

The Bread of Life

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 6:22-58

Pastor Bryan Clark

I am so hungry. I need something to eat. I am so thirsty. I need something to drink. This isn't rocket science is it? But I wouldn't say, "I am so hungry I need to go out and buy a new pair of shoes." Or, "I am so thirsty, I need to watch television." This isn't complicated. I'm hungry; I eat. When I am thirsty, I drink. Yet I would suggest to you if you really understand that concept, it is profound. As a matter of fact, if you really understand what we just said, it is potentially life changing. That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 6. Last week, we looked at the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 plus, and the miracle of Jesus walking on the water. We pick it up then in verse 22, which is just the next morning.

The next day, the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples had gone away alone. There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

(*NASB, John 6:22-25)

So this is the next morning. At least some of the crowd is trying to figure out, "Where did Jesus go?" They knew there was one boat. They saw the disciples get into that one boat and head out to sea. They knew Jesus wasn't in the one boat that left, so they get up the next morning and they're trying to figure out what happened. There was one boat; it left. Jesus wasn't in it, so where did He go? So they gathered together in boats. They figured Jesus must be in Capernaum because that was basically home base for Jesus and the disciples. Verse 26:

Jesus answered them and said, Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled.

So they asked Jesus basically, "When did you get here?" He's not interested in that conversation. What He says to them is, "You seek Me, not because you saw signs—meaning not because you saw the sign that I am the Messiah that can save your soul—but rather you seek Me because you're hungry, and you want more bread. Verse 27:

"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

This text is really important to understand. Jesus is seeing their physical hunger and their desire for bread as kind of this metaphor of a much deeper, more significant hunger—a spiritual hunger in their soul. And so what He's saying is, "You come seeking nothing more than physical bread. Tomorrow you'll be hungry again." He has the potential to offer them living bread. It's much like the conversation with the woman at the well. Jesus offers so much more than just a drink of water, than just a little

bread. “I can offer you eternal bread that will satisfy your eternal soul,” as He again identifies He's been sent from the Father. The Father has put His seal or His mark on Jesus. Verse 28:

Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?”

So they kind of hear what Jesus is saying, and kind of not. Jesus seems to be offering something more from God. This is the natural reply of a religious person: “Tell us what works we need to do to get this from God.” Jesus then in verse 29:

Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, (It’s a bit of a play on words, *work*, singular) that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

It's not a bunch of works; it's this one work—**that you believe**. This is the repeated message of the Gospel of John. It’s not a bunch of religious activity—only that you believe. That's what you need to do. Verse 30:

So they said to Him, “What then do You do for a sign, so 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 OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT’” (Vs. 30-31)

So their response is, “Okay, we will believe if You give us a sign.” Now this is rather strange. We're just coming off Jesus feeding somewhere in the neighborhood of ten thousand people with five loaves and two fishes. Seems like a pretty good sign, again remembering we learned last week that this is the Passover, meaning the Passover season. So in the synagogue, which was there at Capernaum, they would have been reading from Old Testament passages about the redemption out of Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the wandering in the wilderness and the manna from heaven. So you start to see why Jesus strategically picked this season for this conversation. What they're saying is, “Hey, we know You gave us some bread yesterday. Moses did that for forty years. Big deal! Give us a sign.” That’s essentially what they’re saying.

Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.” (Vs. 32-34)

So what Jesus says back is, “First of all, Moses didn't give bread from heaven. God gave bread from heaven. And the same Father that gave the bread from heaven has now given you **the true bread from heaven**.” Now you remember, Jesus has already said that Moses wrote about Me. The Old Testament is about Jesus. It's full of shadows and images and pictures. Jesus said it straight up. The Old Testament is about Me; that's who Moses was writing about. So we again have a confirmation that when God provided the manna from heaven, it was a picture, an image, that ultimately the true bread that satisfies the ultimate hunger would be sent from heaven to earth to give the world what it needs to live eternally. That's what Jesus just said. So they respond in verse 34: “**Lord, give us this bread**.” Now this is very similar to the conversation with the woman at the well in John chapter 4. She comes to get water. Jesus identifies Himself as the Living Water. “You drink of this Living Water, you'll never thirst again.” And she says, “Where is this water? Give me that water and make my life a whole lot easier. I won't have to come to the well every day.” So again, it's that same level of confusion. “Where do I get this bread? It sounds pretty good to me.” Verse 35:

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.”

