

“Fulfilled In Christ”

We’re continuing to look at the seven facets of discipleship this week. The seven facets fit into three categories.

There is an upward look

1. Focused on God
2. Fulfilled in Christ

There is an inward look

3. Biblically integrated
4. Growth-oriented

There is an outward look

5. Ministry-minded
6. Committed to the church
7. Devoted to disciple-making.

Last week we looked at the first, *Focused on God*. This week we're looking at the second: *Fulfilled In Christ*.

Thinking about what it means to be fulfilled in Christ this week, I remembered a man who told how he woke up at 4:00 am one morning overwhelmed with anxiety. He tried to slip down to the kitchen to avoid disturbing his wife, but his 8-year-old son heard him. He poured a cup of juice for each of them and admitted to his son that he was struggling with something he didn't fully understand. He said that as he tried to explain it to his son, he began to understand it better himself. He had emptied his cup, so he said, *"It's like my life is a cup. But lately, a big hole has opened up in it, and all the things that used to bring me joy have leaked out. Instead of joy, I have anger, fear, and hurt feelings."* His son said, *"What caused the leaks?"* As he tried to explain to his son, it started to become clear. He took a piece of paper, drew a cup, and then drew a sort of network of hoses and faucets connected to it. He said it was as if he had all these different things and sources that he tried to use to fill his cup, but they had all failed, and some of them were so corrosive they caused big leaks. He labeled them people,

places, positions, possessions, and pleasures; he said as he drew this picture, he realized at 35 years old that he had spent over a decade trying to fill his life through these things expecting to attain a life that overflowed with positive emotions and genuine fulfillment, but nothing delivered what he had hoped to discover. As he tried to say all this in language simple enough for an 8-year-old to grasp, it became clearer and clearer to him that although he professed faith in Jesus as his Savior, he had not been looking to Jesus for fulfillment. Jesus was a gracious Savior and the true and only Lord, but he wasn't really the bread of life for him in a meaningful way.

He said that period of deep personal darkness had been the worst thing that had ever happened to him but that 4:00 am conversation with his 8-year-old in the kitchen turned it into the greatest thing that he ever experienced because of what it taught him and where it led him. He learned that the significance and fulfillment he had looked for was not found in the places he had looked, but it was offered to him in Jesus. He learned that there was in Jesus Christ a true and lasting source of peace, love, security, and significance. To use imagery Jesus used in John six: ***Jesus is the bread of life, and we satisfy our souls with him by continually believing in him.***

Let's begin by noticing how clearly this passage shows us that...

I. AN ESSENTIAL ISSUE IN LIFE AND DISCIPLESHIP IS TO SEE JESUS AS WHO HE SAYS HE IS: THE BREAD OF LIFE.

John 6 offers an important lesson in discipleship because it tells of a critical turning point when there were some people who were following Jesus, who stopped following him. **John 6:66** says, *After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.* Why did they turn back? The reason they turn away is that they come to understand something that they hadn't grasped before. What is it? The issue is what Jesus says in **verse 35**. He says, *"I am the bread of life."*

What this story shows us is thought provoking and serious...

A. Many people will follow Jesus as long as they think he will help them get the things they truly want. That is *not* true discipleship.

To understand why some quit following Jesus then and why this is an issue for us today, it helps to see that

There are two ways of looking at life in relationship to Christ. One is the perspective of the fickle crowd the other is the perspective of the faithful disciples. The first is that we follow Jesus to get the bread of life from him. The other perspective is that we follow him because he is the bread of life for us. There is a huge difference between the two.

The people who turned away from Jesus had a faulty view of what it meant to follow him in the first place. Like many people today they thought Jesus helps you get what you need or want to fill you up, but he is not that himself – he isn't enough himself. You think a good job, a fulfilling love life, a happy family, and financial security – are the things that will satisfy you. To the degree that Jesus is important, it is because you believe he can help you get those things, add some flavor to them.

Our culture is inundated with false ideas about where life is found. This is what Jesus is speaking about in **John 6:27** when he says, *Do not work for the food that perishes.* Jesus says this because we can do this! It seeps into our mindset from the culture. It is possible to affirm many Christian teachings, attend church regularly and even serve in a ministry and yet miss what Jesus Christ says you need at a deeper level. What we see in **John 6** is that if don't believe Jesus is the bread of life you will follow him only insofar as following him doesn't interfere with your ability to fit into the world and chase the same things the world chases. What Jesus says is so different. When Jesus says, *follow me* He is telling us the kind of life God wants us to live and enjoy isn't found in the places we are looking for it! It is in him!

