

John 6:35

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[0 : 00] This morning as we come to the Lord's table, we're going to be meditating upon one of the great statements of the Lord Jesus concerning Himself, and He says, I am the bread of life. I am the bread of life. It's remarkable in the Bible how frequently we come across food being used to illustrate spiritual truths, and not least bread.

Bread is a key element in life. In many cultures it's so significant, such a central part of the diet, that we've come to speak of bread being the staff of life. We use bread in slang for money.

We sometimes speak about going out to earn my crust, or we're going out to work to put bread on the table. It's central to our thinking, and even the retailers, the big supermarkets, know how important bread is for us, and how beguiling, in fact, the smell of newly baked bread is so that so often when you go into a large supermarket, you come in and there's this lovely smell of newly baked bread wafting across the counters, leading you inexorably to cross the various aisles in order to get to where the bread is being baked. It's all very subtle.

The discussion that we have between Jesus and the people who had followed Him after the provision of bread in the wilderness is a discussion about what is important in life, what is really significant.

And we're going to see that Jesus speaks to them about Himself in terms of eating bread signifying a union with Himself, what it is to be united to Jesus by faith. In many cultures to eat bread with someone was a symbol of having fellowship with someone. You sat down at a table, and you ate a meal together. You partook of bread together, and it spoke of something deeply significant. You weren't just sharing a meal.

[2 : 25] You were sharing yourself with the other person. You were in fellowship with the other person. And of course, in the tabernacle and in the temple, there was a table with bread spread on it, twelve loaves of bread, the bread of the presence or the showbread, one loaf for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. And of course, the symbolism was that of fellowship between God and His people.

They were at table together symbolically. And of course, when we come shortly to the Lord's table, bread is one of the elements that the Lord has chosen to display the blessedness of being united to Him by faith. Now, it would be wrong to see in Jesus' words here a direct reference to the sacrament in itself.

But nevertheless, in what Jesus is teaching in regard to union with Himself by faith, it's what undergirds all that we are about as we come to thank the Lord for His goodness to us, for His grace to us in giving Himself, and how through His finished work of atonement, we may be joined to Him by faith, and we may have fellowship with Him, and we may know the deep want in our lives, our deepest needs satisfied through communion with the Lord Jesus. So, the passage is a dialogue between the Lord and the Jews who had followed Him, and the Jews who had followed Him after the feeding of the five thousand in the wilderness. And you have to admire the seriousness of the people, undeterred by Jesus' remarkable escape from their attempts to make of Him a king.

They've hopped into their boats, they've crossed the water, they've come in hot pursuit, and they've now caught up with the Lord. And verse 59 tells us that the exchange takes place in the synagogue, the synagogue at Capernaum, which was on the other side of the lake, on the western side of the lake. So, this is a group of people who are serious about life. They were almost certainly regular at church. They were regular at the synagogue. And so, this is a different encounter than some of the other encounters we have with Jesus, when Jesus is meeting with people who are in different ways on the fringe of society. Think of Jesus' encounter with the woman whom He met at the well at Sychar, the Samaritan woman, or the demon-possessed man in the Gadarenes, and so on. These are different. These are religious people. They are serious-minded people. And yet, they have not

committed themselves to Jesus.

They have no living faith. They have no real connection with the Lord. And they are at cross purposes with Jesus' teaching on what is truly important in life. So, there is a huge difference, isn't there, between being religious and being converted, between being morally serious and being right with God. Jesus, in His words, gets to the heart of what it is to have a living relationship with Him, rather than one which is simply based upon religious performance and attending to outward appearance and being in the right place at the right time. So, Jesus sets up in His discussion with these serious-minded people three pairs of comparisons, three contrasts. First of all, He makes a comparison between bread that spoils and bread that lasts, bread that endures. Secondly, Jesus contrasts bread that is a sign and bread that is the reality. Thirdly, between bread that satisfies and bread that does not satisfy. Bread that spoils and bread that endures. Bread that is a sign, bread that is the reality, bread that satisfies, bread that will never satisfy. Bread that endures. They catch up with Jesus in

Capernaum. They ask Him, Rabbi, that is teacher, when did you get here? Well, on their minds, it's not just a question of timing, but how? How did Jesus get there? But Jesus knows that behind that there is another set of questions, another set of issues, and characteristically, Jesus, with great precision, gets to the very heart of the heart of the heart. He says, they are looking for signs out of an enthusiasm for what Jesus has done in feeding them.

