

The Bread of Life

John 6:22-40

Let me ask you a simple question. How much time do you spend taking care of your earthly life? In any given day, how much time do you spend on things like washing and taking care of your body? How long do you spend in the shower? How much time fixing your hair? Shaving, brushing your teeth. Dressing yourself, preparing and eating food, and attending to all the natural functions of life, perhaps exercising. A lot of hours, isn't it? Probably more than two hours every day. For some people, much more. And if you add the hours you sleep to that total, you get a far greater amount of time. Day after day. Without fail.

How much time do you spend on business and work? We normally think in terms of an eight hour day. For some, it is more than that.

Let me ask you a related question. How much time and effort do you expend in caring for your soul? Again, issues of cleaning, nourishing and feeding, and exercise are all relevant. You might spend an hour making all the necessary outward preparations required to look and feel your best in public company. But what about the preparations needed to maintain the health of your soul?

Indeed, how is your soul? That is a question we often don't think about enough, but I want you to do so as you listen to the sermon this morning, I want to address the issues of your soul, as you sit in this room adorned with your best outward appearance produced by all your necessary church preparations?

In our text this morning, Jesus encounters a group of people with very serious symptoms of soul-sickness. He exposes, first of

all, their horribly misplaced motivation for following him. They are a group of people who had seen his last miracle. They were, no doubt, among the 5000 fed by Jesus' miraculous hand of supernatural power. And they followed him to the other side of the sea.

v.22-25

But they came for all the wrong reasons. And it is by contrast with those wrong reasons that we can identify,

I. THE PROPER MOTIVATION FOR FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

v.26

They followed Jesus because their bellies were full! Those words of Jesus are a strong and pointed rebuke, a sharp and cutting condemnation of their carnal-mindedness. It was a sad exposure of their true motivations. "You followed me because you at a lot of bread and fish and were filled up."

They made a religious profession, didn't they? They gave the appearance of devotion and sincerity, didn't they? But only because Jesus had filled their bellies with good food! They followed Jesus only because they could get for themselves.

Does that sound familiar? It's the WIIFM principle. "What's in it for me?"

That is the battle cry of our age. "What's in it for me?" That's how people determine what religion to follow. That's how people decide what church to attend. That's how people determine which of God's laws they will abide by and which one's they will choose to ignore and disregard. "What's in it for me?"

And preachers seeking to be popular often dish up a healthy dish of food precisely as ordered by such self-absorbed consumers of a religious product which we call modern Christianity. Indeed, that time has come of which Paul warned Timothy, as the NIV translates it,

2 Tim. 4:3 “The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”

They will feed them what they want, they will tell them what they want to hear, to satisfy their own selfish and self-centered cravings and longings. The point is very clear and very easy to understand, though painfully difficult to apply to ourselves,

A. We should not seek God merely because of earthly benefits.

But do you? That’s the hard question.

What is your motivation? Is it your own benefit? Your own satisfaction or well-being or prosperity? Are you motivated by the pursuit of your own happiness, or peace?

The great church father Augustine remarks how seldom “Jesus is sought for the sake of Jesus.” Instead, so often it is, that we seek Jesus for our own sake.

There are many who make a religious profession merely for the sake of what they can get, indeed, no one has ever come to me or to the church requesting food or money who didn’t make some form of religious confession.

We should not seek God merely because of earthly benefits.

You should not come to church with your own desires and needs foremost upon your mind. Instead, as Jesus shows so clearly,

B. We must maintain an eternal perspective on life which focuses upon Jesus Christ.

Look at that perspective,

v.27

“Do not labor for the food which perishes.” Now, don’t take that out of context, and think that you can give up your earthly labors altogether. Just stop working. Maybe you’d like to do that, but that’s not the point. The point is priority. And the great comparison. By comparison to our earthly labors by which we obtain our livelihood and are able to buy perishable food to eat every day, by comparison, we are to labor all the more diligently for the food that endures to everlasting life.

