

Returning to our study in John 6. Let's begin our time together this morning by reading the passage we'll be looking at: John 6:22-36

²² The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but *that* His disciples had gone away alone. ²³ There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus.

²⁵ When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷ Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

²⁸ Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

³⁰ So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is ^ℓthat which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world. ³⁴ Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."

This is now our third week in John 6. So far in this chapter we have seen the account of the miraculous feeding of the 5,000, plus women and children. Most likely putting it more around 15,000-20,000.

Then in verses 16-21, the passage we studied last week, we considered another very prominent miracle of Christ Jesus, as He walks on water, on the tumultuous Sea of Galilee.

But unlike the feeding of the 5,000 earlier that day, that miracle was limited to just the disciples. It was a unique miracle for His own to help them understand who He is and reveal Himself to them as the **I am**. The self-affirmation of deity.

But now, for the rest of this chapter, Jesus is going to address the very crowd he fed the day before, and give a discourse explaining the significance of it.

And if you were here last week, you remember that we fast forwarded to the end of this chapter and considered how this crowd responds to Jesus after He taught them.

What's the end result of His miracle and teaching ministry to this crowd?

Looking ahead to John 6:66, “**As a result of this** (that this, the things He was saying)

“As a result of this, many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.”

“Disciples” there is not referring to the twelve. Because in the next verse Jesus makes a distinction between the twelve and this larger group.

Rather, it’s referring to all those who had “believed” in Him on account of the signs that He was doing. Those who were following Him and associating themselves with Him, but they had superficial, empty faith.

And so, this chapter begins with Jesus feeding a massive crowd miraculously. The massive crowd is enthusiastically attached to Him and following Him around. He’s healing those with physical afflictions.

But by the end of the chapter, all that’s left of that huge crowd is the original 12 disciples. And it is the reaction to Jesus’ teaching separates this crowd from the disciples.

That brings us this morning to verses 22-36. In this entire section, in fact, from verse 22 all the way through verse 65, Jesus is interacting with false converts.

Those who think they are believers, those who think they are worshipping the true God, but do not actually believe.

As we’ve referenced many times in our study through this gospel, Jesus knew all men. John 2:24. “And He didn’t need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.”

But that’s not true for you and I. So how do *we know* when someone is a false convert? After all, we can’t see their heart.

How do we know when someone is associating with Jesus, claiming to be one of His disciples, and yet not genuinely converted?

As Jesus ministers to this large crowd, what we are going to see in this passage is 3 characteristics of a false convert.

3 characteristics of those who associate with Jesus, maybe even “follow” Jesus, and yet are unconverted.

But before we look at those characteristics, let’s first let’s establish the context in verses 22-24.

6:22, “**The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea...**”

Now, take note of that chronological indicator, “the next day,” because it will be pretty important later on in this account.

This is on the next day, the morning *after* the feeding of the 5,000. Just a few hours later than the private miracle we looked at last week, where Jesus walked on the water to His disciples in the boat.

Notice, the crowd is still hanging around the same location where they were fed the day before.

After all, they weren’t going anywhere after receiving that free meal. Not to mention all of the miraculous healing of afflictions they have Jesus do. We’re not walking away from this guy, He’s the answer, the solution to all of our problems.

Our health problems, our financial problems, our government problems.

Many of them spent the night out there on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee. The feeding of the 5,000 was around dinner time, and soon after, evening came and much of the crowd camped out under the stars.

No doubt expecting to meet again with Jesus in that location the next day.

Continuing in verse 22, **the crowd... saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but *that* His disciples had gone away alone.”**

And so the crowd knew that Jesus was still there the night before when they saw the disciples leave in their boat.

So they just assume Jesus is still around here somewhere. Not knowing what happened in the middle of the night.

He had gone to them privately, walking on the sea, and joined them in the boat. Which means now He is with the disciples on the other side, the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee.

In the meantime, verse 23, **“There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks.**

What are these boats and why did they come? We don’t know because the text doesn’t tell us.

Perhaps it was friends and relatives of the those in the large crowd that had followed Jesus over to the other side of the sea.

