

JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:1-71

Key Verse: John 6:35

Good morning everyone. I'm very honored to be here before you all today, and I'm thankful for being given the opportunity to share God's word with you. For those of you who don't know me, I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Matt Groters. Like many of us here, I was invited to Bible study at the university. I graduated from Northeastern Illinois University in 2014 with a degree in Music Education, and now I teach high school music in CPS. But even though I graduated from NEIU, I never graduated from Bible Study. I have great confidence that we will be blessed if we study the Bible and come to Jesus, so that we may have the life that is truly life. Today, we are beginning a series of messages from the gospel of John. Each message will focus our attention on one or more of the "I AM" statements of Jesus. These statements are instances in which Jesus uses a metaphor to describe his identity and role as the Messiah. In this message, we will focus on the first of Jesus' I AM statements, found in John chapter 6, verse 35. Can we read this verse together: *"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.'*" Through this study, we want to learn what it means that Jesus is the bread of life, and how we can feed on this living bread.

Jesus and his disciples were on the east coast of the Sea of Galilee. Many people had followed Jesus there, because they saw him do miracles such as healing the sick. When Jesus saw the great crowd of people, he had compassion on them and wanted to feed them. This seemed impossible to the disciples. There were thousands of people present, 5000 men at least. Still, one of them found a boy with five small barley loaves and two fish, who offered it to Jesus. Jesus had the people sit down. Then, he gave thanks for the food, and distributed it to everyone, as much as they wanted! When confronted with the needs of this great crowd, Jesus was both willing and able to help. He gave them bread, satisfying their physical needs. Jesus is the creator God who took on flesh, and made his dwelling among us. "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." The same one who was in the beginning, whose power fashioned the entire universe, can easily make thousands of loaves of bread and fish out of a poor boy's lunch.

The people rightly concluded that Jesus was from God--as evidenced by his power--but their application was hopelessly misguided. They wanted to make him king by force. The people thought that if Jesus was powerful enough to feed and heal them all, he could defeat the Romans and reestablish the Kingdom of Israel. But they misunderstood what scripture said about the Messiah. Jesus himself taught that the Messiah must suffer, be rejected by his own people, and be killed, and rise from the dead. Becoming king at this moment--and fixing all of the peoples' earthly problems and issues--was not part of God's plan. So Jesus sent his disciples over the sea of galilee in a boat, while he withdrew to the mountain to pray. At night, when his disciples were half way across the Sea with the wind against them, Jesus walked out to them on the sea. Can you even imagine it? Just as he did by feeding many thousands with a boy's humble lunch, Jesus revealed his glory to his disciples by walking on the water, and delivering them safely home. He is the God of creation and Lord of the sea. When he speaks, the created order bows in submission.

Back at Capernaum, Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, and the multitude that he fed on the other side of the lake arrived, eager to see--**and eat**--more. "Rabbi," they said, "When did you get here?" Jesus confronted them about their motivation, saying, "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." The people had started out amazed at God's power through the signs that Jesus was doing. But after Jesus fed them so well, their motivation for following him had changed. No longer did they seek him because of his miracles, or teaching. Instead, they just wanted a free meal.

Then he exhorts them 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. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.*" Jesus has shifted the conversation, swinging from the natural to the spiritual realm. Those speaking with him discerned this, and asked a spiritual question: "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus replied, "*The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.*" Then something strange happened. It's as if the people totally forgot that Jesus had just miraculously fed them. They brought up the account from Israel's exodus from Egypt, when God fed his people in the wilderness for 40 years with the special bread called manna. They demand that Jesus do something like this so that they can believe. Nevermind that Jesus just fed thousands of people with five loaves and two fish! Perhaps they thought if he really was the promised Messiah, he should prove it by feeding them again today. And maybe tomorrow too. How about 40 years of free food? Sounds great! Let me ask you a question. How many times did you attend an event simply because they had FREE FOOD? Doesn't food make people move? Now think about the best meal you ever had. After that meal, were you hungry again the next day? If you're like me, the answer is yes. We have to eat to live, and we have to work to eat. It's a simple fact of life. The people Jesus fed got hungry just like we do. But when they came to Jesus for a free lunch, he turned their minds away from the physical, helping them to think about their deeper spiritual needs. He said, "*Do not work for food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.*" Jesus distinguished between two types of food, spoiling and enduring. He also claimed to be the source of the food that endures forever.

