

## The Bread of Life

John 6:35 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.”*

What food is more basic, more essential and more universal than bread? Every culture has bread. It is eaten by rich and poor alike. There is Flatbread, fried bread, tortillas, corn bread, bean bread, unleavened bread and sweet bread. It is among the most ancient of foods. Did you know that loaves and rolls of bread have been found in Egyptian tombs and excavated from ovens in Pompeii. Starchy grains have been found embedded in a grindstone found by the Sea of Galilee that are 23,000 years old. Bread is a constant throughout human history.

Bread is the staple of civilization. It is what enables a people to leave the hunter-gatherer stage and build more advanced forms of society. It formed the socio-economic underpinnings of many ancient cultures. Kingdoms that could supply bread rose to dominance, while those who could not disappeared from history.

Bread is woven deeply into nearly every culture. For people around the world, one of the most important daily rituals is making or choosing and then enjoying their bread. It is so closely tied to our religious expression that it has an almost spiritual value.

Throughout every culture bread represents the basic sustenance of life. It represents the essentials. It is the core. To have your bread is to have all your basic needs met- to be satisfied, to be full, to be fulfilled, to be content.

Whether it's a freshly baked roll in southern cooking, to tortillas in Mexico to sweetbread in Africa to flatbread in the Mediterranean basin, bread is our constant companion for food and fellowship. It accompanies every meal. It is the dietary glue around which we laugh, cry, forge our relationships, and debate the news of day.

John 6 centers on bread. Verse 4 tells us that the Passover was at hand. The Passover was also known as the Feast of Unleavened bread. The Jews celebrated this feast every year to commemorate the night they fled Egypt. They had to eat and run, and so did not have time for the bread to rise. It is against this backdrop of bread, that Jesus performs one of the greatest of his miracles, the feeding of the 5,000 and that was counting only the adult males. Again, God

was offering bread to a captive people. The difference this time was that the crowds didn't even know they were slaves.

That he could nourish the bodies of so many merely illustrates his power to sustain our souls. Bread only fills us temporarily. Our bellies are satisfied only for the moment. But Jesus can fill our hearts and satisfy us for eternity.

That he fed so many instantly made him the most popular guy in the land. Verse 15 says, *"Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself."*

Jesus then makes a nighttime escape. It is the miracle when he walks on water, and by such supernatural means he flees to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. But the crowds track him down wondering how he got to where he was without them noticing. They weren't following Jesus because they loved him, because they wanted to learn from him, or even because of his miraculous power. They wanted more free food. In verses 26-27 Jesus says,

*"Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. <sup>27</sup> Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."*

#### **I. We Are Ruled by Our Bellies**

The first thing we should understand is that we are ruled by our bellies. We are controlled by our appetites. Our physical needs and desires drive so much of our lives. This is why they were chasing after Jesus, because he filled their bellies. Let's make him our ruler. He gives us free food. People seeking government handouts is nothing new.

Jesus urges them and he urges us today, *"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life."* Jesus confronts our materialistic view of life. When Jesus says, "do not work," he's not saying we should quit our jobs and go live in a commune somewhere. He knows we have to work. He knows we have bills to pay. He knows we have needs to meet. Most of the people in this crowd spent the bulk of their existence just putting bread on the table for that day. Jesus understands that. He knows that farmers must sow seeds that fishermen must catch fish, that teachers must teach and that truck drivers must make deliveries.

His challenge here, though, is not to spend our lives working merely for these things. Don't expend your whole life in pursuit of the temporary. The meaning of life is not found in anything that spoils, rusts, or has an expiration date. Pursue that which is of eternal value. Live for things whose significance doesn't disappear with a hurricane, a tornado, a fire, or a thief looking for a quick fix who pawns your hard-earned goods down at Gold Diggers Pawn.

Nothing else can fill this longing, because nothing else lasts. Is your refrigerator like ours? About once a month we have to clean the thing out because it gets so full of science experiments and biohazards that the EPA wants to declare our house a Superfund site. You open up a container and there is furry stuff growing all over it. You open up another and this awful smell fills the kitchen. The dog turns green. The cat goes four legs up. Even the best of food goes bad. Today's prime rib is tomorrow's toxic waste. That's how it is with every earthly trinket or treasure we try to fill our empty lives with.

