

Sermon outline and notes:

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John 6:24-40, 51, 58 “Jesus: The Bread of Life”

Intro. This discourse follows the miracle of the feeding of the 5000. There are several reasons why Jesus performed this miracle. One reason is that the Lord would use the miracle to teach the people a truth about Himself. As John said, the ministry of Jesus was one of “grace and truth” (John 1:17). In grace, our Lord fed the hungry multitude; but in truth, He taught them the Word of God.

What is it that Jesus taught them about Himself based on this miracle? Jesus said in v.35, “I am the bread of life.” The Jews tended to interpret His words quite literally, but Jesus was using a metaphor, an analogy. You see, there are several characteristics of bread that demonstrate spiritual truths about Jesus Christ. For example, bread was the most common, essential food of that day. It sustained life for millions. Without food, we will die. So it is spiritually. Without Christ our souls shall perish (John 3:16). Secondly, bread is a universal food. So it is with Christ. He meets the need of all people everywhere. Third, bread is a daily food. There are some articles of food that we eat only occasionally; others only when they are in season. But bread is something most people eat every day of our lives. In fact, Jesus taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Mt. 6:11). Even so, we need to walk with Christ every day. Our souls need to be nourished by Him and His Word daily.

So with that background, let’s consider some ways that bread helps us to see some truths about our deepest spiritual needs, and how that need can be met through Jesus Christ. So notice first of all:

I. YOU NEED TO OBTAIN THE BREAD OF LIFE

Jesus makes this appeal in v.27, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you....” Jesus is not telling us not to work for our food, for working to provide food for yourself and your family is an honorable thing. Jesus is just contrasting the trouble that the people willingly took in order to get a meal with their indifference as to obtaining bread from heaven. They had traveled all the way from an area near Tiberius on the western shore to Capernaum on the north shore. That was over 10 miles on foot. They went to quite a bit of trouble and work to seek out Jesus. Why? Because they were looking for another meal! Jesus made that clear in v.26, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.” They reiterated this desire when in v.30 they asked Jesus for another sign. Then they suggested the kind of sign they were really looking for. They said in v.31, “Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” They were looking for Jesus to duplicate the miracle of manna, which they called “bread from heaven,” likely a reference to Psalm 78:24 (cf. Ex. 16:4,¹ 15). So we see that these people were more concerned about their stomachs than about their souls. This reminds me of what Jesus said in Mt. 6:31-32, “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek.” The words of Isaiah also come to mind: “Why do you spend money for what is

¹ An early Jewish commentary on Exodus 16:4 says, “As the first redeemer caused manna to descend ... so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend” (*Midrash Rabbah Eccles. 1:9*), quoted by Burge.

not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?” (Isa. 55:2, NASB).

So instead of spending so much time and effort to obtain earthly bread, Jesus calls on us to work to obtain bread from heaven. He says we should labor “for the food which endures to everlasting life....” You see, there are two kinds of food: food for the body, which is necessary but not the most important; and food for the inner man, the spirit, which is essential, and it alone has lasting value. A person is a fool to seek out only the material things of life. A wise person understands that it is more important to seek the things of God.

Notice that we are to “labor” for this bread from heaven. The word “labor” (*ergazomai*) in v.27 is normally translated “work.” It means that we should earnestly work to obtain this spiritual bread that Jesus offers and that we desperately need. Don’t be half-hearted about spiritual matters, but zealous about obtaining spiritual food. Just as you need food to live physically, you need to consider how much you need spiritual food as well.

Things haven’t changed. People still are more concerned about earthly, temporal concerns than about spiritual, eternal concerns. Many people would not miss a meal, but they think nothing of missing a worship service or personal Bible reading where our souls are fed and nourished. Even if they show an interest in Jesus Christ, they do so only for the earthly benefits He is able to give. He can indeed help you get a better education and a better job. He can help you have a better marriage. He can provide for you the food and other daily necessities that you need. However, if your main interest in Jesus has to do with earthly blessings, you need to listen when He says, “Do not labor for the food that perishes....”

Now I want to share with you two reasons why you should you expend effort to obtain the kind of food that Jesus is speaking of here.

