

The Bread of Life

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[0 : 0 0] I almost said, please be seated, because I'm used to saying that immediately after without having the choir have us be seated. I have an odd sense of humor. Because I'm married to a very sane woman, I'm often successful in keeping it in check.

But when people have a first baby, you have to bring them a gift, you know, people you know, and what do you bring them as a first gift? And time after time, I've suggested to my wife that we bring them a toilet plunger, which I don't think anybody's ever given a new mom and a new dad having their first baby a toilet plunger, but it's actually a very practical gift.

Those of you who have children know, what will a child do fairly soon after they can walk? They will throw something in the toilet. Virtually every child does it. Even the best behaved child will eventually make their way into the bathroom.

They'll toddle in there, and one of the first things they'll do is they'll discover that if you do this flapping moment to the toilet paper roll, it will completely and utterly empty, and it's a very fun thing for a child to do.

And another thing that they'll discover is that there's water to play with that they can reach, and they'll throw things, often the toilet paper, in fact, in, and maybe even flush it. So to give new parents a toilet plunger is actually a very practical gift, but my wife has never let me do it yet.

[1 : 2 6] The second thing, of course, that would be that all children do at some point in time is lock themselves in the bathroom. Virtually every child, once they get old enough, will figure out that they can go in the bathroom door, they can play around with it, and they can lock the bathroom, and almost every child will not only lock themselves in the bathroom, but not be able to figure out how to unlock themselves from the bathroom.

I only read part of John 6 today, because it's a very, very long reading, but if later on you were to go back and read the rest of John 6, it continues to talk about Jesus being the bread of heaven, and later on it will tell you how we have to eat him, and eat his flesh, and drink his blood, and unless we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we have no part in him.

And John 6 is probably one of the most controversial passages in the entire Bible. Between Protestants and Catholics and Orthodox and Coptic, it is a major point of division and difference in terms of how to interpret it.

And I'm today going to really focus on one verse, which is the linchpin verse in the entire text. It's not only the linchpin, it's the foundation of the entire text, and it's John 6.35, where Jesus says, I have to put my glasses back on, where Jesus says, I am the bread of life, he who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.

And if we want to understand this verse, and in fact all of John 6, we just have to remember three simple things. We have to think of the Lord's Prayer, we have to think of being a child locked in a bathroom, and we have to think of a wedding ceremony.

[3 : 1 6] And if we can sort of keep these three things before our mind, this verse starts to be more clear to us, as well as the entire chapter. First of all, the Lord's Prayer.

We could just say it off by heart, because most of us probably do that, but it's a good thing occasionally to see where things come from in the Bible. So please take your pew Bibles and turn to Matthew chapter 6, or take your own Bibles if you've brought your own Bible.

Matthew chapter 6, verses 9 to 13. The reason the Lord's Prayer is called the Lord's Prayer is because it's a prayer which Jesus taught us to pray.

And so some people say that John 17 should really be called the Lord's Prayer, because we have the high priestly prayer. But here is a prayer which Jesus taught us to pray, and we say it every Sunday, and here it is in this translation.

And listen to it again. Matthew 6, verse 9 through 13, page 837 in your pew Bibles. In this manner, therefore, pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

[4 : 25] Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. It's a wonderful and beautiful prayer.

And you'll notice there, verse 11, give us this day our daily bread. I think every one of us knows instantly what that means. Obviously, it's not just praying for bread.

I mean, they'd pray this prayer in China, where they eat very little bread, and rice would be the staple. And they'd use this prayer in South America, where tortillas might be more common, and bread wouldn't be as common.

We all know, when we read this, that what Jesus is telling us to do, when we give us this day our daily bread, we're saying, the basic sustenance of life, the basic stuff that we need to eat and to receive every day, dear Father, give us.

[5 : 37] That's what Jesus is teaching us to pray. It's significant that he doesn't say, you know, please give us this day our daily, you know, our oysters and caviar and lobster tails and things which are really, really expensive and very, very fancy champagne.

But it's almost a universal symbol, at least in Western lands, that bread, that asking for our daily bread is that we're asking God to give us the basic, basic, basic stuff that we need just to live.

And Father, may you provide that for us. So now turn in your Bibles to John chapter 6, page 924. And mindful of the Lord's Prayer, let's listen again to what Jesus says.

I'm going to begin reading at verse 32, on page 924, John chapter 6. Jesus said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Then they said to him, Lord, give us this bread always.

[6 : 49] And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.

And mindful then of the Lord's Prayer, we can see that what Jesus is talking about here is a very, very powerful and simple image. Just as when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we're saying, you know, give us this day our daily bread, we're asking the Father who loves us to give us the basic stuff that we need to eat and be able to live.

And we see here then when Jesus said that he is the bread of life, he is saying that the Father has provided the basic stuff that we need to have the life of heaven, to have everlasting life, to have eternal life, to have life of the age to come, to have life from above, a life which is different than this earthly life, that the very, very basic sustenance, the very, very basic stuff that we need to have to be able to live in heaven and live beyond the judgment and live for everlasting and live eternally, that very, very, very basic stuff God has provided.

