

The bread of life * John 6

January 26, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

I've always been fascinated by news stories about people who are celebrating really advanced birthdays. You know, every so often, you'll see a story about a person turning 105 or 110 or even more – and often, it seems, the conversation turns to food. There's always some food that people point to as the secret to their long life. I've got a video here to show you as an example – this is Ruth Benjamin of Marshall Illinois.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jI-QlxKzgOI>

There you have it – the secret to long life - potatoes – some way every day – sauerkraut and bacon. Sounds like a good life.

Sadly though, even if you ate potatoes, sauerkraut and bacon every day of your life, you'd still die. Sorry to be a downer. That's just a reality. We eat food and that literally gives us life, but the reality is that we all die. We all face 'the end' of this life.

But wouldn't it be great though if 'the end' was not 'the end'? Wouldn't it be great if we could live forever?

As you heard in the reading, Jesus says here in John 6 that we CAN live forever. And what's more, there IS in fact a food that gives us eternal life.

Join me in John chapter 6 and I'll show you what I mean. John chapter 6 (we'll start around verse 24).

As the chapter opens, Jesus performs one of His most famous miracles – He takes five small loaves of bread and two fish, and after giving thanks for them, He breaks them and hands them out and ends up feeding more than five thousand people. That's a pretty amazing thing. And then the next day, the crowd shows up again, and guess what they want? More bread. They would really like some more of that bread that Jesus provided.

Well, Jesus loves their enthusiasm and He's glad that they are there, but Jesus' primary concern is not giving people bread but giving people life and so He takes this bread metaphor and runs with it.

Now the next thirty three verses twist back and forth and loop back and reiterate things that have already been said but there are a number of ideas here that appear again and again. And in the interest of highlighting those, I'm going to summarize Jesus' teaching here in one sentence with four points.

Jesus is the true bread – sent by the Father – to give eternal life – to all who believe.

That's the basic message of this passage – Jesus is the true bread, sent by the Father – to give eternal life – to all who believe.

See, the people who come to Jesus want bread. They want this thing that will give them life. I mean, food is so plentiful and varied for us that we don't really think about it, but in some places, food really is a life or death situation. If you eat, you live. If you don't, you starve.

And bread is a pretty central staple in a lot of cultures. Scholars figure that the average Israelite got between 50-70% of their total calories from bread, so you can see how important it was to them. I remember backpacking around France and no matter where I was, I knew I could get a baguette, so I knew I'd be good. And so these people come to Jesus wanting some bread.

Now Jesus understands that they need bread – He just turned five loaves into a buffet for thousands of people – but He knows that they need more than bread if they're going to truly live. And so He takes this image of bread – with its life-giving qualities – and says 'that's me.' I am the bread of life. I am the true bread.

He says it in verse 35 and then again in verse 48 and then again in 51 –

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry. I am the bread of life that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever.

35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. (Joh 6:35 NIV).

48 I am the bread of life. (Joh 6:48 NIV).

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (Joh 6:51 NIV).

Jesus is the true bread. Bread literally gives you life when you eat it; Jesus too gives us life when we come to Him.

Now, to a bunch of Jewish people (which is who Jesus is talking to), this talk of bread coming down from Heaven is inevitably going to trigger something in their minds. Bread coming down from Heaven? Well, that's manna. That's the food that sustained their ancestors for forty years as they wandered around the desert.

And so they say to Jesus - 'we know that Moses gave our ancestors bread from heaven to eat; how do we know that You'll give us bread too? I mean, sure You gave us bread for yesterday, but Moses gave us bread for forty years. Are YOU as impressive as Moses?'

And right away, Jesus says – whoa, whoa, whoa – hold on there. It wasn't Moses who fed the people; it was God who fed the people. You can see it there in verse 32 - - *32 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, 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. God gave your ancestors the bread that carried them through the desert. And now, Jesus says, 'He's doing it again. Just as the Father gave your ancestors bread, the Father is giving YOU LIVING bread.*

But here's the thing. As good as the manna was, it didn't sustain them forever. That's verse 49 - 49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died.

50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. (Joh 6:49-50 NIV).

See, Jesus is the true bread – sent by the Father – to give eternal life. The Father sent the Son into the world so that anyone who eats the true bread will never truly die.ⁱ

That idea of eternal life through the Son is so central to this passage, that Jesus actually says it like eight timesⁱⁱ in the course of this passage, verse 51, the very next verse, being the most explicit –

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

Clear as day, right? If you eat the true bread, you will live forever. You will have eternal life. Death is not the end but a doorway into the next stage of life.

And Jesus actually says that, three times. He admits that literal bread will fail us; barring His return we will likely experience the end of this life, but then He says – verse 39, verse 40, verse 44 – if you have made the true bread the staple of your diet, then He will raise you up on the last day. You will be resurrected just as Jesus was. That’s a tremendous promise. And it’s a promise that’s rooted in the very will of God.

The Father sent the true bread into the world – why? Verse 39 –

39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. (Joh 6:39 NIV).

40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (Joh 6:40 NIV).

This promise of eternal life through the living bread is rooted in the very will of God and if God wills it, it will happen. God will it. When we come to Jesus, sent by the Father to be the life-giving bread, we will indeed live forever.