And upon daybreak, these friends and relatives began searching for the crowd to find their loved ones and transport them back home. That’s certainly one explanation for where these boats came from.

Another explanation would be opportunistic water taxis seeing the large crowd on the shoreline, and recognizing we could have a very profitable day.

In either case, several small boats came to the shore where the crowd was located.

It's interesting how John refers to the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. Notice the middle of verse 23 again, "**where they ate bread *after the Lord had given thanks.***"

This takes us back to verse 11, "**Jesus then took the loaves, *and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated;***"

Why does John emphasize that detail? I think it is to indicate that right after the Lord had given thanks is when the bread was multiplied.

And so back in verse 23, when John uses this same phrase, He is wanting his audience to know that when they ate the bread it was no ordinary, no common occasion.

It was "**after the Lord had given thanks.**" And thus, when the bread was miraculously multiplied for the crowd.

Verse 24, "**So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus.**"

Remember, they had walked from Capernaum and that region the previous day. A multiple mile trip along the northern coast of the sea of Galilee.

They saw Jesus and the disciples going in a boat across the northern tip of the sea to the other side.

They were hoofing it on land trying to keep up and actually beat Jesus and His disciples to the other shoreline.

Now, here it is on the next morning, this crowd is going to take the more convenient route back. They take advantage of the small boats that had arrived.

By the way, this certainly indicates that *some* of the large crowd had dissipated. We know it must be a reduced number from the previous day because how many small boats would it take to transport 5,000 men plus women and children?

Some surely made the journey back in the middle of the night. Or were even already on their way walking back at this point.

But nonetheless, still a sizable group of people. A fleet of small boats would be required to accomplish this.

And they all head to Capernaum, verse 24 indicates. They know to go to Capernaum because they knew that's where Jesus had instructed His disciples to go.

This crowd is determined to see Jesus again. The text even says at the end of verse 24, they **“were seeking Jesus.”**

An entire crowd of seekers, longing to see Jesus once again.

But seeking Jesus and longing to be with Him and follow Him is not necessarily a sign of saving faith.

And that brings us to the first characteristic of a false convert - They associate with Christ for earthly gain. 25-27

Verse 25, **“When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You get here?”**

Notice, **“when they found Him.”** This would not have been a difficult task.

Capernaum was tiny. Not to mention that Matthew 4:13 indicates that Jesus had even settled in Capernaum for a season of His ministry.

And so if they knew He was in and around that region, it would not be difficult to locate him.

Furthermore, at some point the context does end up in the synagogue in that region.

We know that because of verse 59: **“These things He said *in the synagogue* as He taught in Capernaum.”**

Whether that is referring to this entire discourse He has with the crowd, or merely that at some point it transitioned into the synagogue.

In either case, the determined crowd seeking Jesus had no difficulty locating Him.

And their question to Him here in verse 25 is appropriate. **“Rabbi, when did you get here?”**

They are confused because of what we saw in verse 22. There was only one boat where all of us were last night.

We saw the disciples get into that one boat and head back over here. You weren't with them, Jesus. And now you somehow got here before us. How is it you are here?

Furthermore, notice they still have no idea who He really is. They address Him with the title, **“Rabbi.”**

And yes, He was that. The disciples appropriately referred to Him by that title in this gospel. But the disciples also have identified Him as the Son of God, the Messiah.

The problem with the crowd is that they never get to that point with Him. They *always* identify Him with insufficient titles, like we've seen: Prophet, King, now Rabbi.

Not exactly going in the right direction with their understanding and titles. This is the first of several clues in our passage that the crowd is actually declining spiritually. We'll see another evidence of that in a moment.

Now, how would we expect Jesus to answer them? Probably by giving a straightforward response, directly telling them the truth about what happened.

Maybe it would sound something like this: "Let me fill you in on a few details you are ignorant of. You see, a few hours ago, while it was still dark and windy and wavy, I actually walked on water 3-4 miles and got in the boat with my disciples. And we arrived very early this morning, several hours ago."

That's how we might expect Him to answer. But notice how He actually responds in verse 26, **"Jesus answered them and said, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.'"**

This is yet another example of a response of Jesus that tends to confuse us. Because it appears as though He ignores their question altogether, not even referencing it in His response.

