

The Bread of Life

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[0:00] Well, let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at this passage together. Let's pray. Thank you, our God, for your word. Thank you for sending Jesus Christ into this world for us.

We pray now that as we come to listen to what he says, that your spirit would help us understand and apply your word to our lives.

For we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if you've been following the news recently over the past couple of weeks, you'll know all about Professor Jason Arde, who was sadly found dead on Friday and his death was tragic.

But I've been struck as I've been looking at the news and the media reports that when it comes to Jason Arde, the press and the media are polarized.

There are such strong reactions towards him, either for him or against him. Now, the backstory, of course, is before resigning, Arde was the professor of sociology at the University of Cambridge.

[1:07] And the furore has been over his claims, claims he made about his personal achievements, as well as his academic credentials. What he claimed about himself has produced such a strong reaction, public outrage.

And now as we come to John chapter 6, I'd like you to see that Jesus makes some remarkable claims about himself. And those claims produce such a strong reaction from those who hear what Jesus says.

Basically, the magnitude of Jesus' claims force people to react strongly against him or towards him or for him.

One day in the passage we read, they want to make Jesus king. The next day, they turn away from him and want nothing to do with him. And yet Jesus did not just produce strong reactions from people back then who heard his claims for the first time.

Jesus' claims about himself still force people today to react strongly towards him. In fact, if Jesus doesn't cause you to react strongly towards him, then you probably haven't really heard what Jesus is saying.

[2:26] You haven't actually understood him. Because John 6 makes it clear that what Jesus claims will provoke, will produce a strong reaction, a strong response from us.

And it all kicks off here in John chapter 6, because Jesus declares, I am the bread of life. It's a huge claim, one that has huge implications for us.

So let's just see why, looking at this passage under three headings. First of all, there's the sign of the bread, which challenges our minds. Second, there's the meaning of the bread, which challenges our hearts.

And third, there's the reaction to the bread, which challenges our wills. So first of all, the sign of the bread challenges our minds. In verse 1 to 15, John 6 starts with this miracle of Jesus feeding the 5,000.

Now the 5,000 refers to the men. They're in verse 10. But in reality, there was probably more like 10 to 20,000 people there, including all the women and all the children.

[3:33] And it's an amazing miracle, one that John calls a sign. In verse 14, Remember, John's gospel has been called the book of signs because there are signs, seven signs in fact, that point us to the true identity of Jesus.

Well, why are these signs there? Well, so that we might believe in him. Where each of the signs has a significance. And that's what's happening with what is the fourth sign here.

Where our focus isn't simply to be just on the miracle itself. Our focus is meant to be on the one who carries out, who performs this miracle.

And you notice that it's all managed by Jesus. It's all orchestrated by him in order to reveal his true identity. And when his true identity is revealed, that's when you get these strong reactions towards him.

And so when John mentions here, verse 4, the Jewish Passover festival was near, John's not just telling us when this happened. It's not just a chronological detail. He is also telling us what this says about Jesus.

[4:46] It's a theological detail. It's a point he's wanting to make. Because Jesus is using the Passover to say that he is the one that all the Passover stands for points to.

Now, if you know much about the Old Testament part of the Bible, the Jewish Passover celebrated the exodus of the people of God, the Israelites from Egypt. And they were slaves in Egypt. So this exodus is the time when God rescued them and delivered them from their slavery. And the celebration to remember this great event involved the sacrifice of a lamb for each household, which the family then ate together.

It was called the Passover lamb. And the Passover lamb reminded God's people how God's judgment had passed over them. Now, earlier in John's gospel, Jesus is called the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And so here, Jesus performs this sign to show how he himself will give his flesh, his life for the life of the world.

[5:57] And so this miracle, in a sense, it reenacts the history of God's people in the exodus as Jesus tells how he is going to rescue his people from their slavery to sin and to give them eternal life.

So it's a sign that's pointing to who he is. And so when this huge crowd comes towards him, Jesus asks Philip in verse 5, where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?

And we're then told in verse 6 that Jesus' question is a test. But Philip fails the test. He is only thinking about how much money you need if you were to have to go to the shops to feed this many people, to buy bread for everyone.

Philip's not thinking, who has just asked him the question and what he can do? Because Philip had seen Jesus turn water into wine and do a number of other amazing miracles.

