

Bread of Life

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[0 : 00] Will you please pray with me? Lord, even as we have just sung, now, Lord, I pray that you would fill our hearts.

Lord, with the knowledge of you and your love and your grace and your mercy in Christ. And Lord, we pray that your Holy Spirit would be at work in us to receive your word and be transformed by it. Lord, I ask for your help this morning, that you would give me words, Lord, that would bless and edify, that would faithfully teach your word. Fill me with your spirit, I pray this morning.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We're gonna continue this morning in our series in the book of John.

And I don't know if you've been enjoying it as much as I have been, but we have, one of the things we've noticed as a pastor is that the passages keep getting longer and longer and longer. John 6 has 71 verses in it.

[1 : 11] We're not gonna read all of those this morning, but we're gonna walk through it a little bit. And as we read through it, we're gonna, I'll pick out some parts of it that we're gonna, to focus.

But at the beginning of John 6, John moves the scene to another place. He's moved north from Jerusalem up to Galilee. And this gives us another indication that John was probably not as interested in a chronological and triptych sort of story of how Jesus taught, but more thematic one. And we hear, and we see in John 6, one through 15, a very well-known story that Jesus was teaching. A crowd of people had come out to see him.

They were out in the wilderness, away from the towns. They didn't have any food. The crowd was huge. Probably 20,000 maybe would be an estimate. And Jesus miraculously feeds them.

Taking the loaves and the fish from a young boy who had brought his lunch, Jesus miraculously multiplies it. I wanna ask the question in the beginning, to begin our time today, I was saying, what were those people looking for?

[2 : 27] Certainly, they were looking for a teacher to help them to know God better. That's why they were there. By the end of the day, they were looking for someone to help them get food too, for they were hungry.

It also says at the end of the passage, verse 14 says that the crowds responded to the miracle saying, this indeed is the prophet who's come into the world.

And then verse 15 says, perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew to the mountains by himself.

So these people were looking for a teacher, they were looking for a meal, but they were also looking for a leader, for someone to speak to them from God, for someone to lead them out of slavery and into life.

They came seeking many things that day. You know, one of the words that we use to think about the things that we seek for in our lives is we're hungry for them.

[3 : 31] A sports team is hungry for another championship. A new recruit to a business may be hungry to climb the corporate ladder and so forth.

What about you this morning? What are you hungry for in your life? It might be lots of things. Maybe you're hungry for success in your career, for power, for money.

Maybe you're hungry for a good family and a calm and peaceable home. Maybe you're hungry for the respect of the people around you who you care about. Maybe you're hungry for pleasure.

Maybe you're on the trip with Stanley Tucci to find the perfect Italian food. If you haven't been watching TV, this is a thing. Stanley Tucci is leading people through Italy looking for the perfect Italian food.

Sometimes the things we're hungry for are darker as well. Sometimes it's late night, alone with our computer looking at illicit videos.

[4 : 37] And sometimes it seems perfectly benign. Maybe it's another workout, another mountain climbed, another plane jumped out of, another adrenaline rush.

We might be hungry for lots of things in our lives. We also might be hungry religiously for things. We may be here this morning because we want to be a good Christian.

This is what good Christians do, and we want to be seen as such. We want to be a good citizen. Sometimes we're here because we're going through a really hard time, and we know we need God's help.

Sometimes we're here because we just need the confidence that in the end, we're going to be on the right side of history, that we're going to be with God in heaven.

Maybe some of us are here because we want to be right before God, and we don't know how to do that. There are lots of motivations in our hearts. There are lots of things that drive our actions and our thoughts.

[5 : 42] But this hunger is a metaphor that we use to describe the things that our souls long for, a passionate pursuit, a consuming desire, the things that we are wholeheartedly committed to.

People came seeking these things from Jesus, seeking something. As we gather this morning, we want to start with the question, what are you seeking as you are here?

Here in the sanctuary, here on the live stream, what is it that you are hungry for this morning? This passage in John 6 will speak to us.

Jesus will speak to us this morning, and he will say, you hunger for more than you know, and what you have come for ultimately is me. This is the central thought of John 6.

We're going to break it down. The teaching section, the story goes on. Jesus walks on water to show another miracle, another way in which he's going to be the king, and then the crowd is looking for him because he's not where they expected him to be.

