

Free Bread of Life

John 6:24-35 (NIV84)

²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. ²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs 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. 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 miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" ³¹ Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, 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 he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." ³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

How would your life change if you woke up every morning and realized that you never had to prepare breakfast again because someone would always do that for you? Or how would it change if you never had to figure out what to snack on or come up with a new meal idea for supper? What if you never had to go grocery shopping again? How would your life change if you never had to buy or make food ever again?

Sounds pretty sweet, doesn't it? That's what the people were drooling about as they reflected on Jesus miraculously feeding 5000+ people with nothing more than five loaves and two fish. The idea tantalized them so much that "they intended to come and make [Jesus] king by force." (John 6:15) But knowing their intentions, Jesus and his disciples withdrew from the crowd and went away.

Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there anymore, they too got into boats and went searching for him. They found him in Capernaum. The first thing they ask is, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" (verse 25) "Teacher, why didn't you stick around? Why did you wander off? We wanted you to stay longer."

Jesus cuts through the pleasantries and gets right down to business with the crowd. "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." (verse 26) You want me to be your bread king. You want me to provide you with a life where you don't have to buy groceries anymore, where you don't have to think about where your daily bread will come from. You sought me out only to fill your physical needs. That is not the reason I came into the world, and that's not why you should be seeking me. "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." (verse 27)

Well, okay. "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (verse 28) Okay, Jesus. Just tell us what you need us to do so that we can get this bread that endures to eternal life. What's it going to cost us?

When you get down to it, that attitude, that question shows how all religions of the world divide into two categories: the religions that say "do" and the religions that say "done." We are all infused with the idea that you work for the paycheck. I have to earn rewards. When it comes to religion, this means that I have to do something in order to get the payoff of the religion. Maybe I have to keep certain commandments, live a certain lifestyle, give a certain amount, sacrifice and dedicate my life to a higher power. Then I will be rewarded, and that makes me feel good. We have pride in what we accomplish.

So, Jesus, just tell me what needs to be done. Do you need me to keep a commandment better? Do you need me to tithe? Do you need me to pray more often? To come to church more frequently? Do I have to help someone in need? Give to the poor? You just tell me and I will do it so that I can get this pay off of food that endures to eternal life, to never have to wonder where I will be getting my next meal.

The answer was staring the people in the face. Jesus said don't work for food that spoils. Get away from these ideas that there is a way that I can have God take care of all my physical needs if I just do a work good enough to earn it. No, the food that endures to eternal life, the Son of Man will give you. "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (verse 29)

Soak that statement in. The food that endures to eternal life, the Son of Man will give you. The work is no work. Simply believe.

Over the last couple of Sundays, we have talked about preachers working faithfully for God, about how God gives us rest from our labors only to rejuvenate us to get back to work, and that God will provide our daily bread while we continue to use our God-given strength to work and earn it. We've talked about a lot of work.

Now, relax the back, stretch out the legs, and realize that the Son of Man, Jesus himself, gives you food that endures to eternal life. No, he's not going to give you some kind of everlasting gobstopper or come around like a waiter at the Olive Garden with endless bread sticks. He gives you what you need to sustain you until eternal life. He gives you what you need to get to heaven and live there forever. No works required. Nothing on your end to accomplish in order to get it. It is a gift from the Son of God. It is done.

Instead of falling down and worshiping Jesus for giving them this food that endures to eternal life, the crowd challenges Jesus. "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" (verses 30-31) Woah. Woah. Woah. Woah. You are asking Jesus to prove with miracles that he indeed gives food that endures to eternal life? Where were you guys the day before? Did you not see how he just kept handing out the loaves and the fish, feeding the bellies of over 5000 people? You need something better? That's what they were saying. They wanted to be treated like the Israelites under Moses' care. Their request was basically, "Do something comparable to Moses feeding the Israelites with manna for forty years. Then we will believe in you, believe that the Father sent you and that he has placed his seal of approval on you."

The fact is that the people had tasted Jesus as the Prophet who was to come, the one who was foretold to be greater than Moses, the one who would crush Satan's head and save his people, all people. Instead of consuming him as food that endures to eternal life – believing in Jesus as the one the Father has sent to save people from their spiritual hunger – the crowd wanted the actual, physical bread. Give us manna for forty years, then we'll believe you. They were back to working for food that spoils, food that they would eat and then still one day die.

Are we guilty of falling into the same pattern of thinking? Have we tasted Jesus as the food that endures to eternal life, that he is the one who came down from heaven to destroy the devil and deliver me from eternal death, only to then go back to looking at him as a means to fill our bellies? Do we get so caught up and wrapped up in every day needs and working towards them that we forget that God is holding out to us himself as food that endures to eternal life? Do we threaten God with not believing in him because he didn't do what I asked him to do, because he took away something or someone precious to me, because he hasn't made my life easier, because he hasn't solved my problems for me?

When we look to Jesus only to solve our earthly problems, we are working for food that spoils. If that is our focus, Jesus' words will go over our heads just like they did for the crowd. Don't talk to me about eternal life, Jesus. I want to know what you are going to do for me today? Such a focus deprives us of taking in Jesus as the food that endures to eternal life leaving us spiritually hungry. If we keep that focus on working for food that spoils, seeking God only for daily bread, we will spiritually starve and spiritually die.

To correct this focus, Jesus comes right out and says to the people, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (verse 35) He is the food that endures to eternal life. When we are consuming him, believing in him, then we will never be lacking when it comes to being sustained for eternal life. There is never another work that needs to be done when Jesus is our bread of life. There is never a checklist that has to be checked in order to get to heaven. There is never a tithe amount that you have to give in order to have eternal life. That all is done for you, given to you by the Son of Man, Jesus himself. He is the bread of life. He wants you to consume him, his words, what he has done for you.

Jesus is the food that endures to eternal life. We consume him when we come to worship him, read our Bible at home. We have our thirst quenched for eternal life in heaven as we remember the waters of baptism that made me a child of God, completely and totally forgiven for my entire life. Our hunger is satisfied as we partake in the Lord's Supper and eat and drink his body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine for the forgiveness of our sins. This is how we consume Jesus as the bread of life.

No, Jesus isn't going to be your personal chef. He won't come down from heaven to give you breakfast in bed. Yes, he does take care of our physical needs, but don't let your focus be only on the daily bread needs. That is working for food that spoils. Jesus gives you something greater. He gives you himself as the bread of life, food that endures to eternal life. It is done. No more work required. This is God's gift to us. Continue to come to him, consume him, and you will never be hungry for eternal life. Jesus, as the free bread of life, never goes bad. Amen.