

The Bread That truly Satisfies

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[0 : 00] The passage about the nature of spiritual hunger and three assertions that Jesus makes about himself.! So those are the things we'll be looking at the context.

! This passage is about bread for the world. It's about feeding the hungry.! You may remember the storyline here. Jesus has been teaching and preaching and working miracles and crowds have followed him.

And he looks at the crowd around him and he is concerned for their needs. Where will these people find food? So he says to his disciples, where can we go and find food for these people to eat? And Philip is incredulous at that suggestion. And he says, Master, it would take eight months' wages to feed this multitude. Andrew makes the observation that there is some food in the camp. There is a little boy who has a lunch with him. Five barley loaves and a couple of fish. Probably barley muffins would be a better word.

[1 : 05] They were little tiny things that you would just compact and cook over a hot plate. Barley was the choice grain for poor people. So this was, I think that's why it's mentioned in the passage.

This was a lunch for a poor boy. A small lunch. Of course, you know the story. Five thousand men, they were counted by family units.

Men were the heads of the family. And so perhaps along with women and children that were in the crowd, there were 15, 20,000 people that were fed by this lunch that was prayed over and distributed amongst them.

And afterward, 12 baskets of fragments were picked up when the meal was over. And the people were amazed. They were so amazed that they wanted to make him king right on the spot.

And Jesus slips away from them and goes to the other side of the lake. But they think this is the kind of leader we've always wanted.

[2 : 11] A leader who sees our needs. A leader who will respond to our needs. A leader who has the ability to meet our needs and meet them abundantly. Let's make him king. And he slips away overnight.

They find him on the other side of the lake in the morning. And they come looking for him. And he sees through them. And he knows that they're seeking more bread.

And he challenges them. Verse 27, if you're following. He says, you ate, you had your fill, and now you're looking for more bread. What Jesus says to them at this point is really the key to understanding this entire passage and understanding this bread of life discourse.

He says, do not work for the food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.

What is Jesus saying to them? He's saying to them, you're looking for physical food. You're looking for the kind of food that spoils if it's not eaten quickly.

[3 : 18] Remember, this was an era without refrigeration. And without refrigeration, spoiled food is a very familiar fact of daily living. And Jesus says, you shouldn't be concerned about that food.

You should be more concerned about spiritual food, food that lasts, food that lasts not just for time, but for eternity. That's the food the Son of Man will give you. And this interchange, really, I believe, is the key to understanding the passage.

Later, verse 30, the crowd asked Jesus to give them a sign that they might believe that he is the Messiah. Now, think on that.

He's just fed 15,000 to 20,000 people, perhaps, from this boy's small lunch. Yet they asked for a sign. And they hint to him, the sign ought to be bread.

You know, our fathers ate manna in the wilderness. He gave them bread from heaven to eat. And Jesus corrects them. He says, it wasn't Moses that gave you bread from heaven.

[4 : 19] It's my Father that has produced the bread from heaven. The bread from heaven is the one who comes from heaven to give his life for the world. And their reply was, then give us this bread.

Give us this bread always. And Jesus makes this amazing statement, I am the bread of life. I'm the bread of life.

I'm the bread that never perishes. I'm the bread that never will leave you hungry again. I'm the food that endures to eternal life. So that's the context.

Jesus has just performed this amazing miracle. The disciples are the followers. His followers have come looking for him. There are a couple truths about spiritual hunger that I think are woven into this passage.

One is that spiritual hunger is universal. There's a universal longing for God within every single one of us. We're made in the image of God. We're made for God.

[5 : 19] We're made for glory. We're made for the satisfying wonder of knowing God, relationship with God, fellowship with God, communion with God. We're made for God.

There's a God-shaped void in every one of us. And our deep spiritual hunger is often seen in the passions and pleasures that we will pursue to meet these inner longings.

