

I AM the Bread of Life
February 21, 2010 - John 6

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

¹Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ²and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. ³Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴The Jewish Passover Feast was near.

⁵When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages^[a] would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

⁸Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

¹⁰Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. ¹¹Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹²When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Jesus Walks on the Water

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. ¹⁸A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹When they had rowed three or three and a half miles,^[b] they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. ²⁰But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." ²¹Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

²²The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. ²³Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

Jesus the Bread of Life

²⁵When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

²⁶Jesus answered, "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. ²⁷Do 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."

²⁸Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

²⁹Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

³⁰So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" ³¹Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'^[c]"

³²Jesus said to them, "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. ³³For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

³⁴"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

³⁵Then Jesus declared, "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. ³⁶But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

⁴¹At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴²They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

⁴³"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. ⁴⁴"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.'^[d] Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹I 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."

⁵²Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

⁵³Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Many Disciples Desert Jesus

⁶⁰On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

⁶¹Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶²What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit^[e] and they are life. ⁶⁴Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

⁶⁶From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

⁶⁷"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

⁷⁰Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" ⁷¹(He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

What are you going to do in the next 6 weeks to get ready? How will you prepare? What will you focus on? You have 42 days. What will you do with them? You see Easter is coming.

Will the arrival of Easter weekend in 6 weeks surprise us? Maybe we simply look forward to another long weekend. Or we might join the commercial part of Easter focusing more on chocolate bunnies and eggs.

What is Easter all about anyway? Or perhaps more importantly "Who is Easter all about?" We're going to meet Him in the next 6 weeks. Easter is all about Jesus, the cross and the empty tomb. In the weeks leading up to Easter we will have opportunity to meet Jesus again or for the first time.

We will see what Jesus did and said. We will meet the One of Easter and let Him introduce Himself. I pray by the time Easter week arrives, we will be much better prepared to embrace Good Friday and Easter Sunday. I invite you to come and meet Jesus for the first time or receive His refreshment and strength. I invite you to open yourselves up to Jesus so He can put your life back in perspective. Perhaps there's someone you can think of who needs to meet Jesus. These next services would be a great opportunity to invite them. But we're going to see what Jesus did and said.

The foundation for this journey comes from seven statements Jesus made about Himself in the Gospel of John. They all begin with 2 crucial words, I AM. To a Jew, those were sacred words. God said them to Moses from the burning bush. God called Moses to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt. Moses did not want to do it. So he tried to get out of it. He claimed that he didn't have authority in himself to lead them out. He'd have to tell them the name of the One who sent Him. So He asks God "what name should I tell them?" God said, tell them "I AM," sent you. This is the divine name.

So watch for I AM statements throughout this series. Look for what Jesus claims about Himself. Use these 6 weeks well to hear God speak through His word to you. Today, we're going to go back through pieces of John 6 and ask these questions. What does Jesus do? What did He say? How do people respond to Him? How will you respond to Him today?

What does Jesus do?

- **He creates and provides bread for material life.** (6:1-15)

He provides a huge meal of bread and fish for thousands of people. We need food to survive. Bread is one of the world's three staple foods; along with, Corn and Rice. In Palestine they didn't grow rice or corn. They lived by bread.

The chapter starts with a great miracle involving bread—the feeding of the 5000 men and their families. This huge crowd of people follow Jesus and His disciples. They've seen Him perform many miracles of healing. Jesus goes up on the mountainside to sit down with His disciples. John inserts verse 4 that would be easy for us to skip by. “The Jewish Passover Feast was near.” What did that have to do with anything? So it was near?

I think John wants to help the reader look at what he's about to write with Passover tinted glasses. At Passover, Jews remembered the night the Lord delivered them from Egypt. Whenever they ate the Passover meal, they ate bread reminding them of their quick departure. They also ate lamb to remind them of the lamb's blood painted on their door frames to protect them from the death angel. By the lamb's blood they had life. Passover may also remind them of their wanderings in the desert. They had little food and water. Yet God provided for them by raining down bread from heaven called manna. The Passover brought all of these memories to the mind of reader.

Jesus sees an opportunity with the crowd before Him. They have nothing to eat. So he initiates this event by asking in verse 5 “Where shall we buy bread for all these people to eat?” Looking at things solely from a human perspective, the disciple Philip answers, “eight months wages wouldn't be enough.” Peter's brother Andrew points out a boy with a small lunch. It contains five small loaves of bread and two fishes. But what is that among such a massive crowd of five thousand men plus women and children.

Jesus instructs the people to sit down, blesses the boy's lunch and has the disciples distribute the food. Miraculously, Jesus creates and provides an all you can eat buffet of bread and fish. Everyone eats their fill. The disciples collect twelve huge basketfuls of scraps.

