

Jesus – the bread of life
John 6:1-70

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John is one of the four Gospels in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but John’s Gospel is a bit different. About 90 percent of John’s gospel is unique to John. John is not just interested in telling us all of the things Jesus taught and did, John wants us to **know who Jesus is** and, more importantly, **why that matters**.

While 90% of John is unique, the miracle that we look at today is the only miracle that is in all 4 gospels, and that is the feeding of the 5000.

The feeding is only a small part of the passage we are going to look at this morning. We are looking at nearly the whole of John 6, quite a long passage, but it’s only when we look at the whole passage that we begin to see **who Jesus is**. And while we might all want to say “wouldn’t it be great to have Jesus leading our church, this guy who multiplies food and walks on water,” as we read this passage we will discover that Jesus takes this very excited crowd of 5000 men (plus women and children) and transitions them to a medium size grumbling crowd, and then into a smaller offended crowd!

Who needs Jesus to lead our church, I am capable of doing that??

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⁷*Philip replied, “Even if we worked for months, we wouldn’t have enough money to feed them!”*

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¹⁰"Tell everyone to sit down," Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. ¹²After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, "Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted." ¹³So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.

Excited Crowd.

So Jesus has attracted a large number of people to begin a journey with Jesus. They have already seen or experienced something of His goodness. 5000 men, plus women and children, gathered and enjoyed loaves and fishes courtesy of the messiah.

Can you imagine the excitement they felt when Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes? What an experience! They had already heard Him speak, as no man had ever spoken. They had already seen Him heal the sick and deliver the oppressed. They were amazed at what Jesus has done and eager to see what He will do next.

The crowd are beside themselves with excitement. They are so excited they want to make Jesus their king. He must be their king. Notice what they are saying in verse 14,

¹⁴ When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, "Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!" ¹⁵ When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself.

Moses had prophesied that God would raise up a prophet like himself to lead God's people into liberty. The people knew this, surely this is the Messiah. Surely this is the One we have been waiting for. Surely Jesus will free us from the oppressiveness of Rome, just like Moses freed Israel from the oppressiveness of Egypt. This is exactly what we need.

Their Excitement is based upon what?

To some extent their excitement was based upon what they had seen Jesus do—the healings, the miracles, the feeding of the five thousand. But mostly their excitement was based upon what they **EXPECTED** Jesus to do for them.

If you've got a leader who can overrule the laws of nature— if you've got a leader who can heal the sick and multiply food supernaturally, you've got a great start toward great success. Life could really get exciting under Jesus' leadership.

This is a wonderful thing to be excited about Jesus. Every one of us should live with a sense of expectation and anticipation of God's goodness. God is good—all the time...

But the assumptions behind the excitement are vital to consider. If I am excited about possibly receiving a million dollars for meeting all the property needs we have in the church? That would be something to be excited about. But if my excitement is based upon a false assumption; that some person is going to walk up to me straight after this service and give me the money, how am I going to feel this when this doesn't happen?

This crowd is excited, they are making all sorts of assumptions—but their bubble is about to be burst.

Their excitement about Jesus is based upon some false assumptions—

- the assumption that Jesus has come to be their political leader,
- the assumption that Jesus has come to make life easy for them,
- the assumption that Jesus has come to give them what they want.

How does Jesus respond to their excitement?

¹⁵ When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself.

Jesus, instead of seizing the momentum of the crowd, to build on his following, Jesus withdraws to the mountain by himself. Doesn't he know that leadership lives or dies on momentum!!!!

The poor old crowd, while they are well fed and very excited about the potential that Jesus is showing, they are also a bit confused, they have lost the answer to all there problems – Jesus.

¹⁶That evening Jesus' disciples went down to the shore to wait for him.¹⁷ But as darkness fell and Jesus still hadn't come back, they got into the boat and headed across the lake toward Capernaum. ¹⁸Soon a gale swept down upon them, and the sea grew very rough. ¹⁹They had rowed four or five km's when suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. They were terrified, ²⁰but he called out to them, "Don't be afraid. I am here!" ²¹Then they were eager to let him in the boat, and immediately they arrived at their destination!

According to Matt and Mark Jesus sends the disciples away on the only boat to the other side of the lake before he wanders away to the hills. The crowd knew Jesus had not gone with them. So they did not know about Jesus walking on the water and rescuing the disciples in the storm. They did not know about how the boat miraculously/immediately arrived at the other side as soon as Jesus joined the disciples.

Eventually the crowd gets into boats in search of Jesus. They are looking for Him everywhere. "How are we going to make Jesus our king when we can't even find him?"

It is a good thing when people search for Jesus. But if there is one thing this chapter teaches us it is this—the reason why we are searching for Jesus is also important. These people were not apathetic. They were passionately and aggressively trying to find Jesus. They were an excited crowd. These would be great people to have in our church—lots of energy, lots of enthusiasm, lots of expectation.

When they find Jesus on the other side of the lake they ask Him a question. John 6:25, "*Rabbi, when did you get here?*" Jesus didn't even bother to answer that question.

Instead Jesus addresses the much more important issue—the issue of why they were seeking Him in the first place.

²⁵ They found him on the other side of the lake and asked, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

²⁶ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. ²⁷ But don't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval."

Jesus is saying ‘you are excited about all the wrong things’. You are seeking me for all the wrong reasons. Yes, I gave you a miraculous sign, **but the miracle was actually a message about who I am**. You have totally missed the point.

