

**October 27, 2019**

**Exodus 16:1-5 / Psalm 78:17-29 / Matt. 6:19-24 / John 6:22-27**  
**Clamoring for the Perishable, or Working for That Which is Eternal**

Today I wanted to begin by asking you a couple of heart-searching questions:

What is it that you're pursuing in life? What drives you to get up every day and do what you do?

If you stay on the same course for the years or months or days you have left on this earth, what will you have to show for the gift of life you've been given? What will you have accumulated?

Or to use the words of Jesus: Will it be an accumulation of things that "spoil" (an accumulation of things, as Chap is fond of saying, that "are all gonna to burn anyway") **OR** will the results of your life here on earth be measured by things you sought and worked for that endure to "eternal life"?

That's the thought Jesus sets before us in today's passage. What will we pursue, invest our energies in, or strive to attain in the short lives we have here on this earth? Will it be those things which are temporal, will spoil, or pass away **OR** those things which will endure, and last forever, and therefore follow us into the life to come?

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So, **FIRST**, let's start by looking at the *PEOPLE* in this passage: who they are and why Jesus speaks to them the way He does.

Because by all outward appearances they *SEEM* to be pursuing Jesus with an earnest desire to find and follow Him. They wake up in the morning and discover that although He did not get into the boat the night before with His disciples (to go over to Capernaum on the west side of the Sea of Galilee about 4 or 4.5 miles across from where they are), He's nowhere to be found!

So, they climb into boats that land near them (which had come from Tiberias) and mount a search to find out where He is, or where He went. And when they do find Him (on the other side of the lake) they ask Him: *“Rabbi, when did you get here?”* They had no clue whatsoever that during the night Jesus had walked 3½ miles on the surface of the water to get to the boat, climb in, and shortly thereafter arrive on the eastern side of the lake, in, or near, Capernaum.

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Yet, instead of praising them or commending them (as we might think He would) for taking the time and making the effort to come all that way to find Him – Jesus does just the opposite. Being a reader of hearts, and a discernor of motives, He takes the opportunity to verbally chastise or rebuke them for pursuing Him with the wrong motivation altogether!

He *KNOWS* (as only one who was God could) that what they’re *REALLY AFTER* is not Him, or things eternal, but more free meals! *“You are not looking for me because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill”* (v. 26).

He had fed 5000 men plus women and children the day before, and given them so much to eat that after they had all had their fill, there were 12 baskets of food left over! And now, the next morning, some of those 5000 men (obviously not all of them) pursued Him with no other intent than that of getting more free meals!

And when you think about it, what hungry, unemployed person (as they likely were) wouldn’t do that?! All they have to do is follow this guy around, listen to Him when He talks, and they can get free meals for themselves and their families! It really is an enticing proposition that’s far to too good to pass up!

Yet, Jesus didn’t see it that way. Hungry or not... / With real physical needs or not... / Jesus is still determined that when people seek Him, it should be to gain those things that last into eternity.

He makes it pretty clear in this passage that He didn't simply come to feed people! That was NOT His ultimate purpose! He provided them with food the day before because they were hungry, and Matt. 14:14 suggests He did so out of compassion.

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Yet He doesn't want them to get the wrong idea. He doesn't want them to think He simply came to feed people – at least not with food that spoils or perishes. Later on, in Acts 6, there are people set aside to do that as their ministry – distributing food day in and day out as they cared for the widows and the poor in Jerusalem.

Yet even in that case, it was NEVER to the exclusion of proclaiming the message of Eternal Life. It was always done in conjunction with that. In fact, the reason Acts 6:4 gives us for picking specific people to run the feeding program of the church was to free up those who needed to keep preaching and teaching the Word.

That's one thing we can learn: *In the Bible it's NEVER one or the other!* It's never the preaching of the Word to the exclusion of people's needs, or people's needs to the exclusion of the preached Word. It's never the eternal to the exclusion of the temporal, or the temporal to the exclusion of the eternal. They are always inseparable partners in the work of the furtherance of God's Kingdom.

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So, what do we find? We find that after looking for Jesus all morning – waking up to find He's gone, then locating, getting into, and making the trip across the lake in "some boats" (plural), and eventually coming to find Jesus in Capernaum – they speak with Him only to receive a bit of a rebuke.

