EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And many Explanatory Notes.

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JOHN VI. 22-27.

22 The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one wherein his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone;

23 (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks:)

24 When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.

25 And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?

26 Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

27 Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

WE should mark first, in this passage, what knowledge of man’s heart our Lord Jesus Christ possesses. We see Him exposing the false motives of those who followed Him for the sake of the loaves and fishes. They had followed Him across the Lake of Galilee. They seemed at first sight ready to believe in Him, and do Him honour. But He knew the inward springs of their conduct, and was not deceived. “Ye seek Me,” He said, “not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.”

The Lord Jesus, we should never forget, is still the same. He never changes. He reads the secret motives of all who profess and call themselves Christians. He knows exactly why they do all they do in their religion. The reasons why they go to church, and why they receive the sacrament,—why they attend family prayers, and why they keep Sunday holy,—all are naked and opened to the eyes of the great Head of the Church. By Him actions are weighed as well as seen. “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh at the heart.” (1 Sam. xvi. 7.)

Let us be real, true, and sincere in our religion, whatever else we are. The sinfulness of hypocrisy is very great, but its folly is greater still. It is not hard to deceive ministers, relatives, and friends. A little decent outward profession will often go a long way. But it is impossible to deceive Christ. “His eyes are as a flame of fire.” (Rev. i. 14.) He sees us through and through. Happy are those who can say, “Thou, Lord, who knowest all things, knowest that we love Thee.” (John xxi. 17.)

We should mark, secondly, in this passage what Christ forbids. He told the crowds who followed Him so diligently for the loaves and fishes, “not to labour for the meat that perisheth.” It was a remarkable saying, and demands explanation.

Our Lord, we may be sure, did not mean to encourage idleness. It would be a great mistake to suppose this. Labour was the appointed lot of Adam in Paradise. Labour was ordained to be man’s occupation after the fall. Labour is honourable in all men. No one need be ashamed of belonging to “the working classes.” Our Lord Himself worked in the carpenter’s shop at Naz-
areth. St. Paul wrought as a tent-maker with his own hands.

What our Lord did mean to rebuke was that excessive attention to labour for the body, while the soul is neglected, which prevails everywhere in the world. What He reproved was the common habit of labouring only for the things of time, and letting alone the things of eternity,—of minding only the life that now is, and disregarding the life to come. Against this habit He delivers a solemn warning.

Surely, we must all feel our Lord did not say the words before us without good cause. They are a startling caution which should ring in the ears of many in these latter days. How many in every rank of life are doing the very thing against which Jesus warns us! They are labouring night and day for “the meat that perisheth,” and doing nothing for their immortal souls. Happy are those who learn betimes the respective value of soul and body, and give the first and best place in their thoughts to salvation. One thing is needful. He that seeks first the kingdom of God will never fail to find “all other things added to him.” (Matt. vi. 33.)

We should mark, thirdly, in this passage, what Christ advises. He tells us to “labour for the meat that endureth to everlasting life.” He would have us take pains to find food and satisfaction for our souls. That food is provided in rich abundance in Him. But he that would have it must diligently seek it.

How are we to labour? There is but one answer. We must labour in the use of all appointed means. We must read our Bibles, like men digging for hidden treasure. We must wrestle earnestly in prayer, like men contending with a deadly enemy for life. We must take our whole heart to the house of God, and worship and hear like those who listen to the reading of a will. We must fight daily against sin, the world, and the devil, like those who fight for liberty, and must conquer or be slaves. These are the ways we must walk in if we would find Christ, and be found of Him. This is “labouring.” This is the secret of getting on about our souls.

Labour like this no doubt is very uncommon. In carrying it on we shall have little encouragement from man, and shall often be told that we are “extreme,” and go too far. Strange and absurd as it is, the natural man is always fancying that we may take too much thought about religion, and refusing to see that we are far more likely to take too much thought about the world. But whatever man may say, the soul will never get spiritual food without labour. We must “strive,” we must “run,” we must “fight,” we must throw our whole heart into our soul’s affairs. It is “the violent” who take the kingdom. (Matt. xi. 12.)

We should mark, lastly, in this passage, what a promise Christ holds out. He tells us that He Himself will give eternal food to all who seek it: “the Son of man shall give you the meat that endureth unto everlasting life.”

How gracious and encouraging these words are! Whatever we need for
the relief of our hungering souls, Christ is ready and willing to bestow. Whatever mercy, grace, peace, strength we require, the Son of man will give freely, immediately, abundantly, and eternally. He is “sealed,” and appointed, and commissioned by God the Father for this very purpose. Like Joseph in the Egyptian famine, it is His office to be the Friend, and Almoner, and Reliever of a sinful world. He is far more willing to give than man is to receive. The more sinners apply to Him, the better He is pleased.

