

Jesus the Bread of Life.

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[0:00] Good. Well, welcome everybody. And despite how it feels, in spite of how it feels, it's spring.! I'm told Tuesday might be warm, so there we go.

But it's lovely to see you. And we approach Easter. This is Palm Sunday, so you've all got a Palm Cross. We'll refer to that a little later. We're going to read from John chapter 6. It's quite a long reading.

So we're reading from verse 25 to the end of the chapter. So it's a long reading. It comes on the screen. You can follow along.

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, Rabbi, when did you get here? Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.

[1:10] When they asked him what must, sorry, then they asked him, what must we do to do the works God requires? Jesus answered, the work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.

So they asked him, what miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert.

As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who 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. So they said, from now on give us this bread. Then Jesus declared, I am the bread of life.

He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

[2:17] For I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. Just pause and think about that for a moment.

That's the future for those who believe in Jesus. At this time the Jews began to grumble 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 can he now say, I come down from heaven? Stop grumbling among yourself, Jesus answered.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, they will all be taught by God.

[3:20] Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God. Only he has seen the Father.

I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died.

But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

This bread is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world. Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves. How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

[4:22] For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever. He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. On hearing it, many of his disciples said, this is a hard teaching. Who can accept it? Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, Does this offend you?

What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he has been before? The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit, and they are life.

Yet there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe, and who would betray him. He went on to say, This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.

[5:34] From this time, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. You do not want to leave too, do you?

Jesus asked the twelve. This is when you are raised on a different version of the Bible, and then you get confused. Will you also go away? I expected to read, but there you go.

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. Then Jesus replied, Have I not chosen you, the twelve?

Yet one of you is a devil. He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who though one of the twelve, was later to betray him. It's a bit of a spoiler there, isn't it?

But there we go. Well, what a passage of Scripture that is. Terrific passage of Scripture. And so much in it, too much for one sermon.

[6:35] But we'll do our best, if I can even read my notes. There we go. What have I got here, you wondered? Well, the bread of heaven, Stottie Cake.

Now, if you don't know what a Stottie Cake is, you're not a Jody. Yeah? I've no idea why they're called Stottie Cakes, but they smell good. This is a proper South Shields one as well, so this is a good one.

It's like not a fake Whitby one that you buy in Botham's. A real one. And, well, you've got to have it with peas pudding. Shelley, you're a saint.

She brought me some Stottie Cakes this morning and some peas pudding. So all I need now is ham. Deidre says, Savaloys, that's only true if you're poor. Right? But being a posh Jody, it's ham. Yeah? And peas pudding has been around a long time, since the 1400s. It was called peas pottage, and it was always for the poor. It's split peas, if you don't know. And you make it into a kind of substitute butter, if you can't afford butter.

[7:41] So, or we would say butter. Yeah? And you have your study, and it's going to be very nice. It'll be my supper. But I'll tell you a little more about it later, if I remember.

Have I made you hungry? Hungry. Well, Jesus is speaking to us about a hunger that bread cannot satisfy. Every day we eat, don't we?

We eat every day, and we're hungry again. So, you might have gone out yesterday morning and got a great cooked breakfast, and had your fill, and you think, oh, goodness, I'm full at the end of that. I won't eat for the rest of the day. But one thing I guarantee is, by the next day, you'll be hungry, even if you manage to get through the day without eating again. Because that's the thing about hunger.

No matter how hungry we are, once our hunger is satiated or satisfied, eventually we'll be hungry again. And that's kind of a simple observation that Jesus makes here.

[8:41] People get hungry, and they need to have their hunger satiated, but then they get hungry again. It's as basic as that. Nobody eats something on a daily basis that keeps them satisfied forever.

Nobody. But Jesus says that I have bread to give you that will keep you satisfied, not only today, but for every day of your life, and right through to eternity.

And this is Solzhenitsyn. The belly is an ungrateful wretch. It never remembers past favors. It always wants more tomorrow.

And it will tell you that, because it'll make loud noises if you don't eat. Yeah. But Jesus' point is that the deepest hunger that we have is not physical.

It's spiritual. And we're going to see that as we kind of connect this passage with what came before that Sandy shared with us last week.