## **II. We All Have a Hungry Heart**

Why do we keep looking to temporary things to provide lasting satisfaction? What makes us think we can find long-term meaning in short-term pleasures? It's because we all have a hungry heart. We all have physical desires that we spend so much of our earthly lives trying to satisfy. We spend so much of our time and money pursuing these things, but never find what we're looking for. I think it betrays a deeper hunger that we all have. We all have a longing for something more, something that matter, something that will satisfy us at our deepest level. We have a hungry heart. It's a spiritual hunger that we keep trying to feed with physical things.

What are you really hungry for? What is your life's deepest longing? What are you working for that will last until heaven? How do you try to satisfy that longing? Jesus says we need to work for the food that endures to eternal life. Jesus wants to unshackle you from your snipe-hunt existence where you chase one fleeting physical pleasure after another never to find satisfaction and he offers you true fulfillment. Instead of cotton candy physical delights that taste sweet at first but quickly disappear into sticky nothingness, Jesus is the bread that sustains our soul and satisfies our heart, and will do so for eternity. Jesus did not come to fill our bellies with food, but to fill our lives with the presence of God.

In 1670, Blaise Pascal first put forth the idea that each of our lives has a God-shaped hole. He writes

“What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.”

- Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* VII(425)

In everything that makes you you, way deep down in the core of who you are, is something that only the divine can satisfy. You have a spiritual need, an eternal hunger, a soul desire that can only be fulfilled by a relationship with your Creator, Lover, and Savior. At best, anything else, can only tickle that desire, excite it, remind you that it's there, but only the love of your God and Savior can fill its every longing.

The crowd wants this eternal satisfaction Jesus talks about, but they don't really believe Jesus.

*28 Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”*

*29 Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*

*30 So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’[c]”*

They ask Jesus for another sign, after they've just witnessed one of his greatest miracles. It's obvious what they're fishing for. They want more bread. “Moses gave us bread from heaven to eat. What will you give us?”

### **III. Material Things Take Our Eyes off God**

Here's the problem. Moses didn't give them bread. God did. But they loved their bread so much that they took their eyes off God, and put it on what immediately puts the bread in their pocket. God gave the ancient Israelites bread during their wandering in the wilderness. It was called manna, but instead of making them thankful, instead of inspiring them to worship God, it made them grumble and demand more. They took their eyes off God, and put them on Moses, as if he was the one who gave them manna in the desert.

*32 Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, 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. 33 For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."*

Our physical pleasures should point us to God, rather than distract us from him. Every appetite we have, God created us with that appetite. He also gave us the answer to each one. God gave us food for our hunger, drink for our thirst, rest for our weariness, and the love of our spouse for our passion. These pleasures are more are gifts from God. They should point our hearts toward him. Unfortunately, instead of worshipping and serving God, we end up worshipping and serving the pleasures themselves. We live our lives for food and drink and sex and comfort and thrills. Instead of seeking our deepest joy in the One who created and gives these things as gracious gifts. Instead of seeing these things as gifts from the true object of our lives, we act if these gifts are themselves the object of life.

It is this philosophy of hedonism that drives so much of our culture. If it feels good, do it. If you have an itch scratch it. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. But Jesus offers a bread from heaven that gives life.

In verse 34, the crowd says, "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread." It's the right request. The problem is they are still thinking in materialistic terms. They aren't buying what Jesus is giving away for free. They are looking for something that will save them from working ten hours a day just to buy grain, mixing it, kneading the dough, preparing and baking the bread, just to do it all again the next day.

#### **IV. Jesus Satisfies Our Deepest Need**

Jesus drops the bomb in verse 35. *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."* Jesus is more than just the giver of what we most desperately need. He IS what we need. He's not just the baker. He's the bread. Jesus meets our most basic, most essential, most universal need. He fills the God-shaped hole. He is our sustenance and supply.

##### **1. He Satisfies Like Nothing Else**

So, what does Jesus mean? First, he means that he satisfies like nothing else. You ever get up late at night and you're hungry. You're craving something. You go the kitchen looking for something that will satisfy that craving. You eat your way through the refrigerator only to

discover, “Nope, it’s not the giant cheeseball I’m looking for. It’s not three day old meatloaf.” That’s what we do on all of life- trying to find fullness with things that don’t fill.

But when you do as Psalm 34:8 says and, “*Taste and see that the LORD is good!*” you will know, “Yes, that is what I’m looking for.” He will quench your soul’s thirst at its deepest level. You will want more. You will savor him for years to come, but he also satisfies like nothing else. One true taste of Jesus and you will know He is worth your time. He is worth your love. He is worth your effort. He is worth all that you are.

