

Communion Series: Together at the Table (2023)
The Bread of Life | **John 6:48–51**
North Center | March 5, 2023
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Today is the **first Sunday** of the month, which is when North Center has historically celebrated the **Lord's Table** (or **Communion**) together. And you may remember that last month we started a sermon series on Communion, titled "**Together at the Table**" in which (by the grace of God), on the first Sunday of each month, I intend to take one of the different facets of this meal and preach an abbreviated **biblical theology**. That means that we will try to **trace** each part of the Lord's Table throughout the storyline of the Bible to see (1) **what it means** in the big picture of God's world and (2) **why Jesus chose to incorporate it** into this sacred meal.

Last month, we looked at the **TABLE** – and we saw that God designed the table to communicate something important about *fellowship, friendship, togetherness*. God designed the table to be a picture of *welcoming others into your presence*. It's not just a piece of furniture. It's a **story**. It's an **invitation**.

This is what God is communicating to us every time we come to the Lord's **Table** together.

- Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are **welcomed** into His presence.¹
- Because of Jesus, we have **fellowship** with our Father & with one another.²
- We are **friends** of Almighty God.³

Today, we are going to look at the story of **BREAD** in the Bible.

Like the table, a loaf of bread is so much more than a combination of ingredients that have been mixed together and baked in an oven. It's a story. But most of us are far too busy & distracted & spoiled to ever take the time to consider that there is more to bread than what we see with our eyes and taste with our tongue. As you hold a piece of bread in your hands during our celebration of the Lord's Table today, you are holding a story that began in the Garden of Eden and culminated at the Cross.

1. **BREAD & THE GOSPEL** || *Genesis 3:14–21*

The first time we hear about bread in the Bible is in the Garden of Eden when God is explaining to the serpent & then to Eve & then to Adam the consequences of sin.

So the Lord God said **to the serpent**:
"Because you have done this, **you are cursed** more than all cattle,
and more than every beast of the field;
On your belly you shall go, and **you shall eat dust** all the days of your life.
And I will put enmity between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

To the woman He said:
"I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your **conception**;
In pain you shall **bring forth children**;
Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

¹ Eph 2:18.

² 1 John 1:3; 1 Cor 10:17.

³ John 15:15.

Then **to Adam** He said,
 “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife,
 and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’:
 “**Cursed is the ground** for your sake;
 In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.
 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field.
 In the sweat of your face **you shall eat bread** till you return to the ground,
 For out of it you were taken;
 For dust you are, and **to dust you shall return.**”

And Adam called his wife’s name Eve,
 because she was the mother of all living.
 ~ *Genesis 3:14–20*

Let’s spend a few minutes thinking about this scene together:

1. What does God curse? *The serpent & the ground.*⁴
 - God does not here curse His people.
2. What is the hardship for the woman? *Bringing forth life (birth).*⁵
3. What is the hardship for the man? *Sustaining life (bread).*⁶
 - God means for them to experience life, but it will not be easy for either of them.
4. What is the symbol of Adam’s death? *Dust.*
5. What is the serpent going to eat? *Dust.*
 - The picture here is that the serpent will feed on death **death**.
6. What is Adam going to eat? *Bread.*
 - Which is symbolic of **life** (e.g., *John 6:48, “I am the bread of life”*).
7. What promise does God give to the serpent?
 - That One would come from the Seed of a woman who would crush Satan’s head.⁷
 - What is that? It’s **the gospel**.⁸

So, the first time bread shows up, it’s surrounded by

1. the curse of sin,
2. the promise of life (through *giving birth* and through *eating bread*),
3. and the hope of the gospel.

And then what do we see?

Also for Adam and his wife
 the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.
 ~ *Genesis 3:21*

What’s happening here?

4. God is covering their shame by Himself – without their help.⁹
5. He covers their shame by means of sacrifice.¹⁰

⁴ The serpent (Satan) is cursed (אָרֵר) in 3:14, and the ground is cursed (אָרֵר) in 3:17. Compare with Rev 12:9 & 20:2, 10. See also 1 Tim 2:14.

⁵ Gen 3:16.

⁶ Gen 3:17–19.

⁷ Gen 3:15.

⁸ In theological terms, this is known as the **protoevangelium** (the first gospel).

⁹ Their attempt to cover their shame was insufficient (Gen 3:7).

¹⁰ The skin that once covered something else (*my guess would be a lamb*), God took to clothe them.

BREAD

1. Curse for sin
2. Promise of life
3. Hope of the gospel
4. Covering of shame
5. Sacrifice of another

And the last thing God says they will do is “**eat bread**”.

GEN 3:19

In the midst of sin & curse & hope & sacrifice & gospel...

God's promise to His people is that they would eat bread (*meaning, He would give them life!*)

This meal would forever **remind** Adam & Eve of their sin & of the curse.

Yet, it would also **remind** them of the gospel & the life that God had promised them.

And it would undoubtedly **remind** them of sacrifice.

From the very first time we hear the word “**bread**”, it is so much more than just sustenance. **It's telling a story of hope and promise and life.**

As the world is suddenly submerged in sin and curse and pain and sorrow and struggle and sweat...

