

I AM the bread of life in the wilderness

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- [0 : 0 0] So we're going to read John 6, 1-14, and then I'm going to skip over and read 26-35. After this, Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.
- And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.
- Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, Where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?
- He said this to test them, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, 200 denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.
- One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?
- [1 : 0 7] Jesus said, Have the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place, so the men sat down, about 5,000 in number. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated.
- So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told the disciples, Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.
- So they gathered them up and filled 12 baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.
- Now jumping down to 26. Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.
- Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.
- [2 : 1 8] Then they said to him, What must we do to be doing the works of God? Jesus answered them, This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.
- So they said to him, Then what sign do you do that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written.
- He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Jesus then said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave 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, Sir, give us this bread always. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life.
- Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Well, I have first met my wife in university days, and I still remember at Jesmond Park, there's this attractive Christian girl playing soccer.
- [3 : 3 7] And I told this inappropriate joke. I can't remember the joke, but I remember the reaction. This girl did not laugh, and she just kept playing soccer, and she didn't talk to me again.

I blew it. I absolutely blew it. Now, thankfully, God has erased her memory of this. I remember it. She doesn't remember it.

And we met again years later when I grew up a little bit more. Now, I'm going to let you in on a little secret that I still say and do things that offend Emma.

Now, when you meet a real person, at points they irritate, and at points they confuse, and at points they can even offend.

Don't real people offend? Now, there's a big difference. Obviously, I'm leading to Jesus here. There's a big difference between Jesus and me. I offend because I am offensive.

[4 : 47] I believe Jesus offends because he's greater than what we want. That's why he offends. If you're visiting this morning, we've got no interest in you signing up to a religion.

We want you to meet a person, a real person, a person we love. But like any real person, he offends. That's how you know he's real.

There's so many different ideas of Jesus out there in the world. You've probably come across a lot of them. But so many people just chop off the bits of Jesus they don't like. And in the end, they've just got this figment of their own imagination.

There's so many theories about Jesus out there. But they've just chopped off the bits they don't like. So I invite you to meet the real Jesus.

And how do you do that? In his word. Listen to what he says. Hear what he thinks about himself. Not what I think. What he thinks about himself. From his own words.

[5 : 52] Now, those who met him were deeply offended by him, is what we see in this passage. We pick up the story.

Jesus has just supernaturally fed a crowd the size of, like, apparently the average attendance at a Newcastle Jets game. At least it was that.

I'm not sure if that impresses you or not. But he's just fed this crowd. And they're out in the sticks. They're in the wilderness. And he used the schoolboy's lunchbox.

And this Jewish crowd, they're amazed. They know their history. They know who they are. Their nation began with Moses. He's a big deal. Setting them free from Egypt.

And once they were free, they were in the wilderness. And their stomachs started to growl. And then they started to growl at Moses. What, did you bring us out here to die? Give us some food.

[6 : 53] And God gives them bread from heaven every morning. It's described as like frost on the ground, little flakes. And the families picked up the flakes every morning.

And they baked it into bread. And it tasted like honey. Now, he did this for a whole generation for 40 years. Bread made the difference between dying of starvation in the wilderness and making it to the promised land.

When we hear bread, we might think like, I don't know, gluten-free, multigrain, whatever. There's a thousand different choices.

When they heard bread, they heard life or starving. So Jesus, they've just tasted the bread from Jesus.

And this crowd is excited. They knew that God had promised a second Moses. Is this the second Moses? So his public relations staff must have been really excited. Like, this huge crowd coming.

[8 : 00] But he doesn't like it. Jesus is not happy. He's not happy about it. And by the end of the day, most of the people have walked away.

They're deeply offended by him. So what does he say that's so offensive? Well, first, he suggests he's someone greater than Moses.

Now, for us to kind of feel the offence of this, I think it might be like if we attended an Anzac Day dawn service.

And in that solemn morning air, when you're remembering the sacrifice of people to give us freedom. And after the service, someone next to you says, I'm about to do something that's even greater than that.

It's just... Now, I'm not sure if that quite captures it, but it's so ingrained in our culture. How dare someone speak like that?

[9 : 14] So Jesus does kind of allude to be greater than Moses and be doing something that's even greater than Moses. Whoa, he better be telling the truth.

