me, I will never drive away.

Which I think is an ironic way of saying, I will preserve and keep. I will never drive it away. In fact, by implication, I'll do the opposite. I will keep it. I'll preserve it.

I'll guard it. Now there's a very strong note here of God's sovereignty. Theological term that's sometimes used in this context is predestination.

God gives something to Jesus and Jesus will guard it to the end. And Jesus is raising the issue of this issue of God's sovereignty and predestination here in the context of people not believing him.

Why don't people believe him? It seems to be because they're not believing in Jesus, but that seems to be the flip side of the fact that maybe for some reason God has not given them to Jesus.

[38 : 24] Everything that the Father gives me will come to me and anyone who comes to me I'll never drive away. Jesus is confident that his mission will be successful. Not because of what he does, so much as because what the Father does in giving people to him.

Now that gets elaborated on in the verses that follow. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. A theme that's come a few times already in the gospel and a few times especially in the preceding chapter.

That's the reason why Jesus will guard and keep and not drive away anyone whom the Father gives to him. because he's doing God's will. So they can be confident that if they're given by the Father to the Son, the Son will certainly keep them because the Son does the Father's will.

Notice how important it is that Jesus must be obedient to the Father in order for the Father's purposes to be fulfilled. But the fact that he is obedient ought to give us great confidence and assurance that God's purposes will be fulfilled.

And this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that he's given me but raise it up on the last day. So what Jesus is in effect hinting at here is that God will give people to him whom he will guard and protect to the final day.

[39 : 51] They will persevere to the end. And then verse 40 reiterates that. This is indeed the will of my Father that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day.

Now this strong note of divine sovereignty doesn't in any way undercut or mitigate human responsibility.

Jesus has rebuked them for their unbelief. He's not saying their unbelief is excusable because God hasn't given them to him but he's given others. He still rebukes them.

They are guilty of unbelief. It is a sin that they are responsible for. And yet on the other hand God is absolutely sovereign to give whom he wants to the Son knowing that the Son will preserve them to the end.

Now the issues of divine sovereignty and human responsibility are tricky ones for our finite minds. I guess what I want to say here is simply that the Bible holds the two to the extreme together.

[40 : 55] it doesn't try to compromise each to say somehow we only have limited responsibility and God's sovereignty is determined by knowing what we're going to do or something like that.

Not at all. God is absolutely sovereign but we are absolutely responsible for our own actions and the two whilst in our minds may not seem to quite mesh together in John they fit and elsewhere in the Bible they fit and often in the Bible we get these sort of paradoxical ideas we have to hold the extremes together in full because if we try and in our finite minds rationalise them together we actually end up with something that is neither one nor the other and is heretical in the end.

Then the Jews began to complain you can understand why and because he said I am the bread that came down from heaven it's an arrogant sort of statement and they're complaining they were saying is not this Jesus the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know doesn't mean necessarily that Joseph's still alive remember that they lived in Nazareth it's not all that far from Capernaum people know people how can he say I'm the bread from heaven it's just a carpenter's son from a nearby village how can he now say I've come down from heaven he's supposed to be one of their own and here we get ironically in John's gospel the time when he came to his own but his own received him not which is what we're told would happen back in chapter 1 of course Jesus answered them do not complain among yourselves no one can come to me unless drawn by the father who sent me and I'll raise that person up on the last day don't complain you can't come to me unless the father draws you that's a bit of a puzzling sort of statement but there have been people who think they're capable of coming to God coming to God will only be by depending upon him

Jesus' words here which may seem to be a bit of a puzzle to us they're really trying to I think pull the carpet out from under their feet and make them depend on God and God alone for their salvation no one can come to the father unless the father sends him to him draws him to Jesus having said that Jesus here is rebuking them for not coming so again the idea of God's sovereignty does not in any way excuse their unbelief it is written in the prophets and they shall all be taught by God everyone who has heard and learned from the father comes to me that's a rebuke these are Jews they've been taught from the Old Testament prophets but they haven't come to him indeed the context of this is in the Capernaum synagogue it's in a religious context where the scriptures would be read maybe even the prophets on this occasion Jesus saying you think you've read the prophets and yet you fail to come to me it's the same argument he used in Jerusalem in the preceding chapter when he said you read the scriptures you search them to find eternal life and yet you fail to believe in me if you believe in Moses you'd believe in me it's the same argument in effect but this time using the prophets rather than Moses from the Old Testament not that anyone has seen the father except the one who is from God he has seen the father what Jesus is saying here is that if you are indeed by the prophets taught by God then that will mean that you believe in me that you hear my words that you come to me he's saying there's a continuity between the Old Testament and believing in Jesus Christ those who truly are taught by God and belong to God will listen to the son then verse 47 repeats some of the ideas of earlier on very truly I tell you whoever believes has eternal life remember that he's offering the bread that brings eternal life he's explaining to them how they need to believe in him that's the bread for receiving eternal life

