

**“The Bread of Life”**  
**John 6: 22-59**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**January 25, 2015**  
**Derek McCollum**

\*\*\*\*\*

Catching up so far...

We saw last week how Jesus fed up to 20,000 people with 3 small loaves of bread and 2 little fish. And how there were basketfuls leftover. An overabundance of his provision.

And we saw that having gotten what they wanted and having been made happy, the crowd, John tells us, tries to forcefully make Jesus King. They see the abundance and they try to fit it into their notions of what a savior and King is supposed to do. And seeing this, Jesus escapes and goes to be by himself for a while.

We pick up the story the next day, when the crowds have reappeared on the other side of the lake and they finally find Jesus in the Synagogue in Capernaum and begin to ask him some questions...

...follow along with me in John 6, picking up in verse 22...

Voltaire once wrote, “Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers.”

I think this is pretty good advice in some respects. And in this conversation we just read, the crowd asks quite a few questions. But like Lemony Snicket, it’s a case of asking “all the wrong questions.”

These questions are going to be good for us to consider. Because I think we are often guilty of the same thing—asking the wrong questions about Jesus and getting all the wrong answers. And our wrong questions keep us from really getting down to the best question of all—who is Jesus—the real Jesus? Who is he and what are we going to do with him? I hope you’ll keep that in the back of your mind as we walk through this passage.

The story is really constructed around 3 questions that the crowd asks, Jesus’ response to those questions, and then Jesus’ final conclusion.

Here's the first question they ask: *Where have you been, Jesus?* Look at verse 25... "when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here?" Or in the modern middle school version, "Dude. where'd you go?"

You know that feeling, right? You're in college and you haven't seen your roommate in 3 days and then they just show up. "Dude, where'd you go?" I have a friend who lived in New York City and before he was married, he had an amazing knack for just showing up places. In fact, one day a few years ago, I was actually talking to another friend on the phone about this guy and about his habit of just showing up in random places and, while I was talking on the phone about it, I walked into a coffee shop and there's that guy just sitting at the table in the corner, like it's the most normal thing on earth.

And my response is was exactly like this crowd..."bro...when did *you* get here? And better yet, *why* are you here?"

But Jesus' response to the crowd here is very different than what we might expect, and what they probably expected. What Jesus says, in essence, is "you're asking the wrong question." In fact, what he does is amazing... he turns the question right back around on them. And what he says is basically, "why are *you* here?" Look at verse 26... "Jesus answered them, 'truly, truly I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Don't labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life.'"

He answers not about himself, but about them. His answer asks them the same question they asked him—*why are you here?* What did you come for? What are you really looking for? Did you come because you saw a crowd? Because you saw a miracle? Because you were hungry? Or because you see something deeper in yourself... a deeper need that you know needs addressing?

It's a good question for us to ask too. Why are we here? I mean really, why are you even here this morning? Maybe your friends drug you here. That's fine. I'm glad you are here. Are you here because you feel guilty about what you did last night or last weekend? And you think that coming to church will do some sort of penance and in the end it will all even out, like Karma? Are you here because you think engaging the "spiritual" part of your life will

make you a more well-rounded person? Are you here because you know it's what your parents would want you to do? Or what your wife wants you to do? Or because it's good for your kids?

Maybe you're like the folks in this story and you've come to Jesus because you think Jesus can give you the things you want in your life. Better relationships. Better satisfaction. Better marriage. Better job. The truth is, all of those things might be true. I mean, what happened to the people that came to Jesus just to be healed or just to get some food? They got healed. They got fed.

But let me remind you that Jesus' plans for you and for this world are so much bigger than these things. They are so much bigger than you think! That's what is so destructive about the health and wealth gospel that says that, if you love Jesus, everything in your life will just be great—you'll have money and power and health—"blessing." Not only is this just plain wrong, but it sells Jesus so short! He didn't come to patch things up. He didn't come to do a little repair job on the world and give it a new coat of paint. His abundance does not fit well in our small categories of desire. He came to change everything. To renew the world. To give new life.

We all—Christians and non-believers alike—have a deep need for connection with God. And we come to Jesus because we realize that we have a need that runs deeper than we could ever imagine. That, though we need and deeply desire to be connected to our creator, we are separated by our sin. And so we come to the only one we know can meet that need. The only one who can connect us to our deepest needs by forgiving our sins and giving us his righteousness. That's why we come to Jesus.

