

“The Bread of Life”

December 8, 2013

Text: John 6:30-35

**Though hunger is a blessing for man, it’s also a problem, and
can become a major problem.**

* As we have seen in the past, God created our capacity for hunger to compel us to eat, so our bodies won’t run out of energy.

The Lord also created hunger to continually bring us back to Himself—the-Source/the-Giver of all that is good (every good/perfect gift).

* On the other hand, hunger can drive us to such desperation that we do tragic/terrible things, just to relieve/satisfy it.

* E.g. in the 19th century there were reports of African Bushmen who, when they had no food, would tie what they called a “hunger belt” around their waste to help them bear their pain of their hunger.

They would tighten it every few days, for additional relief.

* During that same period, & in that same region, it was said that during famines, the people of Patagonia would fill their stomachs w/ lumps of clay to deaden their hunger pains.

* You've prob. heard about the Donner Party's resorting to cannibalism when their food ran out, as they tried to cross the Sierra Nevada mountain range in the dead of winter of 1846.

We've all known hunger pangs, but few of us have experienced such bitterly painful hunger as these did, or have had to engage in such extreme/tragic actions in order to deal w/ it.

But whether we know it or not, every one of us has suffered severe spiritual hunger & spiritual thirst.

It is a sense of emptiness, neediness, and vulnerability that can be traced back to man's inherent longing for closeness to God.

It's what the sons of Korah described in Psa 42:1-2=>

“As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. / My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

The person who, because of sin, is separated from God (his Creator & the divine Source of his very existence) will inevitably suffer spiritual hunger/thirst.

* He may have felt such hunger simply as a loneliness of soul.

A heart-hunger that quietly longs to be loved/cared-for by someone w/ an infinite/limitless love that can fill up our souls.

Man's heart has an insatiable yearning for such love, but there's no one who can love him like that—but God.

* On the other hand, spiritual hunger can feel like a fearful, desperate weakness/emptiness that is unprepared to deal w/ death, & what waits for us in eternity.

When a person's conscience is awakened, he senses his sin has offended God, & that punishment awaits him because of it.

He senses that he is alienated from God, the Source of his life, leaving him w/o strength, & w/o help.

He vaguely dreads something he cannot define, esp. so if the time is near when he must pass from this world.

A chilling hunger/emptiness passes over his soul.

But none of this is inevitable, because Jesus has offered Himself to man as the answer to all his hunger/thirst.

When someone who learns that X loves him, & has died for men's sins, trusts Jesus to save him, that hunger/thirst is satisfied.

In today's text, X will promise that anyone who comes to Him will never hunger, and anyone who believes in Him will never again thirst.

That prompted Martin Luther to write=>

“These are indeed dear and precious words, which it is not enough for us merely to know. We must turn them to account, and say, ‘Upon these words I will sleep at night and get up in the morning; leaning upon them will I sleep and wake and work and travel....’ The meaning of these words is, that whoever can believe on the one Man who is called Jesus Christ, shall be satisfied, and cannot suffer either hunger or thirst.”

Our text is a continuation of the discussion between Jesus & some Galilean Jews who are following Him.

He had miraculously fed them bread/fish the day before, so they continued to pursue Him, hoping for more of the same.

Jesus had told them not to seek/work only for mere physical food, but for food that endures to eternal life.

And He said He's the One who could give them that food.

When they asked what kind of work God expected from them in return for the food that brings eternal life,

Jesus answered (6:29)=> *“This is the work of God, that you **believe in Him** whom He has sent”*

(obviously, a reference to Jesus Himself).

In today's text we find three problems that, unless resolved, prevent people from receiving the bread of life that banishes spiritual hunger and thirst...

A faulty assumption, a faulty understanding, a faulty conclusion.

*** A Faulty Assumption**

The crowd's faulty assumption here is that they would believe in Jesus, as the One whom God has sent, if He would just prove Himself to them.