Jesus identifies Himself as the **bread**. This is common language for Jesus. He speaks in metaphorical terms all the time. Jesus is not saying literally, “I’m a loaf of bread.” He said, “I am the Lamb of God”; “I am the Vine”; “I am the Water”; “I am the Shepherd”; “I am the Gate.” These are all metaphors. Your soul is hungry and the only thing that’s going to satisfy your hungry soul is the **bread of life**. If you eat of this bread, if you believe, *you’ll never be hungry or thirsty again*.

So again, this is interesting to think about as it relates to physical hunger and physical thirst. We simply can’t live our lives without a constant reminder of, “I’m hungry; I need to eat. I’m thirsty; I need to drink.” Now scientists could explain to us why that’s true, and God could have created us differently. Think of it this way: A mechanic can explain to you how an engine works. It doesn’t mean the mechanic created the engine. Scientists can explain how the body works, but it doesn’t mean they created the body. God easily could have created us not to need to eat or drink. So what’s built into us is this every-day-metaphor reminder that if I’m hungry, I need to eat. If I’m thirsty, I need to drink. But I have a much deeper hunger in my soul. So if I’m hungry, I need to eat, but what do I eat?

If I’m physically hungry I don’t think, “I need to go out and buy a new pair of shoes.” It doesn’t make any sense. If I’m thirsty, I don’t think, “I’m so thirsty I think I’ll watch television.” And yet when it comes to our spiritual hunger and thirst, we go searching for all kinds of things that don’t make sense, that are never going to satisfy the deepest hunger and thirst of our soul. This is what Jesus is trying to get them to understand. Jesus can do something far more than give you some bread, and you’ll be hungry again tomorrow. I’m offering you the Bread that will satisfy your deepest hunger forever!
Verse 36:

“But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” (Vs. 36-40)

Now there’s part of that conversation that has the potential to get in pretty deep and create quite a bit of confusion. I want to avoid that. You have this mysterious teaching throughout the Scriptures that, when it comes to salvation, there’s something that God is doing, and there’s a responsibility we have. It’s mysterious; it’s really hard to figure out, but there’s always God’s part and our part. Jesus is essentially saying, “You don’t believe, but some will believe. The Father will draw some, and give them to Me, and I will take them in, and I will keep them all the way to the end of the story.” When He talks about *raised up on the last day*, He’s talking about the resurrection—life after death—with Him forever! He’s brought this up several times already in the Gospel of John. So, God does His part and there’s a mystery to that. But He says there’s our part, and our part is to listen, to understand, and believe. We don’t need to figure out God’s part. We need to understand our part. And that’s what He says, *“Those who believe will have eternal life.”* Verse 41:

Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.”

Now again, think about this as it relates to the children of Israel coming out of Egypt. When they received bread from heaven, what did they do? They grumbled. So now you have the same dynamic. The True Bread has come from heaven. What did they do? Well, they *grumble*. Verse 42:

They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven’?”

In other words, “We know You. We know Your parents; we know where You live. What is the deal with you? You keep saying, ‘I have come from heaven.’” So you can understand the difficulty of their coming to grips with the fact that this is God in the flesh. So they're saying, “Why do you keep saying that we know Your parents; we know where You're from.” Jesus responds to them in verse 43:

Jesus answered and said to them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.” (Vs.43-47)

Now again, you have God's part and our part. What Jesus is saying is, “You were told that you would be taught by God.” He is sent from God; He is teaching them. He's reminding them of what we learned in chapter one, verse 18: Jesus has come to exegete, to reveal the Father. You were told God would teach you. God is teaching you. I've been sent from the Father and I'm teaching you and I'm telling you that if you believe in Me, you have eternal life! Verse 48:

“I am the bread of life. (If you're hungry, you need to eat.) Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. (It was just bread. It's the very same thing they come seeking. It's just bread. You'll be hungry again tomorrow.) This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I give for the life of the world is My flesh. (Vs. 48-51)

We learned in John 1, verse 14 that, “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word became flesh,*” meaning human. He's simply saying He will have to die. It's looking forward to the cross. So again, the same repetitive message. It's a metaphoric message. Jesus is the Bread. Your soul is hungry. “If you eat of the Living Bread, it will satisfy your soul now and forever.” Verse 52:

Then the Jews began to argue with one another saying, “How can this man give us *His* flesh to eat?”

