

Jesus: The Bread of Life

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Text: John 6

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OPENING PRAYER:

Our great God and Heavenly Father, we praise you for the way in which you plant the seed of your word into our hearts by the power of your Holy Spirit. And we pray that as we place our minds, our wills, our hearts, the whole of our lives, our futures, under the influence of your very speech to us in scripture, that you will enliven us to hear what you say to us. That you will burden us with a desire to obey you in fresh ways. And most of all, that you will point us to our Lord Jesus Christ, that we may be all together, satisfied in him. We pray this together for his great name's sake. Amen.

Please be seated.

SCRIPTURE READING:

We continue our studies in the Gospel according to John. And this morning, we read in John's Gospel chapter six. And you'll find the scripture reading in the Pew Bible. And you'll find a few Bible in the wrack in front of you. The Pew Bible page 891. And it will be for our mutual benefit that we have this text of Scripture open before us open this morning.

As you remember this chapter begins with our Lord's miracle of the feeding of the 5000. And he thereafter crosses the Sea of Galilee. Goes to Capernaum. And the following day, an interchange takes place. And we're going to read in chapter six from verse 25 through 41. And then from verse 66 through 69. Let us hear God's word.

John's gospel, chapter six from verse 25.

25 When the crowd found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26 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. 27 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." 28 Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 30 So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 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. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

35 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. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 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. 40 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."

41 So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

We're told then in verse 60, that:

"Many of those who followed Jesus said, "This is a hard saying, who can listen to it?"

And verse 66,

"After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

SERMON:

I wonder if it has ever struck you as it frequently strikes me, how strong and sometimes even violent people's responses to the Lord Jesus Christ can be. You only need to go into a social occasion and name, the "name that is above every name" at which the Scriptures say, "one day every knee will bow." And you know, that you have just mentioned the socially, most embarrassing name that anyone could hear.

People's reactions to the Lord Jesus Christ are sometimes enormously strong. And usually, actually, people are not able to hide them. They can hide their reaction to almost everyone else, or anything else, but not to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we find that here in this passage. There is nothing new about strong reaction to the Lord Jesus. In verses 14 and 15 of John chapter six, one day, the people want to make him the king. And they describe him as the great Prophet. The next day, in verse 41, verse 52, verse 61, verse 66 they are grumbling, and moaning about him, and deserting him on mass.

And certainly for us as Christian people, there's something of a comfort and knowing that the kind of reaction that we see today at the name of Jesus and the teaching of Jesus is not a novelty. It gives us some sense of confidence that the Jesus in whom we trust is, in fact, the Jesus of whom we read in Scripture, because he produced the same strong reaction then as he produces today.

But the question, of course, is, what is it about the Lord Jesus that produces this strong reaction? And this passage in John six, part of which we have just read goes a long way to helping us to solve that

mystery. It is, of course, the longest chapter in John's gospel. It's actually the longest chapter in the whole of the Bible and the whole of the New Testament. Perhaps that's significant. That it takes the longest chapter in the New Testament to begin to explain to us why people's reactions to the Lord Jesus are sometimes so inordinately strong.

And yet for all its length it divides very simply into two sections, both of which are about bread. The first in verses one through 15 about the bread that Jesus multiplies. The sign of the bread that Jesus multiplied. And the rest of the chapter from verse 16 to the end of the chapter is about the meaning of the bread that our Lord Jesus Christ gives.

Well, it's a wonderful miracle. The crowd gathers, we're told, in verse three of chapter six. Probably, I suspect, on the now famous Golan Heights. There are so many of them Jesus has to go to an incline in order to speak to them and to be heard by them. And as the narrative goes on he feeds them with five loaves and two fish. Somewhere, probably between 10 and 20,000 people in this remarkable miracle.

