

# I Am the bread of life

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let's continue to read in John chapter 6. We're going to read from verse 37 to verse 48. So, let's again hear the Word of God. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my 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 those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, I'm the bread that came down from heaven. They said, is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, I come down from heaven? Stop grumbling among yourselves, Jesus answered.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, they will all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God. Only he has seen the Father. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.

Amen. So as we continue to think about who is Jesus, we're moving from the seven signs that John recorded to think now about these seven I am sayings. And we begin with this one, I am the bread of life. And when we hear that, it immediately becomes clear to us that Jesus was an imaginative teacher. He used word pictures to capture the imagination, to aim for people's hearts then and know. And in particular, we'll see in the next seven weeks, he uses word pictures to speak to us of his identity and of his work. So Jesus said, I am the bread of life. And perhaps when we hear this saying certain things come to our mind, perhaps we think of hunger, because we recognize that our bodies need bread. They need food for energy and for life. Perhaps we think about appetite. We all have appetites. And those appetites vary. In some parts of the world, to hear about Jesus, the bread of life, might make a person think about supply. Where will bread come from today? How will I get enough food to feed my family? Maybe it makes us think of source or provider. Who is it that puts bread on the table for a family? Well, our reading today picks up these themes in order to push the crowds beyond thinking about physical bread. They've just been fed miraculously by Jesus. So they're thinking about physical bread so that they might think about eternal life. So they might think about God's salvation.

They might recognize the work of God through Jesus, his Son. That leads Jesus to the first of his seven I am sayings. And they're very bold statements, each of them, because I am, it sees Jesus take for himself the Old Testament name, the personal name of God. I am who I am. And what Jesus does is he picks up on ideas that we see in the Old Testament, and he points to himself as the completion, as the fulfillment of all that was promised or pointed to. So these sayings, just as with the seven signs, help us to answer the question, who is Jesus, and why should I believe in him? This first saying reminds us, we sang it in Psalm 78, of the time when God rained down bread for his people when they were in the wilderness, having just been released from slavery. And now Jesus is saying, in an even greater way,

Jesus has come down from heaven as the true bread of life, the true bread from heaven. He is God's gift to the world to be received by faith. So as we think about this saying, let's think about three things together. Let's think, first of all, about the hunger, and then we'll think about the work, and then we'll think about the gift. So verse 25 to 27, we can think about the hunger. But first of all, a little bit of Roman poetry, or a Roman poet anyway, called Juvenal in the second century, was answering the question, how can the Roman Empire keep its citizens happy? How can they prevent the people rebelling? And his answer, very famously, give them bread and circuses. A people who

have full stomachs, and who are well entertained, that's all they'll need. The crowds in Jesus' day, and when we think about John chapter 6, that's exactly where they find themselves. In verse 15, after Jesus fed this great crowd, bread and fish, miraculously provided, they want to force him to be their king.

[ 5 : 52 ] And then in verse 25, they come to him and call him teacher, rabbi. They want him to be their teacher, but only because, and Jesus understands this, only because they want more bread. They want more miracles.

It's their version of bread and circuses. They say to Jesus, be our king, but they misunderstand his kingdom. They're thinking in physical terms, Jesus has come to establish a spiritual kingdom, to transform people's hearts and lives so there's loyalty to God.

They say to him, Jesus, you're our teacher, but they reject his truth. They're offended by his claims, and by the end of John chapter 6, many of them have walked away from him.

Jesus said to them in verse 26, very truly, I tell you, looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. They saw his sign, this bread that he provided, but they didn't understand where that sign was pointing them to.

Failed to see that it's pointing towards Jesus as the Son of God, who reveals God, who gives life from God. And so Jesus says to them, and he says to us, verse 27, do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life. Don't settle for food that spoils. What does he mean by that? Well, he's identifying in them that they would be satisfied with having their physical needs met. Food that spoils, then, is any satisfaction, any joy that we are setting our hearts on that is only for our physical life, that's only thinking about now, that ignores God, that ignores eternity, that ignores the spiritual part of ourselves.

[ 7 : 54 ] That's food that spoils. Now, that food that spoils can often be good things. Bread is good, because bread sustains life. Work is good. Family is good. But we can pursue them and make them so important to our lives that they become idols to us, and they take the place of God.

We can pursue the next great experience. We can live for our reputation and status. We can pursue health and fitness. And if we ignore Jesus, we're living for food that spoils.

Jesus would say the problem is that we can be too easily satisfied. deal with what's on the surface, and we miss the core emptiness in our heart, that God-shaped hole that only God and knowing Him can fill.

