

(1) Food that lasts

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[0 : 0 0] The reading will be found on page 1074. The reading will be found on page 1074.

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came rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat. And they were frightened. And he said to them, It is I, do not be afraid. Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

The second half of the reading is found on page 1075, and we're going to start at verse 22 to verse 40. On the next day, the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum seeking Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here? 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 labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal. 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 who he has sent.

[3 : 5 0] 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. 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. But I said to you, that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, and everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

[5 : 1 4] Do please keep the Bibles open at John chapter 6, as we continue to look through John's Gospel together. Page 1074, if you've lost it.

What on earth is God doing in the world is a question people often ask. If God exists, why doesn't he do something?

Now I suspect that is a question which our culture finds rather difficult to give a straight answer to. On the one hand, of course, we like the idea of the gods who will intervene in his world.

In the face of suffering or disaster, God's apparent lack of intervention is often cited as a reason either for his total non-existence, or for the fact that he is clearly powerless to act and to intervene.

So on that level, we want a God who does intervene, who will do something. On the other hand, when back in the summer, the Bishop of Carlisle suggested that the floods were a sign of God's intervention in judgment, he was roundly condemned and pilloried in the press.

[6 : 26] Well, we've seen, haven't we, over the last few weeks in John chapter 5, that God is a God who intervenes in his world. Indeed, that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, he came into the world to do the very works of God himself.

Just flip back to John chapter 5, verses 21 to 23, where we see that the work that Jesus does is the work of God of giving life and judging.

Verse 21, However, that raises the question, what is it that Jesus is doing now?

If he is God, if he does the work of God, what is it that he is doing now? In other words, what is God doing in the world today? Well, the answer from John chapter 6 is that he has come to give life.

Yes, there will be a future judgment day, but the main thing that God is doing in his world now is to give life. Life with God, both in this world and also in the next world.

[7 : 47] That's the main thing we're going to see in John chapter 6 over these next few weeks. But at the same time, as well as seeing that, John chapter 6 will also show us why it is that people reject Jesus and the life that he offers.

You see, have a look at John chapter 6, verse 2 with me, where we see that at the beginning of the chapter, there are large crowds who are following him. We get the same thing in verse 5 again.

We see the large crowds there. And again in verse 10, 5,000 people sit down to eat. So here we see sort of intense interest in Jesus and in what he is doing.

But flick over the page, because by the end of the chapter, things look rather different. We see growing hostility to Jesus, grumbling even against him.

chapter 6, verse 60. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, this is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? And then what happens, verse 66?

[8 : 53] After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. And as well as showing us what God is doing now, John chapter 6 then is also going to show us what it is that turns interest in Jesus to offense against Jesus.

It all happens in the scope of one chapter. So that's what we're going to be looking at over these next three weeks in John chapter 6. I think it's an important chapter for us as we come face to face with Jesus' teaching on eternal life and importance for us as we see why it is that people reject the life that Jesus offers.

Well then, first of all today, on the outline, on the back of the service sheet, our first point, the sign that suggests that Jesus is God's rescuer. The sign that suggests that Jesus is God's rescuer.

Now in verses 1 to 21, two miracles are recorded and they are quite extraordinary, aren't they? The feeding of the 5,000 where John draws our attention to the huge numbers of people, to the impossibility of feeding such a vast crowd with such a tiny amount of food, to the miraculous provision and the volume of leftovers.

And then in verses 16 to 21, the second miracle, where Jesus walks on water. Now we could spend the whole of our time this morning looking at those two miracles themselves.

[10 : 36] But as we've said before, the important thing about the miracles in John's Gospel is they act as signs, as John calls them. And they are just that. They are signs.

They're not sort of naked displays of power. Rather, like any signpost, they point to something. They point away for themselves in John's Gospel, they point to who Jesus is and what he has come to do.

And John gives us a clue about the significance of these signs in verse 4. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand, he tells us.

John tells us it's the time of the Passover feast. Now the Passover, that was the most important national festival in the Jewish calendar in the first century, it was like sort of Christmas and Easter, all kind of bundled together.

he recalled those events which Garth alluded to a few moments ago, the events of the Exodus, 1400 years earlier, when God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt and how under the leadership of Moses he brought them to the land that he had promised.

