

Soul Food That Lasts

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[0 : 00] Open your Bibles to John chapter 6 if you close them after the reading. We begin in verse 35 of John chapter 6.

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.

Now if you remember the story from last week, you know that just yesterday Jesus fed 5,000 people, probably more if you include women and children, with five loaves and two fish.

It's pretty impressive for a day's work. And now these people wake up the next day and they come searching for Jesus because they want more of what he gave them the day prior. And Jesus doesn't give it to them.

He gives them something completely different, but something infinitely better. And isn't this the case often in our lives with Jesus, right? We come to him saying, Jesus, I really need this, or I really want this, or I really desire this.

[1 : 06] And it feels like he doesn't give us what we ask for, but he gives us something different. And in this passage, that's what's happening. Verse 35. I am the bread of life, says Jesus, and whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

First, this is the crux of the passage. This is the diamond jewel in a sense. This is the very heart of it all. If we understand this one verse, I think we understand the gospel and all of Christianity in a sense.

Because Christianity isn't just about the forgiveness of sins. It's not just about following and obeying Jesus, even though those things are really important. It's most fundamentally at its very core about feeding and feasting on who Jesus is.

The picture is one of a meal. It's a table. Where Jesus Christ wants to feed us to the very core of our being with who he is. So Christianity is about literally feeding on Jesus, taking him into the very core of our lives, and digesting him in a sense.

Experiencing him inwardly to the depths. Receiving the very life of God. I think this is what Jesus wants for us in this passage. And I must say to you on a personal note this morning as well, that few verses in the Bible have played a more key role in my own spiritual journey over the last few years than this verse right here.

[2 : 37] I've spent many months writing this verse on a 3x5 card and sticking it in my pocket and walking around with it and throughout the day going to it whenever temptation comes my way, going to it.

Because what I've realized is that what God wants to offer to us is nothing less than himself. And over the last few years, he's been taking me on this journey where he's been taking me from loving Jesus simply for what he can give me to loving Jesus simply for Jesus.

And it's a wonderful journey indeed. Now, I think this passage, this verse, wants to say two things to us in particular. I think it wants to say, first, something about Jesus, and second, something about us human beings.

Something about who Jesus is and something about who we are. So let's look at the beginning. I am the bread of life. Now some of you may recognize these first two words.

I am. Anybody know where that comes from in the Old Testament? Any guesses? Exodus what chapter? Exodus chapter 3. Thank you.

[3 : 50] Moses is tending the sheep in Exodus chapter 3 and all of a sudden God speaks out of a burning bush and the living God appears to Moses and says, Moses, Moses, I want you to deliver my people who are in slavery in Egypt.

And Moses, taking off his shoes because he's on holy ground, says, God, what am I going to say to the people when they say, what is this God's name who sends you? And he says to Moses, I am who I am.

Which seems like it doesn't really answer the question. But nonetheless, God states, I am who I am. It's his personal name and his personal presence, this I am language.

And throughout the Old Testament, this I am language is repeated seven times interestingly. Because in ancient Hebrew thoughts, seven is the number of fullness and completeness and perfection.

And so it's no mistake that when we come to the Gospel of John, we see Jesus making seven I am statements about who he is in the Gospel of John. Because he's picking up on the seven I am statements of the Old Testament and saying, I am the burning bush now in my human flesh and blood.

[5 : 03] I am the living God in your presence. And when you hear me speak, you hear me declare who God really is. And the first time we hear it in the Gospel of John, he says, I am the bread of life.

I don't know about you, but I love good bread. I grew up with an Italian mother. And bread was a big part of our lives growing up. You have bread for breakfast and you have bread for lunch and you have bread for dinner and you have bread before you go to bed and if you wake up in the middle of night, you get some bread.

Bread, bread, bread. And still to this day, when I walk by this Chinese pastry shop just a few blocks away from my apartment and I smell the lovely, white, fluffy, sugary bread, I start salivating because it entices my desires and I want to go to it.

That's what bread does, doesn't it? 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 some more of it. But that's pretty much what Jesus says the Christian life is like.

It's tasting and realizing just how good what Jesus has to offer us really is and coming back for more and more and more and realizing that Jesus can feed us to greater depths than we ever thought possible.

