

Connecting to the source of true life

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, so we're in John's Gospel. I'm going to get into it now for the second week. And John's biography, we've been saying, presents hard evidence that Jesus is God, come into the world as God's Messiah, the long-awaited Savior and King of God's people.

And John builds his case, like a lawyer or a barrister, he builds his case around seven key signs, as he calls them, or miracles. And each of those signs or miracles has a saying with it.

So there's seven key signs, seven key sayings, each of which combine in this identikit picture of Jesus, explaining what the signs actually mean.

But there's only one purpose. Seven signs, seven sayings, but one purpose. And the purpose is not just conveying information. The purpose that John has is to see a response to the information, to see Jesus as God, and, says John, to believe or trust in him as the source of life.

We're working through Jesus' teaching associated with a sign or miracle of feeding a crowd of more than 5,000 people from a schoolboy's lunchbox. And the key saying at the heart of that teaching is verse 35 of chapter 6.

[1 : 3 1] Jesus says, I am the bread of life. Now, it's picture language when Jesus says, I'm the bread of life. And, of course, we easily understand the ordinary or physical word picture bread.

So we know what bread and water is and eating and drinking. We know how those are the basic essentials of life. We know about the idea of hunger and the longing to be satisfied with good food. We know, unlike my fellow man before me, we know that good food satisfies. But giving in to the craving of junk food, which is all too easy and all too regular for us, is actually bad for us.

And in spite of what we might try, it's hard to mix good food with bad food. So we understand the ordinary physical idea of picture of bread, but Jesus pushes us to see a deeper, a more spiritual understanding of bread in these verses.

A heart-based understanding that he wants us to get out of this picture of him being the bread of life. And that's a lot harder.

[2 : 5 5] And so I should say to you also this morning, you should have your wits about you because after looking at this passage all week and a bit longer than all week, I'm still not sure that I've actually cracked it.

So you need to have your wits about you this morning in case I'm telling you something that's actually not right. But here's how it goes, I think. Most of us would know, as we push into this spiritual understanding of bread, most of us would know the phrase, you are what you eat.

And it's been around for almost 100 years. It equates the type of food a person eats to their overall health and well-being. Well, Jesus, I think, is pushing us to see him as the spiritual essential for life and well-being.

He wants us to recognize that only he can satisfy properly the hunger that we have in our hearts, a hunger that's much, much deeper than just physical bread, the hunger for connection with God and satisfying connection with God.

He wants to appeal to us as the good food alternative. He wants us to desire to feed on him and reject junk food alternatives, no matter how much they might appeal, how glitzy they look.

[4 : 1 7] He said, no, feed on me. Reject this. And he promises, if we feed on him, that he will nourish us into the good life and indeed a life that a lifelong diet of him alone can produce.

Now, that's all picture language, which he then, I think, tries to explain and pad out a little bit in these verses 41 through 59. So let's jump back into the text at verse 41.

Last week, of course, we covered verses 22 to 40. And we saw there that the crowds that were following Jesus after experiencing this great miracle, this great sign of having their bellies filled, that the crowds were stuck.

They were stuck on what they could see as a result of that sign. They were stuck on a physical or surface response to the feeding miracle. And we saw last week that out of that came their own agenda for Jesus.

They experienced their feeding, and then they imposed their own agenda on Jesus. They saw him as a new Moses, a great leader or savior who would deliver them from the Romans, who would make them a great nation once again, who'd provide all their physical needs.

[5 : 35] But Jesus pushes back against their agenda, determined that they would hear his agenda for them. And so we said last week, there's a real tussle going on here.

Whose agenda is going to triumph? And along the way, Jesus challenges the crowd. We hinted at this last week. We're going to spell it out a little bit more this morning.

And Jesus issues a challenge to the crowd, saying your current salvation categories are seriously distorted. If you're a visitor here this morning, there's an outline of what I'm saying on the back of the bulletin sheet you got handed this morning as you come in the door.