- Satan is feeding on death,
- And we are feeding on life.

2. **BREAD & THE KING-PRIEST** || *Genesis 14:18–20*

The second time we hear about “bread” in the Bible is right after Abram (*whose name was later changed to Abraham*) and his army of 318 men defeat the combined army of four kings – *which was part of the first war* [מלחמה] *in the Bible* – in order to save his family.¹¹

Then Melchizedek **king** of Salem brought out **bread** and wine;
he was the **priest** of God Most High.
And he blessed him and said:
“**Blessed** be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth;
And **blessed** be God Most High,
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”

...
~ *Genesis 14:18–20*

Again, I want to pause here for a minute to highlight a few of the details of this moment in history.

1. This is first time we ever hear about a **priest** in the Bible, and it turns out that this priest is also a righteous **king!**¹²
2. This king-priest comes (*out of nowhere it seems*) to God's chosen people to celebrate their **victory** over the enemy.
3. To commemorate this victory, this king-priest brings “**bread and wine**”. The first gift of the first priest is bread. He gave God's people bread.
4. Then this king-priest **blesses Abram** as being the “*possessor of heaven and earth.*”¹³
5. After which He **blesses God Most High** who “*delivered your enemies into your hand.*”¹⁴

So, the second time we see **bread** in the Bible, it is given (as a gift) by this **priestly King of Righteousness** as the means of **celebrating** the **victory** of God's people over their enemy and as a means of **blessing** the people of God Most High. →

BREAD

SKIP

1. Given by the king-priest
2. Given to God's people
3. Accompanied salvation
4. Means of celebration
5. Means of blessing

After the first war in the Bible, the very first thing we see is the King of Righteousness giving God's people “**bread and wine.**”

GEN 14:18

¹¹ Gen 14:14–17.

¹² His name (Melchizedek: מֶלְכִּי־צֶדֶק) means “**King of Righteousness**”.

¹³ That ought to shape your eschatological worldview. Compare this with the **parable of the yeast** in Matthew 13:33 (NLT). See also: Matt 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–18. #Postmillennialism

¹⁴ Compare with promises like: Psalm 118:6; Isa 54:17; Rom 8:37; Heb 1:13.

Once again, we see that Melchizedek's bread is part of a bigger story. Just like the **table**, this **bread** was **meant to teach something** about the relationship between God and His people.

- God means to save His people from captivity...¹⁵
- God means to give His people victory over their enemy...
- God means to bless us in His presence...
- God means to give us heaven and earth as our possession...

...And God means to celebrate all of this with bread!

The enemy is defeated, and God's people are eating bread!

And this is truly just the beginning of the story of bread in the Bible.

- ⊘ **Genesis 18:1–5** | Bread was the first meal offered as a gift to God.¹⁶
- **Exodus 16:8–15** | Bread was a gift from heaven to God's people.¹⁷
- **Leviticus 6:16** | Bread was the meal that the priests were to eat in the Presence of God.¹⁸
- ⊘ **Numbers 21:5** | Bread was a focal point of Israel's rejection of God.¹⁹
- ⊘ **Deuteronomy 8:3** | Bread was the object lesson to illustrate our need to feast on God's Word.²⁰
- **Ruth 1:6** | Bread was the sign that God had visited His people.

3. **BREAD & THE PROMISED MESSIAH** || *Micah 5:2*

One of the most significant prophecies about the birth of the Messiah (the Rescuer, the Savior), Jesus, was that He would be born in the house of bread.

SKIP

But you, **Bethlehem** (House of Bread) Ephrathah,
though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
yet out of you shall come forth to Me **the One to be Ruler in Israel**,
whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.

~ *Micah 5:2*

Bethlehem comes from two Hebrew words (**בֵּית**, meaning “house” and **לֶחֶם**, meaning “bread”). We don't have time to talk about all the significance of Bethlehem, just to say that **the picture of bread is so important to God** that He sovereignly determined that Jesus would be born in the House of Bread!

That prophecy in Micah is the last time the word Bethlehem shows up in our Old Testament (OT). And the first time it shows up in the New Testament (NT) is in **Matthew 2:1** where Matthew tells us that “*Jesus was born in Bethlehem* [the House of Bread].” One of the reasons we are to have confidence that Jesus is the Messiah is because He was born in the House of Bread.

And then, if we had time, we could work our way through the NT story of bread.²¹

¹⁵ Just as Lot was rescued from captivity as a result of this victory (Gen 14:16).

¹⁶ It's intended purpose was to refresh the heart (Gen 18:5).

¹⁷ It's intended purpose was so that God's people would know that He is “the Lord your God” (Exod 16:12).

¹⁸ **It wasn't fast-food**; it was **fellowship** food.

¹⁹ Their hard hearts were manifested as they complained of this “*worthless bread*” (Num 21:5).

²⁰ For man does not live by bread alone. Compare with Amos 8:11.

²¹ **Matthew 4:3** | Bread was the first temptation in the NT, and Jesus was victorious over the temptation in which the first Adam fell (see also Luke 4:3 and especially Romans 5:19).