The whole book of Ecclesiastes is devoted to that. Solomon describes how people pursue pleasure. They pursue substances like wine, socializing, success, building projects, luxury living, education, knowledge, in order to fill those inner desires.

And Solomon concludes that none of these can satisfy the inner longings of our hearts. This spiritual hunger is universal. I remember 60 years ago when I was a young man, people were enamored with science and the idea that everything could be understood chemically and electrically and explained through natural phenomenon.

And many asserted back then that this made the need for God obsolete or even unnecessary. And in fact, they boldly predicted there was a coming age when people would outgrow the need for God and would live without any religion and spirituality would be a thing of the past.

[6 : 49] And people would have outgrown that need. Instead, what do we find? As true Christianity has waned in our culture, there's been a growth of spirituality.

It's a false spirituality. But there's spirituality in everything. In TV shows, in art, music, entertainment, more than ever before. Not true spirituality.

It's not the spirituality of people seeking after the true and living God. But it's people searching for some way to meet that deep inner need that is within them because they're made by God and they don't know Him.

And so they're seeking to meet that need. And people are searching, even as we speak, people are searching in Islam and Buddhism and Hinduism and even in pagan religions like paganism more than ever before.

Why is that? Because there's a universal longing within human beings for God. We're made for God. The second thing we see in this passage is that this spiritual hunger can be satisfied.

[8 : 01] In other words, while it's true that all human beings have a spiritual hunger, it's not true that that hunger can never be satisfied. Jesus is the bread of heaven.

He's the one that God has given to satisfy that deepest inner needs that we have as people made in God's image and estranged from God because of our sin.

Remember Mary's song when the angel announces that she is going to be the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in that Magnificat, she makes this glorious statement.

He has filled the hungry with good things, but he has sent the rich empty away. He's filled the hungry with good things.

It's what Psalm 103 says. You satisfy our desires with what is good. And notice the stinger at the end of Mary's statement. He has sent the rich needy away.

[9 : 03] You see, proud, self-assured, self-reliant people who will not acknowledge their spiritual hunger will go away empty. Now, there are three assertions about Christ in this passage, and this is really what I've wanted to get to.

One is, of course, and it's already implicit in everything I've said, that Jesus alone can satisfy that spiritual hunger that is within us. And Jesus makes that amazing claim in this passage in verse 35. He says, I am the bread of life. I, and I alone, am the bread of life. Now, notice what he's claiming in this passage.

He says, my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. There's a whole sermon there. He's the bread of heaven. The bread of life is he, Jesus says.

It's not a substance. It's a person. The bread of life is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. And in verse 38, he says, I've come down from heaven.

[10:14] I am the true bread of heaven. He repeats it again in verses 48 to 51. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate manna in the desert, yet they died.

But here is the bread that comes down from heaven that a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

These are astonishing words. Jesus is asserting here that it is he and he alone that can satisfy, that will satisfy, the deepest hunger of the human heart.

They're startling words. They were startling to the people who first heard them. In fact, you'll notice in verse 41, they were grumbling over this claim. I am the one that's come down from heaven.

I am the bread of life. They were saying, wait a minute. We know who you are. We know your mother. We know your father. We know where you live. We knew you as a boy. We knew you as a young man.

[11:18] How can you say such things? If he had said to them, I have learned wonderful lessons from the rabbis and the teachers that I want to share with you, they would not have grumbled.

They would have been able to accept that. But what he said was something they could not accept. It was over the top. I am the bread from heaven. I'm the bread that the Father has given. I've come down from heaven to be the bread for the world.

And Jesus rebukes their grumbling. He says, stop grumbling amongst yourselves. There's something else astonishing here. It's the scope of his ability to satisfy spiritual hunger.

It's as universal as the hunger itself. He says, verse 33 says, it is he who gives his life for the world. The authentic answer to the needs of the world is Jesus Christ. The authentic answer to every human hunger in every place in the world is Jesus Christ.

