
Bread of Life

John 6:22-59

Pastor Russ Kennedy

Bread Time Stories and More is an undertaking by Chet Fery, an amateur bread baker. His project and web site intends to show how random acts of kindness can change our lives and create a world community that is caring, supportive and secure. Fery has given away over 10,000 loaves of bread to family, friends, colleagues and strangers. Through this effort he has created hundreds of stories that he hopes will touch hearts and stimulate souls. Each Bread Time Story will inspire, instruct, motivate and hopefully will also take you much further. Each story is accompanied by a bread recipe that will make 2 loaves of bread, one for the baker and one to share with a relative, friend, colleague or stranger. Such is the power of one man and bread.

How do we get here?

²² On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³ Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

And the last verse of our text this morning:

⁵⁹ Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

Something has happened on the day before that is affecting our text this morning. Let me take a moment to setup this interaction that is taking place.

Jesus had pulled away from the throngs of people seeking a time of refuge and rest for himself and his disciples.

He was followed by throng of people who were eventually counted at 5,000 men plus women and children.

Having no money and being far from town, Jesus took 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish miraculously fed all the people with it. They even had 12 baskets left over.

The people, probably abetted by the disciples, planned to start a rebellion, make Jesus king and do so by force if necessary. Jesus, understanding what was about to happen, slipped away and could not be found.

The disciples hung around until dark, finally boarded a boat and crossed the sea. Jesus came to them, walking on the water, as they were struggling in a storm that had arisen. They immediately arrived safely at land.

Now, we pick up the next morning with Jesus teaching in their religious meeting house called a synagogue. It is likely then that this is the Jewish Sabbath.

So here are people who are claiming Jesus as their king and calling him their teacher, and yet...

The Probing by Unbelievers

(v.25–34)

That people have questions about or even for Jesus is not surprising. It is not the questions themselves, it is tone? Do you really want to know? What questions do these folks ask that may throw doubt on whether they really believe?

Why should we have to seek Jesus?

(v.25-27)

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."

Their first question really boils down to this, "Why did you not respond to us?" In the English we can ask, "When did you come?" or we can ask, "How long have you been here?" Like French, they are asking a when question that really asks "how long." On the face of it, this question makes sense given what had happened. There is a mild accusation here.

Jesus' answer points to why he slipped away and why he has come to the synagogue to teach. They have wrong motives for seeking Jesus. Jesus penetrates their pretension. Their faith is not in response to Jesus' teaching. It is not even in response to Jesus' miracles. They simply want a Divine food bank. They seek Him because of the material stuff He can give them.

He calls on us to repent of our values. Our lives can be consumed with what we want here and now. Change what you are working hard to have. Rather than the food that fills the belly, labor for the food that sustains the heart and will last through eternity.

There is only one place to get that. It is from the Lord Jesus Christ. God has authenticated Jesus as the One they must believe in. He is the sole giver of heavenly and eternal bread.

How can we work to please God?

(v.28-29)

²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

Well they misunderstand the "do not labor..." They focus on the word "work". OK, so He is not going to give it; we have to work for it. So what is the work we have to do get it?

In an ironic turn Jesus says that the only work God requires is faith in Jesus. So be careful how you hear what Jesus is saying here. To change what you labor for you will have to change who you believe in. There is no work you can do to get the bread of life. Believe in the One, the only One, whom God has sent. Believe in Jesus.

Why should we believe Jesus (you)? (v.30-34)

³⁰ So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?" ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

So they demand from Jesus proof rather than accepting Jesus' Word. John here gives us another ironic play on words: Work for heavenly bread. What work must we do? Don't work, believe. OK, you work to prove that we must believe in you. We believe you are the prophet like Moses so he gave us manna. What are you going to do to give us bread, even if it is a different kind of bread?

As prophet and as teacher, Jesus corrects their misuse of the Old Testament.

It was not Moses who gave them the bread. It is God Who gives them the true bread. See it? Moses didn't give it and it doesn't matter. What matters is that the true bread from heaven is being given from heaven. Right in front of them.

Earthly bread may sustain life but it cannot bring what the true bread from heaven brings. The true Bread from heaven gives life. The manna in the wilderness was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the true Bread, the reality of which manna and all breads are types, pictures and shadows – sign posts.

Listen to their response. Sounds pious, doesn't it? Ah, give us that Bread. However, like the woman at the well, they are still thinking in material, not spiritual terms...

The Preaching to Unbelievers (35-40)

Jesus has not only answered their questions but now asserts the sovereignty of God in the salvation of the lost. He argues by allusion to the Scripture...

³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

The Scriptural Assertion (v.35)

Jesus is the bread of life. He is all that Old Testament manna and meals point to. He is the giver and sustainer of life. True belief understands and sees Jesus as the bread of life.

Jesus will give and sustain life. He is the only satisfying bread and water. He will satisfy the hungers and thirsts of believing souls. This is not "He can" or "He ought". He does. When people claim that Jesus is not satisfying it is because they in some way have substituted believing in earthly bread for believing in Jesus.

The Evident Assessment**(v.36)**

“You have it right in front of you.” Jesus says. It is living, serving, ministering, and will be dying right before you. Yet, you will not believe. How tragic. Yes. How common. Yes. But why? Why is it that the Jews then and people now can have a clear testimony from the Scriptures and from people as to who Jesus is and still not believe?

