

Food That Lasts

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[0 : 0 0] We're in the Gospel of John this morning again, continuing on the story, chapter 6. Just a reminder of what we've been through these past couple weeks.

We've looked at some of the pretty spectacular things that Jesus has been doing. First, he fed a crowd of over 5,000 people out in the middle of nowhere with just a boy's lunch.

Then last Sunday we saw how he walked at least several miles across the Sea of Galilee and then jumped into a boat with his disciples in the middle of a storm.

Amazing. We talked last Sunday about how some of the crowd from the 5,000 that Jesus fed, they couldn't find him the next day on that eastern side of the lake, so they hitched a ride with some of the boats that had come over from Tiberias back to the western side of the lake where they found Jesus.

And we ended last Sunday with their question, Rabbi, when did you get here? So we're going to continue the story this morning in John, chapter 6, verse 25.

[1 : 1 1] When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, Rabbi, when did you get here? Jesus answered, Very truly, I tell you, you were looking for me not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

So it all starts with the question of the people, the people who had been there at the feeding of the 5,000. And they came back across the lake, they found Jesus, they're puzzled about how Jesus got here, and they ask him, Teacher, when did you get here?

And what does Jesus say in response? Let's just hit the pause button for a moment here. What's the true answer to this question?

Jesus could have looked them in the eye and said, I actually got here in the early hours of the morning after a leisurely stroll out on the lake. Even as the crowd asks this question, you can imagine the disciples thinking to themselves, like, oh boy, like, how is Jesus going to respond to this?

They would never believe what happened last night out on the lake, even if all of us told them that this is what happened. Well, Jesus decides to simply not answer the question.

[2 : 3 7] And instead, he makes a statement that shifts the focus of this conversation onto the people themselves. In verse 26, he says, What is Jesus saying to them?

Well, let's first notice the kind of statement that this is. Jesus is telling them why they have been looking for him. He's saying, You've been seeking me.

You've been searching for me. Not for this reason, but for this reason. Have you ever had somebody tell you why you are doing something?

Most of us probably have, and usually we don't appreciate it when someone tells us why we did something. I'm sure many of us have had that happen in a conversation where someone's telling us why we did something, or we almost would take it as an accusation.

And perhaps they even assumed wrongly about us. And you're thinking or you're saying, That wasn't my motivation. That wasn't my reason. Who are you to tell me why I did that?

[3 : 5 6] Are you judging me? Are you claiming to know my inner thoughts and motivations? Most of the time, it's best not to assume that you know exactly why someone is doing something.

There could be reasons you simply do not know. There could be reasons buried in that person's heart, or rooted in that person's past experiences. As Paul said to the Corinthians in his letter, 1 Corinthians 2 verse 11, For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them?

And this is kind of a side point here, but wouldn't it be wonderful if all of us just refused to assume that we know why other people do the things they do?

And I'm talking to myself here as well. Think of how much less misunderstanding and conflict there would be if we just simply chose not to assume anything about other people's motives. Instead, maybe just ask the question. Ask them why they're doing what they're doing. The truth is, we really don't know other people's motivations, and we can guess at them, we can speculate, but at the end of the day, only they know why they are doing what they are doing.

[5 : 22] And this is pretty relevant today. I mean, here's one example. Many people assume that people are wearing masks because they're afraid of getting COVID. And yet some of those people would say to you that they are wearing them not because they're afraid of getting COVID, but because they care about you.

They want to minimize the chance that they would spread it to you if they happen to have it. For that person, it's not fear. It's in fact kindness and love that motivates them to wear their mask.

On the other side of the coin, some people might assume that if you're not wearing a mask, it's because you're angry at the government or because you don't care about the weak and the vulnerable in our community.

And yet for some who aren't wearing masks, that's simply not true. Some people are just simply not wearing them because they genuinely don't believe that the masks help in preventing the spread of COVID.

Now, I'm not here to try and settle the debate this morning on whether they work or not work or whatever. I just say this to illustrate how often we assume that we know exactly why people are doing what they're doing, and yet how easy it is for us to be wrong.

[6 : 38] And we do this all the time. We speculate on people's motives and thoughts, like why they're changing jobs, why they had a conflict with so-and-so, why they believe this or that, why they haven't been coming to church, why they just bought a new vehicle, why my kids are acting the way they are.