B. Jesus wants you to follow him because he himself is the bread of life for you.

When Jesus says he is the bread of life, he is saying it is your relationship with Him, and with God through him, that does for your soul what food does for your body. Faith feeds your heart with

his life, love, beauty, and goodness, grace and presence, His promises give strength and energy. *So Jesus is saying, don't just think of me as the one who can help you get what you need. I am what you need.* He says, "I'm the *bread of life.*"

The same thing that happened in Jesus' day happens today.

People come to Christ wanting him to enrich their lives with the things *they* want or whatever the culture celebrates. When they find out he wants to enrich them with himself, they turn away. We all want good families, loving relationships, rewarding jobs, secure futures, and good health, we want to see our causes prosper and our passions fulfilled. We get anxious or upset when these things are threatened. *"Believing Jesus is the bread of life doesn't mean nothing matters except for him. It does mean that nothing matters as much as Him and nothing matters so much that the presence of that thing overshadows Him or the absence of that thing robs us of the peace and joy of his love, his promises, and his presence."*

As the storm was approaching on Wednesday, I was at my home office looking out at the river from my study and watching how rough the water was. I remember hearing a man once say that he went through a time when his emotional and spiritual life was like a small sailboat on a large lake. On nice days with gentle breezes, he would skim along life's surface, refreshed by the wind and invigorated by the spray. But when storms came (and they always did), He had no safe harbor to sail to and no anchor strong enough to help him ride out the storm. What had at one time provided pleasure suddenly became tremendously threatening. It said it was as if the very things that once gave satisfaction could, in a moment, threaten to destroy him. Jesus doesn't use sailboat imagery, but he teaches us the same lesson. Every Christian can have this. No matter what is going on out there, you realize Jesus Christ is offering you something in here. You bite into a belief in him that feeds and strengthens you.

**II. BECAUSE JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE WE ARE
NOURISHED SPIRITUALLY BY CONTINUALLY COMING TO HIM
AND BELIEVING IN HIM.**

Verse 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.* Believing in Jesus is at the heart of both salvation and discipleship.

A. It's through believing in Christ that we receive eternal life.

*There are two key truths about eternal life in **John 6**.*

1st Eternal life comes through the sacrifice of Christ. Look at **verse 51**. Jesus said, *"This bread is my flesh that I give for the life of the world."* This is good news. You and I, we are capable of all kinds of sins. We have committed more than we know or have admitted. God is holy. He holds humanity accountable for sin and evil. We cannot do enough good works to compensate for or cover our sins. So God came into this world in Jesus to save us. There is one God who exists as three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In the shared plan and grace of God, God the Son came into our world and became one of us. He lived a life of perfect righteousness and of infinite value. He gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins. On the cross, in the mysterious agony of the darkness, when he cried, *"my God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"* he was bearing the eternal punishment for our sins in his own flesh. Because his life was of infinite value, his sacrifice was sufficient to pay for the sins of the world. This is why we stress that salvation is not achieved through good works.

2nd Eternal life is received by faith alone and not by good works.

In **John 6:28-29** *When 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."* **John 6:47**, Jesus said, *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.*

It's through believing that we receive the gift of eternal life. And...

B. Once you have received Christ, it is by believing in him continually that you are fed by him spiritually.

One of the challenging things about the Bible is it is continually calling you to believe, to apply faith in Jesus to the problems of life, to walk by

faith, but if you ask, *how do I do that?* It doesn't give you a checklist of action steps or tips and techniques. It seems that in the Bible, telling a believer in Jesus to believe is sort of like telling someone in a crisis to breathe. You don't have to give instructions. You just have to remind him or her. This is the most crucial aspect of following Jesus. When you are tempted to quit following him, when you are tempted or tired or tested, the most important skill to master is the skill of believing in Jesus in every situation. You don't need a lot of action steps. You just need to remember to do it and commit to it, and you will get better at it.

That said, there are at least three things that can help us.

1st. Keep your relationship with Jesus at the center of your life.

The bread of life is *not* a set of practices, experiences, or doctrines. It is a person. **Verse 33:** *"he" who comes down from heaven.* Following Jesus is ultimately relational. You are walking with the risen Christ, and relationship with him is at the heart of that life.