[8 : 16] The signs have not been used to help them to grow in their understanding, but rather they have been well-fed, and they think on Jesus as the great provider, and they're ready to pursue Jesus around the country, ready indeed to enlist as His followers because He can provide for them. He can supply their physical need. And the same is true today, isn't it? There are people who will attach themselves to Jesus in a sense. They'll attach themselves to the church of Jesus. They will attach to the fringe, to the edge of the church, or make various levels of commitment to attendance and performing religious duty, but they are looking for certain benefits that they think that Jesus can provide. They're looking for the benefits of Jesus rather than Jesus Himself. Matthew Henry quaintly puts it like this, many follow Christ for loaves and not for love. That's love, isn't it? They follow Christ for loaves and not for love.

Jesus says that kind of loyalty is a waste of time. Jesus has much more to offer than a free meal ticket.

He has more to offer than being a potential king. And today, He has so much more to offer than being merely a good example, or merely someone who can give a solid foundation to family life, or a moral framework for society. Jesus has eternal life.

But these people were willing to grow to great lengths. They were willing to go around the Galilean countryside looking for ordinary things like food or extraordinary things like healings.

And Jesus tells them, really, that these are the kind of things which are like food that spoils. They don't last. They are not eternal life. 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.

[10 : 50] You see, ordinary food, ordinary bread doesn't last. You know, real bread, as opposed to the bread that you get in polythene bags and is pumped with chemicals so that it does last a bit longer, real bread will only last two or three days. And then it goes off. It becomes stale.

And Jesus is saying that is so like the many things in this life that people will pursue. They think that they will provide lasting benefit, but in fact, they will give pleasure for only a time.

Jesus is not denying that we can pursue things and they will give pleasure. They would not be attractive if they didn't give pleasure, but the pleasure that's given is fleeting. It lasts for only a short time. They have the briefest of shelf lives.

Now, isn't it one of the great mysteries that in the world people will devote all of their passion and their energy and their time to things that are only going to satisfy for the briefest of time?

That any intelligent person can tell that this is not going to endure, this will not last. This particular good thing, this luxury, this pleasure, this benefit is good in itself, but it will not last.

[12 : 24] Rubber perishes, metal rusts, our homes decay, even our friends and family disappoint us.

And yet, there is something that will endure. Imagine, if you can for a moment, a little diagram. Imagine a dot with a line coming from it.

And the dot is representing the world and all that we have in our world. And there's a line going from this dot and the line never ends.

It goes on and on. It stretches out into the horizon. You cannot see the end. And the line is eternity. It's eternal life. And the dot is this world.

And the millions expending all of their energy in pursuing the things that are in the dot, the things that are finite, not lasting, and ignoring the perspective of eternal things.

[13 : 27] Isn't it strange that that is the way that people think? Why would you waste your energy on the dot, on the blip on the radar screen, and not on the unending line?

Surely that is the logical thing to do, to ask the question, what will endure, what will last, and to give ourselves to obtaining that which is for eternity?

So, Jesus is sounding the warning to anyone who is serious about life, not to waste their energies on pursuing a goal that is simply not worth the effort.

He's echoing the words of Isaiah 700 years earlier. Why spend your money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Listen to me and eat what is good. Eat what is good. Seek the bread that lasts, not the bread that spoils.

[14 : 33] And so, the world, we were thinking of the kingdom of this world, and the lie that it spins the other night.

And the propaganda is that the prizes of the world are worth pursuing. And so, if you've got the right clothes, and if you have money, and if you're a party animal, and are popular, or if you have status, and have the power that goes with it, then, if you have these things, you will be fulfilled.

And up and down the country, on the billboards, and in the advertising, and in the magazines, the same lie perpetuated, and people believing the lie, and seeking for bread that does not last, bread that spoils, and focusing on the little blip, and ignoring the endless line.

And one of our tasks as Christians, in proclaiming the gospel, is to lift the curtain, and to reveal the reality.

