

“I am the Bread of Life”

The “I AM” Sayings of Christ: “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

Feeding the Multitude

In order to try and get some rest from their busy lives, Jesus and His disciples left the area around Capernaum, on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and went, by boat, across the lake, to a lonely, deserted place on the eastern shore (Mark 6:31-32), near to Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). However, the multitude saw Jesus depart and followed Him, “because they saw His miracles (signs)” (John 6:2), around the northern tip of the lake, on foot (Mark 6:33). When Jesus saw the multitude arrive, rather than sending them away, we are told that Jesus “was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick” (Matthew 14:14), “and spake unto them of the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:11). As the day wore on and evening came, the disciples urged Jesus to “send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals (food)” (Matthew 14:15). This was the setting for Jesus’ famous miracle of “The Feeding of the Five Thousand”, when, from “five barley loaves, and two small fishes” (John 6:9), Jesus miraculously fed “about five thousand men, beside women and children” (Matthew 14:21). John is the only Gospel writer who tells us that “those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world (presumably referring to Deuteronomy 18:15, 18). When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone” (John 6:14-15).

Seeking the Saviour

The next day, the people whom Jesus had fed “came to Capernaum (by boat), seeking for Jesus” (John 6:24). When they had found Him, in the synagogue (John 6:59), they were curious to know how He had managed to cross the lake (this was the occasion when Jesus walked on the water – John 6:19). The Jews posed the question, “Rabbi, when camest thou hither?” (John 6:25); but instead of answering their question, Jesus questions their motivation in seeking Him: “Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles (signs), but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled” (John 6:26). The motives prompting the people were purely selfish and materialistic; they wanted a Messiah who would free them from the yoke of the occupying Roman forces and make Israel great again, as in the days of David and Solomon: with plenty of food, power and wealth. Jesus seeks to focus the Jews’ attention on their great spiritual need: “Labour (Work) not for the meat (food) which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man (Jesus) shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed (authenticated)” (John 6:27). In other words, their need is of a far more fundamental and spiritual nature than mere temporal, material benefits can give. Not the passing pleasures that attend this earthly life, but the enduring, heavenly blessings which attend eternal life, are the great need, not only of the Jews, but of all mankind, Jew or Gentile; and Jesus Christ, the Messiah, sent and commissioned by the Father, is willing and able to bestow them.

Believe and Live

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:28-29). The crowd take up the word “Work” which Jesus used (beginning of verse 27, translated “Labour” in the KJV), and show that they are still thinking in terms of an earthly, physical kingdom, and that there is something that they must **do** in order for them to **earn** a place in it. Jesus seeks to point them away from **themselves**, and any meritorious work they might be able to perform, and point them to **Himself**, on whom they must **believe**; the only “**work**” that God requires is, in fact, a **gift** of God’s grace: “For by grace are ye saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8); “And this is his (God’s) commandment, That we should **believe** on the name of his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 3:23). Faith in His Son is what God requires of us in order to enter His kingdom.

Unbelievably, the people now ask Jesus to back up His claims to be sent by the Father by performing a sign-miracle! Had they not followed Jesus across the lake the previous day because they had seen His sign-miracles? Had not Jesus just performed an outstanding sign-miracle by feeding five thousand men, plus women and children, by means of five loaves and two fishes? All this does not appear to have been enough for the doubting Jews: “Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat” (John 6:31). The thinking of the Jews appears to have been along these lines: “In the wilderness wanderings, our great prophet Moses gave the people of Israel bread (manna) straight out of heaven throughout their journeyings to the Promised Land (see the account in Exodus chapter 16): can you beat that?” In His reply, Jesus points out that, first of all, it was not **Moses** who gave them the manna, it was **God** (Exodus 16:4), and, secondly, the bread that God gave from heaven was only **physical bread**, which was but a **type** of the **true, spiritual, Life-giving Bread** which the Father sent down from heaven in the person of His Son; furthermore, the wilderness **bread** was only for **the Jews**; the **true Bread**, Jesus Christ, of whom the manna was a type, gives life to **the world** (i.e. all men, irrespective of nationality or any other distinction): “For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world” (John 6:33). The Jews’ response to this, “Lord, evermore give us this bread” (verse 34), reminds us of the conversation that Jesus had with the **woman of Samaria**, in John chapter 4; there the subject was water, rather than bread: “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw” (John 4:15); on that occasion, Jesus was able to lead the woman to a true, spiritual understanding of who He was and what He was offering her: and she believed, along with a number of her fellow **Samaritans** (John 4:39-42). But here, in John chapter 6, **the Jews**, who viewed the Samaritans with disdain, utterly failed to grasp the spiritual truth that Jesus was teaching them; all they wanted was to fill their bellies.