[9:44] Now, when we hunger, we hunger for all kinds of things. We hunger for love, for intimacy, for material comforts, for relationships, for power, for satisfaction.

Some people hunger so much because they're addicted to things like alcohol and drugs, and they hunger for those. The body craves it, and you've seen it when people are so addicted.

It's tormenting. But we can be equally tormented in our souls when we don't get our relational needs met, or our sexual needs met, or anything else.

We're all addicted to something, and there's always hunger. But that hunger is never satisfied for very long before it returns. The Rolling Stones used to sing, didn't they?

I can't get no satisfaction. But I try, and I try, and I try, and I keep trying. And that's the world, isn't it? And in the next slide, C.S. Lewis reminded us, if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

[11:05] That's what happens, you see, when people begin to feel a spiritual hunger and a spiritual desire. You know, we've heard it so often recently, people passing the building, and then feel, I just felt I needed to go in.

People turning up and saying, can I talk to you? I'm not even sure what I want to talk to you about, except I feel my need for God. And it begins to create a hunger that only God can satisfy.

That is the desire, Lewis said, that was created in us, for God has put eternity into our hearts. He's put it into our hearts, the writer of Ecclesiastes says.

And there is a time for everything, a time to mourn, a time to dance, a time to be hungry, a time to be well-fed, and he goes through it all, time to live, time to die, all of that.

But he says, God has put eternity into your heart. And only God can satisfy that desire. As Blaise Pascal said, we all have within us a God-shaped vacuum or hole, and we try to fill it with so many things, but the only thing that fits is God.

[12:18] And our hearts are restless, Augustine said, until they find our rest in God. So, let's quickly look at this passage then. The first thing we see is that people are seeking bread, but not Jesus.

They're seeking bread, but not Jesus. So, these are the same crowd that had experienced the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. Several thousand people. 12, 15, you name it, 1,000 people. 5,000 women, but then that didn't include the women, men, sorry, but that didn't include the women and children. And this great crowd remained in the vicinity, and they went looking for Jesus after he disappeared overnight.

And they thought he must have gone across to the lake, but then some boats came from Tiberias, and they said, it's Jesus over there. And they said, no, he's not there. Oh, where is he then? And so, they go looking, and they go to the nearest town, and the nearest town is Capernaum.

And there's good reason to go there, because that's where Jesus had his second home. He used to live with Simon Peter's mother-in-law, which must have been lovely, mustn't it? We all want to live with our mother-in-laws, don't we?

[13:27] Hello, Dad. My mother-in-law is here. She knows the joke. They'd experienced this miracle, and they loved the idea of a kind of ancient vending machine.

Here's a guy who can get five loaves and, sorry, was it five loaves and two fish, and turn it into enough food that leaves 12 basketfuls over.

So, they end up with more than they started with. 12 basketfuls, by the way, for the 12 tribes of Israel. It's Jesus' way of saying, God has provision for all of you. None of you will miss out. Great idea. Yeah, wouldn't it be good if we had somebody who could do that every day? What a miracle that would be. I wouldn't have to go to work. I'd just be able to put my feet up, watch the match, and enjoy.

Food by demand. We want a Savior like that. And so, off they went to find him. And when they found him, Jesus said, You're only here because I fed you. It's the only reason you're here.

[14:33] I know you. You see, we always have to remember that John has a purpose. Always this purpose. And he told us already, hadn't he? Jesus knew what was in man. He wouldn't entrust himself to man.

He knew there was something very superficial and fickle about him. Oh, on the surface, it looks great. All of these people coming to Jesus. He's popular. John tells us that they wanted to make him king by force when he did a miracle.

But the trouble is, they didn't want the king that he was. They wanted the king that he could be for them. One who just provided them free food every day. Jesus on my terms.

That's the modern kind of way, isn't it? Jesus on my terms. Who keeps me happy, wealthy, and well. And gives me everything I want. No problems, thank you very much, Jesus. But Jesus says, I'm not that kind of king.

I'm not here just to feed you. I'm not here just to meet your temporal needs. I have come down from heaven to give you something that will keep you alive forever.

[15:35] But it has to be on my terms. And all of that talk about you did not come to me and that you can't come to me unless the Father draws him, etc. All of that's important, you see.

