

The Bread of Life

“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’” (John 6:35).

What kind of things are typically considered essential for life? Well, it really depends on who you ask. If you were to ask a college student, they might immediately say, “coffee!” If you were to ask someone else, they may say, “my paycheck.” For others, “sufficient food for the day” may be their response. In the time of Jesus, bread was a staple for survival. This is illustrated in John 6 when Jesus miraculously multiplies five barley loaves and two fish to feed a crowd of about five thousand (John 6:1-14). The crowd that was following Jesus, however, only wished to be fed physically with the loaves He provided (v. 26). Jesus uses this as an opportunity to teach all of us something about, on the one hand, our need, and, on the other hand, His identity.

First, Jesus teaches us of our true need. The crowd was grossly misled in seeking Jesus simply to have their stomachs filled. Augustine (354-430) helpfully remarks, “How many seek Jesus only that He may do them good temporally! ...Jesus is scarcely sought for Jesus’ sake.” In other words, we should be on guard against following Jesus for the sake of some earthly good—Jesus is worthy to be sought simply for who He is! This is not to deny that we have daily needs such as bread and water, but it is to say that Jesus is concerned here to lift our gaze above earthly matters to consider our deeper need—salvation in Him. It is still true, after all, that we can gain the whole world and yet forfeit our souls (Matt. 16:26). Instead of laboring for the food that perishes, Jesus invites us to look for the food that leads to eternal life, a food which He Himself freely gives (John 6:27; cf. Is. 55:1-2).

Second, Jesus shows us the solution to our need by unveiling something about Himself—He is the Bread of life. Physical bread, coffee, paychecks even (perhaps especially!), all of these things have a limited shelf-life. Jesus, however, gives life that lasts forever. Whoever eats of this bread will never be hungry again! “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day. *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise Him up on the last day*” (vv. 38-40). This One who is eternally satisfying, more satisfying than anything this world could offer, invites us to believe in Him, to trust in Him, in His person, His words, and in His works, for in Him alone do we find the grace and forgiveness we all so desperately need.