

The Bread of Life

John 6:22-40

Call: Ps 42:1-6 (ESV)

Scripture: Isa 55:1-3; 6 (ESV)

I. Introduction

Almost sixty years ago, a song was written which would eventually capture the 2nd spot on the list of the top 500 greatest rock songs of all time. Obviously the list is debatable. But, for this particular song, Newsweek once called the opening riff, “the notes that shook the world.” Not only that, the refrain for this song has become the cry of every generation in the West since it was written. Do you know what song it is? The song is called, “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction” by the Rolling Stones.

In that song, the lyrics reveal a person who is trying and trying and trying to find satisfaction and contentment but can’t find any. As the verses continue, the writer references consumerism, relationships, materialism and various other things in the search. The person tries all these things, thinking they will provide lasting satisfaction. But, what he finds is that none of it works. He can’t find any satisfaction. And, this refrain becomes the cry of that generation and every subsequent one.

But, the song hits upon a question that runs deep in our souls: Where do we go to find satisfaction and contentment? Where did you go this week to find satisfaction? Alexander Schmemmann, the brilliant Orthodox theologian, once said, “Man is a hungry being and endlessly craves” (Schmemmann, 5). So, in our endless craving, where do we go for deep and lasting satisfaction? Even more, where we go says a lot about what we are living for.

After a week off, we enter back into John 6 this morning. I know two weeks ago was a long time, but we began chapter 6 by studying John’s version of Jesus feeding the 5,000, 5,000 men that is. There are probably closer to 10,000 people at this feast. Jesus takes a picnic lunch of five loaves and two fish from a little boy, we called him Sammie, and fed 10,000 people. It is a ginormous miracle showing the abundant provision of God.

As with many times in this Gospel, we get a miracle followed by a teaching that reveals the deeper meaning of the miracle. John’s miracles, which he calls signs, point further than the physical to an underlying spiritual truth about who Jesus is. So today and next week we will explore Jesus’ teaching that accompanies the feeding of the 5000.

One other key point to chapter 6 is that it is during the Feast of Passover. As we said, the Jewish year revolved around the feasts much like our world today revolves around our holidays. To the 1st-century Jew, the feasts were a time to remember what God had done in the past and renew hope for what God would do in the future.

For the feast of Passover, the Jews remembered God’s great acts of salvation when God set His

people free from slavery in Egypt. All the events of that great act of salvation are remembered, from the suffering of slavery to the amazing provision of God through their wilderness wanderings.

The Passover was, and still is, a time to renew hope. Moses had promised that God would at some point in the future provide another prophet like him. And, by the first century, there was growing anticipation that this prophet would arrive during some Passover.

And, to help the people remember and renew, specific texts were read at the feasts. Just like when we go into the Advent and Christmas season, we expect certain texts to be read every year. We expect Isaiah 9, Matthew 1-2, Luke 1-2 and John 1. We expect to hear these texts read every Advent and Christmas. The Jewish world was no different. There were specific texts read for each feast, which would evoke specific symbols and themes for the feast. We will encounter some of these in today's text.

That gets us ready for our text today. I invite you into John 6, beginning at verse 22.

II. The Setting (22-24)

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. (ESV)

Jesus had fed the crowd, dismissed them and sent the 12 disciples back to Capernaum by boat. He then went up on the hillside to be with his heavenly Father. Meanwhile, during the night, the disciples rowed into a storm crossing the Sea. It is then when Jesus walks to them on the water, calming their fears and the storm. When the crowd awakes the next morning, they begin looking for Jesus. They're probably looking for breakfast, but Jesus is nowhere to be found. So, the crowd gets into a few boats and crosses over the sea to the northwest side, to Capernaum.

Verse 25.

III. The One Work (25-29)

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, "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. 27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." 28 Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" 29 Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

A. The Question

The crowd finds Jesus and begins asking him a question. This begins the dialogue. Next week, the interlocutors will change but for today, Jesus dialogues with the crowd. And, they ask, “Jesus, where did you go? You disappeared on us. We got up for breakfast, but you were gone?”