For there is a human demand on Jesus that he's not prepared to meet. He's not prepared to lower the standard or to go some other way.

The devil had tried that with him. Make these stones become bread. Fall down and worship me and I'll give you all of this. Go some other way. Any way, but not the way of the cross.

And this is why the palm is a cross and not a palm branch. The palm branches were used to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem. Hosanna to the son of David.

Hosanna to the king of Israel. This is the king we want. But when they knew he was going to the cross, they said, away with him. Crucify. This is not the king we need. For that was an offense to them.

[16:33] For only a cursed man dies on a cross. Not a Messiah. Oh, how little did they know and understand God's way.

That the Messiah had to become a curse for us by going to the cross. For unless he is lifted up from the earth, until he is lifted up from the earth, he cannot draw all men to himself.

So they seek bread. And not Jesus. They say, Rabbi, how did he get here? And he doesn't even answer their question. For he says, you are looking for me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the laws.

The belly is an ungrateful wretch. It never remembers past favors. It always wants more tomorrow. They were thinking of bread.

And Jesus was saying, you missed the point of the miracle. It was a sign to you. And signs are signposts to point you in the right direction. The point of the miracle is not that I can give you food.

[17:40] The point of the miracle is that I am the one who did it. It's not bread you need. It's me. And you're missing that. You're missing that.

So many people want the blessings that God offers without the son that he offers. Without Jesus. And you can't be a Christian.

You can't have God unless you come by Jesus Christ. That is John's message. I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to God except through me.

Jesus is not interested in popularity. Not the king they wanted. But the king they needed. And so Jesus says, I'm looking deeper.

And every one of us have to examine our motives. Why do we believe in Jesus? Why am I here today? Why do I give my life to this Jesus?

[18:38] What am I seeking? What do I want? Is it about me? Is it about me? Or is it about him? Is it because I need something?

Or is it because I need him? That becomes the question. Next slide. Jesus shows us in this passage that salvation is by faith and not works.

Salvation is by faith and not works. We live in a world that constantly tells us what we need. More money. More security. More success.

More pleasure. It feeds that sense of entitlement. You need this. You can't be happy without it unless you get the latest watch. Unless you get the latest headphones.

Unless you get the latest television. Unless you get the latest stuff. You know all the things. You'll never be satisfied. But Jesus says, look, do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

[19:45] And there's a little bit of an enigma here and a little bit of a contradiction. Jesus says, I want you to work for something that you can't get yourself. A food not that perishes, that you can buy in the store.

But a food that I can give you that leads to everlasting life. Oh, how do we get that then? We can't buy that. So, he says, work for it, but you can't work for it.

It's a gift of grace. So, by work, he doesn't mean earn it. He means seek it. Seek it. They were seeking bread that would perish again.

And, of course, it's drawing upon what happened in the wilderness when Moses gave them manna. Every day it was provided. They didn't work for it. They just woke up and gathered it.

It was enough for the day, but then it perished. If they tried to keep it, it would rot overnight. They couldn't do that except on the Sabbath day. Jesus says, look, put every effort into the miraculous provision that God is providing, just as he did for Moses in the desert, so he's going to provide it again in me.

[20:59] Look for it in me. Now, Jesus is not saying, don't work. So, he can't say, oh, well, that's it. I'm no longer going to earn anything, and I'm not going to buy any food now because Jesus told me not to work.

That's not what he says. He says, make sure what you're working for, when it comes to matters of salvation, what you're putting effort into is the right thing.

And Jesus says, the right thing is me. Man does not live by bread alone, the Scripture says, but every word that comes from the mouth of God, Jesus is the Word of God.

To eat and to feed upon the Word of God is to eat and to feed upon Jesus. So, people in the crowd responded, and they said, what must we do to perform the works of God?

That is the Jewish mentality. How do we earn this? You're talking about the works of God, so what must we do to perform it? As Merrill Tenney put it, to Jewish questioners, attaining eternal life consisted in finding the right formula for performing works to please God.

[22:12] Jesus directed them to the gift of God that could be obtained by faith. Again, there is a similarity to his conversation with the Samaritan woman. If you knew the gift of God, it's a gift.

Give me this water. No, it's a gift. What must I do to perform the works that God wants me to perform? No, it's a gift.

