

I AM the source of true life

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. This morning, as Alex said, we're going to get back into John's Gospel after a break of eight or nine weeks. And of course, I want to do that by way of some revision, so as we actually pick up the big picture of the story of John.

And you remember, we've cast the whole biography of John a bit like a courtroom drama. And John is the barrister. And in chapter one, he outlines his case against or for Jesus.

Regarding Jesus. And he says in chapter one, several really key things. So he says that Jesus is truly and completely God. And he alleges that Jesus is truly and completely human at the same time.

God and man perfectly together. And he alleges that Jesus has come into the world as the fulfiller of God's purposes and salvation. He's come to give light.

He's come to give life. He's come to give family privilege. And he's come to do that for all who will receive him. On his terms.

[1 : 1 1] The flip side is that the rest, those who won't receive him on his terms, he then confirms in darkness.

In death. In alienation from God's family. In spite of their religious lifestyle. So John's biography about Jesus plunks Jesus right into the middle of a context where people are busy being religious.

And Jesus is saying that's not enough. You can be religious and still only know death and darkness and alienation from God.

John's brief is to show that Jesus has come to turn that around. In chapter two onwards, then, John systematically presents the supporting evidence for these claims.

And he builds his case like a good barrister does, step by step, with seven signs or miracles. And the associated teaching that goes with each of those miracles.

[2 : 1 7] Teaching that explains and illustrates the significance of the spiritual significance of the signs or the miracles themselves. And as we track through that, then we're actually getting, and again, the best traditions of the law courts nowadays, we're getting an identikit picture of Jesus built.

Piece by piece, it's becoming clear who this Jesus is and how he wants people to respond to. And as he does that, John also introduces seven key sayings of Jesus, which spell out the nature of the life that Jesus offers.

And this morning, as we jump back into John's gospel, we're jumping back into the context in which Jesus uses the first of these things. Jesus says, I am the bread of life.

I am the bread from heaven. It's a profound thing. Hopefully we'll see what it means as we go through. Alex has already sort of gone before me. So just remember Alex's stuff if you've done me any sense of mine.

So let's just pick up the context there. So the day before, we start verse 22 the next day, so I'm just going to the day before. So what's the day before, verses 1 to 15? Well, the day before, a massive, hungry crowd had experienced personally, not just theoretically, but personally, an astounding miracle.

[3 : 46] As Jesus not only fed the lot of them, 5,000, more than 5,000, could be twice that number if you count women and children, but at least 5,000, fed from the lunchbox of some random young boy.

Not only that, but ending up with 12 baskets, ending up with far, far more than what he started with. And everything about the context of that reminded the crowd of the story of Moses feeding God's people in the wilderness.

So quite correctly, if you look at verse 14, quite correctly, when the people saw the sign he had done, they said, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.

So they got it right. They recognized in Jesus the prophet, the Messiah. But look at verse 15.

No sooner had they got it right than they'd get it wrong. Their own agenda derails them. Only thinking about the need for salvation or deliverance from the external enemy of Roman occupation, Roman oppression, and being convinced that what they've just seen of Jesus marked him out as the guy who had the credentials to lead a rebellion against the Romans, they then seized Jesus, or they then intend to seize Jesus and make him a king by force.

[5 : 24] In other words, they're imposing their agenda onto what it means for Jesus to be the prophet. The result? Jesus just slips away.

It doesn't really tell us why, but I think at least we can say that Jesus wasn't remotely interested in their agenda of what it meant for him to be king. Perhaps he withdrew with deep sadness that the crowds could not see their need to be delivered from something far more fundamental, far more profound than the Romans.

That is, they couldn't see the need to be delivered from their own sinful hearts, from their own alienation from relationship with God. You can just sense the sadness that these guys are still working, operating on the outside in.

Well, the next day, verses 22, then we pick up the story, the crowd's still hanging around. And I presume we're meant to understand that it's sort of 16 hours later, at least, if not more, and so they're hungry again.

They're hanging around, and they're looking for a repeat performance. But Jesus is nowhere to be found.

[6 : 45] Knowing that his disciples had gone to Capernaum, and probably undeterred in their plans to make him king, according to their terms, they commandeered whatever boats they could find to take as many as possible across the lake to track down Jesus.

