

KWASIZABANTU MINISTERS CONFERENCE

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TEXT : JOHN 6:25 – 58.

THEME : JESUS CHRIST THE BREAD OF LIFE.

1. The Lord Jesus is only known by the people to whom He reveals Himself.

- 1.1 In most cases, what we know about other people is what they allow us to know about them, especially if we have not been with them for a long time. There are some things about people that you'll never know until they reveal them to you. So it was with the people who were following Jesus. Their deficiency in faith was exposed when they asked the Lord Jesus for a miraculous sign from Him for them to believe in Him. Indeed some of the people, if not all the people who were following the Lord Jesus were following Him with limited knowledge and for the wrong reasons. Some of them could have been following Him for some time but still did not know Him well, that is why they asked Him: "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see and believe you?" (v.30). This was in response to Jesus' statement that the person who does God's work will be seen by believing in Jesus. This is proof that they had not come to an understanding of who Jesus was. Again the Lord Jesus gave them some more information to help them understand Him better when He said to them: "...the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (v.33). But this did not help them either. To them this was still not clear that He was referring to Himself. This is evident in the way they responded when they said: "Sir...from now on give us this bread." (v.34). Again this is a clear indication that they had missed the point. Is this not proof that without God's help, man cannot understand the things of God?
- 1.2 Despite these people's weaknesses, the Lord dealt gently with them. It was on the basis of these misunderstandings that the Lord Jesus responded the way He responded in the following verse. The Lord in His grace did not scold them for their failure to understand Him – instead He helped them understand what they had missed. He responded by simplifying His answer, trying to come down to their level of understanding. This is how He answered them: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (v.35). He did not only reveal Himself as the bread of life, but He also told them how they could access this bread – by coming to Him (which would quell their spiritual hunger) and believing in Him (which would quench their spiritual thirst).
- 1.3 Our Lord's revelation to the people carried a significant meaning. In those days, perhaps even today, bread was a staple food which people could not be without. This revelation was therefore telling all people that they needed Him for their survival. He was thus announcing Himself as the One no person can do without. As bread is necessary for sustenance (because it is a source of primary nourishment and growth), so is the Lord Jesus necessary for sustenance and growth for all people. It displeases God for anybody, especially Christians, to be spiritually hungry when God has personally made provision for such hunger to be quelled. The Lord's announcement of who He is reveals the fundamental role He fulfills in relation to the yearning of the human spirit. It also reveals the role He also fulfills as the Universal Provider. The Lord Jesus reveals that He is not a special diet for special people. You see, cake is special diet for the selected few but bread is for all – that is why the Lord

Jesus is the Savior of the world. This was confirmed by the Samaritans who came to meet the Lord Jesus at the invitation of the woman who met Him earlier at the well. This is what they said to the woman who had called them to come and meet Jesus: "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world" (4:42). What a quick discovery!! Or should we say: "What a quick revelation." **Indeed the Lord Jesus is only known by the people to whom He reveals Himself as the bread of life.**

2. The Lord's mission – the ministers mission.

- 2.1 After telling the people who He was, the Lord also announced to them His mission on earth. This is what He said to them: "...I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but to do the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day" (vv.38 – 39). This statement connects very well with the previous statement of self-revelation. It was necessary for the Lord's followers to know what the Person they were following was on earth for. This knowledge would help them understand why He does the things He does.
- 2.2 Since the Father's will was that the Lord Jesus would not lose any of the people that the Father had given to Him, how the Lord Jesus relates to them would be very important. It is imperative that the believers' relationship with the Lord Jesus must be very close and it must be closely monitored. There are two statements which the Lord Jesus uttered which point to the importance of this relationship. In v.44 He said: "no one can come to me unless the Father draws him," and in v.55 He said: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."
- 2.3 These two verses show us that the Lord attaches great importance in this relationship. For this reason, He takes it upon Himself to bring the believer to Him – He does not leave it to the person to make personal attempts to come to Him. And as believers we know that when God does something Himself, the result is guaranteed. As another proof of the importance of the God-man relationship, after the person has come to faith in God, God provides the means for that person to remain in the faith. This is made possible when the person feeds continuously on the Word of God which God provides for the believer. It is clear that the Lord plays the leading role in helping the Christian to remain in his/her position in Christ.
- 2.4 As the bread of life, the Lord Jesus beckons those who believe in Him to come closer to Him so that they can enjoy good fellowship with Him. It is the believer's responsibility not to allow earthly things to interrupt this relationship. In order for the Lord not to lose any person, the believer must keep on feeding on the Word of God. When believers fail to feed themselves with God's Word, the result is the Christians' spiritual poverty, culminating in the Church being full of weak Christians. The feeding on the 'bread of life' helps the Christian to have good self-esteem. When the Church does not feed on the Word of God, the result is a weak, spiritually anemic Church which does not know the Lord's will for it. Such a Church is in danger of not remaining in the Lord's sphere of security.

3. The minister's challenge in fulfilling his mission.

- 3.1 The first challenge that the minister of God's Word is faced with is to set a good example for the sheep to follow in his footsteps. In a society that is fast becoming a 'watching' society, instead of a reading society, the minister must model the Christian life for his congregation. The followers are well within their rights to imitate their leader. This knowledge should keep the minister on his knees continuously as his life has the potential to build or destroy the lives of many people.