B. The Response

Jesus ignores their questions about when and how he got there, and tells them why they *really* came to seek him. Jesus knows what is inside humanity. John told us that in chapter 2 (John 2:25). And, here he knows what’s inside this crowd. He says that the crowd saw the effect of the sign – 5,000 plus people are fed – but failed to see the actual sign. This crowd wants their physical needs met. They want their stomachs filled. But, Jesus wants them to go deeper.

C. The Work

Jesus then begins to talk about work, and specifically talking about what they are working for. According to Jesus, there are two kinds of food in this world: that which spoils / does not last and that which endures to eternal life. Jesus encourages the people to work for the eternal food, for this food “is never exhausted [with] a satisfaction that never passes” (Newbigin, 78). This food is a gift from the Son of Man, the one in whom the Father has placed his seal of approval. No one else has the Father’s seal except the Son of Man.

Jesus instructs us the same way, to work for the food that endures. The problem with most of us is that we are spending out time and effort working for the kind of food that doesn’t last, that only temporarily satisfies. Jesus’ words reveal a major flaw in our lifestyle, especially in the West. As Lesslie Newbigin says, if we work for the temporary food, “our life will be an endless ‘rat race’ in pursuit of satisfactions which never endure” (Newbigin, 79). This is what the Stones were singing about. Not to mention that where we spend our time defines what we hold to be important in life. When our lives are oriented around treasures of earth, we are working for the wrong kind of food. Earthly treasures are not bad in and of themselves. But, when they become ultimate, tethering our hearts and souls to this world such that we seek identity, satisfaction and security in them, we’re working for the wrong food. Earthly treasures simply will not satisfy. After all, we know that after we get that new thing, whatever it is, we bring it home, we play with it for a week or two, then it gets thrown into the corner. And, we go back out looking for something new. Jesus’ words force us to ask ourselves, “what are we really working for?” What are we so busily moving through your weeks for?

D. What Work?

At this point, the crowd misunderstands Jesus and focuses, not on the kind of work, but simply on the word “work.” The crowd wants to please God, and they think they can do it if they just know what God requires. So they ask Jesus what’s the program? What works do we have to do to please God? Jesus responds that there is only one work that please the Father, and it is this: “*Believe in me*” (John 6:28). Receive the gift of faith, Jesus says.

This startles the crowd, so they challenge Jesus, verse 30.

IV. The Challenge (30-34)

30 So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32 Jesus said to them, "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. 33 For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

A. The Request

The crowd wants another sign. "Ok Jesus. If you are making this great claim that we must believe in you, give us a sign, a miracle, to validate your claim." But did he not just do a miracle in front of them? Is not the feeding of the 5,000, which is really 10,000, sufficient enough validation? Answer: No, it is not. Why not? Because the bread Jesus fed the crowd with was bread from earth, not bread from heaven. As one writer says, the bread Jesus provided "had begun in earthly loaves and issued in earthly loaves" (Barclay, 251). But the manna in the wilderness was from heaven. So, what Jesus provided was not a sufficient enough sign.

B. The Psalm

The crowd quotes Psalm 78, one of the texts that is always read during Passover. They say to Jesus, verse 31, "*Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat' (Ps 78:24).*"

To paraphrase the crowd: "Jesus, we are impressed by what you did yesterday. We really liked the bread you gave us. But even you would have to admit that there is a big difference between what you gave us, bread from below, and what Moses gave our ancestors, bread from heaven. Let's see if you can top that."

C. The Correction

So, Jesus takes up their challenge and corrects their faulty view on three counts, verses 32-33.

1. First of all, he tells them that it wasn't Moses who fed you, it was the Heavenly Father who fed you.

This confusion regularly happens doesn't it? God does a mighty work through someone, then that human someone gets all the credit. Right? Pastors get all the credit for a booming church. But, it wasn't them who did it, it was God who did it!

