



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."

J O H N 6 : 3 5 (E S V)

I AM

THE BREAD OF LIFE

DATE

August 15 & 16

WEEK

1 of 7

OVERVIEW

John 6

KEY VERSE

John 6:35

SETTING THE STAGE

Jesus performed the miracle of feeding 5,000 men, plus women and children, at the beginning of John 6. This miracle is the only miracle that is recorded in all four gospels other than the resurrection. John is the only gospel who gives an interpretation of the miracle in any form. By the time Jesus is in front of this crowd of people, His disciples had already seen Him perform miracles that changed people's lives in big and small ways. The disciples had already been exposed to the teachings of Jesus that were words from heaven. The disciples had seen Jesus up close and personal like no one else. They had seen the impossible become possible.

However in this setting, the stage was different. There was not a specific individual that had a need such as a man who could not walk or a woman who was hemorrhaging. There was a gathering of people that was enormous when adding together the men, women, and children. It could be argued there were easily 10,000-15,000 people and they all had the same need at the same time. Feeding these people would be impossible.

Continued on page 8 >

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Consider Your Perishables
2. See the Imperishable
3. Consume The Bread of Life, Be Filled

THINGS TO KNOW

- There are two words for "life" in Greek: "*bios*" and "*zoe*." "*Bios*" refers to physical existence. "*Zoe*" refers to the quality of life.
- John uses the word "*zoe*" 36 times, which is more than the other three gospels combined. It is used 11 times in this chapter alone.
- Whenever Jesus speaks about life in this passage, He uses "*zoe*."

I AM

THE BREAD OF LIFE

Setting the Stage, continued >

Jesus was in the impossible business. Jesus, the Son of God, the One the prophets had foretold was in the business of making the impossible possible. Though a different context, the truth remains when Jesus said in Matthew 19:26, “*And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”*” The disciples would be asked to participate in this miracle of feeding thousands on the side of a hill, even in the midst of their disbelief. Andrew gathered the small amount of fish and loaves from a boy willing to surrender what he had to Jesus. The other disciples were asked to pass around the food that miraculously kept coming to the masses of people. Then the impossible appeared to become more impossible. There were leftovers! The people were able to eat as much as they wanted and there were still 12 baskets of leftovers.

The thousands of people who were hungry had been fed by the Son of God, the Messiah. It was following this scene that Jesus proclaims His first *I Am* statement. And as was often the case, Jesus used something contextually to magnify the truth and allow it to become accessible. When Jesus says, “*I am the bread of life*” He is not limiting Himself to satisfying a physical hunger, but He is expanding the meaning to satisfy a spiritual hunger.

Introduction

Have you ever heard the saying, “You are what you eat?” This is a proverbial phrase in our culture that helps us consider the foods we are consuming. What the phrase does not suggest is that if you eat a hamburger, then you will slowly turn into a hamburger. Or, if you eat a salad, then your skin will gradually turn into a leafy-green shade. Rather, it suggests that your physical health is directly connected to the foods that you eat regularly.

To be sure, this saying is also overly-simplistic, as people are much more than what they eat. The Bible makes it clear that we are not defined by our bodies, nor is our physical health the barometer of our dignity and significance. However, this saying about the connection between physical health and what we eat does parallel a deeper, biblical truth: your spiritual health is inextricably connected to what you feed your soul. This is an idea that Jesus explicitly speaks about in John 6 when He refers to Himself as “*the bread of life*” (John 6:35). Jesus is driving home the connection that in terms of the soul, **who we are** is directly connected to **what we eat**. Truly, our spiritual diet is a great indicator of who we are and the greatest catalyst for who we are becoming.



1. CONSIDER YOUR PERISHABLES

Whenever you go to a grocery store, you really only have the option of choosing between two different types of foods: perishable foods and imperishable foods. Perishable foods consist of fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, bread, meat, milk, yogurt, eggs; they are foods that will spoil or **perish** either quickly or eventually. Imperishable foods, on the other hand, consist of nuts and seeds, dried fruits and vegetables, canned foods, frozen meats, etc.; these foods can be kept for an extended amount of time without spoiling, **imperishable** over time.

Whenever a hurricane or pandemic sweeps across the city, people immediately rush to the grocery store, in search of the imperishable food. Why? Because they want to ensure themselves a stockpile of provision that will outlast the severity of circumstances around them. You want the imperishable food because you know it will last. There is security, stability, and longevity in imperishable foods because you know its sustenance will be available to you—in and out of season.