- 3.2 The minister must live out the real life of **v.55** which says: “For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.” The worldview of today’s society is different from that reflected in the verse above. The followers of the minister ought to see the real life in him that God gives to His followers. The reality of following Christ should permeate through the minister’s daily interactions with the people. Those who look up to the minister for guidance must be able to reap the benefits of their personal feeding on the Word of God and the minister’s habit of feeding on the Word of God.
- 3.3 It is also the responsibility of the minister of God’s Word to help the Christians in his care to move from the point of conversion to where God wants them to be. This does not happen automatically at conversion. Just as the people who were following the Lord Jesus did not understand who He was, so can it be that the people in the minister’s care may not understand the One they are following. This then becomes the minister’s responsibility to help them understand the meaning and reality of following the Lord Jesus. As the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to His followers, so is the task of the minister to help the people of God understand the Jesus they are following. This needs to be done with love and care. Depending on the background of each individual believer, the minister has the task of shepherding both the easy and the not-so-easy to lead.
- 3.4 Another challenge that God’s ministers face is to help those who have committed to following the Lord understand God’s process of discipleship. Many Christians struggle with God’s requirements on His followers e.g.: love, patience, holiness, etc. Many followers of the Lord Jesus Christ do not believe they can attain these characteristics. They see them as qualities that can only be achieved by some special people – not themselves. But the reality is that anybody who believes in the Lord Jesus should be able to achieve them. It is one of the minister’s challenges to help his people believe that they have the potential to live the life God wants them to live and that God has supplied them with everything they need to live such a life. We live in times where God’s people are busy with their daily activities just like all other people. Yet for the Christian, the conditions of following the Lord Jesus are still the same as those for the people in those days. Just as the Lord required His followers then to feed on His Word continuously, so does He still require today’s busy Christian to do the same – to feed on His Word continuously and to believe in Him. The process that leads to remaining in the Lord Jesus does not change with time – the Lord Jesus does not change, He is still the bread of life today like He was yesterday. What this bread did yesterday when people ate it, it still does today when modern people eat it. It is still as powerful today as it was when the Lord Jesus walked this earth.
- 3.5 It is the minister’s responsibility to make God’s people realize that their continued dependence on the Lord is not optional for them if they want to attain eternal life. The Lord Jesus said: “Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.” (v.57). The Lord has said it in no uncertain terms that there is no alternative to living the real life except to live it in Christ Jesus. Indeed the world makes alternative offers to people to use in order to bring fulfillment in their lives, but none can give anyone the life that God gives to those who obey His commands. It is the minister’s responsibility to point people to the Lord Jesus for their feeding, otherwise Churches will be full of spiritually hungry followers of Jesus Christ.
- 3.6 Another responsibility of the minister is to help God’s people to follow Jesus for the right reasons. Too many people are misled into following Jesus for the wrong reasons. Indeed the natural man wants things that satisfy him. It is naturally easy to follow someone if there are benefits that gratify the flesh. Not only is this a challenge for the followers, but it is also a challenge for the minister of the Word of God. Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders needs to be taken seriously by the minister of God’s Word today when he said to them: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the Church of God which He bought with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). The

minister of God's Word himself must follow the Lord for the right reasons if the people he is leading are to follow the Lord Jesus for the right reasons. The Lord Jesus warned: "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (v.27). The temptation is so great for people to focus on peripheral issues which seem to be attractive to the human eye and miss the core issue. As ministers of the Word of God we have been charged with the responsibility to help God's people focus on the main issue for following the Lord Jesus – the attainment of eternal life – by pointing people **ONLY** to the bread of life, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. But for this to happen, it must start with us, we must ourselves be focused on the bread of life Himself.

- 3.7** Let me highlight another challenge that the minister of God's Word may face along the journey of serving the Lord. There is the possibility of the minister becoming a danger to the people of God. This warning is contained in the Lord's pronouncement in **John 10:10** where the Lord Jesus says: "The thief comes only to steal and to kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" The negative message here is that the minister can become the thief himself, whether consciously or not. This can happen when he loses focus on the One who called him. If the minister's eyes move away from the Lord and he starts concentrating on himself, he becomes a danger to the people of God. He can steal or kill or even destroy the people of God. When the minister's work becomes more about him and less about the 'bread of life', the temptation is to steal God's glory and honor and make it his own. A perfect example is that of Absalom when he became puffed up and wanted to take his father's kingship. **2 Samuel 15:6** says: "Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the men of Israel." Absalom's actions caused the people's hearts to be removed from the rightful person – king David – and they were attached to him. This was not coincidental, it was a deliberate act. This is the theft that Absalom committed against his own father. God forbid that you as His minister would steal His people's hearts from Him and make them put their attention on you. But beware, this is a very real temptation to which many ministers of God's Word have fallen prey. Please, do not succumb to this evil – we cannot afford to take away the glory from the rightful owner of the flock – He alone is the bread of life, He alone gives eternal life to the people, He alone deserves the glory. Let us not cease to point people to Him and cease to point people to ourselves. **TO GOD BE THE GLORY.**

4. CONCLUSION

- 1. You and I need to ask ourselves the serious question: "Who do we point people to?"**
- 2. In our process of ministering the Word of God to His people, we must remember this: It is not about us but it is all about Him.**
- 3. TO GOD BE THE GLORY. AMEN!**