And it is the person of Jesus. It is not only the person of Jesus, but what the person of Jesus has accomplished. Remember that Jesus is described early on in John's Gospel as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And if you were to go back and read John 6 very carefully, we're not going to go into all of the little nuances of it, we'll see that there's even images here of the crucifixion in John 6 because the bread is given for the life of the world and there's this image and idea of sacrifice.

[8 : 37] But it is that the Father in the person of Jesus and in what Jesus is going to do upon the cross and in his resurrection that the basic sustenance, the basic stuff needed for eternal life is given to us from the Father.

Now, I don't know if any of you have ever been hungry. Years ago, I used to hitchhike. I used to hitchhike all the time and I did some hitchhiking around Ontario and I remember being hungry and looking at food.

And if you're hungry and you're looking at food, it doesn't really help you very much. It only makes you more hungry. You have to get the bread inside you. Right? I mean, bread on the outside is only good if you know that soon you're going to be able to eat that bread and to be filled.

Food is only good if you can get it inside of you and it can quench your hunger. Listen again to what Jesus says in John 6, 35. I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst.

You know, one of the reasons that we know that this isn't just referring to communion is because there's finality about there. Isn't it? Notice that again. It says, whoever comes to me shall never hunger and whoever believes and he who believes in me shall never thirst.

[10 : 07] It implies that there's a way of receiving the bread of heaven. There's a way of having the bread of heaven come to us in such a way that our life afterwards is completely and utterly different.

There's, you know, one of the things about children being locked in the bathroom door. Remember I said we needed three things to understand this text. We had to think of the Lord's Prayer.

We had to think of a child locked in a bathroom and we have to think of a marriage ceremony to be able to understand this text. And I'm going to play around with the image a little bit but, you know, one of the things about a child locked in a bathroom is at first the child doesn't realize that they're locked in the bathroom.

They're happy unrolling the toilet paper, playing in the toilet, squeezing the toothpaste, crayoning the walls, whatever it is that they're doing and they're peace and quiet, completely and utterly contented while they're making mischief.

But then, they maybe decide that they'd like to go see their mommy or their daddy and they go to open the door and they cannot open the door. And that's when their tension starts to rise.

[11 : 17] Maybe they try and try and try and try and try but at some point in time they start to wail and to cry looking for someone to come and open the door. You know, and here I'm going to sort of mix images a little bit.

You have to be pretty quick to catch these two images. But one of the most famous images in the Bible and it's been the subject of a famous painting is the image of Jesus standing at the door of our lives and knocking at the door of our lives to come in.

It's one of the most famous things. It comes from the book of Revelation chapter 3 and Revelation chapter 3 is in a sense picturing us like a house with a door and Jesus is on the outside of our house the outside of the door and he wants to come in and he's knocking and knocking and knocking and knocking.

You know, one of the things which is so comforting about the gospel is Leah I've mentioned earlier Andrew's and Lisa's new daughter was born at 7 o'clock in the morning on Friday and now she would be 27, no, 48, 51 hours old, 52 hours old.

For 52 hours Jesus has been knocking on Leah's the door of her heart and at no point in time in Leah's life until she lets him in Jesus will always be there knocking and knocking and knocking and here's where the images get a little bit confused.

[12 : 40] Okay, you have to be with me here. I apologize for this. You know, many of us our life in church is like the child in the bathroom and we know that our mommy and daddy is off somewhere in the house and they're doing their stuff and we're quite content in our little cozy bathroom coloring on the walls playing with the toilet paper squeezing the toothpaste and doing the mischief that we're doing in our little room and we feel pretty safe and secure because we're in this little room and mommy and daddy is off there and many people that's what church is to them.

Maybe you don't get into mischief in church but church is sort of a cozy place and they sort of have this sense that God is off with Jesus and the Holy Spirit doing something somewhere but they know we're all in the same house and God is out there and we're sort of having our cozy little time within the walls and then maybe something happens a sickness or a tragedy at work or some pressure builds up within us and we call out to God and we start to wail to God and call out to him who's on the other side of that door and many people they live their entire lives very very content just to have God on the other side of that door knowing that when things get very desperate they can slip God a note underneath the door they can talk to him through the keyhole but the scripture says that Jesus desires to come in and it pictures us then as if we are inside of a room the room the room of myself the room of my soul the room of my body and Jesus is knocking to get in and the Christian life really begins when I open the door and let Jesus come in

I don't have to be like a child feeling he's locked or she's locked in a room wailing for Jesus or content to have Jesus out there somewhere in the distance that the whole Christian life really truly begins when I realize that Jesus doesn't have to be out there that he wants to be in here and so I open the door of my life and I look at Jesus and I in a sense say Jesus you've been knocking to come in please come in I invite you to come in I give you permission to come in I'd love it if you came in and that's when the Christian life really truly begins when we ask Jesus to come into the door of our lives and live within and you see that's why in this text there is this idea of some dramatic change which happens once again listen to verse 35 I am the bread of life he who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst it's telling us that the bread of heaven the stuff of everlasting life and eternal life the basic sustenance for that can't just stay outside of us it has to get within us and once it gets within us there is a finality and a change that takes place because it's no not no longer something that we look at out there it is now something which is within and that by the way is is all the thing that's going through of John 6 about eating and believing and seeing and all of the text is trying to say to us listen

