

I AM the Bread of Life
March 2, 2008
John 6:30-35

I'd like you to think about food right now. For some of us, that's not all that difficult to do. In fact, some of you started planning your lunch as soon as the service started. What's your favorite meal? Where do you like to eat out? What do you order when you go there?

I've been told that there's a health-food restaurant in New England with a billboard that says, "**Eat here and live a long life!**" Not wanting to be outdone, the barbeque place next-door put up a sign that reads: "**Eat here and die happy!**"

Have you ever noticed that even when you eat your favorite food, you still **get hungry again** in a few hours? While I crave King Crab, and love eating it, it doesn't gratify me for long.

Some of us have been on a search for something that will satisfy and we've come up short. A few of us have tried partying, relationships, purchasing things, or pursuing promotions. In the long run, we're still starving as we search for satisfaction. Ravi **Zacharias** writes, "With all our ingesting and consumption, our hungers are still many and our fulfillments are few" ("Jesus Among Other Gods," Page 83).

As we return to finish our series on the "I AM" sayings of Jesus, we come face-to-face with the one who declared Himself to be the loaf of life. Before we get to the text, let me give you some **bread background**.

Bread was the most important part of the meal. In our culture, when we go to a restaurant we generally focus on what kind of entrée we're going to order, and the basket of bread on the table is usually secondary (unless you're at the Olive Garden!). In Jesus' day, meat was simply a side dish, and bread represented the major part of the meal. When Jesus says that He is the bread of life, He's saying that **He's the most important part of life**.

Everyone had access to bread. Poorer people used barley to make bread while the wealthier used wheat, but most everyone had the means to make or buy bread. By using this metaphor, Jesus is saying that **He is available to everyone**.

Bread was the means of fellowship. In that culture, when you broke bread with someone, you were friends for life. Jesus likewise offers a **friendship with us that will never end**.

Bread symbolizes God's presence. Bethlehem means the "house of Bread," and the temple was continually filled with the **showbread** (Numbers 4:7). This can be interpreted as "show up bread" or in Hebrew terms, "face bread." This bread was a heavenly symbol of God Himself, and a reminder to His people that every time they eat bread, they should think of Him. Interestingly, if a person would see a **scrap of bread on the road**, he would pick it up and put it on a tree branch for the birds to eat. Bread was **never to be trampled under foot** in the common dust because it carries with it an element of mystery and sacredness.

CONTEXT

In the first 15 verses of chapter 6, we read about Jesus turning five small barley loaves and two sardines into a **feast for over 5,000 people**.

Verse 14 tells us that the people viewed this as a miracle and **wondered if Jesus was the promised prophet**. During that time, there was a belief among the Jews that the Messiah would provide bread from heaven much like Moses did. When they saw the loaves multiplying in front of their eyes, many of them **wanted to make Jesus king** on the spot. But Jesus had other plans.

Coming right after this miracle, the disciples get into a boat and **head to Capernaum**. The crowd, eager to get their stomachs filled again, jumped in boats and found Jesus there. Jesus stopped them in their tracks and blew away their plans for a breakfast buffet when He said:

“I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs 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. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” John 6:26-27

In verse 31, **the crowd lays out a challenge** for Jesus. Essentially they were asking Jesus to **prove Himself**. In their minds, Moses provided bread for over 3 million people for 40 years; Jesus had only given them bread once. The bread from Moses came from heaven; Jesus used earthly bread and multiplied it.

I love how Jesus responds. Once again He’s unpredictable. He arrests their attention with this stunning statement in verse 32: *“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.”*

God was the giver of the Manna and it was the Father who sent the true bread from heaven. Jesus then defines this true bread in verse 33: *“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”* Manna could only solve physical hunger; the Bread of God gives life to all.

Their appetite is now whetted and in verse 34 they respond: *“From now on give us this bread.”*

Jesus then said to them in verse 35: *“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.”*

AND THE CROWD WENT WILD. Wow, they loved this – not!

In fact, if we skip down to verse 41 we read that many **began to grumble** about Jesus because He said that He was the bread that came down from heaven.

It’s very interesting that the Israelites **grumbled when God provided manna** generations earlier. I guess **human nature** hasn’t changed much because many of us still grumble at God today. “God, I know I’ve got a job, but I **want a better job!** God, look at those **nice houses** up on the hill. How come I can’t have one of them? **It isn’t fair!** You gave, but I want..... grumble, grumble, grumble.”

In verse 42, they reveal **the reason behind their grousing**. They knew all about Jesus but couldn't believe He was more than He appeared. Their real problem was that **they had grown too familiar with Him**: *“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’”*

Some of us are in danger of doing the same thing. Maybe you grew up in a church, you know a few Bible stories, you know what happened at Christmas and at Easter, and you think you have Jesus all figured out. **Be careful that you don't allow what you know about Him to keep you from actually knowing Him**.