And when they drag him down in Capernaum, we know from verse 59 that in the meantime, Jesus had gone into the synagogue. So presumably, it's a much smaller crowd that Jesus is dealing with in these verses.

But the pattern of their thinking is revealed in their opening question. The question is, how did you get here?

When did you get here? When did you get here? They were struggling to work out how Jesus could have gotten to Capernaum so quickly on foot.

That was their problem. And you see what we've been told there very subtly? The day before, they'd just witnessed Jesus as they'd seen and heard of him before, doing many miracles.

[7 : 54] They personally had experienced the day before, but still, it doesn't occur to them that perhaps he could have got to Capernaum in some miraculous way.

They're just not thinking about Jesus. They're just not thinking about Jesus in the terms that Jesus presents. And likewise, in verse 25 through 65, then we see the pattern of Jesus' thinking.

So we see their thinking pattern. And in these verses, we see the pattern of Jesus' thinking revealed. And so verse, he just ignores them, verse 26. He just ignores their question.

What a dumb question he's thinking to himself. He just ignores it. And instead, exposes their crummy motives and even their willful blindness.

And all of that, remember, in the context as they protest that they're seeking and following him. I think John uses the wording very carefully in verse 24.

[8 : 57] They go to Capernaum seeking Jesus. But the question is, we keep bouncing against it. What are they seeking? Who are they seeking? On what terms are they seeking? And Jesus responds, truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me.

See, you get this play on this word. You're seeking me not because you saw signs. In other words, you're not seeing me as I'm presenting. You're seeing me as you think I ought to be and as you want me to be.

First and foremost, the filler of a belly. A pretty handy guy to have around when you find yourself stuck in the desert. We know shops within Cooley. And so Jesus says to them, you are deliberately short-sighted in the things you think will satisfy.

Jesus accused them, as I said, of being interested in him only on their own terms. Yeah, you could provide us with a free feed, Jesus.

Your remarkable powers are just what we need to galvanize the nation, to rise in insurrection against these Romans and be done with them once for all. Well, you're the sort of leader we need to get the good life that we deserve as the people of Israel.

[10 : 18] And indeed, the life that God promised us. So they were more than willing to sign up as his disciples at this point, while ever he kept delivering their needs or what they imagined their needs to be.

Do you see what's happened? They've taken this incredible miracle that they personally experienced. They were caught up in. They actually had a physical result. Hunger was stopped and replaced with a sense of fullness.

They couldn't eat anymore. And yet they still reduced that miracle to their own small-minded agenda of immediate personal benefit.

We see nothing in these verses of the crowd being drawn to Jesus as the Son of God. As the Savior.

As someone who's altogether beautiful. Desirable or even necessary for them. We're not drawn.

[11 : 41] There's no evidence that we've been drawn into a deeper desire for a deeper relationship with Christ. More accountability to him as God. Or even a sense of rest and fulfillment in him.

So friends, I want to say to you this morning as we move into this passage, that I think you and I need to see ourselves in this crowd. Not just looking on dispassionately from the vantage point of history.

We need to see ourselves in this crowd. These people want God as long as he delivers what they want and demand and imagine they need.

Failed to deliver? Well, they'll simply move on to another source of supply. And that's what we're told at the end of this chapter. Verse whatever, 59, 60, 66 it is.

Many of the disciples turned away from him. They stopped following him because they started to work out that he wasn't going to deliver the things they wanted him to deliver. And so they just packed up their swag and moved on, looking for the next source.

[12 : 58] Now, you say to yourself, well, isn't Jesus the provider of all our needs? And I have to say, yes, he is the provider of all our needs. And then you say, well, isn't it right then that we should bring our needs before him?

And I say, yes, it is. It is right that we should bring our needs before him. But here's the catch, you see, because it's possible, like these people, to be so focused on what we imagine our needs to be that we actually have focused on ourselves and not focused on Jesus at all, except to see him as the agency or the conduit who will deliver what we want.

And so the result is that we don't see our needs as Jesus defines them. And therefore, we never pursue the solutions that Jesus offers.

