

# The Bread of Life

Text: John 6:25-38

By Pastor Trent Boedicker

I've always wanted to make homemade bread. Now that we've been staying home, trying not to make as many trips to the grocery store, I thought this would be a perfect time to give it a try. There are a million bread recipes, but I found one that claimed to be simple. There aren't many ingredients, and it doesn't require hours of preparation. In fact, this recipe doesn't even call for yeast, which is a good thing because I don't have any, and neither does the store. So, we'll see how this goes. Hopefully, when we're finished, we will have a yummy loaf of freshly baked bread that the kids will enjoy.

Bread is a basic staple in most kitchens. You can eat it with any meal: breakfast, lunch or dinner. Put a slice in the toaster and spread some butter on top. Or use a couple of pieces to make a sandwich with ham and cheese. Or sprinkle a little bit of cinnamon and sugar on a slice and warm it in the oven for a special treat. There are all kinds of possibilities. It's cheap, easy to make, and satisfies our hunger. If you have children, a loaf of bread probably doesn't last very long.

We all have to eat in order to survive, and so in a sense bread represents a basic need for our existence. But Scripture tells us there is an even deeper hunger within us that cannot be satisfied with bread. There is an emptiness that is yearning to be filled. It's not easy to describe, but we feel it in those quiet moments when we're no longer distracted by the hustle and bustle of our daily routine. We sense that there has to be something more than just making it through another day. Maybe you have searched and searched for something to fill that void, but no matter what you do it is still there. Whether you realize it or not, it is a yearning for God. Human beings were meant to walk in a relationship with our Creator, and without him an essential element of life is missing. Just as we need physical nourishment for our body, but we need spiritual nourishment for our soul. But where do we find this? Our passage, in John chapter 6, shows us.

In John 6:35 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" (John 6:35 NIV84).

This is the first of seven "I am" statements that Jesus makes in the Gospel of John.

- "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35)
- "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12)
- "I am the gate for the sheep." (John 10:7)
- "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11)
- "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25)
- "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)
- "I am the vine" (John 15:1).

These are vivid pictures from everyday life that everyone in that culture could relate to, and he uses these things to teach spiritual truth. Jesus is describing who he is and how he relates to

humanity. By using these words Jesus is claiming to be the one who can satisfy our spiritual needs.

This first “I am” statement here in John 6 points to his life-giving mission as the Savior.

Earlier in the chapter, Jesus performed a miracle feeding more than 5,000 people with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. He multiplied the food with his hands so there was not only enough for everyone to eat, but there were leftovers as well. It was incredible. The next day, the people followed him to the town of Capernaum along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. They were eager to see what he would do next. The problem is they weren’t really seeking the Lord, or the spiritual life that he came to offer. They were only thinking about material things, hoping he might provide another free lunch. Jesus challenged them to think beyond the needs of their stomach and consider the needs of their soul.

He wants us to do the same. When he says, “I am the bread of life,” he is telling us that he is the one who is able to satisfy our deepest spiritual needs. You might tell yourself that you are doing just fine without him, but deep down you realize something is missing. If we receive him, he will fill the longing of our heart by bringing us into a relationship with God.

We’re going to spend some time this morning thinking about bread, and how this picture describes our relationship with Jesus.

## **Jesus tells us the bread of life comes from above. (v.32-33)**

If you were wanting a loaf of bread you might go to a bakery, or to the grocery, or if it were homemade you might pull it out of the oven when it is finished cooking. But the bread of life comes to us from heaven. Look at verses 30-33

*<sup>30</sup> So they asked him, “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? <sup>31</sup> Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*

It seems strange that the people would demand yet another sign. It’s almost as if they had forgotten all about the miracle he had just performed. Most of them were in the crowd, a day earlier, when he fed the five thousand. They watched him multiply the bread and fish with their own eyes. What more did they want? What would it take to convince them that Jesus truly is the Messiah?

They offered a suggestion. They remembered stories of how Moses fed their ancestors with bread from heaven while they were wandering the wilderness. After the children of Israel left Egypt, they were worried that they were going to die because they had nothing to eat, but the Lord provided for their need by sending manna. Now the crowds wanted Jesus to do the same.

Sure, it was impressive that he multiplied the loaves, but if he could make bread rain from the sky that would really be spectacular.