The Startling Argument**(v.37-39)**

³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

There is a startling reason given here. Jesus simply says that those who come are given by the Father, are never rejected by Jesus. In other words, there is something else behind saving belief. It is God’s sovereign will. Everyone who was given will come. Everyone who comes will be received. Everyone who was given, does come and is received will be resurrected to eternal life. So, Jesus is doing God’s will while God’s will is being accomplished.

The Encouraging Affirmation**(v.40)**

⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Jesus does not just leave it at that. He encourages them to respond by affirming what the will of the Father is. In an allusion to the Old Testament, Jesus connects Himself with the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness. Israel had a scourge of serpents sent them by God as punishment for sin. The serpent’s bite was deadly poisonous. Moses was told to make a bronze replica of the snakes and put them on a pole lifted up high enough to be seen from the whole camp. Anyone who believed and looked at the pole would live. Jesus is saying, “If you will look at me and believe, you will have eternal life.

So Jesus calls to them to believe in Him. He assures them that it is God’s will to save any who do. And, all who do believe do so as a gift from the Father. In this, Jesus’ call to salvation still has confidence that even hard truth will not drive away those whom the Father intends to save.

Now, this is hard teaching for some. I want to take a moment to highlight what is being said here.

All who truly believe in Jesus do so because they have been chosen and given to Jesus. There is no other way to read this text. This is the Son of God speaking. This is to be accepted as true and to be believed. Will you?

Anyone who truly believes will be received and a raised on the last day. The Bread of life having given spiritual life to the dead soul so that they do believe will one day raise the dead body. One is as sure as the other. This is the Son of God speaking. This is to be accepted as true and to be believed. Will you?

God has chosen to save people through the hearing of the gospel. People hear the gospel through our evangelism. God's people have a responsibility to preach the gospel and invite sinners to be saved. This is the Son of God speaking. This is to be accepted as true to be believed. Will you?

Jesus often speaks like this *to unbelieving people*. Contrary to what we tend to think, truth never kept a person from believing. Lies do. Misrepresentations do. Thinking salvation is about earthly bread instead of Jesus will not save. Jesus' confidence here is in the Father's will. It is not even in His own ability to speak the truth. Yes, He is to be believed because of Who He is. But, He does not expect to be believed because He has the arguments down pat. You get this right? Jesus certainly is the perfect evangelist, yet very few people believed Him. So, take heart. Speak the truth as much as you can to as many as you can as kindly and clearly as you can. And, those whom God has chosen and given to Jesus will believe.

The Problem for Unbelievers

(v.41-59)

They will not believe what Jesus is teaching them. They have been awed by Him as the great Prophet. They start off calling Him, Teacher and all this is happening in their religious teaching hall. Yet, look at how they respond to the Bread of Life giving true manna.

They Challenge His Deity

(v.41-51)

⁴¹ So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" ⁴³ Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— ⁴⁶ not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Here is the problem of familiarity. They think they know Him. All they can see is this man whose parents they all know. How can He have come down from heaven when He is earth born? This is a direct challenge to His deity. How can he be God when he is a man?

Jesus responds by simply asserting once again that He is all that manna and bread actually point to. The Old Testament points to Jesus. It does not merely prophecy of His humanity, but pictures and points to Him as both God and man. So when Jesus came, He was to be received as the Son of God and the Son of man. He is both God and man.

True saving belief confesses this truth. It accepts as true that Jesus is God. There is no salvation apart from believing that Jesus is God come in the flesh. Without

this truth, there is no life to us, no redemption for us, no reign over us and no resurrection to life eternal in our future. The only way to live eternally with God is to believe in His Son and to partake of Him as your life. That comes though what He has done in and through His flesh, that is, His humanity.

They Challenge His Teaching

(v.52-59)

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

Here is the problem of obscurity. They don't understand Him. They do not hear the spiritual sense of His words. You can see them (and maybe some of you) struggling with these words. So they challenge His teaching.

Jesus' explanation is simply to expand and expound on the analogy. Quicken souls and believing hearts will hear these words and leap with joy. If you take this literally, then you will have trouble with it. You will have trouble with a great deal of the Old Testament. You will have trouble with much that Jesus says and taught. You may even struggle with some of what we say from this pulpit and in our ministries. For here is a simple principle: the only way to think of some spiritual realities is in analogies.

This is so in this truth. When we have saving belief in Jesus, we have partaken of Him. Like eating and drinking, we are taking in the sustaining life of Jesus Christ. Now we are not cannibals. We are not eating or drinking the literal flesh and blood of Jesus, not even in the communion meal. All of this is analogy, symbol, likeness. It is not literal. Yet it is still real.

As Jesus says, it is as real as His own coming in the flesh. This is what faith is. It is seeing in the symbols, hearing in the analogies the realities behind them and accepting them as true. Jesus is not a hunk of bread or a dusting of manna. He is not H₂O. But He is living bread and water. He does bring and sustain spiritual life. That life is given by the Father. That life feeds on Christ and drinks from Him and is sustained and satisfied.

Reflect and Respond

Do you believe this? Or are you like these Jews in this text – seeking literal bread, denying Jesus' deity or arguing against His teaching? My friend, seek the true, living bread from heaven. Believe that Jesus is God sent from heaven as a man. Look to Him and live. Eat and drink of Him by faith and be satisfied and sustained.