

RedLetters | The Sermons of Jesus (2024)

I Am the Bread of Life

John 6.14-15, 24-40

February 25, 2024

Therefore, when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."¹⁵ So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

²⁴ *So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. ²⁵ When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?"*

²⁶ *Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷ "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."²⁸ Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."³⁰ So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?" ³¹ "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. ³³ "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."³⁴ Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."*

³⁵ *Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. ³⁶ "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. ³⁷ "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."*

We plan to spend two weeks with this long speech/conversation of Jesus Christ, sometimes called *The Bread of Life Discourse* ... because ... it's evidently important AND because it speaks a concern shared by every single person and that is ... *NEED* (hunger). Are you in touch with your real needs and the needs of those around you?

What DO you need at this point in your life? Do YOU think in terms of Needs vs. Wants? And what is Jesus Christ really claiming here when He uses this poignant image, "*I am the Bread of Life*"? He's evidently

claiming to be the answer to some need in us that no ONE or NO THING else CAN meet, so WHAT is this hunger/need and how does He meet it?

Let's think about:

#1) Hunger Games

#2) Seeing and Believing

#3) Fed and Flourishing

This was the *Season of Passover*. So when Jesus Christ feeds a mass of people in the wilderness (included in all Four Gospels), supplies bread in the wilderness, ... of course, people can't help but make connections between that national holiday and the first Passover and all the original events of the Exodus. There were even well-known writings among the Jewish rabbis saying that "*the Prophet*" Moses foretold (Deut 18) that whenever this Prophet came, he would also feed the people in the wilderness ... So, earlier in this chapter, after the 5000 are fed, the people conclude something about Jesus: (v. 14) "*This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.*"

And then, with public opinion on His side (and you KNOW how important public opinion is!!), with His "user reviews" so high ... the crowds try to take Jesus Christ by force and make Him King (again! 2.23ff). The public concludes that He is prophet and king. Of course Christians see Him as Prophet, Priest and King so the crowds are almost there... soooclose! BUT Jesus flatly rejects public opinion and refuses to BE their king (at least the kind of king they have in mind! [1Sam 8.11]) and He again slips away from the public to a mountain alone. He sends the Twelve across the *Sea of Galilee* by boat.

And as the disciples are making the journey across the lake, He comes to them ... He governs the laws of physics and walks to them ON the water. And then, they're on the other side of the sea. Remember, in the original Passover events and the Exodus, *Israel went through the sea* – so the imagery continues and reminders of the Exodus are in the air!

Then the "seeking" crowd catches up with Jesus and the Twelve (at a synagogue in Capernaum) and the crowds ask Him, "When did YOU get here? Because we didn't see You get in the boats."

And the crowd unwittingly asks the right question because He IS Master of the Elements, and they SEEM to be asking about His identity. BUT... He sees that their good question is coming from not-so-good motives; they're playing games! So, He gives them this non-answer: "*you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.*"

They're trying to manipulate the Messiah, but He sees through the games. They're really NOT so concerned with how He got there or with who He IS but only with their own HUNGER ... their own needs. BUT they don't even really see what their true needs ARE.

They saw the signs ... pointing to this UNIQUE moment in history that faces them (signs indicating that Messiah is here) ... BUT... they're NOT reading the signs...not responding. It'd be like a person staring at a green light and saying, "Oooo! That's a pretty color!" (But then not moving their car!)

"You act like you see the significance of what's happening but you're NOT reacting." And they're saying, "NO! We are reacting! We called you THE prophet...we tried to make you king... we think you're really special ... but now ... uh... um ... how can we get some more of that MANNA?"

Now, in fairness to the crowds: I've never had to wonder about where my next meal was coming from ... I haven't known hunger, and I haven't had to play these hunger games. If you're barely making it and someone offers to meet your needs ... or the ability to create food – you'd be plenty interested. It's hard to think of "the sweet-by-and-by" when your stomach is empty... Still, there IS more to life than bread alone (Deut 8.3) ... and the need for that MORE is Jesus' concern.