One commentator explains,

There was a strong Rabbinic belief that when the Messiah came he would again give manna. [This] was held to be the supreme work in the life of Moses, and the Messiah was bound to surpass it... the [crowd was] challenging Jesus to produce bread from God in order to substantiate his claims. The bread which fed the 5,000 had begun in earthly loaves and [produced] earthly loaves. The manna, they held, was a different thing and a real test.<sup>i</sup>

But Jesus explained to the crowds that the manna their ancestors ate wasn't the true bread of God. It was only a symbol or a shadow that pointed to something greater. The true bread of God is the person who came down from heaven to give us life. Jesus is talking about himself.

This was difficult for the crowd to understand. They wondered, "What is he saying? We know where he is from. We know his family, and have been to his hometown." In verse 42 they grumbled, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

But what they didn't realize is that Jesus wasn't really from Nazareth. Those were his earthly parents, and that was his earthly home, but before he came to this earth Jesus existed for all eternity. He was there, before the world began. He was there before the stars began to shine. He was there before first man and woman walked through the garden. Jesus came from the presence of the Father in heaven to give us life.

Everybody comes from somewhere. Maybe you have lived in this area all your life. You come from northwest Ohio... Hardin County... Or maybe you are originally from another part of the country. Some of you grew up in Michigan or Indiana or California or maybe even further. Somehow, you ended up moving to this area, and I'm glad that you are here.

To say that Jesus was from out of town would be an understatement. He came to earth to dwell among us, but this world was not really his true home. He came from the presence of the Father in glory. He goes on to tell them in verse 46, "*No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father*" (John 6:46 NIV).

This tells us it's not enough to think of Jesus as an earthly teacher. Some people have no problem thinking of him in this way. They admire the wonderful things that he said and did, but they're not willing to embrace him as anything more. Like the crowds who refused to believe, despite all the miracles they witnessed, there are many today who refuse to regard Jesus as anything more than the rabbi from Nazareth. But Jesus never claimed to be a great teacher. Over and over again, during his earthly ministry, he claimed to be the one sent from the Father in heaven. If this is the case we must listen to his words, because he is able to reveal God to us in a way that no other teacher ever could.

## **Jesus tells us that the bread of life satisfies our hunger. (v.34-35)**

Look at verses 34-35.

*“Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”<sup>35</sup> 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.*

Their response reminds us of the conversation Jesus had earlier in the gospel with the woman at the well (John 4:4-15). Jesus was resting outside a village in Samaria while the disciples went to buy food. As he was waiting, a woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus spoke to her of living water. Those who drank from this well would inevitably need to return for more, because it could only quench their thirst for a little while. But those who received the living water he offered would never be thirsty again. This sounded too good to be true, and she wondered where she might find this living water. The woman didn't understand that Jesus wasn't talking about physical things, but spiritual things. He was offering her a relationship with God that would change her life forever.

Here in this passage Jesus was telling the crowd the very same thing. They had come to him asking for physical bread, but he was offering them something better. Even in the OT the manna from heaven could only fill the hunger of those who ate for a little while. Those people had to come back every morning to gather a new supply. But Jesus was offering something that could truly fill the deepest longing of our soul. He told them, *“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.*

There are longings that only Christ can satisfy.

- We come to him with a hunger for truth and he feeds us with the truth of his Word.
- We come to him with a hunger for love, and he pours into our heart a pure and perfect love greater than anything this world can offer.
- We come to him with a hunger for meaning, and he fills us with the purpose for which we were created.
- We come to him with a hunger for eternity, and gives life that will never fade.

Isaiah 55:1–2 (NIV84) describes the coming Messiah and says,

*“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.<sup>2</sup> Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.”*

It is so easy for us to turn to other things for fulfilment. It may be relationships or entertainment or any number of things. Some of these might be good and worthy, but when we make it the highest priority for our lives expecting it to bring meaning and happiness and

fulfillment, we are left hungering for more. We need God at the center of our lives. Scripture urges us to turn our attention to the Lord and seek him with all our heart.

I was reading an article recently about what kinds of food you should buy if you're planning to stay at home for a long period of time. A lot of people stock up on junk food like Little Debbie's or potato chips, but those things don't provide real nutrition and we tend to go through them quickly. The article recommended buying food loaded with protein and vitamins like beans or canned meat or frozen vegetables. Those are things that will provide lasting nutrition we need. I admit, I'm just as bad as anyone else. When I'm at the store, I reach for the things that are quick and easy but that's not always best for us.