[6 : 48] And then, starting in verse 25, we'll see the first section of how Jesus responds to these people who are seeking him. And he responds to them in 25 through 34 by saying, you are seeking something greater than what your fathers knew.

Let's read that passage if you have your Bible, John 6, verse 25 and following. We're going to read this part together as we start this section. John 6, 25.

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.

Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him, God the Father has set his seal.

Then they said to him, What must we do to be doing the works of God? And Jesus answered them, This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has set.

[7 : 57] And they said to him, Then what sign do you do that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat.

And Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. And they said to him, Sir, give us this bread, always.

Jesus begins, as he interacts with this crowd, they come and say, How did you get here? And that's related to the miracle of how he got across the Sea of Galilee by walking on water.

But he shows them, he begins by revealing what he knows about their hearts. They say, Why did you come here? Jesus doesn't answer the question. He says, You know what?

[9 : 00] You're here for a reason, aren't you? But it's not a good one. You're here because yesterday I fed you food. And you're going to come back today and you're going to want more of the same.

He says, You're not even here because I've done miraculous signs. Your sights are set on such basic things. And Jesus is going to begin this process throughout this whole section of raising their hearts, raising their eyes to a greater desire, tuning their hearts to long for something more important.

Jesus says, Don't look for food that's going to feed you today but not tomorrow. There's another kind of food out there, a food that endures to eternal life.

There's a food that comes from the Son of Man who has come from God. There's a food that can come that you can gain. And they say, How do we gain this? What work do we have to do?

He says, It's not a work that you have to do. You have to come and believe in me. And they push back and they say, What signs have you done that we should believe in you? Which, if you think about it, is ridiculous.

[10:09] Think about what we just talked about. He's just fed 20,000 people out of nothing. He's also managed to transport himself across the Sea of Galilee. What other signs do they need?

And this, I think, reveals their hard-heartedness and their dullness about the things that they were most made to long for. They're still pushing back.

Jesus, what signs are you going to do to see these things? They go on and they say, Look, our forefathers, they knew great signs. The story that Carolyn read earlier from Exodus 16.

As God had miraculously delivered them from Egypt, brought salvation from the slavery that they were in, and now was taking them through wilderness to a promised land that he had said was going to come.

And as soon as it got difficult, as soon as it was hard, they started to grumble. God, how can you be good?

[11:07] You've led us out into this wilderness to die. I wish we were back in Egypt and then at least we would die full instead of hungry. Isn't that better if we're going to die anyway?

Forgetting all the miraculous things that God had already done for them. But God graciously responds. He says, I know you're hungry.

I see your need. And I will bring to you what you need. And so he brings this, what is it? This manna from heaven provided miraculously.

And friends, I don't know if you've thought about this, but this went on for 40 years. It didn't just happen then. It happened throughout the whole wilderness experience. God provided for his people until they entered into the promised land.

Jesus says, you're looking for another Moses who's going to bring you another bread that's going to feed you for another day? No, you need to set your eyes to something higher. Look at verse 32 with me if you're looking at the Bible.

[12:12] 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.

Jesus is turning their sights. Don't look back and think about what God has done in the past through those things, but look ahead because God right now is giving you something greater. A manna greater than the ones that your forefathers experienced.

A leader greater than Moses. A prophet greater than these things. You need the bread of God which comes from heaven. and gives real and eternal life.

And that's what Jesus is doing. He's redirecting their thoughts. Friends, I wonder if we need to have our thoughts redirected this morning.

The things that we long for, the passions, the desires, the hungers of our lives, many, many of those things are good and even the most twisted ones have in them a seed of something that God created for us to long after in Him even when we look to other places.

[13:26] If you haven't read C.S. Lewis' Weight of Glory recently, you should go back and read it if you've read it and if you haven't read it, you should look it up. You can find it online.

You can find it in bookstores. It's one of the most penetrating arguments about what it means to live the Christian life. The Weight of Glory, it's a great one.

But in it, one of the things he talks about is a place of desire and hunger and how the things of earth are meant to be signposts for what we were truly created for. He writes this, a man's physical hunger does not prove that a man will get any bread.