A. By It We Have Eternal Life – Note in v.27 that He is talking about “...food which endures to everlasting life....” The food you eat at lunch will not last long, will it? You will probably be hungry again in 3-5 hours. People who ate manna in the wilderness, though it was “bread from heaven,” still died (vv.49, 58). Yet Jesus says that the bread that He gives “endures to everlasting life....” Then in v.47 Jesus says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.” Jesus offers eternal life (v.40), not a life that lasts just 70-90 years.

Two students at a Baptist seminary in Alabama decided they would spend their summer doing evangelistic work in the rural area around Montgomery. One hot day they stopped their car in front of a farmhouse and proceeded up the path through a gantlet of screaming children and barking dogs. When they knocked on the screen door, the woman of the house stopped her scrubbing over a tub and washboard, then brushing her hair and perspiration from her brow she asked them what they wanted. “We would like to tell you how to obtain eternal life,” they answered. The tired homemaker hesitated for a moment and then replied, “Thank you, but I don’t believe I could stand it!” [Illus.#C-12]. She didn’t understand. Eternal life is not just living forever with the same old life we now have. It is living forever with a much, much better kind of life!

I am glad that Jesus offers life that is truly eternal. His “bread” does not give life only for a day. Furthermore, we do not receive it, and then stand in danger of losing it later. In v.39 Jesus assures us that He will keep us to the very end, and raise us up in the great resurrection day. Every believer that is justified *will surely* be glorified! (Romans 8:30). When Jesus starts out with 100 sheep, He’s going to come through with 100 sheep. He will not lose one. V.37 contains some wonderful words from Jesus, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” Peter came to Him and was saved. Later, he denied his Master with an oath. But did Christ “cast him out”? No! And if Peter was not “cast out,” no

Christian ever will be. Praise the Lord!

In contrast, literal earthly bread has no abiding value. A meal sustains life only for a short time. It provides nourishment, but Christ gives eternal life. Why put priority for that which does not last?

Furthermore, we should seek to obtain spiritual bread from Jesus because:

B. By It We Shall Be Satisfied – Jesus says in v.35, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” He says, “I have some bread that will satisfy the hunger of your soul, not just for a few hours, but forever. He also says that He will satisfy the thirst of our souls (cf. John 4). This involves complete and enduring spiritual satisfaction, and peace in your soul.² It is not until you become a Christian that you will understand what Jesus is talking about here.

Could I be speaking to some here today that hunger for this bread? Physical hunger is a bad feeling, but it serves a useful purpose. It motivates us to seek and work for the food we must have to live. Even so, God gives us a spiritual hunger for what we are lacking spiritually. A spirit of dissatisfaction, a hunger in the soul is also a gift of God, to show us our need for this living bread. Are you are hungry for something more than you now have? If you are frequently bored, and unfulfilled, if you lack peace in your soul, then listen to Jesus! A spiritual hunger tells you that you are lacking something in your relationship with God. Don’t try to satisfy that hunger with anything else. It will not bring lasting satisfaction. Hunger and thirst for Christ and be satisfied! Jesus said in Mt. 5:7, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Jesus said in Mt. 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” If you put God first in your life you will not only have the spiritual bread you need for eternal life, but you will have earthly bread as well!

So Jesus says that you need this Bread of Life. Do you have this “bread from heaven?” If not, you should expend any effort necessary to obtain it. You should come to church, read your Bible, pray, and keep seeking, until you obtain this Bread.

But where can you get this Bread? Where can you find bread that will satisfy for both time and eternity? Well let’s move on to my second point and see that we should:

II. LOOK TO THE RIGHT SOURCE OF THIS BREAD OF LIFE

How can you find bread that lasts forever? You will not find the Bread of Life in Islam. You will not find the Bread of Life in Eastern Religion. You will not find the Bread of Life in the sinful pleasures of this world. Where, then, will you find it?

A. It Is Christ that Gives It – Notice in v.27 Jesus spoke of, “...the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you. ...” Here is divine declaration that Jesus Christ is the only One appointed by God to give this spiritual food. In the eternal ages behind us, Christ was set apart as the sole giver of everlasting life.

