

Jesus Is the Bread of Life

John 6:22-59

Sunday, April 3, 2022

I'm really looking forward to our service coming up on Good Friday and to our celebration of the resurrection on Easter morning. You won't want to miss the opportunity to join us in person or online throughout this Easter season.

As we approach Easter, it's good to turn our attention to the Gospels. Over the next three Sundays, we're going to look at a few instances in John's Gospel where Jesus used the words *I am* to reveal something about himself. Last Sunday, Pastor Jerry took us to John 15 where Christ spoke of himself as a vine. Jesus said that those who abide in him will bear much fruit, just like a branch that remains connected to a healthy tree.

Today, we move from vines and fruit to bread from heaven. It's always good to have a Bible open as we work through a passage like this. Again, we're in John 6. We have Bibles available in the back of the Sanctuary, and you'll find our passage on page 1657.

The village of Capernaum was buzzing on the day after Jesus fed thousands of people. The miracle took place on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee. One of the disciples found a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish. Jesus took those meager provisions, gave thanks, distributed the bread and the fish, and fed the crowd until they were full. It's no surprise then that the crowd who witnessed this miracle wondered if Jesus might be more than just a teacher. John recorded their reaction a few verses before our passage in John 6:14-15.

“After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself” (John 6:14-15, NIV).

Notice that they spoke of Jesus as *the* Prophet rather than just *a* prophet. What they were referring to was a promise made back in the book of Deuteronomy, a promise that God would one day send a prophet just like Moses. In that passage, Moses said,

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.” The LORD said to me: “What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him” (Deuteronomy 18:15-18, NIV).

We'll see shortly how Moses fits into our story, but for now, it's worth noting that expectations were high as to who Jesus might be. But Jesus sensed that the

atmosphere was so politically charged that the people were in danger of misinterpreting the miracle, thus misunderstanding his true identity. So Jesus and his disciples returned to Capernaum on the other side of the sea. The disciples naturally traveled by boat, but Jesus opted to go on foot, that is, on the water.

In between the story of the feeding of the five thousand and our passage for today is a story of another miracle, Jesus walking on the water. We'll have to save that passage for another time. Our story begins on the day after these two miracles took place once the crowd sailed back to Capernaum in search of Jesus. When they found him there, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" (v. 25).

In their search for Jesus, the people observed but they didn't see. They didn't yet see who he really was. Look at verses 26-29.

"Jesus answered, "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. 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." 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"" (vv. 26-29).

Let's unpack this conversation. First, Jesus told the crowd that they missed the meaning of the miracle. They observed the multiplication of loaves and fish, but they failed to see its significance. They couldn't see that the miracle was more than a display of God's power at work through a prophet. Jesus said in verse 26 that they didn't see the *sign*. Whenever John uses the word *sign* in his Gospel, he's indicating that the miracle is intended to reveal something about the true identity of Jesus Christ. In a moment, we'll hear what Jesus has to say about the significance of this sign.

Second, not only did they miss the meaning of the miracle, Jesus warned them that they were working for the wrong food (v. 27). Now, there's nothing wrong with wanting something to eat. Even Jesus taught his disciples to pray and ask the Heavenly Father to "give us today our daily bread" (Matt. 5:11, NIV).

The problem was that because they missed the meaning of the miracle, the crowd failed to see what they truly needed. If they could only perceive their greatest need, and if they truly understood who Jesus was, they wouldn't be asking him to fill their bellies. The Lord was offering them the kind of food that doesn't just give them what they need for the day, he was offering them "food that endures to eternal life" (v. 27).

The crowd didn't perceive their greatest need, and so they didn't understand what it was that Jesus was offering. Even worse, the crowd was reluctant to take Jesus at his

word. They didn't fully understand what it meant that Jesus was the true and better Moses, the promised Prophet who was to come into the world.

We can imagine them saying, "Jesus, if you are the promised Prophet, if you really are Moses 2.0, then prove it! Moses gave our ancestors manna when they were wandering in the wilderness. If Moses can provide manna, what can you do? Give us a sign!"

Can you see the irony? How could they not connect the dots from Moses and the manna to the Lord and the loaves? These people observed Jesus's works, but they failed to see their significance. But before we laugh at them, we should know that we suffer from the same condition. **Until we perceive that Jesus is our greatest need, our natural tendency will be to satisfy ourselves with food that spoils.**

Look how Jesus responded to their request for a Moses-like sign.

"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. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread"" (vv. 32-34).

What Jesus said about himself in the rest of this passage is intended to show us that he is the true and better bread from heaven. He is the bread of life. We're meant to see from this text that **Jesus is our greatest need.**

But why do we struggle to perceive that Jesus is our greatest need? It's because too often, we fail to see that sin is our greatest problem. The fact that sin is my greatest problem means more than that some of my behavior is ungodly. It means that sin is pervasive and that it has affected every part of me. It has impacted both my ability and my desire to love God wholly and to love others as I ought.

James writes in his New Testament letter,

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:1-4, NIV).

Sin has started a war within our hearts, a war often won by our selfish spirit. Sin has made us less dependent on God, and more self-reliant in our pursuits. Sin has elevated

pleasing ourselves to our highest aim. Sin has turned our affections toward a world in rebellion against its creator. Sin has made us enemies with God.