He may die of starvation in a raft in the Atlantic. But surely, a man's hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist in the same way.

Though I do not believe that my desire for paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it is a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will find it.

[14:32] Do you see what C.S. Lewis is saying? He's saying that the hunger that we have is meant to point us to something greater and it speaks to our souls that we long for something greater than ourselves when we look for pleasure, when we look for joy, when we look for meaning, when we look for God.

All of these things are signs that perhaps we were made for God and that there is a God and that He is a God who wants to come and bring us this life.

Friends, how often we confuse the gifts and the giver, how often we take the good things of our lives and make them ultimate and obscure the ultimate things that focus on Jesus.

And this is what Jesus is trying to help the crowd that He's speaking to and help us to say. Having shaken up their expectations and redirecting His thoughts, He gets then to the heart of the matter in verses 35 and following.

So let's look at those for a few minutes. I'm going to read this 35 through 51 is the next section in this passage. Remember verse 34, they've expressed this hunger.

[15:51] Yes, we want that. What is it? And Jesus says to them, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

But I said to you that you have seen me and yet you do not believe all that the Father gives me I 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 that last day.

So the Jews grumbled about Him because He said I am the bread that came down from heaven.

They said is this not Jesus the Son of Joseph whose father and mother we know?

How does He now say I have come down from heaven? And Jesus answered them do not grumble among yourselves no one can come to me unless the Father who has sent me draws him and I will raise him up on the last day.

[17:07] It is written in the prophets and they will all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God he has seen the Father.

Truly, truly I say to you whoever believes has eternal life I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the man in the wilderness and they died.

This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

There's a lot of argument here. There's no way unless we want to be here until 12 that we're going to cover all of the intricacies of this passage. But the main point is exceedingly clear.

Jesus says I am the bread of life that has come down from heaven to give you life. And of course this is one of the first of seven of the great I am statements in the gospel of John where he says I am the door I am the shepherd I am the resurrection and the life and so on and so forth.

[18:28] Jesus is explaining this is who I am and this is why I have come. He says I am the bread from heaven that is God has sent me to provide for you the thing that you most need the thing that your soul most hungers for and thirst for and I will satisfy you.

This is the core of what Jesus is saying in this section. He's saying I am the bread for your soul that is able to bring life. And this remember if you remember two weeks ago when Pastor Greg preached about Jesus and the Samaritan woman when he offered her water from the well do you remember what he said?

This water if you drink of it it will be in him a well that springs up to eternal life in your soul. And the woman says yes give me this water so I don't have to come and draw from the well anymore.

She didn't understand it initially any more than these people did. But this is what Jesus is consistently saying I am here to bring you life. think about what bread and water are for us.

When we have when we incarcerate people when we are doing every when we are treating people as basically as possible what do we give them? We give them bread and we give them water because those are the things that if they have those things they will live.

[19:46] And Jesus says I am going to be like that for your soul. I am bringing everything that you need. I am here to bring you life. life. And this life is a future life.

Jesus says it four times in verse 39 and verse 40 and verse 44 and then in verse 51 I will raise him up that is whoever comes to me I will raise him up in the last day.

You will not die but you will live forever because you believe in me. But he also says I am your satisfaction now. You will no longer be hungry.

your soul will be satisfied with me now. This is what he says in verse 35 and it's what he says in verse 50 and 51 as well. And he says I am the bread of life and how do you get it?

By believing in me. Now look friends we traffic in a weak understanding of belief today in our world don't we? we often think that belief is a sort of casual ascent to an idea that really doesn't change our lives.

[20 : 57] But when the Bible talks about belief it talks about trusting it talks about belief it talks about identifying with it talks about throwing your whole the whole weight of your being into something.

Right? It's the it's the great you know it's trusting in the great Zamperini or whatever his name was who carried you across the Niagara the Niagara Falls on his back you're trusting in him to save your life as you cross the water the waterfalls.

This is what it is. It is not a weak thing but it is a strong thing and Jesus is using this imagery of eating to say you have to take this in.

Belief is not just something that's out there but belief is something that becomes a part of you.

Jesus also says that what he is providing here is from heaven and they grumble about it.