In other words, work hard to obtain the necessary food to nourish your soul. Work hard to provide those things which bring satisfaction to your soul. Work hard at exercising your soul, even as you might work hard exercising your body.

What am I talking about? Simple things. Reading the Bible, digging in it deeply for hidden treasures. Day after day. Wrestle earnestly in prayer. Take part in worship, by yourselves, with your family, and with the congregation of God’s people. Those are the means of grace, the means by which we grow in grace.

That’s why the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is so important, and so beneficial, because it keeps the imagery of a meal. It keeps the symbolism of food and speaks so clearly of spiritual food.

There are no shortcuts. No easy ways to keep your soul

healthy. Just consistent, diligent labor. And just as you labor to put food on your table every night, labor to put food on the table of your soul, that you will be well nourished.

There is a great promise here. If you will labor and work hard to enjoy this spiritual food, Jesus will give it to you! And he will give it to you as the one whom God has anointed and sealed as his only begotten son.

Again,
v.27

That's an eternal perspective, and it is offered far and wide. But notice the very common misunderstanding about such spiritual blessings. Notice what these men ask. They ask the same question people are asking today.

v.28

“What shall we do?” Ultimately, that question is this, “What shall I do to be saved?”

It seemed to them, as it did to me earlier in my life, and as it seems to so many people today, that you have to DO something to get into heaven. You have to do something in order to become a Christian. You go to church. You give your tithe. You keep the commandments. You do what is good. And you will go to heaven.

So what shall you do? How did Jesus answer? Actually, he said, you don't DO anything. Instead, you believe. You receive the gift.

Eph. 2: 8 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--9 not by works, so that no-one can boast.”

And, Rom. 4:5 “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.”

v.29

Now, Jesus is using their own language of works, and you should not be confused by thinking that “believing” is itself a good work that earns for us our own salvation. It doesn't. There is no merit in our believing, nothing that earns us anything. Rather, faith is the humility of accepting the gift of God with empty arms. And Jesus says even that faith is a work of God!

Even that faith, with which you embrace Christ, even that faith is a work of God's free grace. And we speak of it in terms of believing, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone.

And so I say to everyone of you who is thinking that in order to gain an entrance into heaven that you have to do something, the truth is that you do not do anything. Instead, you accept what Jesus has done for you. And rest upon him alone for salvation, and not in your own righteousness. So cast aside all your pride, confess your guilt and need, and humbly believe.

How sad it is, how tragic, that those who reject Jesus Christ work very hard to try to achieve their own sense of peace and satisfaction. They work very hard to store up for themselves treasures on earth. They work very hard to provide food, not realizing that it all perishes.

And so I say to you,

Mat. 6:19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in

and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

That message from Jesus didn't immediately sink in, because the reaction of the people was quite poor. Before they would believe, they wanted a sign. So they asked Jesus for one.

v.30

From this we can see,

II. THE PROPER USE OF MIRACULOUS SIGNS.

When Jesus says, “Believe,” it is not proper to say, “Well, prove it to me.” That is the essence of rebellion and stubborn pride. Especially when Jesus has already given them so many signs! The request for the sign came from men who wished to retain their autonomy. That is, they would decide for themselves what was true and what wasn't. They would retain their own right to decide. Instead of surrendering their minds and submitting to the knowledge of Christ as he revealed himself.

Signs are necessary because of the weakness of our faith, and in his great mercy, God has given us many signs to strengthen our faith. And they should strengthen our faith. But be careful, to avoid this error of asking for additional signs.

A. It is improper to demand miraculous signs from God while rejecting the works he has already performed.

Which is precisely what we have here.

v.30

They then refer to an OT sign, and say to Jesus, what do you have to add to that?

v.31

It seems that dead teachers have more authority than living ones, to these men who want to proclaim their loyalty to Moses as a defense against submitting to Christ. And Jesus turns their argument right around against them, by saying,

v.32

Jesus' words must have startled them. Moses didn't give you the manna. God did! And even further, Jesus seems to be saying, the bread that you received in the OT, the manna, wasn't the true spiritual bread that you can receive now, the “TRUE bread from heaven.”

