

“The Bread of Life”

Living as Light in a Dark World – part 6

John 6:25-40

[SLIDE 30] Welcome, friends. My name is Pastor Eric, and I’m coming to you “alive and well” but not live, from the parsonage in Houghton. My family expects to make a complete recovery and be back in action by the end of the week. Thank you so much for your prayers and concern. If nothing else, our own illness has taught us how seriously to take this pandemic. Anyone can have the virus and not know it, and that is why I am so grateful to you all for following our mask and distance protocols. We spread zero cases outside of my family because of all of our actions. Praise God.

Turn to someone near you and tell them, “We need you to be the church.” If we are going to grow disciples, we must all realize that God is counting on each one of us. Together, we can be the church Christ wants us to be, if each one takes seriously the call to invite, teach, and pray. Let us take a moment now and pray like our very souls depend on it, which they do.

Great God of heaven and earth, you alone deserve the honor and glory for who you are. Father, Son, Spirit, you call us to yourself, to be your church and to minister the gospel by our words and actions. May you use this moment now to reveal yourself through your word. May we leave this place transformed and challenged, filled with hope in Jesus, because of the words you speak to us today. We pray this in Christ’s name. Amen.

[SLIDE 31] Before I became a pastor, I worked as a civil engineer. I’ve forgotten most of the procedures, codes and calculations of my profession, but there is one important practice that I maintain to this day: always have one drawer in your office dedicated to snacks. That’s right, I can’t calculate the load-bearing capacity of a 10,000-square-foot auditorium, but I do know the capacity of my stomach. I excel in the oft-neglected field of eating junk food.

[SLIDE 32] I know I’m not alone. We’ve all done gone to that drawer. We try to wait for dinner, yet we stare at the pantry and grab a cookie, a cracker, a candy bar, or a bag of chips. And the next thing you know, said bag is empty, it’s 6:00, and you’ve lost your appetite for something that would have been far more

nutritious and filling.

[SLIDE 33] Snacking underscores a deeper desire we all have. We want fulfillment, yet the things we crave for don't satisfy, not forever. I mean more than chocolate. I'm talking about money, possessions, and even fancy dinners. What thing do you want right now? A new car? A new house? Retirement? A vacation? Those things are nice, but they won't last forever.

Have you ever had this feeling? You've gotten so worked up over something, a major purchase, a project, or even a holiday, and when it's all over, you wonder why you feel so empty. Our focus is often on temporary happiness, instead of eternal joy. That's one of the reasons I always tell pre-marital couples: the wedding only lasts one day; the marriage lasts a lifetime. Which one needs the greater investment of your time?

[SLIDE 34] The question all of us must deal with is this: Is there anything that can satisfy for eternity? Instead of going for the spiritual Snickers Bar, is there a four-course meal that satisfies in this life and the next? The answer is, yes: Jesus, the Bread of Life. Let's take a deeper look at God's word to find out why.

[SLIDE 35] In John 6, Jesus has a conversation with people who have some short-sighted cravings. They know Jesus was a miracle worker; just before this conversation, Jesus fed over 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, then he crossed the Sea of Galilee by walking on water. And there wasn't even any ice on the lake! Two incredible miracles revealing his power and identity.

So, naturally, people from the crowd who witnessed the miraculous feeding come looking for him, because they want another “snack.” Look again at what Jesus says to them. (John 6:26-27) [SLIDE 36]

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...”

To paraphrase, Jesus tells them, “You aren't looking for what you really need. You just want a snack: some fish 'n chips. Don't go after that stuff. Work for food that lasts forever.” And by the way, Jesus isn't talking about Twinkies.

[SLIDE 37] One of my pet peeves is when stuff spoils. I hate the sight of

moldy food. It seems so wasteful. Did you know that now they make smart refrigerators to warn you if something inside is expiring? Jesus also does not want us to waste our lives chasing after stuff that doesn't matter, stuff that rots and spoils. He has a better offer for us all.

His listeners are intrigued, and they ask, so what does God want us to do?

[SLIDE 38] The Bible has many answers to this question. "Love God and love your neighbor." (Luke 18) "Follow the Ten Commandments." (Exodus 20) "Give to the poor." (Mark 10:21) "Love your enemies." (Matthew 5:44) All these answers are correct.

Yet, Jesus gives the simplest answer: "Believe in the one God sent." (John 6:29) I find this summarizes all the other commands quite nicely. What does God want you to do? Believe in Jesus. When you believe in Jesus, you obey all of his commands, which, after all, are the commands of God. That's the simplicity of the gospel. Jesus doesn't complicate things.

Sadly, as is often the case, people try to weasel out of the simplest tasks. Instead of saying, "OK, Jesus," they ask for another sign, a miracle, some "proof" to back up his claim that God sent him. Remember, these people just experienced a miracle on the other side of the lake. In fact, John 6:15 says they were about to "make him king by force," which is why Jesus left them. What other miracle could they possibly want?

