

Soul Food that Lasts

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 May 2015

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 01] It would be great if you took your Bibles and turned back to John 6, Craig just read for us, page 891-892. As you do that, congratulations on making it through the marathon.

The police really wanted you to hear the sermon this morning, especially you, actually, this congregation. I'd been driving around in circles, not able to get through, and a police officer said to me, what are you doing?

And I had my collar on. I said, well, there's a church in there, and I'm the preacher. Oh, you better go through then. We're a very small group at the nine o'clock, and so we had some questions and answers during the sermon.

It's not very Anglican, but it went really well. The questions were fantastic. Answers not so much, but it was a really good time. And I'm tempted to do it again. Let's see how we go.

Is that a whistle? Is that my wife? It's our wedding anniversary. Thank you.

[1 : 19] That's why she's such a godly woman. Righto. John 6, 35. This is the heart of it. This is what it's all about. John 6, 35.

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

That's it. You get that, you get the whole passage. To be a Christian is to ingest the person of Jesus Christ. To take him into your system as we take bread.

To digest so that his life is our life. And we do it the way it works. Ongoingly. Whoever comes and believes ongoingly.

And he says, whoever does that, I will finally, utterly satisfy your hunger and thirst. First, biggest chapter in the New Testament, John 6.

[2 : 21] And it's a bit of a surprising chapter because it seems like it's a failure. It begins with two amazing miracles, really famous miracles at the beginning of the chapter.

Feeding 5,000, walking on water. And then the rest of the chapter is all Jesus explaining the feeding. And his teaching is just beautiful.

I mean, it's so simple. There's not a long word in it. And it's inviting and encouraging. And then you get to the end. And we read in 66, many of the disciples, many of Jesus' disciples turn away and run away.

Because they've got other hungers and other thirsts. They're taking priority over Jesus. And you know you've got something else taking priority over Jesus. When what Jesus says to you offends you.

Many couldn't follow him anymore. And it looks like, and this has been experienced, I think, of the Christians through history. It looks like the mission of Jesus goes forward by going backwards sometime.

[3 : 27] And the key reason is that we're not sovereign individual choosers in all this. What I mean by that is, what I mean by that is, the picture that Jesus has of us both here and in chapter 8, is that we are slaves of all sorts of desires and appetites and hungers.

And when Jesus reveals he is the true bread, we need the power of God to believe it. We need the power of God to operate in us.

I'm very conscious as I speak this morning. Jesus said, no one comes to the Father unless the Father draws him, right in the middle of this chapter. So we need to pray for God's help.

And unless God directly works in your heart and mine, we just, nothing will happen this morning. So why don't we just bow our heads and ask his help? Our Father, we thank you for the clarity of Jesus and we thank you for your fatherly work in our hearts.

And we pray now that you would draw us to him, show us who he is so that we might indeed feed on him and believe on him and come to him ongoingly, increasingly, and that he would satisfy the deepest hungers that we have.

[4 : 44] In Christ's name, amen. Amen. Well, go back to the beginning of the chapter, please. Two mighty miracles, signs at the start, very well known. The feeding of the 5,000.

You remember this? It's a sign of plenty, abundance, overflow. You may not have thought about this. It's the most public of all Jesus' miracles. He doesn't do it in a city street or in a home.

He goes right out into the desert and 5,000 is men, heads of families. So there's very likely 20,000 people or more out there. And there's only five barley loaves and two fish.

And Jesus divides and distributes them. And the emphasis at the end is plenty, bounty, abundance. Verse 11, they all ate as much as they wanted. Verse 12, they all ate their full.

And then there were 12 baskets left over, overflowing satisfaction and joy. If you've been with us through the Gospel of John, you'll know this is familiar. When Jesus turned the water into wine, it was abundant wine.

[5 : 48] When Jesus spoke to the woman of Samaria at the well, he offered her living water that would fountain up, flow up to eternal life and overflow. It's the second miracle that's difficult.

It's disorienting the second miracle. It's the story of Jesus walking on the storm and calming the storm. In verse 16, the disciples go to the sea.