Once we see that sin is our greatest problem, only then will we perceive that Jesus is our greatest need.

Let's now look at what Jesus said about himself starting in verse 35.

“Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 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 those 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 them up at the last day.”

At this the Jews there 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 came down from heaven?’” “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life” (vv. 35-48).

First, **Jesus is our greatest need because only bread from heaven can solve our greatest problem.** If sin has so thoroughly damaged our relationship with God, then reconciliation can only come from God. That's why Jesus says in these verses that the bread of life is given *by* the Father (v. 32), that it is the bread *of* God (v. 33), that Jesus has come down *from* heaven (v. 38), and that it was the Father's will to *send* Jesus (v. 38, 39). The bread we need cannot be made, bought, or discovered.

Second, **Jesus is our greatest need because he alone can truly satisfy our hunger.** In verse 35, Jesus said,

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (v. 35).

Do you ever find yourself eating something not because you are hungry but because you are bored? The problem with mindless eating is that we tend to snack on what we don't need, and we tend to eat in order to fill some other void. In the same way, apart from Christ, we tend to search for things that can medicate our suffering. We look to people to fill our relational emptiness. We look to pleasure as a substitute for joy. And we seek our own kingdom in place of God's rightful rule. None of these substitutes can truly satisfy our need for the bread of life.

Third, **Jesus is our greatest need because apart from him there is no life.** Remember, earlier we heard Jesus say,

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (v. 27)

Jesus spoke about eternal life in his most famous of statements:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).

What exactly is eternal life? In the Bible, eternal life means more than just life that goes on and on. The term *eternal life* really is a way of describing a life that belongs to the age to come. One day God will fully restore all things. The curse of sin and the brokenness it causes will one day be fully removed. At the very end of the Bible, we read about the age to come,

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true” (Revelation 21:4-5, NIV).

This is the promise of life in the age to come. And yet, the Bible also speaks of eternal life as something we can enjoy now. In the passage that we will look at next Sunday where Jesus speaks of himself as the Good Shepherd, the Lord gives us this assurance,

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10, NIV).

In Christ, we have eternal life, a life that we will enjoy fully when all things are restored at the end of the age, but also a life we now enjoy because the gift assuredly belongs to those who have the bread of life.

But how can we who have been so thoroughly damaged by sin ever hope to live eternally with God? As one of my seminary professors would often say, “There’s nothing wrong with us that a good resurrection won’t fix.” (D. A. Carson).

We’ll come back to the theme of resurrection on Easter Sunday, but for now, I want you to see the connection between resurrection and the bread of life. Hear again Jesus’s words and listen for that promise of the resurrection:

“All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 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 those 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 them up at the last day”” (vv. 37-40).

Jesus is our greatest need because in him we have the hope of eternal life.

But that’s not the end of our story. In these final verses, Jesus says that the bread of life is for everyone who believes, but it is only for those who believe. Follow along as I read verses 49 and following.

“Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will 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, “Very truly I tell you, 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 them up at the last day. 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 them. 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 ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum” (vv. 49-59).

Jesus says some strange stuff here. In verse 51, Jesus reiterates that he is the bread of life and that anyone who eats this bread will have eternal life. But then the metaphor takes a turn. In that same verse, Jesus says that the bread is his flesh. The response

from the Jews is understandable. They knew Jesus wasn't advocating cannibalism, but it sure sounded like nonsense. So Jesus doubled down and said,

“Very truly I tell you, 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 them up at the last day. 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 them” (vv. 53-56).

At first glance, it might sound like Jesus was speaking about the Lord's Supper. Whenever we share in Communion together as a church, we read the words of Jesus from the Last Supper when he broke bread with his disciples and said, “This is my body.” Similarly, when Jesus shared the cup with the twelve, he said, “This is my blood.” But I don't think Communion is what Jesus had in mind here in John 6.

Throughout this passage, Jesus has said things like, “Whoever comes to me will have eternal life. Whoever believes in me will have eternal life.” Now Jesus is saying something like, “Whoever eats this bread will have eternal life. Whoever feeds on me will have eternal life.” In other words, to *eat* the bread of life is to *believe* in the bread of life, that is, to believe in Jesus.

The reason why Jesus shifts the metaphor from the bread of life to speaking about feeding on his flesh and drinking his blood is that Jesus was speaking about his sacrificial death. Jesus was pointing his hearers to the cross.

The most helpful illustration I've found of what Jesus is saying here comes from the same professor that I quoted earlier. Consider this: when you enjoy a hamburger, what are you eating? You're feasting on cow, wheat, lettuce, tomato, etc. Unless you eat, you will die. One way to look at this is to see that the cow, the wheat, and the veggies all had to die in order that you might live. Now, of course, the cow didn't volunteer its life for you, nor did the wheat know that its death would give you life, but you get the point.

Let's listen again to Jesus's words now that we know he's speaking about his sacrificial death.

“Very truly I tell you, 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 them up at the last day. 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 them” (vv. 53-56).

Jesus is our greatest need because it's by his death that we have life. Jesus is our greatest need because by faith we know that we live because he died in our place.

There is so much more that we could mine from this passage about Jesus as the bread of life, but I hope more than anything one truth sticks with you as you think about these verses:

Jesus is our greatest need.

Let's pray and then let's sing together about Jesus the bread of life, our greatest need.