

THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:22-40

ETERNAL — NOT PERISHABLE

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?”

John sets the scene for us. The disciples took the only boat at the shore and left. Jesus stayed behind. Now it's the next morning and Jesus is nowhere to be found. Boats arrive from Tiberias and report that Jesus isn't there — so they get in the boats and to go look for Jesus in Capernaum — where he often stayed at this point in his ministry. When they find him — they ask — when did you get 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 doesn't answer their question. Instead he draws out their motives. They aren't coming to him to inquire the meaning of the miracles or the significance of the signs — they're coming to him for another meal. They want Jesus to give them their daily bread.

Remember — this is the same crowd who wanted to make him king after he provided the dinner buffet yesterday. Their vision of the kingdom is narrow — it's focus primarily on the physical and the materialistic. They loved the show. They loved the bread and the meat.

In fact — at this time in the Roman Empire — when a Caesar's approval ratings were low — they would give them people Bread and Circuses. They would open the arena and give free bread to everyone and put on a gladiatorial show for free. And it was enough to buy back the people's favor and approval.

Our approval is often bought at the low cost of a loaf of bread and a show.

Jesus begins to teach them about a kind of food that truly satisfies and that never perishes. Jesus says there is a food that He can give to them that will not perish but endures to eternal life. And he also says that he is able to give it to them because God the Father has set his seal on Him.

During this time official documents were sealed with a signet ring of the king to confirm authority. You would heat some wax and stamp it with the signet ring to imprint the seal into the wax. Any document with that seal carried with it the authority of the king.

Jesus is saying, God the Father has imprinted his image — his seal on Him. Jesus as the Son of God has the Father's approval and his authority to act. Jesus has the authority to give the bread of eternal life that never perishes to those who are hungry and they will be filled.

Now — is Jesus saying — don't spend any time or any effort at the normal everyday requirements of life? No of course not. Eating, working, raising families, going to school, serving with local charities, hanging out with friends — all of these are important and all of them have their place in a well designed life.

What Jesus is saying — don't make those pursuits the sum total of your life. It is easy to get consumed with the everyday realities of life that we completely neglect what's most important. We can so design our lives that all our time and efforts are given to building a life of comfort, satisfaction, and pleasure.

Have you ever been so busy in a day that you neglected to eat? You went from one meeting to the next. One class to the next. One task to the next and in your busyness you neglected the fuel that your body needs to sustain your efforts?

Jesus is saying — far too often — we do the same. We go from task to task — from job to job — from responsibility to responsibility — from relationship to relationship — from pleasure to pleasure — from thing to thing — and in our busyness trying to find satisfaction and meaning — we neglect the fuel that sustains our souls and provides true satisfaction and meaning.

By our nature we seek satisfaction and meaning in things that ultimately perish and fade away.

The reality is that you and I have been hardwired for eternity.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

God has made everything beautiful in its time — the material and the here and now is important. At the same time — God has placed eternity in our hearts — the sense that life continues beyond the here and now. And the Preacher in Ecclesiastes recognizes that we are limited in our ability to grasp all that God has done from beginning to the end. We are limited — finite creatures.

So what are we to do? Enjoy and steward the life God has given us — and do so with eternity in mind.

Paul David Tripp writes...

Everyone hungers for paradise. No one is satisfied with things the way they are. So either you try your hardest to turn your life right here, right now into the paradise it will never be and therefore become driven and disappointed, or you live in this broken world with the rest and peace that comes from knowing that a guaranteed place in paradise is in your future.

Every physical blessing and every physical longing is designed by God to be a sign that points you to the spiritual blessing and spiritual fulfillment found in Christ.

You will either live today with eternity in mind or you will live today like this is the only eternity you'll ever have. And the difference between the two is everything.

If today is all you have — then each day drains another from your account. Each day should be filled with hustle and striving to fix what's broken and enjoy before its gone. But if today is not all you have — if eternity is a guaranteed promise — then each day can be filled with worship and gratitude — faithful stewardship and restful enjoyment.

Jesus invites us into a life of eternal meaning and purpose. Do not seek the food that perishes — but seek the food that endures to eternal life.

GIVEN – NOT EARNED

28 Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”

Or in other words they are asking – “What must we do in order to do the works God requires?”

It’s so engrained in humanity that we must work for everything that we miss that Jesus already said that the bread of life is something that He gives – not something we earn.

When Jesus told them not to work for food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life – he wasn’t focusing on the nature of work but on the goal. He wasn’t introducing some novel form of work that would gain God’s approval. He was showing them that their goals were shortsighted and narrow.