It's one of those places where Jesus was NOT particularly "user friendly." He obviously hadn't read Dale Carnegie's best seller: *"How To Win Friends and Influence People!"*

In fact, had it been one of those “sales calls” where someone breaks in and says, *“This call may be monitored and used for training purposes”* they probably would have pulled Jesus aside afterward, and said: *“Look Jesus, if you’re really looking to grow the number followers you have, pointing out their ill motives after they’ve made such an earnest effort to find you is NOT the best way to do it.”*

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Yet that IS what He does. Despite the effort it took for them to find Him, Jesus tells them you are only looking for Me, *“because you ate the loaves and had your fill.”*

And then adds: *“Do not work for bread that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval.”*

In other words: *“You have pursued and sought me out – and that’s good! But if you’re going to expend such effort, it should be to pursue that which is eternal and not simply food that spoils.”*

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Which brings us to the **SECOND** thing I want us to do: Consider how this message from Jesus to them applies to us. Because I believe this same rebuke He gives to them is intended for all to hear. A rebuke that serves to get us to ask ourselves what OUR motives are for pursuing or following after Jesus.

So, again (because the text demands it) I want to ask you a few more heart-searching questions. Questions only you can really answer, like: Why are you here today? What brought you here? Was it a desire to find Jesus and seek things eternal **OR** was it a desire to simply get some temporal need met?

Are you following, pursuing, or looking for Jesus in order to get things that will be stripped from you when you pass away, or are you pursuing and working for those things that *“endure to eternal life.”*

If Jesus were to look deep into your heart (as He did with these people):  
 What would He see you are really after by pursuing Him?

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You see, if we take this passage seriously, we should *ALL* honestly ask and answer those questions. Otherwise we may expend great effort crossing this wide lake we call our life, only to stand before Jesus (as all people one day will) and be rebuffed (like the people in this text) because the whole time we were pursuing Him we were doing it for all the wrong reasons. With the hope of getting from Him temporal things that will spoil or pass away.

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And just so you don't hear Jesus wrong (or me!) we need to see He does not immediately give up on them, or cast them aside as lost causes, because they seek to find Him to use Him to get some earthly need met. All of us (if we're honest) would have to admit we've done that very thing on occasion. We've sought Jesus out with the sole purpose (or primary purpose) of wanting Him to meet some temporal need or supply material things, related entirely to this life and not eternity.

After all, says Paul, no one seeks Jesus, pursues Jesus, comes to Jesus, or follows after Jesus, with totally godly, pure and unselfish motives – all the time! Paul goes to great lengths to assure us of that in Rom. 3:5-20 where he writes: *“There is none righteous, no not one. None who understands. No one who seeks God...”*

In other words, there is no one who seeks God simply to have God. We all invariably seek Him to receive something from Him.

And Jesus not only knows that, He assures us that in certain ways that's OK. We see that when the Roman Centurion sought Him out simply that He might heal his son. We see that when the friends dug a hole in the roof of a house where he was teaching, simply that they could lower their paralyzed friend into His presence to be healed.

And there is also the 10 lepers, and the woman with a flow of blood, and the father with the demon possessed son who would throw himself into the fire.

There were plenty of times when people pursued Jesus for what we could call “selfish” or “self-serving” reasons (like the people in this text). They pursue Him only to gain things that will not endure into eternal life, but simply to meet some temporal need.

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In that sense this passage can be a bit confusing for some. Because He chastises these men for their temporal focus, but not others, which forces us to ask what are we to take away from this?

And the answer? *It's a matter of priorities.* That things eternal (as we who know our Bibles should already know) far outweigh any of the things this life has to offer. It's a matter of what's *MOST* important.

Those who don't believe in life after death obviously *CANNOT* accept this. For if this life is all there is, the things of this life are what matter most. And that *IS* how many people view things. But those who believe what Scripture teaches view life differently.

*WE* know that although people's temporal needs are important, they are *NOT* the most important. What lasts forever cannot compare to those things that are temporary, transient and decay!

Jesus wants us to see that if we are going to put out so much effort, and work so hard to find Him, it should be in the pursuit of things that last forever. For, as He says elsewhere, *“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul?”* What good would it do in the end if I were to be healed of every sickness but die in my sin? If I were to have an abundance of food and clothes and houses and cars and a bank account that would never run dry, but stand before God on the Day of judgment without my countless sins pardoned, or my transgressions

forgiven, and thus perish eternally? What good would all those temporal things do me then?

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So, please don't hear Jesus wrong! He's NOT saying we can't go to Him asking Him to supply our daily physical needs. In the prayer He Himself taught us He has instructed us to pray for, "*our daily bread*" – which does spoil, and does not endure into eternity!

But He is saying that far too many people seek Him for that reason alone (even those who say they seek Him for other reasons). And that's *NOT* what He wants. If we seek Him, it should be primarily because we want *HIM*, and not just temporal toys and goodies from Him.

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As important as temporal things *SEEM* to us now (in this brief life we have which passes like a vapor, fog, or mist which appears in the morning and gone by noon) they have no value in eternity.

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So, if I may, let me ask you again (in keeping with this text): Why are you here today? What brought you here? What did you come hoping to receive today from the Lord? Did you come with a desire to find HIM, and learn from the Savior, and lay hold of things eternal, or simply to get something from Him that's simply for this life alone, will spoil, pass away and be stripped from us at death?