So, what is the food that spoils? Food that spoils is anything in this life we use to sustain or establish ourselves which is ultimately perishing--which death or decay will finally take from us. This could be our career, education, love life; family, success, fame, or money. For instance, one young man may do his best to find the right woman to marry, but after a seemingly happy engagement and marriage, an affair happens, followed by divorce. Perhaps a young woman works hard for a high GPA with the dream of getting into the best schools and becoming a successful businesswoman. She gets all she wants, but then the market crashes, and she loses everything. Many young people today dream of becoming famous on TikTok. Perhaps they successfully go viral, but the pressures of keeping up appearances or maintaining visibility, and the addiction to fame and likes cause everything to come crashing down as soon as a few videos don't do so well. In the end, these people were all working for food that spoils. On the other hand, food that endures to eternal life is what we can gain in this life which will endure or last forever. What then is eternal, and how can we get it? According to the Bible, there are three basic eternal things: God, God's word, and the souls of humans and angels. So then, to work for food that endures to eternal life is to seek a right relationship with the eternal God, through a right understanding of and trust in His eternal word. This results in an unshakeable hope for the future of our eternal souls.

Jesus helped his listeners do this by focusing them on the true bread from heaven. He said that this bread didn't come from Moses, but comes down itself out of heaven. 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."* He also promised, *"everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."* As Jesus himself declared, He is the true bread of life that came down from heaven. He has come down not to do what people think he should, but to do the will of God His Father, who sent him. This will is for Jesus to save everyone who looks to him in confident trust. Many people think of Jesus as their friend, their buddy, or their poster religious figure. They align themselves with him when it's convenient, when it helps them get what they want--whenever they can get a free lunch. But Jesus hasn't offered himself to us on those terms. He did not come down to be those things. He came down to save those who believe in him.

Now, notice that Jesus gives two conditions in verse 35 for never being hungry or thirsty again: Coming to him and believing in him. Whoever believes must first come to Jesus. Coming to Jesus in this context is to approach him with an openness of heart, ready to listen, understand, and *receive* what is offered. Perhaps you may have to change when you come. Perhaps you might hear something you don't like, even if it's true and right. But you come all the same. You come with humility to Jesus. Jesus is unique amongst all great religious figures in the things he said and did. For example, no one else has both claimed to come down from heaven as the source of eternal life for all who believe in him, AND accurately predicted the specific details of his death *and* resurrection. Jesus is the one to whom we should come, because he is the most qualified and able to give us that food that endures to eternal life. One of the most beautiful statements Jesus ever made is in verse 37: *"Whoever comes to me, I will never drive away."* Notice, Jesus did not say, "Whoever cleans up their life and comes to me," I will never drive away. He didn't say, "Whoever is successful as a parent, as a student, or in campus mission and comes to me," I will never drive away. No! WHOEVER comes to me, I will NEVER drive away. If anyone sincerely comes to Jesus, the bread of life, they will be accepted, if they put their trust in him. As John most famously recorded earlier in his gospel: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that WHOEVER believes in him, will not perish, but have everlasting life."* We come as we are to Jesus, no matter our race, ethnicity, language, moral failure, or anything else about us, and we can be eternally secure if we trust in him.

The next question that must be answered concerns what we must believe *about* Jesus. How does one "believe or trust" in Jesus? Let's discern what Jesus means as he responds to the peoples' new objection. When Jesus declared that he was the true bread of life that came down from heaven, people were offended and started grumbling about what he said. After all, wasn't he just the son of Joseph and Mary? Jesus didn't back down: *"Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life...I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* Look at the progression of Jesus' teaching: First he said that the bread Moses gave them will not suffice, but they need the true bread God gives from heaven. Then, Jesus declares that He Himself is this very Bread of Life. Now he explains how: *"This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* Obviously, eating Jesus' actual flesh and drinking his actual blood is out of the question. None of the early apostles and followers of Jesus actually did that, and besides, if Jesus is in heaven now, we certainly can't do that, so it precludes us having the life he says we can only have by eating and drinking. So it has to mean something else. When Jesus says, *"This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world,"* He is talking about His death

on the cross, when he offered up his body to be broken, and his blood to be poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Our sins. The sins of whoever would come to him and believe. What must we believe about Jesus, then? That Jesus Christ was crucified for our sins, and raised from the dead to make us right with God.

