

## Jesus Fills Me Up to Eternal Life

John 6:51-58 (NIV)

<sup>51</sup> 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." <sup>52</sup> Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" <sup>53</sup> 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. <sup>54</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. <sup>56</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup> 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. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

For the past three Sundays, we have focused much on what God does in our daily, here and now, life. That first Sunday we zeroed in on how God not only expects the impossible but does the impossible for us here on earth as Jesus fed more than 5000 people with five small barely loaves and two small fish. The following Sunday we reflected on how God so richly provides daily bread for us in spite of our grumbling as he did for the Israelites with the manna provided every day and as he does for us with all the blessings he packs into a single loaf of bread. Last Sunday we talked about continuing our education in God and his Word every day, that he builds us up here on this earth through his Word and this is why we make a point of always moving forward in our Christian faith. Today we shift focus a bit as Jesus shifts our focus through the conclusion of his Bread of Life sermon.

After the feeding of the 5000+, Jesus left the crowds and went to the opposite side of the lake. But the crowds followed him all the way to the synagogue, their local congregation, where he was teaching. Jesus wasted no time in calling out their expectations of the here and now. He 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." (John 6:26) The people sought out Jesus because their bellies were empty and they wanted them filled again. They wanted to make Jesus their bread king, their endless source of literal, physical food.

Do we seek after Jesus primarily as our bread king, as if my God exists solely for the here and now physical needs? Think about when we come to Jesus. Are most of our prayers - maybe even all of our prayers - concerning physical needs, daily bread needs? Do I only pray about making sure I have enough money in the bank to pay the bills? Do I mostly only go to God in prayer when my body is hurting or when someone else is undergoing surgery or medical tests? Are all of my prayers for safe journeys, for ending suffering?

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray – the Lord’s Prayer – have you ever stepped back and thought about the ratio of content. There are seven petitions - seven asks - in the Lord’s Prayer. Six of them are about God and spiritual needs. Only one is about physical needs. Do our prayers strike that same balance or are we inverting that ratio and primarily seeking Jesus to make my physical life better, to make my life happier?

These are tough questions because almost certainly we want to start speaking our excuses. "But I did pray that one time to be delivered from temptation." "I had that whole day or week of praying for forgiveness for what I had done to that person, what I said to them." We get defensive because we don’t want to admit that we are often consumed with physical concerns and we leave the spiritual needs off to the side. That’s what these Jews who were seeking Jesus had done.

Now, let’s be clear that it is good and right to bring all our physical and earthly needs to God. We need care for our physical bodies here and now, and God invites us to come to him boldly with these requests. More than that, God has shown us over the last few weeks that he graciously provides for our physical needs as he has always done for the people of this earth – through the feeding of the 5000, through the gift of manna, through the blessings packed into a loaf of bread. But the pains of the body, the hungry bellies, the need to pay the bills – all of these things are destined to perish with time. One day, these will no longer be needed and no longer will be of any concern to us.

This is why Jesus challenges the Jews listening to his Bread of Life sermon. He says, "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." (verse 51) He preached that they shouldn’t be seeking after him primarily to fill their bellies, but they should seek him because he is the bread come down from heaven that gives eternal life. Their ancestors ate the bread and still died. Manna took care of their bodies, not their souls. If they consume Jesus, they will have life without end – food for their souls. "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." (verse 53)

“Wait. What?! Eat your flesh?! That’s disgusting! Repulsive! We’re not cannibals! God commanded us to never eat meat with blood in it nor that we should ever drink blood.” The Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (verse 52) They were still thinking with their empty bellies, still thinking of Jesus primarily as their bread king, the one who is here to just take care of their here and now needs.

Jesus continued with the word picture of consuming him for eternal life so that they would understand not to take him literally. He is not commanding that they literally eat him because that would be against God’s Word, but rather that they take him in as much as someone who eats three square meals a day. Jesus is not to be literally eaten, but he is to be consumed for eternal life.

Why? Well, when God made the world, he did not make people to die. If sin had never entered into the world, we never would have known death. We would not have bodies that break down, get sick, or fail. No one would ever go hungry, let alone die of starvation. But Adam disobeyed. He brought sin into the world and with it, death. We all face a certain death because we are sinful. If any of us were without sin, we would not die. The Jews of old that came out of Egypt ate the manna, that bread from heaven, and still died, but Jesus said, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” (verse 54)

This is why Jesus came. He came to give his life to conquer death and instead give us the gift of eternal life with him. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.” (verse 56) Jesus is teaching the Jews that he is here to give his flesh and blood in a life lived perfectly for them, for us. He will give his life unto death and then rise again so that they and we know that whoever consumes Christ will rise to live with him and never die again. Consume Jesus, and you will live forever. Take in his Word. Take in his sacrifice. Take in his life given for you. Take in that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, that he is God come down from heaven not just to fill our bellies, but to fill us up to eternal life.

Jesus is focused on giving us eternal life through him, that this is more important than our here and now daily bread needs. How do we focus ourselves to that same truth? It’s about taking Jesus in over and over again. This is what we stressed last Sunday, that continuing education aspect of our faith in God and our knowledge of God. It’s a daily feeding, a daily consuming of Jesus through his Word. This is how he fills us up to eternal life.

This means I focus my life on consuming Jesus. We celebrate that today as Timmy has been filled up with Jesus for eternal life with him as he is about to be confirmed. And Timmy’s feasting on Jesus is not over. After today, Jesus will continue to fill him up with the forgiveness of sins and life eternal with God through the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

As we continue to fill up on Jesus to eternal life, the content of our prayers begin to change as well as our here and now focus. Yes, we will still pray for the here and now daily bread needs because we have them and God fills them. But now we take purposeful time to pray for eternal needs. When you encounter temptation, pray that God delivers you and seek out his Word in how he will help you through this, passages like 1 Corinthians 10:13 that tells us God is faithful and will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear but will give us a way out or a way to endure it. Passages like Matthew 28:20 that God is with me always, like Hebrews 13:5 that God will never leave me or forsake me. Pray for other people, your brothers and sisters in Christ, to also flee and resist temptation. Deliver them from evil too, dear Lord! Pray for other people that God’s good news that he is our perfection and worthiness before the Father would fill up their hearts, specifically for our kids who came to our Bible Camp this past week. Pray that God will continue to train up people – pastors, teachers, evangelists, and the like – to share God’s good news with the world so that more and more people would go to heaven with us having consumed Jesus, the bread come down from heaven. When you give your offering, don’t think about it as just keeping the lights on at church, but think of how God will use your gift so that other people will come to know Christ through the preaching and teaching of the members of this congregation.

We are here not just for the here and now daily bread needs. God will continue to richly and generously provide those to believers and unbelievers alike. We are here to filled up by Jesus, the bread come down from heaven, so that we know that we have eternal life with him. This is why we pursue Jesus, why we consume him. He is the only one who gives us bread that fills us up to eternal life by giving us himself. Amen.