

**Sermon preached by Pastor Robert Barnett at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, March 9, 2008**

JESUS: THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:25-40

I am a bread-lover. Are you? Maybe that's why Susan Seligson's book sounds so interesting. Have you heard of *Going with the Grain: A Wandering Bread Lover Takes a Bite out of Life*? Interesting title, isn't it? She recently traveled the world breaking bread in many different countries. Listen to what she says:

Were I asked to distill the culture and spirit of a faraway place into one tangible object, it would be a hunk of bread. I never tire of flour in all its incarnations. A crusty baguette, a dense slab of black bread, a round of pita, chapati, country biscuits, matzo, lavash – these are a few of my favorite things. . . . Wherever I am. I've taken to keeping my pockets full of the local bread.

Jesus called Himself the Bread of Life. The favorite, the necessary staple of every nation. That's what He said in verse 35: "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." That's a claim that clearly call us to attention. Let's take a moment and see what He meant.

LOOKING FOR A SIGN

Jesus made this statement shortly after the feeding of the 5,000. You know the story; we see it here in the first part of chapter six. There, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus took a little boy's meal – five small loaves of bread and two tiny fish – and fed a hungry multitude. The disciples gathered up what was left and filled 12 baskets with pieces of the leftover bread. What a miracle! 5,000 people are fed and those were probably just the men.

The meal satisfied the hunger of thousands of people and because they were Jews, it reminded them of a familiar story from their history. We read about it in the book of Exodus. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt and under the leadership of Moses – and the powerful hand of God. They escaped their captors, crossed through the Red Sea, and received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. Then, God had them wander around the Sinai desert. The Lord took care of them. He fed them – like the 5,000 – in a miraculous way. Every evening, quail covered their camp and each morning, on the desert floor, were thin flakes of bread-like frost called manna. For 40 years, God fed them with this bread from heaven.

But the crowd on the shores of Galilee got the story wrong. They didn't know their Bibles. They thought Moses sent the manna from heaven, that Moses did the miracle in the desert. They compared Jesus to Moses and asked Him to do something greater. But Jesus sets them straight – He says it was God who provided. It was God's power that fed the Israelites in the desert and God's power that fed the 5,000.

Now Jesus says He has God's power, He is the manna. More than just a miracle, He is the true bread of heaven.

But a disturbing thing happened in the aftermath of this amazing miracle. Jesus rebuked the crowd when they came to Him: "I tell you the truth," He said, "You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." "You're here because you got a free lunch, and you want more."

They were looking for material blessings, caring only about the physical bread. They longed for political liberty, they wanted financial prosperity, they wanted to be free of illness . . . they wanted a better life for themselves and their children. Sounds like us, huh? But Jesus tells them something they did not expect, "*Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.*" Wow!

The people asked what they should do and Jesus taught them. This is the work of God, that you believe in the One whom God has sent. They were called to believe in Him, they were called to trust in the Lord (as the proverb states) and not lean on their own understanding, and to put their faith in Jesus.

But you know what? They didn't. They witnessed the miracle, they were summoned in person by Jesus. What more could you want? But they didn't believe! It is amazing how this crowd responds.

They demanded another miracle: "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?" It would be hard to imagine a more vivid testimony to the confusion and deception of the human heart. They had proof positive of Jesus' power, of His deity, but they still would not believe.

"Seeing is believing" is not always true. Something has to change in the human heart before anyone can put their faith in Jesus.

You see, these unbelieving folks saw the miracle, but they did not see Jesus. They saw with their eyes but not with faith. They did not come to Jesus to follow Him, to worship Him, to rejoice in His mercy and forgiveness. They came for how Jesus could make their lives easier, what Jesus would do for them, or give to them.

They asked for another miracle not because the feeding of 5,000 wasn't enough to believe. They asked because they didn't like what Jesus was saying. Their request was just a way of putting him off. You see, Jesus had called on them to change their attitude, not ask for more stuff. And they did not want to do that so they would not believe.