Jesus is the bread of life get him inside of you and you know whatever the imagery that Jesus is able to use in John it's all an imagery of you have to get him inside now how does the inside part come in this text listen again to the verse it goes like this I am the bread of life he who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst now notice that there is coming to Jesus and believing in Jesus and that these two things are sort of seem to be related not quite parallel but complementary where is it in life that you have this combination of coming and believing coming together and believing well the first thing to understand is that in the New Testament when the word believing is used it never is referring to something of the mind primarily believing isn't something primarily of the mind in other words it's not that we have to have certain thoughts in our head that we have to assent to certain thoughts or certain beliefs or certain ideas or certain phrases it's not a matter of knowing things about

Jesus that we can assent to and it's not primarily referring to something of the heart which is emotions because as you know we all on one level can make emotions come to us we feel like having a good cry or we feel like getting angry and so we can sort of evoke anger or a good cry or whatever within us but ultimately the things of the heart are things like a storm that blows in and blows out that in fact the word believing primarily refers to an act of the will not I mean the mind is involved and the heart is involved the heart rejoices the mind descends but it's primarily something of the will so where is it that we see a picture of coming together and believing well I've been very blessed on Friday night I did a wedding and on Saturday afternoon I did a wedding on Saturday and Nadia and I were here Nadia played the organ

[18 : 31] I did a wedding for a young woman who comes to the 915 service Emma and in three weeks time if you were here at the 915 service I used the young woman sitting right there who was helping with the overhead projector Kendra many of you might know her she is going to be marrying Jeremy right up here right where I'm pointing right there on the 4th of November Kendra and Jeremy are going to get married and if you come to this Anglican wedding you would see and by the way Kendra's invited all of you to come to the wedding if you come to the wedding you'll see perfectly illustrated what Jesus refers to as coming to him and believing in him because here's how an Anglican wedding works whatever it's at 4 o'clock I can't remember what time the wedding's at but let's say it's at 4 o'clock at 4 o'clock Jeremy and his best man and his groomsman will be behind that door out of sight and Kendra with her dad and her mom and with her bridesmaids will be behind that door out of sight and when everything is completely ready to go

I think this is how they're doing it the bride's mother will be escorted to her seat the final one seated and then I will come out of that door with Jeremy and the other men and Jeremy and the men will stand at the front of the church facing the front back to the door and I will stand on that steps and I will say ladies and gentlemen please rise and greet the bride and at that point in time the music begins the congregation turns Jeremy and the men turn to face the back and the bridesmaids start to come into the church and eventually Kendra will come into the church and Kendra and James will come together and meet right there and then after I give some housekeeping instructions and after we describe what the purpose of marriage is and after we have scripture read and after I talk a few minutes about what Christian marriage is and what the scriptures have said then I will say to Jeremy Jeremy do you intend to be

Kendra's husband forever and he'll say I will and then I'll say to Kendra do you intend to be Jeremy's wife forever and she'll say I will and then I'll have Kendra hand off her bouquet to the bridesmaid and James I mean Jeremy will turn to face Kendra and Kendra will turn to face Jeremy and they have nothing in their hands and I instruct Jeremy to have his hands like this down because it's the posture of taking and Kendra will put her hands in Jeremy's hands and Jeremy will say I Jeremy take you Kendra to be my wife to have and to hold from this day forward for richer for poorer for better or worse sickness and health this is my solemn vow and then I'll say that's very lovely and I'll have Kendra and Jeremy momentarily break their hands and then Kendra will have her hands down like this open in a position of taking and Jeremy will put his hands in hers and then Kendra will say

I Kendra take you Jeremy to be my husband to have and hold from this day forward for better for worse for richer for poorer on and on and on this is my solemn vow they have come together and they have believed an act of the will the will is used to take the other person to allow the other person to come into their lives to pledge themselves to that other person in an Anglican wedding ceremony you see between Kendra and Jeremy what Jesus desires between you and me he is the bread of life that has come from heaven he is the one who is the very sustenance that we need to have the life to come eternal life everlasting life he is the very very sustenance which we need and it's no good if we just look at him we need to have him inside of us we need to have a way to have him come inside and how do we do

Jesus says if you come to me and if you believe and we can just think of Kendra and Jeremy of the coming together of the opening of the hands and of saying I give myself to you Jesus and Jesus says to us I give myself to you for better for worse for richer for poor in sickness and health forever and ever and ever and that's how the Christian life begins so some of you maybe are wondering how does this believing stuff work and it's not a matter of trying to screw up a particular type of emotion in your life it's not a matter of trying to believe certain things in your life in a sense what I'm telling today is this if you haven't done this yet picture yourself at the front of the church and picture yourself looking to Jesus and saying Jesus you are the bread of life you are the sustenance of heaven you are what I need to have eternal life in me and picture looking at

[24 : 06] Jesus with your hands open and saying Jesus I take you and then picture Jesus putting his hands out and you putting your hands in him and saying and Jesus says to you I take you and that's how the Christian life begins let's bow our heads in prayer