This world is fading away, but there is something which endures. The kingdom of this world will pass, but the kingdom of our God endures forever.

[15 : 54] You can have all these things, and still be left with a great void, an emptiness, that none of these things have the ability to fill.

Bernard Levin, the journalist, wrote an article once entitled, Life's Great Riddle, and No Time to Find Its Meaning. And he spoke of the fact that in spite of his real success as a columnist over the previous 20 years, that he was afraid, in his own words, that he might have wasted reality in the chance of a dream.

He writes, To put it bluntly, have I time to discover why I was born before I die? I have not managed to answer that question yet, and however many years I have before me, there are certainly not as many as there are behind.

There is an obvious danger, he writes, in leaving it too late. Why do I have to know why I was born? Because, of course, I'm unable to believe that it was an accident, and if it wasn't one, it must have meaning.

It's so true, isn't it? It's so perceptive. Somebody's seeking, somebody aware of the need for something more. And earlier on, in earlier years, he described Britain in these words, Countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire, together with such non-material blessings as a happy family, and yet, they lead lives of quiet and at times noisy desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that there is a hole inside them, and that however much food and drink they pour into it, however many motor cars and television sets they stuff it with, however many well-balanced children and loyal friends they parade around the edges of it.

[17 : 53] It aches. So, Jesus speaks about bread that endures and bread that doesn't, and we encounter, after he's said this, we encounter one of these characteristic misunderstandings of the people.

Instead of inquiring about the nature of this bread that doesn't spoil, the crowd pick up on the mention of the word work, and they ask Jesus, what must we do to work the works of God, to do the works of God?

Now, really, it's putting into classic expression the impetus, the motive of the religious person.

They're saying, in effect, to Jesus, just tell us what God wants of us. We'll do it. If only we know we have it within us. We have the capacity to do whatever God requires of us.

What must we do to do the works that God requires? Point me in the direction, and I will do it. You see, a non-Christian religious man believes that if he is only shown the right path, if he is only shown the correct mountain to scale, he will walk that path, he will climb that mountain.

[19 : 17] Tell us what we must do to do the works that God requires. And Jesus nails the lie down firmly. He says to them, the work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.

You want to know what will make God happy with you? Nothing. Nothing that you can do will make God content with you and bring you into everlasting life.

Well, there is one thing. You can believe in the one he has sent. You can have faith. Ah, but even then, that faith is not yours.

It's not a work. It is the gift of God. God will not allow you to boast in anything that you have. Jesus is essential saying, you can't work for what's most important.

You can only receive. You can work your way out of poverty. You can work your way up the career ladder. You can work your way out of all kinds of predicaments, but you cannot work your way to heaven.

[20 : 22] You cannot work to please God. You must receive from God. You must believe in Jesus. You must believe in the one that he has sent. And so, that is the only attitude that is proper before the living God.

It's the attitude of coming as an empty beggar, willing to receive the bread that lasts. The bread that lasts contrasted with the bread that spoils.

Secondly, Jesus contrasts the bread that's a sign and the one who is the reality of that sign. They go on, what miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?

What will you do? Our forefathers ate manna in the desert. As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. You see how Moses and the desert are so prominent in the thinking of the crowd because the sight of Jesus giving bread to this vast array of people in a remote and wild place has reminded them of the great event in their own historical past of Moses feeding the people.

If Moses gave the people manna every day for forty years, well, surely then Jesus can prove himself. He can authenticate himself by doing more than one feeding miracle.

[21 : 56] It's astonishingly brazen, isn't it, that they should speak to the Lord in this way, that they should demand him to prove himself. And Jesus corrects them in two different respects.

First of all, he points out it wasn't actually Moses who gave them the bread, the manna. It was God who gave it through Moses. And secondly, he points out that the manna was not in itself the point of the miracle in the desert.

The manna was pointing towards a future reality, and that future reality, the reality of the manna, is now, in fact, standing before them.

the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. And then in verse 35, he removes all doubt whatsoever, he speaks plainly, I am, I am the bread of life.

I am the reality. The manna was a shadow. The manna was a sign. I am the reality.