[12:20] He is the answer. He is the only answer. And when he says he gives his life for the world, he's clearly not saying that in the end, everybody will be saved. He's simply saying that he is the one universal, world-encompassing answer to the spiritual need of humanity.

From the need for forgiveness and new life to the need for our deepest inner longings to be fulfilled. He is the answer. He's the bread for the world. He says it again in verse 51. This bread is my flesh that I give for the life of the world.

Just as God is jealous that his glory be known as the creator and sustainer of the universe, so Jesus is the one who's given his life for the world.

He is bread for the world and no one else. Something else Jesus says that I want for us to see. He doesn't just say, I have bread from heaven, or I can show you bread from heaven, or I can tell you all about bread from heaven.

He says, I am the bread from heaven. I'm the bread from heaven. He makes a shocking statement in verse 53, which makes it such a hard saying for people to accept.

[13:38] I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. He's referring here, of course, to his sacrificial death on the cross for our sins.

Remember the words when he instituted the Lord's Supper. Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you. We partake of the bread and the wine at the Lord's table as a sign that we must partake in his sacrifice, of his sacrifice.

We drink the cup with these words, this is the new covenant in my blood. And what Jesus is saying to us in these words is that his sinless life, his sacrificial death for our sins, his giving of his body and blood for us.

And we must eat that. We must partake of that sacrifice if we are to have eternal life. Now this metaphor, we must eat of that, is a familiar metaphor to us.

The metaphor of eating and drinking are fairly common ways in which we express a deep, passionate involvement with something. We say, I devoured that book in a single day.

[15:02] Or we drive along and we say, I was just drinking in the beautiful scenery as we were driving. Or you say, he swallowed it hook, line, and sinker. You could taste the excitement in the room.

I had to eat my words. All those are metaphorical ways of eating, digesting. They're poetic ways of speaking of deep involvement, rich participation in something.

Jesus is saying, I am flesh and blood, and you have to partake of who I am and what I am and what I have done for you if you are going to live eternally.

You have to come to me. And to no one else. You have to drink of me. You have to eat of me.

There is no one else that will satisfy your hunger. It's only satisfied in Jesus. The second claim in this passage is that this hunger is only satisfied by believing.

[16:10] It's very clear in the passage. He who comes to me will never be hungry. He who believes in me will never be thirsty. Verse 35.

The necessity of believing in Christ is one of the features of this passage. Verses 28 and 29 are very striking. When they asked him, what must we do to do the works that God requires?

Now, if you ask the average person on the street, what do you have to do to do the works that God requires? I would imagine that the average person would say, well, to do the works of God would be to take care of the poor and needy, to try to help others, to make the world a better place, to help people who are down and out.

And all those are excellent and appropriate things for us to be involved in. But what does Jesus answer to the question? What do we have to do to do the works of God?

He says, the work of God is this, to believe in the one that he has sent. God says, you ask me what to do?

[17:17] The answer is this, believe in my son. There is no greater thing you can do than to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, in this traditionally religious community in which we live, many people feel that they have believed in him.

And I like what verse 35 does. It puts it two ways. He who comes to me will never be thirsty. He who believes in me will never be hungry. He who believes in me will never be thirsty.

So coming to Jesus, believing in Jesus are one and the same thing. And those who believe in him come to him. They come to him for all that they need. They come to him for their need of forgiveness.

For their sin and their estrangement from God and their rebellion against God and God's purposes. They come for pardon. They come for life. They come for salvation. They come for forgiveness.

They come to Jesus. Jesus. Jesus is the bread that they seek. And when they go looking for bread, they go looking for him.

[18:21] And the emphasis on coming to Christ by faith was such an emphasis in the 16th century reformers. They were living in an era when because of broad acceptance of Christianity, especially in Europe, where they were ministering.

There was broad acceptance in the broadest sense of the word in the larger culture. So many people believe that simply partaking of the Eucharist meant that you had fed on Christ.