John Hanneman taught our men's day last Saturday. If you are a long-time PBCCer, you'll know that John led a thriving 20s ministry here at the church for many years. I remember asking John many times, "How'd you do it John? Tell me, what was your secret?" He would always, always laugh and say, "I made mistake after mistake after mistake. I didn't do anything. It was God who did it all." Every time he would say it. He

knew the truth.

So, Jesus corrects them. It wasn't Moses who did the feeding, it was God who did it.

2. Secondly, Jesus changes the tense of the verb from "gave" to "gives." God gave once, yes, but now God is giving the true bread from heaven. In other words, Jesus is saying this: "But my father is *giving* you at this very moment the true bread from heaven" (Klink, 330).
3. And, thirdly, as sweet as the manna was, it was not the true heavenly bread. There is another bread that God gives out of heaven. Manna physically sustained Israel for 40 years, but there is another bread, the true, bread, which God gives that gives life and ultimate satisfaction to the whole world, not just Israel, and forever, not just for 40 years! This is the true bread.

D. The Desire

At this point, the crowd's cravings are awakened, just like the woman at the well. He has touched the deepest longings of their souls. They want the bread, "Give us always this bread!" And, our souls say the same thing! Yes, Lord, Give us this bread!

Verse 35.

V. The Bread of Life (35-40)

35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. 37 All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 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. 40 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."

A. The I AMs

"I am the bread of life!" In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes seven I am statements that have a predicate. This is the first one.

- I am the bread of life.
- I am the light of the world.
- I am the gate of the sheep.
- I am the Good Shepherd.
- I am the resurrection and the life.
- I am the way, the truth and the life.
- I am the true vine.

These statements go a long way to revealing the identity of Jesus and how he meets us in our lives. But, even before these seven statements with a predicate, we've seen two I AM statements without a predicate. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that he was I AM. And, last week Jesus told his disciples he was "I AM" as he was walking on the water.

B. The Bread of Life

Here he says, I am the bread of life. It sure is a strange way to talk about yourself, isn't it? I am bread? I can understand if he would have said maker of bread, or baker of bread or giver of bread. But, *I am bread?* A person is bread? Really? (Johnson, 53). No one ever spoke like this!

Bread. Along with water, bread is essential for life. It is absolutely necessary for physical life. Notice Jesus did not say, "I am the coffee of life." He did not say, "I am the chocolate of life." He did not say, "I am the cake of life." He said bread. As much as we think we do, we don't need coffee or chocolate or cake, but we need bread. Or if Jesus was in an Asian country or an African country, he might have said, "I am the rice of life." Or, if he were in Idaho, he might have said, "I am the potato of life." What Jesus is claiming is that he is absolutely essential for life! Life will not work without him period. You cannot make it without him period. That's what Jesus is saying here. He does not claim to be a luxury, something we could live without. He is necessary for life for all people in all the world for all time! In other words, Cupertino needs Jesus more than it needs its next meal. San Jose needs Jesus more than it needs its next meal. The United States needs Jesus more than it needs its next meal. The world will not survive without Jesus. He is absolutely necessary for life. And, he is the only one who can bring a life to the full, a satisfied and contented life. As Augustine said, "In Jesus there is an eternal sufficiency in which there is no want" (Klink, 331).

To paraphrase then what Jesus is saying, "I am the prophet promised by Moses. I am the prophet who comes into the world with heavenly food. But I am more than the prophet with the food. I am the food. I myself am the heavenly bread. And, just like your bodies need bread to exist, so you need me to exist. You cannot make it without me."

C. The Action

Jesus goes on to say that those who come to him will never hunger and will never thirst, speaking to that "eternal sufficiency" and eternal satisfaction. This once again takes us back to the context of Passover and what the Jews are remembering during this feast. Exodus 16 is another one of those texts that is typically read and reflected upon at the Passover feast. That text explicitly says that God will "*rain down*" bread from heaven "*each day*" (16:4). It's an unbelievable promise! Bread from heaven in the desert every day. And the text says that the people were to go and gather a day's portion each day. Except on the day before the Sabbath, when two days worth would "rain down." The point being that God will provide everyday *but* only one day at a time. The people must go back out to gather everyday. They must trust God to provide everyday. So, what does this have to do with Jesus' claim? Jesus says in verse 35, "*Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*" Never?