Did you notice that? Verse 41 Jesus is telling them all these wonderful things I have come for you to do all these things but you're not receiving me and they're like yeah we're not really happy because we know you we know where you came from you're from West Haven you know I mean that's the that's the you know we know we know your mom and dad you can't you claim to come from heaven and bring this tremendously great gift how is that possible?

[22 : 29] They were looking for something and it's no way that some local boy could provide that. They could not believe that Jesus was God's provision but what Jesus says is the thing that you're most seeking is not something that you're going to know and be able to be in control about understanding where it comes from and how it's given to you because it's not going to come from this earth it's not going to come from these things it's going to come from heaven but the thing that you're most longing for this bread of life will not come from growing wheat but it will come from receiving from God one that he has sent into the world.

What they are seeking God is drawing them to understand and receive and what they need is beyond achieving they must simply accept it as having come from God.

Jesus then concludes this section verse 51 I am the living bread that comes down from heaven if anyone eats this bread he will live forever.

We'll get to the second part in just a minute of that verse but I want to sit there for a minute. I want to ask you a question what is the diet upon which your soul feeds today?

Where do you turn to find life on a daily basis? Maybe you can ask yourself the question in these ways what do you fill your discretionary time with to gain meaningful life?

[24 : 11] Where do you find joy and meaning when life grows stale and dull? What do you trust in when things get really difficult? It's pretty easy for us to feed ourselves on lesser things and so C.S. Lewis again reminds us it would seem that our desires are not too strong but too weak.

We are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. We are like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot understand what is meant by an offer of a holiday at the sea.

How often we look to other things for the life that Jesus says he alone has come to bring to us.

Friends is our diet a healthy one or do we have far too many pop tarts and Doritos in our spiritual diet?

Have we allowed our life to pursue dissipation and momentary fleeting pleasures when the bread of life is standing before us saying I have come to give you life?

It's the season of Lent. We're a Baptist church we don't tend to make a big deal of it but I think Lent is a really useful thing.

[25 : 41] Helps us prepare for Easter. It helps us remember the gospel. It helps us think about the depth of our sin and the greatness of the need of humanity that allows us to enjoy the wonders of the love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ.

Lent is traditionally a season of repentance and confession of sin. Friends I wonder whether you might consider examining your life this morning maybe there are things that you've been feeding on that your soul has been feeding on that you need to let go of for a while and they may be good things that you just need to take a step back from and fast from so that you can experience your deeper hunger for Jesus and meet him in that.

Maybe there are things that you just need to let go of and repent of and turn away from forever and not go back to. Jesus says I am the bread of life and he invites us to come.

The last section Jesus pushes his audience and pushes us how is it that this bread that Jesus brings us will bring us life? The end of verse 51 he says a striking thing and this bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

How does this bread give us life? Is the final section and if you think about it right up until now Jesus has been saying generally some pretty positive things.

[27 : 21] I have come to bring you life. You don't believe but the father is going to bring you and he is going to keep you and this is going to be a great thing. But in verses 52 and following Jesus explains what it means for him to be able to bring this life to us with language that is shocking and surprising.

The Jews in verse 52 complain and say how can this man give us his flesh to eat? That sounds pretty weird doesn't it?

Because to a first century Jew in fact to a Jew today eating the flesh of a person is repulsive eating any flesh that has blood in it would also be repulsive. Leviticus 17 if you go back and look at it very clearly says this is not allowed.

Because life is in the blood and when you eat flesh it has blood in it you are taking the life of something else. And the Old Testament law says this we do not do because God is the one who gives us life and we cannot take it.

And Jesus uses this image and then in verse 53 through 56 he ramps it up four times listen to what he says in these verses Jesus said to them truly truly I say to you unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him.

[29 : 02] Jesus ratchets up his offensive language. Why? What does he mean by this? Well let's make sure we start this is not zombie-dom this is not vampirism this is not cannibalism it is very clear that Jesus is using a metaphor here nobody was confused about that in the first century so if it's not cannibalism then what is it?