And now, as we leave this rich passage, let us ask ourselves, what use we make of it? For what are we labouring ourselves? What do we know of lasting food and satisfaction for our inward man? Never let us rest till we have eaten of the meat which Christ alone can give. They that are content with any other spiritual food will sooner or later “lie down in sorrow.” (Isa. 1. 11.)

NOTES JOHN VI. 22-27.

22.—The day following, etc.] In this, and the three following verses, we have an instance of the extreme minuteness with which St. John describes all the particulars connected with any of the miracles of our Lord which he records.—Here, for example, he tells us that our Lord’s remaining behind, and not accompanying His disciples when they went into the boat, was observed by the multitude; and that nevertheless they could not find our Lord the next morning, and were puzzled to account for His being found at Capernaum when they got there.—All these little things help to prove that the circumstance of our Lord’s joining the disciples was something miraculous, and cannot be explained away, as some Rationalists pretend to say. In particular the question, “When camest Thou hither?” (ver. 25) is plain evidence that the multitude did not think it possible for our Lord to have walked along the shore, as some modern writers suggest, and did not understand how He got to Capernaum, except in a boat.

In each of the seven great miracles recorded by St. John this fulness and minuteness is very noticeable. Had he been inspired to relate as many miracles as we find in Matthew and Mark, his Gospel would have been fifty chapters, instead of twenty-one. Writing long after the other Gospel writers, and at a time when many who witnessed our Lord’s miracles were dead, there was a fitness and wisdom in his supplying the abundant particulars which characterize his descriptions.

[The people which stood on the other side of the sea.] This means the multitude, or some of them, whom Jesus had fed on the north-east shore of the lake, and whom the disciples had left standing near the banks when they embarked, before our Lord sent them away. Matthew and Mark both mention that our Lord first made the disciples embark, and then sent the multitude away; and retired to the mountain to pray.

23.—[Howbeit there came other boats, etc.] This verse either means that other boats came from Tiberias the morning after the miracle of feeding the multitude, which were not there the evening that the disciples embarked; or else it means that there were other boats from Tiberias not far from the place where the miracle was worked, though there were none actually at the spot where the disciples embarked, except their one boat. The verse is carefully inserted parenthetically, in order to account for the multitude following our Lord to Capernaum. Had it not been inserted the infidel would have asked us triumphantly to explain how the people could have followed our Lord, when they had no boats! We need
not doubt that every apparent discrepancy and difficulty in the Gospel narrative would equally admit of explanation, if we only knew how to fill up the gaps.

After that the Lord had given thanks. This is purposely inserted to remind us that it was no common eating of bread that had taken place, but an eating of food miraculously multiplied after our Lord had blessed it.

24.—[When the people.] There is no occasion to suppose that this expression means the whole five thousand whom our Lord had fed. For one thing, we are distinctly told that our Lord “sent them away,” and the greater part probably dispersed, and went their way to their homes, or to Jerusalem to the passover. For another thing, it is absurd to suppose that so large a multitude could find boats enough to convey them across the lake. It evidently means the remaining portion of the multitude, and probably included many who followed our Lord about from place to place, wherever He went in Galilee, without any spiritual feeling, from a vague love of excitement, and in the hope of ultimately getting something by it.

[They also took shipping.] This means that they embarked in the boats which came from Tiberias, and crossed over the lake.

25.—[And when they found Him on the other side of the sea.] The place where they found our Lord was on the north-west side of the lake of Galilee, on the opposite side from that where the miracle of feeding the multitude was wrought. The precise spot however where they found Him is a point which it is not very easy to decide.—Of course if we read the discourse which follows as one unbroken discourse, all spoken at one time without breaks or pauses, except such as arise from the remarks of the people who heard our Lord, there can be no doubt where our Lord was. The fifty-ninth verse settles the question: “These things said He in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.”—But if we suppose a break at the 40th verse, where the Jews begin “to murmur,” and a short interval before the discourse was resumed, it seems highly probable that the crowd found our Lord at the landing place of Capernaum, or just outside the city,—that the discourse began there and continued up to the 40th verse,—and that then, after a short pause, it was resumed “in the synagogue of Capernaum.” It certainly does seem rather abrupt and unnatural to suppose the crowd landing at Capernaum, going up to the synagogue, and there beginning the conversation with the question, “When camest thou hither?”

[When camest thou hither?] The question evidently implies surprise at finding our Lord, and inability to understand how He could possibly have got to Capernaum, if He did not go in the boat with His disciples. It is a question, be it remarked, to which our Lord returned no answer. He knew the state of mind of those who asked it, and knew that it would be of no use to tell them when He had come, or how.

Wordsworth’s idea that there is a mystical reference in this question to the manner and time of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, appears to me very fanciful and far-fetched.