How often do we come looking for Jesus, not for who He is but for what He will give to us? How often do we ask from Him only those things that will make our lives easier and happier? We pray and He comes through for us, but we aren't satisfied with the blessing. We want something more. We try to manipulate God into doing what we want – and we feel sorry for ourselves when we don't get it.

And then, our faith wavers and we have trouble trusting the Lord and seeing His ways. We start focusing on our physical and material comfort at the expense of our walks with Christ. It's dangerous! Jesus said: *"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life."*

FEASTING ON THE BREAD OF LIFE

Of course we are to work for our sustenance. We are to labor for our daily necessities. The Bible tells us that God Himself gives us our daily bread. But if that is all we are seeking from Him, we are missing the point. If we are consumed by our material needs, our physical comfort, we will forget about our spiritual well-being.

Now we can and we should take those concerns to Jesus. But are we as hungry for holiness as we are for happiness? Do you pray as much for your spiritual growth, the salvation of your friends, the expansion of God's kingdom, as you do for physical needs?

Do you labor only for the bread that perishes? If you do – and friends, all of us struggle here . . . I do and you do – if the treasure of your heart is only for the stuff that will perish, you are missing the point. Only Jesus is the true bread. Only life in Jesus will give real fulfillment and satisfaction.

When He declared, "I am the bread of life," Jesus was saying about Himself: "I am essential to life. You can't live without me." J. C. Ryle writes, "We can manage tolerably well without many things on our table, but not without bread. So it is with Christ. We must have Christ, or die in our own sins." You see, Jesus is the staple that everyone needs. Even the poorest of people bake and eat bread. Jesus was claiming to be necessary for the life of our souls, the One whom you and I cannot do without.

Are you trying to do without Jesus? Are you saying, "I'll take care of myself. I can get by on my own? Maybe you're doing OK. You have a house, a car, plenty to eat, a good job, a wife (or husband), a family, and an education and you think you can put Jesus on the back burner.

You are fooling yourself. Eventually the tough demands of life will exhaust your human resources. The problems of life will come and they will knock you down and you'll hit the wall. Then what will you do? Christ is available to you. He is the bread of life, and if you come to Him you will never have to go spiritually hungry again. He will satisfy the desires of your heart.

Kent Hughes tells the story of accomplished author and playwright William Somerset Maugham. He had fabulous wealth from his writing career, but his success failed to satisfy him. He owned a villa on the Riviera filled with valuable furniture and works of art and served by eleven servants. But that did not satisfy.

Shortly before his death, his nephew, Robin Maugham, visited him. Robin was a Christian and had sent his uncle a Bible. When he arrived, Robin found the old man reading the words of Jesus: *"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"* Maugham said, "I must tell you, my dear Robin, that Scripture used to hang opposite my bed when I was a child... Of course, it's all a lot of bunk. But the thought is quite interesting all the same."

That evening after dinner, Maugham flung himself down onto the sofa: “Oh, Robin, I’m so tired.” Burying his face in his hands, he went on, “I’ve been a failure the whole way through my life.”

Robin tried to encourage him: “You’re the most famous writer alive. Surely that means something?”

“I wish I’d never written a single word,” he answered. “It’s brought me nothing but misery... And now it’s too late to change. It’s too late...”

At that point, his face contorted with fear and staring into space with horror, he began to cry hysterically and shriek, “Go away. I’m not ready... I’m not dead yet... I’m not dead yet, I tell you...” Shortly after Robin’s visit, his uncle died.

Somerset Maugham’s problem was that he had more than mere physical needs. He possessed a soul. And none of the bread of this world was suited to feed his soul.

Jesus is the true bread from heaven. He is the Bread of Life and only He can satisfy.

THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE

When Jesus says He is the “bread of life,” He not only contrasts spiritual satisfaction with physical sustenance, but He points to the miracle that the eternal Son of God became man.

