

Jesus, our bread of life!

Do you remember the first time you ever went to an all you can eat buffet? As adults, those places kind of lose their appeal. With an increase in age and experience usually comes the important lesson that *quality* is to be preferred over *quantity*...but not when you're a kid!

The appeal of an all you can eat buffet - you have a limitless supply of good things, and you'll never leave a place like that hungry. All your troubles are gone: no cooking, no cleaning, no thought of what comes next, just being present in that glorious moment of total satisfaction.

As strange as it might sound, it seems as though some of the people following Jesus through Galilee saw him in that same way. With a few loaves of bread and a couple small fish, Jesus fed a crowd of over 5,000 people with leftovers to spare.

In a time and culture in which many people likely lived a hand-to-mouth existence, the miracle of this feeding meant wisdom, stability, and a limitless supply of food to satisfy their daily hunger. In fact, the people were so excited at this prospect; they intended to drag Jesus to Jerusalem and put a crown on his head, so they could enjoy this giver of bread and all he could do for them. But they missed the point.

Jesus didn't come to bring bread. He came to be bread.

He is the Bread of Life that satisfies every one of our needs in this life and the next. But the people following him wanted to see another miraculous sign, once again betraying their misunderstanding. "You know, our ancestors ate manna in the desert. Moses fed our forefathers for forty years! What sign will you provide?" almost trying to coax him into giving them more food. And Jesus didn't miss the opportunity to teach them and us a very important lesson: being hungry for all the wrong things will only leave you even emptier inside.

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”

Sometimes food can serve a purpose greater than simply filling a stomach for a few hours. Think about it. When you and your loved ones are gathered around the Thanksgiving table, what are you celebrating? Turkey and stuffing, or rejoicing in God’s blessings, especially those blessings you call family sitting and eating with you?

Like I said when we talked about the feeding of the 5,000, that miracle wasn’t primarily about food – it’s about a God who makes promises and keeps them, a God who provides. Jesus wanted to use that physical reality of food to draw their focus away from the temporary and perishable and put it on the eternal and imperishable, but they just didn’t get it.

We hear that same promise of Jesus, “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.” This is the food that endures to eternal life Jesus promises to give us – all that he is and all that he has, he says it’s yours!

Perhaps what’s most shameful and embarrassing of all is this – if I honestly consider all the things that I’ve put ahead of Jesus’ gift of himself in the gospel, it’s embarrassing to say how little I settle for. Some food in the fridge, bills paid, a few extra dollars after all’s said and done, this is what I work for?

There is a reason people who eat at buffets eventually find their way back to the kitchen for another meal – the satisfaction doesn’t last.

I heard somewhere recently that when a baby is born, its stomach is the size of a cherry. My how things change! Try satisfying your hunger with a thimble full of rice, and see if it works.

When we try to satisfy our hunger with food that spoils, we'll end up feeling even emptier inside, and next time we'll need even more. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of God will give you.

What must we do to do the works God requires?

If it's all about me, what do I have to do to get at some of that food that doesn't spoil, the stuff that lasts for eternity? What do I have to do so that I stop working for food that spoils and start working for food that lasts?

They missed the most important part of what Jesus said. This isn't about you or what you do, it's about what God does. Jesus answered their natural question with a supernatural answer – the gospel! The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.

You see, when it comes to satisfaction and fulfillment that lasts for eternity, it isn't about you. This is about what God does and what God gives. This Bread of Life that lasts to eternity and the eternal life that comes with him, this is God's gift to you, and faith just receives it. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

Jesus is the ultimate and only source of spiritual life, total sustenance, total satisfaction. So, listen when he says, "I am the Bread of Life," I am your life.

For all our running around working for food that spoils, Jesus the Son of God said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

What a remarkable promise Jesus makes – eternal satisfaction, never hungry, never thirsty. How can he say that? The one who didn't own a stitch of land, the man who didn't live in the lap of luxury, the rabbi who didn't have a pile of money lying around that he could start shelling out, speaks to you as the one who is able to give you everything. Yes, he'll see to it that you have clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, and

everything you own, but he wants to use those temporary blessings to point to his ultimate, eternal gift.

Jesus gave up all things so that he could give you everything. Elsewhere in John's gospel, Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me." What was the will of God who sent him? That this Jesus would live in perfect trust of God's providence, because he knew you wouldn't; that this Jesus would resist the urge to put his temporary needs ahead of your eternal need; that this Jesus would always and only strive toward his Father's will and keep himself focused on eternity, because he knew you couldn't.

What was the will of God who sent Jesus? That this Jesus would go to a cross and give up all, so that he could give you everything.

What was this food that satisfied and sustained Jesus? Saving you.

Jesus' nourishment was his suffering, death, and resurrection. It's been well said that God hasn't given all sorts of different gifts to the world – as if love is one and hope is another and faith still another. God has given one gift to the world – Christ his Son, the Bread of Life – and in that gift are contained all other gifts.

In a time and culture that strives to find satisfaction in food that spoils, and looks for fulfillment in temporal things, remember the promise here: Jesus gives you more.

God wants you to see his greatest blessing, Christ himself, and how he wants to give you that gift over and over and over again – in his promises fulfilled in the gospel, in the water of your baptism where he connected you to Jesus, in the bread and wine of his Supper, where Jesus feeds you with his body and blood for your forgiveness.

Through those simple looking means, Christ is giving himself to you, making you a participant of the total sacrifice of himself on the cross. The

God of all that is, has made himself completely yours in Christ.

When we feed on the gospel, the Bread of Life himself, then we can see all those other blessings in our lives in their proper perspective. Your career, your family, your recreation time, the shirt on your back and the shoes on your feet are not an end in and of themselves.

All those things point you to the greatest blessing of all – the goodness and grace of God that is yours through Christ: his perfect righteousness covering you; his death a payment for your sin; his resurrection your guarantee; his bread that gives life and never perishes, spoils, or fades – it's all yours. Amen