[SLIDE 39] They ask Jesus for the bread from heaven. These people hold Jesus to the ultimate Jewish standard: the great prophet and leader, Moses. "Hey, Jesus, are you as good as Moses? What about manna? Can you give us that?" When the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years, they had bread that fell from heaven, literally. (Exodus 16) They think it'd be cool if Jesus could give them a few more holy crackers.

However, Jesus points out, Moses didn't give them that bread; God did. God supplied the bread from heaven. God gives the bread of heaven to the whole world. Are you hungry?

[SLIDE 40] They answer, "Yes, we're hungry. Bread of heaven sounds wonderful."

Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life." (John 6:35) "If you're hungry, find me. If you're thirsty, listen to me." Jesus talks about eternal life, belief and

disbelief, the will of God. He promises resurrection to his followers. He promises they are safe in his care. He continues to make the case that he comes from the Father and offers the only sustenance that truly satisfies our souls.

It's not like Jesus makes this claim without personal experience. Early in his ministry, Jesus spent 40 days in the desert being tempted. His first response to the devil was, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)

[SLIDE 41] What is the bread of life? Obviously, it's not a literal food that fills our stomachs. Instead, Jesus is telling those who would follow him that their lives can have deeper meaning than they currently experience. Instead of dashing about looking for spiritual junk food, they can have everlasting life in him. They can be accepted, rewarded, loved, protected. They can have friendship, joy, peace, and rest. It's amazing just how much Jesus promises to give us, both in this life, and 1000 times more in the next one. That's what the bread of life is.

Not surprisingly, his audience grumbles and complains about this teaching. They do not believe Jesus is from heaven, nor do they believe the life he offers them will be that satisfying. They are hungry, but not that hungry, apparently.

[SLIDE 42] Have you looked at your own life and asked what satisfies you? One thing I appreciate is playing strategy games. I always want to play more. And even though I try to remember to be thankful just for the opportunity to play, I have to admit, when I don't win, I wrestle with the part of me that remains unsatisfied. And that's just for a game with no real consequences.

[SLIDE 43] Psalm 34:8 says, “O, taste and see that the Lord is good.” The type of spiritual nourishment Jesus offers us simply has no comparison. You can't find it at Walmart. You can't buy it on Amazon or Ebay. You can't purchase it from the stock market. The bread of life, eternally given to you, is broken for your salvation. It comes freely to you, at great cost to the Savior.

Where do you go for spiritual nourishment? Is Jesus' life in you? Or are you trusting in something else to save you? Maybe you've put your hope in your possessions. Your job. Your family, boyfriend or girlfriend. OK, none of those things are inherently bad, unless they replace the gift God has given you: a loving relationship with Christ.

The fact is, Jesus died to set us free. (Hebrews 12:2) He is the only one who

can offer himself as the bread of life because of his great sacrifice for us on the cross. Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:14-15:

[SLIDE 44] “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

When you go to the spiritual candy store for a temporary fix, you are missing out on the most satisfying bread ever. We are surrounded by temptations, and it’s all too easy to click here and there, drop your credit card number, and think, “This should make me happy.”

[SLIDE 45] To see Jesus as the bread of life, you have to admit your own hunger. You have to be willing to seek the things of God. Jesus said in Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” Blessed, exceedingly joyful, no matter the circumstances. How hungry are you?

Deep in my heart, I believe there are too many people eating spiritual junk food. They are looking for a quick bite, instead of a full meal. To those who haven’t found satisfaction, God says this in Isaiah 55:1-2

“Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.

² Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.”

Friends, listen to Jesus. He is ringing the dinner bell. “Free grace for all! Bread of life! Eternal life! Come ‘n get it!” I’m not talking about cheap grace, not vending-machine grace, but real, costly, eternal, wholesome nourishment for your soul. No wonder the kingdom of heaven is described as a banquet.

(Matthew 22, Luke 14). Hunger is something we can all relate to. Each of us is invited to the meal. Jesus offers his very life for us.

[SLIDE 47] How are we going to respond to this offer? Will we follow Jesus? Will we experience his love and forgiveness? Will we say yes to God and no to sin? Will we stop filling up our lives with stuff that doesn't satisfy, and eat the bread of life instead?

Generations ago, before the invention of white bread, real bread was a lot more wholesome. It contained protein, vitamins, minerals, and fiber. It was good for you. Well, the Bread of Life is good for your soul. Do you know the best vitamin for a Christian? B-1. (Be one.)

I pray that you will feast on the Bread of Life at the table in God's kingdom, and not settle for Sin-Slurpee at the devil's 7/11. I pray you will accept the invitation to eternal life. May you listen, obey, worship and adore Christ, the Bread of Life, and let him fill every spiritual craving in your life. Let us pray.

Memory Verse: John 6:35 (NIV)

"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."

Reflection Questions:

1. What things do you crave when you're hungry? How healthy are they?
2. What spiritual cravings do you have? How do you fill those?
3. What did Jesus mean when he said, "I am the bread of life"? What other metaphor could you use?
4. Of the promises that Jesus makes, which is the most satisfying for you? (Peace, rest, acceptance, forgiveness, etc.) Which do you want more of?
5. Have you tasted of the bread of life? Does he satisfy your soul? How can you digest more of the spiritual food of God?