

Fed by Grace | Food in the Gospels

The Bread of Life

John 6.24-40

2.2.14

We're looking at the life of Jesus Christ in the Four Gospels and we've noticed how often **food is a topic** both in the teaching of Jesus and in His lifestyle. He goes to a lot of gatherings and get-togethers and occasions where food and wine are served.

Last week, a very famous event included in Matthew, Mark, Luke AND John i.e. the Feeding of the 5000: Jesus Christ miraculously provided bread and meat for at least 5000 people in the great outdoors. He is the Host for the event. AND this week, John records the events of the next day when Jesus engages His disciples and some of the crowd and helps them process what they saw. And in His interpretation of this "sign" (as He calls it) Jesus Christ refers to Himself AS food, "I am the Bread of Life" (First of seven "I am" statements in John).

We plan to look at this very long speech/dialogue of Jesus Christ, sometimes called **The Bread of Life Discourse**, to look at it for at least two weeks... **BECAUSE**...it's evidently important **AND BECAUSE** it speaks to something facing EVERY single person and that is ...NEED (hunger). ARE YOU IN TOUCH WITH YOUR NEEDS and the needs of those around you?

What do YOU need at this point in your life? Do you think in terms of Needs vs. Wants? And what is Jesus Christ really claiming here when He uses this poignant image, "I am the Bread of Life" – He's evidently claiming to be able to meet some need in us that no ONE or NO THING else CAN meet, so WHAT is this hunger/need and how does He meet it?

Let's think about #1) Hunger Games #2) Seeing and Believing and #3) Being Fed and Flourishing

This was the season of Passover and so when Jesus Christ feeds the people in the wilderness – multiplies bread in the wilderness...of course people can't help but make connections with that huge national holiday and with the ORIGINAL EVENTS of the Exodus. There were even well-known writings among the Jewish rabbis saying that the Prophet Moses promised (Deut 18) that whenever this Prophet came he would also feed

the people in the wilderness...So, earlier in this chapter, after the 5000 are fed, the people conclude (v. 14) "This is truly **the Prophet** who is to come into the world."

And then, with public opinion on His side (and YOU KNOW how important public opinion is!!) with His user reviews so high...**the crowds try to take Jesus Christ by force and make Him King**. (They conclude that He is prophet and king – and Christians see Him as Prophet-Priest and King...sooo...we're almost there...apparently!) BUT, Jesus strenuously opposes being the king (**at least in the way they have in mind!**) and He withdraws again to a mountain alone. And he sends the Twelve across the Sea of Galilee by boat.

Then He comes to them... supersedes the laws of physics and walks to them ON the water. And then they're on the other side of the sea (Once again, in the original Passover events and Exodus **THEY** went through the sea – so the imagery continues [it's in the air!]).

Then the "**seeking**" crowd catches up with them (at a synagogue in Capernaum) **and they ask Him**, "When did YOU get here? Because we didn't see You get in the boats?"

And the crowd **unwittingly** asks the right question (because He **IS** Master of the Elements **and they seem to be asking about His identity**) **BUT**... He sees that **their right question** is coming from **wrong motives (games)** so HE GIVES THEM THIS NON-ANSWER: "you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."

They're playing with Jesus Christ and He sees through the games. They're really NOT so concerned with how He got there or with who He IS but only with their own HUNGER...their own needs. **AND** they don't **even** really see what their needs ARE.

They saw the signs...and they should recognize this UNIQUE moment in history that faces them...BUT... they're NOT **reading** the sign...not responding to it. It'd be like a person staring at a green light and saying, "Oooo! That's pretty color!" (But then not moving their car!)

You act like you see the significance of what's happening but you're NOT responding. And they're saying, "NO! We are responding! We called you THE Prophet...tried to make you king... we think you're really special...now...how bout some more MANNA?"

Why do you work for food that spoils when I can give you food that lasts forever?

They say... “Well... Yeah! Teach US to do what YOU do... what would WE have to do in order to WORK the WORKS of God like you do? You know: ‘give a man a fish and you feed him for a day – teach him how to multiply fish/bread and you feed him for a lifetime’...So, sure! Teach US how to do those tricks...the works of God!”

And in a sense, Jesus says, “Now we’re getting’ somewhere! **Let’s talk about God’s work!** This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom God has sent!”

See, you think I’m special...maybe even “THE Prophet”... maybe even a King who can make your life great... You may think I’m a hero RIGHT UP THERE WITH EVEN MOSES HIMSELF... but I’m telling you: I made Moses (Heb 3.3). I’m the King of all Kings...and you think I may be good for another couple of loaves and fish.

You want Me to fix your political situation... to fill your stomachs... You think I’m great ...almost as great as Moses and the Exodus... WOW! Are your thoughts small?!