[Verse 30]=> *“So [Therefore—in response to X's telling them they should believe in Him] they said to Him, ‘What **then** [therefore] do **You** do for a **sign**, so that we may see, and **believe** You? What work do You perform?’”*

I.e., If You want us to believe You're really the "sent One" from God, make us believe it by giving more/better evidence.

The crowd's comment attempts to shift their responsibility for believing in Jesus away from themselves and onto X.

It assumes that they are such reasonable/logical people that, given sufficiently compelling proof, they would believe Him.

Notice that they don't promise to "believe in" Him—just simply to believe Him/His-words (i.e., to stop considering Him a liar).

This is a false assumption because it completely ignores the effects of the Adam's fall on man's ability to draw good/correct conclusions about spiritual truth.

I Cor 2:14 says=> *"A natural man does **not accept** the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he **cannot understand** them, because they are **spiritually appraised**."*

At the Fall, man lost his ability to make spiritual appraisals.

As a result, Jesus will say later in this chapter (verse 44)=>

*"No one **can come** to Me unless the Father who sent Me **draws** [helko—tugs/draws/drag] him."*

Adam's Fall has so injured mankind's spiritual capacity for reason/logic in the spiritual realm, that it takes an act of God to persuade man to recognize Jesus as God's Son, and to believe in Him.

The notion that fallen man is capable of reasoning his way thru any spiritual truth, and coming to good/reliable conclusions, badly overestimates his ability (which is really a spiritual disability due to the Fall).

It ignores the spiritual blindness which engulfs the unsaved.

The Jews always proceeded on this faulty assumption, and it went beyond mere naïveté, becoming an arrogant attitude that was presumptuous/wicked.

In Mt 12:39, Jesus confronted this attitude, saying=>

“An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it.”

** It is lack of *willingness* to believe, that keeps people from X (not lack of evidence).

X’s feeding of the 5000, if it had accomplished nothing else, should have created an open-mindedness among those Jews He had fed, by which they at least gave Him a fair hearing and the benefit of the doubt.

Rank unbelief is never satisfied/persuaded, no matter how much evidence is given, or how compelling that evidence may be.

E.g. after the crucifixion, when the Jewish leaders remembered X had said He would rise from the dead after 3 days, they posted a guard at his tomb to make sure He didn’t rise.

My guess is that they had instructed the soldiers to kill Him again if He did rise.

And when He did—and they knew He did—they simply concocted a lie to explain away the disappearance of His body, saying that His disciples had stolen it. Their sons/daughters have lived w/ that lie for 2000 years, & it has contributed to the damnation of countless Jewish souls.

Whenever we find a truth in the Bible and we refuse to accept it, because we simply aren't comfortable with it, we repeat the same error committed by this Jewish crowd, and by those Jewish leaders who orchestrated Jesus' crucifixion. We challenge God, in essence, to force us to believe it in some way, & we withhold acceptance of it until He does.

As if the assumption that, given the right evidence they'd believe, weren't faulty enough, the crowd now suggested the kind of evidence they required from Jesus.

Their audacity here seems to have no limit.

[Verse 31] (the crowd)=> *“Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, **He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.**”*

What do they mean by that, & who is the “he” they refer to?

It's Moses, & we know that, because of Jesus' omniscient answer in the next verse=> *“It is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven.”*

This crowd had the arrogance/audacity to set up a standard of acceptability for any miracles Jesus might perform.

The standard was Moses, and if our Lord wanted to impress them, He was going to have to outperform Moses. They implied that Moses had fed their forefathers bread (manna) from heaven, for 40 years; Jesus' bread was just barley bread, & it was only enough for 1 day. And Jesus had started w/ 5 pieces of bread & 2 fish. Moses hadn't used any starter material at all. I.e., the Jews were disparaging Jesus' miracle as if it hadn't measured up to Moses' standard—their standard. They were saying in essence, “You're going to have to try harder, Jesus, if you want us to believe you.”

*** A Faulty Understanding**

Jesus patiently explained to the Jewish crowd that their demand for better evidence was based, in part, on a faulty understanding of the “bread from heaven” itself.

