

John 6:16-40 “Bread of Life Sermon, Part 1”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

When we were last in our study of John's Gospel, back in November, if you can believe it, following through the life of Jesus that we might believe and find life in Him, Derek led us through the miracle of Jesus feeding 5,000 plus with five loaves of bread and two fish.

And the people ate their fill and they thought, this guy is great. Let's make him king. But Jesus withdrew by Himself.

Much of the rest of John chapter 6, where we pick up this morning, is a sermon, so to speak. Jesus teaching and interacting some with the people there as would have taken place often at the synagogue.

They're talking with Him about what they need, about who He is. And Jesus says some wonderful, amazing things that if you really stop to listen to Him and contemplate Him are mind-blowing.

[1 : 28] They leave some people listening in anger and in disbelief, leaving Jesus, I don't want anything else to do with Him.

And on the other hand, they leave others convinced that He is the one that they must follow. That happens by the end of this sermon. We're going to take two weeks to get to the end of it.

But I want us to follow through Jesus' sermon and reading it as we go this morning. So keep your Bible open. We're going to keep reading another section and another section.

Before Jesus begins speaking, though, He starts showing Himself to His disciples in a very personal way. With yet another of John's signs.

Remember, signs that point to who Jesus is. And so we'll start reading in verse 16. John 6, verse 16. When evening came, Jesus' disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum.

[2 : 35] It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. And 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. But 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. Just one of these times where Jesus will walk on the water. Amazing.

But here, finding His disciples in the darkness, in a storm full of fear. And the one who just cared for their bodies, fed them, now cares for their souls, doesn't He?

Do not fear. I am here. Remember, just remember for a moment what security there is for us in being with Jesus.

[3 : 39] He can reach us no matter where we are, no matter what's going on. And when He comes into the midst of whatever it is we're facing, we are safe with Him.

And we need not fear. His presence should calm our fears. It is I, He says. Some of you have heard that comfort recently.

In some really tough places. It's been hard. And you've heard Jesus said, I'm here with you. He meets us in our fears. And the disciples here are starting to learn more about this miracle worker who fed 5,000.

That He rules over nature. He cares for this world. And He tends to our souls. And all in a day's work. Amazing. Verse 22.

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 that boat with His disciples.

[4 : 46] But that His disciples had gone away alone. And 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 those 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?

And 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.

It's interesting, isn't it? The crowds are eagerly tracking Jesus down. They're getting ready to listen to Him teach for a long time.

And He starts the sermon by asking, why are you really here? And then He answers. He doesn't even let them say why they're there.

[5 : 47] He tells them. He answers for them. Because you ate your fill. Because you like what I do for you.

Jesus begins by identifying a common human struggle, doesn't He? Demanding God to perform for us.

We are at the center of our lives. And like the prodigal son, we like more what God does for us than the Father Himself.

Why do you really seek Jesus? I remember thinking when I was still in school that maybe if I was spiritual enough, if I did enough church things and was up front leading enough, that maybe a girl would like me.

That seemed really appealing to me. These crowds wanting to make Jesus king. They like that He can solve those very practical, physical, real daily life kinds of problems for them.

[7 : 03] They would like to use this powerful miracle worker against Rome, right? Yes, we'll go with this guy. Or at least while we do struggle through this, we would like to be well resourced and full along the way.

They're with Jesus not for the suffering, but for the success. We want to have a good life, right? Those are bandwagon fans, y'all.

They're there while we're winning. They don't realize that multiplying the loaves to fill their bellies was merely a sign of something far more significant.

Some of you hang around Jesus primarily to give your kids some moral direction. That's important, right? Others of you are here counting on God to give you community.

Again, not a bad thing. But Jesus is challenging you here right at the start to consider the priority of something else.

[8 : 18] Something even more than those things. The priority of spiritual food and life. Listen to what he says next. Do not work 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. Seek lasting satisfaction, Jesus says. He's talking to agrarian men and women who are used to working for their food, right?

In fact, they connect that to their very existence and survival. Maybe that's not so much the same for you when you go to work. You've got food at home in the pantry or the fridge, perhaps.

When they go and they work for food, it's not merely their livelihood. It is their life. That food that they work for.

That what it produces allows them to live. And so Jesus takes something that they know quite well. Something they can still taste from the day before.

[9 : 33] And He says, make sure that you're not satisfied with something that will leave you empty again the next morning. That will eventually spoil. That you'll need more and more of the next day and the next year.

If you're going to survive, you'll have to keep working. Jesus says, no, no, that's not what I'm offering. I've got something better than that. It's got to last. Not just fill you temporarily, but really last.

