

The Bread of Life

John 6:24-40; 60-69

By [David Felker](#)

Please turn with me in your Bibles to John chapter 6, John chapter 6. It begins in the church Bible on page 891.

Starving Souls and Hungry Hearts

And before we read, something to consider. My wife could tell you that sometimes, especially when I am hungry, that I can be pretty forgetful. Sometimes, especially when I am hungry, I can be pretty forgetful. In our first year of marriage I was a student at RTS and I woke up and was heading to class and my wife had gotten up and was out at an early breakfast. And so I got up, I got ready, I ate, I grabbed my bag, I grabbed my keys, I grabbed my phone, but I couldn't find my wallet. And so I looked all over our tiny little duplex and it was nowhere to be found. And so I still wasn't panicking but I called my wife who said that she didn't have it, she hadn't seen it, but she would be home soon and could help look for it. And at that point I did what you do when you lose something - you begin to retrace your steps. And the night before, I had a few friends over to watch a game and so I called them to see if they were playing a trick on me; they didn't have it. And the story goes on, my wife gets home, we look for almost an hour, at this point my class was probably done, there was still no wallet, and I very vividly remember saying to my wife, which was met with a fair amount of laughter, I said, "Either you have it, my friends stole it, or a robber came in last night and took it." And at that point my wife said, "What did you eat last night?" And I told her and she walked to the pantry and opened the bag of chips and inside the bag of chips, of course, was the wallet. You know, I was hungry, concentrating on the game, and I put my wallet in the bag of chips. I think my wife said something at that point like, "Maybe the robber put it in there." And we laugh about that but everyone is hungry. Everyone is hungry.

A couple of years ago there was an interview that Tom Brady, the famous quarterback of the New England Patriots, did with *60 Minutes*. And in this interview he was at the height of his career. He had won three Superbowl titles, he had won two MVPs, he had a supermodel for a wife, he was a multimillionaire, so his story is basically - rich, beautiful people winning Superbowls. That's his story. And many of you have seen this interview but he sits down with the journalist and he says, "Why do I have three Superbowl rings and still think

there's something greater out there for me? I think it's got to be more than this. I mean, this isn't it. This can't be what it's all cracked up to be." And the journalist asked, "What's the answer?" And Tom Brady responds, "I wish I knew." And that's a story we've heard many times from people at the top - "I wish that I knew."

In the account that we're about to read, this is the longest chapter in the gospel of John, it's the longest chapter in the entire New Testament, but we will see that everyone is hungry. We have hungry hearts - hungry maybe for comfort, hungry maybe for romance or for money, hungry maybe for power or for approval, but everyone is hungry. And so with that said and with that in mind, before we read let's look to the Lord in prayer for help. Let's pray.

Father, we give You thanks for time together tonight. We confess that our hearts are fickle, our mind is a factory of idols, we are hungry, we are thirsty, we have parched souls, and so enable us tonight to taste and see that You are good, that we would hunger and thirst after righteousness. Work through my lisping, stammering tongue and point all of us to Jesus Christ that we might be satisfied in Him. We pray this in His name, amen.

John chapter 6 beginning in verse 24:

So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I

have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

And then verse 60:

"When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

Amen, this is God's Word.

I want to look at three things in this text tonight. The first is the problem that Jesus exposes. The problem that Jesus exposes. Second, the proof that you are feasting in food that perishes. And then third, the person to whom the sign points.

1. The Problem that Jesus Exposes

And so first, the problem that Jesus exposes, which is laboring for food that perishes. The sections we just read is on the heels of two miracles of Jesus. The first was the feeding of the five thousand, a very, very public miracle, and then a semi-private miracle, Jesus walking on water. We didn't read this but the crowd has gathered at the beginning of chapter 6. You can see in verse 2, it says it was a "large crowd." Verse 5 says, "Jesus, lifting up his eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him." Verse 3 we see that there are so many people in fact that Jesus has to find an incline, a mountain, so that He can speak to them and be heard by them. And so Jesus feeds them with five loads and two fish, somewhere between, most commentators would say 10 and 20 thousand people. And verse 12 tells us that even after they've eaten their fill that they were

satisfied, they were nourished, and there was even a great abundance left over. And so it was a wonderful, it was an amazing display of Jesus' power and it was an amazing display of Jesus' generosity to them.

