

JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:16-40

Key Verse: 6:35

“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.’”

The events in today’s passage take place after Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Jesus explains the meaning of it. It was a lot more than a free meal; it was a great lesson about Jesus. Jesus’ signs always point to him. Whenever we experience God’s work, we need to come to Jesus and know him better. Then we can grow to be like him. This is what Jesus really wants for us. In this passage Jesus walks on the water and then engages in a conversation with the crowd. Through both his miracle and his words, Jesus reveals his true identity. Let’s learn who Jesus really is.

First, “It is I; don’t be afraid” (16-21). Jesus walking on the water is one of the seven miraculous signs in John’s gospel. It has significant meaning. After Jesus had fed the five thousand, they were really excited and even crazy. They began to have small committee meetings to discuss their wonderful new future with Jesus. They decided unanimously to make Jesus king. In order to become a king, crowd support is crucial. Any leader who has ability to solve financial problems is guaranteed to be popular. To the crowd, it seemed that Jesus was the right person to be king. So they tried to make him king by force. Jesus’ disciples must have been excited about this too, and looked forward to their important positions in Jesus’ newly formed government. Jesus knew what the crowd intended. So he withdrew to a mountain by himself to listen to the voice of God in solitude (15; Mk 6:46). Jesus clearly said “No” to the world’s demand. But he always said “Yes” to the Father.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum (16). Now it was dark, and Jesus had not joined them (17). They were exhausted after serving the crowd, and their dream of Jesus’ kingship was not being realized. So they might have been disheartened. Without Jesus, they began to be fearful and anxious. Furthermore, a strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough

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(18). They rowed with great effort, for a long time, but only made it three or four miles (19a). They felt that everything was against them. When they were about halfway across the lake, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened (19b). For a person to walk on water defies the laws of nature. Theoretically, if a person moved fast enough on the water, surface tension would keep them from sinking. But practically, it is impossible. Yet Jesus came to them walking on the water.

What is the meaning of this? It reveals that Jesus is God in the flesh, who has almighty power. Jesus is the Creator God. Jesus is the Sovereign Ruler over nature. To this Jesus, nothing is impossible. Jesus changed water into wine. Jesus healed a royal official's son who was at the point of death. Jesus healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Jesus gave sight to the blind. Jesus even raised the dead. Jesus is not a mere man; Jesus is God. Why did Jesus come to his disciples at this time? Jesus knew that they were in danger. To Jesus, they were very precious. They were called to succeed his gospel ministry. Jesus came to protect them and to guide them. Jesus is always mindful of his servants and still protects and guides us today.

Though Jesus came to his disciples, they did not recognize him and were frightened. How did Jesus help them? Let's read verse 20. **“But he said to them, ‘It is I; don't be afraid.’”** When they heard Jesus' voice, all of their fear and anxiety vanished. Peace and joy filled their hearts. They willingly took Jesus into their boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading. When Jesus was with them, everything went well. Jesus is always willing to come and be with us. Sometimes in our life journey, we are terrified by events or problems and do not recognize Jesus' coming. Yet even when we hit rock bottom, Jesus does not rebuke us; he comes with his words of comfort, “It is I; don't be afraid.” Realizing that Jesus is with us makes a big difference. If we feel that Jesus is not with us, we are fearful. The world looks dark, and everything seems to be against us. But when we realize that Jesus is with us, we are not afraid, even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps 23:4). As we heard through her testimony, Missionary Birgit Pierce experienced victory over death when Jesus was with her. Jesus says to each of us, **“It is I; don't be afraid.”**

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Second, “do not work for food that spoils, but...” (22-29). When Jesus fed the five thousand, it was a divine revelation of who Jesus is. People in the crowd should have understood the meaning of the sign and grown spiritually. Instead, they began to degenerate. Most of them had lived in poverty, and eating the bread and fish to their fill was an unusual and memorable treat. The next day, being hungry again, they returned to the place where Jesus had fed them. But Jesus was not there. They did not know that Jesus had joined his disciples, walking on the water. So they wandered around in a desperate search for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” (25) They were so happy to see Jesus, thinking, “Now, we will get bread.” It seems that Jesus would welcome them in their desperate need.