That’s what makes Jesus’ saying so compelling. He isn’t claiming to be a prophet of God. He isn’t saying He is an instrument of God. He isn’t claiming to send the bread of heaven. He says He is the bread of heaven and by saying that He is saying He is God!

By using the words “I am the bread of life,” He deliberately restates the Old Testament words given to Moses at the burning bush. Moses had been commissioned as Israel’s prophet and redeemer, to lead them out of Egypt.

When Moses asks for God’s name to tell the people, the voice in the bush says to tell the Israelites: “I Am has sent me to you.” This is the name Yahweh or Jehovah. When Jesus used this holy name for Himself, He was making the unmistakable claim to be God in flesh and blood.

This immediately points us to the Cross. Look down the page a bit at verses 51-56:

Jesus says: “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.” Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.”

Jesus was referring to His death on the Cross – His body would be broken like bread, His blood would be poured out like wine. Feeding on the bread of life means dwelling in the shadow of Calvary, living the cross-centered life.

When we look to Him and cry out for mercy on the basis of His atoning sacrifice, when we seek our justification only in the justice of God, when we believe Jesus is raised from the dead, we know what He means by the bread of Life.

But you know, when Jesus spoke His words, He rebuked an unbelieving crowd. That's what makes the passage so disturbing – but oh so comforting. Jesus also spoke with graciousness and compassion. You see, Jesus calls people who do not understand, people who do not yet believe. He draws to Himself the confused and lonely, the helpless, those who are perishing and thirsty and starving.

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me. 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.”

This is the unmistakable declaration of God's sovereign election. People do not come to Jesus because it seems a good idea to them. Never does it seem a good idea to blind and sinful people. Apart from a divine work in their souls, people remain satisfied with less than Jesus and contented to live in their own sin.

Only because the Father elected His people before the world was created, only because we are drawn by the Holy Spirit, do we believe.

But this promise, this irresistible call, is offered to all the world. All who come to Christ are His. You think feeding 5000 with a few hunks of bread and a couple of fish is a miracle? That's nothing! Here is the real miracle! The gospel: Jesus gives Himself for the life of the world!

This should give each of us a strong and unquestioning motivation to tell others about Jesus. There is no barrier, not economics, not race, not language, not religion, not a wounded heart or a damaged past. No problem is too great, no sin is too bad. Jesus says that whoever comes to Him He embraces. He will not turn anyone away who comes to Him in faith. No one! Never!

Why? Because He is the One drawing you and me to Himself. All of us who belong to Jesus are a gift of the Father to the Son. Isn't that fantastic! The Father gives us to Jesus and we will come. The success of our evangelism is guaranteed! All who the Father gives to Jesus will come to Him. Everyone we witness to – if God is drawing him – will respond to the gospel and be given to the Son. Everyone.

The power of evangelism is not in us. It is in the sovereign plan of God. The effectiveness of our witnessing rests on the desire of the Father to give to His Son. Friends, you and I have no excuses for not telling our neighbors about Jesus.

The question is not: “Am I one of the elect?” The question for our friends, for us is: “Have I come to Jesus Christ in faith? Have I responded to His gracious call? Have I received His invitation and come to Him, starving to death for the bread of life; honestly confessing my sin and asking for forgiveness?”

Jesus says: “Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” Here is the security of our salvation. If you are not one who has come, simply listen and believe Him. If you have, know that you are secure in Him.

The call of Christ is to feed on Him, to keep on feeding on Him every day. He is the bread of life and we can be satisfied with Jesus.

Abide in Christ. Follow Christ. Feed on Christ. All of these are expressions of the ongoing life of faith to which Jesus calls us.

We cannot exhaust Him. The promise is that Jesus will give us a life satisfied in Him. He will raise us up on the last day. He calls us to believe that He has come, so that we may have His life abundantly.

So friends, Christ is available to you. He is the bread of life, and if you come to Him and stay with Him, you will never have to go spiritually hungry again.

He will fulfill the desires of your heart. Jesus is the true bread from heaven. He is the Bread of Life and only He can satisfy.