(v.27) *"Why do you work for food that spoils when I can give you food that lasts forever?"*

They say... "Well... Yeah, even better! Teach US to do what YOU do... what would WE have to do in order to WORK the works of God like you do? You know, Jesus,: *'give a man a fish and you feed him for a day – teach him how to multiply fish/bread and you feed him for a lifetime'* ...So, sure! Teach US how to do those miracles...the works of God!"

And in a sense, Jesus says, *"N o w we're getting' somewhere! Let's talk about God's work! (v. 29) THIS is the work of God - that you believe in Him whom God has sent!"*

"See, you think I'm special...that I might even be, "THE Prophet" ... maybe even a king who can make your life better... You may think I'm a hero maybe even up there with even Moses himself... but I'm telling you: I made Moses (Heb 3.3). I'm the King of all kings, the VOICE (Ps 29) behind all true prophets ...and you think I may be good for another couple of loaves and fish... You're aiming pretty low."

"You want Me to fix your political situation... to fill your stomachs... You think I'm great ...almost as great as Moses and the Exodus... WOW! Are your thoughts small?!"

See, this is the universal human tendency that C.S. Lewis talked about in his famous quote:

"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." (The Weight of Glory)

Moses wasn't the SOURCE of the Manna... He was only an arrow pointing to ME... but I am the Source and Substance of what you most need ... I am Bread of Life, he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. (v. 35) ... the true bread from heaven that gives life to the world! Not just

to the Israelites in the desert or to you Galileans, but the whole world will partake of Me and come to life!
... And you want a meal and a tax-cut?

AND then Jesus tells them: 1) How He will bring about Life and meet our need and 2) HOW we can receive it. (1. How He will feed the world and 2. How the World will eat)

I will do – “the works of God”, not just feeding the masses... I WILL DO THE WHOLE WILL of God... I will complete all God’s work on planet earth. *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”* (v. 38-40)

I have come into the world to DO what no human being has ever done – I’ve come to love God with ALL my heart, soul, mind and strength and to love My neighbor as Myself (Matt 22.37-39) ... I’ve come down from heaven NOT to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” (v. 38) ... I’ve come AS GOD to fulfill the divine promises I’ve made over the centuries (2Cor 1.20) AND I’ve come AS A HUMAN BEING to DO YOUR (HUMAN) PART OF THE AGREEMENT – to fulfill, as the Last Adam, the divine commandments like you’ve never done ... to pay the debt of obedience you owe ... AND to suffer your penalty for disobedience... SO THAT (v. 40) *everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day...* This is how I will meet the need of My people, a need deeper than you’ve imagined! This is how I’ll accomplish My work – as your Stand-In ... in your place.

AND there’s the second part – the way people receive this life or EAT THIS TRUE BREAD, is by beholding the Son and believing ... this is what God calls us to do...THIS IS THE WORK OF GOD – that we rest and receive! That we stop our tricks and our manipulating and our “this-for-that” kind of obedience (obeying so I can get what I really want ... and think I NEED) and instead, just believe... seeing the one obedient Man doing the will of God in our place and trusting Him ... believing ... resting ... receiving... and finally being raised BY Him on the Last Day.

Now how does this play out – how do we take Jesus Christ for who He really is and how do we become FED AND FLOURISHING by that? In what sense can we rely on Jesus to take care of our deepest needs? – how does it actually happen?... what do we DO to work the works of God?

1) We recognize that there is another deeper realm (Maslow’s hierarchy, as we saw a few weeks ago). There is some part of the human complex that even the best educated, best-resourced, well-adjusted person JUST CAN’T satisfy ... There is somewhere, submerged in every human heart a hunger. It’s in shallow people and in the deepest kind of spiritually refined and truly thoughtful/reflective people. It’s in the fanatic or fundamentalist who really doesn’t know why he believes or even really WHAT he believes but he just believes. In religious/spiritual people, this deep need is there.

And... even in the most devout atheist like Bertrand Russell. Listen to a letter the infamous atheist philosopher wrote:

“The centre of me is always and eternally a terrible pain— a curious wild pain— a searching for something beyond what the world contains, something transfigured and infinite—the beatific

vision—God—I do not find it, I do not think it is to be found—but the love of it is my life—it’s like passionate love for a ghost. At times it fills me with rage, at times with wild despair, it is the source of gentleness and cruelty and work, it fills every passion that I have—it is the actual spring of life within me.” (1916, Letter to Constance Mellon, “Collette”] *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1914-1944*, pp. 96-97).