The reality is that that manna, that bread from heaven which fed the people of the Old Testament, was undoubtedly true food for the body. But, as a gift from God, as a miracle from God, it also represented something far better, the true spiritual food which nourishes the soul. And in that illustration, in that image, the manna represents Jesus.

So, they already had a sign! In fact, many signs. All through the OT God had performed miraculous signs on behalf of his people. And Jesus would not give another sign to people who had chosen not to believe in his earlier signs. In that regard, Jesus would later say this,

Mat.12:38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” 39 But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the

preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. 42 "The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here."

Jesus was rather harsh in his refusal to grant additional signs. Mat.16:1 Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. 2 He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; 3 "and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. 4 "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed."

The point is, he has given us his signs! All that are necessary. And if you reject what God has already revealed you have no right to demand more. Do you want a pointed illustration of that? Consider the rich man and Lazarus, found in,

Luke 16:27 Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 'for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' 29 "Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' 30 "And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

Likewise, as we studied a few weeks ago,

John 5:46 "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

The signs are already given! And,

B. All of God's miraculous signs point to Jesus.
All of them!

Beginning with the sign of the manna, as we've seen.
v.32-33

Jesus is the bread of God. He gives life! Not merely physical life that could be sustained by that manna, but spiritual life. Eternal life. Real life. Jesus gives it. And, of course, the crowd says that they want that life.

v.34

At this point, Jesus is able to be extremely explicit, and gives as clear an invitation of the gospel as you find anywhere in Scripture.

v.35

Remember how this conversation started. Jesus said, "Do not labor for the food which perishes." What really matters is spiritual food, and Jesus is that spiritual food! So feed on Jesus, and you will never hunger! Believe on Jesus, and you will never thirst.

Such a marvelous eternal perspective, a focus of life that is fixed upon Jesus. A recognition of what is really important. And what really satisfies.

Jesus is talking about life. He is talking about salvation. Skipping ahead just a bit,

John 6:47-51

And to be even more graphic, more dramatic, in words that have such a direct connection with the Lord's Supper,

John 6:53-58

Now, let me stop for a moment and step back, and ask, "Why stress these sorts of things?"

And the answer for us is that we are too shortsighted in our view of life. We get all wrapped up in the busyness of daily life, the daily routines, responsibilities and activities. I know that I do, and I don't think that I'm very unusual in that. We get all wrapped up in the affairs of our physical life, and sometimes, particularly when bad health or specific struggles comes to you, those affairs are all consuming. I've known people whose entire lives were consumed with the simple issues of staying alive.

And we need to get beyond that. Whether young or old, in good health or poor, whether you enjoy a generous provision of this world's wealth or struggle to make ends meet, you have to be absolutely convinced that Jesus is the bread of life. That in Jesus, you will find life. In Jesus, you will find nourishment to remain alive. And in Jesus, with your eyes fixed upon Jesus, ultimately, you will not hunger nor thirst. No matter what you might experience in the flesh.

Don't let your temporary hungers and thirsts deceive you. Don't let your physical pains and weaknesses deceive you. Your life goes beyond them, for Jesus is your life. And so, as you study Jesus and his miracles in the book of John, believe in him. Believe in him unto eternal life, if you have never before done so. And you who are believers already, believe in him as the source and strength of your life, and as the object of your life, the very

reason you are alive and exist at all. Fix your eyes upon Jesus.

And as you do so, gain,

III. THE PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF ETERNAL LIFE.

Here's where doctrine becomes so very important, and so very practical. Because this doctrine of eternal life speaks to you in the midst of your current earthly struggles. And it raises you above them, and fixes your heart on something greater than this life. Eternal life.

The true doctrine is this.

