

Savoring the Bread of Life

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- [0 : 0 0] The evening arrived. The boys took their places. The master, in his cook's uniform, stationed himself at the copper.
- His pauper assistants ranged themselves behind him. The gruel was served out, and a long grace was set over the short commons.
- The gruel disappeared. The boys whispered each other and winked at him, while his next neighbors nudged him.
- Childless he was, he was desperate with hunger and reckless with misery. He rose from the table, and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said, somewhat alarmed at his own misery, Please, sir, I want some more.
- As many of you can probably tell at this point, the paragraph that I just read is from the book *Oliver Twist*.
- [1 : 1 2] In his work, Charles Deakins uses satire to critique the English poor laws of the 1830s, and to spotlight the greed, the hypocrisy, and the evil of his society.
- At a more basic level, though, Deakins speaks on the fundamental right that every human being has, to be fed and to be nourished.
- In many ways, this pursuit of human flourishing is present in every culture. The difference comes in the paths we take.
- For Asians, we value hard work and education. In fact, even though this year was an outlier, Chinese New Year, is traditionally a time where friends and family gather together, and more often than not, we discuss our respective advancements in our career, our investments, our education, and our achievements.
- The truth is, our physical longing for food and shelter is often a cover-up for the deeper spiritual longings of our hearts.
- [2 : 3 9] Behind every pursuit of an earthly treasure lies a hidden desire for something transcendent and beyond this world.
- We see this dynamic between our physical need and our spiritual need play out in our passage this morning. Today, we'll be looking at the classic story of Jesus feeding the 5,000.
- So please turn with me now to John chapter 6. John chapter 6. Now we'll be looking at verses 1 to 15 and 22 to 40, but for the purpose of time, I will not read the text.
- Instead, I invite you to follow along as we progress through the narrative. Episode 1.
- At this miracle at the Sea of Galilee. So in John 6, we first find Jesus crossing to the Sea of Galilee from Jerusalem.
- [3 : 5 4] Verse 2 tells us that a great crowd of people followed him. These people, however, were not so much fascinated by Jesus' teaching, so much that they wanted to learn from him and obey him.
- Rather, as the verse tells us, quote, because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. Now, so far in the book of John, there has been two healings.

The first one in John chapter 4, where Jesus heals an official son. And the second one is the healing at the pool. Now, of these two accounts, the healing of the disabled man in chapter 5 sparked by far the greater reaction and even opposition, such that the rest of chapter 5 is spent on Jesus' defense of his authority.

Likely exhausted now from his extended conversation with the Jewish leaders, Jesus now retreats to the hill country to spend time with his apostles.

Now, this is a pretty consistent pattern in the Gospels. We find Jesus alternating between public time in ministry and private time with his loved ones, either with his Heavenly Father or his friends and his disciples on earth.

[5 : 28] Now, we are told that around that time, the Jewish Passover festival was near. So markets were crowded with people bargaining for bread.

Kitchens were filled with workers preparing for the next meal. Much like how Chinese New Year has its roots in triumph over the mythological creature, Nian, the Jewish Passover commemorates Israel's delivery from Egyptian labor and persecution.

In other words, this is a time in Israel's history that they would remember how God had let them out of slavery. And it's a point, a rallying point for intense nationalistic zeal and passion.

And we'll see why this setting is important when we come back later. But for now, even in the midst of this busy setup for the festival, a couple people took the effort to catch up to Jesus.

In fact, their number likely increased over time. Hey, aren't you supposed to be helping out at home? No, dude, you gotta come check out this Jesus guy, man.

[6 : 56] I mean, he teaches, he preaches, he prophesies. He even claims himself to be the son of God. So even though Jesus and his disciples had already left on a boat, these people ran around the lake and got to the Sea of Galilee before Jesus did.

So when Jesus saw them, he had compassion for them. And he taught them extensively, as the book of Mark tells us, for a few hours. And so more and more people came.

And by the evening, the total number, according to some scholars, including women and children, was well over 20,000. Now, as it was the time for supper, Jesus began to think about feeding his audience.

And it so happened that one of his disciples, Philip, is from the nearby town of Bethsaida. So Jesus asked him, where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?

Now, make no mistake. Jesus was not stunned by the amount of people that showed up, nor was he surprised at what he was going to do.

[8 : 20] Jesus had a plan. But he wanted to use this opportunity to test Philip to see if he really understood what Jesus' ministry was all about.

Now, of course, like how many of us would respond, Philip answered, thinking only in the terms of marketplace.