But they still think that this eternal bread is something that they need to earn and work for. So they ask – What work does God require so that we can earn eternal life?

There’s two problems with their question. First – they assume that they will be able to perform and do the tasks that God requires. They over-estimate their ability. And second – they’ve not realized that life itself – including eternal life – is a gift from God – and like all gifts – it cannot be earned. It must be received.

29 Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

Jesus says – Faith is what God requires. And it’s not some abstract form of faith. It is faith in the one who God has sent. Faith in Jesus is what God requires.

John Calvin wrote...

Faith brings nothing to God. On the contrary, it sets man before God empty and poor that he may be filled with Christ and His grace. It is therefore a passive work so to say, to which no reward can be paid. And it bestows on man no other righteousness than what he received from Christ.

See when you work for something, your payment is not a gift. It’s been earned. You deserve it. When you go to work and your boss pays you, you can be grateful you have a job – but that paycheck is not a gift. It has been earned. You deserve it. But faith is not a work. It is a gift from God. God sends His Son and we either receive Him or reject him. If we receive Him, it is by faith. If we reject Him, we are saying by our actions – no thank you. I’d rather work out my salvation on my own.

Faith comes empty handed to God and recognizes my poverty and says “God of mercy – fill me by your grace with the gift of Christ.

Calvin concludes...

For what we receive as His gift, none provides by his own industry. The Spiritual food of the soul is the free gift of Christ, and that we must strive whole-heartedly to become partakers of so great a blessing.

At the end of the day – everyone will either trust in their own industry or trust in the gift of Christ.

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.’”

So they say — if we're going to believe in you — then what sign will you perform to verify that you are sent from God. Now don't miss this...they've already been given a sign — He just fed thousands of people with a 1st century Lunchable — with leftovers.

But it's not enough for them. So they bring up the manna in the wilderness. Jesus — prove to us that you are greater than Moses. When Moses led the people in the wilderness he provided manna — daily bread from heaven to feed us.

Now — They don't need more verification. They don't need any additional signs. What they need to do is to respond in faith to the sign that's already been given to them. Their request also exposes their true motives. There's a not so subtle demand in bringing up the manna in the wilderness. They don't really want to put their faith in Jesus. They don't want Jesus — they want what he can give them. Not only do they want to be fed physically right now — they'd love for it to become a daily thing.

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.”

Jesus corrects their theology — because what you believe determines your behavior and ultimately who you become. Andrew Wilson explains what Jesus is saying really well...

It wasn't Moses who gave heavenly bread to you [Israel]. It was my Father who gives the true bread from heaven to the world. In one sentence, Jesus reframes the giver, the gift, it's timescale, and it's scope. Glorious.

Jesus is saying — Moses didn't provide the bread. It was God the Father who provided the manna — but it was just bread. It was meant to point to the true bread from heaven — the Bread of God — the one who comes down from Heaven to give life to the world.

Jesus is saying — you didn't work to receive the manna that came from Heaven. It was a gift to be received and it was meant to prepare God's people for the greater gift — the Bread of God — who would come to give life to the world.

There's an inherent choice to be made here. You can either have...the bread of labor or the bread of life.

The Bread of Labor is the bread that you work for that perishes and never satisfies. It's the bread of contract - I do my part and you are obligated to do yours. This bread is served on the table of labor where you strive and never achieve — where you wonder constantly — do I measure up?

On the other hand...you have...

The Bread of Life — the bread that you receive as a gift that never perishes and always satisfies. It's the bread of covenant - relationship with God where we are motivated by love and delight - not duty and obligation. The bread of life is served on the table of grace where you receive love and acceptance as sons and daughters of God and enjoy the life that God gives.

It's one or the other — which will you choose?

The Bread of Life is eternal, not perishable — and — it's given, not earned. Now, let's see the last point — the bread of life is a person, not a program.

PERSON – NOT A PROGRAM

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.

What Jesus has been alluding to – he now makes plain. He is the bread of God, the true bread from heaven – Jesus is the bread of life. It’s not a program to perform – It’s a person to know, love, and follow. This is the first of seven “I am” statements in John. They hold deep theological significance because they tell us who Jesus is and why we need him.

