

The Marks of an Unbeliever

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An essential part of Christianity is a right understanding of who Jesus is and what He came to do. In the Gospel of John, our Lord makes seven “I Am” statements that reveal more about His nature, His character, and His purpose for coming to this world to die for the sin of the world.

We’ve first looked at Jesus’ message in John 6, where He called himself the “Bread of life.” This conversation was, by the world’s standards, the “worst sermon Jesus ever preached.” He went from 20,000 followers to twelve in a matter of hours. Jesus’ words, however, accomplished what He set out to do, which was to separate His true followers from those who were not called by Him.

Let’s take a deeper look at the central theme of Jesus’ words when He called Himself the “Bread of life,” and why the crowd rejected Him while Peter and ten disciples believed.

Let’s start with the unbeliever as exemplified through the crowd in John 6. First, we see that the individuals that composed this large crowd were focused on physical needs – not spiritual matters. When Jesus talked to the crowd about desiring “food which endures to eternal life,” the people only thought about sustenance to fill their famished bodies. The men and women listening that day could not believe that Jesus was who He said He was

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– the Bread of Life, the One doing the Father's will, from heaven. They sought after Jesus to fulfill their temporal problems.

Second, the crowd wrongly believed that they had to do “the works of God” for this bread that Jesus was promising them. Even though the people still could not grasp His spiritual meaning, Jesus reversed their flawed theology by telling the multitudes that they, being mere humans – and sinful at that – could not do God's work to obtain the bread that He was offering them. These people thought they could earn God's favor and provision based on their legalistic obedience to the Mosaic Law, and Jesus used this interaction to expose their pride and self-righteousness.

Third, because these individuals had no spiritual discernment and no true desire for Christ, they tried to manipulate Jesus into feeding them – much like the devil attempted to use Scripture against our Lord earlier in His ministry. Members of this crowd continued to misunderstand the true nature of their sinful condition and their desperate need of more than their next meal, asking for a sign to believe in Jesus. At the beginning of the chapter, however, Jesus already performed a sign with the feeding of the multitudes – and they subsequently proved that they, like all unregenerate sinners, did not have the willpower within themselves to believe in Him.

The crowd in this narrative displayed the very position of many unbelievers who claim that they would believe if Jesus would just do ‘this’ or ‘that.’ These unbelievers fail to realize they do not have the power to change their own hearts. Unbelievers cannot believe based on external signs. They need an internal transformation; they require the work of God in their hearts. Men and women, boys and girls, must realize that until they put down their own dreams of self-righteousness, autonomy, and authority – and until they are willing to come to Jesus solely on His terms (not theirs), they will never believe. That willingness comes from God alone.

Fourth, the crowd made an incorrect calculation that their choice to believe in Jesus was supreme to any eternal plan from the Father. Jesus emphasized that their unbelief, which they conditioned on the appearance of a sign, was irrelevant to the plan of salvation. No matter how the crowd responded to Him, Jesus would not lose a single person given to Him by the Father that day. Jesus was on a divine mission – not to do His own will, but the will of the Father.

While the unbelieving crowd could not comprehend the meaning of Jesus' words to them, these statements from our Lord should bring tremendous joy and peace in the hearts of all believers. The logic of this passage first demonstrates that everyone the Father gives Jesus will come to Him. Not a single person will resist, reject, or refuse to come – at least not determinatively. All those given to the Son by the Father will come.

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The passage also shows that all who come to Jesus will be received by Him. Jesus never rejects anyone who comes to Him because believers are a gift from the Father to the Son. As such, Jesus will raise every believer to eternal life on the last day. No one given by the Father will be lost. Jesus will remember all believers forever. This understanding should comfort every believer, that on their death beds, they can fade from this world in perfect peace, knowing with full assurance that Jesus will not abandon them in eternity.

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When Jesus finished His discourse with these multitudes, He was left with twelve around Him – and one was a devil (Judas). Peter’s response to Jesus signified the heart of a true disciple: one who leaves everything behind, placing all hope and trust in their Savior and Lord. The response from Peter and ten others highlights how true disciples respond to the gospel.

Believers have been given understanding of Jesus’ words – something that Peter proved with his response to Jesus. The crowd never accepted that Jesus was pointing to Himself as the true bread that came from heaven; they kept thinking about physical bread to feed their growling stomachs, and that they needed to bring something to the table to manipulate Him into giving them what they wanted.

For believers, John 6 is such a beautiful and sobering picture of how we could never have obtained salvation of our own volition. When we were unbelievers, we were more concerned with our earthly needs, and we focused on what our works could do to gain us our temporal desires. We thought it was our plan that might move God to do what we wanted, when and how we wanted Him to act. Only through Jesus, the Bread of life, can anyone come to a right understanding of who He is and receive the full and free forgiveness He alone offers through the eternal plan of salvation, salvation by His grace through faith in His name.



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