Well there's been lots of lots of conversation throughout the church history about this passage particularly as it relates to the Lord's Supper maybe Jesus is using this language because he's instituting in these passages the practice of the Lord's Supper which we will have at the end of this service where we will eat a cracker and drink some juice or wine and in doing so we remember and celebrate Jesus' sacrifice for us there is again so much here I'm not going to get into the weeds I'm going to simply quote one of the commentators that I thought summarized the way I think the best way to think about this is John 6 this passage is not about the Lord's Supper but rather the Lord's Supper is about what is described in John 6 so both this image that Jesus is using in John 6 and the Lord's

Supper is pointing to the same thing well what is that it is that Jesus came the word became flesh so that he might die on the cross for our sins so that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life why do I say this is what he means by eating and drinking well verse 54 says this whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day verse 40 if you want to look back Jesus says this 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 that last day the parallelism is exact what Jesus means by eating his flesh and drinking his blood ultimately is this is a metaphor that's picturing belief believing in me he who looks to and believes in me this is what he's doing but he's using shocking language to try to break them out of a misunderstanding he's using words of ingesting right it's an intimate image it's an organic one it's a personal one it's a connection now think we do this with our own language sometimes we drink up someone else's joy and happiness when we enjoy their company we ruminate on someone's ideas as we are exposed to them and we think about them these are this is common language for how we take things from the outside and we they become a part of us here particularly it is a picture of what is called the

doctrine of union with

Christ that when we are spiritually joined to Jesus Christ by faith and when we in belief we take him into ourselves in a true and spiritual way as our Lord and our life even as he takes us into himself and we find ourselves as a part of his body and these are all images that talk about a spiritual reality of this deep spiritual connection with Jesus what Jesus is saying is are you offended by this image of eating my flesh and drinking my blood friends you haven't even begun to be offended by what I'm talking about he goes on in the last section in 60 through 65 many of the disciples heard it and said this is a hard saying who can believe it and Jesus says do you take offense then what if you were to see the son of man ascending to where he was before and if you pull this thread through the gospel of

John what Jesus is saying is if you're offended by this image there's a greater offense coming that I'm calling you to identify with the greater offense is that the son of man the son of God the word became flesh will be crucified buried and then he will rise from the dead he will be lifted up on the cross then he will be raised from the dead and then he will ascend into heaven to go back from where he came from to affirm that he truly is the bread of life because this is the gospel we know isn't it friends Jesus died on the cross for our sins in our place his body was broken his blood was shed for us so that we who deserve death because of our sin don't have to die but instead can experience this transforming new and eternal life friends this is the good news of the gospel this is what

[34 : 33] Jesus is calling people to believe not in Moses but the prophet that Moses predicted not in manna but to the life the manna pointed to not in following the law to be right with God but following the word made flesh by faith in the crucified son who came to give us life this is what we are being reminded of in this passage this morning and the last passage is one of those places where I go to regularly particularly in the hardest times particularly when I've faced the worst disappointment the greatest loss the biggest questions many disciples turned away when Jesus used this shocking language they no longer wanted to be identified with him and they no longer followed him Jesus turns to his disciples the twelve says do you want to go away too and

Simon Peter answered him Lord to whom should we go you have the words of eternal life and we have believed and come to know that you are the holy one of God friends the disciples saw something clearly in that moment for though they didn't understand Jesus fully and they wouldn't until after the resurrection no we don't understand all that God is doing in our lives today may we too take up this response where else would we go where else will we find the life that we know is in Jesus he alone is the true source of real and everlasting life he is the one who is able to truly give us meaning and purpose he is the one who is able to take us away from fear of death and judgment he is the one who allows us to live a life will you take it will you believe in him today please pray with me

Lord we thank you for this word and we thank you for Jesus and we thank you that Lord as we turn to the Lord supper now Lord as we celebrate this Lord that we are reminded that you have come to bring us life and Lord we confess our sin Lord we acknowledge that it is because of our sin that you had to come Lord that the wages of sin is death and Lord that apart from you we are living in spiritual death but Lord we praise you that because of Jesus we will not die but live forever when we are joined with him by faith Lord I pray for those this morning who are struggling Lord that they would be encouraged and strengthened in their faith in you Lord we pray for those who are seeking who are exploring what it means to know you and to follow you that they might have their eyes opened and their hearts opened to you that they might believe and trust in you and your work for their salvation

Lord strengthen us all of us with these words today we pray in Jesus name amen