And even in the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer, there's a whole section that says if you come, you can put your mouth on the bread.

But if you come without faith, if you come just simply in a rote manner, you're not participating in Christ. Because the concern even in that liturgy was that participation was a sincere coming to Christ and feeding in Christ in the heart by faith.

It's feeding on him in faith with thanksgiving for forgiveness of sins, for the hope of glory, for all that Jesus is to us and all the ways that he meets our deepest longings.

[19:33] That's the meaning of eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ in this passage.

And in the context of the passage, the necessity of true faith and coming to Christ in true faith and believing in Christ, in that context, we have some of the most shocking statements that are made in this passage about the nature of true faith in Jesus Christ.

True faith in Christ, true coming to Christ is a spiritual gift. You can't do it on your own. And the passage makes that clear. Notice verse 37. All that the Father has given me will come to me.

It's even more clear in verse 44. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. That's pretty plain, isn't it? Even our faith by which we come to God, without which no one could ever come to God, is a gift from God.

Salvation has its origins, as John chapter 1 says, in the will of God and the purposes of God. No one can come to me unless the Father enable him.

What a word for proud, self-sufficient 21st century mankind. The thing that you need the most to come to Jesus Christ is something you cannot do unless it is given to you by God.

[20 : 58] The thing that you need to come to Jesus, to feed on him in your heart by faith, is something you can't do without grace. You must be enabled by God. No one can come to me, Jesus says, unless the Father who sent me draws him.

It could not be plainer than that. The most passionate preacher cannot make you a Christian. The most prayerful and careful and thoughtful parents can't make you a Christian.

You can't even make yourself a Christian. There's more to it than just turning over a new leaf and deciding you're going to do better. Because the hardness of your heart and my heart is such. The stubbornness of our rebellion is such. The lawlessness of our nature is such. The wickedness of our minds is such. The sinfulness of our state is such that no one will ever come to Christ unless God draws him.

We're not able to come to him. We're not even able to want him apart from his grace. Apart from what verse 44 says.

[22 : 11] Apart from God drawing us. What must happen? God must bring light to the darkness of my mind. He must stir my conscience.

He must thaw my frozen will. He must place a desire for himself within me. And how does he do that? He does it through the word.

Faith comes through hearing. And hearing through the word of God. He does it through the preaching and teaching of God's word. That's why what happens here every Sunday is so important.

As we gather together to worship him. To sing his praise. To make a corporate testimony of our love for him. As we hear his word open to us. God is drawing us. He is wooing us.

He is calling us to himself. I remember one time. I've thought of this so many times. A young woman who had grown up in the church.

[23 : 07] She was maybe late teens, early 20s at the time. I was speaking to her after the service in my study. And she was weeping.

She was struggling with the conviction of sin. And waiting for her outside. Pacing back and forth outside.

Where he was in her view. Was a young man who wanted nothing to do with God. And was taking her away. And he did. And I say that to say this.

Don't resist God's mercy. When you're wooed by God. When God is drawing you. When God is convicting you of sin. When God is showing you your need of Christ.

When God's spirit is present with his people. As his word is taught. Don't resist that. Don't turn away from that. When you feel drawn to him.

[24 : 08] It's a very important day for you. When God speaks with that still small voice. And you find yourself stirred. At that time. Come to Jesus. Believe in Jesus. Repent of your sins.

Cast yourself on him. Feed on him in your heart by faith. Well the third assertion of this passage. Is that this bread is for our eternal enjoyment.

Notice what Jesus says to the people in these verses. Very truly I tell you. You are looking for me. Not because you saw the signs I performed. The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

That was a sign. But because you ate the loaves. And had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils. But for food that endures to eternal life. Which the son of man will give you.

Jesus is saying. You came to me because you were hungry. And you ate. And you were filled. And you're seeing me as a wonderful provider. Of everything you could want. You're looking for more bread.