How did Jesus answer? He said, **“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”** (26). When they came to Jesus at first, their motive was very pure. They had a desire to know Jesus. However, when they ate bread and were satisfied, they lost spiritual desire. Their hearts were consumed with the desire for bread. They had no more concern about Jesus, but only about bread. They saw Jesus as a kind of vendor who would grant free bread endlessly on demand. Their motive in coming to Jesus had completely degenerated. This is the exact depiction of fallen mankind. When we are hungry we seek God wholeheartedly. But after receiving material blessing we lose spiritual desire and become complacent. We lose our dignity as human beings and live as mere flesh.

How did Jesus help them? Jesus said in verse 27a, **“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”** Jesus taught them to have the right purpose of life. **“Do not work for food that spoils”** does not mean that they should not have jobs or do business. It means that their hope and purpose should not be in fleeting material things, but in Jesus himself, who gives eternal life. Here **“food that spoils”** refers not only to physical food, but to all the perishing things of the world, including honor, power, academic achievement, social position and the like. Human beings are different than animals. Human beings need meaning, and things of lasting value. Human beings have dignity and should live a good life. What is a good life? The late Chuck Colson wrote a book called

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“The Good Life: Seeking Purpose, Meaning and Truth in Your Life.” He seeks to answer the questions, “Who am I?” “Why am I here?” “What is my purpose?” “How can my life be meaningful?” He finds that Jesus answers all these questions.

Many people give their hearts to their physical well-being. They work very hard to gain money, worldly honor and power. But they are lazy in seeking intangible, spiritual things. Jesus wants us to understand what is most important in life. So Jesus said, **“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.”** Apostle John understood this and wrote later in 1 John 2:17, “The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.” Solomon once had all the glory, power, wealth and honor of the world. But he confessed, “Meaningless, meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!” (Ecc 1:2). He said in Ecclesiastes 11:9 and 12:1, **“...you who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment...Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them....’”** His conclusion was, **“Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind”** (Ecc 12:13). The Bible constantly urges us not to work for food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life. 1 Peter 1:24-25 say, **“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.”**

How did the crowd respond to Jesus’ teaching? They asked him, **“What must we do to do the works God requires?”** (28) They were ready to do anything as long as they could get bread. They thought the work of God was something they should do with their own effort. Jesus answered, **“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent”** (29). God wants most of all, for us to have faith in Jesus. Hebrews 11:6a says, **“And without faith it is impossible to please God....”** Romans 1:17 says, **“The righteous will live by faith from first to last.”** Whatever we do: housework, childcare, professional work, study, ministry or whatever—the motive and purpose must spring from faith in Jesus. The work of God is the work of faith.

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Third, Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life” (30-40). Jesus taught the crowd what God really wanted for them, that is, to believe in the one he had sent. But the crowd was not interested in that. They were only concerned about getting bread. So they asked for a sign of bread from heaven to eat, quoting Scripture (30-31). Actually, they had already experienced that Jesus fed them miraculously. Why, then, did they ask for another sign? They were trying to pressure Jesus to feed them continually, and in return, they would believe in him as the Messiah. It was a kind of deal. Many people want to make a deal with Jesus. They say to Jesus, “You do something for me first, and then I will do something for you.” Though Jesus has done so many things, even giving his life for us, they want Jesus to do something more before believing in him. In fact, they do not take a relationship with Jesus seriously. They only want to use Jesus for their own benefit. In verse 32 Jesus taught them that manna was not given by Moses, but by God the Father. God the Father gives true bread from heaven, which gives life to the world (33). The crowd said, **“Sir, always give us this bread”** (34). They did not understand the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ words, but persisted in their demand for bread.

