

## The Bread of Life John 6:49-51

We have been studying this fascinating chapter for a number of months. We have seen that the crowds followed Christ because they wanted the earthly bread and comfort that he could give them, and they totally misunderstood not only his Messiahship but also their greatest need. And when Jesus presents himself as the bread of life that everyone needs they start to question whether he is truly the Messiah. It is interesting because earlier in this chapter right after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand they wanted to take him by force and crown him king, but when their true need and his true Messiahship are made known they start to denounce the king. And the reason is simply this is not the king that they wanted.

And it is amazing that as you look at man he is so often never convinced what he needs most. We have been going through the whole COVID experience, and it was amazing to see the quickness in which different companies were able to produce vaccines, and how those vaccines began to change society. They actually are saving many people's lives, especially the vulnerable, but also many individuals livelihood, as they were able to go back to work or open up their shops and restaurant. And we should be so thankful for medical science that can help with many of the harmful viruses and diseases that threaten us. And I think if you were to ask individuals what their greatest need was in this past year, they would say to eradicate this virus some way or some how. Just have it done away with.

And this is where Jesus does not change his message, he sees what these individuals need most and he comes back to the same message that has just given a bit earlier about who he is in verse 48, "**I am the bread of life.**" He has already said this and this is the message that they have just rejected. And of course this is one of these great "I am" statements of Jesus in the Book of John, but he also ties it to bread, and not any old bread but that he is the bread that gives life. And it is amazing how Jesus progresses with this teaching though this whole section. He began by speaking of the bread from heaven that the Father gives in verse 32. And then he identifies that he is that bread in verse 35, now through this section he indicates that it is this bread is his body that will be given up in death for all those who trust in him.

And all of us would agree that this is what people need most is Jesus Christ - the bread of life. But let me ask the question that should be obvious: do we see that it is Jesus Christ that we need most in our lives right now? With all of the trials and adversity in our lives, do we see that is what is most necessary is his presence and grace, and it be even conformed into his image? I think we are like the little child who thinks he knows what he needs more than his parent. He thinks he knows best about what his schedule should be, and when he should go to bed, what he should eat, or whether he should do his homework. But what does the child need. He needs what he does not think that he needs. And so often as the people of God we think we need something other than the grace and the presence of Christ in our lives. We need our spouse to change, or a new job, or better health or whatever, and Christ and his gospel basically takes a back seat in our lives. And certainly as believers we have eternal life in Christ but if he is the bread of life than we should be constantly feed on him. He is who we constantly need.

And I really want us to see our need and come to trust in Christ whatever we are going through this morning. I want us to see our perceived needs and then our want us to see where our true need is met. May God open up our eyes and hearts to see all that Christ is to us that we might have a greater trust and love and focus on him.

1. We need to recognize our perceived need Vv.49.

One of the things that can be so surprising in our lives is our perception can be so different than reality. What we think we need in order to find satisfaction and joy and meaning. I can remember this a number of years ago when a lady was pressuring a single lady to date a certain man. And when I enquired why she was doing that, the older lady said so that she would be happy and find meaning in her life. And so life and meaning were found in some earthly relationship and not found in Jesus Christ. Jesus is just not enough. And we can think at this moment, with the certain difficulty in my life my greatest need is something in this temporal world whether more money, a better relationship, or some sort of temporal happiness and satisfaction.

It is what the world sees also. This is why they reject salvation by Jesus Christ - they just do not see Him and the salvation he brings as what they truly need. I can remember witnessing to a man about his need of Christ. His life was falling apart, and he responded that he would trust in Christ for salvation if God would heal his broken relationship with his wife. And he saw something of greater necessity that Jesus being the living bread. And it is the same with us so often.

But look at what Jesus says here, **“Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.”** This is what they wanted from Jesus - they wanted him to keep creating bread miraculously just like the Israelites in the wilderness. And they look at this as some kind of miraculous and preferable state. It is like so many who dream of winning the lotto or dream that some lost relation that you never knew died and left you a terrific inheritance. All the difficulties of life and all the trials would be over, eradicated from our lives. And again, we should be thankful for any alleviation of suffering in our lives. These people’s lives were in constant threat of starvation or failing crops.