[Verses 32-33]=> *“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. / For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives **life** to the **world**.’”*

Their misunderstanding was multi-faceted=>

1st, the Jewish crowd misunderstood that it was God who had given them manna—not Moses.

Moses' job was simply to give them instructions about how they were, and how they were not, to gather it.

The important point is that God was/still-is the One who gives/sends Jesus, & X is the true bread of heaven. God was giving the world its Messiah at that very moment, and He was the Bread of Life.

2nd, they misunderstood the phrase “*bread out of heaven.*”

It was bread from heaven only in the sense that God in heaven had sent it.

But in their view that “bread from heaven” (manna) was some sort of “heavenly bread” w/ unearthly qualities. They were wrong about that too.

Actually, it had very earthly qualities, including a tendency to become infested/contaminated w/ worms if not eaten w/i a day.

Nor did it extend the lives of those who ate it since they all died in the wilderness.

But manna wasn't the true Bread from Heaven anyway.

X is the “*true*” bread—heaven's real/genuine bread.

Manna was a prophetic type of that true bread, but it wasn't spiritual at all, & it gave no spiritual benefit to anyone.

3rd, the Jews misunderstood, that manna could do nothing more than sustain man's biological life, just like most other food. The true “*bread of God*”—Jesus X—however, actually gives spiritual/eternal life to man's soul.

At this point, Jesus hasn't yet directly revealed that He is that life-giving bread Himself.

But He certainly hinted at it back in verse 27 when

He said this food endures to eternal life, & that

He (the Son of Man) is the One who gives it.

4th, the Jews misunderstood that the recipients of this life-giving bread are not simply the Israelites (as was true of manna), but "*the world*"—more specifically, every member of the human race who believes in Jesus (both Jews/Gentiles).

In verses 47-48 of this chapter, Jesus will say=> "*He who believes has eternal life. / I am the bread of life.*"

Apart from X, the Bread of Life, the world of mankind can have no true/spiritual life—only physical subsistence.

Jesus said (Jn 10:10)=> "*I came that they may have **life**, and have it **abundantly**.*"

So the Jewish crowd's faulty understanding was actually a whole series of misunderstandings that went to the heart of Jesus' role as the Giver of eternal life (the Bread of Life).

To compare Him w/ Moses/manna was absurd, & I'm sure that Moses himself would have grieved over it.

* **A Faulty Conclusion**

[Verse 34]=> "*Then they said to Him, 'Lord [better translated "Sir"], **always** give us this bread'*" (not just once, as You did w/ the barley bread, but "*always*").

The crowd completely missed the point, & still thought Jesus was talking about physical bread—for 2 reasons=>

1st, because Jesus hadn't yet explained in a direct/specific manner that His metaphor was about Himself—He was the Bread.

2nd, because the crowd was thinking at a very mundane level.

To them, Jesus' words were mysterious, but they contained the appealing promise of an endless supply of bread.

And w/i that context of their own materialistic hopes, limitless physical bread was good enough.

The crowd had falsely concluded that Jesus merely gives people this bread; but in reality He is the bread, & to receive it a person must “*come-to*”/“*believe-in*” Him.

The crowd had asked for a gift, & Jesus offered them Himself, but they wanted something else from Him, instead—flatbread.

[Verse 35]=> “*Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will **not hunger** [ou me—absolutely never hunger], and he who believes in Me will **never thirst.**’*”

At this point, Jesus revealed Himself to be the Bread of Life.

That means He is the heavenly bread from which eternal life is derived.

He is the One who not only imparts spiritual/eternal life to man, He also sustains that life w/i him.

He is food for the soul, that gives it life & sustains its strength, supplying all its spiritual needs and all its holy desires.

The spiritually hungry/thirsty person who comes to Jesus finds salvation, & in that salvation, finds his soul's satisfaction.

It's not that he has no more need to feed on X at all after that, once he has initially believed in Jesus.

Rather, the desperate emptiness that had plagued his soul before he believed, is gone, having been filled, when he first believed in X.