Wouldn't it just be wonderful if we all just embraced this simple truth that Paul reminds us of? Who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? Back to Jesus.

Jesus is saying the kind of thing here that ordinarily we shouldn't say to one another. And notice how he says it. He doesn't say, you know what, I think that the reason you're looking for me is not this, but this.

No, he states it very matter-of-factly. He says, truly, truly, I say to you, the reason you're looking for me is not this, but this.

He's claiming to know the truth of what's going on in their inner thoughts and motivations. Coming from anyone else, this would probably be an immediate turn-off, and maybe some people were turned off when they heard Jesus say something like this.

[8 : 03] But with Jesus, it's different. He's already demonstrated repeatedly that he knows things about people that no ordinary person could know.

We saw it with Nathaniel. We saw it with the Samaritan woman at the well. The disciples witnessed this kind of thing repeatedly at the first Passover festival that they went to with him.

Remember back in John chapter 2, where John said this, Jesus would not entrust himself to the crowd that saw his signs, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about men, mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

Amazingly, in all these instances, the disciples have seen that Jesus has been correct about people, about their inner motivations and thoughts and reasons.

He's not just guessing or speculating. He's not assuming things that he doesn't know to be true.

Somehow he has divine knowledge. And he actually knows the things that God alone knows about people.

[9 : 14] This is the kind of thing that's going on here. Again, in the passage we're looking at this morning, Jesus is telling these people that he knows what's really going on inside their hearts. He knows why they're really going to all this trouble to come all the way back across the lake and hunt him down and follow him around.

So now let's look at the reasons Jesus gives. Verse 26. Jesus answered, You are looking for me not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life. So according to Jesus, why are they following him? What's the real reason?

And what's the problem with their motivation? You're looking for me because you ate the loaves and had your fill and not because you saw the signs.

Do not work for food that spoils, but work for food that endures to eternal life. Now at first glance, and this is kind of what I was thinking at first, we might think that these people care more about getting more free food than they do about the miracle that Jesus did.

[10:43] It kind of sounds that way a little bit. You guys came all the way across the lake because you got a free meal. Don't wear yourself out for food that spoils. But the more I reflected on this and thought about that, it just didn't make sense.

Like how could people really be more excited about getting some free food than about the fact that Jesus whipped this meal for 5,000 people out of almost seemingly nowhere?

And we heard two weeks ago that at least some of them started to think that he was the prophet or the Messiah and they wanted to make him king. So did they care more about getting more free food than the miracle?

Were they just a bunch of lazy freeloaders and moochers? I don't think so. I think we get a clue about this from what Jesus tells them to do.

He says, Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life. A more literal translation of that would be something like this.

[11:48] Work not for food of the perishing sort, but for food of the lasting unto eternal life sort. As we reflect on these words, we begin to see that Jesus is giving them a larger principle of life.

And he's using food as kind of the metaphor. I mean, what kind of food endures to eternal life? This is not ordinary food. This is a metaphor.

And do not work for food that spoils. They're meant to apply this more generally, more broadly to their whole outlook. In other words, I don't think Jesus is saying, The reason that you're following me around is just to get more free food.

Stop putting in all this effort to get more free food that doesn't last. I think Jesus is saying more than that. And I think the key, if I'm reading this right, is in, we see it a little bit in verse 26.

You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs. The signs. Jesus refers to the things that he has been doing.

[13:05] Things like the feeding of the 5,000 and healing people as signs. And a sign by definition is something that points to something.

So what's the problem with their motivation? If I'm hearing Jesus right, it's that they're more excited about the miracle itself than they are about what it points to.

They're thinking, and we can guess here, we don't know for sure, but maybe something like, here's a guy who can multiply bread and they're not going to do it. Come on, everybody.

Look at this. What's he going to do next? Isn't this awesome? They're all excited about the miracle and they probably should be, but the main point, it seems, is not the miracle itself, but what the miracle points to.

It's a sign. It seems that these particular people are going to such lengths to follow Jesus because they want to be, we might say, sensationalized.

[14:09] They want to see more of the same. They want to be wowed by things like this, this meal that they had. And so it seems that Jesus is saying that the feeding of the 5,000 was not something that he did just to fill the stomachs of people.

God the Father had given him that work, that miracle to do as a sign. And signs are meant to tell us something. They're meant to point to something.

And it was a spectacular sign. It was something impressive. Give a bit of an example here. I mean, imagine you're, happened to be in Madrid, Spain.