Throughout his teaching in this chapter, Jesus is helping people confront their bigger issue, which is not where their next meal will come from. Jesus tells them twice: “Your ancestors ate manna and died.” The biggest spiritual problem is death. Even if Jesus miraculously gave us all we wanted, we would still have to die. Death is a spiritual problem, though it is manifest in the physical realm. The Bible says that death is wages--payment. God has given the death sentence to all of humanity for our disregard of him and failure to live in accordance with his holiness, righteousness, and truth. If we honestly look at the standard of God’s holiness in the 10 commandments, and agree that we’ve lied, we’ve stolen, we’ve been sexually immoral in thought or deed, or disobeyed our parents, or failed to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we will see that we are guilty, and we have offended and angered God. We are destined to *“die once, and after that, to face judgment.”* Our sin against God not only causes our physical death, but it condemns our souls to be separated from God, both in this life, and eternally in God’s prison, which is called Hell. At the judgment, *“the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death”* (Revelation 21:8).

This is a hard teaching, who can accept it? The people asked this after Jesus insisted that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to have eternal life. It’s also hard to accept that we cannot save ourselves from death and hell, from God’s righteous wrath against our rebellion. But don’t go away, as many people did after Jesus taught about the bread of life. You’ll miss the good news. Let’s look at the 12 disciples. When Jesus asked them if they would also leave, Peter spoke up, saying, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” The disciples were convinced that Jesus was their only hope to be saved from the judgment to come, to be granted everlasting life, because he is the Holy One of God, the Messiah, the only savior. They believed in the Son of Man, and so received the food that endures to eternal life. When we confess and turn from our sins and idols and come to Jesus; when we trust in his perfect life, his offering his body and blood on the cross for our sins; When our hearts believe and rejoice in his glorious resurrection from the dead, then God forgives our sins and makes us as righteous as Jesus. This way, we can be restored in relationship with the eternal God, and have a sure hope for our eternal future. This is how we eat the food that endures to eternal life.

When I started studying at Northeastern Illinois University, I wanted to become a professional violinist. My “daily bread,” or “my bread and butter,” was practicing 6 hours per day. Honestly, I loved music and the violin more than most things, even God. Though I was raised in a Christian home, when I was in college I did my own thing. I justified not attending church or reading my Bible by reasoning that I was too busy, or that it was too much of a hassle to get up on Sunday and attend a local church. But there was also something else underneath--sexual immorality. My immoral thoughts and actions made me feel guilty. I thought God wouldn’t accept my Bible reading or personal devotions, and that it was no use anyway--I couldn’t stop doing what I knew was wrong.

I was invited to Bible study through TrueVine Club my freshman year, and eventually started attending the Chicago UBF worship service and studying the Bible one to one. Some time later, my musical aspirations were shown to be food that spoils. I started having pain in my shoulder

and chest while I was playing, and had to take a break. I started reading Christian books that I found at my parents' house, and continued studying the Bible. Through this, I realized that if I got a serious injury my violin career could be over, and I started to consider the state of my soul. It became clear that all my hope was in myself and my violin skills. I measured and defined myself based on my performance. If I didn't play the violin, what was I anyway? I didn't have an answer. I was also still captive to my sexual sins. My selfishness and idolatry loomed larger and larger as the sin it really was the more that I studied the Bible. It eventually dawned on me that I probably wasn't actually a Christian, considering I wasn't living like one. One night, after falling into sin again, I cried out to God and asked Him to make what Jesus did on the cross count for me, to save me and make me a new person, and enable me to do what is right. I transferred my trust from myself, my own abilities, and my hope for my future, into the hands of the only one who could save me, purify me and secure me for eternity. AMEN!

When I found the food that endures to eternal life, I also found what it means to feed on the living bread of Jesus. The Bible came alive to me when I read it. The Holy Spirit had taken up residence inside of me, helping me understand, cherish, and seek to know God's word more than anything else. I went from hours a day playing the violin to hours a day studying the Bible and theology. I learned practically that "*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" I found that when my hope for the future was in God's word, and Jesus' life, death, and resurrection on my behalf, I was free from the need to define myself by anything else—to work for the food that spoils. I wasn't hungry for sexual fulfillment in the same way. I wasn't driven to be a better violinist than all my peers. I could let go of my professional music career dream and become a teacher. I could trust God to guide me to the best spouse to build a life together to serve Jesus' kingdom. I found what Jesus said in the sermon on the mount to be true: "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*" Jesus, the bread of life, satisfied all my spiritual longings, making me right with God through His eternal word of truth, and giving me a sure hope and future which death and decay cannot touch. My prayer for everyone here is that we all taste and see that the Lord is good. May we feed on Jesus, the bread of life, by trusting in his life, death, and resurrection to save us and give us eternal hope in heaven.