

JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:22-40

Key Verse: 6:35

“Then Jesus declared, ‘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.’”

In the first part of chapter 6, Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Jesus revealed to his disciples his compassion for suffering people. Jesus wanted them to share his heart and participate in his work, bringing what they could by faith. When we share Jesus’ heart and bring something to Jesus by faith, Jesus uses it to carry out his world salvation purpose.

In today’s passage the crowd that enjoyed Jesus’ gracious provision tracks him down to ask for more. Jesus told them, “I am the bread of life.” Jesus wanted them to accept him as the Messiah and have eternal life in his name. May God help us to feed on Jesus, the bread of life, through this study.

First, “Do not work for food that spoils” (22-27).

We can imagine the scene the day after Jesus fed the five thousand. The crowd had seen a miraculous and historic event and felt that a whole new world was opening up for them. After a sound sleep, they awakened and began milling around. They must have talked with great excitement to one another. Then their stomachs began to growl. So they looked around for breakfast, but couldn’t find anything. Looking at one another, they made big smiles and said, “Jesus!” But when they wanted to place their order, they could not find him. Assuming that he had gone to Capernaum, they commandeered some boats and went across the lake in search of Jesus. It must have been a chaotic scene. Family members tried hard not to separate from each other. People with no experience were trying to use others’ boats, perhaps without permission. Yet, mysteriously, the crowd moved as one. They found Jesus on the other side of the lake and asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” They were surprised at his diligence. It was a mystery how he got there without using a boat. Jesus could have told them, “Well, I walked across the water.” But he did not. A politician would have been happy that this huge crowd intensely followed him. But Jesus was not really happy. Jesus saw the motive of their hearts. It did not please him.

Look at verse 26. “Jesus answered, ‘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.’” Jesus keenly perceived their motive in looking for him. They wanted another meal. They had degenerated from seeking a miraculous sign to seeking a happy meal. They were like little children who run to greet their father, not because they are glad to see him, but because they expect some candy. Jesus was very sorry that though they stood before the Son of God, in their hearts they were panting for a piece of bread. To them, Jesus looked like a sandwich. Jesus wanted them to realize that their inner motive had degenerated.

Jesus went on to say in verse 27, “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” When Jesus said, “Do not work for food that spoils,” he meant that they should not spend all their effort just to earn bread. It is a foolish exchange for a man to give his life for bread. We remember Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. In a very short time, he regretted it with bitter tears. Bread may taste good, especially with frosting, but it soon spoils and becomes moldy. Not only bread, but all the things of the world perish, spoil and fade away. Working hard only for bread, or money, is foolish and it is a cursed life (Gen 3:19). Jesus said, “Do not work for food that spoils.” Jesus wants to liberate mankind from the curse of materialism.

Many live under the illusion that material abundance will make them happy. Students study hard with the single desire to get a good job and make a lot of money. If anything interferes with their plan to make money, they become very nervous, even hostile. But Jesus warns us against the tragic mistake of working hard only for money. Those who trust in money have an appointment with disillusionment. Just ask those who are suffering from a mid-life crisis. Then why should we study, if not to make money? It is to learn until we can master a field of study and be a useful steward of God’s world. Dr. Albert Schweitzer understood this well. After accepting Christ at a young age, he made a decision to study hard for the glory of God. He studied medicine, theology, history, music, and various

sciences. Then he went to Africa and used his knowledge to serve the people there. He lived for God's mission, not to make money. The word "mission" is not just UBF terminology. It is God's truth that God made man to work for him, not for money or bread. Jesus came to liberate mankind from the curse and to restore the blessed life of mission once again. We should examine ourselves: "Am I working for bread or for God's holy mission?"

Look at verse 27a again. "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." There is another kind of food mentioned by Jesus, that is, food that endures to eternal life. It is the word of God. The word of God gives life to our souls. The word of God nurtures our inner person to grow in the image of God. The word of God enlightens us to do the work of God and participate in the divine nature. Obedience to God's word lasts forever in God's history. For example, Peter was once a smelly fisherman. One day, as he was cleaning his nets, Jesus got into his boat and asked him to put out a little from shore so he could preach to the crowd that had gathered. Peter agreed. When Jesus finished, he said, "Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch." Peter had good reasons not to do so. But he overcame himself and obeyed Jesus' words. Then he caught such a great number of fish that his nets began to break. Peter's spiritual eyes opened to see God in Jesus. It was the beginning of God's great work through Peter in his history. We also remember the servants' obedience at the wedding at Cana, and Andrew's faith to bring five loaves and two fish. These acts of obedience became part of his eternal redemptive history. It is paradoxical. We cannot obtain the word of God by our effort. But when we obey Jesus, he gives us the words of life. Jesus strongly encourages us to make a greater effort to obey the word of God than to obtain a piece of bread. We must examine our attitude toward the word of God. It is so easy for us to be engrossed in the struggle to survive. Buying groceries seems urgent, doing homework seems urgent, and finding a partner seems urgent. While doing these things, it is easy to neglect our personal Bible study and one-to-one Bible study with others. Jesus urges us to make a greater effort to obey the word of God. Jesus said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

Look at verse 27b. "On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." Jesus fed the five thousand by the power of God. It was God's seal of approval on Jesus, not an invitation to free food.

Second, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (28-40).

After listening to Jesus' teaching, the crowd felt that they should do some kind of work. They were willing. So they asked, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (29). This is a profound truth of God and worthy of deep meditation. We could write one message on this verse. However, in this context, Jesus was simply trying to help the crowd with the truth of God. They had a fixed idea that they must work for bread. This idea is ingrained in human beings. Many work so hard for bread that they sacrifice their family members, not to mention their faith in God. Jesus really wanted to liberate mankind from this mentality. What God wants from us first and foremost is not some kind of work, but to believe in Jesus Christ and have the life of God in our souls.