In John 6, Jesus takes this familiar, earthly concept of perishable/imperishable food for physical health and uses it to draw parallels about perishable/imperishable food for spiritual health. In fact, what is interesting is that Jesus sets up this entire conversation immediately after He miraculously feeds 5,000+ people with **perishable** food. And not surprisingly, the people come back to Him wanting more food. But Jesus' answer is both sharp yet surprising:

JOHN 6:25-26 *When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?”²⁶ 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.” (ESV)*

Jesus confronts them and says that they are not seeking Him for who He is to them, but for what He can give to them and do for them. How often do we do the same? Jesus is telling them that true satisfaction is not found by something He gives to us, but in who He is to us.

Jesus is telling them that true satisfaction is not found by something He gives to us, but in who He is to us.

In other words, the miracle for the stomach and their physical sustenance was designed to move them to consider their soul and their spiritual sustenance. Jesus' miracle of physical provision actually served to diagnose the problem of their notion of spiritual provision. Their endless quest for physical sustenance mirrors their endless quest for spiritual sustenance. And what they eat will show who they are. Jesus continues and says,

JOHN 6:27 *“Do not work 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.”*

Jesus is saying that it is in the human condition to look for what will sustain us and give us life. And like a grocery store, there are only two options: perishable food for the soul and imperishable food for the soul. The question is not, therefore, **whether** you have sustenance, but **what** is your sustenance.

The Greek word Jesus uses for “life” is the word, “*zoe*,” which refers to quality of life both essential and ethical.¹ It does not communicate merely existing, but living life to the fullest. Jesus is essentially making the distinction that, similar to our two options in the grocery store of perishable and imperishable, there are only two options of food for the soul: perishable food that does not lead to “*zoe*,” and imperishable food that does lead to “*zoe*.”

¹ biblestudytools.com/lexicon

We are all seeking to find true sustenance for the soul somewhere: what we believe will finally make us feel significant; what we believe will finally make us feel secure; what we believe will finally make life as grand as it ought to be. What is that for you? What is that “thing” that you are endlessly working for and incessantly feeding upon in order to experience life to the full, *zoe* life?

- Job
- Relationships
- Approval of others
- Financial Security
- “Stuff” like a new car, new house, new clothes
- Physical appearance
- Alcohol or any other substance

We believe, though incorrectly, that consuming these types of “bread” will release energy and revitalization into our souls that we desperately need. But Jesus is saying that we should not see these things as sustenance for the soul because they will spoil. This means, each time, we will need more and more of it to get “the high.” We will keep chasing it over-and-over again because it will satisfy us only for a while. In other words, its effect upon us and the life it gives to us is **perishable** because it is perishable itself. Upon consuming it, the energy it imparts to us fulfills for a moment but perishes for a season. It is not “*zoe*” life because it demands lasting, ongoing work for earthly food and therefore perishable, finite fulfillment.

2. SEE THE IMPERISHABLE

This is why we need an imperishable food for the soul, to experience an eternal fulfillment for life. *Zoe* life is one that gives eternal, ongoing fulfillment because it comes from a heavenly source and it is not dependent upon our earthly, perishable work.

JOHN 6:28-29 *Then they said to Him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”*

²⁹ *Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” (ESV)*

The immediate question the crowd asks is “what do we have to do?” They are thinking there must be some sort of work and effort involved to be right with God. They fixate on the word “work.” According to their works-righteousness belief system, they must find and perform the work that God requires.²

They were looking at the eternal while grasping at the finite. There is nothing but emptiness and hunger waiting for those who grasp for the finite.

For this crowd, it was not making sense. They could not grasp the fact that they did not have to do some sort of tangible, laborious work to find favor with God. They were looking at the eternal while grasping at the finite. There is nothing but emptiness and hunger waiting for those who grasp for the finite.

Jesus simply proclaimed to them that all they had to do was believe. John uses the word “believe” 98 times in his gospel, more than any other writer in the New Testament. In fact, John’s purpose for writing this gospel and relating these stories of Jesus was so that the readers would believe (John 20:30-31). The Greek word “*pisteuo*” is translated “believe.” It means to “think to be true/to be persuaded of/place confidence in.”³ The people had heard the teachings of Jesus and seen the miracles of Jesus up close and personal, yet still did not believe.

² Michael Card, *John the Gospel of Wisdom*, IVP Books; Downers Grove, IL; 2014, p. 91.

³ biblestudytools.com/lexicon

When Jesus proclaimed the simple truth of believing, they responded with yet another question.

