

DO NOT BE A MATERIALIST

6 ²²The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite side of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not joined his disciples in that boat, but that his disciples had left by themselves. ²³But some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the crowd had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴When the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum, looking for Jesus. ²⁵And when they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you get here? ²⁶Jesus answered them, I tell you the truth, You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not work for the food that spoils, but for the food that lasts for eternal life, [the food] that the Son of man will give you; for he is the one whom God the Father has affirmed. ²⁸Therefore they said to him, What must we do so that we may perform the works God requires? ²⁹Jesus responded to them by saying, This is the work God requires, [namely,] that you believe in the one whom he has sent. ³⁰So they said to him, What sign then do you give, so that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, He gave them bread out of heaven to eat. ³²Then Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, It was not Moses who gave you the bread out of heaven; on the contrary, it is my Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven—³³for the bread of God is he who comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world. ³⁴Then they said to him, Lord, forevermore give us this bread. ³⁵Jesus said to them. I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (Jn. 6:22-35)

See the attached Appendix for the Complete Text of John 6:22-71

Introduction

Are you a materialist?

The dictionary defines a materialist as someone who places the highest value on material well-being; someone who is pre-occupied with material rather than spiritual things. A materialist is someone whose whole life is absorbed by the things of this present material world, with little or no regard for the spiritual life. A materialist is someone whose attention is focused upon the tangible, visible dimension of this present world, so much so that he becomes insensitive to the spiritual dimension of life.

Consider the people whom Jesus addresses in this present passage of the Gospel of John: They sought physical, material bread from Jesus (vs. 26.) They demanded greater concrete proof to support Jesus' claims (vs. 30.) They viewed Jesus in human, not divine, terms (vs. 42.) They interpreted Jesus' teaching in a literal, physical sense (vs. 52.) They were a people who were pre-occupied with the material dimension of life and were utterly insensitive to the spiritual dimension.

The Word of God exhorts us not to live like materialists—focusing our lives on the earthly things of this present world—rather, we are to focus on the spiritual, because the things of this present world are temporary, but the kingdom of God is eternal.

I. Do Not Be a Materialist, on the Contrary, Seek the Spiritual Bread Jesus has to Offer

When the crowds re-gather around Jesus on the near side of the lake, our Lord rebukes them with these words: *"I tell you the truth, You are looking for me, not because you saw signs"* (vs. 26a.) These people were not flocking to Jesus because they had spiritual perception and have rightly understood the spiritual significance of the mighty works He has performed. They were not flocking to Jesus because they appreciated the fact that His miracles demonstrate that He is the divinely appointed Savior who came to give them entrance into the kingdom of God. They were not flocking to Jesus because they appreciated the fact that His miracles demonstrate the power, the grace, the blessing, the abundance of God and of His kingdom—it's not that they understood that His miracles are a foretaste of what He provides for His disciples in His Father's kingdom, as is portrayed in Revelation 7:16-17a,

Never again will they suffer hunger; never again will they suffer thirst ... ¹⁷for the Lamb who is at the center of the throne shall be their shepherd; and he will lead them to springs of living water. (Rev. 7:16-17a)

These people were not flocking to Jesus in order to become His disciples; they were not flocking to Him for deliverance from the wrath to come; they were not flocking to Him for entrance into the kingdom of God.

Now Jesus goes on to state the reason they were coming to Him, *"You are looking for me because you ate of the loaves and were filled"* (vs. 26b.) These people were flocking to Jesus not because they had spiritual perception, but because they had a physical experience—their stomachs had been filled with the food He provided—and they were hoping for more of the same. They were flocking to Jesus because they viewed Him as someone who was able to satisfy their physical and material needs, as is evident from John 6:2, *"A great crowd followed him, because they saw the signs that he had performed on those who were sick."* They were flocking to Jesus because they viewed Him as someone who was able to fulfill your political ambitions, as is evident from John 6:15, *"Jesus, perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force in order to make him king, withdrew again into the hills by himself."* These people were flocking to Jesus because they had 'felt needs' (they felt—they were acutely aware of—their need for food, for healing, for peace of mind, for stability in marriage and family, for success and prosperity), and they viewed Him as the one who can meet those needs.

What is our perception of Jesus? Do we merely perceive Him to be a wonder-working servant who can **adjust our environment** (physically, emotionally, socially) so as to make life comfortable? And who will continue to provide such services beyond the grave and on into eternity? Or do we rightly perceive Jesus to be a wonderful Savior who came to perform **the radical work of transforming us** (from being a practicing sinner into being a forgiven saint—a person who is devoted to his God) so that we may be spared from the coming judgment, might have a place in the kingdom of God, and might be a trophy of His grace unto the glory of His name?

When Jesus later goes on to speak of the life-giving bread of God—as opposed to the merely life-sustaining natural bread—the crowd expresses their craving for such wonderful bread: *"the bread of God is he who comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world. ³⁴Then they said to him, 'Lord, forevermore give us this bread'"* (vs. 33-34.)

