

John 6:22-40

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[0:00] Well, friends, next week is my formal induction service, so I think I formally become your rector next week. Which means anything I've said or done over the last two months is technically not on the record.

Over this next week, I'm going to take full advantage of that. In all honesty, I do pray for that occasion. I look forward to that with you, because the induction service, there will be a point where I kneel in the middle of the congregation, and I ask for God's mercy.

And that is precisely the posture that I should have. And I also want you to know that leading up to next week, I'm praying for you, and I will continue after that. And if you want to know what I'm praying, go to the end of Ephesians chapter 3, verses 14 and following, and that's what I'm praying for you.

So please pray for me as I pray for you this week, and the Lord will be gracious to us. If you've closed your Bibles already, go to page 892, 892.

This is John chapter 6, and we're going to begin right smack in the middle, verse 35. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life, and whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

[1:25] Now, a bit of context is helpful. Yesterday, Jesus fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. It's pretty good for a day's work. Now people come to Jesus because they want more bread, and today, Jesus doesn't give it to them.

Jesus offers them something completely different, but infinitely better. And I suspect this is often the case in our lives. We come to Jesus saying, I really need this, I really want this, I really desire this, and it feels like he's not actually giving us what we ask for, but instead, he's giving us something completely different.

And that's what's happening in this passage. Verse 35, I am the bread of life, and whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. This verse is the crux of the passage.

It's the heart of the gospel, and if we understand this one verse, we're going to get the heart of the Christian life. Because Christianity isn't just about forgiveness of sins, but thank the Lord for that. Christianity isn't just about following and obeying Jesus and becoming his daily disciple, but oh my goodness, what a privilege that is. Christianity is about feeding on Jesus. That's the image we're given here.

[2:40] Thousands of people coming to one person to receive what only one person can give to thousands of people. Feeding on Jesus. Taking him into our lives. Inwardly digesting his grace.

Receiving spiritual nourishment, and renewal, and redemption, and experiencing the very life of God. I think this is what Jesus is offering us in this verse this morning.

And I must say, on a personal note, this verse is very important to me. There was a season of life. I think I was a grad student at Regent College for a number of years, where I wrote this verse on a three-by-five flashcard, you know, next to my Greek and Hebrew flashcards.

I wrote this verse on there, and I stuck it in my pocket before I left home every single day. And as I was walking to the bus, and in between classes, and on breaks from work, and before and after meals, I would take it out, and I would go back to it, and go back to it, and go back to it.

Because there was something about this verse that I felt God had to teach me. And over the months, I discovered that what God wants to give me more than anything else is himself. And part of what I needed to experience, part of the formation I needed to experience, is Jesus taking me

from loving him simply for what he can give me, although, wow, what he gives me is amazing, to loving him for him.

[4:02] Loving Jesus for Jesus. Now, I think this verse this morning simply wants to say two things to us. It wants to tell us something about who Jesus is, and something about who we are.

So let's begin with who Jesus is. The very beginning. I am the bread of life. Now, some of you may recognize those two words. I am. Anyone here know the first time those show up in the Old Testament?

Anyone? Exodus? Exodus burning bush. Exodus burning bush. What chapter is that? Chapter 3. Chapter 3. We have some really bright people here this morning.

This is great stuff. Moses is tending the sheep. And suddenly, God appears to him and speaks out of the burning bush and says, Moses, Moses, I want you to deliver my people out of slavery in Egypt.

Moses, taking off his shoes because he's on holy ground in the presence of Almighty God, says, God, what am I going to say to the people when they ask, what's the name of this God who sends you to me?

[5:05] And God then replies the first time, the first of seven that we get it in the Old Testament, I am who I am. It doesn't seem like it really answers the question.

And yet it's God's personal name, an indescribable name that designates his personal presence and his personal character and his personal commitment to redeem and deliver his people. It's a name that is repeated throughout the Old Testament. And it's no mistake that when we come to the Gospel of John, Jesus has seven I am statements. Where he describes that he is the perfection and the fullness of God's presence in our midst.

When we encounter Jesus, we encounter a burning bush of God's presence in our midst. When we hear Jesus speak, we hear God speak in our midst. When we see Jesus act, we see God act in our midst.

And Jesus takes these words upon his lips. What an audacious thing to do. And the first time he uses them in the Gospel, he says, I am the bread of life.

[6:09] Now, I don't know about you, but I love good bread. I grew up with a mother that had Italian heritage and bread was a big part of our lives.

You have bread for breakfast, bread for lunch, bread for dinner, bread for a snack before you go to bed. And if you wake up in the middle of the night, you get some more bread. So it's just bread, bread, bread, bread.