The Spirit forever indwells him, & testifies to him of Jesus.

He still gets hungry at times, but he goes back to Jesus, & his soul feeds on Him at will (as we saw last Sunday during our Communion service).

And in heaven he anticipates an even closer, more wonderful fulfillment of his relationship w/ X, as seen in Rev 7:15-16=>

*“They are before the throne of God; & they serve Him day and night in His temple; & He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. / They will **hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore.**”*

Jesus chooses His words carefully in verse 35 of our own text to make a very important distinction=> “*He who comes to Me,*” not “those who come to Me”; And “*He who believes in Me,*” not “those who believe in Me.”

It's all very singular/individual, one believer at a time, placing his faith in X.

An unappropriated X is not life-giving Bread to anyone.

So the crucial question is not whether Jesus is the Savior who gives eternal life, but How is Jesus to become *my* Savior, and give *me* life (as an individual)?

X answers that Himself=> “*Come to Me; & believe in Me.*”

Again, this is a very individual matter.

1st, “*come*” to Jesus—this is a movement of the heart towards X.

We have been alienated from God, but we hear the gospel.

Something w/i us is stirred to listen attentively, and to think about Jesus—He is God, He is man, He came into the world as a man to take other men’s sins upon Himself, and He is the Savior we need.

By a process we don’t even understand, our alienation turns into desire, & we are drawn to Him by the Father.

A thought-process something like this takes place w/i us=>

* “If He died for all who trust Him, I will trust Him.

* “If He died on a cross as a Sacrifice for guilty people, I qualify—I’m a guilty person—& I will rely upon His sacrifice to free me, from guilt/condemnation.

* “I will make Him the basis for my hope in eternity.”

Intuitive agreement w/ what is being said about Jesus

develops into a prayer, from our heart to His heart.

If, as you sit there, you are one of those who are give/taught of God, you know full well what I’m talking about.

If not, then no matter what I say, you may understand
it w/ your mind, but you won't understand or
accept it w/ your heart until the H.S. enables
you to, & as the Father draws you.

According to Charles Spurgeon, the 18th cent. hymn-writer,
Charles Wesley, was dressing one rainy morning w/
his window open, & a strong wind blowing outside.
A little bird flew in the window, landing on his chest,
& having found what seemed like a
safe/warm/dry spot, it snuggled under his coat,
as he stood very still.

Thinking later about this incident, Wesley wrote=>

“Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Your bosom fly
While the raging billows roll,
While the tempest still is nigh.
Hide me, O my Savior, hide me
Till the storm of life is past.”

That is a beautiful picture of what it means to “*come*” to X.
2nd, we must “*believe*” in Jesus, in order for Him to become the
Bread of eternal Life for us personally.

First/foremost, to believe in Jesus means to inwardly
acknowledge that He is who Scripture says He is=>
the Son of God, and the Savior of men/women.

But it goes beyond that, to include entrusting ourselves
and our souls to Him.

At this point, it's no longer theoretical/theological,
but it becomes extremely personal/poignant.

- * Knowing that Jesus came to save sinners, the believer says, "Then I depend on Him alone to save *me*."
- * The believer knows X took on Himself (on the cross), the sins of all those the Father had given Him.

So he says, "Then I assume I am one of those given to Jesus, & that He took my sin on Himself too."

He makes a conscious decision to trust Jesus to take away his sin/guilt.

- * He calls out to Jesus in prayer, asking Him to forgive his sin, & to feed him w/ the Bread of eternal life; Not on the basis of anything good he has ever done, or will ever do, but simply as a display of Jesus' undeserved divine goodness/grace.

Implicit in such belief, there is a repudiation of his sins, for which Jesus died.

This involves a forsaking-of/repentance-from those sins he once loved, & which he had served as false gods w/i his heart.

Paul described this in the lives of Thessalonian Xns:

*"How you turned to God **from idols** to serve a living and true God"* (I Thes 1:9).

It becomes the major turning point in a believer's life.