You're driving around and you see this on the side of a building. That's a pretty big sign. They actually broke the Guinness Book of World Records for the largest billboard back in 2018.

The thing is, the size of 20 tennis courts. It covers most of this huge building. And I don't know, I kind of like it. Even how the tree branches kind of go in between the windows.

[15:19] I mean, imagine how much time it took just to put that up and to take it down, all the scaffolding. It's impressive. So impressive, you might even take a slight detour on your way home just to show your kids.

Now imagine that the next day after you see this billboard, you're at work and it comes up in conversation and you're talking to someone about it and someone at some point just says, so?

Are you going to buy one? And you're kind of like, what are you talking about? Buy one what? Well, a Ford EcoSport. Oh, well, I wasn't even really thinking about that.

I was just thinking about how awesome that sign is. Like, it's huge and it's so well done. I think that's a bit of an example, an illustration of what's happening here with the crowd and Jesus.

They see the signs that he's doing and how spectacular they are, but they're more caught up in the excitement of the sign than what it points to. Like, hey everyone, here's a guy who can make food appear out of thin air.

[16:30] We saw it. We ate it as much as we wanted. Come on, let's go see what he'll do next.

Maybe next time he'll make something even more awesome than that. Who knows? Maybe if we stick with him long enough, it'll be like that Oprah episode where every guest received a brand new car worth 30,000 bucks for free.

We don't know exactly what they're thinking, but it seems that this is kind of along the lines of what they're thinking. They're missing the point. The key contrast, I think, comes in what Jesus says in verse 27.

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life. Again, the more literal, work not for food of the perishing sort, but for food of the lasting unto eternal life sort.

They're more excited about the bread than the reality that the bread points to. I think Jesus is saying something to the effect of the physical bread that I made is not the point.

Don't put in all this effort to follow me around just to see more things like that. Where's the bread that you ate now? It's gone. It doesn't last.

[17:52] It's a perishable thing. It's either consumed or it spoils. No, the point of the miracle is that you would look for and seek after the food that doesn't perish.

The special provision of God that lasts, that never goes bad, that there's always more of, the special food or provision of God that when you eat of it, it gives you not just life for another few days, but life for endless days.

And it might be here that we're starting to remember back to what Jesus said to the woman at the well where he again used a familiar thing like water, food, water, to describe a much greater thing. He said to her, whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

It's as though Jesus is saying, I'm here to offer you more than just a spectacular show, more than just some material blessings, more than just some things that will eventually be consumed or spent or wear out or lost when you die.

[19:14] I'm here to offer you the food and water, the most essential needs of your soul, a special provision of God so that you might truly live forever.

This is the reality that the sign of the feeding of the 5,000 points to. If you're going to put in the effort like you've been putting in to follow me around, do it for this reason.

Do it to get this food that lasts into life eternal. So you can imagine at this point that Jesus has their attention, that there's no shortage of questions rising up in their minds like, well, what kind of food are you talking about, Jesus?

What sort of food lasts into eternal life? we've never heard of that before. What are you saying? Are you talking about a food that we eat and then we live forever?

Is it a food that, like, what are you talking about? Is it literal food? Kind of like the fruit of the tree of life?

[20:24] Or are you just speaking metaphorically? What is this food and where do we get it?

Where does it come from? Jesus answers one of these questions immediately, even before they ask, where does this lasting food come from?

He says, do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. Which the Son of Man will give you.

So where does it come from? It comes from the Son of Man. And we won't look at all the passages today, but there's many places where it's just obvious that when Jesus says the Son of Man, he's referring to himself.

In other words, you get this food that endures to life eternal from me. I will give it to you. It's quite the claim.

It's quite an offer. And then Jesus throws in this little statement at the end of verse 27, which the Son of Man will give you, for on him God has placed his seal of approval.

[21 : 41] Literally, for God the Father has sealed this one, referring to the Son of Man. What does that mean? There's a couple different ways that the word sealed can be used, but the way that makes the most sense here is like the seal, like a wax seal.

Back in the day, it was common for them to use seals. They had a stamp or sometimes even a ring that they would, it had a detailed pattern on it. It was unique to the family that had it or the town that used it, and they would press it into hot wax or clay to authenticate whatever the seal was on, to show that this is the real deal.