26.—[Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say.] This solemn expression, as usual in St. John’s Gospel, introduces a series of sayings of the deepest importance. The very first was a sharp and cutting rebuke of the carnal-mindedness of those whom our Lord addressed.

[Ye seek Me ...not ...miracles ...eat ...filled.] This was a severe saying, and one which He, who knew all hearts and read all secret motives, could say with peculiar power. It is a sad exposure of the true reason why many followed our Lord, both on this occasion and on others. It was not now even desire to see miracles performed, as it had been the day before (see v. 2). These, after a time, when the novelty was past, would cease to astonish and attract. It was a lower and more carnal motive still: it was the mere wish to be fed again with loaves and fishes. They wanted to get something more out of our Lord. They
had been fed once, and they would like to be fed again.

The poor, and mean, and carnal motives which induce men to make some religious profession, are painfully exhibited here. Perhaps we have but a faint motion how little the reasons of many for coming to public worship or communion would bear sifting and examination. We may be sure that all is not gold that glitters, and that many a professor is rotten at heart. It was so even under our Lord’s ministry, and much more now. Augustine remarks how seldom “Jesus is sought for the sake of Jesus.”

Our Lord’s perfect knowledge of the secret springs of men’s actions is strikingly exhibited here. We cannot deceive Him even if we deceive man; and our true characters will be exposed in the day of judgment if they are not found out before we die. Whatever we are in religion, let us be honest and true.

To follow Christ for the sake of a few loaves and fishes seems miserable work. To some who know nothing of poverty, it may appear almost incredible that a crowd of people should have done it. Perhaps those only can thoroughly understand it who have seen much of the poor in pauperized rural parishes. They can understand the immense importance which a poor man attaches to having his belly filled, and getting a dinner or a supper. Most of our Lord’s followers in Galilee were probably very poor.

To deal plainly with people about their spiritual condition, and faithfully expose their false motives, if we know them, is the positive duty of ministers and teachers. It is no kindness or charity to flatter professing Christians, and tell them they are children of God, and going to heaven, if we know that they only make a religious profession, for the sake of what they can get.

Wisdom and discrimination in giving temporal relief to the poor are very necessary things in ministers, and indeed in all Christians. Unless we take heed what we do in such matters, we do more harm than good. To be always feeding the poor and giving money to those who make some profession of religion, is the surest way to train up a generation of hypocrites, and to inflict lasting injury on souls.

27.——[Labour not, etc...sealed.] This verse is peculiarly full of instructive lessons. (1) There is something forbidden. We are not to labour exclusively, or excessively, for the satisfaction of our bodily wants, for that food which only perishes in the using, and only does us a little temporary good. (2) There is something commanded. We ought to work hard and strive for that spiritual food,—that supply for the wants of our souls, which once obtained is an everlasting possession. (3) There is something promised. The Son of man, even Jesus Christ, is ready to give to every one who desires to have it, that spiritual food which endures for ever. (4) There is something declared. The Son of man, Jesus Christ, has been designated and appointed by God the Father for this very purpose, to be the dispenser of this spiritual food to all who desire it.

The whole verse is a strong proof that however carnal and wicked men may be, we should never hesitate to offer to them freely and fully the salvation of the Gospel. Bad as the motives of these Jews were, we see our Lord, in the same breath, first exposing their sin, and then showing them their remedy.

The figure of speech used by our Lord, which supplies the key-note to the whole subsequent discourse, is a beautiful instance of that Divine wisdom with which He suited His language to the mental condition of those He spoke to. He saw the crowd coming to Him for food. He seized the idea, and bids them labour not for bodily but spiritual food. Just so when He saw the rich young man come to Him, He bade him “sell all and give to the poor.”——Just so when the Samaritan woman met Him at the well, as she came to draw water, He told her of living water.—Just so when Nicodemus came to Him, proud of his Jewish birth, He tells him of a new birth which he needed.
When our Lord said, “labour not for the meat that perisheth,” we must not for a moment suppose that He meant to encourage idleness, and the neglect of all lawful means in order to get our living. It is a kind of expression which is not uncommon in the Bible, when two things are put in comparison. Thus, when our Lord says, “If any man come after Me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children, etc., he cannot be my disciple,” we see at a glance that these words cannot be taken literally. They only mean “If any man does not love Me more than father,” etc. (Luke xiv. 26.) So here the simple meaning is that we ought to take far more pains about the supply of the wants of our souls than of our bodies. (See also 1 Cor. vii. 29; 2 Cor. iv. 18; 1 Sam. viii. 7; John xii. 44.)