[11 : 48] And every year, at the Passover feast, those events were reenacted as a reminder of God's rescue of his people. Just as perhaps in a few weeks' time, on the 11th of November, the wearing of poppies and the keeping of a two-minute silence will bring to mind the events of two world wars and numerous conflicts since.

As no doubt, many newspaper articles will be written about those events, recalling those past events. Well, so in a far greater way, the Passover acted to recall the greatest event in the history of Israel, God's people in the Old Testament.

And there are a number of highlights of that first Exodus rescue. One was when God parted the waters of the Red Sea to allow his people to escape from the Egyptian armies unscathed.

And then as God's people travelled through the desert, there was another highlight as God provided for them, as he provided food for them, bread and quail to eat.

Miracles involving water and also food. What's more, God has said there would be a second rescue. Indeed, that he himself this time would come and rescue his people himself.

[13 : 15] That there would be a second Exodus. There are a number of promises about that in the Old Testament. I put one of them on the outline. Do look it up later, not now, otherwise you'll get distracted, but do look up Isaiah chapter 11 later on.

And so you see, every year at the Passover feast, these Exodus events were reenacted partly as a reminder of that first Exodus, but also as a reminder that God had promised that one day there would be another Exodus, another rescue when he himself would come.

Well, I wonder if we can begin to see the point. For those who knew the events of the Passover well, as they did in John chapter 6, it would have been hard to have missed, wouldn't it, the significance of these two miracles, for they are Exodus-like miracles, one involving water and one involving food.

It looks very much as if Jesus has come to bring in that second rescue, that second Exodus that God had promised.

Well, the sign that suggests Jesus is God's rescuer. Secondly, let's move on to the teaching that explains that Jesus is God's rescuer in verses 35 to 40 and the heart of Jesus' explanation comes in verse 40.

[14 : 49] Have a look at it with me. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life and I'll raise him up on the last day.

Now, we can see, can't we, as Jesus summarises the rescue that he has come to bring, that his rescue is far more important than a physical rescue of a people who have been enslaved.

Why is it that Jesus has come to earth? Well, in his own words, verse 40, he has come to do God's will, so that those who believe in him should have eternal life and be raised up to resurrection life on the final day.

Jesus is offering the gift of eternal life. Now, I don't know what springs to mind when we think about eternal life. I guess in the popular imagination, it often conjures up all the wrong sorts of pictures, doesn't it?

Floating around on a cloud, playing a harp, wearing a dazzling white, flowing nighty. Doesn't sound particularly attractive, not to me anyway, it might do to you. That is your problem, not mine.

[16 : 03] So, have a look at John chapter 17 verse 3, on the outline there, where we see Jesus' definition of eternal life.

This is eternal life, he says, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. So, you see, what is it that Jesus offers in John 6?

Eternal life, knowing God forever, being raised up with him on the final day. It's an extraordinary claim, isn't it?

It's a wonderful claim. Several months ago, there was an article in the New England Journal of Medicine, written by Daniel Callaghan, and he spoke of what he described as the affluent West's hunt for the secret of immortality.

He wrote this, speaking as American, America's view of death has changed. Once accepted as a natural part of life, modern medicine now treats death as a biological accident, a contingent that need not happen.

[17 : 18] As he went on to say, that medical research has turned into a kind of sharpshooter, aiming to pick off the causes of death, one by one, denying that any of them are beyond the reach of science.

But interestingly, his point was that people still die. And many of us, I guess, for many of us, the reality of that, the reality of old age and death, will be very real to us, either with friends or family or colleagues.

Yet wonderfully, Jesus promises eternal life. Life with God in this world, and life with God in the next, raised to resurrection life with him.

And that is unpacked in the previous few verses. So in verse 39, here is Jesus' own promise that those who belong to him will be raised up on the last day. None will be lost, not one.

In verse 37, the promise that God has given Jesus a people, and all of them, all of this people group, whom God has given to Jesus, will come to Jesus.