Kind of like what He did with Nicodemus. Look back 3:2, **"Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."**

How do we expect Jesus to respond to him: You are correct that I am teacher, you are correct that God is with me. Now let me tell you more about my identity."

But that's not at all how He responds to Nicodemus: **3 Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'**

He doesn't respond at all to what Nicodemus is saying. He answers with a completely unrelated statement pertaining to Nicodemus' spiritual condition.

Why does He do this on occasion with certain groups or individuals? Because He knew all men, He knew that until Nicodemus was born anew, He would never accept the truth about who Jesus was.

And back in our text in verse 26, it's the same principle at work. When Jesus responds like this, it indicates the insincerity, the unbelief in the group He's interacting with.

Notice, this crowd isn't even at the level of *sign* faith. *Miracle* faith. They have somehow managed to go *below* miracle faith.

Faith in signs is better than no faith at all. John 14:11, Jesus even says that: **11 Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.”** [[also see John 5:36]]

The works, my miracles are not an end in and of themselves, they are rather signs, pointing to who I am. And who sent me.

And so at the very least, if you had nothing else to go on, my miracles speak for themselves.

In fact, glance over at 5:36, **“36 But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.”**

John did no miracles. I do miracles and if you thoughtfully reflect on them, they should lead you to the recognition of who I am.

But back in John 6:26, this crowd is not willing to reflect on the sign. They are not willing to consider that the miracles are intended to communicate something about this individual.

They are not interested at all in the meaning of the miracles. The *significance* of the feeding that occurred the previous day.

In fact, we could even make an argument that they are *declining* spiritually. For instance, look back at verse 2, what was true of them the day before:

“2 A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.”

So they started off at least being amazed at the signs, the supernatural work. But now, they seek Him not even for the signs, but merely for the physical benefit.

One author put it this way: “Instead of seeing in the bread the sign, they had seen in the sign only the bread.”

They are not curious about the miracles, confused about how this man can do miracles. No, their motives are below even that.

He says to them here in verse 26 that the only reason you're seeking me is the product, the earthly gain, the physical benefit I provide. I just happen to do it through miracles.

And so, Jesus to them, was basically a magician.

We don't care who You are, and how You do it, we don't care if it's natural or supernatural. All we know is, You are able to make health problems go away, and you are able to provide us with a free meal.

You represent the solution to our earthly problems.

Again, before we criticize and condemn this crowd, let's be reminded of their context and condition compared to ours.

To most of us, at this point in history at this location on the globe, we don't know poverty to this degree.

Most of us, do not know what's it like to go without food. To be unsure of where your next meal is coming from.

But the same could not be said about this crowd. Most of these people would have been very poor. In jeopardy of going hungry often.

And so this isn't just a *free* meal, that you and I might get excited about. This for many was a *necessary* meal.

And so the temptation and unbelief is not justified, but it is certainly understandable. To cling to this mysterious individual who can make our lives better.

This is what the false convert does with Jesus. He is merely a stepping stone, the means to an end.

The goal is earthly relief or gain. If Jesus can provide great. I'll take Jesus.

If He can increase my bank account, if He can make my suffering go away, if He can heal my marriage, if He can improve my life here and now, I'll take that deal.

The false convert uses Jesus to as a means to an end. He represents merely the fulfillment of my earthly needs and desires.

But Jesus cares about motives for seeking Him. He cares far more about spiritual and eternal needs than solving one's physical and temporary needs.

And so, He puts the issue on the table in verse 26: **“truly, truly I say to you, You are seeking me because you ate of the loaves and were filled.”**

Truly truly, absolute certainty, of utmost importance. I am speaking with the utmost clarity and authority *on your motives*.

Look back a few verses earlier in this account, in verse 15: **“So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.”**

When people are only interested in Jesus as a source of safety and security and deliverance from oppression, He withdraws. He removes Himself as a source of those things.

And we find the same thing back in verse 26. He doesn't physically withdraw this time, but He does confront and challenge this crowd regarding their motivation in following Him.