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Which brings us to our **THIRD** point. That the words "*food which spoils*" is simply a general phrase which encompasses that category of earthly things we will never be able to carry with us into eternity. His message, therefore, is very clear: We are not to pursue Him with little more than the twisted and ungodly hope that if we do, He will in return bless us with an abundance of temporal, perishable or material things. He is our Redeemer and Lord who came to earth that we might be saved from the power, penalty and presence of sin in our lives, not the One we use to help us achieve earthly success, or accumulate earthly wealth.

This is only ONE of many passages in the NT that dismantle the false and heretical gospel so popular here, and elsewhere, which goes by names like: *“The Prosperity Gospel”* or *“The Health and Wealth Gospel”* or *“The Name It Claim It Gospel”* or *“The Best Life Now Gospel.”* A gospel that promises its adherents that if they will just be a faithful believer, God will make them rich, healthy and happy in this life.

Whereas Jesus encourages us to pursue and pour our energies into those things that will follow us into eternity, these preachers encourage going to Jesus in the pursuit of things that we can never take with us. So please be warned. It’s the world that lives, works and strives in hot pursuit of material things, not the people of God.

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God promises to supply our *NEEDS*, not all our materialistic *WANTS*. Generous as He is, He will often bless us with more than we need – so we can share it with others. But Jesus *NEVER* promises to make us rich, and nowhere encourages us to work hard in the pursuit of earthly wealth. Work hard to store up treasures in heaven? Yes. But work hard to store up treasures on earth? No.

Paul summarizes the Christian view of life so perfectly in II Cor. 4:16-18 where he says: *“Though outwardly we are passing away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us and eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we (that is, we Christians or we believers) fix our eyes (our eyes of faith) not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

How important it is in this materialistic world that we be reminded of that regularly, so we can recalibrate the compass point of our lives, and reset our priorities! For what both Jesus and Paul want us to know is that those things which matter *MOST* are invisible, spiritual, and eternal, **NOT** visible, material or temporal! They are the everlasting things of the kingdom of our Christ and not the passing things of this earth.

Which brings us to our **LAST** point, and the ultimate question that we must all ask ourselves. Why do I pursue Jesus? When I sense that I've come into His presence, what do I seek to ask Him for? Do I want Him, or do I simply want to get something from Him?

Do I seek Him for the intimate fellowship and spiritual communion I can share with Him, or do I seek Him with the hope that I can get Him to bless me with some earthly treasure I seek?" Do I see *HIM* as the treasure I am willing to sell all to purchase and possess / or do I *USE HIM* to get the earthly things I crave more than Him?

You see, the true Gospel, the biblical Gospel, the pure, un-adulterated and unamericanized version of the Gospel is that through faith in Christ we get GOD!

Through faith we are joined to Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit who is the presence of God – *Father, Son and Holy Spirit* – come to dwell in our bodies! And there is NO GREATER GIFT we could ever have, or any other gift we should ever desire, more than Him!

Think of it! After much time and effort these men find Jesus. But they don't really want Jesus, they only want from Him "*food that spoils*" or something that will pass away.

They can have HIM, but they don't want HIM. Here He is, the "Bread of Heaven," and they're looking for a few loaves of bread! The greatest treasure in all creation is standing right in front of them, and they really want a few mere loaves of bread and maybe some fish!

And they're not the only ones for whom that's true. I believe I told you of the conference on "Idols of the Heart" which I taught in India, and before even starting, I asked everyone there: "*If you could have 1,000,000 U.S. dollars or you could have Jesus, but you couldn't have both, which would you take?*" And almost every one of the 200+ in attendance – without exception – said the \$1,000,000.

When offered the gift which nothing in the universe can ever compare to, they chose the \$1,000,000 instead. I'd probably get a similar response in churches here in the States. Not outwardly, of course, because we know better! Like kids at a children's sermon in church, we know the right answer is usually "Jesus." Americans are better at giving the "correct answer" even though in many a heart many would be thinking they'd prefer to have the \$1,000,000.

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Yet, what Jesus wants us to realize that HE is the gift of all Gifts! In fact, God would be withholding from us the greatest of all gifts if He were to give us everything in the entire universe, but withhold from us the gift of Himself.

An ancient prayer I once read drove this home for me where it says: *"O my God, if I worship you from fear of hell, burn me in hell. If I worship you from hope of heaven, bar me from it. But if I worship you for Yourself alone, withhold not from me the beauty of your presence."*

I wonder how many people would clamor to those, "Prosperity Gospel Churches," if all they received for all their efforts, and work, and prayers, and faith, was GOD?

In fact, if all I could ever promise you was nothing more than HIM, or *"those things that endure to eternal life,"* would you still come simply to seek and possess and fellowship with HIM?