[25 : 08] You want for me to be the bread king. The king that satisfies your need for bread. That satisfies your needs for long. Don't work for that food that spoils. Don't just work for the temporal blessing.

Of a full belly for the moment. Don't come to me for the bread that spoils. I have something more satisfying. More profound. More wonderful. More marvelous to give you.

I've come to give you right now. That which will satisfy your deepest inner longings. Not only for time. But for eternity. When you enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

You are entering into that relationship. Which you will enjoy for eternity. And you're beginning to taste of the satisfactions. Of those joys that are eternal satisfactions.

That will never grow old. Never grow stale. And you'll never get to the end of the wonders of them. He says, I've come right now to satisfy your deepest inner longings.

[26 : 09] I've come to give you me. I've come to give you what you can feast on and enjoy forever and ever. What will never spoil. Never go stale.

You see what Jesus is saying to these people. He's saying you're following me for the wrong reasons. You're trying to make me your king so that I can go to work on your agenda. Rather than so that you can surrender to me.

And work on my great glorious kingdom. He says, You saw the sign. That's why you've come. But you still haven't understood who I am and why I came. The bread that Jesus gave these people to eat.

Was meant to point to a deeper spiritual reality. That Jesus himself was the bread from heaven. And they ate but they still didn't get it.

What was behind these people's pursuit of Christ? In John 6. It wasn't humble submission to him. It wasn't reflecting a desire for Christ. It was willing to follow Christ no matter what it meant.

[27 : 15] No matter where it would lead. They weren't driven by a love for Christ and a desire for Christ. And a longing after Christ. Just for himself. They came to have their needs met.

That brings the question to us. What do you want from God? What are your dreams? What are the things you long for in your marriage? Is your dream for nothing deeper than an ideal marriage? Perhaps your wife who always dreamt of the ideal husband. And perhaps even envied someone whose husband seemed more sensitive than yours. Or maybe a husband whose ideal for a wife is such that the woman God has given you will never be able to live up to that ideal.

And the people who are looking for physical bread. And Jesus came to give them spiritual bread. He came to meet their deepest longings in the most profound ways.

And this struggle between physical bread and spiritual bread is actually the core struggle of the Christian life. Because the temptation always is forced to satisfy ourselves with temporal blessings rather than longing for the spiritual blessing of God himself.

[28 : 31] It's the pursuit of the blessing rather than the pursuit of the blessing. It's the pursuit of the blessing rather than the pursuit of the blessing. The deceiver wants us to think that life is all about physical bread.

And we're told hundreds of ways every day that true happiness is found in people and passions and positions and pleasures.

That life is being able to get and maintain and enjoy these things. Do you see what Jesus is saying to us in this passage? He's saying the bread really worth living for, the only bread that will ever satisfy is not earthly bread.

It's me, the bread from heaven. And when you make temporal bread the end, you have turned his blessings inside out and upside down and turned them in on themselves.

So ask yourself this morning, what kind of bread do you hunger for? What kind of bread do you desire? Because you see, all the blessings of this life, the blessings of your marriage, the blessings of children, the blessings of family, that God gives are not an end in themselves.

[29 : 48] They're designed to point us to the reality of Jesus who is the true bread from heaven. And see, you can be coming to Jesus for the bread of a marriage that works.

And if you don't get it, you're going to be terribly disappointed with Jesus and perhaps even angry with Jesus. But if you're living, if you're not living for the bread that perishes, but if you're living for the bread that satisfies Jesus as the living bread, you can say, Jesus, I want to know you in my marriage.

I want that more than anything else in my marriage. I want for you to be my all in all. And to enable me to be the woman who submits and finds joy and loves this husband.

Enable me to be the man who loves and lays down his life like Christ laid down the life of the church. I want to know you in my marriage more than anything else. When you're lonely, what kind of bread do you want?