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In his best selling book called, **“Into Thin Air,”** Jon Krakauer relates the hazards that plagued some climbers as they attempted to reach the summit of Mount Everest. **Andy Harris**, one of the expedition leaders stayed at the peak too long and on his descent, he became **in dire need of oxygen**.

Harris radioed the base camp and told them about his predicament. He mentioned that he had **come across a cache of oxygen canisters** left by the other climbers but **they were all empty**. The climbers who already passed the canisters on their own descent **knew they were not empty**, but full. They pleaded with him on the radio to make use of them but it was to no avail. Harris was starved for oxygen but he continued to argue that the canisters were empty.

The problem was that the lack of what he needed **had so disoriented his mind** that though he was **surrounded by something that would give him life, he continued to complain of its absence**. **The very thing he held in his hand was absent in his brain**. The lack of oxygen had ravaged his capacity to recognize what was right in front of him, **and he died**.

Friends, **what oxygen is to the body, the Bread of Life is to the soul**. Many of us are suffocating and starving and we don't even know it. We think we have Jesus figured out but we might be way off. Jesus is offering life to us while we run around trying to appease our appetites.

I ate all my king crab and now I'm hungry again. The Israelites ate the manna and were famished the next day.

Jesus repeats this metaphor in verse 48: *“I am the bread of life.”* He then reminds them that even though people **ate manna in the desert, they eventually died**. Material things have a built-in mortality. No matter how much we exercise, how good our diet is, we're eventually going to die. If you want something that lasts for eternity then you must partake of the one who alone is eternal. Look at verse 51:

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

This is really a startling statement. Verse 52 reveals that his listeners **begin to argue sharply** among themselves. The word used here reveals that they almost **break out into a fight**.

You see, **whenever an individual encounters Jesus, a decision has to be made.** We see three responses to the claims of Jesus in the closing verses of chapter 6.

1. Disruption (60-65). The first thing we notice is that Jesus always disrupts us. Look at verses 60-65: *“On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’”*

The issue here wasn’t that they couldn’t understand it. They just didn’t want to receive it. Many times we think someone just needs more information about Christ before they can be saved. While this may be true, more often than not, it’s not a matter of needing more data; it’s an issue of lordship. In other words, the problem is not intellectual, it’s moral. Let’s face it; some of you do not want to fully surrender your lives to Christ.

It’s striking that **Jesus doesn’t adjust His teaching** to make it more palatable to people. The real Jesus is not always easy to listen to or to follow. **Are you bothered by what the Bread of Life is asking you do? Good.** Do you feel like Jesus **cramps your style?** He does. Does it seem like His teaching is **hard to accept?** It is. The question now becomes, “What are you going to do about Him?”

2. Desertion (66). Look at verse 66:

“From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”

We can’t help but **feel a little sad** at this point. The crowds had listened to his teaching, they had been fed bread and fish, they followed Jesus across the lake to hear more of his teaching and then many of them listening to Jesus had enough.

They didn’t get what they wanted, so they left lacking what they needed. In a similar way, we often want things that won’t benefit us and all the while we need things we never give a thought to. As a result, we bail instead of believing.

3. Declaration.

As Jesus looks around and watches the crowd thin out as people walk away, He turns to the twelve in verse 67 and asks, *“You do not want to leave too, do you?”* Peter speaks up in verses 68-69 and says: *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the holy one of God.”*

Peter is saying something like this: “Lord, you are not easy to live with. You embarrass us and, at times, you frighten us. We don’t always understand you, and yet, your words are the most remarkable that we have ever heard. They explain who we are and they make us understand life itself. We are satisfied by you and are held here by our desire for more of you. We have put our faith in you. You fit the prophecies and fulfill the predictions. You are the Great I AM. Where else would we even think about going?”

It's Time for Supper

Most of the **important decisions** in life are not choosing between what's good and what's bad. The hardest decisions are between **what's good and what's great**. The good choices have temporary value. They might look good, and even taste delicious.

But **Jesus calls us away from the good, away from the tasty but temporary**, and offers us a life of eternal value and significance. He offers us himself – the great and mighty God – and invites us to fill our hearts with his love, our minds with his truth, and to live our lives to his eternal glory.

Why settle for anything less.

We are going to conclude our service this morning with a very special meal. One that tastes much better. The night before Jesus was betrayed, He had supper with His disciples.

As we prepare to celebrate communion, let's remember the manna, let's remember the miracle of the bread and fish, and most of all, let's remember the Messiah, who alone is the Bread of Life.