So they're still thinking literally. Now this is a consistent problem. You remember when Jesus was talking to Nicodemus about being born again, what did Nicodemus say? “What am I supposed to do, crawl back into my mother's womb and be born again? I don't know what you're talking about.” When Jesus was talking to the woman at the well, she's still thinking literally. “Tell me where I can get this water. It'll save me some trips to the well.” So again, they're saying, “We don't understand what You're talking about. Are we supposed to eat You...cannibalize You?” It makes no sense to them.

So now, starting in verse 53 to 58, which is as far as we'll go this morning, this is a portion of the Gospel of John that's created quite a bit of confusion over the years. Some of you come from backgrounds or traditions where you were taught that the elements of communion either are or become the flesh and the blood of Jesus—and a lot of that support for that view comes back to this particular text in the Gospel of John. So I'd like to spend just a little bit of time trying to get some clarity here. We here at Lincoln Berean believe that the elements of communion are symbolic. They represent the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus that are required for our salvation. Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of Me. Remember that My body *was* broken; My blood *was* shed.” When we look at this particular text, there are several things to think about before we read through it.

One of the consistent problems with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, and now with these unbelieving Jews, is they keep thinking literally. They're missing the metaphoric message. That's what they just said, “What are we supposed to do, eat You?” Clearly they're being sarcastic, but they don't get what Jesus is saying, so it's helpful to understand their inability to understand the metaphor and what Jesus is saying. In other words, if you go back to a literal interpretation, you're actually aligning yourself more with the unbelieving Jews than the intent of the text. That's the whole problem; they were taking it literally and not understanding what Jesus was saying.

One of the big challenges is: if this passage is about communion or the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist—whatever term you want to use—it's understanding that wasn't even introduced for another year, and then to the believing disciples in the upper room. At this point, Jesus hadn't even instituted communion. There's just no way these people could have understood that's what He was saying. In the upper room Jesus took the bread and said, “This is My body.” So the word *is*, is a little Greek word that can mean *literally*, or it can mean *figuratively*. This literally is, or this symbolically represents. The word is used both ways throughout the Gospels. So that particular word doesn't settle it one way or the other. But the fact that Jesus was sitting with them in the upper room when He uttered those words, makes it abundantly clear He wasn't saying, “Eat Me.” It was symbolic. “This is My body.” He was literally, physically with them when He said, “This is My blood.” These were Orthodox Jews that been trained their whole life not to eat flesh and blood. There would have been such an eruption if they thought he was speaking literally. The elements of Passover had been figurative for hundreds of years. Jesus is simply redefining the meaning: “This now represents My body which is broken for you. This represents My blood which is shed for you.” That's really the only way you could understand that when Jesus is physically with them saying those words.

So you go back to John chapter 6. If Jesus is introducing some concept where, in some way this literally becomes part of the body and blood of Jesus, certainly when we get to the upper room a year later, He would develop and unpack that even more. But what happens is the opposite. John is the only Gospel writer that does not mention the instituting of communion in the upper room. Matthew talks about it; Mark talks about it, and Luke talks about it. John's the only Gospel writer that doesn't bring it up at all. If you understand the text with the metaphor, with Jesus as the Bread of Life as we've been naturally understanding it, there's no way, no reason to suddenly take it as literal.

So for example, in verse 53 the statements are absolute: **unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, You have no life in yourselves.** In other words, “Unless you do that, you cannot be saved.” If He's speaking literally of communion, the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, then now that is contrary to everything He's taught us already in the Gospel of John

where He has consistently said, “You just need to believe.” As a matter of fact they even asked, “What are the works?” “No works; just one thing. Just believe.” So now all of a sudden if it's something else, then it's contrary to everything we've been taught. One more thing. The verbs for example in verse 53, *eat and drink*, are in what's called the aorist tense, and that simply means it's past tense, *once for all time*. In other words, it's like a period; it's a moment in time. If He was referring to communion, it would be something that happened again and again and again. But that's not what the verb tenses mean—once to believe...once to eat...once to drink. There's one time when we believe and are saved. It's not some continual thing that happens, but just a natural, normal reading of the text. In light of what's preceded it, it's understanding Jesus is metaphorically saying, “I'm the Bread and you need to eat the Bread.” “I'm the Water and you need to drink of the Water.”