Or when you're in pain in your marriage, what kind of bread do you want? When you're looking for a spouse to meet needs that they can never possibly meet, what kind of bread do you want? When you're so concerned about public image, what people think of you, and how many likes you got on your last post, what kind of bread do you want?

[31 : 14] When you're concerned about public embarrassment and wondering what people think of you, what kind of bread are you looking for? When you're craving for people to like you and respect you, what kind of bread do you want?

When you think, if I can't have this, fill in the blank, then there's no comfort, there's no consolation for me. What kind of bread do you want? See, in all these and hosts of other ways, we look for bread that will satisfy our appetites.

And if that's what you're looking for, you're going to be in real trouble when you don't have it. If your eyes are on the physical bread of a good relationship, you'll ask yourself, and you'll ask your spouse, rather, excuse me, to be what they can never be for you.

Because no spouse can ever satisfy your deepest longings. No husband, no wife will ever be able to fully meet your needs. Because there are needs in you that can only be met by God.

By relationship with God, and by knowing God, and loving God, and being fulfilled and satisfied in God, and all that He is for us in Jesus Christ. But if you're longing for them to be something they can't be, you'll suck them dry.

[32 : 33] And they'll never be good enough. There's only one bread that will satisfy, and it's Jesus, the bread of heaven. Do you remember what happened at the end of this chapter? At the end of the chapter, after Jesus had fully convinced them that He was the bread of heaven, and He hadn't come to give them earthly bread, many who followed Him walked away.

What happens if you don't get your dream? You might pout, blame, complain, wallow, lash out, envy, covet, doubt God, disbelieve the Bible.

All those things show that you're living for earthly bread, and not for heavenly bread. God's goodness, His love, His grace, His power, His strength, His call to you never changes, even in the midst of breadlessness.

In fact, breadlessness will sometimes make, will actually make those things grow sweeter. They'll make Him grow sweeter.

What Christ is telling us in this passage is that He is the bread that's come from heaven. He's the bread that satisfies, not only for time, but for eternity. And when you find your joy, and your delight, and your fulfillment, and feasting on Him, and on abundance, that same abundance will be your food forever and ever.

[34 : 10] We're given right now, in Christ, something of the eternal blessedness and joy that we will experience forever and ever.

Notice the negatives in verse 35. They're the strongest possible negatives. It says, He who comes to me will never go thirsty.

Excuse me, never go hungry. He who believes in me will never be thirsty. At any moment that I find myself, that you find yourself hungry and thirsty, it's because you're trying to satisfy your appetites on something other than Christ.

Because when we come to Him, we will never be thirsty. We will never be hungry. When He is our all in all, He will fully satisfy.

And so that occasional hungriness I feel, when I've already eaten too much today, and I'm standing in front of the open refrigerator at 10 o'clock at night saying, why isn't there something in this house to eat?

[35 : 32] That restlessness is a signal to me that I'm not finding satisfaction enough in Jesus. He's the one that I truly need.

He's the bread of heaven. He's the one that's come to give His life for the world. Will you love Him? Will you come to Him? Will you believe in Him?

The crowd thought Jesus spoke in very grandiose ways. But what Jesus said to them is, I am the bread that has come down from heaven.

If you eat my body and drink my blood, if you fully partake of me, you will have life. This bread is my flesh that I give for the life of the world.

Let's pray together. Lord, we come to you in prayer confessing the fact that we often seek to satisfy our longings in something other than you.

[36 : 43] And we repent of that, Lord. We acknowledge it. We repent of it. We repent of those times when we're restless and ill at ease and longing for something, anything.

And actually, we ought to be going to you. Forgive us, Lord, for that. We thank you that the blood of Jesus Christ, your Son, covers our sin.

And we pray that you would help us to take away from this passage the realization that we are made to feed on Christ and our Christ alone, that he and he alone is the bread of heaven.

And we pray that we would be satisfied in him. We ask this for his glory. Amen.