It says here, in verse 7, it would take more than half a year's wages, in Greek, that's 200 denarii, to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite.

Now, while this conversation was going on, Andrew walks up to Jesus with a boy next to him. Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish.

Now, barley loaves are the kind of inexpensive bread that were usually eaten by people of the porter class. And these fish, it's not the fish that you see at Chinese restaurants, right?

[9 : 25] It's just pickled fish that usually went as a side dish, along with the small cakes of barley loaves. So no matter how you see it, these five loaves and two fishes were not meant to feed the whole crowd.

Jesus' response in verse 10, however, is shocking. Have the people sit down. Next thing you know, the people were arranged in groups of 50s and 100s.

Indeed, the way Jesus ordered the seating suggests that he had already come out with a solution. Now, Jesus' disciples were certainly confused.

What on earth is he trying to do? The people, however, were excited. Ooh, are we going to see another miracle this time? So all eyes were fixed on Jesus.

Jesus took the bread and said the common words of Jewish thanksgiving. Bless art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who bringeth forth food from the earth.

[10 : 44] And then he distributed them. One by one. And notice, as much as they wanted.

Jesus fed them as much as they wanted. While Philip remarked that 200 denarii would not be enough for someone to even have a bite, Jesus' providence was not only sufficient, but lavish.

So lavish that by the end of the day, when they collected the leftovers, the number totaled to 12 baskets. Again, let's not miss this significance because this number 12 is emphasized in all four Gospels when this miracle is mentioned.

Because would you believe it? The Lord has what it takes to feed all 12 tribes of Israel. Make no mistake.

The people present at the miracle would have immediately understood the significance of the 12 baskets. In fact, the way Jesus fed them reminded them so much of how Moses used to lead Israel.

[12 : 11] If we look at Deuteronomy chapter 18, I'm going to read to you Deuteronomy chapter 18, verse 15 to 19. Way back, Moses promised Israel that the Lord would raise up from them a prophet like himself.

It says here, The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you. From your fellow Israelites, you must listen to him. And we fast forward to verse 18.

Verse 17, The Lord said to me, what they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth.

He will tell them everything I command him. So, back in Deuteronomy 18, we already have this expectation of the greater Moses. Yet prophets came.

Actually, the judges came first. And then the prophets came. And then David came. But then, the northern and southern kingdom and all the kings came.

[13 : 23] None of them fulfill this anticipation of the greater Moses. So, this time around, upon seeing Jesus' miracle, people said, Surely, this is the prophet who is to come into the world.

Now, granted, the crowd were not exactly wrong, because Jesus is indeed the greater Moses who has come to live among his people on earth.

At the same time, there are some misconceptions about the role of this great prophet. One of them being that he should also be a king.

You see, in the way Moses led the people out of Egyptian slavery, the Israelites now expect the great prophet to lead them out of Roman servitude.

Bro, didn't I tell you he's the real deal? Come on, what, he prophesies, he heals, he teaches, and now he feeds us?

[14 : 40] Surely, he can also free us. I mean, who's the Roman empire to the great prophet? unfortunately, these people were not willing to just stop at the thought that Jesus was the great prophet.

They were willing to do whatever it takes to put this thought into action. And that is why John specifically mentions 5,000 men to signify an army, an army of new recruits who are willing to fight and serve the right leader.

In fact, what they probably had in mind is they would form a rebellion, they would crown Jesus as king, and they would dare the authorities to respond.

In a sense, they would put on Jesus the cape that they had designed for him, a triumphant dictator.

The situation is made worse when Herod Antipas, King Herod, the king of the Roman empire at the time, he was already agitated when he heard so many news of Jesus' disciples doing X ministry, Y healing, Z teaching across the whole nation.

[16 : 14] So tensions were already high. Any civil insurrection, any protest, any movement from the public would alarm the authorities even more.

But beyond that, Jesus knew, Jesus knew that his kingship was not on earth. And his enemy was not the Roman empire.

His victory would not come from defeating Herod in a siege warfare, but by crushing Satan through his death and resurrection.

As one commentator notes, Jesus would go into Jerusalem not wielding the spear, but to receive the spear thrust and bear judgment.

Therefore, Jesus retreats. Episode 2. Discourse at the Capernaum Synagogue.

[17 : 24] The rooster crowed. The sun rose. It was a new morning. Suddenly, one man exclaimed, where did Jesus go?

Well, sure enough, it didn't take long for people to realize that Jesus hadn't left with his disciples on the same boat, actually the only boat that took them there, which means Jesus could probably still be close by.