A. All those who believe in Jesus, but only those, shall have eternal life.

And that means, they will be resurrected. Their bodies shall rise from their graves at the last day.

v.40

What is the practical use of that? Well, have any of you lost a dear loved one who died in the Lord? Have you grieved the death of someone you loved deeply? Then you know the practical use of good theology--it is your comfort in that grief, your ONLY comfort.

v.40

Do any of you fear what lies ahead of you, fearing the dangers of this world or fearing the experience of death or even dying? Do any of you fear that, perhaps, you will not be saved since you have committed horrible sins?

v.40

There are those who don't believe, and don't be mistaken, as we saw in verse 36. And if you are among those this morning, I

can only tell you this, that if you die without Christ, without any commitment of saving faith, then you shall face the judgment of eternal death, eternal condemnation. And to escape that sentence of God's wrath and justice, you must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And you must do it today, while you are still alive in the body.

All those who believe in Jesus, but only those, shall have eternal life. But let's go one step deeper, in order to give you who do believe great assurance and confidence that your salvation is certain.

v.37-38

There is, in these verses, great doctrine. The great doctrines which we call the five points of Calvinism, the doctrines of grace which we call the reformed faith. These are the great doctrines that define our church as reformed and presbyterian. But that's not my interest this morning. My interest this morning is to allow these doctrines to give to you great hope and assurance, and to stir you to sing God's praise as you worship him.

The doctrine is this.

B. All those who believe in Jesus have been chosen by the Father and given to Jesus Christ.

The obvious point is this, there is a group of people identified by the father and well-known to Jesus. In fact, Jesus is fully aware that God gives to him this group of people. And those whom the Father gives to Jesus will come to Jesus. The whole group. Everyone in the group. In other words, those who accept Jesus and believe in his name are the ones whom God has chosen and given to Jesus. And Jesus will receive every one of them.

Who are those people? The Bible uses many words to describe and define them. How about "the sheep."

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep...14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep."

The sheep. And the shepherd. And who are those sheep? They are the elect, the chosen of God.

2Ti 2:10 "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

In the mind of God, there is a defined and perfectly ordered group of people who will be saved. And they will be saved because God has chosen them to be saved. And because God has made that choice, because the ultimate cause of that choice is found entirely in God's good pleasure and not in any degree whatsoever found in us, we are left to do nothing but sing his praise!

And if you rightly understand the doctrine of God's election, the doctrine of God's choosing those who will be saved from before the foundation of the world, if you rightly understand that doctrine, you will be left humbled in the dust at the feet of Christ and able to do nothing but sing to the glory of his grace!

Let me read one such song of praise, perhaps the greatest doxology which we find in Scripture,

Eph.1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the

heavenly places in Christ.”

And there is another great spiritual blessing which I’ve hardly even mentioned yet. And this, too, is intensely practical. It is the blessing of perseverance. You see, Jesus makes it so perfectly clear that,

C. All those who have been chosen by the Father shall persevere to the end.

v.39-40

We call the doctrine the perseverance of the saints. It’s the “P” in tulip, the fifth of the so-called five points of Calvinism. This verse is the very definition of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Every single person whom the Father has chosen will come to Christ and be saved. Every single person who comes to Christ to be saved will be saved. And every single person who comes to Christ to be saved shall persevere until the end and be raised up to everlasting life.

There is an unbroken chain, as Paul speak so clearly in, Rom. 8:29 “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

And what is the practical benefit of such a great doctrine? Well, if you know much about the rest of Romans 8, you know what it is.

Rom.8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all

day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Dear ones, let these words encourage and strengthen your souls this evening, no matter what the distress or tribulation of your life might be. Let these words bring health and joy to your souls, as you sing God’s praise.

So I say to you,

John 6:27 “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, because God the Father has set His seal on Him... 29 This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

John 6:35 “[Jesus says,] I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst...39 This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. 40 And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Therefore, nothing, nothing, nothing, “shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”