And yet, of course, as we read through John's account of this, John's interest is not simply in the fact of the miracle. And he gives us little details that underline this. The fact that people were satisfied with what they ate. As He indicates to us in verse 12. And even once they had been satisfied, there was a super abundance left over that Jesus told the apostles to gather together. And there were 12 basket full of bread left over.

It was a tremendous display of Jesus' power, but also his lavish generosity. It's reminiscent in a way of the much more private miracle in John chapter two, where he created a super abundance of wine out of the water.

But it's also, and John certainly understood it this way, it's also very obviously an event in which Jesus is quite deliberately replaying Old Testament history. That's one of the reasons why, when John describes what happens later on, after the multitude has been fed with this bread that seems to come down from heaven, he uses the same language that's used about the children of Israel, when God has given them manna from heaven: they grumbled. And here John tells us that there were 12 basketfuls left over. And all of that reminiscent of the way in which God had brought his people out of their bondage in Egypt. And as he gathered them and marched them through the desert, in their 12 tribes, God provided a sufficiency for them — all the way.

And also perhaps a little reminiscent of the Great Shepherd Psalm. How he feeds his people in the midst of enemy occupied territory.

But the most important thing that John wants us to focus our attention on — And in fact, as the narrative flows on you see that this is Jesus' great burden. Is not the fact of the miracle, nor the abundance of the miracle, but on the person who has performed the miracle. All of this, in a sense, is managed by Jesus in order that through this sign that he's giving to the people that they may recognize his identity.

Remember how later on he discusses this with them? Moses gave us a sign. What sign do you give us? He says, *It wasn't Moses who gave you the sign? It was God who gave you the bread.* And you see, he's drawing them in to the implication that if it was God who gave the bread in the wilderness,

then what is the identity of the one who has given them this bread when they have no food? And so this is the first place in the Gospel of John where we are introduced to the whole series of “I am” sayings. Which, of course, is the meaning of the divine name that was originally revealed to Moses when Moses said, “Who shall I tell them sent me?” “Then tell them I am.” *I am the sufficiency I am the Savior of my people. I will provide for all of their needs.* And so Jesus is wanting them to see as the passage tells us over and over again, that they’re meant to see who he is.

And you see their response. They say, do you notice, first of all, well, verse 14, “This must be the prophet that Moses told us would come.” And indeed, Moses had said, “One day God will send *thee* Prophet — this must be He.” And then they said, “Let’s make him King.” The truth of the matter is that the Lord Jesus Christ is God’s prophet. And the Lord Jesus Christ is God’s King. So why does Jesus react so violently to this suggestion that he is the Prophet and the King? Because he understands that unless they also recognize that he is the Priest, they have misunderstood what it means for him to be the Prophet, and the King.

And that’s why later on in this passage, he tries to help them to understand that he is the bread of God who will give his life for the world. He’s come not just to speak God’s word. He’s come not just to exercise God’s authority. Both of which he does in this wonderful miracle. But you don’t really understand who he is. You can never come to appreciate His identity until you see that what he has really come to do is to “give His life a ransom for many.”

And the tragedy of the situation here, as Jesus goes on to say, in chapter six and verse 26, “Truly, truly I say to you, you are seeking Me, not because you saw signs but because you ate bread.” Now you see the point he’s making? He has done this amazing miracle and all they have seen is mountains of bread. They haven’t understood that this was a signpost. This was Jesus pointing a finger by the things he was doing to Himself. And trying to demonstrate to them that he alone was the bread of life who could satisfy the needs of their souls. Because you see, the very thing that Jesus says about why he taught in parables applies to why he taught in miracles. Many people think in their ignorance, Jesus taught in parables because we need stories — and the stories make the message clear. Actually, Jesus taught parables for the very reverse reason. And he says it himself. He says, *I’m teaching in parables so that those who fear will not understand. That those who see will not actually get the point. But those whose eyes are opened by my heavenly Father will see that these are not simply attractive stories, but they are messages about who I am.* And exactly the same is true of the miracles. Every single miracle! This is why John uses the word in his Gospel, every single miracle is not so much about what is done but it’s intended to be to us a disclosure of the identity and the sufficiency of the one who has done the miracle.