Well, to the people's convenience, some boats from Tiberias landed on the shore near them. So, group by group, they boarded the boats, crossed the lake, and landed at Capernaum.

still in search of Jesus. Now, when the people saw Jesus, they were understandably confused about how he got there. It says here in verse 25, they asked him, Rabbi, when did you get here?

Which could also mean, how long have you been here? There's something noteworthy of Jesus' response. Why doesn't he tell them how he crossed the lake?

[18 : 50] Why doesn't he tell them how he walked on the water? I mean, surely, the people would have been impressed even more. Instead, he says, very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

Unfortunately, for these people, they only approached Jesus because they saw him as a miracle worker.

So then Jesus targets the root of people's curiosity because miracles themselves, mere miracles, can corrupt faith.

Miracles were never meant to be an end within themselves. Rather, they should point towards the gospel, towards Jesus himself.

So Jesus continues on. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

[20 : 17] For on him, God the Father has placed his seal of approval. Now, previously in John chapter four, Jesus offered the woman at the well drink, a drink that will forever quench her thirst.

This time, Jesus again offers food that will endure to eternal life. Unfortunately, both the woman at the well and the people present at this miracle only saw Jesus as a magician who could pop food and drink out of thin air and feed them.

at the same time, Jesus emphasizes that this bread that he's going to give is not earned by hard work. Do not work.

And notice how he says, which the Son of Man will give you. So, Jesus is the only one who can give out this food that endures to eternal life.

God has placed his seal of approval. Now, once again, the people misunderstand Jesus' intentions.

[21 : 42] Whoa, food that never perishes? Sounds good, man. Sign us up, bro. Sign us up and tell us what to do. We're going to do whatever it takes, and we will overcome any challenge for this food that never spoils.

Well, Jesus responds in verse 29, the work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent. God demands faith, not just an abstract trust in something empty, but a concrete confidence in the one who has revealed himself, Jesus Christ.

Okay, believe, that doesn't sound too hard, but I'm afraid we're going to need something more. I mean, after all, Moses, also provided our ancestors food in the wilderness.

Moses provided manna in the desert. What more can you do? So the logic goes like this. If Jesus is indeed as he claims, the prophet greater than Moses, shouldn't his followers be entitled to something even greater than what Moses had done?

in a sense, the crowd is asking Jesus to prove his identity as the Messiah by again doing a greater miracle than the miracle of the manna.

[23 : 26] Jesus doubles down. very truly I tell you, 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.

Verse 33, for the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. It is clear to Jesus that these people are giving too much credit to Moses and too little to God.

they are missing the point. Both the food in the desert and to an extent the law of Moses were temporary signs put in place by God that rightfully point forward.

the true bread and the true law is Jesus himself. For as important as the manna was, it perished in time.

As crucial as the law of Moses is, it would eventually be replaced. Jesus is declaring that God has moved on from his old ways of relating to his people.

[24 : 52] God now communicates to the world through his son, the life-giving true bread. Now frustratingly, the people still don't seem to understand what Jesus means.

like the woman at the well who says, sir, give me this drink. They say in verse 34, always give us this bread.

The key word is the word always. When they say always give us this bread, the idea is that the bread of life needs to be given over and over again.

Even though Jesus has made it clear that the food that he offers does not perish. So Jesus finally declares as clear as he can in verse 35, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me, and still you do not believe.

[26 : 08] Straightaway, Jesus targets the root of the people's curiosity. The fact is they were only interested in Jesus because of their physical appetites, but also their political ambitions to crown Jesus as king.

Despite witnessing Jesus in his fullness, in his divine revelation, the crowd was blinded by their own selfishness.

That said, the fact that some people see miracles, but do not believe, is neither a failure of God's plan, or a knock against Jesus' ministry.

Quite the contrary, Jesus makes it clear that not everyone will be saved. Verse 38, for I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me.

So Jesus makes it clear that he builds the authority, the authenticity of his message, not on people's response.

[27 : 23] Jesus' message would not be better because a lot of people believed him. Rather, his confidence is in the plan of the father.

Verse 39, and this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

So before time, God the father chose those who he will give to the son, such that in time all would come to the son to Jesus and believe in him.

And then Jesus would protect them until the last day. Church, it is crucial, yes, it is extremely important for you and I to understand that we are not the ones who keep our salvation.

Jesus is the one who protects it. Because if you and I, if our salvation is ours to keep and lose, we will lose our salvation the next minute.

[28 : 41] We greet, we lust, we judge, compromise.