I am the bread of life he repeats it rounds off the argument to this point from verse 35 onwards but also of course he's made it clear that this is greater than the manner the manner in the wilderness was physical you had to keep eating it day by day otherwise you'd die of hunger after a few days but coming to Jesus is a once off event it's a once off eating but it's got an eternal satisfaction and consequence now he moves into much more metaphorical language don't get too puzzled by this because it's been explained by the straightforward language of verse 35 to 48 but now he talks about eating the flesh of the son of man but what he's doing is really in effect linking up what he said about believing now with the metaphor of eating the flesh but he's adding a couple of dimensions to his argument your ancestors ate the manner in the wilderness yes they've already said that back in verse 31 and they died because the manner wasn't good enough to keep them going for eternal life this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die it's better than manner

[46 : 26] I am the living bread that came down from heaven whoever eats of this bread will live forever and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh now he's using the language of eating again it's a once off event he's not talking about keeping on eating day by day because he's wanting to make it very clear that the manner was a daily eating this is a once off event that will last forever there are plenty of people who argue that these words here are meant to remind us of the Lord's Supper where we have the bread and the wine or feed on the body and blood but Jesus never uses the term body here it's only ever me or flesh or bread he doesn't have wine in the argument though he does introduce blood later but the verbs are all in the tense of a once off event it's about becoming a Christian not about an ongoing celebration of the Lord's Supper Jesus is also adding a dimension at the end of verse 51 when he says this is the bread that I will give for the life of the world my flesh he's adding a dimension because flesh suggests is more than just the person the bread it suggests death it even suggests sacrificial maybe even violent death he's saying you see coming to me and believing in me is not just me as a person as a miracle worker believing in me must be focused in my death if you feed on me you'll be trusting in my flesh that was sacrificed for you so he's adding a dimension here to what he's been saying so far he's linked up himself with bread now he's particularizing that to his death and cross the Jews response to this is a dispute how can this man give us his flesh to eat they're a bit offended by this idea as perhaps we would be if we thought it was something about cannibalism so Jesus said to them very truly

I tell you unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you now Jesus response here adds yet another dimension I think their dispute in verse 52 is because they're a bit offended even scandalized by the idea of eating flesh which you would never do it would be totally unclean even to touch a corpse let alone to eat human flesh in the Old Testament it's one of the most obnoxious sorts of things that you could think about but now Jesus heightens the scandal because he says and drink my blood and that would be just as obnoxious if not more so it was explicitly prohibited in the Mosaic law again blood if not even stronger than flesh suggests violence and death remember the Passover background there are certainly allusions here to sacrifice because the

Passover sacrifice would have its blood sprinkled on the doorposts and so on so that God would protect those people the same sort of idea surely is here Jesus is saying that coming to him and believing in him is not just in him nor even in the fact that he just dies a violent death but that his death is sacrificial and can be efficacious for those who believe in it he uses in fact a different verb in verse 54 those who eat my flesh literally it's munch on it it's a very vivid verb to use those who munch on my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life and I'll raise them up on the last day this is not talking about the Lord's supper it's talking about trusting in Jesus death how do we eat and drink the blood eat the flesh drink the blood by trusting that Jesus death has brought us salvation by living lives of trust in that so that what we do and say reflects our trust in that event my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink compared to the manner and even compared to the barley loaves those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them that actually is language that's used in the

Anglican prayer book from Archbishop Cranmer in the 16th century in the prayer of what's called humble access we do not presume to come to your table but the result of eating would be and you abide in us and we in you or something to that effect this is where the language comes from it's not really quite what it's about I think but having said that the Lord's Supper is actually a sacrament that reminds us about coming to Christ it's about trusting in Jesus' death and so what we do regularly when we celebrate the Lord's Supper in whatever church we're part of and however we do that is that we are in a sense saying again we come to Jesus we believe in him we trust in his death and taking the bread and the wine is a symbol of doing that and therefore of the union we have in him through our faith it's not a magic event it's an event that is only of effect if there is the faith that Jesus is talking about here it's not so much that this passage points to it but rather the Lord's

