

John 6:25-35 (NIV)

When "the crowd" found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

²⁶ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

²⁸ Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

³⁰ So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

³² Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, 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. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

³⁴ "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Last week we talked about outlandish statements, and about how outlandish Jesus' words must have sounded to the crowds there at the Feast of Tabernacles when he stood up and announced to them, "**I am the light of the world.**"

"No—you are a carpenter from Nazareth! How on earth can you say that you're the light of the world?"

That was certainly the response of, at least the biggest part of the crowd there at the temple.

But of course, if you can **back up** what you say, as Jesus can, then that takes the "outlandishness" out of your claim, doesn't it?

If you really *are* who you say you are—if you really *can do* what you *claim* to be able to do—well, that changes things.

I was watching an old episode of *CHiPs* the other night—one where a guy wants to park in a place where already a car and two motorcycles are parked, and so he threatened to move the car and motorcycles by himself. This, of course, seemed outlandish, until you watch the guy—a huge, big, strong guy—pick up each motorcycle, one at a time. He lifted them up and moved them with just his hands, and then he picked up the car, one end at a time, and moved it over until it was where he wanted it, so he could park.

You see, anybody can make any old wild-hair claim they want, but if you can back up what you claim with action, that takes the "outlandishness" out of your words.

And, here in this passage, Jesus had already done some of that backing up.

You see, just hours before this, Jesus had taken five small loaves of bread and two small fish, and with those managed to feed over 5000 people. And, He even wound up with leftovers—enough to feed several hundred more

people, presuming they weren't teenage boys (because anyone who's had teenage boys knows that twelve baskets of leftovers would only feed about six teenage boys).

But the point is, Jesus had performed an amazing miracle in feeding this crowd who didn't have any other means of finding food.

And so, the crowd followed Him—across the lake. They got up the next morning, realized Jesus wasn't there, and went off in search of Him.

Now, we're tempted to think that that's a good sign—that it indicates that the crowd was with Jesus. Because they tried to follow Him, they wanted more of Him. If the crowd kept coming back, that's good.

That's how the world thinks: crowds—lots of people—automatically equals "good."

But that's not always the case. In fact, it wasn't the case here, and Jesus knew it, so He addressed it right away. When they finally found Him, Jesus said to them there in verse 26, "**You were looking for me because I fed you and you want more.**"

He knew their real motive, you see? He knew that they didn't want Him, they wanted the benefit—the food they got by being with Him.

It's like what the apostle Paul declared to the Philippian church, "**The people of the world—their god is their stomach.**" (Phil. 3:19, paraphrase)

What does that mean? It means the way of the world is to think only about our immediate well-being. The way of the world, the way worldly people think, is, "I'm all for whatever satisfies me—satisfies my hunger, my urges, my desires—at the moment."

Paul talks about that too, again to the Philippian church, he writes, "**Those of the world have on their minds only the things of earth.**" (Phil. 3:19, paraphrase)

That was the problem with this crowd. It's a problem with lots of crowds, really: the thinking that, "If it helps me at this moment, then I'm for it."

But Jesus, quite sharply, calls that motive into question.

The crowd followed Jesus because he satisfied their earthly hunger—they got a free lunch. That is the earthly way to think.

But Jesus says, "That's not the better way, the greater way, the Godly way to think." In verse 27 there He says, "**Look, don't concern yourselves—don't give yourselves—and don't invest your days and your life searching for food that spoils. Instead, give yourselves to finding food that leads to eternal life.**"

You see what He's doing? He's trying to transform the way they think, the way they look at life and the things they value and prioritize. He's trying to get them to think outside the temporal box that they were trapped in.

And He uses food to do it. Jesus does it by laying another—what would seem to be an outlandish—

statement on the crowd there in verse 35; He looks at them and declares, *"I am the bread of life."*

Well, that sounded good to them. Free food – not just for the day, but for life. That's sort of like winning the Chick Fil A "free sandwich every day for a year" contest.

So, they said, "Great – lay it on us." Verse 34 there, *"Sir, from now on give us this bread."*

But Jesus, because He knew the motive of their response, said, "No you still don't get it. You're still thinking temporally. You're thinking is confined to that which you can see. You're thinking earthly. You're thinking here and now."

"You're thinking with your stomach, but to get me, you have to think with your spirit."

"There's more to life than the here and now. There's more to life than food and drink and money and sex and politics and possessions and whatever else you aspire to – whatever else drives us in this life."

Jesus said that back in Luke 12:23: *"For life is more than food and the body is more than clothes."*

If we always come back to those things, we'll never really get Jesus. To get Jesus, we have to think beyond our immediate hungers and urges and appetites. To get Jesus, we have to think beyond what we see with our eyes.

As the Apostle Paul tried to explain to the Corinthians, we have to *"fix our eyes – we have to focus in, not on what is seen, but on what is unseen."*

Why?

Paul goes on, *"because what is seen is temporary. It's what is unseen that is eternal."*¹

If we're ever going to really get Jesus, we have to broaden our vision. Widen our priorities. We have to break out of the trap of presuming that what feeds me – what satisfies me is what's of ultimate importance.

If we keep that mindset and try to just add Jesus to the list of other things that feed us: that will never work. We'll just wind up frustrated and conflicted.

Actually, we'll very likely wind up deserting Jesus.

If we insist on just going to Him to feed us when we want fed, we'll leave Him sooner or later, because He doesn't work like that. Jesus will never be one loaf among many.