But there were three problems with that whole view and then first was right here in the text, and that is it could not stop death. It could prolong life and that is what it did with the children of Israel in their wilderness wanderings but it could not give them life eternal. And that was the same nature of even the wonderful gift that Christ gave them when he multiplied the loaves and the fish - it prolonged life, it met a temporal need but it could not give what they truly needed. They misunderstood or fail to see or didn’t want to see their real need over their perceived need, and therefore did not recognize the greatness of what Christ was offering. It is amazing how willfully blind we can be so often.

But the second problem is that the physical food that they desired from Christ could not and would not satisfy. The temporal things of life that promise us joy, meaning and satisfaction, promise us the same thing as the gospel of Christ but they cannot deliver on that promise. And you can see that with the children of Israel in the wilderness because save Joshua and Caleb they all died in the wilderness. The same bread that God gave them miraculously they began to complain about - oh that we could have meat or the good things that we enjoyed back in Egypt. And it is amazing how the fickle the human heart is. And the grace of Christ here is that he did not give

them what they wanted because he knows that it would end in the same way, not only would they die in their sins, it would lead to further rebellion against God. They think they know what they need. They think they know what would truly satisfy their hearts, and they could not be more wrong.

And there is a third problem with their main desire being physical food: the reason they died in the wilderness is that they were judged by God. It speaks of God's punishment and God's holy wrath against them for their unbelief. So often many Israelites dream of going back to the wilderness. That was a day that God provided and miracles were done. But it was a time of great disobedience and judgment of God. Why would anyone go back there? There has to be a superior bread, there has to be something more necessary in our lives rather than physical food which can never satisfy. There has to be some bread that gives the desired satisfaction and life that our hearts so long for.

Our hearts were made for God, and any time we try to replace the Creator with something from creation it will end up in disaster. People have tried with material things. If I could just have this or that then I could be satisfied. They have tried it with sex. No amount of sex can satisfy the heart but in the end leave you shackled, enslaved and in shame. What lie are we telling ourselves tonight? Where have we been looking outside of Jesus Christ?

## 2. We need to see our real need. Vv.50-51

One of the things that I find extraordinary is the length that people will go to deny the gospel and their need of Jesus Christ. And you see that right after this offering of eternal life in Christ. Jesus was the master of imagery, and sought to make truth as understandable as possible. So to the Samaritan woman he offered at the well springs of living water - something so superior to the temporal nature of the water that she drank. He is the spring of living water and whoever drinks this water may never thirst again. And the woman at the well first mistook the words of Christ but further explanation was needed. Here the explanation has come first and then the illustration, so the excuse that they have right after verses 50-51 is just rank unbelief.

Look at the next verse, **"This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die."** Jesus speaks of a superior bread that has come down from heaven, and of course in the context that bread is none other than himself. And it is interesting that all the way through this gospel that he and the gospel writer John always talk about Christ's preexistence. And even though the crowd knew of his human birth and that he is the son of Joseph, they still do not understand that he is none other than God in human flesh. The Israelites ate of manna from heaven but here is the superior bread that is offered to this multitude of individuals - that if they eat of the bread that Jesus provides they will not die, and the meaning here or the offer here is none other than eternal life. And the bread that he is offering is himself, and you have to understand what he means by eat, and that is explained in the context of this sermon of Jesus and his discussion with the people. Look again at verse 47, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life."** So eating and believing are the same thing; they are the same activity. And here is the superiority of Jesus over anything that we could have earthly, and that is eternal life - life unending in his

presence. When one eats or believes in Christ he or she will not die. Who wouldn't want this bread?

Now look at the next verse, **"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."** Oh that we might have ears to hear and hearts that will believe what Jesus says here. In case there is any doubt about what Jesus is talking about he spells it out to them so clearly. **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven."** Jesus is the living bread. And the whole narrative has been moving in this direction since the feeding of the five thousand in the wilderness. And the bread that is offered for the life of the world, in other words irregardless of who they are there is salvation through his flesh.