[23 : 12] It's a wonderful claim to Godhead. Jesus is divine, and the blessing that comes from him, the satisfaction, the nourishment, the fulfillment that Jesus brings the hungering soul, it satisfies and it lasts because it's of divine origin.

Jesus is God. Many of the commentators, when we come to this and the other I am sayings of Jesus, they point out the fact that it's echoing the words of the Lord to Moses when Moses inquires as to the name of God and God's response is, I am who I am.

And here we have Jesus saying in effect, I am the great I am. I am the God of Moses. I am the bread of life.

He is the substance where all the rest was shadow. He is the water from the rock. He is the bread in the tabernacle.

He is the manna in the desert. All of these things are signs and Jesus now having come is the reality. He will deliver what they promised, all that they pointed to, he now gives in himself.

[24 : 44] Now, of course, the tragedy, isn't it, is not to identify the reality and to be content with the sign. It's a tragedy in every walk of life.

You know, when we say that someone has lost contact with reality for whatever reason, it's tragic, isn't it? They withdraw from normal human contact and they live in a world of images and dreamers.

You know, young people perhaps withdraw to themselves and they become absorbed in comics or video games. they can't relate to real people.

The real world around them is something from which they've abstracted themselves and that's a tragedy in the everyday world.

But a greater tragedy is to simply focus upon things that are signs of some spiritual reality and never to encounter the truth, never to meet with the things to which the signs and the shadows are pointing.

[25 : 56] Now, this is always a danger with the sacrament that people can see no further than the sign and miss on the reality. I've come across people who looked on the Lord's Supper as something that was all important to them.

They would never miss a communion Sunday. They would come out and they would come because they had a sense that here there was something which was magical, mystical in its essence, but they didn't know Jesus as Savior.

They did not know the reality to which the sacrament points. They never experienced the salvation to which the bread and the wine and the wine point and speak so clearly.

May none of us make that error this morning that we come to the table because we have first encountered the one who is the true bread and that our souls hunger for communion with Him.

Jesus is the reality. He is the one to whom the bread in the wilderness is the sign. Thirdly, Jesus makes a contrast between bread that doesn't satisfy and bread that does.

[27 : 26] He goes on to spell out the fact that He is the only truly satisfying bread. He is the bringer of a life that is truly satisfying. He brings eternal life.

Now, Jesus isn't speaking about simply life that goes on and on and on and on and on and ending existence, which of course isn't necessarily good in and of itself.

But when Jesus speaks of eternal life, He is speaking almost more of a certain quality of life, the life of heaven which will be endlessly blissful, a life characterized by heaven's joys.

He speaks of passing over from death to life, from condemnation to acceptance, a life of fulfilled service, of contented fellowship, of joy in the Holy Spirit.

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.

[28 : 40] Asian Christians, when they're speaking about this passage, Jesus' words here, I am the bread of life, sometimes they'll paraphrase it and speak of Jesus being the rice of life, because of course rice is their staple in places where wheat isn't grown and bread is unfamiliar.

They can understand more clearly Jesus as being the rice of life. One Asian Christian said that it's true of his people, it was as though they had two stomachs. One stomach was for rice and the other stomach was for any other food.

And no matter how much food apart from rice was filled, the other stomach was filled with, so long as no rice had been eaten, there was still a deep hunger pang, only rice can satisfy.

That's what Jesus is saying here. There is a vacuum, there is a void in every human, and only Jesus can fill that void.

You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee, Augustine said. And we can fill that void with all kinds of things, we can fill it with our books and our films and our cars and our pleasure with our sport, with our family, with our friends, with anything.

[30 : 09] But so long as we don't have Jesus, then we will be hungry. Now only Christ can satisfy. Jesus is the only bread that truly satisfies.

And it's understandable because we were created for fellowship with Jesus and life lived apart from Jesus is a dysfunctional life, deeply dysfunctional.

We were wired for fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. And if we seek to find our fulfillment apart from God's design, how tragic and how unsatisfying that will be.

Faith in Jesus removes the barrier of our sin, restores our relationship with God, and brings peace and fulfillment into a life.

Why then, this is again another mystery, why then do people not flock to Jesus? Why do they not come in their droves in Aberdeen?

[31 : 25] Why are they not pounding on the door of the church this morning to come to the bread of life? And the answer lies in the distinction that the theologians make between two different kinds of call.