Jesus, “the Bread of Life”

We now come to the words of our text: “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). Jesus wants His hearers to understand that not only is He **the one who gives** “the bread of life” – **He Himself IS** “the bread of life” (i.e. He is “life-giving bread”), and the life that is found in Christ is not

received by physical eating, but by faith; in other words, the Bread of Life which Jesus gives is not **physical bread for the body**, but **spiritual Bread** which gives Life **to the soul**. Those who come to Jesus, by faith, will have their spiritual hunger and thirst completely satisfied, because this Life, which Jesus **gives** and which Jesus **is**, doesn't just last for ever (verses 27, 40, 47, etc.), it brings with it the joy of knowing God Himself: "And this is life eternal, that they might **know thee** the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

Behind these words of the Lord Jesus is the Biblical teaching that we are born into this world "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1), destitute of spiritual life, and under the wrath of God (Ephesians 2:3). God originally made man in His own image, with the capacity to know God and enjoy fellowship with Him; this was man's "glory", and set him above the brute beasts. But when man fell into sin, that image of God was marred and ruined: man lost the true knowledge of God and became cut off from the Holy One (Isaiah 59:2) who cannot countenance sin (Habakkuk 1:13). The Psalmist bewails this loss of God's image in man in these words: "Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish" (Psalm 49:20). Jesus Christ, as the Life-giving Bread, came to restore that which we had lost (Psalm 69:4), so that we might once again **know God** (Colossians 3:10) and walk in fellowship with Him (1 John 1:3).

The saying, "You are what you eat", was never more true than with regard to Jesus Christ as the Bread of Life. He is the most wholesome food your soul could ever wish for, and if you feed on Him, by faith, you will become like Him: holy, blameless, pure, honest, patient, righteous, meek and lowly in heart, full of love and compassion, and with an earnest desire to do God's will and live for His glory; in other words, God's image will be restored in you. Jesus is able to give this Life because, as God, He is the source of all Life: "In him was life" (John 1:4). "God hath given to us (Christian believers) eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:11-12); "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son (literally, "obeyeth not the Son", because **not believing God** is an act of disobedience) shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth (remains) on him" (John 3:36).

Comings and Goings

From John 6:36 onwards we meet with various statements which indicate the Jews' continuing, wilful rejection of Christ and His teaching, despite all the evidence that they had seen and heard. Jesus' teaching did not coincide with their preconceived political and carnal ideas of what the Messiah should be; their perceptions of the Messiah's kingdom were earthly, rather than heavenly; they saw only with their physical eyes: "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness (hardness) of their heart" (Ephesians 4:18). Jesus knew only too well what was going on in the hearts and minds of the majority of His hearers, leading to them growing more and more hostile (verses 41-43, 52, 60), and eventually to many of them leaving Him: "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (verse 66). But Jesus also knew that there were, and always would be, those who **would**, by God's grace and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, understand His teaching, and the spiritual nature of His kingdom, and would believe in Him, come to Him, and receive the Life which He came to offer: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (verse 37); "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me

draw him" (verse 44); "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (verse 39). Here we have the Biblical teaching that God, from all eternity, has chosen a people in Christ (predestination – see Ephesians 1:4:) who would, in time, be drawn to Christ by the gracious power of God (effectual calling, or irresistible grace), and who would be kept in Christ by the power of God through faith to the end of their lives here on earth (the perseverance of the saints); and then, at the last day, Jesus will raise their bodies also, "and so shall (they) ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

To clarify one issue that some people misunderstand, God does not **force** anyone to come to Christ against their will: "Thy people shall be willing (or, "offer themselves willingly"; literally, "are freewill offerings") in the day of thy power" (Psalm 110:3); "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hosea 11:4); "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31:3).

