

Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live
(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)
John 6:22-35
The Bread of Life

There is little that smells more inviting than fresh bread being baked in the oven. And although few of us bake bread anymore, every grocery store, every Walmart, every Costco has a bakery or a long aisle filled with every kind of bread imaginable. But bread was even more important in the culture of Jesus's day. It represented the major part of the meal. Indeed, it was the most important part of the meal. It was the chief staple, often the only staple that sustained their physical lives. Without bread people died! So when Jesus said to the crowd that he was "the Bread of Life," he would certainly have gotten their attention. Now when we put this statement "I am the Bread of Life" together with "Give us today our daily bread," two truths emerge from them. Christ is concerned with both providing our physical bread and our spiritual bread. Jesus has just provided physical bread for them, but now he wants to do much more! He wants to give them spiritual sustenance or nourishment; he wants to bring life to their souls. Indeed every one of his seven "I am" statements in the book of John is Jesus's claim to be able to satisfy completely the deepest needs and longings of our hearts. Think about it! As the "Bread of Life" he is the satisfier and sustainer of life; as "the light of the world" he dispels sin's darkness; as the "door or gate" he is the entrance to a life of complete security and intimacy with our Creator; as the "good Shepherd" he is our protector and guides us through life; as "the resurrection and the life" he is our hope as we face death; as the way, the truth, and the life he is our absolute certainty in perplexing times; and as "the true vine" he is our source of vitality and productivity. (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5) Jesus truly is all you need! But just exactly how do we receive this bread that Jesus is talking about? What we discover in this passage is that:

I. It Is a Matter of Seeking (John 6:22-27)

²² *On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not*

entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone.²³ Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.²⁵ When they 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 work 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.”

Jesus had crossed the Sea of Galilee by night in order to join the disciples in Capernaum. The people whom he had fed from the five loaves and two fish the day before saw in the morning light that Jesus was no longer in the area in which the miracle had been done. So they began to look for him. Eventually they made their way either around or across the lake and found him in Capernaum. In their seeking we discover three things:

1. We must seek Christ with the right motives.

These people were more concerned with their stomachs than their souls. It was all about the physical and material benefits that he could give them. They are the materialists. When Christ demanded more, they would walk away.

*****On a very minor scale, I can see how Jesus felt. Years ago we had a few bird feeders. When we looked out the window we had a menagerie in the back yard. Squirrels were hanging upside down, gorging on sunflower seed. Birds were all over the ground and the deck, and even ramming into the windows. But did they appreciate us? Did they have any sense of loyalty in return for our generosity? The next day, when the bird feeder was empty, all we got were some disgruntled looks before the birds and squirrels completely deserted us.**

*****Missionaries in third-world countries often talk about “Rice Christians.” These are people who will quickly convert to Christianity in exchange for food or some other physical benefit. The problem with Rice Christians is that when goodies are gone, so are they. Some people use church for business contacts or community status. Rice Christians**

can be found all over the world. These people look to God only for what they can get. They are quick to turn their back on God the first time he fails to deliver. The problem is that none of these things last. Physical food quickly spoils and material things will eventually break, be lost, or wear out. Now is it wrong to possess a nice home, a car, stocks and bonds, or even more than one of these things? No! But when we seek these things to the exclusion of seeking after God or we seek them more than we seek God, we miss the very best for us. What's worse, we may even miss heaven itself! Dr. James Montgomery Boice writes, "I am convinced that in our day in American Christianity there is a lamentable tendency to focus on human need rather than on God himself. I am equally convinced that this is the worst possible way to actually have the need met and to achieve a healthy Christianity... What is wrong is that it is tragically possible to so focus on our needs that we are actually focusing on ourselves rather than on Jesus and so we never get to the solutions to our problems that Jesus wants to bring... I am convinced that one of the major steps to achieving good spiritual mental health is getting your mind off yourself entirely and on the Lord instead." Indeed that is what true worship is! Isn't it? We are caught up in the wonder of who God is, all that he has done throughout history, and all the beauty of his creation...

2. We must seek Christ with the next world in mind.

We must live our lives with eternity in view. We must not obsess over perishable food but long for food that lasts - not for that which is temporary but for that which is eternal. Life is not about pies, cakes, meat and potatoes. Jesus wants them to focus far more on the spiritual aspects of his mission rather than the physical aspects. The Jews are looking for physical bread that will become stale and moldy, and he wants to give them spiritual bread that will both sustain them now and throughout all eternity. Far more important than physical life, says Jesus, is eternal life.

3. We must seek Christ as the only giver of bread that has God's seal of approval.

Jesus not only is the source of physical food and spiritual food, but has been exclusively appointed and authorized by

God to bring eternal life and salvation. No one else can deliver. No one else can provide the bread that brings eternal life.

II. It Is a Matter of Asking (John 6:28-31)

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.’”