That’s very interesting in the history of the Christian church for centuries, I mean, centuries and centuries, this passage has sometimes been thought to be a passage about the Lord’s Supper. Now, I don’t have time to explain to you this morning why I do not think this is a passage about the Lord’s Supper, but the Lord’s Supper illustrates Jesus point precisely. What do you get in the Lord’s Supper? Answer? Bread and wine? Or - answer? The Lord Jesus Christ by faith. You see? The bread and the wine goes out. But but what do you get when you take the bread and the wine in the Lord’s Supper? Answer? Well, I got a little bit of bread, and I got a little sip of wine. And you see, in that case, you have come for the bread and the wine and you’ve missed the sign altogether.

Now, you understand, some of us in this room do that frequently when we're driving our automobiles. And we've maps. And we've even got gizmos in our power and voices that will speak to us and we still miss the sign. How much more true was that of these people, before whose very eyes, Jesus had, as it were, shown this amazing sign that identified who he was. It was, it was a marvelous invitation to them to come and embrace Him and trust Him. That all they were interested in, they chased him across the lake, because they thought *maybe we'll get more bread*. And they missed the whole point. My friends it's possible to be that near to Jesus and see what Jesus does and still not see. So this sign of the bread that Jesus multiplies was intended to point them to the identity of the one who multiplied the bread.

And so you notice as the passage goes on, and they follow him to the other side. It looks certainly from verse 59 as though a lengthy conversation took place the next day in the synagogue at Capernaum. And Jesus, you notice in verses 26 and 27 warns them. Look at his words, "Truly, truly I say to you, you are seeking Me, not because you saw signs, but you ate your fill of the loaves." Isn't it great when people are interested in Jesus. Well, yes, but — there's more than one reason you can be interested in Jesus. And Jesus is saying, you're interested in me for the wrong reason. You're seeking me not because you saw the signs, because all you saw was the loaves of the fish. *Oh*, he says, What? What a, what a word to us! "Do not labor for the food that perishes. But for the food that endures to the eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you." *Don't labor for bread that perishes, but seek the bread that lasts forever?* He's echoing the words of Isaiah 55 that are at the head of our order service. "Why do you spend your money and labor for that which can never in the last day satisfy?"

And you see how he's been teaching this every single chapter? The wine that ran out in chapter two. The life of Nicodemus that was mere flesh and blood. The inadequacy of the worship that took place in Samaria and in Jerusalem. In chapter five, the man who was near the waters but who could never be healed. And now these people who are seeking bread, but can never satisfy. When Jesus gives wine that satisfies — life that satisfies — worship that satisfies — wholeness that satisfy — feeding that satisfy. And so the great question they should have been asking was, *Where do we get this bread, Jesus, that never goes stale or dry but satisfies us forever?* Again, and again and again, he says to them, *I am the bread of life that God has sent down from heaven. And if you are to be satisfied*, he says, *you need to take and eat the bread. You need to take and eat the bread.*

But you see, just exactly like Nicodemus, exactly like the woman at the well, exactly like the paralyzed man at the water — they didn't see. They said, *Well give us this...* as the woman said, *Well give me this water. So I wouldn't need to come to the well, in order to draw water every day.* And the man said, *Well, if there's some way of this water healing me, then get me into the water.* And and these people say *if there's some way that we don't need to go to the bakers every day, or do the baking ourselves, then give us this thread that we don't need to be in the daily routine of providing for our needs.* And they don't see that in the case of Jesus, the only way to eat the bread of life is by faith.

