

Come and See: Asking Jesus in John, Pt. 2
Give Us This Bread Always!
John 6: 30-40

First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

March 5, AD 2023
Gerrit Scott Dawson

We tell so many stories about magic potions that give us what we long for: usually something to do with love or life. There's a great *Twilight Zone* about a man who wants a potion to make a beautiful woman completely love and adore him. The bottle only costs \$1. But after about a month of her complete, constant, and hypnotized devotion, he learns he'll have to pay a fortune for the antidote. Love that isn't real isn't worth it. We read *Tuck Everlasting* or watch *Highlander* or *The Age of Adelaide* about people who never die. At first it seems like paradise, this fountain of eternal youth. But as the decades roll by, and everyone they love ages and dies, living forever becomes a curse. This magic isn't what we thought.



We already read this way back in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve seized the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The LORD takes counsel within his triune self: “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden.” Ever after, an angelic being with a flaming sword guarded the gate to the tree of life. I always thought this seemed like quite a curse. Why did God have to forbid us the fruit of eternal life? Why curse us with dying? But then one day my theology professor opened my eyes to the great gift contained in the curse. What if the man and woman had indeed been allowed to eat of the fruit that would let them live forever as they were? They had fallen. Their hearts had darkened. Now shame and sin, violence and deception resided in the heart of humanity. Living forever would *not* be a blessing if there were no remedy for the twisted nature now within us. It would be like being stuck in middle school for eternity! God did not want to eternalize our sin. Rather, he planned to make a way to give us new hearts before we live into eternity. Understood this way, death in a fallen world is a gift. Especially when God has undertaken to recreate humanity and the world for everlasting life without distortion, sin and brokenness.

Weirdly, this has everything to do with our passage this morning. As we enter the conversation Jesus has with the crowd, we will see how often our idea of paradise is just too shallow. Our vision for the good life is small minded. Getting what we want the way we think we want it would not be a blessing, but a colossal sorrow.



Earlier in John 6, we have the story of Jesus feeding the 5000. From a little boy's five small loaves and two fish, Jesus satisfied the huge crowd with as much food as they wanted. There were even leftovers. Well, the folks thought this was a pretty great miracle. In an age of food scarcity, they figured Jesus was a man to stay near. So the next day, they found Jesus on the other side of the lake. Jesus knew what they wanted. "You seek me because I filled your bellies with bread. Now that you're hungry again, you'd like some more. I tell you, don't work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

They wanted more bread, and they had a spiritual way to ask for it. "Hey, we remember that in the old days of Moses, our ancestors at the manna. That miraculous bread came down from heaven every morning and satisfied them. You seem to be a prophet like Moses, so can you do that? We need food!"

Jesus countered them. "Look, Moses was not responsible for the manna. It came from my Father. And manna was just a temporary sign of what was to come. My Father wants to give you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives his life for the world."

The people wanted bread they could eat right now. Jesus spoke to them on a different level. The miracle of feeding the 5000 was meant to point them to something deeper. The true bread from heaven is the person who came down from heaven to give his life for the world. Loaves and fish are just a pointer to the one who gives eternal life.

They don't even hear him. Like the woman who wanted living water to save her from having to slog out to the well every day, these folks just wanted some crusty grain, "Sir, give us this bread always."



So Jesus had to get real straight with them. “I am the bread of life.” It’s not about sourdough. It’s about me. It’s not about marbled rye. It’s about me. I, I am, I’m the bread of life who alone satisfies your deepest hunger. Put your faith in me. Live into me. Trust me and you will be filled with everlasting life that begins now. It was more than they could take in. How could Joseph and Mary’s boy say he came down from heaven? How could anyone be bread for others?

Once more, Jesus levelled with them. Of course he could ask the Father to send miraculous bread every day. He could ask to restart daily manna. But that would not solve their deeper problem. So he said all again, only more pointedly. “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. And they died.” There you go. All you ever wanted in this world is simply not enough. It won’t satisfy you. It won’t stop you from dying. Manna kept the Israelites alive for a time, but it did not destroy death. Feeding the five thousand brought fullness, but only for a moment. People need more.