Now here is question that might seem so academic to you but what does he mean that the bread of life is his own flesh. Some see it as some sort of mystical encounter with Christ when we are depressed or needy just think about Christ and he will feed your soul with encouragement or whatever your heart needs. Certainly that meaning is foreign to the whole context of eternal life in this passage. And some have taken this to mean the Lord's Table, that the moment the priest in the Roman Catholic Church prays over the elements that in someway and somehow they turn into actual body and blood of the Lord, and by ingesting these elements we are ingesting the actual body and blood of Christ, and we are that much closer to eternal life. And there are a number of reasons why this could not be talking about the Lord's Table. The first is that whole meaning would be lost on his original hearers and he is trying to direct them to where eternal life is found. Second, if that was the meaning than it would contradict what we have just said and what has been just taught in this passage, and that is salvation or eternal life is found in faith in Christ, and faith alone. It is in believing in him. Again, you have to define the words of Christ by what has already been said before.

And the last reason is that the language that is being used here is one of substitution. You can see that right at the end of the verse, **"and the bread that I will give for the life of the word is my flesh."** Notice even the future tense of what Jesus says here. In other words this offering up of Jesus has not taken place yet. Jesus did not die that we might take the Lord's Supper and be saved. Rather, both the teaching of Jesus right here and the Lord's Table teach that salvation is through the substitutionary death of Jesus alone. The Lord's table strengthens our faith and reminds us constantly of the blessed truth of his perfect humanity and his bloody sacrifice that we might have life. Look at that little word "for" in the last sentence again. It is the Greek word "hyper." And it means "on behalf of," or "in the place of." Now look at that last sentence with that meaning: "And the bread that I will give on behalf of the life of the word is my flesh." The same word is used in John 10:11, **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."** We could translate the verse, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life *in the place of* his sheep." John Calvin writes about this and says that this "denotes that unique giving which was made on the cross when offered Himself to the Father as a sacrifice. Then He delivered up Himself for the life of men; and now invites us to receive the fruit of His death."

So how do we apply this passage, and why does Jesus use this strong image of eating as it relates to believing? Well, let me give you three reasons why he uses it as an illustration of trusting and believing in Christ. The first is that it is absolutely necessary. We often talk about things that we absolutely need in life, but most of those needs are really desires that morph into needs because we set our hearts on them. I need my husband or wife to love me. I need to get that promotion at work. I need to purchase this or that. And really they are not needs but desires. But can you think of anything more necessary in our lives that food or eating? Some might say that exercise is necessary but if you are not eating you are not able to exercise. Some say that the mind is necessary, but if you are not eating then your mind will not function as it was intended. In fact, the food that Christ offers is even more necessary than physical food because of the promise of eternal life. And that really is our true need, sins forgiven and an eternal relationship with Christ. Have you truly trusted in Christ?

The second reason why he uses this powerful metaphor is because eating involves appropriation of the actual eating of the food for it to be of any value in our lives. We can know doctrine but that is not enough. We can have a splendid and glorious feast in front of us but not eat. We see the food, we know its benefits and delights, but we never appropriate that meal. And you might even be really deep in your knowledge of Scripture but have you come to Christ? Is your confidence in him and in him alone?

A third reason why Jesus uses this illustration for believing is that believing is personal. You must do the eating for it to be of any value to you. Your parents or spouse or friend cannot do it for you. You have to believe and trust what Jesus has done is more than enough for a sinner like you. There is a humble dependence upon him, and what he has done, and this salvation is very personal.

The fourth reason why he uses this powerful metaphor is because eating is delightful. Isn't it? God in his goodness has given us tastebuds. Why? Because he wants us to enjoy the good delights that he puts before us. It is amazing how eggs can be so different whether scrambled, or hard pointed, or sunny side up, or put in a cake or whatever. All the different textures are there for us to enjoy from our holy God. But as we come and feast upon Christ we now in our belief have an appetite for him. We never had it before. We want to learn of him through his word. We want to be like him more and more. Why? Because we have believed that he truly is the answer for my sinful soul, and now we cannot look away.

There is no greater issue that any person faces than what they do with Jesus Christ. Here he promises that if you trust in him there is life eternal, if not then there is judgment. The call is to come feast on him, believe on him. He is our great satisfaction.