

JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:22-40

Key Verse: 6:35

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."

In today's passage, Jesus declares that he is the bread of life. Ever since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, the bread problem has been the focal point of human life. George Orwell (1903-50), the author of *Animal Farm* and *1984*, had an encounter that offered a graphic image of this problem. While he was eating, a wasp flew in and landed on his plate and was sucking his jam. He cut the insect in half with knife. But it paid no attention and kept on sucking the jam, while a tiny stream of jam trickled out of its severed stomach. Only when it tried to fly away did it realize what had happened. The wasp and people without Christ have much in common. Everyone has the bread problem because everyone has to eat to survive. How can we overcome this problem of life? Jesus declares that he is the bread of life. Jesus is the answer to our bread problem. May God help us to know what it means that Jesus is the bread of life!

I. "DO NOT WORK FOR FOOD THAT SPOILS" (22-34)

Jesus fed the crowd of 5,000 with the five loaves and two fish, and they were fully satisfied. They were happy to eat the free meal. Through this event, they should have realized that Jesus is the Son of God. They should have faith in Jesus. Sadly, they failed to see the spiritual meaning of his miracle. Rather, they saw Jesus as a free baker. They wanted to make him a king so that they did not have to struggle with the bread problem (15). It seemed to them that Jesus would make a perfect social welfare program. So when Jesus quietly slipped away from the east side of the lake, they became restless not knowing where Jesus was. They searched for him all night. They finally found him in Capernaum, on the west side of the lake. They asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" (25) They were glad to see Jesus, hoping that they had a second chance to make him a king who could supply them bread permanently.

What did Jesus say to these people? Look at verse 26. *"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."* Jesus was sorry because they had completely missed the point of the miracle. Their eyes were on bread, not on Jesus. They were like a child who is so excited about a toy gift that he forgets who gave the gift. The crowd had come to Jesus the first time with a spiritual motive. They came because they had seen the miraculous signs that Jesus performed. They came to see the Messiah. After getting the free meal from Jesus, however, they began to focus on bread only, not the Messiah. When they came to Jesus the second time, they came with bread problem on their minds, and no more.

Jesus knew that they were working so hard for bread. They were desperate. What did Jesus say to them? Look at verse 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.” This verse reminds us of Matthew 4:4: *Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

What then is bread? Bread represents the food that is necessary to sustain our physical life. This problem has been a life problem of mankind throughout human history. Everybody needs bread to survive, so people struggle very hard to get a little more bread. And there seems to be no end in this struggle. Think about a typical American man. He begins to work for bread in high school, if not earlier. He works all his life to pay for his food, house, car, appliances, education for his children, and so on. He works hard to save as much as he can so that he can retire in Florida or Arizona. Almost all his life is devoted to working for bread.

In Jesus’ times, the Israelites suffered even more because of the Roman Empire’s economic and political exploitation. What little they earned was taxed away by Rome for its military expenses and luxuries for its citizens. They lived in a recession that seemed to last without an end in sight. In this sense we can understand why they were so preoccupied with their bread problem and why they were so excited to find someone who could give them free bread everyday. But the sad fact is that even if people solve their physical bread problem, they cannot save their lives with bread. Man is a spiritual being as well as a physical being. He cannot live on bread alone (Dt 8:3). He needs to eat, but he cannot be truly happy just because his stomach is full. The more serious problem facing mankind is sin that kills the soul of a person. People who are under the power of sin and death cannot be happy, even if they have all the bread they need. Physical bread or money, no matter how much we have, cannot bring us out of the darkness of sin and death. It cannot save us from eternal condemnation.

That is why Jesus said, *“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”* This verse teaches us an important truth. A life spent only toiling for food that spoils is not a blessed life. According to Genesis 3:17, it is a cursed life. Many people spend their entire life working only for food that spoils, without knowing that such life is a cursed life. When God created man, he created him to do God’s mission. Man did not have to work for his own food (Ge 1:30). But after the Fall, man was cursed to work hard for his food (Ge 1:28; 3:17).

So working for only three meals a day is a cursed life. Then how can we overcome this cursed life? After all, all of us have to work for food in order to survive physically. How can this problem be solved from the root? The Israelites in this passage thought that their problem would be gone once they had a free bakery. Many people today also view this only as a political or social problem. Democrats argue that generous social programs are the answer. Republicans argue that “the trickle-down” economic policy is the answer. But can the politicians really provide the answer to our bread problem? Even if their economic plans secure our financial future, which is unlikely, we can be sure they would not solve our life problem. It is because human desire for material things is unlimited. More importantly the sin problem would remain unsolved.