Our hearts are black holes of discontent. They devour possessions, relationships, hobbies, money and desires all the while screaming, “More. More. I need more!” But once you have Jesus, you’re heart cries out, “Yes, this is it. This is what I’ve been looking for. This is what I need.”

You have a never-ending hunger that nothing in this world can satisfy. There is not a better job, a better boyfriend, a better wife, a better house, a better car, a better outfit, or a better degree that will satisfy that hunger. Only the Bread of Life can do that. Psalm 107:9 declares “*For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.*”

Jesus satisfies your soul. In John 10:10 Jesus says that he came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly, a life full of joy, a life full of hope, full of love, a life full of peace.

## **2. Satisfaction with Jesus Lasts**

Not only does Jesus satisfy like nothing else, but when Jesus fulfills our spiritual hunger, he brings a satisfaction that lasts. I can eat the most filling and fulfilling meal in the world today, and still be hungry tomorrow. Anything in the world I consume now, doesn’t satisfy me later. I’ve read that we will spend 35,000 hours of our lives eating. That works out to 8 years of eating non-stop for 12 hours a day! The problem with eating, however, is that shortly after we are done, we are hungry again. Isn’t that how all of life works? No matter what we buy. No matter what we accomplish, no matter what we earn, no matter what we get, no matter where we travel, just a short time later it loses its ability to satisfy us, to bring us contentment. Yesterday’s meal doesn’t fill us now. Our present from last Christmas doesn’t make us happy now. Last year’s vacation doesn’t restore us today.

But the Bread of Life leads to eternal satisfaction. Jesus explains in verse 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.”* Feeding on Jesus in this life satisfies you in the next life.

Jesus doesn’t spoil or go bad. You will never find a bag of moldy Jesus on the counter of your life. Jesus is never stale and crusty. Jesus will satisfy you at your deepest level of your heart’s desire, and yet you will hunger for more of him. The more you hunger for him, the more he fills you.

The promise to never go hungry again doesn’t mean that one time with Jesus is enough. D.A. Carson writes in his commentary on John, *“This does not mean there is no need for continued dependence upon him, for continued feeding upon him;”* it does mean there is no longer that heart and soul emptiness that we had before we met Jesus. Jesus satisfies our deepest need.

I want to leave you this morning with the true story of Mabel. Mabel was an 89 year-old lady in the nursing home where she had spent much of her life. Her face was contorted by cancer, she was blind, nearly deaf, and nobody had come to visit her for many years, until a young preacher by the name of Tom Schmidt came to visit her.

She grew up the only daughter of a farmer. When her parents died in 1950, she was placed in a convalescent home. She lived for 25 years here, with roommates who didn’t know who they were, who soiled their beds daily, who screamed out constantly during day and night.

Tom came to visit Mabel and read her the Bible. Many times he would pause in his reading, and she would recite the rest of the passage from memory. Mabel never spoke of loneliness or pain, except for times when they would sing hymns together and she would put a particular stress on a certain word or verse.

One day when he came to visit Mabel, Tom asked her a question. *“Mabel, what do you think about when you lay here all day?”* She replied, *“I think about my Jesus.”* The preacher thought to himself, sometimes I have trouble thinking about Jesus for an hour, and here Mabel thinks about Him all day!

After a pause he asked, *“Mabel, what do you think about Jesus?”*

She replied, "I think about how good He's been to me. He's been awfully good to me in my life, you know...I'm the kind who's mostly satisfied. Lots of folks wouldn't care much for what I think. Lots of folks would think I'm kind of old-fashioned. But I don't care. I'd rather have Jesus. He's all the world to me." Then Mabel began to softly sing:

Jesus is all the world to me, My life, my joy, my all  
He is my strength from day to day, without Him I would fall,  
When I am sad to Him I go, no other One can cheer me so,  
When I am sad, He makes me glad, He's my Friend.

Tom Schmidt writes, "This is not fiction. As incredible as it may seem, a human being really lived like this. I know. I knew her. How did she do it? You know, don't you? Mabel feasted on the Bread of Life- the Bread that satisfied the hunger of her soul."

If you and I live long enough, we will be where Mabel was. But you don't have to be elderly and in a nursing home to have a hungry heart. I am sure many of you sitting here in this sanctuary have a soul that is longing for satisfaction.

My friend, if your soul is hungry this morning, Jesus is the Bread you need that will fully satisfy your soul. Won't you come to Him- whether it's the 1st time or the 101st time- and pray, "Jesus, My soul is hungry for You today. Would you come and fill me?" If you come to Him and trust in Him I promise- you won't be disappointed. You will be satisfied.