Jesus has gone off by himself. He wanted to withdraw. It's nighttime. The disciples take the boat across the sea to Capernaum. And they sail straight into the teeth of a storm.

And they're making very heavy wither of it. And suddenly, verse 19, Jesus comes walking on the water and they're terrified. And in verse 20, he says, I am, don't be afraid.

And then instantly, miraculously, they're at the shore of the other side of the lake. And my question is, why is this miracle here? What's the point of this miracle?

[6 : 52] What on earth does it have to do with Jesus being the bread of life? And I'm somewhat comforted this week. I've read every commentary that I can lay my hands on. And they are completely as bamboozled and flummoxed as I am.

Somewhat encouraging, don't you think? You know, you look at it carefully. It's almost as though Jesus is walking across the sea on other business. You know, he sees them incidentally.

He sees them struggling over here. And just as they're about to go under, he reveals his divine name, I am. That's the Old Testament name for God. And they're terrified.

And then he marvelously takes them to shore. And there are all kinds of devotional, allegorical, torturing and twisting of this text to draw out some happy spiritual lesson, which you've probably heard preached from this pulpit by me in the past.

And we usually end up saying something like, in the storms of life, you'll be okay. Jesus will come walking on the water and he'll calm your storm, which is nonsense. What that's doing is that's making Jesus my servant here, which is the opposite, I think, of what the point is.

[8 : 11] The story is meant to be disorienting. The way it's told to us is to show us we don't understand this person, Jesus. And the reason is because we're dealing with the person of Jesus.

It's as though the water is very clear, but so deep we can't fathom it. And that's the point. And that's why it goes together with the feeding. You know, it's possible to look at the feeding and the miracles of Jesus and the plenty, the plenty that he supplies and completely miss the person that he is.

And walking on the sea and revealing his divine name shows there's much more to the person of Jesus than we could ever fully possibly understand. And it brings the two things together.

You cannot have the plenty that he promises without the person. But if you have the person, it brings the plenty. It's the two things together. And that's why in the next verses, Jesus begins to explain.

First, he explains about the plenty. And then he begins to explain about the person who he is. So let's have a little look at that under two points. Firstly, eternal life is plenty.

[9 : 21] Verses 25 to 29. The whole of the rest of the chapter takes place the next day. You see verse 22. The crowd has chased Jesus around the lake to Capernaum and they are not happy.

And they ask him what they think are hard-hitting questions. Actually, the first question in verse 25 is a bit banal. Look down at it. Rabbi, when did you come here?

What they really mean is, supper last night in the desert was great. You know what you did with the bread and fishy things? But what happened to breakfast?

And to all their questions, including this one, Jesus doesn't really reply. But what he does is he redirects their hearts and minds to what really matters. Away from the belly.

Up higher to what we really truly long for. The bread of heaven. I just listen to how Jesus starts to answer them.

[10:28] Verse 26. Truly, truly, I say to you, this is the answer. You are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

It's not very polite, is it? I mean, it's like me saying, why are you really here today? You here to get something? Luther says it wonderfully. He says, they love Jesus like lice love a tramp.

Not interested in his welfare, but there to suck the blood. He says, our love for the gospel is often nothing but gluttony and selfish interest.

The gospel we love on account of greed and not on account of righteousness. They love the plenty when it comes to bread.

They're not interested in the plenty that it pointed to. And that's why in verse 15, they wanted to force him to be king.

[11:31] I mean, you make this man king who can multiply food. You've got an unbeatable army. You know, you can outlast any siege, kind of super chef king Jesus, any meal, any time of day.

But they're ignorant of who he is. And so Jesus sees through them and redirects their questions. And I think this, I've got to say, this happens to all of us.

We all come to Jesus with our own issues and questions and our ideas about what he's going to give us. And we find when we come to him that he's different, more wonderfully different than we could possibly imagine, thankfully.

And what he offers us is so remarkable but so different, it challenges us to the core of our motives. And when we're challenged, we've got this choice of kind of holding on to our challenge or actually listening to him.

And just before we become really honest, Jesus then takes us the next step. Don't you find that? Jesus sends the next challenge to us just about three weeks before we're ready for it.