And that's a hard thing for people to receive, because overcoming that self-centeredness we were born with requires both divine assistance and a willing spirit.

On this day, back at Capernaum, Jesus was offering divine assistance, but He found very few willing spirits. As Jesus goes on through chapter 6 to explain to the people how He must become all to us – how, in order to gain real life, we have to become one with Him and to receive Him completely, letting Him rule in us and in everything about us – the crowd started backing away.

John 6:60 and following tells us, "On hearing this, many of His disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching – who can accept it?'" and they grumbled, and they left. No more crowds, you see. Only the twelve remained.

People are tempted to think what troubled them was all the talk of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood

and all that. But that's not really what turned people away.

What turned them away was Jesus' call to totally surrender to Him, so that He could become everything: their food, their drink, their reason for living.

They would not do that.

They were more interested in food, politics and miracles than in spiritual realities, and so they were unwilling to surrender their own autonomy – their own rights to do as they please – in order to let Jesus do as He pleases with them.

And so, Jesus could never be the bread of life – the essence of life, the fundamental building block of life – to them.

That's what bread of life means: the one element without which you can't live; that is necessary for survival; around which you shape your life; without which you die.

That's who Jesus is.

That's who Jesus came to be – to anyone who would receive Him.

To recognize that He is – and to make Him in our own lives – utterly everything. Everything that matters. Everything that lasts.

Is Jesus your bread of life?

When you receive His body and blood, as we will here in just a moment, are you just going through motions – or are you reaffirming in your heart that Jesus is the one essential for your life?

Is Jesus more important to you than food or drink?

More important than any desire or longing?

More important than popularity or the approval of others?

That's what He means when He says He's the bread of life.

And only when He really becomes the bread of life – the bread of *our* lives – will we understand what following Him really means.

Prayer:

Lord, help us grasp this "Bread of life" business for what it really is – what you really meant when you called yourself that. Help us come face to face with who we've made you to be in our lives – an occasional supplier of wants, or life itself.

And regardless of how we've treated you or what we've thought of you in the past, let us this day see you for who you really are, and especially so as we remember your sacrifice and as we receive the spiritual food of your body and blood.

In your name we pray, Jesus. Amen.

Service of Holy Communion

I'll lead us through the liturgy of the table, and you respond with the words as they're printed on your screen.

This is Jesus' invitation:

You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins,

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:18

who live in love and peace with your neighbors,
and who intend to lead a new life,
following the commandments of God and walking in
His holy ways,
draw near with faith,
and take this holy sacrament to your comfort;
and humbly kneeling, make your honest confession to
Almighty God.

Let's pray the **General Confession** together:

**Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
maker of all things, judge of all people,
we confess that we have sinned,
and we are deeply grieved as we remember
the wickedness of our past lives.
We have sinned against You, Your holiness and Your
love,
and we deserve only Your indignation and anger.
We sincerely repent, and we are genuinely sorry
for all wrongdoing and every failure to do the things
we should.
Our hearts are grieved,
and we acknowledge that we are hopeless without
Your grace.
Have mercy upon us.
Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father,
for the sake of Your son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, who
died for us.
Forgive us.
Cleanse us.
Give us strength to serve and please You in newness
of life,
And to honor and praise Your name, through Jesus
Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

We continue our confession as we pray together the
prayer Jesus taught His disciples.

**Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy
name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is
in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our
debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from
evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the
glory, forever. Amen.**

I'll pray the Collect:

O Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who with great
mercy
has promised forgiveness to all who turn to You
with hearty repentance and true faith, have mercy
upon us,
pardon and deliver us from our sins,
make us strong and faithful in all goodness
and bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ
our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray together for inner cleansing:

**Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open,
all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration
of the Holy Spirit,**

**that we may perfectly love You and worthily magnify
Your holy name,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who gave in love
Your only Son, Jesus Christ,
to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption,
who by His sacrifice, offered once for all,
did provide a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for
the sins of the whole world,
we come now to Your table in obedience to Your Son,
Jesus Christ,
who in His holy gospel commanded us to continue a
memory
of His death until He comes again.
Hear us, O merciful Father, we ask, and grant that as
we receive this bread and this cup,
may take into ourselves His most blessed body and
blood. Amen."

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus took bread, and when
He had given thanks,
He broke it and gave it to His disciples, and said,
"Take and eat; this is My body – given for you; do this in
remembrance of Me."

And then, after supper He took the cup, and when He
had given thanks,
He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of this, all of you,
for this is My blood of the New Testament,
which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of
sins;
do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."
This is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, given for you.
Take it and eat, remembering always that Christ died for
you.

Feed upon Him in your heart, by faith with thanksgiving.
[Eat]

This is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was
shed for you.

Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed
for you and be thankful.

[Drink]

Father how we thank you today for the grace You've
shown to the world through your Son, Jesus.

Thank you for making, for your creation, a way to come
home.

Thank you for feeding us, not just the bread that lasts for
a day, but the Bread that lasts for life – and even
eternal life.

Make us a people who really understand who Jesus, the
Bread of Life really is. And may our lives be full and
joyful – beautifully and winsomely different –
because of Him – the Bread that feeds us. In Jesus
name, amen.

Closing Song:

Benediction:

May we be a people who find our satisfaction, not in the
things this world feeds us, but always in Jesus, the
real Bread of real Life – given to us, and to the world,
at Christmas.