[6 : 26] I am the bread of life, says Jesus. And if we were to translate this literally, we would have to say I am the bread of the life. Because Jesus is not saying that he's just one type of bread amongst many types of bread, but he's saying that he's the only bread that can really last.

And the word he uses for life is zoe life, not bios life. So it's not life that degenerates and grows old and withers away. It's life that always stays new, always stays fruitful and always stays abundant. I am the bread of life, says Jesus. I'm what you really need to flourish. I'm what you really need to experience fullness of life.

I'm what you really need to be satisfied as a fully alive human being. That's what Jesus is saying to us. Now, to modern people, we tend to view such grandiose claims by human beings as a bit suspicious.

Who does this guy really think he is to make these sorts of claims? And that's exactly how the crowds respond in our passage, actually. If you take a look at verses 30 and 31, they're suspicious.

[7 : 48] So they challenge Jesus. What sign do you do that we may see and believe in you? Like, what work do you perform to prove yourself, Jesus? Our fathers, they say in verse 31, ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, he give them bread from heaven to eat.

Now, interestingly, in their suspicion and challenge of Jesus, they point to Exodus, the book of Exodus, this time, chapter 16. It's a time just after God delivers his people out of slavery in Egypt. And the people are in the wilderness, and all of a sudden, the fact that God delivered them starts to wear off a little bit when they realize that they're in the middle of a desert. And they have very little food and very little water.

And they look back at their time in Egypt and go, we were slaves in Egypt, but at least we had enough food. So they start grumbling and they start saying, I want to go back.

I want to go back. Now, we could pause here for a moment and talk about how many of us may feel that way in our lives. We decided to trust and follow Jesus.

[9 : 03] We experienced his grace and love. We had high hopes for what it would be to be disciples of Jesus Christ, how that would turn out, only to discover that we feel like we're in a wilderness or a desert.

Jesus didn't save us from heartache. Jesus didn't deliver us from pain and suffering. And Jesus didn't give us the life we wanted.

And we begin to wonder in the midst of the wilderness, will God provide for us? And we often feel this deeply in the midst of suffering. The Israelites were in this place in Exodus 16 and they asked God, what are you going to do for us when we're here in the wilderness?

And God had a very simple answer. He said, every morning, I'm going to rain down bread from heaven and you can eat as much as you possibly can. And then the next morning, I'll rain down bread again and you can eat as much as you possibly can.

And the next morning, I'll do it again and again and again. And in John chapter 6, Jesus picks up on this context and he says, I am the bread of life, the bread who's come down from heaven.

[10:14] I will give you myself. I'm the gift of God. I'm the provision in the midst of the wilderness. And Jesus says, I'll give you life over and over and over and over again in that place.

Look at verses 32 and, yeah, 32 and 33. Jesus says to them, truly I say to you, excuse me, truly I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my father.

And notice the present tense verb here. My father gives you the bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and notice the present tense again and gives life to the world.

That's a present, continuous activity on God's part. Every day, he is giving life to the world. Jesus says, I am the bread of life. He doesn't take us out of the midst of the wilderness.

Rather, he feeds us in the midst of it. He gives us himself. Jesus is God's gift to us. So that's the first thing.

[11:26] Jesus is the bread of life. Jesus tells us something about himself. But our passage doesn't leave us there. Our passage wants to tell us something about who we are as well. Look at the second half of verse 35.

Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Now, I want you to notice the language of hunger and thirst.

It's very kind of visceral language, gut-wrenching language. Hunger and thirst shows up all throughout the Gospel of John. Jesus wants us to see, and I think John wants us to see, that human beings most fundamentally are hungry and thirsty creatures.

We're desiring people. We want things. And thus, that means that we're searching creatures.

Because when we desire and want something, then we go searching for something to satisfy those desires and wants.

So we go searching around to satisfy our desires. And that's part of the core of what it means to be human. I saw a great example of this a few months ago.

[12:29] I was having coffee Saturday morning, Bean Brothers in Carersdale with my family. And there was a new water bottle I'd never seen before.

It was nice and silver and shiny. Coconut water, supposedly, is the big thing these days, I'm discovering. And it was called Thirsty Buddha. And the tagline was Buddha-licious, which was kind of fun.

And it said underneath the Buddha-licious tagline, it said, Hydrate from within and replenish and quench your thirst naturally.