What a miracle! And what great timing! Jesus did this in front of thousands of witnesses. What a great opportunity to launch His campaign for king. He already had an army of followers. They declare in verse 14, “Surely this is the prophet who is come into the world.” Here’s a guy who will deliver us from our oppressors and provide us with full tummies. What more could any crowd want? If Jesus would provide them with daily food and deliver them from their oppressors so life would be more comfortable, they’d be happy to anoint him king. Isn’t that what we often expect of our political leaders today? Provide a beautiful economy so we can comfortably make money and ensure we’re all warmed and fed. But lead us and make difficult choices? That’s not usually what voters look for.

Yes, Jesus had miraculously provided literal bread for the people. But He did not come to just fill a crowd’s stomach for a few hours of satisfaction. Jesus had something much deeper and much more permanent to give.

So in verse 15, He withdraws from the crowd because He knew they intended to make Him king by force. What happened to Jesus disciples?

The next verses tell us they get in a boat. They want to row to the other side of the lake. You’ve got to feel for those poor disciples. They gave up their jobs to follow Him. They have a similar understanding of the Messiah as the crowd did. They maybe thought Jesus had the perfect opportunity to seize power. He threw it away. Just a few hours before, they were ready to take their place in Jesus’ cabinet. Now they row across a stormy lake alone. Maybe they wondered “is he really worth following? Is he just another pretender?”

Things get worse on the lake. Winds blow. They make little progress and all of a sudden they see something horrifying. They see this figure approaching them on top of the water. Remember, the person writing this account was in that boat. Yet suddenly this ghost speaks. It’s Jesus. **What else does Jesus do? Jesus demonstrates His deity by walking on the water.** He demonstrates His authority over nature. Then He speaks—“It is I, don’t be afraid.” But those first words could also be translated “It is I AM.”

In those words, perhaps Jesus reassured His disciples. “I am divine. Today was not the day for me to be crowned as King. There are great trials ahead. But don’t worry. In me, you will find sustenance for life.” Then Jesus demonstrates this sustenance by meeting their immediate need. Remember they were in the middle

of the lake struggling to get to the other side. Verse 21 says, “They took him into the boat and immediately they reached the other side.” This must have been a great assurance to the disciples.

The next day some who tasted the miraculous bread pursue Jesus. They want him to give them more literal bread to eat. So they find him on the other side of the lake and ask him when he got there. But in verses 26 and 27, Jesus uncovers their real motives. They weren’t looking for him because they wanted more of Him. They wanted more food. They were hungry again. Jesus says in verse 27, I have a different type of food. Its one you don’t have to freeze or put in your fridge. It will endure for eternal life. This food God the Father approves.

So the crowd engages Him. Verse 28. “Okay. What works do we have to do to get this food?” Jesus says, “One work only. Believe in the one the Father has sent.” In other words, believe that I am in fact God’s Son, the second person of the Trinity.

The crowd understands this claim. But they demand evidence. So in verses 30 and 31 they essentially say, “Prove you are the one.” It’s kind of incredible that they made this statement after what happened the day before with all that bread they ate. But they had something else in mind. Their teachers told them Messiah would provide manna from heaven just like Moses in the desert. The true prophet would duplicate this miracle. “So Jesus, you may have provided bread from a boy’s lunch yesterday. But you really need to make it rain bread from heaven for us to believe that you are the Sent One.”

Jesus then corrects their misunderstanding in verse 32. “It wasn’t Moses who provided the bread or manna. God did. God now offers you bread from heaven. But it wasn’t manna. It was a person; the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

The crowd does not really get it. But they still want literal bread. So Jesus states it plainly in verse 35.

What does Jesus say? I am the Bread of Life – 6:35 “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.” Jesus is the bread which gives and sustains “life”.

What does it mean to declare “I am the bread of life?” It means Jesus claims He is the source of our lives. He is the source and sustainer certainly of our spiritual lives. Our spirit searches for satisfaction, purpose

and wholeness. Jesus provides all of these. But from Him, all life ultimately flows. Remember John 1. He was in the beginning with God and was God. IN Him all things were created. Nothing was created apart from Him. Jesus is the ultimate source of physical life. He is the source and sustaining of our spiritual life.

Just as we need bread every day to survive, we need Jesus every day to live spiritually. When we abandon Him or live independently from him, we stagnate spiritually – it feels like we have spiritual flu or dehydration. We barely function. We are weak.

But we can still live physically while being weak spiritually. In fact sometimes, physical strength is fertile ground for spiritual weakness because we have so much confidence in ourselves. We might live like that for years; but then our health breaks down; our life blows apart; we are reminded that we are not immortal. Then we begin to recognize that there is something more to life than grabbing a pay cheque, stuffing our selves and buying stuff. Our spirit needs nourishment with the source of life.

Jesus claims to be the bread of life. Then He expands on it a little using language they understand. Verse 38. “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.” Here’s another major claim by Jesus. **“I am the Bread that came down from heaven – 6:41.** They knew about the bread from heaven their forefathers ate in the desert. Now they realize Jesus claims to come from heaven?