Supper is in a sense a reflection on what's being said here in part just as the living father sent me and I live because of the father so whoever eats me will live because of me Jesus has been full of death type imagery but there's also the corresponding life imagery because ironically through his death we have life this is the bread that came down from heaven not like that which your ancestors ate and they died but the one who eats this bread will live forever he's rounding off his argument again verse 35 to 48 rounds off one argument 49 to here rounds off another argument and then we're told in 59 that he said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum remember it's the time of the Passover there is various debates about what sort of readings would have been read in the lectionaries of the time and some suggest that probably Psalm 78 may have been read at this time and some of the allusions of course in this chapter could well have been in their scriptures earlier in their service on this day in the

[53 : 33] Capernaum synagogue these words are scandalous words to the Jews they don't like being told to eat flesh and drink blood it's horrific an idea for them but when many of the Jesus disciples heard it they said this teaching is difficult who can accept it I don't think they mean difficult in the sense of hard intellectually I think they mean difficult in the sense of scandalous more than anything and Jesus being aware that his disciples were complaining about it said to them does this offend you then what if you were to see the son of man ascending to where he was before it is the spirit that gives life the flesh is useless now it's not there saying contradicting himself by saying you've got to eat the flesh now saying the flesh is useless I suspect what he's hinting at there because he's just said it in the context of ascending to where he was before is to say my death is powerful and worth eating or feeding on because I will ascend to where I was before if Jesus died and stayed dead we wouldn't even know his name today but because he rose we know that the death was powerful and therefore we can come to him and believe in him and feed on him knowing that we'll receive benefits of a very powerful death because he rose and ascended to where he was before the words that I've spoken to you are spirit and life but among you there are some who do not believe for Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe and who was the one that would betray him not only are the

Jews having difficulties some of Jesus disciples I don't think he means the twelve I think it's a bigger group that's being described here but amongst the twelve even there is one of course we know that it's Judas he's identified at the end of the chapter who will in the end betray him for this reason I've told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the father Jesus brings back that argument I guess of predestination he's encouraging his disciples to keep on with him trusting that God brought them to Jesus he's also encouraging people to come and see and believe well many disciples turned back and no longer went about with him there's the rejection that John chapter one predicted so Jesus asked the twelve do you also wish to go away but he knows the answer to that he's just told us he knows there's one who'll betray them he therefore seems to imply that he knows they won't go away and Simon Peter is the spokesman as so often

Lord to whom can we go you have the words of eternal life that's what Jesus has just said and Peter believes him and thereby demonstrates that God the father has drawn him to Jesus in saying those words there is no alternative Peter may not have a completely right understanding of who Jesus is that's okay at this stage but he certainly knows enough to know that eternal life is found in Jesus and none other we have come to believe and know that you are the holy one of God Jesus answered them did I not choose you you see that's why you believe because I chose you I choose the ones whom the father gives to me predestination again and yet never undermining human responsibility to believe yet one of you is a devil he was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot for he though one of the twelve was going to betray him and that of course happens in chapter thirteen well this has been a complicated argument and I hope I've picked the guts out of it sufficiently

I guess to summarize a couple of points just to draw a couple of threads together this passage is about Jesus if we try and see it in any other way as about us or a boy or what to do with loaves and fishes or whatever or the Lord's Supper even we actually fail to see it center it is about Jesus who is greater than even Moses and that was a big claim for Jews of the first century he's greater than Elisha we saw alluded to the food that he gives which is him himself is better than the manna in the wilderness he does an even better job than the original Passover Jesus in here is looking backwards to the Passover and showing that he is better but by doing that he's looking forward to I presume one more year to go to his death on the cross which happens at the very time the Passover lambs are sacrificed for he is the true Passover sacrifice for the sins of the world this miracle and its explanation also functions as a test not only for

Philip but for the Jews and other disciples will they murmur and believe or not will they be humbled like the test in the wilderness in Deuteronomy 8 or not the notion of predestination is a humbling notion though it is also one of great confidence and assurance for us there's a reminder here of God's sovereignty that we have come to God yes we might say because we made a decision to believe in him but under girding all of that is the fact that God drew us to himself and chose us in Christ if you have trouble with that sort of undermining your own ability to trust in Jesus then let me encourage you to think it through more because knowing that God has chosen us rather than us him fundamentally ought to give us even greater assurance because we can know that we will be raised up on the last day as Jesus keeps reiterating in this chapter not because we've got a hold on God but because he's got a hold on us and he's more powerful and I trust in his hand not mine and just as bread is the basic staple for physical life so this chapter is telling us that Jesus is the basic staple for eternal life no other food will get us there he's essential for that