God does not mind our questions. He wants us to seek, to ask, to bang on the door of heaven. And in fact the crowd asked a very *good* question followed by a very *revealing* question:

1. “What must we do to be doing the works of God?” Now I am quite sure that the answer they got was not the answer they were looking for! They wanted to know what kind of religious duty was necessary to earn God’s approval. They thought Jesus was talking about some physical work that would yield eternal life and they assumed that they could do it. These people are the legalists. It seems that the human mind has always been flattered by MY doing something for God. Indeed people often consider themselves entitled to reward because of doing something for God. You see, if we can earn our salvation, then we can succeed in bringing God into the humbling position of being in debt to us, and many of us would love that. But this is not the way of salvation.

Jesus’s answer is dumbfounding. It is stunning. God’s requirement is simply summed up in believing in Jesus as the Messiah. Apparently they had not heard or they had simply ignored the Lord’s statement that the spiritual life he offered them was a gift - nothing more and nothing less! What God requires of us is that we give up trying to please him by our own efforts and instead commit ourselves into the hands of our Savior who has lived the perfect life for us and died the perfect substitutionary death for us. No baptism, no church attendance, no sizable gift, no good deeds can meet the standard or work that could get us to heaven - only a life that we could never live - a life of absolute perfection. Jesus was and is that life!

2. *“Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?”* We see the same attitude in them that we often see today. There is a *“prove it to me”* attitude coupled with an *“I’m not so sure”* attitude about Jesus’s ability to furnish such signs. (I’ll believe in God, if you prove his existence to me! I’ll believe in God if he showers me with every thing I desire.) It is immediately clear that their faith is not really faith at all. They have a *“seeing is believing”* faith.

Now it is also important that you understand that to a Jew a “sign from heaven” was considered to be the highest form of authentication or legitimation. In their thinking, if Jesus was the coming prophet like Moses (the Messiah) he could be expected to perform further signs - indeed greater signs than Moses. One or even two signs would not do. Further there was an expectation that in the messianic age God would again provide manna (“bread from heaven”). If Jesus is who he seems to think he is he would provide that manna.

III. It Is a Matter of Eating - Believing! (John 6:32-35)

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.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” 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.”*

Jesus response tells us a lot about human nature. *First*, we often believe that the source of our blessings is found in the merits or abilities of a person instead of coming from God (a charismatic leader, a wealthy donor, an esteemed theologian). They believe that Moses was the source of their blessing in the past and that the manna was given through his merits. He had a special secure line to heaven. Moses and God were “tight.” There was even the idea that Moses was presently interceding for them. They were caught up in the worship of a man instead of the God who made and gifted that man. Jesus wants them to look to God for their needs and not to a human channel of God’s blessing. After all, it

was not Moses who gave the food from heaven but God the Father. *Second*, we often make the poor decision of accepting the immediate and material and reject the eternal and spiritual. We are caught up in the next 24 hours and delay any thought about the day when life here comes to an end. Much more important than physical bread for our physical bodies is the spiritual bread that totally satisfies. God had given manna in the past, but he was giving a new type of bread now. Whereas he had given manna to sustain them physically in the desert, God is now giving them his very own Son, the true bread, to sustain and satisfy them spiritually. This new bread, in the person of Jesus Christ, was far superior to the old bread. Jesus was bringing eternal life to Israel and ultimately to the whole world. The real bread from heaven was not the Law of Moses as they had been taught, but the person of Christ - their Messiah and Savior who would fulfill and perfectly meet every requirement of that Law.

If they would only eat of this bread, they would live forever. Jesus is both the living water and the heavenly bread which satisfies your hunger and quenches your thirst. Together food and drink represent our total human need. Jesus is saying that he is the complete answer to your every need and most importantly your greatest need - your need to be delivered from the death and the bondage of your sin. What an invitation he offers! More than food or things, Jesus is offering life that will ultimately end your loneliness, your sicknesses, your broken relationships, your weariness, your fears.... In the words of an old chorus we sang before meals at camp, "Come and dine the Master's calling, come and dine!"

Conclusion

But as we close, I want you to stop and think about something. Have you ever thought about all that wheat must pass through before it becomes bread? The farmer must first plant the seed. Then it must grow and when it is ripe it must be cut down, winnowed, and ground into flour. Ingredients must be added to that flour and finally, it must be subjected to the fiery heat of a hot oven before it is ready to be eaten. Only by this process do we arrive at the bread that is able to sustain our life. Well this is what happened to the Lord Jesus Christ in order that he might become your bread. He was born into this world. He grew up

facing the day-to-day hardships that we face. He was bruised. He was crucified by sinful men. And on the cross he also passed through the fires of God's holy wrath as he took your place and judgment. This is his glory. This he suffered for you! How can you refuse to feed on him? Come and dine the Master's calling. Come and eat! Will you come?