But then that of course begs the question – how exactly do you receive the true bread? How do you eat it? JESUS is the true bread – He does in verse 54 say - 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (Joh 6:54 NIV) but no one EVER has literally eaten Jesus’ flesh – so how exactly do we partake of this true bread?

Well, Jesus says – verse 47 – “47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life” (Joh 6:47 NIV). Verse 40 is similar - 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life (John 6:40 NIV). Fifteen hundred years ago, St Augustine put it like this - Why do you make ready your teeth and stomach? Believe, and you have eaten (ACCS, 6:28).

Jesus says – when we take who He is and what He values and all that He accomplished and we make it a part of ourselves, we will have eaten the true bread – sent by the Father to give eternal life. We receive the eternal-life giving bread by faith.

Jesus is the true bread sent by the Father to give eternal life to all who believe.

Which leads me to the point that I want to send you home with today – When we make Jesus the staple of our diet, we’re going to live forever. I think that’s really the central point of John 6 –

When we make Jesus the staple of our diet, we’re going to live forever.

You know what I mean by staple, right? The bread and milk and butter and eggs that dominate our diet.

Just out of curiosity, I thought I'd look up the definition of staple food – and here's what [Wikipedia](#) says - A staple food, food staple, or simply a staple, is a food that is eaten routinely and in such quantities that it constitutes a dominant portion of a standard diet for a given people, supplying a large fraction of energy needs and generally forming a significant proportion of the intake of other nutrients as well.

Jesus ought to be our staple – something consumed routinely and in such quantities that it constitutes a dominant portion of what we take in, giving us energy and strength and all the other things that we need.

Jesus invites us to feed our faith in Him daily, to draw strength from Him and to make His thoughts and values the primary things that we put into our minds and bodies. We don't literally EAT Him, but we internalize Him, to the point where He truly becomes our life.

And when we do that, God promises that we are going to live forever. Bread gives life; true bread gives eternal life. The Father calls us to Himself (v. 44), He gives His Son as life-giving food and when we receive Him, He guarantees that He will raise us up on the last day. He guarantees that we will live forever!

When we make Jesus the staple of our diet, we're going to live forever.

Which leads me to two implications. One challenge and one encouragement.

First – what are you filling yourself with? Today, more so than when Jesus originally spoke, there are many, many things that we can fill ourselves with. TV and Instagram and crosswords and Facebook – there are all sorts of things that can consume our time when we consume them and yet Jesus is telling us that He should really be the staple of our diet. Not soap operas. Not social media. I mean, those things are not inherently bad, but they're kind of like the junk food that you sneak in on the edges.

You need Jesus to be the meat and potatoes of your spiritual diet. If you look at the last part of this passage, 53 -58 or so, Jesus uses active ongoing language to imply that we would eat and keep eating over and over. Verse 58 for example - he who feeds (actively, continually) on this bread will live forever" (Joh 6:58 NIV). Jesus is not the fancy schmancy meal that you have once at an expensive restaurant and never again; this is the basic stuff that you eat that gives you life every day.

Are you intentional about reading God's Word, feeding your faith? Do you actively take things into yourself that feed your relationship with Jesus? It doesn't have to be fancy; bread's not fancy – but it gives life. *We're going to be missing a number of chapters of John as we work through this sermon series; why not go back and catch up on those chapters we missed one week at a time so you get a sense of the Gospel of John as a whole?* Watch what you consume this week and ask yourself – do I have a well-balanced diet with Jesus at the centre? At the very beginning of this, the people come to Jesus looking for bread and He says -

27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you (Joh 6:26-27 NIV). Focus on what's eternal and make Jesus the staple of your diet.

Second – the encouragement – if you have made Jesus the staple of your diet, then you are going to live forever. Case closed. That’s the will of the Father – that you would respond to His call to come to know Jesus, that you would nurture your relationship with Him, that Jesus would not lose any given to Him and that we would be raised to life on the last day. If Jesus is your meat and potatoes, you’re going to live forever.

I’ll be honest with you. I’ve been in a lot of hospital rooms lately where it didn’t look good; I’ve been in a lot of funeral homes over the last few years and sometimes, it’s easy to say ‘where’s the hope? Where’s the hope in this?’ You know what the answer is? HERE is the hope – John 6 – the promise Jesus makes to us that if we make Him the staple of our lives, He will raise us up again at the last day. Jesus Himself died and rose again; so too shall we if we trust in Him. That’s the Father’s will! 40 For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (Joh 6:40 NIV).

Fill your heart with that the next time you go to a funeral. It almost makes me want to stuff my pockets with bread the next time I do a funeral as a vivid reminder that Jesus is the living bread sent from the Father to give eternal life.

Bacon and potatoes and kraut are good, but they won’t give you eternal life. Jesus though will.

When we make Jesus the staple of our diet, we’re going to live forever.

ⁱ God sent the Son to be the eternal-life-giving bread - 32 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, 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. (Joh 6:32 NIV).

37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. (Joh 6:37 NIV).

40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (Joh 6:40 NIV).

44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. (Joh 6:44 NIV).

ⁱⁱ True bread gives life - 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (Joh 6:39-40 NIV).

44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. (Joh 6:44 NIV).

47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. (Joh 6:47 NIV).

50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (Joh 6:50-51 NIV).

57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." (Joh 6:57-58 NIV).