And so because Jesus is the son of God, he is more than able to feed all these people. And then we get to Andrew. He's the next disciple, but he fails the test too.

[7:07] Because when he finds this boy with the five loaves and the two fish, he is only thinking, this isn't enough. No way can we feed all these people with such a small amount of food.

He's not thinking either that Jesus is able to feed all these people. He's seen Jesus do remarkable miracles before. And you see what Jesus does here.

He involves the disciples in his miracle. He tells them to sit the people down. He then gives thanks for the food and distributes it to the people. The food is served.

Everybody is satisfied. And there's this super abundance of food that's left over. And it's a remarkable display of the power of Jesus. And so no wonder it produces such a strong reaction from the people.

Verse 14 and 15. After the people saw the sign that Jesus performed, they began to say, surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world. Jesus, knowing that he intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

[8:13] Now the crowd are convinced Jesus is the prophet who is to come into the world. So he's referring to what Moses, John's referring to what Moses said one day would happen that God would raise up a prophet from among the people.

And he would be the ultimate prophet, the prophet to end all prophets. And so if the prophet Moses led the people out of their slavery in Egypt, the people here are thinking, this prophet will surely lead us out of Rome's oppression.

That's why they wanted to take Jesus and make him king by force. Because they knew that God had promised that the Messiah would come to save his people. And so they're looking to Jesus as the one who will deliver them and bring this political peace.

But Jesus' kingship is different from what they expect. Jesus isn't this political king who will rule by force. He's not coming to deliver his people by crushing the human powers against them.

Instead, Jesus is the king who came to suffer and die to deliver them. From what? From the oppression of sin. And so the crowd recognize Jesus' identity in part, but they haven't fully grasped

who he really is as the son of God.

[9:41] And they haven't fully grasped how he's going to save them. They needed to realize that while he is the prophet and he is the king, just what kind of prophet and king he would be.

He'd be one who would offer himself as a sacrifice. The Passover lamb. And that would be his priestly role. The prophet, the priest, and the king. And so as we apply this before we move on to our next point, this miracle is not just an end in itself, is it?

It's a sign pointing us to Jesus. And so the sign of the bread should challenge our minds. Because it forced the crowd then, as it forces us today, to make up our minds about Jesus.

To say, okay, who is he? How can he do these things? What does this mean? And Jesus' identity here is revealed in such a powerful way.

Because no ordinary human being could do what Jesus did. Only God could feed this many people in this way.

[10:53] And that's why the sign challenges us to see Jesus for who he truly is. So as we see what he does, we should let the evidence lead us to the obvious conclusion, which is that Jesus is God in human flesh who came into this world for us.

That's our first point. The sign of the bread challenges our minds. Secondly, the meaning of the bread challenges our hearts. And that's this big chunk, verse 16 to 59.

What Jesus does here is he declares himself to be the bread of life that came down from heaven. Now we mentioned the Passover celebrated the Exodus. After the Exodus, God led his people through the wilderness.

And as they were going through the wilderness, God provided bread from heaven called manna, and it fed the people on their way. And that's the background to what Jesus is saying here about being the bread of life that came from heaven.

Jesus is saying, I'm the bread, I'm the food that you need. Meaning, he alone can satisfy us in this life and also sustain us for eternal life.

[12:15] And so Jesus says there in 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.

For on him, God the Father has placed his seal of approval. So Jesus is saying there's a hunger in every human heart, in every human being, that goes beyond just physical hunger.

So deep in our hearts, we all try to satisfy ourselves in all kinds of ways with all kinds of things.

Jesus is saying here, everybody seeks satisfaction.

like the Rolling Stones used to sing, I can't get no satisfaction. But Jesus is implying here, we just seek satisfaction in all the wrong places.

So we might try relationships to be satisfied, or family, or career, or success, or money, or comfort, or whatever it is.

[13:21] And yet still never find the satisfaction that we crave. Of course, maybe we get the satisfaction for a little while, but not fully, and not forever.

And that's why Jesus is saying here, we shouldn't work for food that spoils, but rather for food that endures to eternal life, which alone he can give.

Now Jesus here, I think, is echoing the words from Isaiah chapter 55, which we all said together at the very start of our service. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Because Jesus is saying here the only food that truly satisfies, the only way you can be truly satisfied in life, is through Jesus.