And what is remarkable about this is that today, in many circles, we've actually encouraged people to do this. We even believe the church's *job* is to do this very thing.

To create false converts by catering to them.

How does the church do this? Drawing them in with something they already know they need and desire, something they're already inclined to in their natural, fallen state.

And then once you've won them over by catering to their preferences, once you've won them over with your compassion in meeting their felt needs, then give them the truth of the gospel and they'll be more likely to listen.

It's a sanctified version of the *bait and switch* method.

The church pretends initially like it's about feeding you, building an orphanage, providing medical care, but really once you get in, you find out it's *supposedly* about something entirely different. The truth of the gospel.

And we are told that the church *must* do gospel ministry in a way that the culture not only understands, but also *finds attractive*.

Otherwise, they'll never listen to you about Jesus, they'll never entertain worshipping Jesus.

How do you do that? How is the church supposed to demonstrate its value and make the gospel more attractive to the world?

Well, you identify social ills, social problems in a given society and you seek to alleviate them.

And thereby the church demonstrates its worth in a given area, the church gains credibility in the culture by proving it is doing something beneficial for society.

If people are starving, create a soup kitchen.

If people are suffering, offer medical care.

If people are oppressed by systems and injustices, help to break those systems down and free them.

If people don't have clean water, dig a new well and provide it for them.

And the idea, if the church would be as serious about these things as it is about the truth, well then we would *really* start to have some influence, or so we're told.

Author and pastor Joel James wrote an article entitled, "Regaining Our Focus: A Response to the Social Action Trend in Evangelical Missions."

Joel James ministers in Africa and therefore has had a front row seat of how evangelical missions has shifted its focus over the years.

And he reports that what is happening is that America is sending "missionaries" to Africa who are primarily concerned with social reform.

And in that article he is pointing out the biblical inconsistencies in their argumentation, as well as the negative effects it has on the church there.

If you're wanting to study this issue further, I would commend that article to you.

Here is a crucial clarification he wrote about in that article: "We ardently believe that Christians can and should be involved in meaningful demonstrations of compassion—everything from giving a sandwich to a homeless person to working at an orphanage."

And so yes, individual Christians are called to love their neighbor as themselves. Obviously, as individual Christians we're going to have a heart of compassion and mercy on those who are suffering and in need.

Indifference to the afflicted or those in need is certainly not a Christian virtue.

But that's not what is going on today in what is known as the social gospel movement.

It's not really referring to the heart of compassion that you and I are called to do as individual Christians, it's not talking about you and I loving our neighbors as ourselves.

But rather that *the church* has an *equal* responsibility to preach the gospel *and be* involved in social reform.

That's the issue. To treat those two ideas as *equal partners* in the church's mission.

Practically speaking, that means when you go on a church's website you should see their doctrine and preaching ministry, how they are ministering to the saints, the people of God.

And with an equal emphasis, there should be a section on the website detailing all the ways the church is involved in social work in that particular community.

This is why today you have the idea that the gospel is no longer just God saving sinners through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ.

It is just as much about *human flourishing* in the here and now. And therefore, when it comes to purpose and mission of the church, *building an orphanage* is just as much a fulfillment of the great commission as *planting churches*.

But interestingly, we would find no such support for an idea like that in the NT. The details of the great commission, for example, those details are clear about what the purpose of the church is, and would challenge that very concept.

The mission and purpose of the church is clear in the NT, so where does this addendum to gospel ministry come from? *It comes from the world.*

The world cares about those things. The world cares much about social reform and riding societies of all injustice and all suffering.

The world has organizations devoted to helping those in need. Think of the United Way, the Red Cross.

That's not foolishness to the world. That makes perfect sense. Furthermore, the world is better at that than the church.

The government has more resources and programs to care for those in need than the church. And if the government, or any institution of the world, can do it as good or even better than the church, you know it's not the purpose of the church.

Again, I turn to Joel James, "And when the world sets the agenda, it is no surprise that the gospel, expository preaching, and serious theological training sometimes slip into second place..."