When our Lord says, “labour for the meat that endureth,” etc., I think He teaches very plainly that it is the duty of every one to use every means, and endeavour in every way to promote the welfare of his soul. In the use of prayer, the Bible, and the public preaching of God’s Word, we are specially to labour. Our responsibility and accountableness, the duty of effort and exertion, appear to me to stand out unmistakably in the expression. It is like the commands, “Strive, Repent, Believe, Be converted, Save yourselves from this untoward generation, Awake, Arise, Come, Pray.” It is nothing less than wicked to stand still, splitting hairs, raising difficulties, and pretending inability, in the face of such expressions as these. What God commands, man must always try to obey. Whatever language Christ uses, ministers and teachers must never shrink from using likewise.

The “meat that endureth to everlasting life,” must doubtless mean that satisfaction of the cravings of soul and conscience, which is the grand want of human nature. Mercy and grace, pardon of sin and a new heart, are the two great gifts which alone can fill the soul, and once given are never taken away, but endure for ever. Both here and in many other places, we must always remember, that “meat” did not mean exclusively “flesh” in the days when the Bible was translated, as it does now. The Greek work rendered “meat” here means simply “food” of any kind.

When our Lord says, “The Son of man shall give you the meat that endureth to everlasting life,” He appears to make one of the widest and most general offers to unconverted sinners, that we have anywhere in the Bible. The men to whom He was speaking were, beyond question, carnal-minded and unconverted men. Yet even to them Jesus says, “The Son of man shall give unto you.” To me it seems an unmistakable statement of Christ’s willingness and readiness to give pardon and grace to any sinner. It seems to me to warrant ministers in proclaiming Christ’s readiness to save any one, and in offering salvation to any one, if he will only repent and believe the Gospel. The favourite notion of some, that Christ is to be offered only to the elect,—that grace and pardon are to be exhibited but not offered to a congregation,—that we ought not to say broadly and fully to all whom we preach to, Christ is ready and willing to save you,—such notions, I say, appear to me entirely irreconcilable with the language of our Lord. Election, no doubt, is a mighty truth and a precious privilege. Complete and full redemption no doubt is the possession of none but the elect. But how easy it is, in holding these glorious truths, to become more systematic than the Bible, and to spoil the Gospel by cramping and limiting it!

When our Lord says, “Him hath God the Father sealed,” He probably refers to the custom of setting apart for any specific purpose, and marking for any peculiar use by a seal. So also deeds and public documents were sealed to testify their execution and validity, and give them authority. So it is said in Esther: “The writing that is written in the king’s name, and sealed with the king’s ring, may no man reverse.” (Esther viii. 8.) The expression applied to our Lord in this place certainly stands alone, but I think there can be little doubt as to its meaning. It signifies that in the eternal counsels of God the Father, He has sealed, commissioned, designated, and appointed the Son of man, the Incarnate Word, to be the Giver of everlasting life to man. It is an office for which He has been solemnly set
apart by the Father.

Parkhurst thinks that the word means “Him hath God the Father authorized with sufficient
evidence, particularly by the voice from heaven; and he refers the sealing entirely to the
testimonial which the Father had borne to the Son’s Messiahship. This also is Suicer’s view,
and Alford’s.

Stier remarks, “This sealing is not to be understood merely of miracles, but of the stamp
divinity which was impressed upon His whole life and teaching.” This is Poole’s view,
and Hutcheson’s.

It has been thought by some that there is a tacit reference here to the history of Joseph;
and that our Lord meant that as Joseph was appointed to be the great almoner and reliever
of the Egyptians by the king of Egypt, so He is appointed by the King of kings to relieve
the spiritual famine of mankind. At any rate it is an apt and suitable illustration.

The idea of Hilary, and some others, that the expression “sealed” refers to our Lord be-
ing the “express image of the Father’s presence,” appears to me far-fetched and without
foundation.

The last words of the verse would be rendered more literally, “Him hath the Father
sealed, even God.” It almost suggests the idea that our Lord desired to prevent His hearers
supposing that He referred to Joseph as His father. It is as if He said, “the Father I mean,
remember, is not an earthly father, but God.”

Rollock remarks on this verse, that our Lord does not confine Himself to showing the
folly of only seeking “the meat that perisheth,” but is careful to show the true food of the
soul, and to point out who alone can give it. He observes that this is an example to us in
teaching man the Gospel. The remedy must be as plainly taught and lifted up as the dis-
ease. He observes truly that none can speak better of the vanity of earthly things and the
spiritual glory of heavenly than many Papists do. But it is when they come to the feeding of man’s
soul that they fail. They try to feed him with man’s merits, the intercession of saints, pur-
gatory, and the like, and do not show him Christ.

It is note-worthy that it was the remembrance of this verse which made Henry Martyn
persevere in preaching to poor Hindoos at Dinapore, in India. He had found they only
came for temporal relief, and cared nothing for his preaching, and he was on the point of
giving up in despair. But this verse came across his mind. “If the Lord Jesus was not
ashamed to preach to mere bread-seekers,” he thought, “who am I, that I should give over
in disgust?”