So Jesus says your current salvation categories are seriously distorted. Now look at the response. Having heard everything Jesus said about being the bread from heaven, the life that nourishes and sustains and satisfies in a way that nothing else can, the response?

The crowd, including the Jewish religious leaders, common response. They grumbled. Verse 41. They grumbled at Jesus. Now grumbling is as it sounds.

[6 : 46] It's a growing anger and rejection of everything that Jesus had said. It was rising up from within them. And it was overflowing into, verse 42, a verbal attack on Jesus and a dismissal of him, in fact.

Why do they dismiss him? Well, they say, actually, how dare this guy lecture us like this? He's the son of Joseph. We know about him. He's so ordinary. How can he possibly be claiming something so extraordinary?

Jesus goes from hero to zero in less than 24 hours before the crowd.

Now, why were they so annoyed? I suggested last week, this was not an annoyance that grew out of a lack of understanding. It was as if they were tearing their hair out and saying, Jesus, we don't have a clue what you're talking about.

Quite the opposite. Their annoyance is a refusal to accept Jesus' teaching because his salvation categories, spiritual or heart categories, were at odds with theirs, physical or outside categories.

[8 : 03] There was a clash. And so verse 43, Jesus says to them, stop grumbling. Now, that terminology would have reminded the Jews of the terminology that God's people used in the wilderness.

Remember, God brought them out of Egypt and then they were in the wilderness. And what did they do when they got to the wilderness? After being rescued in the most amazing way by God, they grumbled. They grumbled.

And so Jesus here is really saying to them, look, you guys, just stop your grumbling for you're sounding in my ears very much like God's people sounded all those years ago back in the wilderness.

They also grumbled about God's salvation or deliverance. They too longed for deliverance, longed for salvation. But then when God sent it and sent the Savior, they didn't like it.

They refused to accept it. It didn't fit with what they wanted. It wasn't even what they liked. They rejected God's terms for salvation.

[9 : 08] I'm bringing you to myself that you might be a holy people. Well, they liked the idea of coming out to Egypt, but they didn't so much like the idea of coming to God as his holy possession. And they dismissed and despised the provision he made for them.

Remember what they said when manna was provided to them and quail? Better they'll be back in Egypt eating garlic and onions. God's provision was not what they wanted either.

And so they too reduced salvation to outside-in physical and practical terms, the terms of the Exodus event. So in their minds, Moses was their Savior.

He was the one who provided manna. Manna was the means of their salvation. And we saw that last week in verses 31 and 32. And salvation then was the deliverance from their physical enemies. Back then it was the Egyptians. And deliverance into political freedom as they moved into the promised land. And from there they would dominate all the nations. They too deliberately rejected any focus on spiritual deliverance, spiritual renewal.

[10:24] They refused to take ownership of sin. They refused to see the need for forgiveness and grace as God's free gift to them. They refused to see the need for heart. Renewal.

And renewed relationship with God. And the challenge to live distinctively as God's people in obedience and worship. They weren't interested in any of that. So they too believed that salvation was something they could expect.

Something they could control. Something they were entitled to. Because after all they were God's people. And at the end of the day God would happily accept them on the basis of their religious actions of sacrifice, prayers, tithing, and keeping the law of Moses.

So Jesus said to these guys look as you're grumbling here before me you're just like your predecessors. You want God's salvation but when it comes you don't like it.

You want God's savior but when it comes you want recognition. You want God's provision but when it comes you complain about it. You want life but you don't want life.

[11:35] You want a substitute convenient life of your own creation. And Jesus was evaluated against those categories and rejected.

They refused therefore to give up control of their practical, physical, outside in salvation. They refused to accept Jesus insisting that salvation or life was a spiritual inside out process beginning in the heart controlled by God and ultimately received as a gift not a reward for hard work.

Their categories were seriously distorted. And Jesus then moves on to make a big claim against that. He says I am God's single salvation category.

I am the bread of life. As he tells them to stop grumbling in verse 43 he's also pushing them to instead start believing. Start believing what I've already made clear to you says Jesus verses 35 through to 40.