Now, just so you can hear it from the pen of a social gospel promoter, a pastor and author who passed away last year. He wrote, "If you care about having an influence on society, evangelism is not enough," (185)

What does he mean by that? Later on he writes this: "... while the mission of the church... is to evangelize and make disciples, individual Christians must be well-known for their sacrificial service to the poor and common good *if a society is going to give the gospel a hearing.* (263, fn. 37)"

Now, it's really the last part of that sentence that is the dangerous part. Because again as I mentioned a minute ago, individual Christians should have the reputation of loving their neighbor as themselves.

They should have the reputation of being good citizens who are good for society and the common good. That's 1 Timothy 2:2.

But the assumption in the last part of that statement is that we can make the gospel more appealing to unbelievers by doing things in the community that naturally make sense to them.

That they already appreciate and value as unbelievers.

And then once the unbelieving community can see that the church is actually beneficial to society, it's kind of like a united way with some religion attached to it, it will then at least tolerate its existence, or better yet, accept its message.

Another quote from that same author: "But *effective* churches will be so involved in deeds of mercy and justice that outsiders will say, "We cannot do without churches like this. This church is channeling so much value into our community that if it were to leave the neighborhood, we would have to raise taxes."

Help to eradicate poverty, clean up the city, fight against societal injustices. Plant some trees, adopt a sidewalk.

The world will then be much more likely to accept the truth if the church would maybe preach a little less, and work a little more in the community.

I belabor that point, as we return back to John 6:26. Because this would be the perfect time for Jesus to demonstrate the appropriateness of the social gospel and the value thereof.

After all, He just compassionately and miraculously fed them the day before. Not to mention all of the physical healings He has done for them up until this point.

He has benefitted their community in many ways. They're attracted to Him, He's got them in the door. He's got the hearing, they're listening.

He has greased the slide with His miraculous compassion, and now surely, when He shares the truth with them, they'll accept it.

But instead of that, what we see Jesus do here is challenge this crowd for associating with Him to make their life easier.

"you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

We're told that the provision of physical needs and relief from difficulty serves an advantage for truth, it will serve as a catalyst. It will make the truth of the gospel more palatable. It will grease the slide.

But that's now how Jesus views it here. Rather, the feeding the previous day has become an *obstacle* to saving faith.

So much of an obstacle that merely one day after satisfying the hunger of thousands, He teaches this discourse and doesn't even get one convert out of thousands.

The entire crowd, by the time He is done teaching, walks away, including some who were called disciples. Some who had previously committed to Him.

The mercy ministry, the compassion expressed in the feeding of the 5,000 yields absolutely zero positive effect.

If social reform greases the slide for gospel ministry, if the church should be doing these things because it make unbelievers more conducive to accepting the message...

Well, the church must know something Jesus didn't right here.

In fact, the church must be better at it than Jesus. Because when it comes to the social gospel, His ministry was a failure.

In this account, His mercy ministry of feeding the hungry becomes a liability. An obstacle to saving faith.

Now, let's not swing the pendulum too far the other way and not recognize that the Lord can use those things, acts of compassion. They can be tools the Lord uses in our ministry to unbelievers.

But they are in no way an essential component of the ministry of the church.

Here in this passage, Jesus refused to allow the world to dictate how it will be reached. He will not let the world set the terms, set the agenda of the church.

They were not interested in who He was. They were merely interested in how He could improve their life on earth.

Jesus, and by extension His church, must have a higher interest, a greater priority than merely meeting the felt needs of people.

Notice in verse 27 how He exhorts this crowd in light of their godless motivation in seeking Him.

²⁷ Do not work for the food which perishes,

Present imperative – do not work. Which means, you are working, you are laboring for the food which perishes, and you need to cease.

Now, taken in isolation, this could be a problematic statement. Because we could misunderstand Jesus to be commanding idleness. Even unemployment.

Stop laboring, stop working for food which perishes. Stop laboring to provide for the basic necessities of this life. Quit any job you have and don't worry about earning a living.

But this is obviously not what is intended here. Not to mention how it would contradict other clear passages in the NT commanding God's people to work. (Eph. 4:28, 2 Thess. 3:10)

Rather, this statement must be understood in light of the contrast in verse 27, **“Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life,**

It's a statement of comparison. Where Christ is exhorting the crowd to labor, to work, to spend far more effort to obtain eternal life, than merely preserving your physical life.