By faith, that's my open hungry mouth that hungers and thirst for the satisfaction that the Lord Jesus Christ alone can give. And so he makes it very plain here, doesn't he, in verse 64. If you'll look there. *There are some of you*, he says, *who don't believe.* That's the problem, *some of you here who don't believe.* And he goes on in this passage to make the same devastating point that he's made in every single encounter up until this time. You're called to believe, but it's not something you can do by your own decision. And there's a very easy way of testing that. When somebody says, *Well, I can believe in Jesus anytime I want you.* You say to them, *Oh, let's see you believe in Him now. Let me see you*

believe in him now. And you can stand on your head. You can blow yourself up. You can do anything. But you cannot in an unaided way if you're blind and spiritually dead believe in Jesus simply in your own unaided power and in your own unaided decision. Jesus says, *you need the father to draw you.* Just as he said to Nicodemus: *You need the birth from heaven to come down to you.* Just as he said to the woman at the well: *You need to look at me and trust me.* Just as he said to the lame man: *You need to come to me if you're going to be made whole.* And the man rightly said, *There's nothing I can do to get up and walk.* And it's so interesting that it was in that context, particularly, that people said, *Enough is enough. Because he's telling me, he's daring to tell me that there is something I cannot do in order to have the bread that lasts forever. And that I need God's help, because I'm a powerless sinner.* And we're told that from that point onwards many of them said, "This is a hard saying." *And we've had enough.*

You know that really is — that really is the crisis point.

When I'm brought to the position where I recognize there is nothing I can do to contribute to my own salvation. That I don't even have the power to make the decision I need to make about trusting in Jesus Christ, unless by God's grace, the Father works in my heart and opens my eyes and softens me inwardly and I come and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then — I'm able to eat and drink and be satisfied.

And then you'll remember how this passage ends with perhaps Simon Peter's greatest hour in John's gospel. When most people have gone. My dear friends, let us not, let us not for a moment, assume we're in a different kind of world. Most people in our world have gone from Jesus. Most people in the United States of America and the Western world have gone from Jesus. We are not the majority position. And so Jesus words to the disciples are so poignant for us. *Well what about you? Would you rather go too?* And Simon Peter, good on ya Simon Peter, we so often criticize ya, in our foolish loftiness. Good on ya Simon Peter. Simon Peter said to Jesus, "Where else can I go? You alone have the words of eternal life."

Now what's this passage teaching us? This longest passage in John's gospel. What's it teaching us? It's asking us three questions. Number one, where am I really looking for lasting satisfaction? Where am I really looking for lasting satisfaction? Is it exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Question number two, what do I see in Jesus? Well what *do you* see in Jesus? Is he the bread of life without whom you know you cannot live?

And question number three. Do you have somewhere else to go to find eternal life? Well, listen, my friend, if you're somewhere else to go to find eternal life, you'd better go there as quickly as you possibly can. Because finding eternal life in Jesus Christ is freely given but will cost you everything. And if you can get eternal life cheaper you better go to that place where it's on sale. But there is nowhere else, is there? Peter was right, "You alone have the words of eternal life. Lord Jesus, there's nowhere else for me to go." *And I want to trust you.*

I said at the beginning that we live in a world in which reactions to the Lord Jesus are often violent. And that's the way they always need to be. Cause in a sense, you're either either violently for him or you're violently against him. Let us pray.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Our Heavenly Father, we're conscious that this is the longest chapter in the Gospel. The one in which our Lord Jesus speaks most about himself. The one in which he speaks about himself in the simplest way because bread was the staple of life in the world in which he lived. And the one in which he calls us to the most monumental decision of our lives. Have mercy upon us, Lord, that we should hear the Lord Jesus Christ say to us, "Will you also go from me?" And that we should turn away and think we can find eternal life somewhere else. Lord we are stray sheep. We grumble and we moan and we complain. Behind one another's backs and behind your back too. We are restless and discontented. We come today to pray that we, "may taste you our living bread. We long to feast upon you still. To drink of you the fountainhead and thirst our souls from you to fill."

Hear us Lord, we pray. And help us unreservedly to trust you. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.