[12:44] Well, that's my experience. Verse 27. Do not labor for food that perishes, but for 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. Jesus is using food as the picture of newness in life. He just simply says there's two kinds of food.

Food for the belly, food for this world, food that spoils. And there's eternal food, food for eternal life, food that will never spoil, that I will give you, ultimate satisfaction.

And he says, he says, you are wearing yourselves out pursuing this belly food. He says, you're giving your life over to what spoils.

And I'm offering you something of a completely different quality that's going to satisfy you in a different way. He said, don't stop working, he says, but work for this. Redirect your goals higher. He says, the bread that I gave you yesterday, he's saying to the crowd, I could have done 10, 100 times that amount of bread.

[13:52] But tomorrow you'll be hungry. That's the way it works with our desires and appetites. But eternal life is different. Now we've looked at this a little, haven't we?

This word life, there are two words in Greek for life. Eternal life is a kind of an unusual word. There's a word for biology, natural life, God's gift to us here.

Belly life, if you like. No, there's more to it than that. And there's life life, which is called zoe life. It's the quality of life. And in the Gospel of John, it really is knowing God and enjoying the freedom and security and the light of his face of being known and loved and valued beyond imagination.

And I think this life life, zoe life, is the basis for enjoying biological life as well. Because we're all looking for life. You know, we're all attracted to the magazines that say, this is living.

And I've done some research this week. Real living, it's a travel magazine. And you can get country life and Midwest living and Canadian living and West Coast living and log cabin living.

[15:09] I'm sorry if some of you subscribe to that. There's real living, which is an Australian company like Home Depot, which advertises their products. But the most wonderful one I found on Jordan's desk, it's called Best Life.

And the three headlines on the front were, grow serious money, have a flat belly, find out what women find sexy. Jordan knows.

Jesus is very honest. I mean, he says, we're all looking for this zoe life, you know, through, I don't know, lovers or money or.

But unless Jesus gives us the bread of life, it will spoil. And the life that he gives eternal zoe life is not just life that goes on and on and on and on and on, which would be terribly dreary.

It's a different quality of life. It's the life of acceptance. It's the life of God. We live in a culture that is immersed. I think we're very committed to the pleasure principle, the theory of pleasure, which is as old as the Greeks.

[16:18] That how you live life is you maximize pleasure and minimize pain. So you find what you desire. Acceptance, honor, family, connection, status, sex, beauty, independence, power.

Chase it as hard as you will, unless it becomes painful. Hugh Hefner, who I think most of people under 30 have never heard of, but Hugh Hefner famously used this theory as the justification for the Playboy magazine.

But when you think about it, it's not really the pleasure theory. It is the law of diminishing returns that is the basis of that empire and so much else.

Because the simple reality is that what is true of all our earthly appetites and desires in this world is that the more you have of something, the less satisfied with it you are.

There's nothing in this world that endures. There's nothing that's able to satisfy our spiritual hunger except the bread that heaven gives. There's nothing that's able to satisfy our spiritual hunger.

[17:57] I thought about it between the services. You know when you answer a question, you think an hour later what you should have said? I think this is all wrapped up into the idea of choosing Jesus and wanting Jesus for Jesus and not for what he gives me.

Because the very next thing he does is he makes application. What does this mean for us? In verse 28. They say to Jesus, okay, what must we do in order to be doing the works of God?

And Jesus says, verse 29, this is the work of God that you believe in him who he has sent. They want to do works.

We want to do works. Jesus says there's only one work and it's not really what you do. It's the work of God because it's fundamentally God who does this in us.

It's the gift of God. But our part, what we are to do is to believe. To believe in the one whom God has sent, which is active. It's not ticking boxes.

[19:01] It's a transforming, connecting relationship, actively trusting in the real and living Jesus. So that the way we seek the food that he's come to bring is through this open-handed, on-giving, receiving of his gift by faith in Jesus.

Now, why? Why is that true? And we move from eternal life as plenty to eternal life as the person. Okay, moving on to the second point, which is the last point.