And I still, the neighborhood I live in, if I walk by some bakeries in the neighborhood and I smell that yeasty, sugary, sour-y, I don't know if that's a word, bread emanating from the bakery, I start salivating and my hunger is stirred and I just want to get in.

And that's what bread does to us. That's how it works. When you smell it, you want to find it. And when you find it and see it, you want to taste it. And when you taste it, you just want more of it.

And that's pretty much what Jesus says the Christian life is like. It's seeing and it's tasting and it's savoring just how good Jesus is. Just how marvelous his grace is.

[7:19] And coming back for more and more, daily and weekly and monthly and annually, realizing that Jesus can feed us to greater depths than we ever thought possible and we ever thought we needed.

I am the bread of life, says Jesus. A life that always stays fresh, always tastes good, always multiplies, never degenerates, never goes stale, never grows moldy.

I am the bread of life. I am the bread of life. This is what Jesus is telling us about himself. This is who he is. And then Jesus in the second half gives us a glimpse of who we are.

Look at the second half of verse 35. Verse 35. I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Note that word. And whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Note that word. Hunger and thirst. It's very visceral language. It's gut level. It's about our appetites and our desires. I love this about John.

[8:23] You get the sense that John loved eating and drinking. The stuff he highlights for us, salvation is depicted as tasting the best wine, as drinking the best water, as eating the best bread.

It's just all over the place. And one of the things that John wants us to see is that Jesus understands that we are hungry and we are thirsty creatures.

And that's what's underneath so much of our sin, I would suggest. It's not just a blatant hatred. It's a deep hunger. That we're going throughout our lives, looking for life in all the wrong places.

It's as Augustine once said, Underneath all my sinning, O Lord, was simply the desire to love and be loved. A profound example of this that interestingly is rampant in our culture but not talked about that much is the pornography industry.

It's a multi-billion dollar global industry. And what makes it tick? What undergirds it? What makes it so successful and compelling? It's that in each and every one of us there is a hunger and thirst for relational intimacy in life.

[9:33] Every one of us wants to know and be known by somebody. And every one of us when we are known and know somebody, we want to be loved and we want to be accepted.

And we want to love and we want to accept. And so we go looking for the fulfillment of that longing in all the wrong places. And we discover that as much as we seek and as much as we get, we end up being dissatisfied because we're looking in the wrong places.

I remember seeing a quote from Hugh Hefner. I think I've shared this before, but it applies here. I was in line at Superstore waiting for groceries, which a lot of you can probably empathize with, right?

And I saw, I think, People Magazine and there was a, Hugh Hefner was dying and there was a line that, a quote from him where it said, I'm at the end of my life and I'm deeply afraid of being alone. And I wonder if I'll ever find love. It's a modern parable for us. In the end, all these things we are, we look to are so dissatisfying, they don't deliver what we're looking for.

[10:40] And behind all our dissatisfactions is a hunger and thirst for the life that only Jesus can give. I love the way that Bob Dylan put it in one of his songs.

We often think that God is an errand boy to satisfy our wandering desires. Or you could say, God is like a heavenly Santa Claus. We come to Jesus and we say, Jesus, I want you to give me this. And we realize that the work that Jesus needs to do in us is to make us want what he actually gives. See, Jesus came into the world not to destroy or diminish our desires, but to raise the bar fire higher.

To say that we should seek for much, much, much more than we're seeking for. And to tell us that he is the only one who can give us what we're truly seeking for. And to show us that his heart would be glad and pleased to give us what we're seeking for.

I am the bread of life, says Jesus. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

[11:50] Now at this point, some of you may be convinced. Notice my whole sermon is just on one verse this morning. Some of you may be convinced. Some of you may be encouraged. Some of you may be refreshed. Oh, Lord, this is just, this is exactly what I needed to hear from you this morning.

And yet there may be others of you, if you're like myself, where there's doubts lingering in your hearts and minds. This raises more questions than it answers. Maybe you're wondering, will Jesus' life satisfy me if I go to him?

If I go to him, will he really be the answer? Will he be true to his word? And will I really experience the life that he offers and promises? Because if not, if these promises are empty promises, then I don't want to waste my time.

In verse 35, Jesus answers us. He says, whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. In other words, Jesus is saying, I can really save you and satisfy you.

And sometimes it's hard for us to believe, though. Especially in those really deep, dark, hard places in life. I remember I went to a conference a number of years ago on pastoral approaches to same-sex attraction.

[13:03] We talked about a lot of issues, as you can imagine. Very complex and pressing and important for our day. Sensitive, affects people's lives in a number of ways.