Perhaps we can put it like this in a way that we might understand. Boys and girls, you might recognize this, and I suspect adults too. Do you ever get to that point in late afternoon when the dinner is cooking, and you know there's a delicious, hot, healthy meal coming, but you find you're getting hungry and hungry and hungry? What do you want? You want a snack. It doesn't matter that you're going to be satisfied with good stuff. You want something that's probably not as healthy, that's not going to fill us up. We do this all the time, and we do this in our lives. Jesus is saying, I can fill you.

So you have eternal satisfaction, and we are content with things that are so much smaller. Jesus says, work for food that endures to eternal life. What does He mean by that?

[ 9 : 56 ] Well, He means in verse 27, the eternal life which the Son of Man will give you. So He's talking about Jesus coming to give this gift, this food that endures to eternal life. He takes that even further in verse 35 when Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. What will satisfy you is what I have come to give, and it's myself, Jesus is saying. And then verse 47, very truly I tell you, the one who believes Jesus has eternal life. To believe in Jesus as the Son of God, to trust in Him is to have this eternal life, is to have this food that endures. So Jesus is speaking of the hunger, the hunger for satisfaction.

I wonder if we recognize that longing in our own lives, longing for satisfaction, pursuing in various places, perhaps exhausting ourselves. The Rolling Stones there, didn't they? I can't get no satisfaction, though they tried and tried and tried and tried. Bruce Springsteen recognized it when he said, everyone has a hungry heart. We are made for God, and the only way we'll be satisfied is when we find God through faith in Jesus. Jesus says in verse 27, He gives the food that endures, and we can trust Him because on Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval. Jesus is the Father's approved agent. If we decide tomorrow we want to buy ourselves a BMW car, we will likely go to an approved BMW dealership. If we want to buy a BMW dealership, if we want to buy an iPhone, we will go to the Apple shop or to a recommended iPhone stockist. If we want eternal joy and satisfaction, where do we go? Go to Jesus, the Father's approved agent who promises to satisfy

the deep longings of our soul. So Jesus says to the crowds of His day, you are far too easily satisfied with bread and with services, you need to look for deep satisfaction in me. So to us comes the same challenge, the opportunity not to settle for the little crumbs of pleasure, but rather to choose the eternal feast of joy that comes in knowing Jesus, the bread of life. So that's the hunger that Jesus talks about. Now let's think about the work in verses 28 to 34.

Let's think for a moment about performance-related pay. Again, boys and girls, I wonder if in your family you were ever told, I will give you your pocket money if you do your chores. It's performance-related pay.

We see it in the financial industry. We hear about it in the world of football. You work hard, you work well, you will earn your salary. You may even receive a bonus. The crowds of Jesus' day assume this is how religion works. Religion is about performing in order to receive payment. Verse 28, they asked Jesus, what must we do to do the works God requires? We can think about this technically as a theology of merit. If I work hard, if I obey God's laws, if I am religious enough, God will owe me, God will pay me. Seems to be a common teaching in Jesus' day. He famously had a conversation with the man who asked, what must I do to receive eternal life. What must I do? Perhaps there's a common misunderstanding as well of Christianity in our day. What's Christianity about? You ask people on the streets about trying to be a good person, to do good deeds, to be nice. And the presumption is, well, so long as we don't break any major laws, so long as we are a good neighbor, then surely God will be obliged to welcome us into heaven. Now, there are two problems with that thinking, with the idea that performance-related pay applies to religion. One, it brings God down. It ignores the fact that God is holy, perfect, far above us in a category all of His own, in His being, in His character, in His actions.

That ignores that holiness by imagining that we can meet His standard. But it also does another thing at the same time. It lifts people up. It, by necessity, makes sin seem like a small thing. It loses sight of the fact that every sin is an eternal offense against God. Human pride says, I can do it if I try hard enough. I can match God's standard, and God's bound to be pleased with me. So, when we think this way, we're bringing God down, and we're raising people up. Jesus corrects their thinking, perhaps corrects our thinking, when He says in verse 29, the work of God, there's just one work, the work of God is this, to believe in the one He has sent. This is not a theology of merit. This is not me earning and proving myself. This is a theology of grace. This is trusting in Jesus' completed work of salvation and us receiving by faith. Our one work is faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus, the bread of life, the Son of

[16:24] God who gives life. So, we don't trust our obedience. We don't say, well, if I can work really hard on the Ten Commandments, if I work really hard on being in church and reading my Bible, we don't trust our obedience. We trust in His perfect obedience. We fail. He never did. In the same way, we don't trust our sacrifices. It's not about us giving to church or giving to charity or if I give enough time to help poor people or serve in a soup kitchen, then God will be pleased with me. No, we trust only in His perfect sacrifice.

That His perfect sacrifice of Himself on the cross was a demonstration to us of the justice of God against sin as Jesus became the sin bearer and was punished in our place.