In fact, we think it's quite strange. Why would Jesus push us down this track? It just doesn't seem relevant to me. And it doesn't seem relevant because we haven't identified our needs properly. As the article in the front of the bulletin suggests, young people in particular, the evidence is coming out now, young people in particular treat God like a phone app.

It's a useful tool there to be used at your command to get what you want, but it's only one of a range of apps. It might be a good app, maybe even the best app you have, but it's only a range.

[14 : 36] It's only one of a range. And it will provide this where another app will provide that. Oops, now we're stuck here.

That wasn't meant to be a pregnant pause, young people. We often think like that ourselves, don't we? As adults, we're shocked when we see thinking like that in our children.

Where did our children get it from? Perhaps we modeled it to them. Perhaps we've been better teachers of our children than we realized.

We just didn't realize what it was we were teaching them. A horrible consumerist view of God. So Jesus challenged the crowd then, and he says to you and me today as well, you're short-sighted in the things you think will satisfy.

You should put your energy into pursuing real heart satisfaction. So Jesus recognizes here the efforts and energy they're using in chasing after the good life of peace and security and satisfaction.

[16 : 02] He acknowledges that. He said, yeah, I can see you guys are chasing the good life. But he exposes their pointless fixation with physical appetites, the outside-in approach to finding the good life.

Looking at their desires and the material blessings, things that push them to the deeper, more urgent level of spiritual need when they understand properly the failures of these things.

And Jesus wants them to look for real heart satisfaction. That's where the idea of bread comes in.

Just as bread is the basic staple and source of physical life, nourishment and health and growth into maturity, so Jesus pushes them to desire him as their bread.

Put your effort into pursuing me and you'll find the truly satisfying life which will sustain throughout eternity, says Jesus. Augustine famously said of the Lord, you have formed us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.

[17 : 19] He was echoing Jesus' words here. If you want that which gives you the good life, it will satisfy you. And everybody does.

I recognize it, in you, says Jesus, as he speaks to the crowd. Well, the good life of rich, satisfying nourishment which every person on this earth ultimately longs for and seeks after is not just a reality, but get this, what Jesus says, he says to the crowd, it's not just a reality, but it's actually a gift, a reality that comes to you as a gift to those who will accept it.

It's a reality guaranteed by God. That's what it means when it says that God has set a seal on Jesus. In those days, a seal was essentially like a signature. It authenticated a document.

So Jesus is saying, look, I come to you as the authenticated one, the only accredited outlet, if you like, for the real satisfying life we are created to enjoy in relationship with God.

Jesus comes, he says, with the authority and the power to deliver this life. He truly is the bread, the satisfying bread, if only they will ingest him.

[18 : 43] John's made that point repeatedly in his biography. And in the end, there only is one point. If you want to read, if you're not a Christian here this morning, there only is one point to get through John's biography. He makes it over and over and over again, like a barrister building his case.

It just revolves around this one thing. Jesus says, if you want life, I'm the person you're looking for. There's so many other places that offer life, but I'm the only accredited outlet for satisfying true life.

Jesus says in his own words, I am the deeply satisfying life you long for.

And hopefully you're seeing the progression in the text. You know, you are, you should be, and now we've got to Jesus' main point, I am.

I am the deeply satisfying life you long for. Recognizing that Jesus is speaking about spiritual bread, spiritual nourishment, spiritual life, the crowd now respond.

[19 : 47] Verse 28, and that's such a sad response. Sometimes commentators suggest this is the crowd searching for truth. I don't think that for a moment. I think this is just an expression of unbelief thrown back in the face of Jesus.

Jesus says, look, I am the life you're looking for and I will give this life to you as a gift. What does the crowd say? Tell us what we have to do to earn it. Tell us what we have to do to make God happy.

It's an expression of stubborn unbelief in which they push back Jesus. Why? I can only assume because they're determined to keep control through a typical religious response.

If you tell us what we need to do so that God will be happy so that in turn he will deliver the good life we want. So my friends, the crowd are actually refusing the terms that Jesus just offered them.

He's offered them deep spiritual life and heart satisfaction and they're rejecting it determined to keep salvation and the good life under their own control and in their own agenda.

