

Title: The Bread of Life  
Date: May 5, 2024  
Subject: Jesus is the Bread of life  
Scripture: John 6

In November 1944, 36 young men volunteered for the Minnesota Starvation Experiment. The purpose was to study the psychological and physiological effects of starvation and find effective dietary strategies to bring people back to health from the war-caused widespread famine. For one phase participants were restricted to 1600 calories per day in order to lose 25% of their weight. The men self-reported they became obsessed with food. They talked about it non-stop. They dreamed about food and savored their two small daily meals. Their lives focused on food.

Registered Dietitian Nutritionist Kelly Houston, “People with eating disorders tend to think about food more often than the average person. Most non-disordered eating people think about food about 15% of their day.” She contends that people should eat for fuel, fun and life ([kellyhoustonrdn.com](http://kellyhoustonrdn.com)).

Sara Upson, “Clinical findings from Reiff and Reiff found that individuals with a normal or healthy relationship with food thought about food 10-20% of the time” ([mysignaturenutrition.com/2012/03/15/time-spent-thinking-about-food](http://mysignaturenutrition.com/2012/03/15/time-spent-thinking-about-food)).

A 2019 survey ([foxnews.com/lifestyle/americans-spend-240-hours-annually-thinking-about-food-study](http://foxnews.com/lifestyle/americans-spend-240-hours-annually-thinking-about-food-study)) indicated food cravings struck the hardest was 2:41 p.m. and that we think about food 40 minutes per day which comes to about 4% of the 16 hours we’re not sleeping. Far less than the other studies.

There's also the time involved in eating food, preparing it, shopping for it. We spend a lot of time around food. Therefore, it may come as no surprise that the one miracle in all four gospels other than the resurrection is focused on food.

It’s Jesus feeding the 5000. Matthew, Mark, and Luke give the meat and potatoes about the miracle. John adds the dessert - Jesus using the miracle as a source for teaching.

Jesus was near Bethsaida on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. The disciples had just returned from their tour and reported to Jesus. There were so many people coming and going Jesus and the Twelve didn't have a chance to eat. Jesus told them to come with him to a quiet place where they could get some rest.

Nice idea, but the crowd was relentless. They’d seen the miraculous signs Jesus had performed and wanted more. Jesus performed more healings and spoke about the kingdom of God.

It was getting late in the afternoon, long past 2:41pm maximum craving time. The disciples approached Jesus to ask him to send the people away so they could find something to eat and a place to stay. Jesus told the disciples they should give the people something to eat. Then he asked Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people?” It was a test. Jesus knew what he was going to do. Phillip responded by saying eight months’ wages wouldn't be enough to buy food for everybody. Jesus sent the disciples out to see how much food they

had. Andrew brought a boy who had five small barley loaves and two fish. He questioned how far that would go among the crowd. After all, it was just one boy.

The miracle is known as the feeding of the 5000 as that's the number of men who were there. There were also women and children (Matthew 14:21). The culture of that time dictated that men and women didn't eat together in public. Think more in terms of 20,000 people which is amazing since the nearby villages of Capernaum and Bethsaida had between 2 to 3000 people each.

Jesus said the boy's food was enough. He had the people sit in groups of fifties and hundreds. He blessed the food which the disciples distributed. Everybody got some, more than some, all they wanted to eat. Picture the surprise of the disciples and the crowd as five loaves of bread and two fish keep multiplying and multiplying and multiplying. At the end, because bread was considered a gift from God, they collected the scraps that had fallen to the ground and what people hadn't eaten. They wound up with 12 baskets of leftovers.

Some believe the "miracle" came when Jesus and the disciples shared their lunches. The crowd followed their example resulting in a big potluck dinner. No divine action needed, just human kindness.

Not quite. The immediate reaction to Jesus' miracle was the desire to make Jesus king by force (John 6:14). They wouldn't do that for everyone sharing their food. It was a miracle.

Jesus wouldn't allow people to make him king according to their image. And to make sure the disciples didn't get caught up in the mania, Jesus compelled them to get into a boat and leave. Then he dismissed the crowd and went up into the hills by himself to pray.