In John's account here there's more attention given to the aftershocks and the conversations that happen. You see their response, first of all in verse 14. Notice this confession that they make. They say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." And then in verse 15 they say, "Let's make Him king." So, "This is the prophet. Let's make Him king." And as the narrative goes on and Jesus' dinner guests would have seen those amazing, wonderful miracles of Jesus - they've seen His power; they've seen His generosity - they wake up the next morning and find out that Jesus is not there. Jesus has walked on the water to Capernaum where He's teaching and so these people, again who are saying the right things and they're seeking the right man, verse 24 says they're seeking Jesus. They actually follow Him to where He's at and they ask Him a series of questions. And look at verse 25. Here Jesus cuts right through their actual question. They say, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" And Jesus kind of stops them right in their tracks and says, verse 26, "You're seeking Me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of loaves. Do not labor for food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life."

The Power of Christ: Exposing the Heart

And so what is Jesus saying? What in the world is He doing? Jesus is exposing their heart. He's rebuking their motives. He's rebuking their reasons for following Him. Isaiah 55 - "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and why do you labor for that which does not satisfy?" Jesus is exposing their heart here. A couple of weeks ago my family went on vacation. My dad could not go because of work and so the females in my family were in charge of the movie selection and so we watched *Anne of Green Gables* and *Anne of Avonlea* and I think that just got me in a mood and so in the famous *Pride and Prejudice* story, those of you who have read the movies or seen the books know that it centers around the Bennet family and the middle sister of the five Bennet sisters is Mary. And Mary is the most overtly Christian; she's the most virtuous of all the sisters. And this is what Jane Austen says about her in the book. She says, "Mary, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family" - so the most unattractive of the sisters - "Mary, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family worked especially hard for knowledge and accomplishments of which she was impatient for display. It gave her a pedantic air and a conceited manner." What Jane Austen is saying is that for Mary it wasn't about Jesus; it wasn't about holiness. It wasn't about Christian character. It was a power play. She felt plain. She felt maybe average or below average. She felt inferior to her sisters. And so of course she becomes the most Christian. And of course her real opponent wasn't her sisters; it was God. It was God who would not deliver on what she thought would satisfy the hunger. You know the Christianity, her knowledge, her accomplishments.

The Object of Our Hearts' Desire

You see it's very easy to have a dream or maybe a genie wish or maybe a plan of what you want God to do for you and you seek Him like they did in hopes that He will give it to you. Jesus is not deceived; He's not fooled. God sees the thoughts, the motivations, the thoughts of your hearts, the desires of your hearts. The passage that we're looking at wants us to examine our heart and ask ourselves the question, "What about you? What do you want? Why are you seeking Jesus? What do you want from Jesus?" He sees beyond the appearance. "Man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart" - 1 Samuel 16:7. "His eyes are as a flame of fire" - Revelation 1:14. He sees us through and through. It's very possible for us to think and believe that religious activity is going to be the ticket that's going to ensure that we get the comfortable life that we want or we get the dreams that we want. Remind your heart tonight, why do you spend money for that which is not bread? Why do you labor for that which does not satisfy? And it's very possible for me to go through the motions and for Jesus to not be the object of my love. And so that's their problem - they're laboring for food that's perishing.

II. The Proof that you are Laboring for Food that Perishes

A second thing, to piggyback off the first point, let's do some self-examination - What is the proof that I'm laboring for food that perishes? And two things here.

Perishing Food and a Discontent Heart: Demanding More Signs

The first is that you demand more signs. Look in verse 30. "They said to him, 'What sign do you do that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?'" Now if you want to mirror into what we are like just follow the flow of conversation. They say to Him, just twenty-four hours before in verse 2, listen to this. It says, "They saw the sign and they came to him." Verse 14, "They saw the sign that he had done and said, 'This is the prophet.'" And then in verse 30, "What sign do you perform that we may see and believe so that we can know that you are for real, so that we can know you are really from God?" And so here's a multitude of people who, again, just twenty-four hours before Jesus fed them with five pieces of bread and two fish. And they come to Him and He says, "I'm the Bread of Life." And they said, "Well what sign do you perform so that we can know you are for real?"