It's a hunger for something more than a paycheck; more than just a good retirement or even a good marriage ... even above self-actualization. It is a hunger for the Source, for Life Himself.

You have to be convinced of that. And as Lewis said, *“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”* (Mere Christianity) Before Jesus Christ will satisfy the hunger, the hunger has to be acknowledged ... faced ... owned!

2) You must take Jesus Christ on His terms and for Who He really is. He is the Savior of sinners and THAT’S WHAT HE OFFERS you. It means that YOU and I have an awful problem that we can’t solve. A solution had to come down from heaven ... and He did. You may not see your need for divine forgiveness and divine power to repent from sin is that big a need, but Jesus Christ is saying, *“Let Me define your needs and let Me meet the one need NO ONE ELSE CAN SOLVE.”* In a sense, this is the primordial need because until you are reconciled to God, your eating and working and breathing and your living situation and everything else is just an animal impulse. Your relationship with God makes sense of all other needs.

3) Eat the bread by believing Him every day. Go with His program every day. *“He who CONTINUES TO COME to Me (V. 35) Every day we wake up aware of our many needs and THIS is always the biggest, to daily trust Him and walk with Him into a new kind of life (Rom 6.4, 7.6; Col 3.10; Eph 4.24 et al) that comes NOT out of fear and insecurity but INSTEAD stems from confidence and fullness. I am eternally and infinitely loved because of Jesus. Therefore I want to become what He’s declared me to be ... seeing and believing, I then want to love God and love people in the way He did!*

4) WE say, *“seeing is believing”* and Jesus here uses those two words but a bit differently. His point is, *“see Who I am ... and then trust Me. As you do, your questions will be answered. BUT if you wait ‘til all your questions answered, you will never trust, never truly live and never truly know. We said it a few weeks ago – we see Him, we believe and then answers start to fall into place – facts follow faith. Don’t play hunger games with the Messiah.*

5) The crowds and the disciples in the *Four Gospels* are people in process. Jesus is leading them to see who He is. Maybe you too are IN PROCESS and coming to see...to see and to believe. That combination of words is often repeated in this important discourse. Don’t give up on the process. Keep trusting the light you have ... keep hungering and keep coming. He will not disappoint you as long as you keep coming: *“the one who comes to Me I will certainly not reject.”* (V. 37)

6) Listen to your own prayers. Are you praying ONLY for your daily needs? OR are you asking God to define your needs? Maybe what you THINK are needs (like money and health and whatever it is you most often

pray for) maybe those areas of perceived needs (stuff near the base of the pyramid) maybe they've been put there to get your attention...And maybe they're pry-bars into the real areas of your life. Ask Him instead to use these needs to change the way you see and believe... walk into God's priorities ... and connect to Whom you really need.

Q U O T E S

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when **infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.**

It is written that we shall "stand before" Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...**to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.**

– C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory" (a sermon preached at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, on June 8, 1942; emph added)

I am strangely unhappy because the pattern of my life is complicated, because my nature is hopelessly complicated; a mass of contradictory impulses; and out of all this, to my intense sorrow, pain to you must grow. The centre of me is always and eternally a terrible pain — a curious wild pain — a searching for something beyond what the world contains, something transfigured and infinite — the beatific vision — God — I do not find it, I do not think it is to be found — but the love of it is my life — it's like passionate love for a ghost. At times it fills me with rage, at times with wild despair, it is the source of gentleness and cruelty and work, it fills every passion that I have — it is the actual spring of life within me. I can't explain it or make it seem anything but foolishness — but whether foolish or not, it is the source of whatever is any good in me....At most times, now, I am not conscious of it, only when I am strongly stirred, either happily or unhappily. I seek escape from it, though I don't believe I ought to.

– Bertrand Russell (renowned philosopher and atheist) Letter to Constance Mellon; October 23, 1916, in Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1914-1944*, pp. 96