- The miracle was a revelation of Jesus as the Bread of Life.
- It was a revelation of Him as the spiritual provision that every person needs.
- It was a revelation of Him as the compassionate Messiah.

But these people were blind to the true message. They had these preconceived ideas of what Jesus should do for them. They were very busy trying to push Jesus into the mould they had prepared for Him.

I am sure you have seen this before, possibly even fallen into the trap yourself— people excited about Jesus—not the real Jesus but the Jesus they have created in their mind. It is a very fragile form of excitement.

So Jesus confronts it. He addresses their motives for following Him, challenges these false assumptions, and so the excited crowd became the

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Their first question was fair enough.

28 They replied, “We want to perform God’s works, too. What should we do?”

29 Jesus told them, “This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.”

OK, Jesus what do you want us to do? We want you to be our king. How do we get this show on the road?”

The answer “*believe in the one he has sent.*” Not the one you have been dreaming about, not the one you have created in your own mind, not the one who suits your needs or wants, but “the one the father has sent”.

30 They answered, “Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What can you do?”

Unbelievable! They have just experienced one of the greatest miracles ever recorded in human history. Feeding of the 5000. Now they are putting demands upon Jesus, telling Him what He needs to do to convince them.

I say unbelievable, but chances are we have all fallen in to the same trap, trying to make Jesus do something we want and then we will follow Him?

Jesus is full of grace, and sometimes He will accommodate our shallowness, our ignorance, our stupidity. But we need to realise that Jesus has already done everything He needs to do to prove His love for us.

Later in John he writes *“Greater love has no one than this, that He would lay down His life for His friends.”*

Jesus laid down His life on the cross for you and me. He voluntarily took the punishment for sin that each of us deserves. He has nothing else to prove. No miracle, no answer to prayer can compare to that demonstration of love toward us. It is on the basis of that sacrifice and the miracle of His resurrection that He expects you and me to believe on Him.

So this group is asking “give us more stuff”. Moses gave manna to our ancestors in the desert. “Lord give us this bread and don’t ever stop”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “give us that bread every day.”

³⁵ Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Jesus is offering them something eternal—something of more value than anything in this world. But they are so caught up in their own materialistic world that they cannot seem to hear or see it.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus uses the term “I am” to declare His deity and to reveal Himself to the people. It is the same term Moses heard from the burning bush. This is the first of seven “I am” metaphors in the Gospel of John:

- John 6:35 I am the bread of life.
- John 8:12 I am the light of the world
- John 10:7 I am the door or sheep gate
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- John 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life
- John 15:1 I am the true vine

Jesus here is using the image of bread to illustrate Himself as the giver and sustainer of spiritual life. Jesus tries to get them to understand what he means by 'I am the bread of life'. And then down to verse 47

47 "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. 48 Yes, I am the bread of life! 49 Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. 50 Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh."

Rather than embracing Jesus' correction of their understanding of Him, they begin to grumble.

52 Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they asked.

And so the **grumbling crowd** is becoming the...

Offended Crowd

Notice, in verse 52, they are no longer calling him Rabbi, and they are certainly not calling him Lord— "this man", *How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*

Jesus is communicating a spiritual truth about Himself using the metaphor of bread and now his own body. They are not coping with this metaphor but Jesus goes on...

53 So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. 54 But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

With hindsight we know what Jesus is talking about, but it must have been quite a mystery for those listening. Jesus knows that he is on a journey to the cross. On that cross He will give His body for the salvation of humanity.

This is not what these people wanted to hear. Their law forbids the drinking of blood. They are repulsed by the very thought. They are not cannibals. But Jesus is not talking about a physical act of eating and drinking. He is talking about a spiritual act of faith, whereby we receive the sacrifice of the cross.

Being a follower of Jesus is all about Christ crucified. It is not about political power and social advantage. But following Jesus is about following His Life.

⁶⁰ Many of his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?"

They were not saying they could not understand his message. They were saying we understand it but do not accept it. Of course, they were understanding it on a physical, materialistic level rather than on a spiritual level. But to put it bluntly, they did not at all like what they were hearing.

So, Jesus asked them the question in verse 61, *"Does this offend you?"* They were no longer the excited crowd. They were now the offended crowd.

⁶⁶ At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him.

When we follow Jesus for the wrong reason, when we're excited about Jesus but that excitement is based upon false assumption, what will happen? We become offended when Jesus does not fulfil our expectations.

Many people become offended at God. I've been a little offended at Him at times myself. Usually the problem goes all the way back to false assumptions—false assumptions about what following Jesus is about, false assumptions about what God wants to do or is doing. That's why we need to make sure we understand the bible when we call people to follow Jesus. We need to be honest about what it means to be a follower of Christ. We need to learn our faith!

We may initially be drawn to the Lord because of the loaves and fishes, because he met our need. Maybe our early experiences of Christianity are all about me and what I want and need. But if I follow Jesus just for the loaves and fishes, if I follow Jesus with only a thought of "what's in it for me", I have missed the whole point.

Christianity is not about using Jesus to fulfil all my personal desires. It not about getting God to give me more stuff and make life more pleasant. That might a by-product of our relationship with the Lord. It is not the objective.

We don't need loaves and fishes, we need the great "I am". We need the Bread of life. We need Jesus!

Then in verse 67,

⁶⁷ Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?"

Peter's answer is a powerful truth to remember.

⁶⁸ Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God."

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