The gift is not to work. The gift is to, Jesus says, believe. Well, there must be a catch. I remember years ago, preaching in Sunderland City Center.

It was a great, it was one of these things. I was actually literally on a box. And Sunderland City Center at that time wasn't very nice. Well, okay, I won't say that. It's not very nice. Sunderland City was a very old-fashioned one.

It had walkways over the top. And the match was on. The Sunderland fans were going to match. And there I was preaching. And they all began to stop at the top. One of them threw an egg at me, but it missed her. And there I was on the box.

[23:12] I had five pounds in my hand, a fiver. I said, I will give this fiver. Anybody will come and get it. And everybody was looking. And there was a big crowd.

And nobody came and took the fiver. Everybody waited for the catch. I would have had to give the fiver. I was a poor student. I was glad nobody took it. But it proved a point to me.

People don't like gifts. They wonder how that's going to commit them in some way to something they don't want to be committed to. Jesus said, the works of God that you have to perform is simply

to believe.

Because it's a gift. And this explains John 3.16. In God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. That what? Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. To believe. Well, in one sense, that's easy, isn't it? Oh, yeah, I just believe. But the point is, you have to believe in everything that Jesus said and did. Everything He taught. You have to believe that.

[24:21] And that takes commitment. It's not so easy, is it? It involves understanding the content of His message and the nature of His person.

You have to get to know Him to believe in Him. But it is to believe. To ascend to, to agree, to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Let me tell you about a German called Martin Luther. I'm going to end with this one. I'm going to get through the hole, but never mind. Martin Luther. Martin Luther was a German monk.

And in, he was, in about 1505, when he was 21 years old, he was a lawyer, a solicitor, we would say. And he was walking home one day from his law firm back to his family home.

And there was a severe thunderstorm. And the lightning was so intense, and he was so afraid, that being a good Roman Catholic, he cried out to his saint.

[25:20] Saint Anne, spare me, and I will become a monk, he said. Fifteen days later, he left law school, much against his father's wishes, and entered the Augustinian Monastery in Erfurt in Germany.

Fast forward five years to 1510, and Luther was disillusioned. He'd done everything within his power to placate his guilty conscience and earn the favor of God.

And of all the monks in the monastery, he was regarded as the most devout. He decided he would go to Rome, because surely in Rome, he would find peace for his soul and find his salvation.

Rome, the place of the martyrs. Rome, the place where the cathedral church, where the very Pope himself resided. Surely there, he would find salvation.

He went and he performed acts of self-punishment, like surpassing sleep. In cold winter's nights, he went out and lay in the snow in attempt to atone for his sins.

[26:28] And he used a whip to beat himself and to cause blood to flow down his back. And reflecting on it, he said, if anyone could have earned heaven by the life of a monk, it was I.

When he was in Rome, he visited the graves of 46 popes and the cemeteries of 80,000 martyrs born. Imagine. Finally, he went to a church which had in it the Scala Sancta, the holy stairs, which were reportedly the stairs that Jesus and Pontius Pilate stood on, where Jesus was condemned to death.

Supposedly, it was said, transferred from Jerusalem to Rome in the fourth century. And up those stairs, he went on his knees.

On every step, he prayed the Our Father, the Pater Noster. When he got to the top, he said he heard a voice like thunder. And the voice said to his soul, the just shall live by faith.

And he got up. And he left that place disillusioned. He began to fix his mind on that scripture, the just shall live by faith.

[27:50] Until he said, the Spirit of God allowed me to comprehend these words. When I learned how the sinner's justification proceeds from the pure mercy of the Lord by means of faith, then I felt myself revived like a new man and entered an open door into the very paradise of God.

From that time, also, I beheld the precious sacred volume with new eyes. I went over all the Bible and collected a great number of passages which taught me that the work of God was.

And as I had previously, with all my heart, hated the words, justice of God. So from that time, I began to esteem and love them as words most sweet and most consoling.

In truth, these words were to me the true gate of paradise. What is the work of God? To believe that Jesus is the bread of life.

To believe that Jesus alone can satisfy your needy soul. You need Jesus. You need to eat Jesus. You need to feed upon Jesus.

[29:02] You need to fill your heart with Jesus. For no one else and nothing else will satisfy. To whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