And this is verses 30 to the end. And you can see the crowd is, again, not satisfied with that answer. The crowds are really satisfied. And they want another sign. Sign yesterday wasn't good enough.

Verse 31. Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. It's all very impressive what you did yesterday, Jesus.

That was just one meal. Moses fed for 40 years. And you fed 20,000, but he fed the whole nation. And you gave us barley.

[20:07] And it wasn't even, what's that stuff called? Gluten free. Whereas Moses gave us bread from heaven. If you're any better than Moses, which we think you're claiming to be, prove it.

It's amazing the kindness of Jesus' answer to them. He points out, verse 32, very simply, that it wasn't Moses who gave the bread, but it was God who gives, present tense, the true bread from heaven.

And then he comes to the heart of it. Verse 33. For the bread of God, what is it? Is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

Verse 35. Who is he? I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst. He says, I am the bread of life.

It's not, I can give you the bread of life. I can show you the bread of life. I can take you to God who'll give you the bread of life. He says, I am the bread of life.

[21:13] It's the gospel in one little phrase. I'm what you need, he says. Without me, you're going to starve eternally. The life that God gives us, the life that comes from Christ, it's not a philosophical ideal that comes through rational meditation.

It's not a force that comes through experience. It's a person. And that means Christianity is the most personal of all religions.

Christianity is Christ and people, people and Christ. We use words like friendship and knowing and trusting and give and take, or we do with each other, and sharing affection and trust and making the other a priority in our lives.

I heard this week a Nepal expert speak about some of the devastation. He said, the thing we don't realize in the West is a lot of those big old buildings were temples where their gods dwell.

So the earthquake means they haven't just lost a skyline, I quote. They've lost their way of connecting with their gods. Jesus is saying that God has come down from heaven as the bread of heaven to fill us, to give us more than we can imagine.

[22 : 41] And if we come to him, he becomes our Zohar life. So let me pause and just see if there are any questions, and then I'll move to two, kind of what that means for us.

I know this is, you have to be very brave, and I am happy to not take questions. What I mean by that is if you ask a question that's too far off, I won't answer it.

Is there anything that someone wants to pick up and push back on or ask for clarity on? No pressure.

Yeah, Dave. Okay, so you said Jesus, and this is what popped in my head, maybe far off. But then, so this is distinct from the Holy Spirit, right? So there's, like when you're saying that you let Jesus in your heart, that's different than the Holy Spirit, like, coming into your heart as well?

The question is, is this different than the Holy Spirit coming into your heart? No. No, it is the same thing, because the Spirit, as Paul says, is the Spirit of Christ.

[23 : 54] And when he dwells in us, he is, he becomes, he brings Christ with him. The ministry of the Holy Spirit, we'll get to this when we get to chapter 16 in John.

What the Holy Spirit loves to do is shine the spotlight on Christ so that we come to faith in Christ. So there are a number of ways of putting it. It means he is present to us.

The rest of the New Testament says we are present to him. It's very interesting. Our life is hidden with Christ in God, but it's not separate from the Holy Spirit, just as it's not separate from the work of God the Father either.

Anything else? Yeah, Karen. David, you're speaking to me, especially in the message around suffering, and the more I grow as a Christian, the more I'm hearing the words and understanding them.

How do I take them to the people I interact with who are going through the suffering who aren't Christians? How do I, how do I do?

[25 : 03] And if you don't want to answer that, and in an hour you have a better one. You can call it. The question is, as we trust more deeply in Jesus and feed on him ourselves, how do we take this message of hope and life?

To those who are suffering who are not believers or not identify themselves as Christians, is that right? Yeah, I think probably we could spend a day on this together with a, there'd be some very interesting answers that we all could give to that.

There's two things I would say. The first is that, no, three things. I like to say three things. Is that all right? I want to say three things. The first is that I think there's a great deal to be said for being honest.

Because being a Christian doesn't mean having your act together. And when we are suffering and we don't know what's going on, which we don't often, the frustration and anger and honesty about that, even with our non-Christian friends, I think is very winning.

The second thing to say is that often people see Christ at work in us in a way we can't see ourselves.

