

I Am the Bread

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Introduction.

- A. To most of mankind, normal is whatever they're used to, and this is no less true of modern Americans than it is true of anybody else. We see the world in a lot of ways that doubtless would seem bizarre to someone not familiar with our culture, and probably one of the strangest of American attitudes is our love-hate relationship with food. We love to eat. In fact, we love to eat so much that the US is probably the most overweight nation of all time. However, our love of food fills many of us with guilt and self-loathing. How many of us have not eaten all we wanted to at a party or a restaurant because we didn't want to "look like a pig?" How many of us consume things that are not actually food, like diet sodas, so that our love of eating doesn't show up in public? From any rational perspective, it's plain to see that Americans are weird about food.
- B. Perhaps this difference comes from the fact that to us, the purpose of eating is recreation, whereas to most people who have ever lived, the purpose of eating is survival. I have never been anywhere close to starving, but to millions and perhaps billions of people alive even today, starvation is an ever-present danger averted only by constant hard work. They would regard all of our efforts to TRY to lose weight with disbelief.
- C. We need to consider eating through the eyes of people like these to understand just why it is that in John, Jesus compares Himself to food. His point isn't that we should go on a Jesus diet if we get too much of Him; His point is that we need Him to survive. The hungry of Jesus' time struggled with this idea, it's foreign to us today too, but we need to understand it. Let's turn to John 6 to learn why Jesus said, "I am the bread."

I. Don't Seek Jesus for Physical Reasons.

- A. This 6th chapter of the gospel of John is a strange chunk of text. We can read through it once and feel like we understand it all, but once we try to put the point into words, we come up with nothing. In our efforts to grasp what's going on here, it might help to think of the bulk of the chapter as a dialogue following a predictable pattern. From 6:26-40, the text follows a predictable sequence. Jesus says or does something that's a provocative lead-in to get the attention of His Jewish audience. The Jews then react in a predictable way. Finally, Jesus uses the Jewish reaction as a springboard for teaching, concluding with another lead-in.
- B. The first of these lead-ins is actually an action rather than a comment. Jesus gets the ball rolling on this dialogue in John 6:1-14, when He feeds the 5000. This was certainly a provocative moment. This prophet, out of nowhere, is able to produce enough food to satisfy a small army of people.
- C. The people of the region react to this by swarming after Jesus. What's interesting about this, though, is not their action itself, but Jesus' characterization of why they're doing it. We see this in John 6:26. Jesus says that they're following Him not because they saw the signs, but because they want more food. Now, we might not grasp the distinction here at first, but the point is important. The people knew Jesus had fed the five thousand, all right, but they didn't think about the spiritual significance of Him doing that. They were only following Him because they figured they might get fed again. They would have been just as happy if He'd showed up with a bunch of money and just bought them all a meal. The food was their concern.
- D. Jesus uses this opportunity, though, to instruct His misguided audience in John 6:27. He tells them that they're barking up the wrong tree. They should be looking for enduring food, not physical food, from Him. This comment, in fact, is Jesus' next lead-in. These folks are following Him in hopes of getting just one meal out of the 21 they need for the week. His comment that they can have food that endures forever is guaranteed to get their attention, and He makes this comment so that they will continue the dialogue.
- E. Naturally, the people do that, which is what we see in John 6:28. They give Jesus another opportunity to teach by asking, "How do we work for this food?" However, this is just another appeal for a free meal.
- F. Jesus' response to this is apparent in John 6:29. He tells them that the way they work the works of God is by believing in Jesus. Now, this passage is useful when we're arguing with the "I'm saved by faith, not by works" people, because it shows that faith IS a work, but in context, it's even more interesting than that. This is one of the earlier hints in Scripture of the idea of justification by faith, that we will be saved not by our own righteousness, but by our faith in Christ who justifies the ungodly. That's the way we get enduring food. As was true before, this statement is not just teaching, but a further lead-in for Jesus' audience.
- G. Consider the way they react in John 6:30-31, by saying, "If You want us to believe in You, give us a sign by providing for us the meal we've been looking for all along." They're telling Jesus that He's asking them to put the cart before the horse. What Jesus has told them is that if they believe in Him, He will give them enduring food. The Jews here say it's much more reasonable to get food from Jesus first, and then believe in Him.
- H. What's interesting about this statement is that it shows the fundamental mental mistake that the people are making. Jesus has ALREADY fed them. He's already taken 5000 of them and given them an all-you-can-eat bread-and-fish buffet. If they were interested in coming to God, that one act would already have confirmed

the word of Jesus in their eyes. The problem is that they AREN'T really interested in coming to God. They're only interested in Jesus for as long as He continues to feed them. It's the difference between the virtuous young woman who marries a man because of her love and respect for him, and the gold-digger who marries some rich old sugar daddy, but will only stay married to him as long as the money lasts.