The next day the crowds realized they didn't know where Jesus was. They went on a massive hunt and finally found him. Jesus told them he knew the reason they were looking for him was because he gave them free food, not because they were aware of the miraculous sign he performed. The people quickly changed their approach and wanted to know what miraculous sign he would do so they could see it and believe (John 6:30). They felt the Messiah should be able to outdo Moses who fed the nation of Israel three meals a day for 40 years. Jesus had only done one meal for 20,000 people. If he was the real Messiah he'd be able to keep the whole thing going. They wanted an unmistakable miraculous sign.

This brings us to John 6:32. Read John 6:32-42.

Jesus had earlier identified wrong reasons to follow him. One was to have an easy, even cushy life. The crowd wanted free food, so if Jesus could keep pumping out free food, and maybe do something in the political arena, he'd be okay. The average person spent up to 1/2 of their wages for food. If they didn't have to do that, they'd have a lot more free time to sit around and swap stories. The Messiah would be a labor-saving device.

People today often want an easy life and feel Jesus should make life better, more comfortable. It's true life is better with him than without him. But a life with Jesus doesn't mean troubles and trials will vanish and he'll only give us good stuff.

The second improper reason for following Jesus is people want God to do what they want him to do. The crowd wanted him to be like Moses. Jesus corrected their appraisal of what happened during the wilderness

wanderings of the Israelites. Moses didn't give the people food. Moses was merely the conduit through whom God supplied bread.

People often want God to do what they want, but God doesn't work that way. He doesn't take orders like a fast-food restaurant so we can have it our way. He doesn't operate according to our instructions.

Jesus directs their attention to the spiritual.

Jesus identifies himself as the bread of life in V. 35. He does this several more times (vv. 48, 51). He also talks about him coming down from heaven or the bread coming down from heaven (11 times including the crowd's response - 29, 32, 32, 33, 38, 39, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58). God directly sent Jesus. Jesus came to do the will of the Father (39, 40).

Jesus clarifies what the will of the Father is. It's that people who place their trust in the Son of God, Jesus, will be given eternal life and Jesus will usher them to heaven. This is because Jesus is the one who gives life to the world (V. 33).

When the people clamored for this bread, Jesus clarified that he is the bread.

Why did Jesus call himself "the bread of life"? He did it to make a connection to the miraculous feeding of the 5000 that had just taken place. He showed that he was the staple, the necessary item for people's spiritual health. Taking him provides spiritual satisfaction: never go hungry, never be thirsty, have eternal life, live forever, be raised at the last day, never be driven away. Later, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he used bread as a symbol for his body.

Jesus didn't say he was physical bread. We don't take his other I AM statements in a literal way. When he said, "I am the door" (John 10:9), he didn't mean he was a literal, physical door through which sheep walked into the sheepfold. He used door as a metaphor to show he is the one way for people to enter God's kingdom.

When Jesus says he is the vine, it doesn't mean he becomes a plant.

The book of Psalms uses similar language when it implores people to "Taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8). It's pretty obvious this isn't literal. We can't wander around, find God who is invisible and take a bite out of him. The psalmist is asking people to experience God for themselves, and they'll find that he is good.

It's kind of like asking a child to eat something new. We go through all sorts of creative ways trying to get them to take a bite. We take a bite and then when we use exaggerated emotions, expressions and contortions. "Umm. It's so good." May even try logic - "Your brothers and sisters like it." Wave it under their nose to see if they can get the smell and that entices them.

The second part of the verse is "blessed is the man who takes refuge in him" (Psalm 34:8). It isn't so much that God has been tried and found wanting but that people don't want him and haven't tried him. Or they come to him with improper expectations that God will give them that special job with eight weeks' vacation, a 6 figure salary and a company car or remove all difficulties.

The psalmist doesn't say that. Jesus doesn't say that. They do say that you'll find that God is good. He works all things out for his good and ultimately our good. Those who find refuge in him are blessed. They'll have eternal life and be raised by Jesus at the last day.

The people Jesus spoke to had a hard time swallowing that he was the bread of life. It got stuck in their throat. "What? How? Who? You? No way." They began to grumble and trotted out his dubious heritage as we see in v. 42. Read John 6:42.

What Jesus said didn't make any sense to the crowd. He had presented them with the opportunity to believe: v. 35 - he who believes in me will never be thirsty; V. 36 - you have seen me and still you do not believe; v. 40 - everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life."

Believe. What does a person need to believe? It's not a vague belief in something somewhere.