[26 : 31] Which is why it's so important for us as a group to keep saying, I see Christ doing this in you. I see you doing this in Christ. Hold your finger in John 6 for a minute and go to 1 John chapter 4.

No, sorry, 1 Peter chapter 4. Turn right to page 1016. Let me start in chapter 2 and then dive to chapter 4.

In chapter 2, 21, speaking of suffering, to be good, to do good and suffer and endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

For to this you have been called, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you might follow in his footsteps. The example word is the Greek word, hupergrammon. It's when they taught a child to write, there'd be a little slate and they'd write a letter, write a letter, and they'd guide the child's hand over the letter, the shape. And the thing about this is that Christ's life is shaped in a cross.

[27 : 47] The one we follow died on the cross. We lived a cross-shaped life. And we are to do the same. So we're not to pretend that we're not going to suffer. And we're not going to pretend that it's not difficult.

But that example in itself is pleasing to God. If you go over the page to chapter 4, verse 12, Peter says, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

I don't need to underline that, do I? You know you're going to suffer. You know all of us are going to die. It's not a surprise, is it?

If we're following Christ. But it's the next verse, it's the key. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

When the spirit of glory and grace rests upon you, he says elsewhere. And what that means is that when Christians suffer, even without understanding, and suffer with patience, there is a spirit of glory and grace that rests on us that we can't see ourselves.

[28 : 57] And I would say there was a third thing I was going to say. And. And it has to do with the nature of growing faith.

Let me say it this way. It's going to bring us back to John 6. No more questions. I want to say it this way. I think as you grow stronger in your faith. I think you see the weakness of your faith more. That is my experience of my faith in God is I am weaker and frailer. And he is stronger and more wonderful.

But I think that's the mark of a growing faith. So let me show you what that looks like in the passage. So go back to John 6. Look at what he says we are to do in verse 35 to 40.

All the things we are to do are in the ongoing present tense. Verse 35. Whoever comes to me. Active.

[30 : 18] Movement of our hearts to Christ. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Verse 37. Whoever comes to me. The movement word.

Verse 40. Looks on the sun present and believes in the ongoing. So that faith is like a movement in our hearts and souls.

It's an ongoing movement outwards towards Jesus Christ where we draw near to him actively. Doesn't mean you'll always feel different but it does mean he'll transform you. And while faith is a gift of God, God does not do our believing for us.

That's been a very helpful phrase for me. Faith is a gift from God but God will not do our believing for us. And if we begin to taste the bread of heaven now, we know that nothing in this world can come close to that true Zoe life.

And we'll pursue that Zoe life because if we pursue other things, we know we're pursuing other things when we get restless and bored and anxious. And the other side of this, and I want to finish with this, is the breathtaking comfort of what Christ promises.

[31 : 26] Look at verse 37, please. All that the Father gives me will come to me. Whoever comes to me, I'll never cast out. I'll always welcome.

And 39, this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing, none of all that he's given me but raise them up on the last day.

I think if you've been a Christian for a while, we often ask this question the wrong way around. We say, you know, can I lose my salvation? As though salvation is something that depends on my grip on it.

But Jesus is saying that our salvation depends on his grip. That what it means for each person to be saved is that God the Father has given us to Jesus Christ. And the real question is, can Jesus let us go?

And he says here, there are no exceptions. Whoever, whatever, all, never, nothing, all. He's saying to us, I am more trustworthy than your heart and your feelings and your conscience.

[32 : 28] I am committed to you. I've committed myself to this. That is, what happens to you on the last day is not yours to grasp, it's mine. He says four times, I will raise you up.

I will raise you up. I will raise you up. That's the purpose he's come. So you see, the issue is not how much faith you have or the quality of your faith, but whether it's directed to Jesus. I finish with this lovely little quote, again from Mr. Luther. He says, we might compare this to two people who possess a hundred gold coins. One person carries them in a paper sack. The other keeps them in an iron chest. For all that, both possess the entire treasure. Thus the Christ whom you and I own is one and the same, regardless of the strength or weakness of your faith or mine. In him we possess all, whether we hold him with a strong faith or a weak faith.