

John 6:22-35

Lent 4, March 10, 2024
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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." 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."

Few things in life are as satisfying as a good meal. There's a reason why many Americans count Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Super Bowl Sunday as their favorite holidays, and it's because of the *food* associated with those days. The table full of so many types of delicious, homecooked food—platters filled with ham, turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, vegetables, salads, appetizers, desserts. These are the types of days you plan for, you save room in your stomach for, because you know just how satisfying that meal is about to be.

Good food is satisfying! Not only does it take away your hunger, it's a *pleasure* to eat tasty food, and it also provides essential nourishment for your body. Along with clothing and shelter, food is one of the basic needs for every human being. But there's another item we all need, however, though we might not always think of it as an essential like the others. That is *spiritual* food. Eating, drinking—being *filled* with God's Word that brings life. So, if you've been a little spiritually malnourished lately, if you've felt your faith weakening, if you just simply don't feel as close to the Lord as you used to—Jesus has the food to satisfy your hunger. That food He identifies as Himself, as He is, in the words of our theme:

The Bread of Life: Food that Truly Satisfies

- I. We don't want it
- II. Jesus provides it

This account follows just after the Feeding of the 5,000, so the progression of events goes like this: Jesus feeds the 5,000; they want to make Him their Bread King, so He miraculously disappears from them; He sends His disciples across the lake on a boat; He waits a while then walks on water to meet them; then they land on the other side of the lake for the events of our text. The same group of

people that He just fed have come around the lake to meet Him again, and they have this question, **“Rabbi, when did you come here?”** Normally, when we’re asked questions we just give the appropriate answer. But Jesus does no such thing here, because He can see their hearts. He has the bigger picture in mind.

His response to that question is: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”** That word “signs,” John frequently uses it in His Gospel, and every time it’s used is to describe a miracle, the purpose of which was to point to Jesus being the Son of God. And frequently, it’s recorded for us by John that the people would see His signs, recognize that they indicated that Jesus was clearly God in the flesh, and they believed. These miracles were like giant, blinking road signs pointing to Jesus: “Here is the Messiah!” *This* group of people, however, *did not cross* the lake because they saw these signs and believed. Rather, they saw the signs and didn’t care what they meant. *This* particular group was here only for the food.

Now, this scenario is probably one you can all relate to. It’s early evening, mom is in the kitchen fixing supper, but *you’re hungry now!* So, you ask if you can have a snack, and mom says, “Yes, you can have an apple or some carrots.” An apple or some carrots?! You were hoping for a pop-tart or some cookies or maybe a few pieces of candy! You’re not interested in an apple or carrots. But mom says, “No, you can have an apple or some carrots or just wait for supper.” You see, mom knows that if you fill your stomach with junk, you’re not going to be hungry when supper comes. That means that you won’t be eating the meal that you really need to eat. You’d be replacing the essential nutrients of a healthy dinner with unnecessary sugars and carbs.

Here we have a group of people who have seen the sign that should have told them, “This Man can offer us more important blessings than just food.” Yet, what are they after? They’re after the junk food. They’re not interested in waiting for the meal that Christ is preparing. They want Jesus to take away their physical hunger rather than their spiritual emptiness. And naturally, we’re just like this particular group of people.

Listen to what happens next. Jesus tells them, **“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.”** Then they said to him, **“What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”** Jesus answered them, **“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”** Do you want to be truly satisfied? Jesus says that He alone can provide what you need. So, He invites the crowd to believe in Him—and not just in some general sort of way, but believing and trusting that every spiritual need has been taken care of by Him.

They come back at Him with this: **“Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”** They’re missing the point. They say, “Ok, sure. We’ll believe in you if you give us some sort of sign to prove that you’re worth believing in.” Ummm, hello! They just got that sign when Jesus took five small loaves of bread and two small fish and kept breaking it and serving it until over 5,000 people were filled by it. *There* was the sign, the giant, blinking arrow pointing at Jesus and saying, “This man is God, because no one besides God could do this!”

But instead of seeing that sign and believing, they suggest to Jesus what type of sign He might do for them. They point to the manna that had been provided to the Children of Israel in the wilderness. Their point is, “Yeah, you fed us that *one* time, but you know what would really be great and impressive? If you kept providing *every* meal for us!” They veil their approach to the Lord in spiritual terms, things they think He wants to hear like, “We *want* to see and believe in you!” But they’re after the snacks, the junk food—or as Jesus calls it, “***The food that perishes.***”

Are we really any different? We approach the Lord regularly when we pray, but I think for many of us it’s in this sort of way: you have a few things on your mind that you want the Lord to help you with. “Lord, please help me get through this test.” “Lord, please help me feel better soon.” “Lord, please help me in my baseball game tonight.” “Lord, please help me find someone so I’m not so lonely.” And those are good things to pray about, in fact, Jesus *invites* us to pray about those things. But those aren’t the *only* things to pray for, though they certainly tend to be the only things we pray for. Or, maybe when you pray you do something like this. You say a few things that you think God wants to hear first: praising Him, thanking Him for the blessings of the day, asking for forgiveness, and *then* you get to the laundry list of needs that you’re *really* interested in.