Here's what's included in believing in Jesus. Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man. As the ultimate act of grace and mercy, God provided send his Son to become God in the flesh. The reason this was necessary is all people are sinners who face eternal torment and hell and can't bring about their salvation. Jesus lived a perfect life and gave his life as the perfect payment for people's sins. He rose from the dead to demonstrate his power over death, the devil and sin. When people place their trust and confidence in Jesus, they're brought into a right relationship with God. They receive the free gift of salvation meaning their sins are forgiven and they have the promise of eternal life. There's nothing a person can do to add to or take away from Christ's work.

"Faith is more than intellectual assent, and mentally agreeing with the core beliefs of Christianity does not equal entrance into God's kingdom. Even Satan and the demons know certain things about God (James 2:19). We can mentally agree with facts without making those facts the centerpiece of our lives.

"Can a person be saved without holding to the core beliefs of Christianity? No. But along with accepting as true those core beliefs must be a spiritual transformation. Jesus said that in order to inherit eternal life one must be "born again" (John 3:3). To be born again is a work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a repentant sinner." ([gotquestions.org/Christianity-beliefs.html](http://gotquestions.org/Christianity-beliefs.html))

Corresponding info on the back of the sermon notes about what it means to have a biblical worldview.

Jesus told people to stop grumbling and doubled down in his teaching. Read John 6:44-51.

Jesus anchors what he says in the Scripture that people said they accepted. He says he will raise up at the last day those who've been drawn by the Father and have come to him. He has seen the Father and shares what the Father has said. He repeats the need to believe. The one who believes has everlasting life. He reaffirms that he is the bread of life. He will give his life for the world.

The grumbling turned to arguments between the listeners who put a gruesome spin on Jesus' words. They were obsessed with physical bread, the manna of Moses' time and the five loaves which fed the five thousand. Their minds were filled with pictures of flaky bread gently falling from the sky. So when Jesus spoke the way he did, they assumed he was speaking of the unspeakable, that Jesus was talking about him giving his flesh and people were supposed to eat his flesh.

Instead, Jesus was pointing to him dying and that he would take his physical flesh with him. He speaks of the need for faith to take him as the essential food of one's life. If people don't accept Christ's sacrifice in faith, they won't have any life. Jesus went so far as to say, in a verse that we didn't read earlier, V. 29: "the work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

It would have been nice if people would have caught the aroma of what Jesus was saying, if they would have said, "Oh, that's so good."

Instead, we find in V. 60. Read V. 60. The teaching wasn't hard to understand but it was hard to accept that it could be that easy - that all they needed to do was to accept Jesus' words as true and put their trust in him. The result was they grumbled some more. Jesus responded by asking if this offended them and saying that the words he spoke are spirit and life.

Read V. 66.

Who were these disciples? The difficulty for us is we think of disciples as being all on one level. We assume a disciple is a committed follower like the 12 disciples or the apostle Paul. The term can be used loosely. The basic meaning of the word is a person who follows another.

There were many people who followed Jesus but they didn't **follow**. They may have been a disciple, but they weren't a **disciple**. There were lots of people who were sort of disciples. They liked Jesus - as long as he didn't get too radical, as long as he gave them what they wanted, as long as he didn't require too much of them, as long as they could just go along for the ride. They were the kind of people who'd say they are Christian because they're not something else.

These people drew the line when there was a call for commitment. They won't accept his teaching that he was from God and is the only one able to give eternal life. They reject Jesus' message and choose to leave when he spoke about the importance of believing in him. They were disappointed he wouldn't be their political Messiah when he was offering them so much more. It's like being disappointed you didn't win the turkey dinner from the grocery store give away... when you're offered free food for a year.

There were people in college who declared they were going to be a missionary in a certain country. It didn't come across to me as a determined decision but something of bravado and show: "Hey look at me and what I'm going to do!" It's like the youth speaker who announced he was the devil's number one enemy. The gathered teens thought it was great. Don't remember hearing anything about him after that splash. And the same for those who boasted about what they were going to do. They didn't burnout for Jesus but dropped out.

Jesus asked the 12 if they wanted to leave. Peter speaks up. Read vv. 68, 69. More on this next week.

World War 2 ended before the Minnesota Starvation Experiment completed its study. They were still able to use some of their findings to help the needy after the devastation of war and for future famines. They dealt with the temporary provision of bread.

Jesus said he was the living bread that came down from heaven. He would give his life for the world. Any person who would eat the living bread, place their trust in Christ's sacrifice, would not die but live forever.