And so Jesus is asked here in verse 28 by his hearers, what must we do to do the works that God requires? And so he says there in verse 29, Jesus answered, the work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.

[14:31] God requires us to believe in Jesus, the one he sent. And so we can't do anything ourselves to get the satisfaction that we long for.

It comes from Jesus when we believe in him. And that's at the heart of Jesus' discussion here. But the people are unwilling to believe in Jesus, and so they demand that Jesus performs a sign for them, which is odd, isn't it?

Look at verse 30. So they asked him, what sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? How can they ask for a sign when they've just seen this remarkable feeding of thousands of people?

That was a sign that was enough for them to believe. And so their demand for a sign proves not that they can't believe because they don't have enough evidence, but that they won't believe because they refuse to accept the evidence that is right before their eyes.

And perhaps you're here this afternoon and you feel that you could believe if only there was just a bit more evidence.

[15 : 48] If only Jesus did more stuff to convince you, your mind, then you would give your heart and you would believe. And yet what we see here is that our problem often isn't a lack of evidence, it's a lack of willingness.

Where it's not just that you need a bit more proof to believe is that your heart doesn't really want to believe. And so what the people do here is they appeal to the exodus and to the manna in the wilderness.

Just pick this up in verse 31. Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness as it is written he gave them bread from heaven to eat. 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 for the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

Now for these people comparing themselves to their ancestors wasn't a great move because their ancestors were a people who grumbled and grumbled and grumbled against Moses against God and they failed to trust God.

So Jesus reminds them it wasn't Moses who provided the manna it was God. And Jesus is saying to them he is the fulfillment of the manna in the wilderness.

[17 : 13] So the true bread from heaven is he who has come from the Father that's Jesus. But unlike the manna Jesus doesn't just give this temporary satisfaction he satisfies and sustains for eternal life.

And they want this bread verse 35 so Jesus says I am the bread of life whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

It's the first of these seven I am statements that Jesus makes. And of course he is using the bread or bread as a metaphor here.

Jesus is symbolized by the bread. So just think for a moment what does bread do? This is a home economics test. What does bread do?

It's obvious well it satisfies our hunger doesn't it? It gives us strength it sustains our bodies it gives us life. But notice what Jesus doesn't say he doesn't say I have the bread of life to give away to you so he's not a baker who dispenses with bread who dishes it out no Jesus says I am the bread he's saying something astounding not that he can show us the way to satisfaction in life which is something other religious leaders and founders will say listen to my words listen to what I say this is the way you should go no Jesus is saying that he is himself the ultimate satisfaction in life he's the bread he's the spiritual food he came down from heaven to give life to the world he's saying that he can satisfy your hunger he can quench your thirst so what you've been searching for what you've been looking for that longing to be satisfied in life that has evaded you only Jesus can fill that hole meet that need plug that gap because he alone is the source of eternal life and so the only way to receive this life from

[19 : 46] Jesus is to eat the bread what does that mean well we eat the bread by believing in Jesus by faith we take Jesus and feed on him as it were and that's what satisfies and gives us eternal life which means if we don't take Jesus the bread of life then we will starve forever will perish without Jesus it's such a strong metaphor that he uses and that's why Jesus always produces such a strong reaction because he's saying to the people then as he says to people now if you don't take me into your life let me be your all and feed on me then eternally you will perish you will not have eternal life so verse 41 says at this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said I am the bread that came down from heaven they said is this not Jesus the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know how can he now say I came down from heaven so just like Israel grumbled against Moses in the desert and they were characterized by their unbelief so here the people grumble about Jesus and they refuse to believe in him and they're not just asking a question here when they say is this not Jesus the son of Joseph they're saying we know where he comes from we know there is nothing special about him we know his mum and dad how can he come from heaven and promise us eternal life and so they refuse to accept him or believe in him but Jesus pushes this further look at verse 51