JOHN 6:30 *So they said to Him, “Then what sign do You do, that we may see and believe You? What work do you perform?” (ESV)*

They had just participated in one of the greatest miracles of Jesus, the only one recorded in all four gospels. Jesus had fed over 5,000 men, plus women and children, with a basket of fish and barley loaves. And now they dare to ask, “*what sign do You do, that we may see and believe You?*” This question is the epitome of either arrogance or ignorance, sometimes there is a fine line between the two. So often we do the exact same thing, asking for something more recent; more tangible; more significant.

We often forget that God does the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary. It may appear to be an ordinary day, but it is a miraculous day of life. The sun came up the way God miraculously designed. The balance of oxygen in the air allows us to take the breaths we need to live, just the way God miraculously designed. Gravity keeping our feet on the ground takes place because of God’s miraculous design. What we have taken for granted as being ordinary are the extraordinary miracles of God we happen to experience on a daily basis. But we still want more, just like these people dialoguing with Jesus.

What we have taken for granted as being ordinary are the extraordinary miracles of God we happen to experience on a daily basis.

The next verse (31) becomes a point of reference for Jesus in case He was “unaware” of what took place in the days of Moses with manna from heaven. Yet, another showing of their arrogance or ignorance.

JOHN 6:31 *Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.” (ESV)*

This particular portion of the chapter is one of the longest dialogues Jesus has with any crowd of people beyond His disciples in all of Scripture.

Jesus responds to them as the dialogue continues,

JOHN 6:32-33 *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. ³³ “For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” (ESV)*

In a very subtle way, Jesus tells them something astonishing. He uses the term, “*My Father.*” In this dialogue, unbeknownst to this group of people, they have been conversing with the Son of God. Jesus shares this information in the context of His response concerning the manna “His Father” provided Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. It was the “bread of heaven” that was designed to provide daily nutrition. The manna from heaven was not imperishable; it was perishable. The manna from heaven had a one-day shelf life, except on day six of each week (see Exodus 16:4-5).

The other subtle distinction between the manna in the days of Moses and what was transpiring amid this dialogue was the realization of the **provider** and the **provision**, “*my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.*” No longer do the people have to settle for the perishable, they can have the sustenance of the imperishable. This bread of heaven which Jesus speaks, gives “*zoe*” life to the world. It comes down to a matter of belief between the tangible temporary bread versus the intangible eternal bread from heaven.

Jesus is telling the crowd that “*zoe*” life is found in Him because God sent Him from heaven to be our provision, just like God sent manna from heaven to be provision for the Israelites. The notion

that something is “from heaven” denotes a sense of life, wholeness, eternity, and infinitude—it is imperishable, it will not spoil. These words captured their attention.

JOHN 6:34-35 *They said to Him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”³⁵ 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.” (ESV)*

Jesus is essentially teaching the crowds of people, “Unless I am your spiritual sustenance—whom you look to for ultimate satisfaction, security, and significance for your life—you will look to something else. And it will spoil.”

Interestingly, this “imperishable bread” is not a principle, practice, or performance; it is a person. It means our spiritual sustenance is located in the context of a relationship to another person, namely God Himself through Jesus Christ.

This form of sustenance is drastically different from every other religion or way of life in the world. If romance is your “bread,” then you will relate to it in terms of experience and emotions and actions, which will inevitably wear off. If gaining the approval of people is your “bread,” then you will relate to it in terms of appeasing and working and networking. If financial security is your “bread,” then you will relate to it in terms of working and accumulating more and more. All these things are things, and you will use people to get these things. This is a hamster wheel of life. It is a cycle of constant doing rather than being. It is works-based and more about the religion than a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

But what is different with the food that endures to eternal life? Jesus answers it in the following response:

JOHN 6:47-51 *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.⁴⁸ I am the bread of life.⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven... (ESV)*

This “bread” is not about doing and working; it is about believing, trusting, and dependency. It means this “zoe bread” is accessible to anyone, indiscriminately and impartially available to everyone, no matter their moral performance, background, or ability. All other “breads” must be labored for in order to receive. And therefore, the result is that only the most moral or the most talented or the most intelligent or the strongest will attain it—and yet, even they will realize it will spoil. This “zoe bread”—Jesus Christ Himself—is offered to everyone but only those who know they are weak and hungry will believe and receive Him. It is a gift of grace, received by faith, not a reward achieved by works—so that no one can boast, except in Christ. (see Ephesians 2:8-9)

Jesus Christ is the imperishable “bread” and sustenance for the soul because your soul finally finds for what it is designed. Our infinite, eternal soul requires an infinite, eternal source that will not change or flux in circumstances. All other “bread” will perish and will not sustain you when you consume it. Only Jesus Christ is the “bread” who will sustain you towards eternal life, and life to the full.