The want, the need of your soul requires far more preoccupation and attention than the needs of your body.

This is very similar to a passage we cross-referenced a few weeks ago: It's a familiar one to you:

Matthew 6:33, **“33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”**

He's not saying don't plan, don't work, don't provide or think about the needs of this life.

But He is saying, as someone observes your life, what is your priority? Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

Or in our passage – labor for the food which endures to eternal life.

The point isn't to identify, “what is the food” which endures to eternal life? Jesus doesn't answer that yet. He will as the discourse continues identify the “food” as Himself.

But for now, the emphasis is on the kind of food to labor for. Your consuming desire and effort should be eternally and spiritually focused, as opposed to temporally and earthly focused.

Again, we might be tempted to distance ourselves from this crowd, as if *we ourselves* don't associate with Jesus in this way.

We don't labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life.

And maybe that is indeed true of you. But if you believe that is indeed true of you, consider this statement from John MacArthur:

“Which gives the most anxiety? Your sins or your misfortunes in life? That's a good test. The one born of God is overwrought with his sins.”

Let's just broaden that principle out: If indeed you are one who has your spiritual priorities in place.

If indeed you are striving and laboring far more to invest in your spiritual life than your physical life...

What are you most consumed with in your life, your thoughtlife? What is the all-consuming preoccupation, the dominating thought patterns in your life?

What are the things that cause the most angst, the most fears?

Is it your spiritual life and your relationship with God?

Or is it the things of this world that will not transfer to eternity?

As you evaluate your life, what is it you labor for? You invest in the most? What gets the most of your attention and focus and effort?

Now, maybe you're thinking: this is sounding like salvation by works. Jesus is saying labor and work for the food which endures to eternal life.

That's not at all what He is saying here, as the relative clause makes clear. Notice the middle of verse 27, "**which the Son of Man will give to you,**

The Son of Man, the mysterious divine figure out of Daniel 7:13, He will *give to you* this food.

Which means it is a *gift*. Who receives this gift? We're not there yet, but notice in verse 29 the first of several references in this chapter, in this very discourse teaching the premium and importance of faith:

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.

The Son of Man gives the spiritual food of Himself to those who believe.

How can this crowd be so confident that eternal life is found in this one speaking to them and not another?

Notice the last clause of verse 27, "**for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.**"

One commentator had a helpful treatment on the language of this seal:

"The affixing of a seal was common in antiquity as a mark of ownership. In an age when many were illiterate the seal attested ownership as a written label could not."

"But a seal could also *authenticate* a document: the seal showed that the seal's owner approved. This is the meaning here. The Father has set the seal of his *approval* on the Son."

In other words, God the Father has authenticated, certified the Son, authorizing Him as the one who alone can provide eternal life.

This seal speaks not only of the *exclusivity* of this one, but also the *authorization* of this one to bring salvation.

The false convert associates with Christ for earthly gain. The gain of their earthly existence improving in some way.

Christ to the false convert is merely a steppingstone to fulfill their natural desires.

That brings us to the second characteristic of the false convert - They assume their works will earn them eternal life. 28-29

²⁸ Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?”

This perhaps is the easiest way to know if you or someone you know is a false convert. An inability to grasp the concept of salvation as a gift to be received by faith.

I cannot tell you how many times I have sat across from someone who has been in church, sitting under the Word of God for years on end. Their Bible looks worn out and well-read.

And yet, when I ask them what the gospel is, they have no idea what I’m even asking.

When I rephrase it, “what are you trusting in for salvation?” on what grounds would God grant you entry into heaven?”

And the professed believer in Christ, the long time bible reader and church goer, gives an answer like this:

I have a desire to keep the commandments of God, I try to love others as myself. I read the bible as much as I can, I pray as much as I can, I go to church as much as I can.

That is the testimony of the false convert. One who seeks eternal life as the result of their own works.

Which is natural to mankind, and why it is inherent in every religious system outside of biblical Christianity.