Then, He gives proof to back up this claim. In the last of v.27 He talks about “the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” In those days the most common seal was made by sealing something with hot

² We should note that He is speaking here according to the fullness and satisfaction there is in Himself, and not according to our imperfect appropriation and appreciation of Him. If a Christian still hungers, it is simply because he is not drawing from the fullness of Christ.

wax impressed by a signet ring. There are 2 primary purposes for setting a seal upon something: to signify ownership, and to attest or confirm that something is genuine. For example, the “Good Housekeeping” seal means that a product is supposed to do what it claims it will do. (See use in Esther 8:8.)

In v.27 the second purpose for a seal applies to Jesus. He is speaking of a seal of approval. Now in what way did God the Father set His seal of approval upon Jesus Christ? Well, He received a sealing of sorts at His baptism, when He began His ministry. He was anointed and sealed by the Holy Spirit, which was accompanied by a voice from the Father, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (See also John 1:32-34 and 3:34). Secondly, the Father had set His seal of approval upon Jesus Christ by virtue of the many miracles that He had done by the power of the Spirit, including the great miracle done only the day before. The feeding of the 5,000 should have reminded them of how God used Moses to feed “bread from heaven” to the multitude in the wilderness. A miracle like that pointed to the fulfillment of the prophecy in Dt. 18:15-18, where God said He would send a great prophet like Moses. God had surely set His seal of approval upon Jesus! Furthermore, Peter said in Acts 10:38 says, “...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” There is no one in recorded history who did so many miracles before so many witnesses as Jesus. God clearly set His seal upon Jesus. You can believe in Jesus with confidence when He says, “I am the bread of life” (v.35).

Now let’s move a step further. Not only does Christ give this bread of life, but from our text we also see that:

B. He Himself Is that Bread! - We see from v.33 that this Bread is a Person. There Jesus says, “For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Just as manna came down from heaven and gave life, even so Jesus came down from heaven to give eternal life! The Father’s provision for a dying world was to send from heaven His only begotten Son. And then in v.35 we see that Christ is that Person.³ He says, “I am the bread of life....” The Lord places Himself before us under the figure of bread. According to the form of the sentence in the original (I myself), Jesus completely identifies Himself with this bread of life. That is why Paul said in Col. 3:4 that “Christ ... is our life....” Look to none other for an abundant life on earth and an eternal life in heaven.

So far we have seen that we should seek the bread of heaven even more than earthly bread. We have learned that Jesus Christ is the One that God has appointed to provide that bread. In fact, He Himself is that bread. How then can we get this bread from Jesus? What must we do? Well that leads to my last point:

III. HOW WE ARE TO RECEIVE THIS BREAD OF LIFE

V.28 states the issue here, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” This was spoken in response to the appeal of Jesus in v.27 that we work to obtain the food that does not perish, but endures unto eternal life. They felt that something was required of them, but what that something was they did not know.⁴ The people picked up the word “labor” and misinterpreted it to

³ This is the first of 7 “I am” statements in John.

⁴ To the Jews, salvation and life comes by works and effort. So the form of their question reflected their belief. It was the old self-righteousness of the natural man, who is ever occupied with his own doings. The carnal mind is flattered when it is consciously doing something for God. He imagines that salvation is due him, because he has earned it. Man

mean they had to work for salvation. Steeped in legalistic religion, they thought they had to “do something” to merit eternal life. It is similar to the question of the Philippian jailer, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The priest answers, “Rites and ceremonies!” The typical person says, “Good works.” The thinker says, “Culture, education.” The moralist says, “Live a moral life.” But Christ says there is one “work” that is needful, and what He said must have surprised them. Notice that we obtain this heavenly bread:

A. Not by our Works – Jesus indicates here that this bread is not received by works. Rather, it is a gift. Manna from heaven was a gift from God. Even so, the Bread of Life that Jesus gives is a gift freely given. Notice in the last of v.27 that Jesus speaks of bread that, “the Son of Man will give [*didomi*] you.” Then in v.32 Jesus said, “...My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.” Likewise, Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” If it be a gift, then this heavenly bread is received:

B. By Faith in Christ – At least 3 times He talks about this. Jesus says in v.29, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” Then he says in the last of v.35, “he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” Likewise, in the last of v.40 Jesus says, “everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” In blessed simplicity of language, He stated that the one thing that God requires of sinners is that they believe on the One whom He has sent into the world to meet their deepest need. Instead of outward acts, God is first concerned with inward faith. Christ is the Savior appointed by God, and faith in Him is that which God approves, and without which *nothing else* can be acceptable in His sight. To the Philippian jailer Paul replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” Yes, only believe.