It's pretty offensive. Because Moses spoke to God as a friend. Jesus says, I speak to God as my father. Yes, Moses, he ate and drank up in the mountain.

And he saw something like the glory of God's feet or his back. Jesus says, I know him fully.

I've come down from heaven. I am in closest relationship with God. So he offends by saying, I'm a bigger deal than Moses.

I'm doing something greater than Moses did. And then he confronts their motives for why they're seeking him.

[10 : 16] He says, do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures for eternal life. Now in those times, most of the people lived off the land.

And apparently, it's probably approximate to like 85% of someone's income was just to put the fish and bread on the table. Having bread is life.

Not having bread is starvation. And how amazing would it be if you had someone who could put bread on the table every day. You don't need to work.

Imagine that work-life balance. You can go to the beach more. Imagine if Jesus just increases your income 85%. They want this bread.

Give us this bread continually. This is fantastic. But he's offending their idea of where they'll find life. He points out the obvious fact that physical bread isn't enough.

[11 : 27] Even in Moses' day. Yes, they ate the manna for 40 years. But that generation died. They didn't make it to the promise.

They didn't make it. That physical bread wasn't enough. Because they missed the true spiritual life that God wanted to give them.

They were just focused on the bread. And now he's saying, you're doing the same thing. You're coming to me because you think I'm useful. Stop searching for things that spoil, that perish.

And I think people today will still seek Jesus as long as he's useful. How useful is Jesus if when you pray to him, he can heal all your sicknesses?

If he does that, wow, yeah, he's worth following. He's useful if he guarantees that your kids will grow up to be good people and have good jobs.

[12 : 34] He's useful because he gives you get out of jail free card once you die. You can have ongoing existence forever.

People seek Jesus because he's useful. And Jesus is saying, don't search for things, life in things that perish, that spoil, that fade.

Now, I've just turned 36. And someone, Kath saw this image of me from, we're going to meet Kath later in the service.

She saw this image from me from SMBC. Someone posted it on a group chat of SMBC friends. I barely recognize myself because there's so much color in my hair.

Like six years ago. And I haven't even earned my gray hair yet. Like some of you have earned it. I haven't earned it yet.

[13 : 40] It's fading. Like my soccer team is struggling to field 11 players because there's so many injuries. Like we're too old.

You know what I'm talking about. Success, achievement, power, anything.

It fades, right? It all fades. During World War II, there was a radio broadcast.

And the presenter said it better than I can. So he said, most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want and want acutely something that cannot be had in this world.

There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we fall in love or first think of some country or first take up some subject that excites us or are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning can really satisfy.

[15 : 01] There was something we grasped at in that first moment of longing which just fades away in the reality. I think everyone knows what I mean.

Jesus is saying, don't strive for things that perish. It will leave you starving in the wilderness. Don't come to me because you think I'm useful to get something from me.

I've come to give true bread, true life, quality, quality of life. So what quality of life is Jesus talking about here?

He does say he will raise his people on the last day. He's going to, we Christians, we believe that Jesus will raise us physically, materially for forever existence.

But it's more than that. It's more than just existing forever. However, the Bible has a term for ongoing existing without quality of life.

[16 : 07] It's called hell. It's not just existing. He's talking about a quality of life here. He's saying, I want to give you true life.

Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. And whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Eternal life starts now, as soon as you come. So here we come to the first of the seven I am claims in John's Gospel.

And we're going to spend seven weeks on this. Jesus is saying, I didn't come to be useful. I am the bread of life. The wording in the original language, it's strange wording.

It's emphasizing not the bread. It's saying, I myself am the bread of life. Jesus didn't come to give bread, but to be bread.

When my one-year-old Aurora is in her high chair and she's got a bib on and she's got a placemat, which barely catches any of the scraps that are just going everywhere.

[17 : 22] But she's a noisy eater. She's... Jesus says, if you want true quality of life, you need to be a noisy eater.

That's kind of what's behind this word here. Whoever feeds... Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life.

And I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food. And my blood is true drink. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

Now, for all the cannibals in the room, you're loving this. But for the rest of us, that's an offensive image, is it not? You've got to feed on my flesh and drink my blood.

Now, this offends. It offends even Christian tradition. Because a lot of Christians go, oh, he's talking about Holy Communion, where you have the wafers and the wine.