And it is very easy for us to just throw stones at that and to get so frustrated when we read that. But think about it this way. Why is it that Jesus, for us, is constantly "in the dock," as C.S. Lewis says? He's constantly on trial. We are prone to pick out the thing that is going to make the hunger go away. Maybe for my family to change in these particular ways or for more income or more status

or more comfort, for a boyfriend, for a wife, for no more addiction, for no more pain, for no more sickness, for no more unemployment. We're so prone to do that, fill in the blank, that we kind of lock in on it and we say, "Okay, Jesus is the Prophet. I believe what He says. Jesus is the King. He reigns and rules over my life. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. But if He could just fix these couple of things in my life, if He could just not withhold His goodness in these particular ways, then I'll really believe and then I'll really know and then I'll really trust that He's powerful and He's generous." You see we do the same things. I think that if we're honest we have two or three things carved out for our lives that we're banking on Him giving us. We want more signs. And you know, for these people, remember, they hadn't seen Jesus die on a cross and they hadn't seen Him walk out of the tomb three days later but that's been revealed to us. We know that about Jesus. And yet how often is our heart - we look at our circumstances and the language of our heart is, "If God would come through for me in these particular ways then I could really trust Him." That's the first thing. We're just like these people; we're clinging to that which perishes when we demand more signs.

Perishing Food and a Discontent Heart: Grumbling

A second thing is that we're clinging to that which perishes when we grumble, and we grumble because Jesus isn't who we want Him to be or He doesn't give us what we want Him to give us. Notice in verse 41 it says, "The Jews grumbled about Him." In verse 61, "Jesus, knowing in Himself that His disciples were grumbling about this." And then in verse 66, when they realize that Jesus doesn't just do whatever they want Him to they just leave. Even earlier, it's very interesting that they bring this up, they say in verse 31, "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness which Moses gave them so what work do you perform?" And we know what he's referring to. This is the book of Exodus when God gives manna. Just remember that story, though. The Israelites were in slavery, God delivered them in the Passover, and so they leave and then Pharaoh changes his mind. He sends 600 chariots after them. And so they get to the Red Sea and they're in an indefensible military position. They have the Red Sea in front of them and they have probably the greatest military at that time in history behind them. And God splits the sea, they walk through on dry land, and God defeats their enemies. That's Exodus 14. In Exodus 15 they sing a song of thanksgiving to God. And then in Exodus 16, what do they do? They say, "God brought us out here to die," and they grumble.

And we're just like that. You see the Jews here are grumbling; they're grumbling because some of the things Jesus said are hard thing, they're difficult things, they're amazing things that Jesus is saying. And they're also grumbling because Jesus is not who they want Him to be. He's not giving them what they want Him to give them and so they're questioning His power and His generosity. And that's a huge theme in the Bible, that God's help and God's care and God's goodness seems long ago, far away, remote and unlikely to happen again. There's

something wrong with our hearts, there's something wrong with our spiritual memory that we think about God's help, God's care, God's goodness, God's faithfulness as if it was long ago, far away, remote, and unlikely to happen again. And yet hard providence in our life sticks with us for so long. Listen to what Tim Keller said in a sermon on Exodus 16. He said, "It always seems like the last time God came through for you was ten years ago even if it was ten minutes ago." We're such a forgetful people. We forget that things that God did ten minutes ago feel like ten years ago to our heart and disappointments that we had ten years ago feel like ten minutes ago to our heart. That's what we're like.

The Posture of the Heart towards Jesus

And so maybe the script that you had in mind for your life is different than the one God has handed you. Maybe the place where the Lord has brought you seems like you've got the Red Sea in front of you and 600 chariots behind you and it's not producing joy, it's producing bitterness. And we think, "I know Jesus is the Bread of heaven but I don't understand why God would work it to where my life is so hard? I don't understand why God would work it to where my kids have to walk through this or my parents are suffering in these particular ways. Or I don't understand why God would work it to where they have affluent parents and everything just seems so easy for them and it's always so hard for us. Why God? Why now? Why me?" And it forces us to ask the question, "What's the posture of your heart towards Jesus?" Are you prone to have a complaining spirit or contentment? Are you prone, is it easier for you to count your complaints than it is your blessings? Is your default to grumble or to be grateful? Can you see that the theme of your life is God's generosity to you? Fight against grumbling and complaining. Tonight even, on the turf of your heart, fight for contentment in Jesus. "Contentment grows," as one author said, "in the deep soil of a thousand mirco-gratitudes." Contentment grows in the deep soil of a thousand micro-gratitudes. What is the posture of your heart towards Jesus?