We can understand the crowd. For those who suffer from hunger, obtaining bread is a serious matter. So many people in the world are starving in places like North Korea and Africa. The United Nations estimates that about five million children die from malnutrition every year. Worldwide food production is sufficient to feed everyone in the world. But food is not distributed properly, mainly due to people’s greed and selfishness. That is why Jesus taught us to pray, **“Give us today our daily bread”** (Mt 6:11). Jesus understood how people suffer from hunger. So he fed the large crowd. But if we only try to solve the problem of physical bread, we miss the deeper issue. Once, Jesus fasted for forty days. He was hungry. Everything must have looked like bread. At that moment Satan tempted him to use his power to make bread for survival. Jesus answered, **“It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’”** (Mt 4:4). This means that as serious as the bread problem is, a broken relationship with God is even more serious. Jesus wanted the crowd to know that it is more important to hear God’s word and believe than to seek bread for their survival.

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When the crowd asked, “**always give us this bread,**” what did Jesus say? Let’s read verse 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.’”** “I am the bread of life” means that Jesus is the life-giver (1:4), and the sustainer of life (Heb 1:3). “Bread” refers to what is essential for life. As we need bread for our physical bodies, we need Jesus for our spiritual life. Without Jesus we cannot have eternal life or even sustain our lives. But Jesus promised that whoever comes to him and believes in him has eternal life. They will never go hungry or thirsty. There are two kinds of hunger: physical hunger and spiritual hunger. When we hunger physically, food provides nutrition and strength that our bodies need and gives us joy and satisfaction. This is why good cooks are very popular, and eating fellowship is very important. Likewise, when we hunger spiritually, we need spiritual food. Spiritual food is Jesus, who is the Word of God. When we feed on Jesus, he provides health, strength, joy, meaning, and all the good things we need. When Jesus feeds us we are truly satisfied.

One young woman grew up happily in a Christian family. But when she was 18 years old, her mother called with the news that she was leaving her father. The pain of this was too much for the young woman to bear. She blamed her mother for breaking their family and could not forgive her. She tried to hide her pain behind a cute smile. She pretended that everything was alright. She ate delicious food to comfort herself. But she did not find comfort in food; she only gained weight. At her father’s suggestion, she went on the television show, “The Biggest Loser.” In the midst of taping the show, she had an accident and chipped her tooth. She lost her smile. She felt that her facade was being stripped away, and her inner anguish was laid bare. Utterly helpless, she wanted to leave the show and run away and hide forever. She cried out to Jesus in her pain. Then the Spirit of God helped her realize that though she could do nothing to save herself, Jesus was right there to help her. She surrendered to Jesus. It was the moment she began to live a Jesus-centered life. She stayed in the competition only by faith in Jesus. In the end, she lost 110 pounds and won the prize for losing the most weight. She began to forgive her mother and to make a new love relationship with her. In her anguish of soul, food could not satisfy this young woman, but when she met Jesus, she was truly satisfied.

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Jesus really wanted the crowd to believe in him and have life. But he knew that even though they had seen his divine work they did not believe in him. Jesus might have been discouraged. But in that moment he acknowledged the Father's sovereignty. So he said, **“All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away”** (37). Jesus taught that he came not to do his own will, but the Father's will (38). The Father's will is that Jesus would lose none of all that the Father gave him, but would give them eternal life and raise them up at the last day (39-40). Here we can find the way of true joy and satisfaction. We try to find joy and satisfaction in many ways, such as eating delicious food, watching movies, going to parties, online gaming, sports, chasing boys and girls, and so on. But these things do not last. We always feel empty and dissatisfied. Only Jesus can give us lasting joy and true satisfaction. Jesus welcomes anyone who comes to him. Jesus never drives people away. Jesus leads us to eternal life. Jesus promises to raise us up at the last day and give us eternal victory. Thank you, Jesus! Let's come to Jesus.