That sacrifice demonstrates the extent of God's amazing love in the Son being willing to die for us while we we're still sinners and dead in our sins. Our hope doesn't rest on our efforts.

Our hope rests on the verdict that God places on Jesus' life. What is the verdict of God the Father on the Son? Well, three days after He died on the cross, He was risen in glory. He was risen in victory to show that the Father approved of His Son and of His saving work. And so we need to always remember, it's not about our works to be saved, it's about trusting in the work of Jesus. Jesus. Martin Luther, the reformer, spoke about needing to hammer the gospel into our heads constantly. Why is that? It's because we so easily forget. We can so quickly become like the crowd in our thinking.

[18:51] What works do I need to do so that I can win the favor of God? No, the work has been done and it's been done by Jesus. Our work is to trust in Him.

Who will we trust at the end of the day to be right with God? When we stand before God on the day of judgment, who will we trust? Who will we trust in our record? Will we trust in the record of Jesus? The invitation is to put all our hope and confidence in what Jesus has done to secure salvation for all who would look to Him, all who would come to Him, all who would believe in Him.

This chapter, chapter 6 is wonderful in showing, and we'll see it in a minute, that God is in charge of salvation. God is sovereign in salvation, but also telling us what we need to do in response to the finished work of Jesus. So in verse 34, verse 35, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Or verse 40, my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life. It's the work of faith in response to all that Jesus has done. Our good news rests in God's mercy and not our merit. God's grace and not our good deeds is where our hope is found, the work of Jesus and not our works.

And that leads us on to the last thing we're going to think about, to think about the gift, from verse 35 to verse 48. John Stott, one of the more prominent Bible teachers and writers in the English language in the 20th century, wrote a little book called *Why I am a Christian*. And he had various reasons listed, believing the truth claims of Jesus were true, and thinking that Christianity best explains the reality of humanity. But his number one reason, he said, the hound of heaven pursued me. Borrowing from a famous poem by Francis Thompson, I think was the chap's name. Stott was saying, I did not choose Jesus, Jesus chose me. That's true for John Stott, true for Paul the Apostle. The most dramatic conversion story in the whole Bible, I'm sure.

[ 22 : 08 ] We find Paul as Saul, hating Jesus, hating the church of Jesus, committing his life to arresting Christians, happy to see Christians be killed, breathing out murderous threats. But what happens?

The risen Lord Jesus meets with him on the Damascus Road. His life is transformed. He becomes a missionary, spends his whole life talking about the grace of God, salvation through Jesus. He did not choose Jesus, Jesus chose him. It's the testimony too of every Christian. As we understand God's grace, we understand, I did not choose Jesus, Jesus chose me. And in John chapter 6, Jesus emphasizes to the crowd that unless God acts to save, to choose, to call, we would and we will never believe in Jesus. So, all glory and praise and honor belongs to God for salvation. Let's use three words beginning with G to help us to see this point.

The first is the word gift. In verse 37, we read Jesus say, all those the Father gives me will come to me. And whoever comes to me, I will never drive away.

All those the Father gives me will come to me. So, every Christian, this is reality. We are gifted to Jesus by God the Father. God's eternal plan to save a specific group of people that we call the church was planned in order that his Son, Jesus, would receive honor and glory. And so, the Father is pleased to gift Christians, to gift the church to his Son, Jesus. So, when a person believes, when a person comes, when a person looks to Jesus, we need to understand that that in itself is a work of God. That's a gift of the Father to the Son he loves. Here's an amazing answer to the question, why am I a Christian? Someone asks you that tomorrow morning over tea break. Well, because God the Father gifted me to Jesus, the Son, so that his Son might receive honor. We might not talk that way, but that's truth. That's truth from Jesus in John chapter 6. That's why we're saved, the gift of the Father to the

Son. Another G. And this is in verses 37 to 40, the idea of guarantee. Because there is a remarkable chain of logic here to show that God's saving plan is definite. It is certainty, not possibility.

[ 25 : 18 ] So, let's see the definite certain language of Jesus. So, we began, all those the Father gives me will come to me. Not might, or some will, all will come to me. Continue verse 37, whoever comes to me, I will never drive away. To put it positively, whoever comes to me, I will certainly keep and guard.

says Jesus. And then he begins to speak about his Father's will and to make plain that Jesus does the Father's will. I've come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me.

And then verse 39, this is the will of him who sent me. What does God the Father will? That I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. The Father's will is that Jesus loses none. And remember, Jesus does the Father's will. So, it's not Jesus will keep most of his people. The vast amount. No, Jesus will keep and lose none. And he will raise them all up. So, salvation isn't just thinking about the past or the present. Here, Jesus points to the future, talking about the day when he comes back as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He's revealed in glory. He makes everything new and takes his people to be with him forever to enjoy resurrection life. That will happen for everyone who looks to him, who comes to him. Verse 40, my Father's will

is that everyone who looks to the Son who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life. Everyone shall have, not might have, shall have, and I will, not possibly, I will definitely raise them up at the last day.