III. The Person to Whom the Sign Points

And so we've seen the problem, the motives have been exposed, we've seen the proofs that we're laboring for food that perishes, that we demand more signs, and that we grumble. And so third, how do I feast on the food that doesn't perish? How do I feast on the food that doesn't perish? And the answer, in closing, is you have to look to the person to whom the sign points. And one commentator notes that "The crowd, instead of seeing in the bread the sign, they see in the sign only the bread." You see here Jesus reveals the sign was pointing to Him, that He is the Bread of Life. That is the epicenter of this passage. He is the Bread that does not perish. And you see in the gospel of John over and over and over again how He does this. Sinclair Ferguson pointed this out that "The wine that ran out in chapter 2, the life of Nicodemus that was mere flesh and blood in chapter 3, the inadequacy of worship that took place in Samaria and Jerusalem, in chapter 5

the man near the waters but who would never be healed, and now in chapter 6 these people who are seeking bread that can never satisfy. And when Jesus gives wine that satisfies in chapter 2, life that satisfies in chapter 3, worship that satisfies and wholeness that satisfies in chapter 5, and here feeding that satisfies, “The great question they should have been asking,” Sinclair Ferguson says, “is, ‘Where do we get the bread of Jesus?’”

And notice in this passage again and again and again what He says to them. He says in verse 35, “I am the Bread of Life,” in verse 48, “I am the Bread of Life,” in verse 51, “I am the living Bread that came down from heaven.” And the only way to be nourished by this bread, the only way to eat the Bread of Life, is by faith. Notice, look in verse 28, they say, “Tell me what we must do.” And it seems like they’re almost tightening up their shoelaces. And Jesus says to them in verse 29, “Believe on the One in whom God has sent.” And you can almost hear them saying, “I mean that sounds - what else? That sounds too easy. That sounds too simple.” And that really is the crisis point. Salvation is either all of grace or it’s nothing at all. It’s either all of grace or it’s nothing at all. Salvation is a sinner saying, “I have no bargaining chips. I’m starving; I’ve got nothing to offer.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones defined a Christian saying, “A Christian is a man or a woman whose mouth has been shut.” A Christian is a man or a woman whose mouth has been shut. What God requires of us to be in relationship with Him is to come with the empty hands of faith and say, “None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good. Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling. I’m banking everything on Jesus.” And you know, “I believe. Help my unbelief.”

Clinging to Jesus: Eternal Nourishment for the Soul

One last thing. Many of you know this, but my mom, who is here tonight, my mom about a year and a half ago was diagnosed with cancer; she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. And she had surgery that April and she has done two rounds of chemo and it has been a year and a half where she hurts, she’s down, she feels like she bumps up against the edge of her energy almost every day, and my mom, if you know her, she’s very fun - you’re fun Mom! She’s very silly, she’s kind, she’s full of life, she’s very hospitable. And she’s said that one of the things that she thinks God has taught her in her sickness is just my dad’s faithful care for her. And she says, “You know, wedding day years ago, I had my dress on, I had my hair done - I’m fun, I’m pretty; we’ve got dreams. We’ve got life ahead of us. I know that he loved me then. But you know now, after surgery in the hospital bed or two or three days after a chemo treatment, or you know, house is a mess, hair is a mess, I’m not fun, I’m not energetic, I’m not hospitable, he really loves me. It’s not about all that I’m bringing to the table. He really loves me.” And I just pressed home to her, it drove home, “He doesn’t love me for what I bring; he just loves me.”

The Gospel says, “Come without money, come to Jesus Christ and buy.” And so when your heart is wounded and weak, when it’s sick and sore, when you’re not

at rest and broken and grieved and fearful, do you run to Jesus? Do you run to Jesus? You will be spiritually hungry this week and somehow, some way you will feed that hunger. How are you feeding that hunger? Are you feeding on Jesus day by day? For what are you laboring? Note how the passage ends. The fledgling disciples come to Jesus, everyone is leaving, He says to them, verse 67, "Do you want to go away as well?" And they say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Where are we going to go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that You are the holy one of God." Where else would we go but Jesus? Are you trusting in Him tonight? Are you feeding on Him day by day? Because if you're not, He is willing; doubt no more. Call upon Him while He is near. Go back to Jesus. He is nourishment for your soul. He is the Bread of Life. Whoever feeds on Him shall not hunger, shall not thirst. Declare bankruptcy of heart and run to Jesus tonight. Stop playing games. Cling to Him. Come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Amen. Let me pray for us.

Father, we are hungry and so we often run to work, to relationships, to money, to satisfy our hunger, and You have provided for the needs of Your people in Jesus. You have provided the Bread of heaven. And so humble our hearts and help us to drink deeply tonight of Your goodness to us in Jesus Christ. Move us towards Him. We pray this in His name, amen.

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