There is a turning away from sin, & a turning towards God, whenever someone believes unto salvation.

In Jn 6:37 (our text next time) Jesus will say=>

*“All that the Father gives Me will **come** to Me, & the one who **comes** to Me I will certainly not cast out.”*

Although Jesus doesn’t specifically mention it in our text, there is a 3rd way in which a believer receives Jesus.

When Jesus described Himself, using the analogy of bread, He was implying that we as believers receive X in a spiritual sense into our hearts/minds, just as a person would take literal bread into his mouth.

In eating bread we chew it up, & our taste buds discover its flavor—its secret essence.

In the same way, the believer, having received Jesus into his heart, thinks about Him, meditates upon His goodness, & discovers what a precious Savior he has.

Jesus, the Bread of Life, become comfort food to his soul. He discovers far more about his Lord after his conversion than he knew about Him beforehand.

As a new-believer, he really knew little about Jesus—primarily, that He is the divine Savior of souls.

But as he grows in his faith, & contemplates the wonders he learns about his Savior in Scripture—His character & incarnation, His roles as our Advocate/Mediator,

His offices as our Prophet/Priest/King—he learns to savor his Lord, and to love Him all the more.

He says w/ David=> *“How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!”*
(Psa 139:17).

But there’s even more in this analogy.

Food, after it has been chewed up, is swallowed/digested. Then it begins to give strength to every part of our bodies.

Our life is sustained and built-up.

In the same way, we are spiritually built up by the great truths about Jesus in His Word.

They both satisfy our souls, & strengthen our spirits.

We find ourselves in agreement w/ the poet who wrote=>

“Let others stretch their arms like the sea
And grasp in all the shore,
Just grant me the blessings of your grace,
And I desire no more.”

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Text: John 6:30-35

1. Every one of us has suffered severe spiritual hunger and spiritual thirst; it is a sense of emptiness, neediness, and vulnerability that can be traced back to man’s inherent longing for closeness to [8 God].

Psa 42:1-2

2. Jesus has offered Himself to man as the answer to all his [14 hunger] and thirst.

Jn 6:29

In today’s text we find three problems that, unless resolved, prevent people from receiving the bread of life that banishes spiritual hunger and thirst...

*** A Faulty Assumption**

3. The crowd’s faulty assumption here is that they would believe in Jesus as the One whom God has sent if He would just [12 prove] Himself to them.

[Verse 30]

I Cor 2:14

4. At the Fall man lost his ability to make [20 spiritual] appraisals.

Jn 6:44; Mt 12:39

5. The crowd now suggested the kind of evidence they required from [12 Jesus].

[Verse 31]

*** A Faulty Understanding**

6. Jesus patiently explained to the Jewish crowd that their demand for better evidence was based, in part, on a faulty understanding of the “[12 bread] from heaven.”

[Verses 32-33]

7. Manna could do nothing more than sustain man’s biological life; the “*bread of God*”—Jesus Christ—actually gives spiritual, [16 eternal] life to man’s soul.

Jn 6:47-48: 10:10

*** A Faulty Conclusion**

[Verse 34]

8. The crowd had falsely concluded that Jesus merely *gives* people this bread; but in reality He [6 is] the bread, and to receive it a person must “*come to*” and “*believe in*” Him.

[Verse 35]

Rev 7:15-16

The crucial question is, how is Jesus to become *my* Savior and give *me* life?

- *9. First, “*come*” to Jesus—this is a movement of the [12 heart] towards Christ.
- *10. Second, we must “*believe*” in Jesus—inwardly acknowledge that He is who Scripture says He is; but it goes beyond that to include [24 entrusting] ourselves and our souls to Him.
11. When Jesus described Himself using the analogy of bread, He was implying that we as believers receive Christ in a spiritual sense into our hearts and minds just as a person would take literal [12 bread] into his mouth.
12. We are spiritually built up by the great truths about Jesus in His Word; they both satisfy our souls and [24 strengthen] our spirits.

I Thes 1:9; Jn 6:37

Psa 139:17