Jesus is the one who keeps our salvation. Not only has God the Father entrusted a group to Jesus, He also commissions His Son to come down to reveal Himself to those He has chosen.

And finally, the Son perseveres, preserves them until the day of judgment. Now some of you might already be thinking, well, if Jesus protects my salvation, doesn't that give me an excuse to do whatever I want?

If I cannot lose my salvation, where is my responsibility in it? What exactly is my role? Well, not quite. Let's look at verse 40. It says, for my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

The verbs look and believe are present tense. But in Greek, present tense can also mean a continuing action. So to continually look to the Son, to continually entrust ourselves to Him, that's the path towards eternal life.

[30 : 38] to live. Brothers and sisters, do you see that we are not so different from the crowd present at this miracle?

Do you see that we are people who are fundamentally hungry? hungry? We hunger for relationship, to be loved, to be protected, and to be taken care of.

We thirst for recognition, to be given attention, to be affirmed, and to be praised.

rest. We long for freedom, to rest, to spoil, and to indulge.

so we look towards this world. We look to our spouse and our loved ones. We look to our career and our income.

[32 : 04] We look to our ambitions and goals, only to find ourselves completely unsatisfied when none of them can fill the emptiness in our hearts.

Like Oliver Twist, we go to these things and say, please, sir, I want some more. If I could only have more of this one thing, my life will be complete.

What's more, like the crowd, we have a preconceived idea of how God is supposed to work. And when we get frustrated when the way Jesus operates does not line up with our expectations, while the crowd viewed Jesus as king and tried to forcefully enthrone him, the truth is you and I tend to view Christ as a vending machine.

We throw in our coins of offering. We throw in our tokens of prayer. We throw in our paper notes of time spent in ministry and Christian witness, so that God would be so pleased that when we press the button, he will dispense the item that we have wanted for so long.

But when what we have put in does not exactly align with the value of what we have received, we feel that we have been cheated. And to continue the vending machine imagery, we are convinced that, well, the device must be broken.

[34 : 11] We try to slam it, we try to shake it, to no avail. What happens then when a customer believes he is not getting his worth out of his investment?

Well, he moves on to a different vendor, to a better machine. so in many ways, you and I, when things don't work out the way we expect them to, when God doesn't answer our requests on time, when we feel repeatedly disappointed by God, we move on to the next supplier.

believing that the next one will be the answer. The result is an endless cycle that begins with optimism, but always ends with crushed dreams, leaving us exhausted and dried up.

in light of our spiritual condition, what does Jesus offer us as remedy?

Well, Jesus points out that our issue is not so much a lack of passion, but a lack of focus. You see, much like the crowd we are willing to do whatever it takes to win this bread.

[36 : 03] Jesus makes it clear that the point was never meant to be on our doing, but on his being. That at the final section is filled with first person pronouns.

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, but as I told you, all those the Father gives me will come to me.

I will never drive away. I have come down from heaven. I shall lose none of those he has given me. I shall raise them up at the last day.

Praise God, for in his arrangement, we are not the ones who have to work, because the work has already been done.

bread that Jesus offers reverses the world's system. The world's system is one that compels us to look at everything through a materialistic lens, to evaluate all that we do based on the profit we are going to get and the loss we might suffer.

[37 : 21] But the bread that Jesus offers reverses this. In John 6, Jesus first affirms our physical needs.

Jesus is not saying that physical needs is unimportant. He recognizes that we cannot live in this world without being fed in our bellies.

But at the same time, Jesus calls us to greater heights. He invites us to set aside our desire for material fulfillment.

He invites us to look at him, to gaze at the sun, to take in his beauty, to soak in his perfection, and to delight in him.

For in Christ, we are satisfied. For in Christ, we are secured.

[38 : 33] And in Christ, we will rise to see him face to face on the last day. Let's pray. Lord, we have looked to and we have chewed on many things that promise us fulfillment.

each day is a struggle, Lord, for we build our identity on what is offered to us.

Each day is a struggle for us to forget the gospel and to be swell into the currents of this world. Lord, we praise you for the bread of life, the bread that never perishes, the bread that never spoils, the bread that fills us forever.

May it be a daily reality that our understanding of faith moves from our brains to our hearts, that in our best and worst moments, we would look to you, to chew on you, to savor the bread of life, to look to you to sustain us, to protect us, and we long, long for the day, oh Lord, when all this disease will be over, when all the sickness, all the pain, all the suffering, all the heartbreaks will be gone, and we will see you face to face, to enjoy, and to soak in your presence, and celebrate and praise you with the saints in heaven forevermore.

Pray this in Jesus' name, amen.