That’s what this crowd does. Instead of focusing on the gift – He just said at the end of verse 27, Son of man **will give to you**. But they don’t hear that, they focus on work.

“What shall we do.” Jesus, you just mentioned *eternal life* and *working* in the same sentence. We can get behind that. Now just tell us what to do that we may work the works of God.

That is to say, the works that are accepting or pleasing to God.

Here is the pride of the false convert – they assume their own ability, they assume their own works could be righteous enough for God to accept them.

It’s also important to note that the false convert is concerned with the things of God. Heaven and hell. The false convert is involved in religion. They are among God’s people.

They are not *indifferent* to the Word of God and keeping His They are not necessarily anti-nomians. Anti law. Anti coming under the commandments of God.

The rich young ruler certainly wasn't an anti-nomian in Matthew 16. He loved the law and tried his absolute best to keep it.

The false convert may very well have a religious zeal in the things of God.

But, as AW Pink said, "It was the old self-righteousness of the natural man, who is ever occupied with his own doings."

"The carnal mind is flattered when it is consciously doing something for God. For his doings man deems himself entitled to reward. He imagines that salvation is due him, because he has earned it... Man seeks to bring God into the humbling position of debtor to him."

The false convert, no matter how much theology they know, no matter how long they have been in church, even a healthy church preaching the Word of God.

They often will not have gospel clarity. They will articulate a path to eternal life that involves their *doing* instead of their *trusting* in Christ.

Notice how Jesus responds to this question in verse 29, "**Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."**

They spoke about "works" plural. He answers in back with a singular "work." That singular work is to believe.

But it is not a belief or faith without a specific object. Notice, you "**believe in Him whom He has sent.**"

And so the work of God, that which God requires, what's pleasing and acceptable to God, is to believe in Christ Jesus, whom the Father has sent.

There is one singular work when it comes to gaining eternal life – that *work* is to *believe*.

And you might be inclined to challenge that language a bit because what is common in many passages is the *contrast* between faith and works.

And that is true. That is the overwhelming testimony of Scripture, to not classify faith as a work.

In fact, this is one of the only passages I can think of where faith is identified as a work.

But let's be reminded of why Jesus is using this language – the point here isn't to give a new theology about how faith is actually a work.

Rather, He's responding to their question by using the language they used.

Ok, you want to talk about works, you want to talk about what God requires of you – here it is – believe in Him whom He has sent.

And when we understand it like that, it is consistent with other passages: Thinking of Acts 16:30 and the Philippian jailer:

“30 and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

There’s something to be done. The sinner must do something. What is that something?

31 They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

So he asks what he must do, they respond with “believe.”

And so, granted while faith is contrasted with works in the scriptures, faith is still something we do. And in that sense, we can identify faith as that which is required of us by God.

The point here with this interaction is that false converts trust in themselves that they can perform the righteousness God requires.

They operate under the assumption that all they need is a list of commands and they can fulfill them and obtain eternal life.

**The false convert associates with Christ for earthly gain.
They assume their works will earn them eternal life.**

That brings us to the third characteristic of the false convert - They attribute their unbelief to a lack of evidence. 30-34

³⁰ So they said to Him, “What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?”

Now, at least in one sense, they are tracking with Jesus. “Ok, it’s not about working it’s about believing.”

“Great, give us something that will warrant our belief. Give us evidence so that we can be certain, and then we’ll believe.”

But these are self-incriminating words because this crowd, as recent as yesterday, saw a sign and personally benefitted from that sign. The miraculous feeding of the 5,000.

And so Jesus could simply say, “what about yesterday, in fact, isn’t the reason you’re standing in front of me because you’ve seen many signs already?”

Isn’t the reason you sought me out this morning in Capernaum because you’re expecting me to feed you miraculously again?

This is unbelief in the false convert. The selective memory, the inconsistency, the assumption that once I see I'll believe.

When in reality, no amount of evidence would ever be enough.

Herein lies the great irony and the problem with this crowd: If this man is who He says He is, He's making some really remarkable claims, therefore we expect to see miracles. Evidence that God is with Him.

And yet, when they see miracles, all they can see is the product, they fail to see the sign, the significance of the miracle.