The crowd could not quite grasp the truth of the analogy. They struggled with this concept.

JOHN 6:52 *Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”*

Honestly, it is a great question. How does this happen exactly? What does it mean to “feed” on Jesus, as one consumes bread? How is the “energy” of this bread, the imperishable bread, the Bread of Life, released into you?

3. CONSUME THE BREAD OF LIFE, BE FILLED

Jesus' analogy of bread highlights a parallel between one's physical and spiritual sustenance, but the analogy of bread also extends to physical and spiritual consumption as well. For example, imagine a piece of bread. It does nothing for you unless it is broken, eaten, and consumed. You can smell it. You can even lick it. You can buy it. You can talk about it. You can take an aesthetic picture of it and post it on social media. But as long as the bread remains intact, then it cannot nourish you. All the energy and nutrients of the bread mean nothing if it is not taken, broken, and devoured. And quite profoundly, Jesus says that the same is true of Himself, too.⁴

JOHN 6:53 *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." (ESV)*

Jesus did not try to clarify their misconceptions. Their problem was not intellectual. Instead, He intensified their confusion by a heavier use of imagery.⁵ Though the words and phrases used by Jesus sound strange on the surface, Jesus is declaring the gospel message. He is painting a graphic illustration of the Lord's Supper which would become an ordinance of the church as a way to remember the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. Later in verse 63 He made it clear that His language was figurative and not literal.⁶ Jesus would be broken instead of us so that we could be made whole. He would die the death that we deserved to die because of sin, and yet, by His stripes, we could be healed (see Isaiah 53:5).

It is not a coincidence that Jesus is teaching this lesson in the synagogue during Passover (see John 6:59). At this time, the Jewish community would have been specifically looking back over the Scripture pertaining to the exodus out of Egypt and into the wilderness, which entailed God feeding the Israelites with manna from heaven.⁷ Thus, in doing so, Jesus is giving them a lens for understanding and interpreting the Old Testament in light of Himself. As bread symbolized God's presence, sustenance, and provision, Jesus was now saying something grand in connection to these things: "I AM this bread."

Salvation is possible because Jesus' body, like bread, was broken apart for us. And we access this salvation by believing and receiving His sacrifice as our righteousness before God. In this sense, we are eternally nourished. In fact, the word Jesus uses for "eat" is the Greek aorist tense—indicating that "eat" is a singular event, a decision to believe and appropriate the gift of eternal life.⁸

However, we can appropriate this "zoe" life not just for eternity, but in our day-to-day living by trusting and depending on Him in our daily situations as well. His body and blood give us more significance, security, and satisfaction than any other "breads" the world can offer. It is our livelihood for today's worries, concerns, and grievances. Applying the gospel of who Jesus is and what He has done for us infuses us with spiritual vitality each day, which will nourish us because it is imperishable.

This is why we take communion: eating the bread and drinking the grape juice illustrates symbolically what it means to feast our deepest needs and longings upon the finished work of Christ for our spiritual nourishment, sustenance, and vitality. Communion is a picture of the gospel pouring into us vigor and hope not only for eternity but for today.

⁴ Timothy Keller, "The Bread of Heaven" sermon from the series, The Gospel of John, Part 1 given at Redeemer Church in New York City, NY on April 14, 1991.

⁵ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's New Testament Insights*; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI; 2010, p. 146.

⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs; 2007, p. 251.

⁷ Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 201.

⁸ *Ibid.*

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Consider how you are living your life. What is your true source of sustenance, for your sense of significance, security, and satisfaction? What is it, that if you did not have it on a regular basis would cause life to feel meaningless and empty? What is it in your life that contributes to your happiness more than anything else? For many of us there are two responses: 1) the church response and 2) the honest response. Perhaps it is time to focus on the latter, simply the honest response. What you are hoping in deeply and holding onto tightly is what you are feeding upon the most consistently. Are you satisfied?

Remember, only in Jesus is there “*zoe*,” a true quality of living and satisfaction—even in the valleys and storms—because only He can satisfy the deep needs of your soul. He gives full forgiveness, and no other bread does. He gives a new identity, and no other bread does. He loves you fully, aside from your performance. He arranges the events in your life with meaning and specificity, and no other bread offers you this kind of assurance and security.

The world is hungry and thirsty reaching out for the perishable. God’s plan is for us to reach out for the imperishable, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Heaven. Your eternal purpose begins when you personally eat the Bread of Life, broken for you, and find “*zoe*,” abundant life for the hereafter as well as the here and now.