His mission he had already made clear to them in the world is to save those that God had given them through being their true bread from heaven. being the one who perfectly satisfies their deep longing their hunger longing who's the basic sustenance of life.

[13:06] And he's already made that clear to them and in these verses he spells it out again.

Different pictures slightly different emphasis a little bit more detail but essentially I think the same picture has been restated.

In verse 44 therefore how can you believe when you receive glory from one another try chapter 6 verse 44 makes a bit more sense no one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day.

Jesus said look this this spiritual life is an altogether different category from what you guys are thinking about. It's not yours to command it's not yours to manufacture it's something that requires the inner working of God in your life.

The deep longing of the heart for acceptance with God for life ever after is a spiritual reality which can only come through Jesus only comes through me says Jesus I am the source of real life.

There is no other life apart from me. And for Jesus for a person to be connected to Jesus the father has to draw him.

[14:22] Now the word draw is a very very strong word and it's sort of like a word drive because it always implies resistance. So the picture here is that God actually in a sense has to drag people to Jesus and they're digging their toes in resisting every part of the way.

Jesus is saying this work of salvation is something that requires God's input because not only are you unwilling to come and see me as your savior and trust me as the bread of life you're actually unable.

You've been so distorted by sin that you're actually unable to come because sin has blinded you to the truth. You need God's work within your heart as part of this process of coming to life.

But verse 45 at the end of verse 44 and verse 45 God's drawing power will always triumph. There's never uncertainty in this. God's drawing power always triumphs.

Isaiah recognized that and Jesus quotes Isaiah here chapter 54 of Isaiah. Look at the quotation. It is written in the prophets that's actually Isaiah they will all be taught by God.

[15:49] Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Now the context speaks here about faith or belief.

And it's really inferring here that faith or belief is an insight implanted into blind children by the Father in fulfillment of his promise.

So I don't have time to go back and do it in detail but I'd encourage you to go back and look at chapter 53, 54 and the start of chapter 55 of Isaiah and you'll see the context fits perfectly with what Jesus is saying here.

In chapter 54 well chapter 54 immediately follows on from chapter 53 which is the big chapter in which God speaks of his promise to send his suffering servant for what purpose?

Because his people need someone to deal with their sin if they're going to be back in good relationship with God. And God promises to send his suffering servant who would sacrifice his own life to deal with the guilt and sin of his people so that relationship with the Father would be restored.

[17:13] Then in chapter 55 verse 1 we have the classic invitation to God's people to come come you who are hungry come you who are thirsty come and buy and drink and eat you who have no money it's picture language it's an invitation given God's promise of salvation given God's promise of the servant coming to deal with your sin it's an invitation to come and receive it you don't have anything to buy it with just come and receive it as a gift and all that is behind Jesus' summary in verse 47 Jesus is the only way to the Father the only pathway to life Jesus is all that is essential for real life and he is

God's package that was promised he is the one and we'll get to the verse that talks about given his life as bread he is the one who is the suffering servant the one who will give his life to deal with guilt and sin the one who issues the invitation come to me and eat and drink when you've got nothing to buy that food with or earn that life with and the process of joining those two together is chapter 54 God's planning implanting spiritual insight so you actually want to do that which in your natural state you wouldn't want to do and the proof of the inner work of God's spirit people actually come everyone who has heard everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me when the Father works in a person's life implanting that moment of illumination into an otherwise blind life the inevitable result is that the person comes to Jesus that's why the Father does it people the proof of the inner work done by God's spirit is that people actually come to Jesus in belief and truth and then having come to him they might be assured of having life and relationship with God forever and there's further assurance offered in verse 46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God he has seen the Father

Jesus is saying well look I know what I'm talking about because I have been with the Father we know together sorry we know what our purpose is and together we're acting to implement God's purpose in salvation he has come to he's come to them to make real his Father's purpose in salvation verse 49 he does what manna was never ever meant to do and never could do give spiritual or eternal life it's the same idea as we had back last week where Jesus told him we've been sealed the Father verse 27 being sealed by his Father he's really just said listen to me I know what I'm talking about I've got authority to say this stuff you think I'm ordinary I'm telling you I've come straight from the Father to deliver this truth this reality to you so he's got a challenge he issues he's got a claim he states and now he switches into a command as he ramps up the pressure on the crowd verse 53 onwards