Beyond this day, beyond this life, beyond this world even. That's what's most valuable, He says. Don't miss it. Our relationship with God must be central in our lives.

Not primarily because He gives us so many good things. Although He does. Not because there are benefits to being His friend.

Although there are. But because God Himself is the best thing. Don't settle for less than truly knowing Him.

[10 : 39] Than living with Him. The one who is the ultimate good. Don't demand God be a vending machine. To give you what you pay for.

To perform what you need. Well, the crowds aren't put off by Jesus' challenge on that point. I hope you're not.

He's asking you to consider your heart. Because He wants to invite you into something so much better than what you often live for. So much better than what you often even hang around church for.

Something that is worth living and even dying for. The people listening to Him, they hear what He's saying. They seize on that word work. And they say, you know, we got a question.

Jesus, okay. We're tracking. Tell us what work to do. Verse 28. Then they said to Him, What must we do to be doing the works of God?

[11 : 42] They're saying, We will. Well, literally it reads, Work the works of God. Just tell us what they are. What must we do?

You tell us, Jesus. We're in. How can we help advance the cause? How can we get in on this new kingdom and be a part of that?

What can we do for God? Because we certainly want to be on His team. The question itself implies a natural tendency that we all know very well.

The tendency to think it's all up to us. Right? We actually like that. We love to contribute, don't we? We like to be having a significant impact.

To feel good about ourselves. Like we've got something to offer. And maybe you've already thought, Come on, you less spiritual people who think that God should perform for you.

[12 : 40] That's not how it works. God is the king. We are the servants. Get it right, people. Spiritual people know that we perform for God. That's how it works.

Hmm. That's not what Jesus says. Modern day religious people like me would say it this way. Give me the list, Jesus. I am good at lists.

Those of you who know me know I can do a list. I love lists. We're so good, most of us, at this approach to relationship with God that many people who aren't in a church think that that's what it means to be in a church.

That's where you go to get the list of do's and don'ts for your life so that you know what you are supposed to do and what you're not. What are the things God wants me to do to ensure that I'm on his side?

That's not how Jesus works. Can you imagine the open door that question gives him? Don't you love it when someone comes to you and says, what can I do to help?

[13 : 50] What are the things that I can do for you? It's like every Saturday morning in my house. Dad, what can I do for you? Why are you laughing at us?

Imagine a preacher who's seeking to shape a movement to transform a group of people to really get something done, and they're asking him to tell them what to do.

Like, lay it on, man. Tithing. Teaching. Ten commandments. Is that enough? Like, there's a list, isn't there? Jesus says, verse 29, this is the work of God.

Work. Singular. The one thing. We might say the main thing. God wants us to do. To believe in Jesus.

Let's please not complicate what Jesus intends to be very simple. He's calling us to come to him.

He's just said that he is the one who gives the life that we long for, that God himself attests to that at his baptism, at many other times.

[15 : 11] So he says, your work, really not work at all, is trust me. What must I do to be saved? The Bible is very clear on this point.

It's not a long list. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is trusting Jesus to do the work on our behalf.

To give us the life that he promises to give. To hold us and to bring us into God's family. In a relationship of utter dependence on him.

Sometimes people of faith give faith a bad rap, honestly. Partially it's because we have this nagging tendency to put our faith in ourselves.

In other people. In what we do. But really everyone in here. Everyone in the world. Is a person of faith.

[16:12] When you sat down a few minutes ago after singing some of those songs. Not a single one of you turned around and gingerly reached to the pew to make sure it was going to hold you up.

Now I saw a couple of you who turned around very carefully. Not wanting to sit on a two-year-old who might have been crawling behind you. That was, however, because you didn't have faith in the two-year-old. Not because you didn't have faith in the pew to hold you up.

Every one of us. The most cynical. The most skeptical among us. We exercise faith all the time. Day in and day out. We put our trust in all sorts of things and people.

The problem is. We're so used to them letting us down. The question Jesus puts before us is whether or not what we trust will truly.

And always. And forever. Hold us. We're used to be let down by people. By institutions. Even by ourselves.

[17:15] And Jesus says, God sent me so that you can put your faith in one who will never let you down. The only thing he asks you to do is to trust me.

And yes, as you enter into that relationship of trust and dependence, you'll find your life centered on a new king and a new kingdom with all sorts of things to do.

Good works that God has designed just for you. And you'll delight in doing them in relationship with him. But nothing you do is the basis of your relationship with the king.

Nothing you do is the essence of the life that he offers to give you out of the abundance of his grace. Jesus says, Shorten your list.

