

“I AM the bread of life”

John 6:25-59

Food is a big industry these days in the UK. We have numerous celebrity chefs, Michelin-star restaurants, cookery programmes....

We have become a nation of foodies. Food snobs.

Glass-blowing house restaurant menu-

“Beer-battered fillet of line-caught cod, pommes frites and warm pureed pea salad.”

You might call this a bit pretentious!

Where I grew up – up North – this used to be known as fish, chips and mushy peas... and it came wrapped up in newspaper and was lathered in salt and vinegar!

Well, in this passage, there is a whole food theme going on.

Jesus is talking about food and specifically bread. Earlier in the chapter, he has just fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Now he is reunited with his disciples and they get into conversation about bread.

“Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs 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.**”

(John 6:26-27)

Jesus was always doing this – taking everyday objects and images and teaching spiritual lessons from them. He did it when

he met a woman at a well who was drawing water – and started talking about living water that flows from within.

He talked about the lilies of the field, corns of wheat, the birds of the air, sheep, trees, mustard seeds.... Whatever was to hand. Jesus was the all-time great communicator, story-teller, picture painter. He would use these vivid images, these stories, to tell simple but profound truths.

“So” – he says to his disciples – “you were impressed with the bread thing then. You are feeling all full up and amazed that we fed that many people with bread that would have cost a lot of money.”

“Well – don’t get taken up with food that will spoil – our fridge recently broke and a whole fridge full of food was spoiled – work for food that endures to eternal life... the Son of man will give you this.”

See how he did that... Blink and you’ll miss it.

Don’t worry about **food for your bellies** – **get concerned with spiritual food.**

He did this another time –

“So do not worry, saying, '**What shall we eat?**' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But **seek first his kingdom** and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

(Matthew 6:31-33)

Back to John 6:

Their conversation continues and moves on to the kind of works they should do and to belief.

They want to know what miraculous signs Jesus is going to do, so they can see them and believe... which, when you think about it, is a bit cheeky, seeing as Jesus has just fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish and then walked on water. I mean, what else is he supposed to do!

But they ask nonetheless:

"What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them **bread from heaven** to eat.'"

(John 6:30-31)

Okay, stretching out five loaves of bread to feed five thousand people is quite impressive, but our forefathers got bread from heaven – manna in the desert.

Jesus then really takes up this theme:

"I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

(John 6:32-33)

Jesus is painting away – using these images – but the disciples are not getting it.

Painting with Nancy – oil paintings – couldn't see what she was painting for the longest time and then all of a sudden, it became clear.

It's not clear yet. The disciples say:

"from now on, give us this bread"

(John 6:34)

They are trying to keep up.

Now JESUS delivers his punch line. He fills in the gap and they start to see the picture.

"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."
John 6:35

As we look at the remainder of this dialogue, I want to point out the two main themes of what Jesus was saying; two promises that he was making to those that would become his followers:

- 1) I will give you satisfaction and fulfilment in this life and
- 2) I will give you eternal life after that

1) Satisfaction and fulfilment in this life

We have some very basic needs in our human make-up. We need other people – community. We need a sense of purpose. We need a sense of significance. We need to be loved.

These are very strong needs and they produce very strong appetites in us. Whether we know it or not, we will do everything we can to make sure that they are met. We spend our lives trying to find satisfaction.

We do all kinds of things to try to meet these needs and to fill what I would say is a spiritual hunger.

And whether it's the Rolling Stones singing "I can't get no satisfaction" or U2 saying "They still haven't found what they are looking for" -
We all struggle to do just that.

C.S.Lewis:

“Most people, if they really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you but they never keep their promise.”

Jesus was making a bold statement to his disciples here. He was talking about **human need and desire**, he was digging deeper than the initial talk of food for the physical body – he was making the claim that **only he can satisfy the longings of the human heart**.

The psalmist said it:

“for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.”
(Psalm 107:9)

The prophets said it:

“Come, all 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 is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.”
(Isaiah 55:1-2)

Now Jesus is saying it:

“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.” (John 6:35)

There is a depth of satisfaction and fulfilment that Jesus is talking about here.

Elsewhere, he talks about a child asking his dad for bread:

“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though

you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

(Matthew 7:9-11)

"Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart."

We have a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy. If we think we can fulfil that desire in something else, that something else will ultimately spoil – this bread will not spoil.

I love freshly baked bread. I love making it and I love eating it – a warm piece of freshly baked granary bread with melting butter or a wedge of cheese is not to be spurned.

But at the bottom of our bread bin on numerous occasions are hardened wedges of stale bread, or if we wait too long, mouldy pieces of leftover old bread.

It ultimately spoils.

But there is something that will never spoil, and can never be taken away from us.

Let's just take a look at the second theme that Jesus draws on in this passage:

2) The promise of eternal life:

First of all, he is promising satisfaction and fulfilment in this life. But he is promising more than that. He is promising eternal life.

"I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this

bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."
(John 6:48-51)

Jesus then starts talking about eating his flesh and drinking his blood so that they can have eternal life.

What has happened now? Have we walked into some kind of 1st Century flesh-eating zombie movie – some weird cannibalistic sect?

You want to live forever.... You must eat me and drink my blood.

No, of course not. Jesus is talking about his death on the cross.

We fast forward to a scene just before his death and once again, Jesus talks about bread..... He is having a last supper with his followers and he lifts up a piece of bread that is on the table...

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."
(Matthew 26:27-28)

Jesus is saying that the only way to fulfilment in this life and indeed to eternal life is through him. It is to accept that he died for us on the cross, it is to become his follower.

He is not just offering us a system, a religious code or practice, a good feeling – represented by bread – the sustenance of life.

He is saying – I am that bread – I am the bread of life.

A conversation that started with the disciples thinking about bread and being full... ended in Jesus saying that he is the bread of life – that he gives full satisfaction and fulfilment and that ultimately he gives us eternal life.

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE.

Jesus has died so that we might live. I am God become breakable. I have come to die for your sin – I am broken so that you can be whole.

You have to receive me to get this contentment. Only as I believe in him, get to know Jesus, can I receive this ...

The onus on us, if we are Christians, is to share this bread.

“Evangelism is just one beggar telling another where to find bread.”

(D.T. Niles)

English word – “*companion*”.

The French word – “*copain*” – friend. Sharing your bread with another.

It's too good to keep to ourselves!

Community group questions and discussion points:

1. Jesus distinguishes between “food that spoils” and “food that endures to eternal life”. What do you think he means by this?

2. In what ways do we go after food that spoils and what does not really satisfy our true hunger? (See Isaiah 55:1-2)
3. Jesus identifies himself as the “bread of life”. And the “bread from heaven”. What do you think that means?
4. Psalm 107:9 says: “he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.” How can we be satisfied and find our fulfilment in Jesus and in his kingdom?
5. Read together John 6:53-59. What did Jesus mean by this? What is the importance of communion to us as Christians? Why do we take it and what role does it play? In what way do we eat Jesus’ flesh and drink his blood?
6. Read Matthew 7:9-11 together. Take some time to identify some of the things that we might want to bring to our father in prayer – the bread that we might want to ask for together. “Give us this day our daily bread.”