



SERMON TITLE: Bread of Life  
SCRIPTURE: John 6:22-59

DATE: January 12, 2020  
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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

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I would not consider myself a "foodie." I'm far from knowing the best restaurants and unique 'hole in the wall' places around town, but I do love to eat. Always have. But there is a problem. I don't necessarily love to eat wholesome food. I am what people call a 'grazer.' I will just continually graze all day, taking small bites of this and samples of that. And my kryptonite? Sweets. I have no qualms about eating dessert before a meal or maybe even a few times a day. I have a sweet tooth and am especially a sucker for pies and cobblers.

The problem, however, is that as delicious as these foods are, they are not very nourishing. Ok, maybe not nourishing at all. The nutritional value is close to none. But since I favor grazing and dessert more than wholesome meals, by the time dinner actually rolls around I am not very hungry. I have already filled myself with tasty things, but not the best things. Maybe you can relate?

The passage we will be looking at today has a similar scenario. Jesus is offering himself to the crowds as the 'main course' but they seem pretty content to feed on things that bring temporary fillings and won't last long. Sure, they're good at the moment, but they're not the best option when it comes to nourishment and especially our spiritual nourishment. They have become accustomed to grazing and don't seem to have much room left for the more wholesome meal of taking in Jesus.

Verses 22-25 The Crowds Search for Jesus: Following one of Jesus' most well-known miracles, the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus departs and heads towards Capernaum. The crowds follow.

Verses 26-27 An Unusual Greeting: The very same crowds of hungry people that were met yesterday with compassion, teaching, and a miracle are today met with a different and unexpected response from Jesus. They have come to receive breakfast after having been filled by such an incredible dinner. Jesus however, reveals their motives for seeking him as earthly and temporary in nature and then challenges them to seek beyond what can fill their earthly needs and begin to fill their eternal ones. At this point, the crowds are following him not because of who he is, but because of what he's done. Their motive seems to be more about what they can physically get from the "miracle man", rather than spiritual wholeness from the God-man.

Verses 28-51 Old Testament Foreshadowings: The crowds, in response to not being met with more food, but instead a challenge, essentially ask Jesus to prove himself saying, "What sign do you do, that we may see and believe you?" They then go on to quote the narrative of the Hebrew people when Moses was leading them out of slavery in Egypt and how God made bread rain from Heaven in order to sustain and nourish His people. Jesus' miracle of multiplication yesterday wasn't "enough" of a sign and it apparently didn't hold much of a flame to making bread rain from Heaven. They want a sign like that.

Jesus responds in verse 35, "I am the bread of life." Jesus expounds the Old Testament metaphor. The imagery of bread coming down from Heaven to fill earthly hunger in the Exodus narrative is now being trumped by the bread of life

coming down from Heaven to fill our spiritual hunger. Jesus is the bread from Heaven, but it is not our bellies He fills, it is our souls.

Verses 52-59 From confused to offended: The crowds are confused. Not only because they can trace Jesus' earthly ancestry to Mary and Joseph, but also because of Jesus' introduction of the word 'flesh' in verse 51. The metaphor of Jesus being bread to eat might have eventually been embraced by the crowds, but now Jesus is pushing the imagery even further and explains that they must eat his flesh.

The crowds are stunned and dismantled, but Jesus doesn't relent. "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." Jesus is committed to pushing this teaching forward in order to create a decisive moment for the crowds and followers. They wanted to receive from him when he was giving them bread, will they now receive when he is giving them His word. The passage begins with Jesus questioning their motives for following him and now he has taken them all the way to the fork in the road. "You can follow me based on what I can do for a time, but I won't let that go on forever. Eventually, you will have to choose. Will you follow me for who I am? Will you consume me and in so doing discover true life?"(paraphrased)

Jesus is not teaching literally throughout this passage (thankfully because that would be weird), but figuratively. He is not inviting the crowds to cannibalize Him, but he is inviting the crowds and us today to internalize Him. He is putting a finger on the soft spot of our hearts where our motives to follow Him are based on what He will do for us, rather than who He is. He is inviting us inward, evermore towards deeper life and relationship and causing us to look at the reflection of shallow spirituality. He is creating a decisive moment in our lives. Straddling the fence cannot be a permanent place to remain in our faith. Either we take in all of Jesus – who He is, what He teaches, what He desires for us – or we don't, but we cannot just keep 'following' Him while only looking for earthly benefits. This falls entirely short of making Him Lord of our lives and reduces Him down to nothing more than a "blessings vending machine."

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#### Discussion Starters:

1. What is your absolute favorite thing to eat and why?
2. What is something that stuck with you from Matt's message today. What till you take away?
3. What are the similarities between earthly hunger and spiritual hunger? What are the differences?
4. Why are the crowds following Jesus? Why does He question their motives in verse 26?
5. Why do you think most people follow Jesus today? What are the motives?
6. The crowds wanted Jesus to perform another sign and prove that He was worthy to be trusted (verse 30). Why was his feeding of the 5,000 not a "good enough" miracle for them to believe? Do we do the same thing in our own lives? Is our faith similarly based on God "proving" himself to us? If so, why and when will it be "enough"?
7. What kinds of things does the world consume to fill their desires? Do you think this works? Why or why not?
8. In what ways have you come to Jesus seeking what you can receive from Him (his blessings, provision, comfort, miracles, etc.) without actually seeking the relationship? How might you need to alter this in your own heart?
9. Do you believe Jesus can fill any spiritual thirst or hunger we have? If no, why not? If yes, have you begun to seek out things other than him? Why?
10. What would it look like in your life to pursue Jesus at a deeper level? What would it look like for you to "consume" all of Him: Today? This month? This year?
  - a. How might this affect your approach to:
    - i. Your job?
    - ii. Your family?
    - iii. Your friends?
    - iv. Yourself?

\*Extra Mile if you or your group feels like going the extra mile this week choose something to fast from for the next seven days as a physical reminder that Jesus is the true satisfier of our souls. It could be food, coffee, TV, social media, technology, golf, music, etc. Whenever you feel yourself craving those things in their absence, take your thoughts to Jesus and center your heart on Him. You may be surprised to discover how He satisfies in the absence of so many familiarities or you may discover you did not need them as much as you thought you did.