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 Jesus is making another startling claim here saying the bread that he'll give for the life of the world is his flesh again the bread is a metaphor speaking of his body his flesh that would be broken on the cross or ripped apart as he died on the cross Jesus gave his flesh and his blood when he died and so Jesus says in verse 54 whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise them up at the last day he's saying his flesh is our food his blood is our drink it's a shocking graphic way to speak isn't it but Jesus is saying we must take him if we are to have life he gave his life for us on the cross his body broken for us blood shed for us so as we feed on him by believing we receive his life so he had to suffer in order that we could be satisfied he had to die so that we could live his body had to be broken so that we could be made whole his blood had to be poured!

out so that we could be filled and that's the true meaning of the bread let's try and illustrate it just imagine if you can there's a nice crusty big loaf of bread on the table you know the kind of artisan loaf kind that's really hard on the outside maybe a bit burnt black on top and it's on the table and you're so hungry you're starving well something has got to happen hasn't it for you to find satisfaction the bread has got to be broken or cut if your hunger is going to be satisfied because if that bread on the table that nice bread if it stays whole then you stay hungry and eventually you'll die well that's going to be pushing the illustration a bit far you probably will take some precautions to eat something before dying but you get the point if the bread is broken and you take it in then you live it has to be broken in order for you to be nurtured and satisfied and sustained and so when Jesus says I am the bread of life he's saying that he must die he must be broken on the cross so that we can live eternally and he's saying he came down from heaven to give us eternal life to then take us from earth to heaven to be in his presence forever and so as we apply this before we move on to our final point which is much shorter so don't panic the meaning of the bread is a challenge to our hearts because it forces us to recognize that Jesus came into this world give his life for us out of love he was willing to die in our place and so he invites us to take him to believe in him so that we won't perish for all eternity but that we will have eternal life and only when you see that Jesus was willing to do this for you and it won't just blow your mind it will melt your heart and it will start to change your life forever because as you realize that he invites you whoever you are whoever whatever you've done he invites you to freely take him because he wants to give you all that he can give and it doesn't just impact your mind it impacts your heart and transforms you forever so thirdly then what's the reaction to this bread well it challenges our wills this is the end of the chapter verse 60 through to 71 and it basically highlights the reaction to what Jesus has said and again it's a strong reaction because the people really hear what

[26 : 36] Jesus is saying so many disciples desert Jesus while the twelve remain with him so those who turn from Jesus find his teaching hard don't want to accept it Jesus knows about their grumbling and he knows that some of them don't believe even among his own disciples and he says in verse 65 that no one can come to him unless the father has enabled them and so while we are called to believe in Jesus Jesus makes it clear this is not something that we can do ourselves it is God the father who enables us to believe and it's from this that many turn away and no longer follow Jesus because the reality is we are completely powerless helpless we are starving and unable to contribute anything to our salvation in other words we cannot get to

God by ourselves we're hopeless helpless God has got to work in us in order to draw us to Jesus and only then can we take and eat and find satisfaction and so it's after the many disciples decide that they're not for this they desert Jesus that Jesus then turns to the twelve in verse sixty seven and he asks you do not want to leave too do you and it's Simon Peter who speaks up it usually is Simon Peter who speaks up but it's different this time sixty eight and sixty nine Simon Peter answered!

Lord to whom shall we go you have the words of eternal life we have come to believe and to know that you are the holy one of God Simon Peter has got it unlike all the other times or basically ninety nine percent of the time when he puts his foot in it what he says here as the mouthpiece for all the other disciples is spot on he's nailed it there is no one else to go to he realizes that Jesus alone has the words of eternal life and so he and these disciples had grasped enough to know that Jesus had come from God and so they had come to believe in him and the question is what about you what's your reaction to Jesus have you come to believe in him because you won't find satisfaction in anyone or in anything else you won't discover eternal life anywhere else we said at the start how

Jesus produces a strong reaction from people and it's inevitable when we really hear and understand what Jesus is saying because when Jesus confronts us as he confronted the people here then he challenges our entire life he exposes our hearts our desires our sin and he calls us to follow him unreservedly not simply to admire him oh Jesus is such a good teacher he says some lovely things or be impressed by him but to go to him and give our all to him to take him by believing in him to feed on him because nothing less will do and yet it's clear here as it is today that for many people that's just too much far too much but what

Jesus says here means that you actually can't sit on the fence when it comes to Jesus you are either for him or you are against him Jesus is the bread of heaven and he continues to invite us to receive him isn't that good news the only issue is will we there's no other way to be saved let's pray together