I've often wondered about this verse. Because there have been times in my life when I do go to Jesus and feed on him, but it seems to me that I don't always remain satisfied. I get terribly hungry and thirsty the next day. It seems the satisfaction fades so quickly. So, what is Jesus saying here?

Well, the key is in the tense of the verbs "come" and "believe." In the Greek, they are in the present tense, and the present tense emphasizes continual action, meaning "to keep on." So, Jesus is effectively saying, "keep coming" and "keep believing." He is saying, "Whoever keeps coming . . . will never hunger. Whoever keeps believing . . . will never thirst." And that crowd at Passover would understand the "keep coming." Why? Because the Israelites of old had to keep coming and keep trusting that God would provide for them every day.

So Jesus says, "I AM the Bread of Life. You need to keep coming to me everyday ... keep believing in me everyday." In other words, Jesus is speaking more about a lifestyle than a single event.

So, when we find ourselves empty, when we find ourselves working too much for the food that perishes, it likely means we have fallen out of the habit of the "keep coming," of the "keep believing." It means we've fallen out of the habit of being with Jesus every day. The Israelites of old would have died of starvation if they didn't walk outside every day for food. We will die spiritually if we are not spending time with Jesus every day.

This is why the practices are so important. This is what John shared with the men last Saturday. The importance of the practices: praying, reading, examining, Sabbathing. They are so important because of what Jesus says right here. It is one thing to realize we need to be saved from sin and wrong-doing. It is quite another thing to realize we need to be saved from working for the food that perishes. In other words, it is quite another thing to realize we need to be saved from our busyness and distractedness and frenzied lifestyles. If we do not deal with these things, we will never find satisfaction and contentment. We need to free ourselves daily for God so we can rest awhile in him. We will die spiritually if we do not do this.

D. The Security

Jesus' last words in our text today are more good news. They deal with the security of those who do come and believe. They are safe. Those that the Father draws to Jesus, the Son will keep. No one gets lost. That is because your security is not found in your hanging onto him, but his hanging onto you.

It's like a father encouraging his son to walk across a log over a fast flowing stream. The son looks up at his father, scared to death. So, the father reaches out his hand and the son grabs his hand tightly. The son then walks across the log holding tightly to his father's hand. The son goes because he knows his safety lies not in his strong grip of his father's hand, but because his father is holding onto him. It's a journey of trust. And, our father is holding us in his loving hands, and we are forever safe.

The bread of life is connected to an ultimate and final reality – rest and satisfaction, safety and security forever and ever. That’s our destiny if we come and believe in this one – the bread of life.

Next week, Jesus will go even deeper into what this metaphor means.

VI. Conclusion

Well, we began by looking at a secular song which spoke to the deep cry of dissatisfaction heard around our world in our day. And, we learned today that Jesus says to come to him for sustenance, nourishment and ultimate satisfaction.

So, over against that song about dissatisfaction, there is an old hymn that speaks to Jesus as our ultimate satisfaction. The hymn is called, “*Satisfied*” by Clara T. Williams. I’ll read one verse and the chorus:

*Well of water, ever springing,
Bread of life so rich and free,
Untold wealth that never faileth,
My Redeemer is to me.*

*Hallelujah! I have found Him
Whom my soul so long has craved!
Jesus satisfies my longings,
Through His blood I now am saved.*

Amen.

Benediction

Blessed are you when you hunger and thirst for him, for you will be satisfied. Go now nourished by Jesus, the bread of life, and feed on him daily in your hearts by faith. And, watch what he does through you this week. Amen. Go in peace.

Resources

Barclay, William, *The Gospel of John, Volume 1*

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Johnson, Darrell, *Who is Jesus?*

Klink, Edward, *John (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*

Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Light Has Come*

Schmemmann, Alexander, *For the Life of the World*