And I just thought that kind of perfectly encapsulated how we often try to hydrate ourselves and quench our thirst and hunger naturally. It's a sense that somehow we can actually hydrate from within ourselves.

See, I think this shows us that our culture understands that we are desiring human beings, that we long for things, that we search for things as people. What I think our culture is at a complete loss to understand is that what our longings are for and how we can truly experience satisfaction of them.

[13:43] We go looking in all the wrong places. And I want to submit to you that I think this is really what is underneath so much of our sin. In fact, so much of our sin is not just a blatant hatred, but it's rather that we're looking for life and we're just going in the wrong places.

And we're really, really hungry. I think a profound example of this isn't often talked about very much in our culture is the pornography industry.

I think what undergirds the pornography industry so much in our culture, which is multi-billions of dollars, is a hunger and thirst for relational intimacy and life.

Every one of us wants to be known and wants to know somebody else. Everybody, every one of us not only wants to be known, but also to be loved and accepted when we're known and to love and accept someone else.

We often go looking for this relational life in the wrong places to the internet or the pornography industry. And I saw a sad thing the other day. I was sitting in Superstore looking and I saw a title that just jumped out to me from one of those weird people magazine things.

[14 : 56] And it was Hugh Hefner. It was a quote from Hugh Hefner. One of the guys who has had his lustful desires satisfied more than any other man that's probably ever lived in his whole entire life.

The head of Playboy magazine. And he's on his deathbed right now. And it had this quote from Hugh Hefner where he 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 amazing. He, seeking after love his whole entire life and he seems to be the guy that's had the most satisfaction of it and he comes to the end of his life and he's utterly destitute on his deathbed.

In the end, all these things that we look to are so dissatisfying. And we know what it feels like to be searching and come to the end and discover that it's unsatisfying and it's alienating.

We know what it's like to be bored and restless and anxious because we can't find true life. We can't find true peace. We can't find true rest which we so deeply strive for and want to live for.

[16 : 09] Behind all of our dissatisfactions is a deep hunger and thirst for life. And the thing is, is that when we become Christians, this doesn't go away. We still do sneaky ways of trying to find satisfaction in other places.

we'll come to Jesus and we'll come to Jesus not for Jesus' sake, but we'll say, Jesus, I want something else that you can give me. That's exactly what the crowds are doing in John chapter 6. Look at verse 24. When the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, this is the morning they woke up, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum seeking Jesus.

And then look at verse 25. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here? Jesus responds in verses 26 to 27.

Doesn't answer their question, but cuts to the chase. Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

[17 : 20] They don't want Jesus. They don't think Jesus can satisfy them, really. They simply think Jesus can give them something else that really is going to satisfy them. And in this context, it's bread.

But in our context, it may be something else. Maybe we come to Jesus because we believe that it's a marriage or a boyfriend or a girlfriend that's really going to satisfy us, and so we come to Jesus because we want that, ultimately.

It's not bad to ask for that. But maybe that's our deepest desire. Maybe we come to Jesus because we want a job or a promotion or fame or recognition.

Not Jesus himself. Bob Dylan has this great line in one of his songs where he says, we often think that God is an errand boy to satisfy our wandering desires.

He's a heavenly Santa Claus, I would say. And Jesus knows this about the human heart. Jesus knows the habits of the human heart. And so he names it in verse 27.

[18 : 26] Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man, i.e. me, will give to you.

Now notice how Jesus is not harsh with these people. They're wandering desires all over the place, and he's not harsh with them. He simply says, you're looking in all the wrong places.

Don't look there. And don't settle for so little. Go for something better. This reminds me of a famous quote from C.S. Lewis. Many of you have probably heard it before, but it's worth repeating.

It's from The Weight of Glory. He says this, it would seem that our Lord Jesus finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us.

Like an ignorant child who wants to go on playing, making mud pies in a slum, because he cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased.

[19 : 34] Far too easily pleased. And I think what we see in this passage is that Jesus has come into the world not to destroy or diminish our desires, but rather to raise the bar far higher.

And say that we should seek for much, much more, and that he's the only one that can truly give it to us, and he would be glad to. I am the bread of life, says Jesus.

And I will give you deep, satisfying life if you come to me. Now, at this point, some of you may be convinced.