[21 : 07] You see, in stating that he gives the good life of satisfaction as a gift, I take it that Jesus expects them to recognize and acknowledge the need for the gift because they've tried really hard to find the good life through religion and through other things and it's failed them.

And he would expect them therefore to be more attentive to a viable alternative. But no, they're committed to the same old path. And remember back in chapter 5, Jesus has already had the similar argument with the Jewish religious leaders.

They too should have realized their rebellious hearts meant they were hard-wired to reject the good life of obedience to God and replace it with a cheap, unsatisfying substitute of their own making.

They weren't looking for Jesus in the Old Testament. Why not? That's the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus tells them, you weren't looking for me because you don't see any need for me. They thought eternal life was to be gained simply by going through the motions, by reading the Bible and keeping all the religious festivals and doing all the religious things.

That's what Jesus said to them. You think in doing these things you have eternal life? Well, he said, no. And Jesus pushes back again on this crowd and said, I'm offering life much easier than you think.

[22 : 34] Verse 29. So Jesus comes back again. You can see this tussle, this to and fro. Jesus says, it's a gift. They say, tell me what to do. Jesus says, it's real easy.

You don't have to do anything. You just have to believe. He rejects the religious determination that they will please God.

He says, no, you won't do that. He says, what do you need to do to get this life? He's believing, believe in me. I'm the one sent by the Father to be your bread. Now, I take it this answer would have been shocking to the crowd because Jesus is totally at odds with their way of thinking.

They're talking about this life. They want to earn it. And Jesus says, well, you can't earn it. What you have to do is accept it. And I am that life. I am God giving himself to you.

to be your life, to be your nourishment, to be your future. But now they hold back and push back for a religious option of something they can do to cure God's blessing without having to accept God himself in Jesus.

[23 : 52] And my friends, it sounds so much like us, doesn't it? I've used before the notion that we run all the time and we're not alone. We commonly run it as Christians.

We run what I call formulaic living. If we do A, B, and C for God, then it's only right and proper that we expect God to do X, Y, and Z for us in return.

And so when we have a contract like that, we get what we want but in a sense don't have to give up our independence or our sense of entitlement.

And we don't have to treasure God. We don't have to delight in him generally. We just recognize that we need him to complete his part of the formula.

We recognize we need him to resolve the problems which block our happiness. Jesus said, I'm offering you a way, I'm offering you a life that's way better than anything you dare to think.

[25 : 01] I'm offering you the gift of God himself, verses 33, 35. Again, the crowd hold their line. And it's a real struggle that's happening here. They hold their line determined to keep control and determined now to manipulate Jesus into doing what they want.

And how do they do that? Well, the question is credentials. Remember the day before? They'd just seen him and experienced the miracle he's done. What do they do now? They say, well, I say Jesus, that was all very impressive.

You fed 5,000 from a schoolboy's lunchbox. Very good, but not enough. If you really are the prophet of God, if you really are, who you say you are, then we want to see something bigger and better.

It's pretty aggressive, demanding, manipulative stuff. They're really saying to Jesus, they're really putting pressure on Jesus to do what they say needs to be done for Jesus to prove himself.

Claim to be bigger and better than Moses? Then we expect bigger and better miracles. What did Moses do? He fed the people, the whole of the people of Israel, not just for one meal on one day, Jesus, but how many times a day?

[26 : 14] Twice? Is that right? All right, regularly, six days a week for 40 years. I suddenly realized I didn't know myself there. No, I was actually just testing you guys. I do know. And Jesus holds his line, correcting them and pushing them back to recognize and accept him as the bread from heaven, the bread of life who alone satisfies the real hunger of the human heart.

And once again, you see, this interaction shows how earthbound and full of unbelief they are. They actually ascribe manna to Moses, for goodness sake.

And Jesus just in passing corrects them, but it's a pretty serious correction. Listen, you idiots, it wasn't Moses that gave you manna, it was God. And that manna was stuff that perished, it was only a temporary fix.

I'm telling you that I'm giving you a bread, I am a bread that's far, far better than anything you've ever experienced in manna. That was the focus of your salvation picture for the people of Israel, this manna.

Well, I'm telling you, I'm now going to be the focus of God's salvation picture with a complete permanent fix. I am the bread of heaven, the bread from heaven.