Jesus' command is to feed on me for salvation now it's interesting that when you look at verse 52 you see the development the crowd came with their agenda Jesus challenged them they push back Jesus challenged them they grumble Jesus challenges them now verse 52 the word here again a very strong word this is this is they're just babbling over with absolute annoyance and anger and hostility at Jesus they just had enough of them why I think it's because Jesus has very clearly made before them a connection that they don't like they will not accept Jesus has made himself central to salvation and life he has removed from them any sense of control any sense of entitlement they might have in this matter of salvation he's really said to them you cannot manufacture your salvation no matter how many religious things you do

Jesus has taken away all the things that are so important to them and because they can't counter what he says their only resort is to blaster to let that anger just rise up and ooze out of them but interestingly Jesus doesn't take a step backwards he shoves it into their face if you want to follow in that language if you can accept that language from him so Jesus said to them this is what he says in response things are getting out of control almost fisticuffs breaking out so Jesus said to them and this is going to quiet things down isn't it truly truly I say to you unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you now at first reading this just gets seriously weird doesn't it eating his flesh drinking his blood it's a it's a it's a it's a it's a a very graphic picture but the context here is that

[23 : 40] Jesus pushing the crowd even further into that area where they're refusing to go by insisting that if they're going to have life then nothing short of actually feeding on him his whole person flesh and blood is going to be satisfactory or necessary if they're to enjoy salvation or relationship with God in eternal life then nothing short of feeding on Jesus is the pathway now I think it's pretty safe to think and accept that the crowd here know that Jesus was using very graphic and very offensive picture language I think it's unreasonable to think that they would have thought this was literal the reason why I suggest that is because for Jesus to make any suggestion of a literal interpretation would have just been totally against the law of Moses and therefore they would have had reason to grab

Jesus and pulverize him but they have no reason to grab him and I think that then tells us the crowd knew jolly well that he was using a picture language pushing them to a conclusion they refused to accept that salvation required an intimate totally dependent relationship with Jesus that's described in picture languages as nothing short of feeding and eating and drinking from him so ask the question what is it to eat or feed and drink Jesus well we don't actually have to guess because the passage actually tells us and we've seen it right through John uses just different phrases different pictures and we can put the whole thing together so I believe that what feeding on Jesus is is believing in

Jesus John spoke about believing the need absolutely essential need of believing in Jesus back in chapter 29 and chapter 29 verse 29 and verse 35 and verse 47 so we have to believe in Jesus it's coming to Jesus that John uses in verse 35 it's looking to Jesus that John uses in verse 40 it's listening and learning from Jesus that's in the verse 45 so I think it all just goes together it's not mystical it's not too hard Jesus said look yes you must eat me and drink me he's been really really emphatic in other words what he's saying is unless you guys see me says Jesus as critical for life as bread and water then there could be no life no relationship with God unless you see me as being so central to life that you have to ingest me in my whole being flesh and blood not just taking bits of me you might like but the whole kit and caboodle unless you're doing that then there's no life no salvation so let me come back verse 55 to the phrase

I used in the introduction you are what you eat verse 55 Jesus says my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I abide in him you are what you eat other food Jesus is considering saving here other food has some benefits but there's only one source of real life real salvation and only one way of connecting into that source of life through trusting or believing or coming to Jesus or being taught and learning from Jesus or having faith in Jesus all of those phrases are sort of similar ideas similar pictures describing the one reality if you're going to have life if you're going to have salvation if you're going to have a relationship with God then it has to be entirely invested in and through