Why is faith so important? It is because salvation is not based on what *you* can do, but upon what *Christ* has done. This is affirmed in the last of v.51, “...the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” What does He mean? He had already come from heaven to be born in human flesh (John 1:14). He knew that He had to give His flesh as a sacrifice, to die on a cross. That was the only way eternal life could be given to us! So accept the Work already done, the finished work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf.

Are you willing to abandon your own doings, your own righteousness, and to accept His? You must not trust in yourself, but in Christ. Is the finished work of Christ the only rock on which your soul is resting for eternal life, or are you still secretly trusting to your own doings for salvation? Your prayers, your offerings, your church-goings, your good works, your efforts at moral living will not save you. Christ is the One who saves you based on His sacrifice on the Cross. Trust in Him. That is the only way to have eternal life.

Yet I am not talking about mere mental assent. True faith leads to action. It will lead you to take the next two steps spoken of by Jesus. We obtain the Bread of Life:

C. By Coming to Christ - Notice how coming to Christ & believing on Christ are linked together here in the last of v.35, “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” Believing in Jesus, and coming to Jesus go hand in hand. Once you believe in Christ, then you will come to Him. In that day they could literally come up to Him. Now you must approach Him in prayer.

seeks to bring God into the humbling position of debtor to him. But the essence of what they were saying was this, “What do we have to do to have this life you are speaking of. How do we get this “bread”?”

If I made an offer that I would give \$5 to anyone who comes to me and asks for it, who is it that will come up to me after the service and ask for the \$5 bill? It would be the ones who believe!

Even so, a person cannot be saved unless he comes to Jesus by faith, and through prayer. This involves turning away from sin and self, and turning away from any Christless religion, and coming to Christ. It is like a plant turning its leaves toward the sun. In v.37 Jesus assures you that if you come to Him, seeking that bread of life, He will accept you, and never reject you. Your life is secure in Him.⁵

Finally, as we believe in Christ, and come to Him, then we are saved:

D. By Receiving this Bread – In vv.53-58 of His sermon, Jesus illustrated coming and believing by speaking about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. This means that you must receive Him within, just as you receive food and drink. This gift of Jesus, and the spiritual bread He offers, must be *personally* received. Bread will never do you any good if you do not receive it into yourself. Even so, John 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” Christ will never force-feed you. You must willingly receive Christ by faith.

Conclusion: You need the Bread of Life that I have spoken of today. Jesus is the only One who can give it to you. But your sin nature, your pride, and the devil will fight against a decision to come to Jesus and ask for this bread by faith. That is why Jesus said in v.27 that we are to work, “...for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you...” It is a struggle. It is not easy to turn from sin, and come to Christ. But I appeal to you today, come to Jesus. He is the only one who will satisfy the deepest longings of your soul. He is the only one who can give you eternal life. Come to Jesus today! Don’t delay.

Sources: Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Oliver B. Greene (vv.26-32), *The Gospel According to John, Vol. 1* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1966); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); Herschel H. Hobbs *John: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965); Alexander Maclaren (v.28-29), *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); John Macarthur, Jr., *Are You a True Disciple?: Study Notes on John 6* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1990); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948); Warren W. Wiersbe, “*Be*” *Series: New Testament Volumes 1 & 2, John* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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⁵ Burge says, “The verb ‘cast out’ (Gk. *ekballo*) refers regularly to something that is already ‘in’ (see 2:15; 9:35; 12:31). Therefore the idea is not about Jesus’ welcoming people, but about Jesus’ keeping people whom the Father has given into his care. This interpretation is confirmed by 6:38: Jesus will not lose a single one of those who have come to him (cf. 10:1-18).