In verse 63 Jesus indicates that He has been speaking in symbolic, or spiritual, terms: *"The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."* When He said, *"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if any man eats this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world"* (vs. 51,) He was referring to Himself and to His atoning death in the place of believing sinners. When He said, *"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day"* (vs. 53-54,) He was speaking of the necessity of receiving Him as the Source and Sustainer of spiritual life.

Let us not be materialists; on the contrary, let us seek the **spiritual** bread that Jesus offers. Let us recognize that Jesus is the Source and Sustainer of spiritual life—He is the One through whom we can receive the forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation to God and communion with God—and let us be sure to receive Him on these terms.

II. Do Not Be a Materialist; on the Contrary, Labor for the Spiritual Bread Jesus Gives

Jesus is speaking to everyday, common, ordinary people: farmers, fishermen, carpenters, merchants, and housewives. He counsels them and us: *"Do not work for the food that spoils"* (vs. 27a.) That is to say, do not devote your life to the losing cause of keeping your body alive.

The men of this world labor for the food that spoils—its perishable, it rots. They work long hours to purchase food, they consume that food, then they do it all over again, working more hours for more food to consume—and what does it ultimately profit them? The natural bread that feeds and sustains the physical

body does not give life, it merely sustains physical life, enabling men to go back to work and continue the cycle throughout the years of their lives until they die.

And what happens if by one's labors he should accumulate enough wealth to take care of his necessities and break out of the cycle of working for his daily bread to sustain him for more such work? Consider what the Lord Jesus says in Mark 4:18-19 in His parable of the gospel seed sown upon the various soils:

Still others are like seed sown among the thorns: these are people who have heard the word; ¹⁹but the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the intense desires for other things come in and choke the word, and so it becomes unfruitful. (Mk. 4:18-19)

The people described here are those who view riches as the means of delivering them from *"the cares of the world"*—the accumulation of wealth will enable them to support themselves and free them from the threat of poverty. But they fail to discern *"the deceitfulness of riches."* Material wealth delivers them from the cares of this world, but it entices them to devote themselves to the pleasures of the world they can now afford to indulge; their possession of material wealth does not free them to pursue the spiritual life. Consequently, the spiritual life is choked to death as they devote themselves exclusively to the pursuit of the "good life" of this present world that their wealth enables them to enjoy.

Here is the devil's strategy: convince men that they must first and foremost work hard in order to keep body and soul together, and then convince them to work even harder to indulge the body at the expense of the soul. What is necessary for the sustaining of the physical earthly life can easily become life-dominating, to the exclusion of the life of the soul. Our Lord Jesus describes the men of this world in the following terms: *"do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, What shall we wear? ³²The Gentiles seek all these things"* (Matt. 6:31-32a.) The Greek word translated *"seek"* (ἐπιζητέω) literally means, "to seek with intensity;" in other words, to become pre-occupied. In this case it is a matter of becoming pre-occupied with the physical and material dimension of life to the exclusion of the spiritual. What is necessary for the enjoyment of the "good life" can even more easily become life-dominating, for the affluent lifestyle and its pleasures demand more money; therefore, more time and effort must be devoted to securing the needed money to sustain and enjoy the affluent life.

Jesus counsels us to work *"for the food that lasts for eternal life"* (vs. 27b.) We are to put our labor, our effort, our heart and soul, into obtaining that spiritual food, which is imperishable and provides eternal life, as opposed to merely sustaining this present earthly life for a few short years. We are to invest our lives in Christ and the kingdom of God, rather than in ourselves and the things of this present world that is passing away. As the Lord Jesus teaches in His Sermon on the Mount: *"Seek first his kingdom and its righteousness; and all these things* [i.e.; the

necessities for daily living] *shall be provided for you*" (Matt. 6:33.) In the same vein, the Apostle John warns,

Do not love the world, or the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. All that is in the world—the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the empty glory of life—is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, and the desires that belong to it; but he who does the will of God remains forever. (1 Jn. 2:15-17)

Note that Jesus commands us to *"work"* for this spiritual food. The Christian life requires devotion, dedication, discipleship, as the Apostle Paul exhorts the Philippian church: *"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling"* (Phil. 2:12.) David's counsel to his son Solomon was as follows: *"Now devote your heart and your soul to seeking Jehovah your God"* (1 Chron. 22:19a.) The initial act of receiving Christ as our Savior is the beginning of the Christian life; it is not the consummation of the spiritual life. Jesus exhorts us to become His disciples:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls—³⁰for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:28-30)

This necessary dimension of the Christian life—discipleship—is glaringly absent from so much of contemporary "Christianity." As the Christian researchers, Barna and McKay state it:

Many Christians have taken the position that since their salvation is "guaranteed," they have no further responsibility to assimilate the tenets of Christ-like behavior into their lifestyle. [This false sense of assurance] has perverted their sense of enduring obligation to God. For this reason alone, the importance of discipleship ... cannot be overemphasized. (George Barna and William Paul McKay, *Vital Signs*; Crossway Books, Westchester IL; 1984; p. 145)

It must be stressed that this dimension of the Christian life known as discipleship is a necessity, it is not an option reserved for more "serious Christians." In giving the Great Commission, Jesus' command is, *"Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; ²⁰teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"* (Matt. 28:19-20a.) We must pay careful attention to the words of Jesus when He declares, *"Not every who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven, only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven"* (Matt. 7:21.) Or again, when He

says, *"If anyone would serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him"* (Jn. 12:26.)