The external call, when the gospel is preached and proclaimed and explained and shared, that goes out to all people, and all people hear of Jesus, and that He is the answer to their questions that perplex them, that He is the one who can satisfy the longing of their hearts.

He is the one who will forgive sin and who will bring us safe to heaven. But left to their own, no one will respond to the invitation to believe in Jesus.

Sin blinds their minds, binds their will in chains, and it has always been thus. The people in that day in Capernaum largely rejected the invitation of Christ to come to them and find fulfillment and fullness and satisfaction and place of emptiness, because they were blind in their sin.

The late James Montgomery Boyce, who was minister of Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia, told an anecdote once of a U.S. newspaper group, and the logo of this group was a lighthouse, a lighthouse of lights streaming out, and underneath it the words, give the people the light, and they will find their way.

[33 : 02] And the assumption behind that was that people, they make foolish mistakes and bad decisions because they don't know the right way. Show the right way to them, and they will follow.

Good journalism can change lives. Now, we have the same kind of misconception here.

Governments think that education will change people's behavior.

And so, what's the response to teenage pregnancy? Greater sex education, more sex education in school. What a blunder.

The Bible describes the way the world is. People prefer darkness to light. Jesus, when He was in the world, was the world's light.

The light was shining, but the people did not respond and come to Him. They tried to put it out.

They crucified the lighthouse. And what is needed is the effectual call of God that comes about when God's Holy Spirit draws a person to faith in Christ.

[34 : 11] Christ. And Jesus speaks of this in verse 37. Jesus says, All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away, 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 shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day. So, Jesus is saying that there is a group of people who have been given to Him by the Father and who will most definitely come to Him, and they are the chosen of God and are irresistibly called.

And who are these people? Well, they are, again, simply the ones who do in verse 41, look to Jesus. How do you know if you are called? You know that you are called because you look to Jesus.

And so, as always with the gospel, we're left with two ways to live, two ways to live. And from our perspective, a choice, we choose to believe the devil's lie that rejecting Christ and following our own desires will lead to our own fulfillment.

That's the ancient lie, still has the strong pull today, as always. Or we turn to the Lord Jesus. We trust Him.

[35 : 39] We believe the truth. We come to the living bread, and we find in Him all that we ever longed for, all of our deep desires met. We receive His peace, His joy in our lives.

faith. And wonderfully and so tenderly, Jesus gives great encouragement to any to come to Him, to have faith.

Just think of the word pictures that the Lord uses to describe what it is to come to the living bread. He just says it's simply coming, coming in the knowledge that we will not be rebuffed, that we'll not be sent away should we come to Jesus.

Even simpler than coming, it is to look to Jesus. Look with the look of faith. Or thirdly, it is tasting, tasting, eating the best food that is provided for you, and it is absolutely free.

How wonderful, how wonderful that is. Who would refuse that offer? If you'll forgive me the liberty of telling a story about an Aberdonian, there was a story told about a man from Aberdeen crossing the Atlantic in the days of the great liners, and he had saved up for the privilege, but he had decided that he would not go to the dining car for his meals, and he had taken his own food with him.

[37 : 17] And so, day after day, over the long journey, he would go to the little hamper of food that he had taken with him, and he would eat in his cabin while the rest of the passengers were eating in the dining car.

Then, as the days went by, of course, his food got stale and hard, and he decided that he would go up to the dining room, and he would fork out for the meal and eat with the rest of them.

And he sat down at the table, and the man next to him said to him, of course, you know, it was part of the price of the ticket you could have come from the beginning.

And that's so true, isn't it, of the gospel offer. So many thinking of the work that they must do to do the works that God requires, of the human effort, of their deal, their contract, their compact with God.

God asks us to come with empty hands, to come to the one who never rebuffs, to look to him with the look of faith, to taste and see that God is good, to feed upon him, to be satisfied.

[38 : 36] oh, I would feed you with the finest of wheat. You would eat from honey, honey from the rock.

Let's listen to Isaiah as we prepare to come to the table. Come, all of you who are thirsty, come to the waters and you who have no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what are not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy. Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fear.

Amen. May God bless to us the preaching of his holy word.