They understand this part. They don’t like it. This was no longer the miraculous meal provider they enjoyed the day before. He’s claiming to be much more than that. So they start grumbling and in verse 42 say “Is this not Jesus, son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he say, “I’ve come down from heaven?” “We know his mother and father. We know she gave birth. This guy didn’t come from heaven. They grumble, just as their forefathers did in the wilderness even though they were provided with bread from heaven every day.

Jesus rebukes them for grumbling. If I was Jesus, I would quite while I was ahead here. It would be time to shut down the conversation because they’re not getting. In fact they’re getting angry. But instead of shutting it down, Jesus pours gas on the fire.

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.”

In that paragraph, Jesus makes several claims about Himself. He restates that He is the bread of life in verse 48. In verse 51 he states “I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” Then he ties the bread to his flesh and says that anyone who eats the bread, which is flesh, they will live forever.

Remember the Passover reference? At the Passover, they ate the flesh of the lamb. As they ate that lamb’s flesh and painted the blood on their doorways, they received life. This protected them from the death angel and released them from slavery the next day. Jesus declares that He is all of these spiritually. Just as they ate the lamb’s flesh and received life, if they believe in Him, they received life. Just as the bread that came down from heaven in the wilderness gave them life, Jesus is the bread that came down from heaven and offers them life now.

Well the Jews get what Jesus is saying but they don’t get it. They think he means they actually have to take a bite out of His arm. So in verses 53-59, Jesus makes things worse. Not only must they eat His flesh, now they must drink His blood. Talk about gross.

Then it’s tempting to conclude He’s talking about the Lord’s Supper. But Jews did not know anything about flesh representing bread and drinking blood. That was offensive and forbidden. Besides if he is talking about the Lord’s Supper he’s teaching that anyone who simply takes part in the elements is saved. Do you see that in verse 54? “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day.” But that’s contrary to the teaching of the rest of the New Testament.

I agree with commentators who interpret these phrases like this. “Just as eating and drinking are necessary for physical life, so also is belief in His sacrificial death on the cross necessary for eternal life. Coming and believing are replaced by eating and drinking.”

But the language Jesus uses here is challenging to grasp. Now if you find that to be the case, you are not alone. Sadly, some of those closest to Jesus didn’t grasp it. Verse 60 tells us some of Jesus’ own disciples found this to be a hard teaching. Jesus had more than twelve disciples up this point. But this teaching was hard either because it was difficult to understand or they didn’t like the implications of fellowship with Him as

necessary for intimacy with God. After a little more discussion look what happens in verse 66. “From this time on, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.” Wow, talk about negative church growth. Jesus began this chapter with five thousand men and their families wanting to crown him king. By the end of the chapter it seems he’s lost the crowd and many disciples. But Jesus wasn’t interested in some temporary fix or a few hours of pleasure. He came to bring real everlasting life. He is the bread of life.

So he turns to the twelve, do you want to leave too? But good old Peter shows that they got it. Verse 68 – “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.” Besides that, just a few hours earlier, Jesus demonstrated His sovereignty over nature by walking on the water and coming into their boat. Jesus reminds them that He chose them yet even one of them ultimately did not believe.

What did Jesus do? He provided real bread for a large crowd of people. He walked on water before the disciples and safely delivered them to the other side of the lake. What did Jesus say? “I am the bread of life. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.” Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

How do people respond?

The crowd that pursued him to the other side of the lake DEMANDED He provide for their physical needs only. Ultimately they REJECTED him because He claimed to come down from heaven.

The disciples in verse 66 ABANDONED Him because His teaching was hard to accept. The twelve CONFESSED Him as the Holy One of God with the words of Eternal Life. Do you see yourself possibly as fitting in with any one of these groups?

How will you respond?

To this one who claims to be the bread of life; you’re ultimate source of life.

- **Take a first or another look at Jesus.** Maybe you will commit to coming back to see what Jesus does and says as we approach Easter.
- **Receive Jesus the bread of life for the very first time.**

Apart from Christ, the Bible describes you as starving, thirsty and spiritually dead. But come to Jesus and you will receive the One who is the bread of life. Maybe God has awakened a hunger and thirst in your soul. It can be satisfied by turning to the Bread of Life. . He died so that you might have life. He died to pay the penalty for your sin. So turn from sin or whatever else you're seeking to satisfy your soul and turn to Him.

- **Keep receiving His Word and way into life every day, hour.**

We need to feed on Jesus' word. We need to recognize His provision. We need to walk with and depend on Him throughout our days. Jesus is the bread of my life as He sustains me in difficult times, hears my complaints, guides my steps, comforts me in pain, opens my eyes, grants me wisdom, brings people into my life to help me.

He brings heaven into my life every day. He intercedes at the right hand of God on my behalf; brings the wisdom of heaven into my soul; provides Holy Spirit's strength; comforts me with a supernatural comfort and a peace that passes all understanding. He is a constant companion who never gets tired, never has to put me on hold; never is too busy.

Will you come back and come near to Jesus your source of life? This time before Easter I invite you to draw near to Jesus through prayer and His Word. And you may discover how starved you've been without Him.