Note further that Jesus assures us that our labor shall not be in vain, for *"the Son of man shall give to you"* this spiritual food (vs. 27c.) As we seek to cultivate the spiritual life, the Holy Spirit will develop that life within us, note Philippians 2:12-13,

Therefore, my beloved ones, just as you have always obeyed, so now—not only in my presence, but much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who is working in you both to [create the] desire and to [produce the] work for the sake of his good purpose. (Phil. 2:12-13)

Indeed, the spiritual life is cultivated and developed by means of the Holy Spirit, as opposed to our own human effort—we must surrender ourselves to Him and rely upon Him. In order to gain victory over the remnants of the old sinful nature and live out the new life of discipleship, the Apostle Paul informs us that we must rely upon the Holy Spirit: *"if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if **by the Spirit** you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live"* (Rom. 8:13.) Note that the attributes that are pleasing to God and are a reflection of His own divine character are in fact *"the fruit of the Spirit,"* as Paul points out to the Galatians: *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, integrity, ²³meekness, self-control"* (Gal. 5:22-23.)

Let us not be materialists; ...on the contrary, let us, in reliance upon the Holy Spirit, labor for the spiritual bread that Jesus gives.

Conclusion

The Lord Jesus Christ urges us not to be materialists, focusing all our attention on this present earthly life and investing exclusively in the things of this present world. We must not be materialists because such a lifestyle is a form of idolatry:

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. (Matt. 6:24)

The Lord Jesus Christ urges us to receive the spiritual life He provides and to cultivate that life, so that we may participate in that which is truly the "good life,"—the life of the kingdom of God—both now and forever.

Let us heed both the LORD's warning: *"What profit is it for a man to gain the whole world, but forfeit his soul?"* (Mk. 8:36.) Let us take to heart His promise: *"My Father's will is that every one who looks to the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day"* (Jn. 6:40.)

Appendix: The Complete Text of John 6:22-71

6²²The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite side of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not joined his disciples in that boat, but that his disciples had left by themselves. ²³But some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the crowd had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴When the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum, looking for Jesus. ²⁵And when they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you get here? ²⁶Jesus answered them, I tell you the truth, You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not work for the food that spoils, but for the food that lasts for eternal life, [the food] that the Son of man will give you; for he is the one whom God the Father has affirmed.

²⁸Therefore they said to him, What must we do so that we may perform the works God requires? ²⁹Jesus responded to them by saying, This is the work God requires, [namely,] that you believe in the one whom he has sent. ³⁰So they said to him, What sign then do you give, so that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, He gave them bread out of heaven to eat. ³²Then Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, It was not Moses who gave you the bread out of heaven; on the contrary, it is my Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven—³³for the bread of God is he who comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world. ³⁴Then they said to him, Lord, forevermore give us this bread. ³⁵Jesus said to them. I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶But as I told you, you have seen me, but yet you do not believe. ³⁷All whom the Father gives me will come to me; and he who comes to me I will by no means reject; ³⁸for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, [namely,] that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰My Father's will is that every one who looks to the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴¹Then the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, I am the bread that has come down out of heaven. ⁴²And they said, Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, I have come down out of heaven? ⁴³Jesus responded to them by saying, Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught by God. Every one who has heard from the Father, and has learned, comes to me. ⁴⁶Not that any one has seen the Father, except the one who is from God, he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷I tell you the truth, He who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, but they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that has come down out of heaven, so that a man may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if any man eats this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. ⁵²The Jews therefore argued with one another, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? ⁵³Jesus therefore said to them, I tell you the truth, Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,

and I will raise him up at the last day; ⁵⁵because my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me will also live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that has come down out of heaven; [this is] not like [the manna your] forefathers ate, but died; whoever eats this bread shall live forever. ⁵⁹He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

⁶⁰Many of his disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a difficult teaching; who can accept it? ⁶¹But Jesus, knowing that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, Does this teaching cause you to stumble? ⁶²[What] if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before? ⁶³It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no value. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. ⁶⁴But there are some of you who do not believe. Jesus knew from the beginning which ones did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵So he said, This is why I told you, No man can come to me, unless the Father has enabled him [to do so]. ⁶⁶At this point many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. ⁶⁷Jesus therefore said to the Twelve, Will you also leave? ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have believed and know that you are the Holy One of God. ⁷⁰Jesus answered them, Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? But one of you is a devil. ⁷¹Now he was referring to Judas the son of Simon Iscariot; for although he was one of the Twelve, he would betray him. (Jn. 6:22-71)