One of the best things about the conference is that they spread out five testimonies over the course of the weekend. People sharing about their struggle and their journey in this area. this area. And one of the things that astonished me is that in every single story, there was a common golden thread. Very different circumstances, very different people. And it's not that these struggles were just in the past. They were like, no, these struggles are still a living reality for me. And yet a common thread was that the crux or the turning point in their story for all of them was wrestling with the question, will Jesus be able to give me the life that he says he can give people? Is it enough for me? Will it be enough for me? Or should I go looking in other places? And it's not to mis-simplify something that is very complex and very personal, but they said for each of them, they had to wrestle with Jesus over that question. And that was the turning point for them. And it was amazing. Person after person, testimony after testimony, struggling with this and everything that comes with it. And they said, yes, I've discovered that Jesus really can give me the life. And Jesus can really give you the life too, if you come to him. Now, some of you may say, okay, I understand Jesus can give me life if I come to him, but will Jesus really accept me if I come to him? Like, does he actually want to give life to me personally? And I think a lot of us can feel this way because we feel the guilt or the shame or the weight of our own sin and who we are. Like, we kind of know each other, but if you knew that half about me, you could really peer into my heart and my history the way that Jesus can. You would realize there's no way he can accept me. How could he?

It's like Peter when he realizes that Jesus is Lord and he says, depart from me, for I am an unclean man. And yet Jesus assures us, he gives us a wonderful truth in verse 37. He answers us and he says in verse 37, all that the Father gives me will come to me. And here it is. And whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. It's the strongest possible negation. In Greek, there are two ways of saying no. Ooh or may. Most of the time when you say no, you choose one word for no. And yet Jesus puts both words, ooh and may, right together here. In other words, he is doubling down on the negative as if to say, I'm not just saying no to this, I'm saying it is impossible. It will never happen that somebody comes to me and I will cast them out. It will never happen. And so Jesus is, well, we discover that Jesus is more trustworthy than our feelings about him or ourselves. That Jesus is more trustworthy than our heart or our guilty conscience or our troubled minds. He will never cast us out.

Now, some of us may feel, okay, Jesus will really give me life and Jesus will really accept me, but I don't feel like I have the power to go to Jesus. I don't feel like I have the will and the desire and the drive to actually believe in him. Some of us feel powerless in that place because, well, it can be for a lot of reasons. It can be because of apathy or fatigue or fear or pride, but whatever it is, it's hard to be in that place. And interestingly, Jesus speaks to that as well. He says in verse 37, all that the Father gives me, notice the giving language, all that the Father gives me will come to me, and then skip down to verse 39, and this is the will of him who sent me, that I, Jesus, should lose nothing of all that he, the Father, has, and here's the giving language again, given to me.

Now, throughout our passage so far, all the giving language has been of God giving Jesus to the world, Jesus is the bread of life, and Jesus giving life to the world by laying down his life. It's a downward movement, and here, for the first time, we hear about God giving people from the world to Jesus.

[17:41] It's an upward movement, and so we discover that God's grace comes down to us, and then God's grace brings us up to God. God's grace gives us life in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then God's grace empowers us to reach out and receive the life that he has come to give us. It's an amazing thing. I love this truth, because it means that not only is our salvation in God's hands, but our very faith.

Our very faith doesn't depend on our own strength. It is in the hands of Almighty God. faith and belief is not just some autonomous thing that we muster up in ourselves, or we think our way into, or we work our way into. It's something that God works in us. It's something that God empowers in us. It's something that God gives to us, and so we're not alone when we believe in Jesus, because God is helping us believe in him. So when we come to Jesus, we know he'll accept us, and we know that he'll give us life, and we thank God that that the Father is working in us by the Spirit so that we can believe in him and hold fast to him. And yet the last question is, what if this life doesn't last?

Like, what if it runs out? Will Jesus' life really stand the test of time? And when you're young, it's not a question you ask.

But as you get older, you ask it more. And Jesus answers us in verse 39, and this is where we're going to end. This is the will of him who sent me, says Jesus, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me.

[19:24] But raise it up on the last day. Verse 40, 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 will raise him up on the last day.

So Jesus helps us gaze into our future, and he says, you know what? This life isn't going to run out in 70 or 80 years. This life isn't going to end with death.

I'm going to continue giving you life on the other side of death, and I will raise you up into newness of life for all eternity. And so Jesus gives us this wonderful comfort and wonderful security and wonderful hope as we face the future, whether we're young or whether we're old.

And it's in the light of this hope that Jesus asks us, are you going to spend your life here on earth far too easily pleased and looking for life in all the wrong places, or are you going to turn to me?

Are you going to experience the only source of true and deep and lasting and satisfying life? And are you going to discover that I am the bread of life, and that whoever comes to me will not hunger, and whoever believes in me will, who may never thirst?

[20:40] Brothers and sisters, I speak these things to you this morning. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.