[27 : 34] I am among you, God is among you, giving you bread from heaven that's far, far better, way better than you could ever think or imagine. In me, God has given you himself as the source of true satisfying life.

If only you would ingest me, he says, Jesus, take me into you like bread, I will nourish not only your body, but your soul. See, manna was only ever temporary for the physical body.

Jesus says, I'm total and permanent fix to the basic and deepest longing of the human heart. As you ingest me as the basic ingredient of life, I will nourish your soul.

I will reconnect you to the eternal community of Father, Son, and Spirit, which was what you were made for in the first place, and the context in which you will thrive and grow and be healthy.

And I am the bread for the whole world, says Jesus. Verse 34, they said, Sir, give us this bread always.

[28 : 46] Now, what do you think? Believing statement? Or another expression of unbelief, shallowness. Yeah, not much belief, I don't think. It's a shallowness. It's like the woman of the Samaria at the well.

Senses there's something in it, but doesn't really have a clue. Unbelief again.

Genuine but shallow. They respond as their sin-distorted selves, anticipating having something to make life better for them, rather than expressing any sort of connection with Jesus as the Savior, as a person.

But none of that unsettles Jesus. And so the last point I want to point you to this morning is, Jesus says, I'm offering life which is real and secure in spite of your persistent, unreasonable unbelief.

Verses 35 and 40. I should say that lots of commentators launch into these verses with doctrine of election and predestination and stuff like that, which is all true, but I just don't think that's the point of the narrative.

[29 : 54] I think Jesus is just saying, look, what I'm talking about here is real and secure and it's not under threat because of your unbelief. It will happen. It's a reality that will happen.

And Jesus says this to the crowd knowing that he is the one the crowd are hungering for, they just don't recognize it. You know, sometimes we experience that.

We get really hungry and we're longing for really good food, but then what happens? We see Coke in the fridge and we get sidetracked by our addiction to sugar.

And so we settle for something that's absolute crap. It's a bit like that here. Jesus knows that this crowd are longing for him.

They need him. But their sugar addiction is just meaning they can't see him or won't see him. They just want the quick fix of something that's familiar and comfortable to them.

[31 : 04] Jesus points out something very, very clear in verse 36. The only thing between people and true satisfaction of deep longings is the response to Jesus.

In this case, the response of unbelief. The question for the crowd, you see, ultimately, and this is the question for you and me today as well. The question for the crowd ultimately is not, do they understand?

Will they accept Jesus and the life, the eternal life, the good life that he offers on his terms?

And that's exactly the question you and I will be divided on today. Okay. But Jesus says in spite of massive unbelief, he will deliver perfectly his father's salvation purpose.

Every single person that the father intends to save and bring into eternal life will be saved and brought into eternal life.

[32 : 16] Every person that God intends to give life to as a gift will come to Jesus in trust because the father will powerfully draw them to Jesus. Every single person that is drawn to Jesus will be kept totally safe and secure until finally they're raised into a full experience of eternal life.

And eternal life, remember, is not just life without end, which we might think about, but it's actually a life of total satisfaction, complete joy, absolute security. All of that's involved in eternal life.

It's the life we were created to enjoy. We don't enjoy because of sin. It's the life we long for. What keeps you from having it this morning if you're not already a Christian?

Well, your response to Jesus. Simple as that. And you get two options. You can say, well, this doesn't make any sense. Or you can come to Jesus and say, well, look, Jesus, I don't fully understand, but I want to understand.

I know I'm longing for this life. You're telling me that life is to be found in you and not in some of these other places I've pursued all my life. Well, Jesus, I want to really pursue that with you now.

[33 : 37] open my eyes, break my addiction to crappy sugars, and help me to see what's really new.

It's a wonderful picture of God's goodness and generosity for his people. But look at the response, verse 41. I'm just going to leave it hanging. We've got two more weeks to deal with this passage.

I'm just going to leave it hanging this morning. Look at the response in verse 41. They've heard of the goodness of God in Jesus, wanting to give them this good life, that satisfying bread as a gift, not that they have to earn or work for, but just believe and take and accept as a gift.

And they grumble. Nice. Thank you. Thank you.