Jesus does not talk of these "Doctrines of Grace" as a matter for argument or disagreement, but as glorious truths to be humbly received. It is only because of God's sovereign love and grace that anyone is saved and receives eternal life: "by grace ye are saved" (Ephesians 2:5).

Jesus goes on to compare the Life that He gives with that which the manna gave: "I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This (Jesus) is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die" (verses 48-50). The manna only sustained the physical lives of the wandering Jews **temporarily**, the life Jesus gives is of an **eternal** quality.

The failure of the Jews to come to Christ for the eternal life that He was offering them was as culpable as it was wilful. As Jesus said to the Jews on another occasion: "Ye **will** not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). The same applies to people today who hear the Good News of forgiveness and Life in Jesus Christ and yet refuse to come: they don't want Christ, and they don't want what He has to offer: "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14).

Man's sin and rebellion against God in the Garden of Eden means that each one of us is born into this world with a large God-shaped hole inside of us, which only God can fill. People think they can find happiness and satisfaction in the things that this world has to offer, living "in the lusts of our flesh (the sinful nature), fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Ephesians 2:3). Rather than finding satisfaction in Him who is "the fountain of living waters", people try to find it in the "broken cisterns" of this world, "that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). As a result, people are never satisfied, no matter how much of this world's wealth and pleasures they possess: "I tried the broken cisterns, Lord, but, ah, the waters failed! Even as I stooped to drink they fled, and mocked me as I wailed... O Christ, in Thee my soul hath found, and found in Thee alone, the peace, the joy I sought so long, the bliss till now unknown. *Now none but Christ can satisfy, none other Name for me! There's love and life and lasting joy, Lord Jesus, found in Thee*" (from the hymn "O Christ, in Thee my soul hath found", author Anonymous, no. 622 in Christian Worship).

Faith, not Religion

From verse 51, Jesus uses language which is His most symbolic yet in this discourse: “and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world... Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you” (verses 51, 53). “It is evident that the Jews misunderstood the Saviour, and thought that He referred to the literal eating of His flesh. It is no wonder that they strove among themselves over such a saying, for, understood literally, it is horrible and revolting to the last degree: far greater is the wonder that there are millions of people who accept so monstrous an error as actual truth, and believe in literally feeding upon the body of the Lord Jesus” (C. H. Spurgeon: Sermon on John 6:53-56). The people that Spurgeon was referring to believe that their “priests” (an office which the New Testament does not recognise, because all believers are priests, e.g. 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6), by uttering their “hocus pocus”, can magically transform bread and wine into the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ. When Jesus spoke these words (John 6:51, 53), He had already spent much time in instructing the Jews as to what this **eating and drinking** meant: “This is the work of God, that ye **believe** on him whom he hath sent... I am the bread of life: he that **cometh to me** shall never hunger; and he that **believeth on me** shall never thirst... this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and **believeth on him**, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day... Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that **believeth on me** hath everlasting life.” (verses 29, 35, 40, 47). How much clearer could the Saviour make it?! The Bread of Life, which He is, is **received by faith**, and the **eating and drinking** that is required is an eating and drinking **by faith**. This faith is to be placed **in Himself**, as the New Testament everywhere attests, as the one who **died on the cross once and for all** (Romans 6:10; Hebrews 10:10; 7:27 - “the word ‘once’ [in all the verses mentioned] is the translation of ‘ephapax’, which means ‘once for all’ [Kenneth S. Wuest: “Word Studies in the Greek New Testament”) as an **atonement for sin** (1 Corinthians 15:3), and **was raised again for our justification** (Romans 4:25). Life by virtue of His atoning death, received by faith alone, is the message Jesus taught here and elsewhere: “the Son of man came... to minister (serve), and to give his life a ransom (the price paid to God in order to deliver us from our bondage to sin and Satan) for many” (Matthew 20:28); “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up (upon the cross): that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). Nowhere are we taught in the inspired scriptures that eternal life is received by partaking of the Lord’s Supper (which is nowhere in scripture referred to as “The Mass”, or any English equivalent of that phrase – the word “Mass” comes from the Latin word “Missa”, meaning “Dismissal”). Jesus gave Himself **once for all** on the cross, and His atoning death is **never** to be repeated, and the eternal life He purchased on the cross is received **by faith alone**; thus speaks the infallible word of God; and no man, whoever he may claim to be, has the authority to change God’s truth as revealed in the scriptures.