Before meeting Jesus personally, our works are acts of self-righteousness that smell like rotten garbage to God. Or they are desperate acts of survival in a dog-eat-dog society. These days creationists and evolutionists debate each other. Creationists say that God created the heavens and the earth. Therefore, there is order and meaning, and there are moral absolutes and eternal consequences to man's actions. On the other hand, many evolutionists deny God's existence, espouse meaninglessness and deny moral absolutes. They claim that life in this world is the survival of the fittest without any eternal consequence. Actually, to them, life is the survival of the fittest. Life under the curse seems exactly like that, but when we believe in Jesus we cross over from death to life. We no longer live a cursed life in a cursed world. Instead, we come under the protection and providence of God and into his world of blessing. In God's blessing, work is a privilege and an opportunity to glorify God (Eph 2:10). It is not burdensome, but meaningful and joyful. Thus, the word "work" has a different meaning after knowing Christ. A person under the curse simply cannot understand the blessedness of working for God. Nor did Jesus try to explain this. Instead, he simply told them that they needed to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. Jesus said, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

What Jesus said was simple enough. The crowd needed to accept Jesus as the Messiah sent by God. That was all. But they were not willing to surrender without negotiating terms and conditions. They claimed that they needed a miraculous sign. Actually, they had been given a sign already. When they saw the feeding of the five thousand they

realized that Jesus was the Messiah. But now they were asking for another sign. This shows us that people on the material level intentionally misunderstand miraculous signs. They see only material benefit, losing the spiritual meaning. They fail to see what God is doing in history. For example, Thanksgiving Day in the United States is a time to turn to God and to give thanks to him. Puritan forefathers thanked God for the freedom to worship God. After their first winter in America, they thanked God even though they suffered many fatalities and had to ration corn kernel by kernel. When they thanked God for his grace, God poured out abundant blessing both spiritually and materially. Now millions of turkeys are sacrificed in the United States every Thanksgiving Day. Some even call it Turkey Day. What a terrible degeneration. The long holiday weekend gives us time to seek God and thank God. But many use it only to indulge their flesh and become demon possessed. We must celebrate Thanksgiving Day by giving thanks to God. This requires us to spend time and effort to remember what God has done until we can give thanks to him from our hearts. May God help us to do so.

When the crowd wanted Jesus to give them a miraculous sign, they had a specific miracle in mind. They wanted Jesus to provide bread from heaven like Moses did. To strengthen their demand, they quoted from Exodus 16:4. But they only mentioned a key phrase, "bread from heaven." The entire verse says, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.'" In the context of God's purpose for Israel, God was using the bread problem to train his people. But the crowd was twisting Scripture according to their own desire. They imagined that God gave bread from heaven while the Israelites enjoyed a comfortable life. This was not true. Their wilderness training was difficult. God used their bread problem to train them in faith and humanity. God still uses the bread problem today to train his people. Someone said that training is not possible in America because of the liberal moral climate. But that is not true. God trains his people through the bread problem. However, the crowd, in their desperate desire to get bread from Jesus, ignored God's purpose. They ignored God. Thus, they were terrible Bible students. How did Jesus help them?

Jesus reminded them that it was not Moses, but God who gave them bread from heaven. Bible study must be God-centered. When they let their own desire color their understanding of God's word they missed the point. Jesus also taught them what is the true bread from heaven. They thought of manna. But Jesus said in verse 33, "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." The bread of God is not material. It is a person. Jesus came down from heaven to give life to men. Jesus humbled himself from his heavenly throne to be a man, God in the flesh. Jesus did this to give himself to us, that through him we might have life. The crowd didn't understand. They still wanted bread. They said, "Sir, from now on give us this bread."

Look at verse 35. "Then Jesus declared, '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.'" Jesus was not going to give them physical bread. He wanted to give them spiritual bread. Jesus is the spiritual bread. Jesus gives life to our souls. Jesus can do this because he is God. Jesus' words, "I am," echo God's word of revelation to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Jesus is stating that he is God, the God of Moses. So he has the power to give spiritual life. Jesus promises that those who come to him will never go hungry. "Hungry" refers to the spiritual hunger in our souls. It is a hunger for eternal life and for God's love and righteousness. Jesus fully satisfies our spiritual desire for life, love and holiness. Jesus gives us eternal satisfaction. Money does not give life. Jesus gives eternal life.

Jesus says that to have this life we must come to him and we must believe in him. It means to surrender to him as Lord. A good example is the Samaritan woman. Another example is the royal official. Coming to Jesus is more than being present before him. It means to listen to his word and accept it. It means to trust in Jesus by faith. There are many people who hang around Jesus without coming to Jesus. They know enough about Jesus to make a decision of faith, but they are unwilling to surrender. Some worry about losing a boyfriend. Some worry about losing sinful pleasures. Some worry about working too hard or sacrificing too much. So they calculate and hesitate. The crowd was like this. They had seen Jesus but they were not willing to trust him.

Jesus really wanted to give the bread of life to the crowd. Jesus wanted them all to have eternal life. Yet they were largely unbelieving. It was heart-breaking. However, Jesus was not discouraged. Jesus saw this event in light of God's will. Jesus acknowledged God's sovereignty in the work of salvation. God would give his own sheep to Jesus. Jesus would accept them and love them and give them eternal life through his death and resurrection. Look at verse

40. “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

In this passage we learn that Jesus does not want us to waste our precious lives in the pursuit of bread or money. Money cannot satisfy our souls. Money cannot give life. Jesus is the bread of life. Jesus wants us to come to him for eternal life that truly satisfies our souls. Let’s repent of deceptive materialism and put our whole trust in Jesus.