Matthew 6:11 | Bread is the first prayer request (taught by Jesus) which is focused on our needs (see also Luke 11:3).

Matthew 7:9 | The giving of bread is the evidence of a loving Father. He is the **evidence of the Father's love**.

Matthew 26:26 | Bread is one of the symbols of the New Covenant.

Luke 24:35 | Jesus made Himself known to His disciples in the breaking of bread.

John 13:26–30 | Jesus used bread to expose the wicked hearts of those who would betray Him.

John 21:9 | It was part of the last meal that Jesus shared with His disciples on earth.

Acts 2:42, 46 | Breaking bread together was the regular rhythm of the early church (see also Acts 20:7).

Skipping over a mountain of amazing stories where God uses bread to teach us something about His character and about our utter dependence on Him to provide our needs, let's just glance at a few verses in the NT before celebrating the Lord's Table together.

4. **BREAD & BIRTH** || *Matthew 2:1*

The first time the word bread shows up in the NT, we don't even see it because it's hidden inside its Hebrew word (אֶמֶץ).

Now after **Jesus** was **born** in **Bethlehem** (House of Bread)²² of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."
~ *Matthew 2:1-2*

Not only did Jesus fulfill the prophecy of **Micah 5:2** (*that the everlasting Ruler of Israel would be born in the House of Bread*), but we might also see it as a symbol that Jesus had come to take the curse upon Himself.

- What were the two hardships in the curse? *Birth & Bread*.
- How does Jesus enter into our humanity? Through *birth* in the House of *Bread*.

Tell me that's not awesome!

5. **BREAD & TEMPTATION** || *Matthew 4:3*

The first time the word "bread" actually shows up in English in our NT is in *Matthew 4* when Jesus is in the wilderness being tempted by the devil. After He had fasted for forty days, the Bible says that...

...the tempter came to Him, [and] he said,
"If You are the Son of God,
command that these stones become **bread**."
~ *Matthew 4:3*

SKIP

This moment is just exploding with symbolism, but I simply want us to notice that, here in the wilderness, bread became a symbol of Jesus' victory over Satan. After forty days of fasting, the strongest temptation Satan could put in front of Jesus was the offer of bread. But, unlike Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden, Jesus used the image of bread to remind Satan that the Word of God is more life-giving than bread.²³

From that moment on, bread would forever remind Satan of the day when the Son of Man (the true and better Adam) was victorious over his temptations.

6. **BREAD & THE CHURCH** || *1 Corinthians 10:17*

For we, though many, are one bread and one body;
for we all partake of that one bread.
~ *1 Corinthians 10:17*

²² **Bethlehem** comes from two Hebrew words (בֵּית, meaning "house" and לֶחֶם, meaning "bread").

²³ Matt 4:4, quoting from Deut 8:3.

As I was reading up on the art of breadmaking this week, I learned that it takes approximately **350 ears of wheat** to make enough flour for one loaf of bread. That's somewhere around **16,000 grains** of wheat in a single loaf. I also learned that, depending on the type of bread that is being baked, these grains can come from **different kinds of wheat** and from a variety of **different fields**.²⁴

16,000 individual pieces of grain – of different varieties – and from different fields – together become part of a single loaf of bread.

And the apostle Paul says that that's a picture of what God does in creating the local church. He takes different kinds of people – from different families – coming from different places...and He makes us into a single body – which is His body.

For Paul, bread was a picture of what it means for us to be one in Christ.

CONCLUSION

As the music teams comes back up, let's turn our eyes once more to what Jesus said in **John 6:48**. Having seen just a glimpse of what bread is meant to teach us *about God* and *about us* and *about our relationship with God*, we come to **John 6:48** where we hear Jesus say, "**I am the bread of life.**"

Q. What does He mean?

A. Well, based on the story of bread throughout the rest of the Bible, perhaps Jesus is saying...

I am everything you need.

1. For those who are struggling with shame, I AM your **hope** for tomorrow.
2. For those who have rebelled against God, I AM the **good news of grace**.
3. For those who are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, I AM the promise of **life**. You will see that while the enemy is eating the dust of death, I AM your **life**.
4. For those who are desperate to feel love, I AM the **gift of God** that has come down from Heaven for you. I AM the **evidence of the Father's love** for you.
5. Amidst all your differences, I AM the One who **brings you together & makes you one**.

JESUS SAYS...

I am the **living bread** which came down from heaven.
If anyone eats of **this bread**, he will live forever;
And **the bread** that I shall give is My flesh,
Which I shall give for the life of the world.
~ *John 6:51*

I AM the true bread which truly gives you life, and since I have given My life for the world, you are ALL welcome to the Table.

PRAY

Jesus is the bread of life, and His life was **broken** – so that your life might be **made whole**.

He **took your death** – so that you might **receive His life**.

He was **laid down** into the grave – so that you might be **lifted up** into the presence of the Father.

He was **separated** from the Father – so that we might have **His access** forever.

As you eat this broken bread today, you partake of the greatest story in the universe: the story of Jesus.

²⁴ The bread that we are using for our communion meal today is a white wheat bread made from organic **hard red wheat** flour and organic **malted barley** flour.