See, this is the universal human tendency that C.S. Lewis talked about in his famous quote:

“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” (*The Weight of Glory*)

Moses wasn’t the SOURCE of the Manna... He was only the arrow pointing to ME...but I am the Source... I am bread of Life... I am the **true bread from heaven that gives life to the world! Not just to the Israelites in the desert but the whole world will partake of Me and come to life!...AND YOU WANT A MEAL and a tax-cut.**

Do you remember, from your High School psychology class, MASLOW’S HEIRARCHY of NEED?...It was a pyramid with our basic animal needs at bottom (food, shelter, clothing, air, water - Physiological Needs)... and then SAFETY NEEDS – employment, security, order and then higher up RELATIONAL NEEDS – like family and love, belonging, intimacy, UNTIL all the way at the top – SELF-ACTUALIZATION – creativity, morality, character – TO BE ALL YOU CAN BE...

Jesus Christ is saying to us...there's an even higher level...a pyramid above the pyramid and ONLY I CAN REALIZE THAT FOR YOU – I can actually connect you to God, connect you to life Himself...

AND then He tells us...1) how He will accomplish life and meet our need and 2) HOW we can receive it: 1) He will do – not the tricks of God (like turning stones into bread – like a magician) and not even WHAT THEY CALLED “the works of God” like feeding the masses... I WILL DO THE ACTUAL WILL of God.

I have come into the world to do what NO HUMAN BEING HAS EVER DONE – I have come to LOVE GOD WITH ALL MY HEART, SOUL, MIND AND STRENGTH and to love My neighbor as Myself...I have come down from heaven to do the will of Him who sent Me... I have come to DO YOUR PART OF THE AGREEMENT – to obey God like you've never been able to do...to pay your debt of obedience...to suffer your penalty for disobedience... SO 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...

AND there's the second part – the way people receive this life or to use the metaphor, the way we eat the True Bread is by beholding the Son and believing...this is what God calls us to do...this is the work of God – that we rest! That we stop our tricks and our manipulating and our “this-for-that” kind of obedience (obeying so I can get what I really want ...and think I NEED) and instead, just believe... SEEING THE ONE OBEDIENT MAN DOING THE WILL OF GOD IN OUR PLACE and trusting Him... believing ... resting.

Now how does this play out – how do we take Jesus Christ for who He really is and how do we become fed and flourishing by that?

1) We recognize that there is a realm above Maslow's hierarchy. There is some part of the human being that even the best educated, well adjusted person JUST CAN'T realize/fulfill ...**There is somewhere, submerged in every human heart a hunger**. It's in shallow people and in the deepest kind of spiritually refined and truly enlightened people. It's in that type of fanatic or fundamentalist who really doesn't know why he believes or even really WHAT he believes but he just believes (like a programmed religious robot)...in religious/spiritual people AND it's even there ...even in the most rabid atheist like Freud and Bertrand Russell (“The centre of me is always and eternally a terrible pain—a curious wild pain—a searching for **something beyond what the world contains, something transfigured and infinite**—the beatific vision—God—I do not find it, I do not think it is to be found—but **the love of it is my life**—it's like passionate love

for a ghost. At times it fills me with rage, at times with wild despair, it is the source of gentleness and cruelty and work, it fills every passion that I have—it is the actual spring of life within me.” [1916, Letter to Constance Malleson, “Collette”] *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*).

It's a hunger for something more than paying the bills; more than just a good retirement or even a good marriage ...even above self-actualization. It is a hunger for the Source, for Life Himself.

You have to be convinced of that. And as Lewis said, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” (Mere Christianity)

2) You must take Jesus Christ on His terms and for Who He really is. He is the Savior of sinners and THAT’S WHAT HE OFFERS you. It means that YOU and I have an awful problem that we can’t solve. A solution had to come down from heaven and He did. You may not see that sin is a problem but Jesus Christ is saying, “Let Me define your needs and let Me meet the one NO ONE ELSE CAN SOLVE.

3) Eat the bread by believing Him every day. Go with His program everyday. Simply trust Him and **allow Him to introduce you to a new kind of obedience that comes NOT out of fear and insecurity but INSTEAD stems from confidence and fullness.** I am eternally and infinitely loved because of Jesus therefore I want to become what He has declared me to be...**seeing and believing, I then want to obey!**

4) **WE** say “seeing is believing” and **He** uses those two words **but a bit differently**. His point is, “see Who I am...Who I am promised to be (in all the OT) and Who I claim to be...hear My words...see My works and then trust Me. As you do, your questions will be answered BUT IF YOU WAIT TO HAVE YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED, YOU WILL NEVER TRUST, NEVER TRULY LIVE AND NEVER TRULY KNOW.

5) The crowds AND THE DISCIPLES in the Four Gospels are **people in process**. Jesus is leading them to see who He is. Maybe you too are IN PROCESS and coming to see...**to see and to believe**. That combination of words is often repeated in this important discourse. Don’t give up on the process. Keep trusting with the light you have...keep hungering and keep coming. He will not disappoint you as long as you keep coming.

6) Listen to your own prayers. Are you praying ONLY for your daily needs? **OR** Are you letting **Him** define your needs? Maybe what you THINK are needs (like money and healing and whatever it is you most often pray for) **MAYBE THOSE areas of perceived needs** (stuff near the base of the pyramid) **maybe they've been put there to get your attention**...And maybe they're pry-bars into the real areas of your life. Ask Him instead to use these needs to change the way you see and believe...change your purpose...and connect you to what you really need to WHOM you really need...to God.