[18 : 33] None will be lost, he won't send any of them away, or cast them out. Now let's just spend a little bit of time on verse 37, because I guess some of us maybe are surprised that Jesus speaks so clearly of what is known as predestination.

In other words, God choosing a group of people who belong to him, it couldn't be clearer, could it in verse 37, all that the Father gives me will come to me, whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.

It's why, for example, in the 39 articles which contain the official doctrine of the Church of England, there is an article on predestination, I put it on the outline.

Article 17 reads, Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby before the foundations of the world were laid, he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation.

why they're words, aren't they, which mirror precisely what Jesus is teaching in John 6, 37 to 40. Now, that is something you might want to ask about at question time, but for all the questions which that may raise, let's not lose sight of the wonderful promise.

[20 : 16] Perhaps there's someone here who is a new Christian, and we're thinking up to ourselves perhaps as we look ahead to the rest of our lives, well, how will I ever keep going in the Christian life, following Jesus?

Or perhaps you're feeling a failure in the Christian life, or perhaps there are particular struggles and issues which you're facing at the moment, and you think to yourself as you look ahead, well, how can I ever keep going with all this stuff going on around me?

Well, aren't these wonderful promises for us? Here are great promises, promises, never to be cast out, never to be lost, but to be raised up on the final day.

And who are the promises for? Well, they're wonderfully inclusive, aren't they? They're for anyone, says Jesus, anyone who will come to him and believe in him.

you see, for Jesus Christ, the fact of predestination does not make us robots. It does not mean that we are not responsible for our decisions about him, to believe in him.

[21 : 23] No, Jesus puts the two side by side here, doesn't he, very, very clearly. Predestination, God chooses the people, yet also the human responsibility to believe.

Nor for Jesus is the fact of predestination some dry, arid doctrine reserved for theologians who inhabit ivory towers. Far from it.

It is the very grounds of assurance if we're Christians. It's what gives us confidence on the final day that Jesus will keep those who belong to him. He won't lose them.

He won't drive them away. They're wonderful promises. But of course it begs the question all the more, doesn't it, why would anyone ever reject these promises?

So thirdly, why the rescue that Jesus offers is often rejected. First of all, people reject Jesus because of their own materialistic agenda.

[22 : 26] Have a look with me at verses 25 to 27. When they found Jesus on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here?

Jesus answered them, truly, truly, I say to you, you're seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the harvest that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.

For on him, God the Father has set his seal. God can you see how Jesus immediately exposes their reasons for looking for him?

It's because they see in Jesus a miracle worker who fills their stomachs with food. Look back to verse 2 of chapter 6, and we see a similar preoccupation.

And a large crowd is following him because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. But they loved the miracles, the signs, but they failed to see what those sign posts point to.

[23 : 34] Their agenda is materialistic. They're delighted to have been fed, but it seems they fail to see what Jesus is really going on about. Indeed, what they try and do in verse 15, they try and make him their king.

They're not hoping that Jesus will boot the occupying Roman armies out of Israel for them. It's very striking this isn't that here are people who are interested in Jesus, yet not in the eternal life, life with God in this world and the next that he offers.

Jesus has come to provide a relationship with God that will last forever. Yet it seems, doesn't it, that their ambitions don't extend beyond this world, in their case, food.

I guess it's a warning to us, isn't it, not to listen to those who claim to be Christians, but whose message is simply focused on this world. If you follow Jesus, he'll sort out all your problems, he'll give you health, wealth and happiness.

Now that is not Christianity. Not of course that Jesus was indifferent to the plight of the poor and the oppressed, far from it. But the fact is that Jesus did not come with a this worldly agenda.

[24 : 56] He didn't come as a political Messiah. He could have done, but he didn't. And throughout history there has been a tendency to make Jesus' message into a message addressing the concerns of this world.

But that is not primarily the reason why Jesus came. Imagine Tom. He and his wife have just had a new baby and they're struggling.

Sleepless nights, endless crying. In fact, he's found the last six months a total nightmare. And he's feeling thoroughly left out as his wife concentrates on the new arrival.

He's feeling lonely. And so he begins to go to church. He makes friends. For a time he looks as if he's interested in the claims of Jesus.

