

I AM: The Bread of Life

John 6:25-40, 47-59 (NIV)

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "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. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." ²⁸ Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." ³⁰ So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread." 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. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." ⁴¹ Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. ⁴² I am the bread of life. ⁴³ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁴⁴ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁴⁵ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." ⁴⁶ Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁴⁷ Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁴⁸ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁹ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁰ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵¹ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵² This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵³ He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Recently, I heard another pastor say that food is one of life's great equalizers. Why? Because everyone needs it, everyone has an opinion about it, and you can't tell someone that their opinion of food is wrong because it is their opinion. Another universal and equalizing thing about food is that after one meal, everyone gets hungry again and will need more. Every meal, no matter how good, only provides temporary satisfaction.

We get to talk about food today because Jesus said, "I AM the Bread of life." (verse 48) This, his 1st "I AM" statement, was spoken in a sermon, a dialogue, the day after he miraculously fed more than 5,000 people. Those people who were fed by him went to great lengths to find him. Why? As Jesus 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." (verse 26) That's why Jesus had left them after feeding them. The people had it in mind to make Jesus their king by force so that they could have him feed them every day because they knew they would be hungry again.

With this in mind, Jesus started off this sermon about food by saying to them, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." (verse 27) This piqued their interest, but it wasn't exactly what they were looking for. They asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (verses 28-29)

Well, they couldn't eat that. No, fill our bellies, Jesus. They challenged him: "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" (verses 30-31) Their short-term memories were on full display, and they demanded a sign of Jesus, a sign they could eat. "Do for us like Moses did for the Israelites when they got manna in the wilderness!" We get it. Manna sounds kind of good. Bread from heaven sweetened with the taste of honey. But they demanded a sign of Jesus that they could eat while forgetting that Jesus had already gave them a sign by feeding all of them the day before so that they were all full; forgetting that this manna came from God, not Moses; forgetting that multiple times their ancestors complained about that manna calling it miserable and detestable food; forgetting that even though their ancestors ate their fill of manna for 40 years straight, they all died. Jesus, you're not offering enough. Give us something to fill our bellies!

Can't we hear the same complaint coming from our lips? God, you want me to believe in you, to follow you, to worship you? Well, then what are you going to do for me? How are you going to give me what I want and fill my belly? All the while God provides you with daily bread with life for your body, strength to work, grocery stores to shop from, so much food to fill your cupboards for more

than one day (especially as you all now have enough food for 2 weeks of quarantine, right?). But that's boring, God. I want more than bread. Who wants to just live on bread alone? Jesus, you're just plain white bread. Give me more because I'm kind of bored with you. It's like we've had our fill of Jesus and unless he comes back to us with a new and exciting flavor to try, then I'm just not interested.

And so we look to fill our bellies with food that spoils. We try to get the desires of our bellies satisfied elsewhere. This, of course, is not just about food. It's every aspect of life. We try to fill up and find satisfaction with work. And work is certainly a good gift from God that we should find satisfaction from, but it will never keep us full. There will always be more to do. There will always be another project that has to get done even though we finished one. We try to fill up and find satisfaction with family and friends, but then we get frustrated when our family and friends don't fill us up and leave us wanting more, that they didn't come through for me as I expected them to, that they're not happy and worry free despite all my efforts to make such a life for them.

When these things don't fill us up and keep us satisfied, we try to fill up on pleasures. We want our favorites, the good stuff, the comfort food, the junk food, the fast food. We don't want to eat healthy. We indulge. We do what is forbidden because we get that temporary rush of endorphins, the euphoria that comes from eating. We eat that family size helping of losing my temper. We munch on that piece of gossip. We pop in that snack of a website click. It satisfies for a moment to be as angry as I want to be, to hear that someone is worse than me, to feast on lustful pictures. We fill up for a moment, think we're satisfied and will remain full.

But it's never enough. Ultimately, we find ourselves empty, hungry. Whether we are chowing down on sinful indulgences or trying to fill up on the healthy vegetables of good works, we never stay full, never stay satisfied. This is working for food that spoils. Like the Israelites of old, we will eat what does not keep us satisfied and will eventually die, die and be separated from God forever and ever.

Jesus gives us something better. Jesus gives us food that endures to eternal life. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (verse 35) Jesus is the true bread come down from heaven. He is God, the great I AM. He humbled himself to take on our flesh and not make full use of his divine power, his divine nature. As God and Man, he came to do the will of his Father: to obey every command perfectly and so fill us up with the healthy vegetables of his life full of perfectly done works and to take away from us every one of our sinful indulgences of spiritual junk food that we consumed by giving his body into death instead of ours. "This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (verse 51) He gave his flesh and has God the Father's seal of approval as heard by his statements "This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased," and by the very fact that he was raised from the dead. Only the great I AM, the one and only God, could do this. Only he is the food that endures for eternal life, that when he eat of him, we live forever. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever." (verse 51) "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." (verse 54) Only Jesus fully satisfies. Only Jesus fills us up never to be hungry again.

How do we "eat" this Bread of Life of the great I AM? "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life." (verse 47) Jesus is not telling you to literally eat him like you do literal bread. He is telling you to believe in him. Believing in him is eating him. This belief, this faith, comes from hearing the message of Christ, what he has done, how he stands approved by God the Father, that his perfect life fills us and his innocent suffering and death removes all the spiritual junk food we've taken in. We eat the Bread of Life when we worship, munch on him when we study the Bible, pop the Bread of Life into our mouths like a snack when we read an email devotion or watch a Time of Grace video. In these ways, Jesus as the Bread of Life fills us up and satisfies us so that we never go hungry again.

When you are tempted to fill your life with food that spoils - with the work, the job you do, with the spiritual junk food of the sins you commit - then go and take a bite of Jesus. If you think Jesus is too "white bread" and unappealing for you, then go through the menu of God's Word. Yes, we have staples and comfort food that we enjoy, those go-to Bible verses and stories that we eat week after week and they indeed satisfy. But maybe it's time to try a different part of the menu, to read a part of the Bible you've never read or a part of the Bible that you can't remember the last time you read it. There, you'll find a new meal of the Bread of life with more richness and variety than all the different kinds of bread on the grocery store shelves. The whole Bible is about Jesus, the great I AM. There is too much variety in what God feeds us with his Word that he is never just "white bread."

And after you've had a good meal of Jesus, share that meal with others. Invite them to read with you. Serve them with a heaping helping of what Jesus has done for them. Give them food that never spoils but fully satisfies to eternal life. Give them food that will keep them from ever hungering again as they feast on the perfect life of Jesus approved of by God the Father and substituted for ours. Jesus calls all of us to feast on him. Fill up with the great I AM who is the Bread of Life and pass him on to others so that they too never go hungry again. Amen.