This letter really came from me. This license is authentic. It has been issued by the town officials. You may still see a seal of sorts today if you look back on your high school diploma.

Gold sticker kind of thing with detail and kind of impressions in it. It's there at least historically to prove that your diploma paper is authentic.

So what is Jesus saying when he says for God the Father has sealed the Son of Man? He's saying that God the Father has placed his seal, his mark of authenticity upon the Son of Man.

[23 : 10] Literally for Jesus, upon me. So that we would know that he is not just a Son of Man but the Son of Man. The one who really can give this food which lasts unto eternal life.

God hasn't just left us to guess or to speculate. He's made it clear. He's put his own unique seal, mark, or sign upon him.

And what is the clear sign or mark or seal? Well, Jesus has already mentioned the signs he has been doing in this conversation.

So I would suggest that the seal or mark of authenticity is the signs which the Father has given Jesus to do. Things which are impossible for any ordinary Son of Man to do.

God has set apart the Son of Man, the one that was promised, the glorious one by giving him special works or signs to do.

[24 : 14] This is similar to what Jesus said to the religious leaders back in Jerusalem. John 5, 36, for the works that the Father has given me to finish, the very works that I am doing testify that the Father has sent me.

And so I think they are the seal, they are the distinguishing mark upon Jesus that helps us to identify him as the Son of Man and give us confidence that yes, he really can give us this food which lasts to eternal life.

At this point in the conversation, the crowd asks a question. Verse 28, then they asked him, what must we do to do the works God requires?

Jesus answered, the work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.

Now there's some translation issues here. Literally, it's what must we do to work the works of God? And Jesus' answer is literally, the work of God is this, that you believe in the one he has sent.

[25 : 32] Now I don't want to get into the whole Calvinism and Arminianism debate here. Some people point to this passage to make the point that even our believing is a work of God.

It's something that he does in us. If that's what Jesus means, then he's not really answering the question of the people the way that they asked it. And sometimes Jesus does that.

Sometimes he doesn't answer the question the way that it was asked. But the overall flow in the sense of this question and this answer, at least to me, I think Jesus is saying the work of God or the work God requires, the work he wants you to do is that you believe in the one he has sent.

Seems to be the logical flow of the passage here. Jesus has told them, don't work for this, work for this. What do we need to do to work the works that God requires?

requires, this is the work that God requires. What is it? What is the thing that God wants us to do, that God wants you to do?

[26 : 45] Very simply, believe in the one he sent, is what Jesus says. It's kind of a strange answer. You can kind of imagine that there might be some thinking like, that's it?

Like, isn't there more? I mean, when it comes to food, putting perishable food on the table, like, we go to work, and we're going to get this lasting food that never spoils just by believing?

think? I think Jesus wants to, you know, make it clear that there is no earning this food.

You don't go to work to put this food on the table. He said already, I will give it to you, which the Son of Man will give you. I don't know what some of them were expecting, maybe a checklist, maybe a list of commands, maybe a new contract position in Jesus' crusade.

food, I don't know, but Jesus doesn't give them any hint that this food, this lasting food can be bought or earned. It's not something that he is selling, it's not something that he's offering in

exchange for a life of good works.

[28 : 09] He says, which the Son of Man will give to you. What do we do to get it? Believe the one he has sent. So simple.

And yet even that statement right there is so pregnant. Jesus again is holding up the mirror to them. He's saying it, I think it's implied, because they don't believe him.

I'm calling you again, I'm inviting you again, believe in me, believe that I am the one that God has sent. Why is he saying it? Because they don't believe, many of them.

And we'll continue the conversation next Sunday. But what is God saying to us here this morning in all this? There's so many places that this could hit home for us today.

the first thing that we saw was how Jesus challenged their very motives for following him that day. You guys came all the way across the lake for the wrong reason.

[29 : 19] You were more excited about the signs themselves than the reality that they point to. There's a question in there. What are your motives for following Jesus?

Do you know that Jesus knows the real reasons? Do you know that he knows what's going on in your thoughts, in your heart?

Do you know that he sees through the face that we so often put on for other people that he sees the real you? If he were standing up at the front today instead of me, do you think he would challenge or correct our motives for following him?

I think he would. And not because he wants to stir up a good fight, but because he loves us. He cares about us. He wants us to follow him for the right reasons, to come to church on Sunday for the right reasons, to serve in the church and in our community for the right reasons, to give generously to people in need for the right reasons.