Let's read verse 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.”* Jesus is the answer. Man cannot solve his life problem just by working hard to preserve his mortal body. But those who have Jesus in their life can solve their life problem. Jesus gives us eternal life; those who have eternal life have no “life problem.” Those who have Jesus’ life in them can have real peace from heaven. They can experience the kingdom of God, where there is no frustration or bloody fighting for survival. To have Jesus’ life in us is the only solution to our life problems. Just as we need bread to sustain our physical body, we need Jesus to sustain our spiritual life.

At first glance, Jesus’ words in verse 27 are puzzling. He says we should not work for food that spoils. Does this mean we should all quit our jobs? He then says we should work for food that endures to eternal life. What a minute. Isn’t eternal life a free gift that we cannot earn? Actually the first part is easy. We should not quit our jobs. In fact, we should work hard. The Bible says that “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat” (2Th 3:10). We should work hard to support our family but this kind of work should not be the main goal of our life. Now on the second point about working for food that endures to eternal life. Jesus teaches us that we should work not only for physical bread, but also for food that endures to eternal life. What does it mean to work for food that endures to eternal life? Look at verses 28-29. When they asked Jesus, *“What must we do to do the works God requires?”* he answered, *“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”* Faith in Jesus is the answer to our life problem because he gives us eternal life. There is no one who can save us from our sins but Jesus. To believe in Jesus is to believe personally that Jesus died for our sins on the cross, and that we will rise again to be with Jesus on the last day. To work for food that endures to eternal life is to know Jesus personally and to obey his words. It is to live a life of faith and mission in Jesus.

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” Let me repeat: Jesus is the answer to our life problem because only he can give us eternal life. May God help us to work for food that endures to eternal life!

II. “I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE” (35-40)

Look at verse 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.”* The crowd thought that their problem was the lack of bread on their dinner table. They wanted Jesus to solve their physical bread problem. But Jesus drew their attention to a more urgent problem—the salvation of their souls.

First, Jesus satisfies our hunger (35). What does it mean Jesus is the bread of life? It means that Jesus came down from heaven to solve our bread problem. In this passage, the words “from heaven” are repeated 10 times (31,32a,32b,33,38,41,42,50,51,58). This repetition has a spiritual significance. No one or nothing from this world can solve the

fundamental problem of the sinful mankind. The solution must come from God. Matthew 1:21 explains this truth. It says, *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”* Jesus came from heaven to be our Savior. C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) said that Jesus’ claim to come from heaven makes him one of 3 things: he is a lunatic, a liar, or the Lord of the universe. He cannot be reduced only to a good moral teacher or a prophet. We must be very clear about who Jesus is to us as we follow him.

In the midst of material abundance, there are many hungry and thirsty souls. Many are hungry for parent’s love. They are hungry for fame and wealth. They are hungry for power. They are thirsty for worldly achievements. They are thirsty and weary from their hard work. Sometimes we see on TV the malnourished children in Africa and North Korea suffering from severe famine. They say that hunger makes people most sorrowful. But there is another kind of hunger. Hunger and thirst in this passage represent man’s tiredness and weariness in their souls. Why are they so tired and weary? The Bible says they are tired and weary because they carry the heavy burden of sin, and because they are under the torment of Satan. This kind of hunger and thirst cannot be relieved by eating food or by drinking beverages. Only Jesus can satisfy their souls because he came from heaven to save people from their sins. Jesus says in verse 33. *“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*

In Luke 12, Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool to teach how fleeting it is to struggle for only physical bread (Lk 12:13-21). A man worked very hard to be materially successful. After many years of hard labor, he finally became rich. One year he struck a gold mine when his ground produced an unusually good crop. He thought to himself, “What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.” He could not sleep at night partly because of excitement and partly because he was worried about his wealth. Then he said, “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’” This man had no concept of a spiritual life. When he was blessed with wealth, all he could think about was how to live a pleasure seeking life. But God had news for him. He said to the man, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” What good is an impressive fleet of BMW’s, heated swimming pools, vacations homes, or a portfolio of stocks and bonds when a man’s life is finished? Jesus asks in Mark 8:36, *“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”* We need Jesus who came down from heaven to give us eternal life.

Second, the will of God to save the world (36-40). Jesus is the bread of life. He who comes to Jesus will never go hungry, and he who believes in Jesus will never be thirsty. But the crowd did not believe because of their fixed idea that physical bread was the answer to their life problems. Then Jesus told them about God’s will so that somehow they might come to him. Look at verse 39. *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”* God’s will is that he wants to save all people through his Son Jesus Christ. God is like a shepherd who leaves 99 sheep in the open country to find one lost sheep. God’s

will is that everyone may have eternal life through his Son. Jesus says in verse 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 him up at the last day.”* God wants each of us to believe in the Son and have eternal life in his glorious kingdom.

In today’s passage, we learned that Jesus is the bread of life. We should work hard, but not just for food that spoils. Instead, we should work harder for food that endures to eternal life. It means that we have a personal relationship with Jesus and obey his words through our life of faith and mission. Let us read together verse 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.”*