Years ago, I used to print out a devotional template on my computer that gave me an outline for Bible reading and prayer. I would use that in meditation most days. At the top, as a heading, I had printed out **1 Timothy 4:7** which says, *discipline yourself for godliness.* That was how I thought of those times of bible reading and prayer. It was discipline, like going to the gym or working out. But one day, I had a particularly powerful time of late-night meditation and prayer, and I felt moved, led to change the verse at the top of those pages. **James 4:8** was impressed on me. It says, *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.* Both Scriptures are true. My ultimate focus however was clarified when I went from thinking of my time in Scripture and prayer as simply disciplining myself for godliness to that of drawing near to God himself. *Keep relationship with Christ at the center of your life.*

2nd. Keep feeding by faith on the fullness of the grace Jesus

gives you. Sometimes we look at what we have in Christ with a very limited, narrow – sort of – tunnel vision way. If I roll up a piece of paper and look through it, I only see a narrow partial vision of what is in front of me. Many Christians think of Jesus primarily as a Savior from sin's penalty: by believing in him, you have forgiveness. That's wonderful,

but you also have his presence and friendship now. His Spirit within you. His promise is to care for and guide you and bring you home and make all things work together for good and, in the end, to make all things new. Listen to the words of a preacher from another century: Octavious Winslow. Here's what he wrote:

Do not limit your heart's experience of Christ's love, for it is infinite in its nature and boundless in its extent. The prayer of the apostle for the Ephesian saints was that they might "know the love of Christ which passes knowledge." As yet, how many of us stand but upon the shore of this ocean!

Bring your heart with its profoundest emptiness, its most startling discovery of sin, its lowest frame, its deepest sorrow, and sink it into the depths of the Savior's love. Believe in its existence, its reality, its fullness, and its freeness. 1

Lamentations 3:21-24 inspired the hymn Great is Thy Faithfulness. But listen to it. It says, *But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:* ²² *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;* ²³ *they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* ²⁴ *"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore, I will hope in him."* Notice what is at the heart of the passage! Look at these wonderful life-giving truths about God: his love is steadfast, his mercies never cease, they are new every morning, and His faithfulness never fails. This is who Jesus is and why he is bread for your soul and heart. Now notice how the passage begins and ends! **Verse 21** *But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.* You have to call these things to mind! You have to draw on these truths and find comfort in them. Look at how the passage ends in **verse 24**. *"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore, I will hope in him."* Is that what we say? Is that the inner dialogue of your soul, what you call to mind and speak to yourself? *The Lord is my portion. I will hope in him.* It matters! The image of the bread of life brings to mind the idea that you have to ingest and digest and take in and absorb deeply who Jesus is for you. Feeding on Christ as the bread of life doesn't mean you will always be overflowing with warm feelings of vitality. It does mean you will always have a more than sufficient source of life and fulfillment in Christ.

Sometimes you may pray like so many in Scripture, *Lord, where are you?* Cloudy and stormy days do not disprove the presence of the Sun. Sometimes like the father of the sick son in **Mark 9**, we have to say, *Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief.* Feelings can ebb and flow, but Christ remains the bread of life – so we put faith to work in our hearts.

3rd. Practice the presence of Christ always. Bread is something that, when you eat it, you take it into you. Scripture says Jesus is like that with us. **Ephesians 3:17** says Christ lives in our hearts by faith.

Long ago, I read a book titled, *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence. He was a wounded soldier who became a spiritual mentor. In his book he writes: *In order to know God, we must often think of Him...remembering Him, praising Him, asking for His grace, offering Him your troubles, or thanking Him for what He has given you will console you all the time ... lift up your heart ... There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with God; those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it.* If someone is with you in the car or workplace, or kitchen, you talk to them. Practicing the presence of Christ means realizing he is with you and living in an inward dialogue of prayer about everything, the good things, the hard things, the confusing things. Sharing each day's developments with him and finding strength and stability in that relationship. ***Jesus is the bread of life, and we satisfy our souls with him by continually believing in him.*** That is crucial for true discipleship.

CONCLUSION

Look at how this story ends. **Verse 67-69** *“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. 68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”*

Over and over in life, Jesus has to ask us this question. It's a question that doesn't allow us to just drift along deceiving ourselves. It requires a decision, a choice of faith, and a definite answer from us. It's the

question he is asking you: *Will you choose to truly believe in him and make him the bread of life for you?*

Amen.

A Prayer for Receiving Christ

Almighty God, You have powerfully revealed your love in Jesus, whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for our salvation. I admit my need for your saving grace. I turn to Christ, the bread of life, and trust in him for my redemption. I believe he died on the cross to pay for my sins and rose again as Lord and Savior. I receive and rest on him alone for my salvation. Grant me the eternal life promised to all who come to him in faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord God, Unite my heart to love and follow Christ so as to seek and find my life in him! I renounce my persistent insistence on following my inclinations and seeking fulfillment in the things of this broken world. I fully embrace Jesus as the bread of life and renew my faith in him. Empower me to more fully open my heart and soul to his presence. Sustain me by your Holy Spirit. Guide me with your inspired word. Transform me more and more into the likeness of Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

¹ *The Sympathy of Christ with Man: It's Teaching and its Consolation.* p 165