And let’s take a step back from the prayer aspect and ask, “What happens next?” Sometimes you don’t get what you want. Sometimes it doesn’t work out how you prayed for it. And then, like a petulant child sulking because he didn’t get to eat a pop-tart before dinner, we sulk. We become bitter and upset at the Lord. We’re upset that we didn’t get the food that we were asking for—these minor requests. And that’s really embarrassing, especially when you consider the Bread of Life which Jesus offers. The meal He worked from eternity to prepare—eternal life won for you by becoming a Man, living a perfect life under the law, being killed, rising to life and snatching victory from the jaws of death. *This* is the feast God has prepared for you and me. And when we don’t get the *snacks*, we’re often disappointed. Jesus offers us the **Bread of Life: Food That Truly Satisfies**. And by our sinful flesh we show that we’re really not very interested in that type of meal.

Dear friends in Christ, God gives you something much more substantial than physical food, much longer lasting than health or wealth. God gives you Himself. Jesus says in verse 35: “***I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.***”

If you pay attention to the way food companies market their products, you should be able to see right through their marketing schemes. Think about all the food and drinks loaded with trans fat and sugars, and yet they’re labeled in such a way to trick you into thinking they’re actually *good* for you. I’m thinking of things like *Lean Cuisine* or *Diet Coke*. I remember in my lifetime the way breakfast cereals have changed their branding to attract more customers. There’s one particular cereal I remember. It used to be called Super Sugar Crisp. And then, there was a big kickback against sugar, so rather than taking any sugar out of the cereal, they just changed the name to Golden Crisp. In more recent years, the number of actually tasty, health cereals increased, so now these sugar-laden ones started marketing themselves as “Whole Grain Cereals.” They use fancy terminology to distract you from the fact that their cereals are not actually healthy. And if they don’t say it out loud, now many cereal brands will imply that if you eat their cereal, you’re less likely to have heart disease, to have a longer life. Of course, what you eat for breakfast probably doesn’t affect your life span at all.

But what if that were true? What if there was a type of whole grain bread that was studied and proven to add ten healthy years to the average person's life? You'd buy it, of course! You'd pass every single other kind of bread in the bread aisle to ensure that your family only had the best. Well, that bread exists, and Jesus is that bread.

Jesus is the food that adds years to your life, and not just five or ten years either. More like you'll *never* die. Now that's a healthy choice! In fact, God's marketing promise is that eternal life is *guaranteed* for any person who partakes this Bread of Life, that is, who receive their Savior Jesus by faith. And "faith" is the key word there, just as Jesus said, ***"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."*** Faith is the means by which we eat the Bread of Life. So, Jesus invites us to believe in Him, and not just with the type of faith that turns to God in times of danger, and not with the type of faith that blindly trusts in God without ever reading what the Bible has to *say* about Jesus.

True faith consists of this—you recognize your sins, you understand that because of them you really do deserve death and hell, but you also know and believe that Jesus has taken your sins from you. On the cross, He gave up His life so that the Bread of Life, forgiveness and eternal life at peace with God would be freely given to you. This type of faith is as Jesus says, ***"The work of God."*** Notice how he doesn't say, "This is the work that you have to do." Rather, this is the work God does. The Bread of Life is offered to you. All of God's blessed promises in Scripture are truly handed to you, and you can take them and receive them because *God* works in you the hands of faith to be able to lay hold on it.

Last week, we celebrated the Lord's Supper, in which we do eat the Lord's Body as we eat the bread, and drink His blood as we drink the wine. That's a very physical way in which Jesus gives us the Bread of Life, in which He gives us Himself. Sometimes, when you approach the Lord's Supper, you might do so worried or nervous, concerned that your sins make you unworthy to be there. I'm thinking particularly of those sins that you're struggling with, that you promise the Lord you're going to try to get better at fighting—and yet, here you come again still struggling with them. Maybe you might sometimes be concerned that it would be hypocritical to approach the Lord's Table at such a time as this, not belonging there, since God does say, ***"He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment on himself."*** (1 Corinthians 11:29)

If this is what you recognize in yourself, that you are sinful and unworthy of God's love, well then it's to you whom Jesus is speaking when He says, ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."*** (Matthew 5:6) It's *because* of your sin that Jesus invites you to His table, that He invites you to His house this morning, so that you may be reassured yet again that yes, your sins are forgiven and that God remembers your sin no more. And if you still doubt that to be true, listen to what Jesus says: ***"All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."***

So, if you came to church today spiritually malnourished, or if you've felt your faith weakening, or if you simply don't feel as close to God as you used to—Jesus is the answer. He has the food to satisfy that hunger. May God enlighten our eyes to see that spiritual food is even more necessary than actual food. And may we continue to seek ways in which we can be fed **The Bread of Life: Food Which Truly Satisfies.** Amen.