A Matter of Life and Death

In verse 60 we read, “Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” and in verse 66 (already quoted earlier) we read, “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him”. These so-called “disciples” were happy to tag along with Jesus as long as things were going well and their bellies were full, but when things got challenging and they were told that they lacked spiritual life they became offended and left.

It isn't enough to be religious. Jesus told Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3): no one is **born** a Christian; having Christian **parents** doesn't make **you** a Christian; being **christened** as a baby doesn't make you a Christian; being **outwardly moral** doesn't make you a Christian; giving mere **mental assent** to the fact that Jesus is the Bread of Life won't give you eternal life; you need to **appropriate (take in) Jesus Christ to your soul by faith**, just as your body appropriates physical bread when you eat it. You need to receive the Life of God into your soul, and that only happens when you come, personally, to Jesus Christ by faith, repenting of your sin and trusting in His shed blood on the cross.

Not all of Jesus' professing disciples left at this time: "Then Jesus said unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:67-69). Jesus is sure to have His true disciples in every age; they, like Peter, know that He is their only hope, the only one who can give them eternal life: are you one of them? Remember, one of the twelve, Judas Iscariot, went on to betray Jesus, and then killed himself and went to hell (John 17:12): he fooled the other disciples into thinking he was a genuine follower of Jesus Christ, but Jesus knew his heart (John 6:70-71), just like He knew the hearts of those who left Him at this time.

The Son of God knows **your** heart too. Don't be like the unbelieving Jews, who walked away from their only chance of Life. Your life doesn't have to end in eternal death. If you recognise that you are a sinner in need of God's forgiveness, then "Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity joined with power; He is able, He is willing; doubt no more" (from the hymn "Come ye sinners" by Joseph Hart, no. 580 in Christian Worship). Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous (those who are good enough in their own eyes), but sinners (those who recognise that they have disobeyed God and have not loved Him as they ought) to repentance (a turning **from** sin and a turning **to** God, in Christ, by faith)" (Luke 5:32).

Jesus Christ is life-giving, soul-satisfying bread from heaven (John 6:51; cf. Psalm 105:40). The Son of God, who has "life in himself" (John 5:26), became the Son of man and was born in the little town of "Bethlehem" (which means "House of Bread"), in order that He might be the Bread of Life to hungry souls throughout the world. He lived a perfect life, and then willingly gave up that life on the cross in order to make an atonement for the sins of all who will come to Him, so that they might enjoy the forgiveness, eternal life, and true and lasting peace and happiness which only He can give. The soul of those who feast, by faith, on Jesus Christ, the heavenly manna, "shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness" (Psalm 63:5); He can give **your** life real meaning and purpose. If you come to Him you will enjoy the fellowship with your creator God which Adam lost when he sinned, and you will find complete satisfaction in Him who is the very source of Life: "O Christ, in Thee my soul hath found, and found in Thee alone, the peace, the joy I sought so long, the bliss till now unknown. Now none but Christ can satisfy, none other name for me! There's love and life and lasting joy, Lord Jesus, found in Thee" (hymn no. 622 in Christian Worship).

"Have you heard the voice of Jesus softly pleading with your heart?" (William Vernon Higham, hymn no. 585 in Christian Worship); if you have, then come to Him now, by faith; He has promised, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst". Amen.