Jesus is showing the guarantee of salvation. He is showing us this security that the Christian has because of this double grip that's going on here. The Father keeps us, the Son keeps us, they're doing the same will, and it's the will that all will be saved and none will be lost of those who are gifted to the Son by the Father. And this changes then how we, to think about the works versus the work, it changes how we think about salvation. So, a picture may help. No pictures are perfect, but this picture may help. So, imagine we're out at sea and you hear the distress, man overboard. Now, at that point, there are two ways, well, possibly more than two ways, but think about two different ways that a rescue could take place. One, from the safety of the ship, somebody could throw out the life buoy, and the cry could go out, swim and grab it. That's one way that a rescue can happen. [ 28 : 42 ] But another way is that a life raft is lowered from the boat that is then paddled over, that the person in distress is then hauled in and carried back to the safety of the boat. In which case, it's a very different message. It's the message, I've got you, trust me.

And I would suggest that rescue one presents a wrong view of Christianity that some people have, where it's like, well, God does his bit, he throws out the life buoy, and then it's up to me to do my part. The idea that God might make salvation possible, but it's up to us to do the rest.

That's a wrong view because it doesn't give glory to God, and it doesn't say that everything from beginning to end rests in God and his grace. That second rescue is much closer to the right view of Christianity, where we understand that everything depends on God's rescue plan. It all rests on the finished work of the Lord Jesus. That Jesus came to make salvation definite and secure, certainty, not possibility. Faith rests in Jesus and his work alone.

And again, we can see that from our third G, which is the word grace. And we find the crowds from verse 41 begin to grumble at Jesus. They don't like this idea that he says that he's the bread that came down from heaven. They say, well, we know who you are. We know your mom and dad, Mary and Joseph. They don't know that Jesus is the Son of God, the eternal Son of God. And what Jesus makes clear, and what John 6 makes clear, is that people by nature would never and will never believe in Jesus. It requires a miracle miracle of God's grace. Verse 26, these people who had seen the signs, they only wanted Jesus because they ate loaves and they wanted some more. Verse 36, Jesus says, as I told you, you have seen me, and still you do not believe. They have seen him on earth working with the power of God, speaking with the authority of God, and still they do not believe. And then verse 44, no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, requires God's work, God's power, God's grace. So how is anyone saved? Verse 44, no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them or compels them.

[ 31 : 26 ] The truth is that left to ourselves, we are so hardened in our hearts, we are so corrupt in our nature that we cannot and we will not come to Jesus by ourselves. We need God's work. The Father must draw us, must compel us. To think of it this way, think about water in a well. How do we get the water that we need from that well? Well, we cannot, you know, try and attract it up? We cannot simply speak to it and hope that it will begin to rise and bubble. No, we need to put the bucket down and draw it up so that we can get that water. This is what God must do in our lives. Left to ourselves, we would never come to God. But God, in His grace and mercy, draws us to Himself lovingly and savingly.

In conclusion, Jesus, the bread of life is the bread we all need. Go back to Juvenile and his idea, you can keep people happy with bread and circuses. That's true, but there's a significant problem that it never, never, never allows people to think about the deep issues of life.

If we are distracted by pleasure, if we're distracted by the stuff of life and we never think about what's eternal, if we never think about the reality of God, our need for salvation, salvation, then we have a problem. A problem that only God can fix. What we need from God is that He would change our hunger so that we might see His glory, that we might want to know the God of glory, that we might see our need of Him and come to Jesus for salvation.

We need for God to supply the gift of salvation. We recognize we cannot get it, we cannot earn it apart from His grace. This gift of eternal life is the gift only God gives through Jesus, His Son. What we need from God is the gift of faith. To have our eyes open to believe Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

[ 34 : 06 ] that we would come to Jesus, the bread of life, to have our hunger satisfied for peace with God and a love that lasts forever. What we need from God is a renewed appetite as Christians to have that constant sense of wonder at the gospel of amazing grace. There is no reason, humanly speaking, why God should save any of us.

It's all of His grace so that He gets glory. Let's pray together. Lord, our God, we thank you for the wonderful certainty of the salvation that Jesus secured.

And we thank you that all who look to Him, all who come to Him will be saved, will receive eternal life, will be kept safe, will be raised up at the last day. Lord, may you work in power in each of our hearts.

May you open each of our eyes to see the glory of the gospel. May you give us a hunger for Jesus, the bread of life, that we wouldn't be too easily satisfied, that we wouldn't be distracted, but rather that by your grace we would be led to pursue Him and to enjoy life with you through Him.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.