He's not just looking for a crowd to cheer him on or a group of fans to enjoy the show of his miracles and hoot and holler whenever he sticks it to the Pharisees. Speaking of motivations, how about all this COVID stuff?

[30 : 46] Do you think Jesus would have some things to say to us about our attitudes and motives, even our behaviors when it comes to COVID? I think so.

I felt convicted about it anyway. the second thing we saw was the misplaced focus of the crowd. There's a question there too.

Are we more excited about the signs that Jesus did than with the greater realities that they point to? Are we more enamored with the miracles themselves than with the man who did them?

Now, I know most of us here are not into sensationalism. we're not really that kind of group that are chasing after miracles, but increasingly in our culture, we are being taught that we need to invest deeply in the things that entertain us most.

We're being told that we are consumers and we need to weigh carefully what we buy into because it's all about what we can get out of it. And this attitude creeps into the church as well.

[31 : 56] For a long time, this hour of church on Sunday morning has been called a worship service. A service. The idea is that you come here to serve, to serve up worship to God.

I'll be honest, sometimes when I'm writing that weekly email, I feel a little tempted to just take that word service out out. Because I know that many in their hearts don't want to come to church to give a service to God.

They want to come to church to get something from Him, an experience, a blessing. And we see this often in the reasons why people leave a church or shop around for another church.

The church didn't have this or that or the music wasn't to my liking or the pastor's preaching was biblical, yeah, but it wasn't really to my tastes. Are we looking to be entertained on Sunday?

Are we into church only if it caters to our preferences and tastes? Only if it sounds and feels the way we like? Following Jesus and being the church is not about being entertained.

[33 : 09] It's about Jesus, the Son of Man and the Son of God who we love and adore. And we'll give Him the best offering of praise that we can whenever we meet with whatever we've got.

It doesn't matter if it doesn't sound polished or professional or entertaining or if we miss a chord or sing the wrong note. The Lord knows what we have to give and what we don't.

The miracles were meant not to entertain us. They were meant to point to the man who did them and the Father who sent him. And so does my attitude towards church, towards following Jesus need an adjustment?

What about for my kids? Am I helping them? My grandkids? I don't have any but maybe you do. Am I encouraging them to follow Jesus simply for who He is and what He has promised?

Another thing we see here is a clear warning, against spending our efforts mainly on stuff that doesn't last and wears out. The stuff of this world.

[34 : 21] Maybe some of you as we looked at that verse heard these words in the back of your mind. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

Sounds a lot like do not work for food that spoils but for food that lasts unto eternal life. Jesus said at one time what good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their soul? what's your main goal in life right now? What's your mission? Is it measured in earthly success? In the acquiring of some certain nice to have things that when I get those things my life's going to be good. My life's going to be better. I'll be comfortable. I think Jesus wants us to set our aim on the things of heaven.

On things that last forever. On the true needs of our souls and on the souls of other people. Do my overall goals and priorities in life right now need an adjustment?

[35 : 40] Finally where does all this hit us as we prepare to some of us gather with family and have a delicious meal with perishable food?

Maybe with family and friends this Thanksgiving? I don't know how all of you plan to mark Thanksgiving this year. I've asked a couple of you. It's a strange year. That might factor into it or change it for some of you.

Some of you may not be having a big meal like you have in the past with family or friends. And so if there's anything we take from Jesus' words about food, I hope we know that it's not about the food. It's not. Thanksgiving is about much more. Or maybe you do have plans for a special meal later this afternoon or tomorrow.

Let's not forget to look with our families as we gather beyond the physical food and having our fill. To the God who has so generously and graciously given us everything good that we have.

[36 : 51] Who's not only provided us with good perishable food to eat, but has given us his son. And through him the food that lasts unto eternal life.

A gift that we receive simply by believing. we can thank God for the good food that we enjoy today and tomorrow if we are having a celebration meal.

But we have so much more than earthly food to be thankful for. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for speaking these words to the crowd.

Lord, Lord, we admit that maybe these were not the words we wanted to hear from you today, but we ask that you would give us ears to hear and hearts that are willing to respond.

Make those adjustments that we need in our hearts. Fix our attitudes, Lord, where they're wrong. We confess those things to you. Give us the right motives and give us a proper understanding of what's really going on in our lives.

[38 : 03] Thank you for all the good things you have been doing in us, for us, even through us. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.