

I Am the Bread of Life

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[0 : 00] It's reckoned that during the course of a lifetime, the average person can expect to eat something in the region of 87,000 slices of bread.

Now of course that statistic will vary depending on how long you live and I guess how much you like sandwiches, but putting those variables to one side, it's a lot of bread.

Now here's another weird statistic for you. Apparently we can expect to spend roughly four and a half years of our time on earth eating. Imagine if you could do all of that eating in one go.

Think of all the time you'd save to do other stuff. Just to put it in context, when we stack up our daily activities across an average lifetime, it starts to get pretty shocking.

Apparently we spend 26 years of our lives sleeping and a further seven years trying to get to sleep. The point I want to make today, and I believe it's as important as it is basic, is this.

[1 : 06] Eating along with a whole load of other stuff like resting, washing, breathing, these are all things that need to be kept up continually. You can't just swallow 87,000 slices of bread and never eat again in the same way that you can't draw one massive breath and never worry about having to breathe again.

So when Jesus said, I am the bread of life, he was making a statement about how we need him in an ongoing way.

I think there's a danger of forgetting that. In Christian faith, we like to emphasise the once for all nature of what Christ has done for us on the cross.

Now it's important that we do emphasise that. After all, Christ has died for us and has been raised. The victory is won. But let's not allow that truth to mask another equally important truth.

Namely, the truth that we need the continuing presence of Christ in our lives each and every day. Just like eating, drinking and breathing.

[2 : 18] In John chapter six, Jesus makes this quite clear when he refers back to hundreds of years earlier to the way the people of Israel, having been set free from slavery in Egypt, were sustained for 40 years by a type of bread called manna.

Throughout that period, the Israelites had learned to depend on God on a daily basis, gathering and eating what they needed each day in faith that God would provide and continue to provide again the next day and the next and the next and so on.

Being to trust and to be sustained by God on a daily basis is vital to being a disciple of Jesus. There are loads of reasons for this, but here's two.

First, seeing Jesus as our daily bread is all about our spiritual hunger being met in him and by him in our everyday experience.

And that's important because our world is as spiritually hungry as it ever was. Someone called Hans worked his way up from being a miner to owning a number of mines.

[3 : 30] His eldest son, Martin, was very bright and he went to university at the age of 17. A respectable career as a lawyer lay ahead of him, but suddenly, to his father's dismay, he cancelled his registration for the law course and became a monk and then a priest.

He was hungry for the spiritual. Martin wanted to live a righteous life. He fasted for days and spent sleepless nights in prayer, but he was still plagued by his own unrighteousness before a righteous God.

No matter how hard he tried, his spiritual hunger only deepened and he could not be satisfied.

Eventually around the age of 30, he was studying Romans chapter 1 verse 17, which says in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed.

The penny dropped. Later on, he wrote this. He wrote, But since he was born in history, he became one of the pivotal figures of Western civilisation, the founder of the Reformation, the seedbed for

social, economic and political thought.

His name, of course, was Martin Luther. Our culture may have shifted radically over the last five centuries, but certain truths never change.

[5 : 26] And basic human spiritual hunger is one of them. That hunger can only be met when we experience what it is to be placed in a right relationship with God.

And that's a gift. But that's not just a one-off thing that happens at the point when someone becomes a Christian. If we think of it like that, then we'll miss something that's at the heart of the Christian life.

Namely, that our relationship with God is a gift to be received on a daily basis. It's our daily sustenance. The life in all fullness to which Jesus referred depends on it.

Now, I said I'd share two particular reasons why it's important to understand Jesus as our daily bread. The second one is this. We need to learn the importance of being fed by God, depending on God and trusting in God on a day-by-day basis.

Now, I know that's a lot easier to say than it is to do. But therein lies a fundamental part of the challenge of growing as a Christian disciple. To trust that God will continue to meet our needs as they arise in the future that we can't yet see, but which God can see.

[6 : 47] Corrie Temboon and her sister Betsy were middle-aged Christian women in Holland when the Second World War erupted. They resolved to conceal fleeing Jews from the Nazis.

They rescued many. But they were eventually arrested and taken to Ravensbrook concentration camp. Betsy died there. Corrie miraculously survived to bear witness to the way in which God can save, heal and forgive.

When asked how to prepare for persecution, she used to tell this story about her childhood. She said, When I was a little girl, I went to my father and said, Daddy, I'm afraid that I would never be strong enough to be a martyr for Jesus Christ.

Tell me, said father, when you take a train trip to Amsterdam, when do I give you the money for the ticket? Three weeks before?

No, Daddy, you give me the money for the ticket just before we get on the train. That is right, my father said. And so it is with God's strength.

[8 : 02] Our father in heaven knows when you will need the strength to be a martyr for Jesus Christ. He will supply all you need just in time.

Now, we may not all literally face martyrdom, but we do all face the challenge of trusting in God to provide in the future that we can't yet see.

We need to learn to live day by day. Jesus said, I am the bread of life. That's quite a bold statement. There's something that perhaps that resonates in us when the people in John chapter six take a bit of persuading as they say to Jesus, what miraculous sign will you give us that we may see and believe you?

And yet when they said this to him, according to the narrative of John's gospel, Jesus had just fed 5000 people before walking on water.

[9 : 06] I can't help but wondering why Jesus didn't just turn around and say to them, oh, I'm sorry. Would it help if I juggled at the same time or something? But in fact, he said simply, you have seen me and still you do not believe.

I think it's easy for us to say to ourselves, if only I experienced something really spectacular, like a miraculous healing or something, then that would be enough to convince me.

But let's be honest, whatever we see or experience or witness firsthand, it's always possible to find a reason not to trust in Jesus. Even those who witnessed his miracles firsthand resisted him.

But not everyone did. There were those who witnessed these things who got what Jesus was saying because they were able to accept what he was offering them.

You see, faith is not something that can ever be proved by a miracle. That's because faith, Christian faith, is a relationship that can only be experienced by encountering it, by taking a few risks and daring to trust.

[10 : 25] If we really want to know what it's like to be sustained by the bread that Jesus is talking about, we've just got to try it and go on trying it and go on trying it and then go on trying it.

Even when we don't feel like we've got much of an appetite, if we're serious about knowing God and growing closer to him, we need to go on being fed.

Every day. Every day.