But others of you probably feel like doubts are still arising in your hearts and minds. You're asking questions. Maybe some of you are wondering, will Jesus' life really satisfy me if I go to him? If I go to him, will he really be true to his word? And will I really experience the life that he offers and promises? Because if it's not true, I don't want to waste my time. Verse 35, Jesus answers, whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

[20 : 47] Jesus is saying, I really, really can and will satisfy you. Now, sometimes it's hard for us to believe this in the deepest and hardest and darkest areas of our life. I was at a Living Waters conference last week.

There was an all-day conference on pastoral approaches to same-sex attraction. We talked about a lot of issues, as you can imagine. It's very complex and pressing, an important issue in our day, sensitive.

And one of the amazing things at the conference is throughout the day, four to five people gave their testimonies, 10 to 15 minutes, about their struggle with same-sex attraction. And it wasn't just a past thing.

Many of them said, actually all of them said, I'm still struggling with this, quite significantly. But they said that a major point in their struggle with same-sex attraction, at a major turning point, they had to wrestle with this major question, will Jesus really be able to satisfy me with his life?

Is he really enough to give me life? Or should I go looking in other places? Jesus. And every single one of them said, that was the crux. And every one of them said that the key to their healing journey was coming to experience for themselves, that when they come to Jesus, he really can give them deep, satisfying life.

[22 : 10] And it was amazing, person after person, and testimony after testimony, talked about struggling with same-sex attraction, and all the shame and guilt that goes with that, and all the wanting to give in, and all the anger with God and difficulty of that.

But they said that in the midst of it, they came to realize that Jesus really can't give them that life.

And that was the major turning point. Yes, Jesus can give you life if you come to him.

Now, some of you may be saying, okay, I understand, I can, 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 me personally life?

Now, a lot of us can feel this way because of the guilt and shame about our sin and who we are. We go, you don't know the half about me. If you were able to peer into my heart, and my history, and my past, and get to know me like Jesus can, you would realize that there's no way he would accept me if I actually went to him.

How could he? And Jesus gives us a wonderful truth in verse 37. He answers us. He says, all that the Father gives me will come to me, and here it is, and whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.

[23 : 31] Notice the word never. It is the strongest possible negation. In Greek, there are two words for no. U, me. In most instances, you choose one of the two to say no.

In this instance, Jesus puts U and may right next to each other to double the force of the negative as if to say, this is an impossibility. It will never, ever happen.

Whoever comes to me, says Jesus, I will, U, may, never cast out. It will never happen. Jesus is more trustworthy, we discover, than our feelings, than our heart, than our guilty conscience, and than our troubled minds.

He will never cast us out. Now, I know some of you are thinking, okay, Jesus can really give me life, he'll 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 to actually believe in him. Some of you feel powerless. Maybe it's because of apathy or fatigue or fear. But it's hard.

[24 : 44] And interestingly, Jesus answers that as well. Look at verses 37 and 39. Verse 37. All that the Father gives me, notice the giving language.

All that the Father gives me will come to me. And then verse 39. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I, Jesus, should lose nothing of all that the Father, here's the giving language, has given to me.

Throughout our passage so far, all the giving language has been of God giving Jesus the bread of life to the world and Jesus giving life to the world. It's a downward movement. And now, Jesus is talking about God giving people from the world to Jesus.

It's an upward movement. And so, God's grace actually hems us in before and behind. God's grace gives life to us through Jesus Christ.

And then God's grace empowers us to believe in Jesus and come to him to receive that life. It's an amazing thing. That our faith and our belief is actually not an autonomous thing.

[25 : 55] But it's something that God empowers and enables and gifts to us. We are not alone in believing in Jesus. God is helping us. Well, we come to Jesus.

He'll accept us. He'll give us life. God helps us empower us. And the last question is, what if this life doesn't last? What if it runs out?

Will Jesus' life really last? And we're answered in verses 39 to 40. This is where we're going to end. This is the will of him who sent me, said Jesus, 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, 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.

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

[27 : 06] I'm going to continue to give 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 wonderful comfort and wonderful security, even in the face of the future.

And he basically asks us, are you going to spend your life here on earth too easily pleased and looking for life in the wrong places? Or are you going to turn to me, the one and only source of true life and discover that whoever comes to me will never hunger and whoever believes in me will never thirst again?

Brothers and sisters, this is good news. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.