Lesslie Newbigin was a rare combination of being a long term, effective missionary to India and also being an internationally recognized Bible scholar and theologian. His commentary, *The Light Has Come* has been invaluable for our study of John’s gospel. So about this passage, Newbigin writes,

The hungry man is fed, but he hungers again. The sick man is healed, but he will die. The victim of oppression is delivered, but then he becomes the slave of other “principalities and powers.” These visible acts of liberation are not to be made the primary object of all desire and labor; they are *signs* pointing to a gift that is never exhausted, a satisfaction that never passes... [Otherwise,] your life will be an endless rat race in pursuit of satisfactions which never endure...(Newbigin, 78-9).

That nails me. How often my life is a pursuit of satisfactions which never endure. This is true from basic survival to luxury and adventure. Think of those days when hurricanes ruin our houses or knock out our power. You say, “If I could just have air conditioning again, I’d never complain. Electricity is the best, I’ll never take it for granted. It’s so great seeing our neighbors and hanging out. We’ll keep doing this after the power comes back.” We get it all back, and in a week, these necessities and luxuries fail to satisfy. During Covid we thought about how great it would be to travel again. Just to see some place new, that will make me happy.

And so we got to travel again. And it's great. But we're still restless. On its own, it's not enough. During Covid, we promised we'd never let our kids get so busy again. But now we're on the hamster wheel, exhausted again. We're endlessly pursuing, capturing, consuming and almost immediately feeling restless and hungry again. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died.

It's not that manna is a bad thing. Survival in the desert is great. Getting better from illness is great. Solving the problems at the house or the office is great. But not enough. Most of the things we chase and get are fine in themselves. Good things. They just are not ultimate things. They just can't solve our essential dying problem. And they can't solve our essential loneliness problem. They can't solve our essential hunger for meaning and our thirst for satisfaction. They can't solve our restlessness.

Jesus boldly, startlingly declares "I, I myself, am the bread of life. I'm the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (6: 50). And that eternal life begins now. Let's turn to Newbigin again,

The true bread which gives eternal satisfaction will be the gift of the Son of Man...when he has been lifted up and pours out upon believers the life-giving Spirit.... Jesus is now ready to reveal the central mystery. He is in his own person, this man of flesh and blood, the presence of the one who alone gives life...For all who come, without exception, he is the eternal satisfaction" (Newbigin, 79-81).

This is the striking news from the one we follow. Jesus is the bread of life. We have to eat him in order to be filled. We have to take him in in order to live. Jesus called this eating *believing into him*. We move out of ourselves as a source. We move towards Jesus and offer him our lives. We surrender the quest for our satisfaction to him. This surrender happens once for all when we get united to Christ by faith. This is the surrender of salvation in which the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us. We repent of our sins and repent of ourselves. We turn to Jesus and ask him to fill us.

This surrender is also the daily dynamic of life in Christ. We believe into him by daily, hourly, always pressing into him. For we relentlessly get distracted by shiny objects. We get marketed hard to consume things other than Jesus to give us life, freedom, fullness. Repenting of trying to find life in ourselves is a daily deal. Repenting of trying to find life outside of Christ is a daily deal.

And there's one more part. It's not just an individual spiritual practice we're talking about. To be in Jesus for the life he gives is to be joined to all other believers, as members of Christ's one body. To be in Christ's body is to be part of his mission to the world. To be engaged in loving the least and the lost. To be offering the bread of life to hungry souls.

So look at this dynamic. Believing into Jesus is deeply personal, reaching all the way inward to your soul. It's offering all we know of ourselves to all we know of Jesus, and growing in both. Believing into Jesus is also deeply communally, reaching beyond ourselves to fellow believers and to the world.

The wonder is that these two part, the inner faith and the outer love, come together in gathered worship. We tap into our source of satisfaction as we rise with one voice to worship him. We find the mysterious fellowship of the body as we come together to the one table. The symbolism is just so powerful. Today, we get up out of seats. We get off our tails and go to Jesus at his table. We go to eat him as we take the bread. To drink him as we drain the cup. We invite him to fill us. To be integrated deeply into our bodies and souls. To have his way with us by dwelling inside us. Then we go back from the table into the great company of believers, and then at the end of worship, we go back into the world on mission for Christ.

This is the way we taste the hope that our dying problem has been solved in Jesus. Eternal life begins now. Eternal life will lead to the resurrection of our bodies. This is the way we taste our hope that our restlessness problem has been solved. We find home in Christ, expressed in private prayer and in the company of other believers. We find hope that our meaning problem has been solved. We are part of the greatest, highest purpose ever expressed for human beings, to be part of the new humanity in Christ, to express the image of God who is love so that the world might know.

So come, beloved, let us eat the Bread of Life together and with joy!