One work. Believe in me. Come to me. Trust me. That is the good news that Jesus declares to you today.

[18:24] Grace. Life you don't earn, but are given freely. He's that good. I hope you hear it as clearly as the people here did.

They understood Jesus asking them to do nothing more than trust him, but also nothing less than trust him. 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 manna in the wilderness as it is written. He gave them bread from heaven to eat. You hear what they're saying?

Where's the sign? Many of them, remember, have just been fed by Jesus with five loaves for 5,000. The rest have almost certainly been talking about it. And yet they want something more. What sign? What sign?

[19:31] I don't know. You've got to be at least as good as Moses. Manna day after day for 40 years in the wilderness. Enough for everyone to eat bread from heaven.

Not just one miracle. Do something more for us, Jesus, or we won't be satisfied. Are you kidding me? What in the world?

Y'all, I so relate to the people here. Demanding more and not being satisfied with Jesus himself. I believe in my head that God loves me fully and completely because of Jesus. So before I step into this pulpit on a Sunday morning, I am thinking and reminding myself I am fully loved by the God of the universe.

And that is enough. Except that there are a whole lot of mornings that I step into this pulpit. And what is really in my mind is, God, that is so nice.

[20:45] I've heard that for a long time. I know you love me. What I really need is another several hundred people or so to think that I'm wonderful. And then I'll be okay. Okay, that will be enough.

Can we make a deal on that? I need this to go really well. I need them to say nice things and then I'll leave feeling okay. Honest. Thankfully, today is not one of those so you can be mean.

Do you relate to feeling like that? Jesus is nice on Sundays. Maybe you've thought this, but if I'm not professionally successful Monday through Saturday, I'm going to spiral into self-loathing.

I need more stuff. Being in God's family, that's neat and all, but I don't feel cool or impressive or good enough when I tell people where I go to church.

I need a new one. Jesus says very clearly to us, he's saying, let me tie it together. I said, seek lasting satisfaction.

[21:56] Then I told you to come to me. To be very clear, come find lasting satisfaction in me. Verse 32, 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, the life, is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. And they said to him, that sounds great.

Sir, give us this bread always. Maybe they're still confused. We're not sure. Is it the physical bread for their life that they're longing for?

Or is it the something greater? And so Jesus now speaks the first of his I am statements in the gospel of John, helping us grasp his true and unique identity.

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.

[23 : 11] I am the bread of life. Meaning, if you come to me, you'll never hunger again. And in case you're confused and think I mean that physically, no, no, no.

You'll also take bread and believe in me and you'll never thirst. Your soul will be satisfied forever. It's the invitation of Jesus we've heard already this morning.

Come to me. All you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. It's the invitation of God through the prophet.

Come, everyone who thirsts. Come to the waters. And he who has no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen diligently. Where? To me. And eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food. This is what God has been saying.

[24 : 17] He graciously invites you into full fellowship with him. Free forgiveness. Forgiveness. Feasting forever in a relationship with him that begins right now.

Anyone who comes to Jesus, no matter how empty, how hungry, how undeserving, will never hunger again.

I'm not talking about some great thing you have to do. Coming to Jesus, remember, even for the very first time in case you're wondering, is not some Herculean task where you have to climb a ladder, reach the top of a mountain to find him.

It can be the simplest whispered prayer. Jesus, help me. Have mercy on me, a sinner.

I need you every hour. It's a continual coming to the truth of his word.

[25 : 18] Coming to his grace in the sacraments. Coming to his people in your grace group. To Jesus himself as you love and serve the least of these.

He says you have loved and served him. Right now, come trust Jesus and find lasting satisfaction in him.

I suspect many of you are like me and that you've done that. You've come and believed in Jesus and Alan prayed about this as we were confessing our sin this morning.

Maybe you're wondering what I wrestled with here all week in this passage. How come, why God, do I still have moments, days, seasons, where I don't feel satisfied?

I thought Jesus promises never hunger or thirst. Two possibilities, I think. the first you should consider is that maybe your heart is wandering.

[26 : 38] We are prone to wander. I am very familiar with this. I've been there. Maybe you're looking for satisfaction somewhere besides Jesus right now.

Pleasure, money, success, comfort, all sorts of places. and what you need to hear is Jesus calling you to come back to him and to find, actually experience true fulfillment and satisfaction that you'll never find anywhere else and that's why you feel hungry.

or maybe what you're feeling is not actually the experience that Jesus is talking about here at all.

Maybe it's not what Jesus is promising that you won't experience. Maybe you're experiencing the reality of the storms, the pain and difficulty of this broken world, the longing to be home forever and Jesus is actually reassuring you.