- I. Jesus' reply to this, in John 6:32-33, is perfectly on point, although it must have completely confused the people. He says that the manna that came from Moses, and indeed the food that He himself created, are not really bread at all. At this point the people are probably thinking, "How can He say that's not real bread? I ate it?" Once again, though, Jesus is not speaking of physical sustenance, but of spiritual sustenance. He's looking at things from a completely different perspective, in which only the eternal is truly worthwhile.
- J. As we consider this first chunk of the dialogue, we come to the point where we can make our first application from this text, which is "Don't seek Jesus for physical reasons." It's easy to look at the people in this story and laugh at the way they foolishly and single-mindedly focus on something as insignificant as another free meal, yet this country is filled with people who claim to be Christians for exactly the same reason. They think that if they follow after Jesus, Jesus will make them rich, and they have this priority despite the fact that any amount of earthly riches pales in comparison to the spiritual blessings available in Christ. They're making the same mistake as the Jews of John 6. We need to be wiser than that. Certainly, God promises to take care of His people, but that is not the point of Christianity, and in order for all those things to be added to us, we have to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first by conforming our lives to the example of Christ.

II. Believe That Jesus Will Sustain Us.

- A. Once we understand the underlying lesson of the obtuseness of the people, we're ready to move on to the next main section of the dialogue, which once again begins with Jesus' provocative statement in John 6:33. He tells His audience that the bread that God provides will give them life.
- B. We see the reply of the Jews in John 6:34. They naturally want to figure out how they can get this special bread, because they are still thinking in fleshly terms. They still hope Jesus is going to feed them again. They're about to find out otherwise. You ever have one of those conversations where you're talking with somebody about one thing, but they're actually talking with you about something else, and you keep on trying to explain until you realize that the conversation makes no sense? That's where these people are with Jesus. They think they know what He's talking about, but they really don't.
- C. Here's where they come across the truth, in John 6:35-40. Jesus ends their hopes for a free meal when He tells them that He is the bread of life to the believer. Let's look at this verse-by-verse.
- D. To begin with, John 6:35 is where Jesus drops the hammer. He tells the multitudes there plainly that He, not some more manna, is the bread of life, that people who believe in Him will never hunger and never thirst. This does not make sense from a physical perspective. How can Jesus be bread, and what does He have to do with satisfying a hungry tummy? Jesus clearly means something else. He's saying that He is the bread of life not to the hungry tummy, but to the hungry soul, and it is those who seek this spiritual bread who will be satisfied.
- E. That gets back to the basic problem that these people have, which Jesus lays out in John 6:36. They have seen Him, but they do not believe. They don't think Jesus is the answer to their deepest spiritual problems. All they think is that they might get some more food out of Him. They accept the miracle, but not the Messiah.
- F. In John 6:37, it seems like Jesus suddenly takes a sharp left turn onto another topic altogether, but He's actually just explaining what He means when He says that He is the bread of life. Remember, folks: bread wasn't recreation to these folks. It was survival. In the same way, Jesus says, He is survival. Survival in physical terms involves having enough to eat, but in spiritual terms, it is about dwelling in the presence of God in heaven. Jesus promises here that those who believe in Him will survive because they will not be cast out.
- G. Jesus continues to explain this idea of life and survival in Him in John 6:38-40. The reason why Jesus is life to those who believe in Him is that this is all part of the plan of God. Jesus came down from heaven to do what God wants Him to do, and God's purpose for Jesus is that all whom God has given Jesus will be preserved. They will not be lost, but they will be raised instead. Jesus concludes this promise by stating that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will be heir to this promise of resurrection and eternal life. This might seem somewhat concerning to us, because, of course, we have never literally beheld Jesus, but there are other ways to see someone than with our eyes, and we see Jesus clearly in His word.
- H. This leads us to the second application we need to make from this text, which is that we must believe that Jesus will sustain us, that He will be the bread of life for our souls. Sometimes, Christians really stress about this when they shouldn't. For instance, I was talking to a friend of mine online the other night who described himself as a vile, detestable person because of all the ways he sins and falls short of what God wants him to be, and it's certainly not the first time I've heard that. Now, it's important for us to have godly sorrow for our sin, but we should never let that overpower us. As Christians, we must recognize that we are not vile and detestable people in the eyes of God. Indeed, quite the opposite is true. We are precious and lovely in His sight, not because we sustain ourselves with our own righteousness, but because of Jesus who sustains us.

Conclusion. If Jesus is not sustaining you right now, why don't you make your life right with Him?