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; (So again, there's the bread; it's Jesus; He came down out of heaven.) not as the fathers ate and died; (just normal bread) he who eats this bread will live forever.” (Vs. 53-58)

Jesus stood before these unbelieving Jews and said, “I am the Bread of Life. If you eat of Me—if you believe—your hungry soul will be satisfied now and forever.” Again, this is not rocket science. “I am so hungry I think I'll go shopping and buy some new shoes.” “I am so hungry I think I'll watch television.” We don't think like that. This is clear to us. “I'm hungry; I need to eat.” “I'm thirsty; I need to drink.” We do it every single day.

Every person in the room has a deep hunger in your soul. You have a significant thirst in your soul. Jesus has identified Himself as the Bread; “I'm the Water; I'm what you're looking for.” These people came to Jesus for physical bread because they were hungry, and Jesus is saying, “You have no idea what I could offer you. I can offer you living bread that will satisfy the hunger in your soul forever!” This is not rocket science, but people misunderstand this every day. When we have these deep longings in our soul, our souls are hungry, our souls are thirsty. But rather than giving them the Bread, the Water that our soul longs for, we try to satisfy those longings with other things. And this is guaranteed to make a mess of our lives.

So it sounds something like this: “I am so hungry. My soul is so hungry, I think I need more alcohol.” “My soul is so hungry, I think I need more drugs.” “My soul is so hungry, I think I need to watch more pornography.” “My soul is so hungry, I think I need a new car.” “My soul is so hungry, I think I need a bigger house.” “My soul is so hungry, I think I need another sexual relationship.” “My soul is so hungry, I need more stuff.” This is what defines our culture, as daily people destroy their lives with things that will never satisfy. That's why this is potentially so profound. It is life-changing. Your soul is hungry. That's a legitimate longing. But the only thing that will satisfy your hungry soul is the Bread of Life. That's why Jesus said, “I am the Living Bread; I'm the Bread of Life. If you believe in Me, I will satisfy your hunger, both now and forever.”

Every person in the room has a legitimate longing and desire for something that will satisfy our hungry, thirsty souls. The only thing that will satisfy now and forever is the One who has come from heaven to be the Living Bread of Life. May you find your long-sought satisfaction in a relationship with Jesus!

Our Father, we are so thankful that when we were lost in our sin with no hope, our souls were so hungry, so thirsty, that you sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. That through His broken body and through His shed blood, He would make a way of salvation that we, by believing, may eat of the bread of life and be satisfied now and forever. God, may that be so of every person here this morning. in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. It's interesting to consider how God has created us and the world around us to reveal all kinds of spiritual metaphors to help us understand Him. The text in John refers to hunger and thirst. What are some others?
2. People are made to hunger after God. What are some ways people try to fill that hunger with other things to satisfy that hunger?

Bible Study

1. Read John 6:22-25. Obviously this is just part of the crowd searching for Jesus. What are they trying to figure out?
2. What are they looking for according to Jesus in John 6:26?
3. Read John 6:27-40. How is this conversation similar to the woman at the well in John 4 and Nicodemus in John 3? Why do you think people struggled so much to understand what Jesus was saying? Why were these obvious metaphors not so obvious to them?
4. Jesus gets into the mysterious tension between God's part in salvation and our part. This is a unique text in that both aspects of salvation are addressed by Jesus. What is God's part and what is our part according to Jesus?
5. Read John 6:41-51. Again, this text can get very complex. Without trying to address every issue Jesus raised, what is the basic message of this text? Who is Jesus and what does He offer?
6. Read John 6:52-58. It is very unlikely this text is referring to communion since that would not be introduced to the disciples for another year and that introduction in the upper room isn't even recorded by John. The basis of salvation in John's Gospel and clearly in this text is belief. It's also been abundantly clear Jesus is speaking in metaphoric terms just as He did with the woman at the well. In simple terms, what is Jesus saying?