But a year later, he's drifted away. Why? Well, because he was never interested, really, in the eternal life that Jesus offers.

[25 : 58] He simply went to church for the friendships. You see, people have many reasons for being interested in Jesus. Social respectability, intellectual curiosity, an interest perhaps in Christian morality.

But this is a warning, isn't it, that if their interest stops there, they will end up rejecting the rescue that Jesus offers. So that's the first reason for rejection, because people have their own materialistic agenda.

But the second reason why people reject Jesus in John 6 is because they have their own religious agenda. Have a look at verse 28. then the crowd said to Jesus, what must we do to be doing the works of God?

Well, it's a great question, isn't it? What is it that God requires of us? And it's a surprising answer. Verse 29, this is the work of God, that you may believe in him whom he has sent to believe in Jesus.

That is what God requires. Yet, tragically, those very same people refuse to do what it is that Jesus says God requires of them. Verse 36, but I said to you that you've seen me and yet you do not believe.

[27 : 26] Again, it's very striking, isn't it? They seem at one level to give the impression of religious devotion. As they say, what is it that God requires? As they go on in the next few verses to speak of Moses, but actually they won't do the one thing that God actually commands, which is to believe in the one he has sent, to believe in Jesus.

You see, imagine Tina. She's religious, she's spent her life thinking that she must do things to earn favour with God, and now she's been invited to church by Christian friends.

She's heard the teaching of Jesus, she's heard about the rescue he offers, that he died so that she can be forgiven. Yet she insists in clinging on to her religion, too proud to admit that she's not good enough for God and never will be.

And tragically she rejects the rescue that Jesus offers. Why is Jesus' offer of eternal life so often rejected?

Well, it's because people have their own agendas. love for Jesus. Now, it's important for those of us looking in on the Christian faith, because I guess Jesus is challenging us, isn't he, to be honest with ourselves, and it may just be that he exposes one or two of us here this morning.

[28 : 52] Well, for Christians, we too need to understand why people reject Jesus' rescue, so that we don't give up talking to people about Jesus, so that we aren't caught out when even the most spiritual or religious people seem to reject Jesus.

What's more, I guess it shows, doesn't it, that we must talk to people about the need to be rescued, why it is that people need the rescue Jesus came to bring. We do need to talk to people about sin, judgments, hell, graciously, lovingly, carefully, but to do so to help people understand that Jesus has come to deal with far more important things than their material, this worldly needs.

And that the solution lies in something far more radical than religious works by which we may seek to earn God's favour. love. So what is God doing in the world today?

Well, he's in the business of rescuing for eternal life. And we'll see next week how he does that. But I want to finish for now by asking whether our agenda is in line with his agenda.

For example, what do we pray about? Yes, Jesus encourages us, he encourages us to pray about the details of life, the little things of life. But I take it there's something wrong if we only ever pray about those things.

[30 : 33] Something wrong if our prayer life isn't shaped by the big thing that God is doing in his world, by the rescue that he has come to bring. Or what are our expectations of this life?

What is our agenda, so to speak? Now, it may be the case that for some of us on the very inside, when you get down to the very kind of heart of what we're about, what we're really passionate about is our own agenda.

Perhaps a materialistic agenda, as these people were. For us it won't be food, because that is plentifully available in our country for most people. It might be the job, or the lifestyle, or the education for our children, or whatever it is.

And it may be that for one or two, the truth is that the rescue that Jesus brings has actually become a bit of a sideshow for us in our lives.

But if I take John 6 seriously, why the rescue that Jesus brings is not going to be a sideshow, is it? It's going to be at the very heart of my own ambitions, and of what I think is important in this world.

[31 : 48] Well, why don't we have a few moments of quiet, I'll then pray, and then we've got time for questions. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I'll raise him up on the final day.

Heavenly Father, we praise you very much that Jesus has come as your great rescuer. Thank you for this wonderful promise of eternal life with you in this world and in the next, being raised up on the final day.

Thank you for the glorious promise that you will not lose any of those who come to you and believe in you. And we pray, Heavenly Father, that this rescue that Jesus brings might be at the very heart of our own lives and of what we consider to be important.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.