He wants you to hear his comfort this morning that he really is the place to find rest for your soul.

He doesn't want you to be confused and start running to look elsewhere.

[27 : 57] True satisfaction, he says, doesn't come from a fuller belly, a bigger bank account, a better relationship. No, he wants you to know right there where you've come to him the comfort that you're not alone.

He has come to be with you. He has come to you in his incarnation entering into this world, his life, his death, his resurrection.

He comes into the storms of life to be present, to give peace that passes understanding when the circumstances don't change, to give hope, pointing us to true life, true hope beyond what we know here.

He has come to set this table this morning to meet with you. And he's coming again to take you to be with him forever.

Friends, coming to Jesus is really nothing more than embracing the one who has already run across heaven and earth to embrace you.

[29 : 05] Look at the assurance that this gives us. If I am the bread of life is the climax of Jesus' sermon part one. This is the conclusion. Verse 36, after this offer of himself, he says, but I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

Yes, there are some who despite Jesus' promise will not embrace him, will refuse his offer, but 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 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.

Just like the disciples in the boat no matter what happens your safety and security today and forever is inextricably linked to Jesus' presence with you and he is here.

Jesus has come down from heaven so that every single person who trusts him will be held and given life and fully satisfied forever that every one of us would be actually a gift from the eternal Father to the divine Son.

You are safe. Listen, if you have even whispered this morning Jesus help. if you have even even weakly and feebly opened your arms to embrace the one who came to reach you you know what your life depends on today?

[31 : 03] It's not hanging by a thread. It is not dangling precariously by your faltering faith or your inconsistent obedience.

It's not being weighed in the balance of good versus bad this week. Your eternal comfort and confidence you know what it all comes down to? It all comes down to this. You want to know what you're going to make it or break it on?

Will Jesus the Son be obedient to his Father? Remember when we looked at this at Christmas and Jesus says I came for this express purpose to do my Father's will?

Of course he will even if it cost him his life he will do the Father's will. You know what your life comes down to? Will the Father's eternal will come to pass?

Oh most certainly it will. The sovereign King and creator of it all he made it he sustains it his will will happen.

[32 : 09] It all comes down to this will Jesus have power to raise you to life even if you die. Friends he is the one who rose himself and conquered the grave.

This is the one in whose hands is your life. He never runs for re-election. He doesn't have to. His power is not dependent on public opinion and it being given to him.

He never retires. He's not merely the greatest of all time. He is the author of time itself and guess what?

He will never die. He defeated death and lives never more to die. This is the King and the Savior whose power and love hold your life.

Your life depends on is he strong enough and is he loving enough. And Jesus says do not fear. It is I.

[33 : 15] I am here with you. I've set this table before you so that you won't forget that. I've come so that we can have relationship forever and you know what the terms of our relationship are Jesus says.

Here's the deal I make a deal with you. I will lay aside the glory of heaven. I'll be born on this earth. I will live a perfect life. I will die a painful death on the cross.

I will rise and defeat sin and Satan and death and you will believe in me.

Come to me. Rest in me. me. That's how our relationship works. It's what Jesus told his disciples on the night one of them betrayed him.

When he took bread and he broke it and he gave it to them as I ministering in his name give this bread to you. He said take and eat. This is my body given for you.

[34 : 26] Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way after supper he took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Shed for many for the forgiveness of their sins.

He didn't have any but he gave his blood for yours. Take and drink it all of you for as often as you eat this bread and you drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

You proclaim it's all up to him and he's done it and you trust him. Come to Jesus. He's already come to you.

If you embrace him however desperately if you rest in him however weakly come and eat with him and with us.

If that's not where you are in your heart this morning if that's not what you see before you the only hope that you have if you would actually prefer that the stuff that God does for you rather than him or perhaps even more likely if you think your relationship with God is based on what you can offer to him and do for him and you've got more to do before you come don't come to this table.

[35 : 41] This table is one that declares our hopelessness apart from Jesus and at the same time our absolute hope that we find life in him and satisfaction in him forever that he's the one who fills us so if that's not your testimony don't come to this table we invite you to come up and we'd love to pray with you if you'd prefer you can stay where you are if that's more comfortable for you we're thrilled you're here wherever you are consider the offer of Jesus to you I am the bread of life he who comes to me will never hunger he who believes in me will never thirst let's pray and then we'll come together Jesus what a what an amazingly gracious offer what a gift might we come crawling stumbling struggling to you and find ourselves held and fulfilled and preserved in such a way that we could never imagine meet us thank you for coming first thank you for setting the table by your spirit meet with us now in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org visit us vitamin societies like infinity forward to us on