This is the cycle of unbelief in the false convert.

Always demanding and assuming that the next piece of evidence, the next objection answered, just a little more proof, and then I'll believe.

The overall testimony of the Scriptures is that demanding further evidence is always a sign of insincere unbelief.

Look back for a moment at John 2:18, we've seen this before for in unregenerate men of religion:

Right after the account that is known as the cleansing of the temple. The Jews responded in a way that sounds eerily similar to what's happening in our account:

Look at 2:18, **“The Jews then said to Him, “What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?”**

What's on their minds is how do we discredit this man so we don't have to face the issue, what He just accused us of.

It's a hypocritical evasion. They want to deflect and divert from the issue, and so they hide behind what appears to be a genuine and honest question about authority.

Presenting themselves in the convenient position of just needing some clarity with regard to your credentials Jesus.

Which gives the impression, “we would be ok with what you've done here in the temple – completely exposing and uprooting our financial enterprise and how we are taking advantage of worshippers.”

That's not the issue at all, we would fine with all that, assuming you can provide some miraculous sign.

When in reality, no sign would ever be enough for this group.

Listen to Matthew 12:38, **“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” 39 But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign;**

There is the divine commentary on those who crave a sign. It is those who are evil and spiritual adulterous who crave and demand signs.

Why? It’s not that signs or miracles have no place or function. The signs aren’t evil.

They had their purpose. Jesus did many signs and miracles. But when people demanded signs in order to believe, he wouldn’t do it.

Because He knew it was a show, it was a way to evade and cover up one’s wickedness and unbelief.

An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign. It’s evil because one is suppressing what they already know to be true based on the evidence they do have.

And furthermore, they are giving the impression that they are sincerely open and willing to embrace Christ, if He were to accommodate to their demands.

Those who blame their unbelief on a lack of signs, a lack of evidence, there is no miracle, no evidence that would ever be enough. (you can also look at Luke 16:19-31 for a great example of that)

And so, back to our passage in John, this is the cycle of unbelief that the false convert is in bondage to.

The self-deception of believing that I just need a little more evidence and then I’ll believe. Show me something supernatural that I can’t explain, and I’ll believe then.

This is a sure sign of the false convert – inverting God’s order. I demand to see first before I will believe.

It is self-deception, flattering oneself, pretending that if I was given more evidence I would believe.

Now, again, lest we distance ourselves too quickly from this crowd, I turn to the words of AW Pink:

“Only a few hours before they had witnessed a miracle, which in some respects, was the most remarkable our Lord had performed, and from which they had themselves benefitted.”

And yet, does not our own sad history testify that this is true to life? Men are surrounded by innumerable evidences for the existence of God: they carry a hundred demonstrations of it in their own persons, and yet how often do they ask, What proof have we that there is a God?”

But he continues, “So, too, with believers. We enjoy countless tokens of His love and faithfulness; we have witnessed His delivering hand again and again, and yet when some fresh trial comes upon us—something which completely upsets our plans... We ask, Does God really care? And, maybe, we are sufficiently callous to ask for another “sign” in proof that He does!”

Notice next in the crowd up the ante. And uses Scripture to try to manipulate Jesus into giving them the sign they want.

“Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.’” [[Exodus 16, also Psalm 78:24]]

False converts know Scripture. Plenty of unbelievers know Scripture, but often they misapply it and twist it to suit their own purposes. Which is what they are doing right here.

Here they using Scripture to support their claim that He better provide a sign that is at least equal, if not superior to, what our fathers experienced in the wilderness.

After all Jesus, you are speaking and acting as if you are superior to Moses. And so we are entitled to see something that at least equates with what Moses was able to do, let alone surpassing it.

That’s the tone here: what sign are you going to perform, and by the way, here’s what our fathers experienced under Moses. So it better be as dramatic or even more so than that.

We’ll end here this morning and look next week at how Jesus responds to this challenge.

This morning we saw 3 characteristics of the false convert:

**False converts *associate* with Christ for earthly gain.
They *assume* their works earn them eternal life
And they *attribute* their unbelief to a lack of evidence**