And in life we might also pursue the wrong things, that cannot satisfy, but instead we ought to pursue what has eternal significance. Spending time reading Scripture everyday might seem to some people like a waste of time, but those who walk with the Lord it is satisfying because he is the source of our strength, and we know that our relationship with him will last forever. Some people may not get why we lift our voices in praise, especially when life isn't going our way, but we believe it is satisfying to worship the Lord in good times and bad because he is our greatest desire.

Psalm 73:25–26 (NLT) says, “*Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth.*”<sup>26</sup> *My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.*”

## **Jesus tells us that the bread of life is given freely. (v.26-29)**

Back up, in the passage to John 6:27-29.

*<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. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”<sup>28</sup> Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*

The people were wondering what do we have to do to receive this bread of life. There's always a cost, isn't there?

When you're at the grocery store you probably look at the price tag before putting something in your cart. They don't just give things away, and you want to know how much each item is going to set you back. Even if you get the value brand, a plain loaf of bread will cost at least a dollar. If you go to a bakery, expect to pay a premium price for the fancy, artisan bread.

So what does God require of us if we are to taste eternal life? As the crowd listened to Jesus, they were under the impression they needed to do something to earn God's favor. Maybe if we do enough good works, or if we perform certain rituals or ceremonies, or if we are religious enough then we will be rewarded by God for our efforts. They were probably expecting Jesus to lay out a rigorous checklist. But his answer surprised them. It isn't about what you do, it's what has been done for you. Jesus paid the price for us, in full. Now all that is left for us to receive

the salvation he offers by placing our trust in him. “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

This is an important theme throughout the Gospel of John. The word “believe” appears more than 100 times throughout the book, as Jesus invites men and women to receive God’s gift of salvation by placing our trust in him. He says,

*John 3:16 (NIV84) <sup>16</sup> “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 20:31 (NIV84) <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Faith is coming to Christ with empty hands, not appealing to our own efforts or ability but trusting in the sufficiency of what he has accomplished for us. It is opening our hearts, inviting him in, allowing him to make us a child of God.

It sounds so simple, but it can be the hardest thing for many of us because it means letting go of our pride and humbling ourselves before God. We’d like to think we can earn our way... we make it on our own... we get there with enough effort and determination. But the gospel forces us to come to terms with our need for redemption. We can’t climb our way to God. He came down to us, to open the way to eternal life.

One author writes,

“How can we acquire this life-giving bread? The only work that guarantees the possession of this redemptive manna is to believe in Jesus. The gospel sabotages any notion of legalism or performance-based acceptability with God. The only thing we bring to Jesus is our need... When we trust in our own cleverness or obedience or resources or abilities, we [deny] God’s grace. But when God kindly deconstructs our self-sufficiency, our hearts come alive again... the Spirit gives life to all who call on his name.<sup>ii</sup>

This was a difficult for the people in the crowds who listened to Jesus that day. There were some things he said which they couldn’t understand. Sadly, many of them walked away and no longer followed him. I’m sure this was heartbreaking for the Lord. He wanted so much to draw them into a relationship with the Father, and fill the emptiness in their soul, but they refused.

The invitation continues to go out today to all people. There is no one who will be turned away, if we simply come with a humble heart and genuine faith in Christ. When we trust in our efforts, we stumble. But when we put our trust in Jesus our lives will be changed. The question is, how will you respond? Will you make the same mistake as the crowds and go away grumbling? Or will you come with empty hands and find life in the Savior?

## Conclusion –

Is there a hunger in your heart, an empty longing that you just cannot fill? You don't have to go through life trying to find what is missing. Look to the one who 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."

Maybe you have been trying to satisfy that longing in some other way, but you realize it isn't working. Whatever it might be, surrender that to the Lord and allow him to take his rightful place in your heart.

Maybe you have been trying to find God on your own, through your religious efforts and good works. You've been trying so hard to climb your way to him that you fail to realize he came down to us. Rest in his grace.

Feast in the Lord! Make Christ the joy and delight of your life each day. Isn't it a wonderful thing to taste freshly baked bread, still warm from the oven? How much better is it to enjoy our relationship with the bread of life. Allow him to pour his love into your heart filling you with the fullness of life. If we let him in, our lives will never be the same.

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<sup>i</sup> Barclay, W. (2001). *The Gospel of John* (Rev. and updated., Vol. 1, pp. 251–252). Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press.

<sup>ii</sup> Smith, S. (2013). John. In B. Chapell & D. Ortland (Eds.), *Gospel Transformation Bible: English Standard Version* (pp. 1418–1419). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.