1. Everyone who hungers needs **the Bread of Life** (John 6:35).
2. Everyone walking in darkness needs **the Light of the world** (John 8:12).
3. Everyone who wants to enter into the fold of God will needs **the gate** (John 10:7, 9).
4. Everyone who wants protection and care will need **the good shepherd** (John 10:11, 14).
5. Everyone who wants to overcome death will need **the resurrection and the life** (John 11:25)
6. Everyone who wants meaning and purpose will need **the way, the truth, and the life** (John 14:6).
7. Everyone who wants to grow will need **the true vine** (John 15:1, 5)

These are bold claims. If their false – then Jesus is a liar and a peddler of false hope who should be scorned not worshipped. But if these claims are true – then Jesus is LORD and the only one who can give us hope who should be followed and worshipped.

Jesus doesn’t point to some other thing outside himself that they need to receive. He points to himself. He’s saying – the sign of the miraculous feeding points to me. Just like bread nourishes your body – I am the bread of life that will nourish your soul. Jesus satisfies all who come to him with their hunger. Or another way to say it – Christ becomes our bread and fills us, when we come to him with our hunger.

All the breads of this world will ultimately leave a sense of dissatisfaction. The inner longings of the soul are never satisfied by the bread of this world. But – when Jesus becomes your bread – your soul is nourished and satisfied.

Our world can offer every form of material, physical, emotional, and spiritual substitutes to try to bring lasting satisfaction. But they never truly satisfy – no drug, no car, no job, no relationship, no home, no dollar amount – nothing can fill the inner emptiness of the heart. Nothing this world has to offer can satisfy – except the bread of life. And – the bread of life is a person – and his name is Jesus.

36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

First Jesus brings an indictment on the crowds lack of faith. At this point they’ve seen Jesus, but they have not believed. D.A. Carson writes...***This crowd has witnessed the divine revealer at work, but only their curiosity, appetites and political ambitions have been aroused, not their faith.***

37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

The Father gives to the Son (Jesus) a group of people. Jesus receives the Father’s gift (the people) and doesn’t to turn them away.

38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

The Father and the Son are unified in purpose.

39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

Jesus does not lose a single person that the Father gives to Him. Everyone of them will be raised up on the last day. Everyone one of them will pass from death to life through the resurrection.

40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Everyone who believes in Jesus will overcome death and experience the ever-increasing joy of eternal life.

So to recap — The Father Gives to the Son a gift — and it’s a group of people. The Son Receives that group of people and they look to the Son for their very life. And by grace through faith — they persevere to the end to overcome death and experience the gift of ever-increasing joy and life that never ends.

Now — the self-sufficient — the self-made person — is tempted to downplay Jesus’s words here. We want to believe that the Bread of Life is a program based on performance — not a person who gives us life. We want to believe that we bring ourselves to God. And then when we show up, He provides the program for us to participate in and then based on our performance, we make either make it to the end or we don’t.

The only problem with that is the Bible — Jesus’s words shatter that mindset. Jesus didn’t come from Heaven to earth to make redemption merely possible. He came to make it a certainty. These last few verses combine everything we’ve seen so far — that the bread of life is eternal, it’s a gift and it’s found in Jesus. At no point has Jesus said anything about moral performance or participation in a program of salvation. Jesus has been clear — The Father Gives. The Son Saves -- We are merely recipients of God’s gracious initiative and powerful salvation.

To the ill-deserving and the underserving — to the one who recognizes that they bring nothing to the table — that apart from grace they’re ruined — this is their only hope.. And the beauty is that it’s the only hope you need. God is so rich in mercy and love that he chooses the unloveable and makes them lovely.

To the proud — the self-sufficient...to the self-made...this seems like a patronizing handout.

How does the Father decide who he will give to the Son? Here’s my best theological answer — I have no idea.

The Bible never gives an inkling of a hint. Jesus just skips right over that. Does that negate human responsibility? Nope. Jesus says — we are responsible to look to the Son and believe in him.

God initiates. We respond. You are not invited into a program to follow but into a relationship with a person. God’s grace doesn’t get you into the program and then say — good luck making the grades. No the same grace that initiates and invites us in — is the same grace that keeps us so that we persevere to the end.

Our faith is not in a program — It’s in the person of Jesus Christ. Jared Wilson writes...

If you look to Jesus, the bread of life, and ask him to satisfy your hunger, he will not give you a stone. He will give you himself. Let us then stop begging for signs and start beholding Jesus. There is one great sign that you are loved more than you thought. It is the cross. And there is a still further sign that you will live in this love forever. It is the empty tomb. Come, you who hunger, bring your nothingness and trade it for the abundant wine and bread of Jesus Christ.