

[John 6:24-35](#)

When it was announced in one of my previous appointments that I was due a sabbatical, the only reaction from my senior steward was, 'What's he going to bring back for us?' There was no concern that it might be beneficial for me, or that I might need it.

It was rather like the 'What's in it for me?' question that we often find in wider society. Politicians know how significant that question is, and so when elections come around their manifestos are packed with promises to the voters about what they will do for them, rather than casting a vision of a better society.

And 'What's in it for me?' is very much the attitude of the crowd that has hunted down Jesus and his disciples after they tried to escape across the water when Jesus knew they wanted to make him king by force. That's what Jesus tells them their motives are:

²⁶ Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.'

I'm not going to deny that there are many benefits that come from following Jesus, but the crowd were only following Jesus in a geographical sense. They weren't following him as their Teacher, let alone their Lord and Saviour. They were in it for themselves.

And if we're honest, sometimes our words and actions as Christians betray similar attitudes. 'I didn't get much out of that service this morning,' say some people – completely missing the point that worship is an act of giving, not getting.

Instead, Jesus says this:

²⁹ Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.'

But is that good enough for the crowd? No! They want a sign like manna from heaven (verses 30-31), despite what they witnessed with the feeding of the five thousand. There's just no pleasing some people!

Which I guess is the point. Jesus hasn't come to please people, any more than ministers have. Sometimes when strangers discover what my work is they say to me, 'It must be hard trying to please everyone.'

My response is, 'It isn't my job to please everyone.'

You get the impression that no matter what Jesus says, this crowd has little intention of becoming disciples. In fact, were you to skip to the end of the chapter you'll find that apart from Jesus' inner circle, nearly everyone bails on him.

And Jesus lets them go. He doesn't soften his message for them. He doesn't redesign his message around their 'lived experiences'. That's something today's church would do well to ponder.

So what does it mean 'to believe in the one [God] has sent' (verse 29) and to feed on Jesus, 'The bread of life' (verse 35)?

Well, let's eliminate one very basic, minimal thing. Believing in Jesus is not simply about believing he exists. Jesus is right in front of the crowd – they know he exists – so it can't be that.

It's something more. It's believing in him in the sense of trusting in him – and trusting in him to the extent that we entrust our very lives to him. What does that involve?

Firstly, it's going to involve trusting in his *teaching*, and that's quite a radical step to begin with. So much of Jesus' teaching cut across the norms of his day and that's every bit as true, if not more so, today. Loving God and loving our neighbour ahead of ourselves? Forgiving people that our society freely calls 'unforgivable'? Serving others instead of lording it over them?

Oh sure, when we see other people living selflessly, we applaud and we nominate them for an honour from the Queen, but to think that we should all do this – isn't that a bit much? We'll let these other noble people do the good acts vicariously for us.

But if we believe in Jesus and his teaching, we won't make excuses like that.

Secondly, it's going to involve trusting in his *kingship*, which is very different from the kingship that the crowd imagined. No military ruler killing his enemies here.

Instead, Jesus spoke language about being lifted up as if on a throne – you find this in John 12:32:

‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’

But he is referring to his death on the Cross! That is where he will be enthroned as King of Israel and King of all creation.

Believing in Jesus means trusting that his Cross is what changes the world. The Cross is where notice is served on the powers of evil. The Cross is where our sins are forgiven, and we begin the journey of living a new and different life.

Thirdly, it’s going to involve trusting in his *love*, because all that I’ve mentioned so far about the teaching of Jesus and of his Cross indicate what an upside-down approach to life he brings. Does he have our best interests at heart when he calls us to self-denial? How exactly can his death serve as the turning-point of history?

I believe Jesus knows that what he asks of us is the opposite of what the world broadcasts, but he invites us to look at all he has done for us and then answer the question as to whether we will trust him.

In particular, he reminds us of all he has done in giving up the glory of heaven to take on human flesh among the poor, and in going to the Cross for us.

All this is for us to trust in his love for us and hence also trust in his teaching and his kingship.

And with that relationship comes all the blessings we long for. They don’t come by us grabbing all we can have for ourselves with the ‘What’s in it for me?’ mentality.

By trusting ourselves into Jesus’ hands we gain more than bread to feed our stomachs: we gain the very Bread of Life, Jesus himself (verse 35).