[18 : 44] He's talking about the sacrament. But I don't think so. The language is way too strong for that. Because if you look at the wording, if you eat and drink, you have eternal life.

Full stop. He doesn't add any conditions. That's the only requirement. You want eternal life? Eat and drink. Unless you eat and drink, you have no life.

There is no Christian tradition that says, only if you partake of Holy Communion, will you have eternal life. No one, people don't follow the logic of that.

It's too absolute language. It's offending Christian tradition even. You've got a noisily munch on my flesh. Now, clearly it's a metaphor.

So what's the real thing that it's a metaphor of? And why would he use such an offensive image? Well, he's told us plainly.

[19 : 53] In verse 47, whoever believes in me has eternal life. Verse 35, whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

So how does he give us this flesh and blood to drink? Well, us city dwellers, we're so far removed from where food comes from.

But if you live on the farm or if you grew up on the farm, you probably get this a bit more easily. That if you leave here and go through drive-through and get a hamburger, that cow, I'm not sure if you know this or not, but that cow went to a building called an abattoir.

And there's some very sharp knives in that building. And that grain of wheat, living and growing in the field, had to be cut from the stalk and then crushed and then put in the oven.

The grain had to die. The cow has to die so that you eat it and live. Something has to die.

[21 : 12] You have to die or the cow and the grain has to die. Jesus dies or I die.

Jesus dies or I die.

And gave his life so that I can live. I think the metaphor is pretty clear. But why use such a picture like feeding?

I think it helps us just cut straight to the point of what belief means. Here's what truth belief means. Belief means. It doesn't mean belonging to a human institution like a church.

Belonging to a group doesn't help you. You've got to feed. You have to eat. You have to drink. What we feed on isn't a list of doctrinal statements that we just intellectually subscribe to.

[22 : 40] It's a person. We have to somehow ingest Jesus into our being. I think we talk like this when we talk about the ones we love.

I think of my family and I think I can't think of them apart from me. They're in me. They're in my heart. They're so a part of me.

I think that's the kind of language belief is about. It's not a list of truths. Once you believe in Jesus, he's just so precious to you.

He's in you. He's not useful to you. He himself is precious to you. Well, I want to finish with a story of someone who's been in the wilderness much more than I have.

And I think she describes what this feeding on Jesus, what effect it has had on her. And so I want to finish with her story. And if I make it through without crying, it'll be a miracle, okay?

[23 : 59] I'll just warn you. But it's a story of Joni Erikson-Tata. These are her words. My prayers as a teenager were so self-centered looking back.

God, help me lose weight. God, help me get a new boyfriend. God, help me get good grades in this test. I thought I'd done God a huge favor by accepting Jesus as my Savior.

A few weeks after high school, my sister Kathy invited me for a swim. And I swam out to a pontoon and dived in. And I snapped my head back when I hit the bottom.

Stuttered already. Crushed my fourth cervical vertebrae, severing my spinal cord. After 46 years of quadriplegia.

Don't be thinking I'm an expert at quadriplegia. Every morning I wake up saying, Jesus, I can't do this thing called life. Please help me.

[25 : 01] Please show up. Give me your smile. Give me your strength. Because I can't make it through the day. Because I go to God with that earnest dependency and requirement of his grace, I experience the sweetest, most precious, most intimate union with Jesus Christ.

I have chronic pain. I had breast cancer a couple of years ago. My husband was driving me home in the van from chemotherapy one day.

We were talking about suffering as like little splashovers of hell. And we pulled into the driveway and he said, Well, what do you think splashovers of heaven are?

Are they those easy, breezy, bright times where everything is going your way? And we said, No. Splashovers of heaven are finding Jesus in your splashovers of hell.

To find Jesus in your hell is ecstasy beyond compare. I wouldn't trade it for any amount of walking in this world.

[26 : 33] You won't find life in what spoils or fades. Can I just invite you, get to know this offensive Jesus.

Because when you feast on him, it's the richest of foods. He gives life even in the wilderness. I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. And whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Let me pray. Lord, I know my words can't even get into my own heart.

My tears can't win us over. Any warnings I've said can't convince us. My prayer is that you would meet each and every one of us and show us the Lord Jesus.

So that we might feed on him and have eternal life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.