Jesus feeding on Jesus therefore needs to be purposeful it's not something that happens automatically you need to says Jesus recognize the extent of your hunger you need to recognize that Jesus is actually deep down what you crave for what you've been longing for all your life because he will be the one who satisfies your heart hunger Jesus is saying build desire therefore for good food take time this is all part of feeding on Jesus take time to understand how Jesus is the perfectly balanced diet he is perfectly suited to your nutritional needs and perfectly supplies all your nutritional needs spiritual nutritional needs for the good life so Jesus says take time to savor and enjoy the delights that I offer you through active personal daily commitment to me that's all part of feeding take time to study my word take time to pray enjoy the fellowship with others who likewise recognize true food good food when they see it determine says Jesus to get rid of all junk food from your diet it's so appealing but you know deep down that it's not good for you that it doesn't satisfy so this is all part and parcel of what it is to feed on

[30 : 02] Jesus come to me believe in me trust in me learn from me respond to me have faith in me search for me desire for me desire me and finally Jesus offers a consequence he says I promise I will deliver the forever life you long for now we know that physical nutrition affects every part of a person we know that no food means you'll die in somewhere between 21 and 30 days without exception we know that bad food likewise stunts or deforms in the short term or causes death over a longer period and I think Jesus is just saying look it's like that in the spiritual realm as well the consequences of what you eat is huge quite literally says Jesus here the consequence of what you eat is quite literally life or death and Jesus promises here to follow the picture the metaphor of food

Jesus promises to deliver limitless health benefits to all who will feed on it the perfect balanced nutritional diet fail safe guaranteed he will deliver forever sacrifice verse 51 that bread says Jesus the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh that links back to Isaiah 53 Jesus emphasizes that he has come down from heaven to do his father's will and salvation what is his father's will primarily to offer himself as a sacrifice to deal with God's anger at our sin to pay the penalty for our sin the things that caused the relationship with God to be broken in the first place the things that leave us alienated from God in our natural state the things that deep down in our heart leave us fearful of

God's ultimate rejection Jesus says I promise you forever sacrifice never again do you need to feel or be guilty before God forever intimacy he promises verse 55 that word abide is a beautiful word and it's very very important in John's biography of Jesus he uses it lots of times it's a warm secure intimate word and part of our deep spiritual heart hunger is a longing for intimacy we substitute it so easily thinking about sex or physical relationships but that's only an expression of something much deeper we long for a deep intimacy and security in a guilt free relationship says Jesus that's exactly what I promise to deliver to you

Genesis 1 describes the intimate abide in me and I will abide in you relationship which God created at the start of the world where people were made in the image of God made to enjoy the relationship within the eternal community Father Son and Holy Spirit we were made to be part of that that was our ultimate being our ultimate satisfaction our ultimate joy is to be part of that relationship well says Jesus if you come to me now for salvation that's exactly what I take you back to that very relationship for which you were created coming to Jesus feeding on Jesus believing on Jesus secures the benefits of his sacrificial death which is a life transforming union with Christ restoration of family relationship and restoration of full enjoyment of the eternal community and Jesus says I promise you forever life it's repeated multiple times in these verses and again that's what our hearts long for every time we observe sickness and death something rises up from within us and screams out in our minds and sometimes even screams out verbally and audibly we were made for something better than this this is not right and Jesus delivers what we long for forever life eternal life is not just life without limits in time it is life without limits in security in relationship with God it is life without limit of joy or satisfaction it's a life without any evidence of hunger and thirst moving forward it's a life of being with

Jesus and being like Jesus it's a life of strength for living in this day to day struggle Jesus promises I will deliver all of that for you if you come to me so my friends a very simple question connecting back to where we started verse 41 are you continuing to be a gambler having heard what Jesus has on his menu and offers you free of charge are you going to continue to turn up your nose and say it's not what I want bring me a different menu or if you're a Christian is Jesus really your food and drink or is he just one part of a very varied diet where other things in your life bring you sustenance and nourishment and life as well let me pray lord help us to understand this passage which is full of difficult pictures lord we understand that the problem and any problem and understanding is our limited incapacity as people to delve into your mind so by your spirit lord help us to see truth and help us to respond to truth and to the lord jesus amen this good to■■■