Of course, there's a follow-up question. Question 2. The crowd asks Jesus... "What must we do to be doing the works of God?" ... "OK, Jesus, we see where you're going with this... it's more than just getting a good meal... so let's get to the point. *What do we need to do?* What do we need to do in order to be good with God.

If you are looking at an ESV Bible, verse 28 says, "what must we do to be doing the works of God?" That phrase "works of God" is very vague in Greek. "works of" could mean, God's works. And it could mean works *that God requires*. The ESV translates it more literally, which leaves the meaning vague. The NIV, however, makes a judgment call, and I think it's the right

one. It says, “what must we do in order to be doing what God requires?” And here’s the implication... Jesus, you’ve said that our initial question is wrong... it’s really more about us... so then tell us, what should we do?

Now, on the surface, this is not such a bad question. We want to be right with God. So tell us what we should do. Our tendency is so often to believe that making things right is about what we do. We talk about this all the time, but it’s worth talking about again. Most of your life is defined by how you perform. You usually get what you get out of your life by what you do. But being in right relationship with God is very different. Jesus again corrects their question here.

There’s a woman named Rumeet Billan. She’s an educator and a speaker on social change, especially in the area of education. And she has a TED talk in which she talks about the basic question that most kids are asked when they are young. “What do you want to be when you grow up?” We’ve all asked and answered that question a thousand times. I want to be a firefighter. A doctor. A Philanthropist. A Dancer. A professional athlete. A zookeeper. But what Rumeet does in this talk is reshape the question. She says what we really need to be asking is “*who* do you want to be when you grow up?” Not *what*, but *who*.

Jesus does the same thing here. What he says is that when it comes to being right with God, it is not about *what*, it is about *who*.

I love the way one commentator puts it... he says, “this is the beginning of the great surprise of the Christian gospel: that the right relationship with God for which we were created is not the fruit of several good things we do, but it is the gift of the one main thing God does for us and in us and then our giving this trust back, in turn, to his gifted son.”

A right relationship with God is not about what you do for God. It’s about whom you believe in. Whom you trust. Because all of our actions, no matter how good we think they are, will never get us right with God. It’s only by faith in the work of CHRIST on our behalf that we are brought into right relationship with God.

The Apostle Paul makes this very clear in many of his epistles when he states that salvation is not by works but that it’s by grace, through faith. Jesus is saying that same thing here. That it’s not a list of actions that puts

you right with God, it's God working through faith. It's a state of relationship, not a to-do list.

That means that right relationship with God is not based on how often you go to church or how often you read your Bible. It's not based on how nice you are or how good of a parent you are. It's not based on how much money you give. It's not based on whether you are a pastor or not. And... and this gets tricky... it's not even based on the *amount* of faith you have.

Often times, this really confuses people. Because we tend to think about even faith itself as an action—as a doing. We say things like “that guy has so much faith.” Or “she's really a woman of great faith.” Well, we are called to have faith, but we need to remember that the thing that saves us is Jesus, not our amount of faith. Your faith is only as strong as the object of your faith.

Think about it this way. If you went to the store to buy a new shirt and you walked up to the counter and put the shirt on the counter and then took out your new wallet... and the wallet was this beautiful leather and had great places for your stuff to go, and you could flip through and always see that great glamour shot that you took 15 years ago... but when you opened it up there wasn't any money in it... well, the salesperson probably wouldn't be all that inclined to give you the shirt based on the quality of your wallet.

On the other hand, even if you had a used plastic grocery bag that you got from Calandro's 2 years ago wadded up in your pocket but in that bag was a roll of hundreds, you'd be just fine.

It's not the wallet that does it, it's what's in the wallet. In that same way, it's not the faith that saves you, it's the object of that faith, Jesus. Even the smallest, crappiest wadded-up plastic bag faith will get the job done.

So let's pause for a minute. Are we asking the right question? When we come to God, are we coming with *what*—a to-do list all checked off and looking good? Or are we coming with *who*—as the hymn says, “nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.”

There's a third question the crowds ask Jesus,.. and it's another good one for us to ponder... “OK Jesus, if you're the guy... if we're supposed to believe in you, then prove it.

Look at verse 30...”so they said to him, then what sign will you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat.” The crowds ask Jesus, “What are you going to do? What are you going to do to show us that we should believe in you?” If the work that God requires is that we believe in you, then what are you going to do to prove you’re the guy?”

I feel for these guys. In many ways, it’s not a bad question. They don’t want to just believe in anything. They want to be sure. But the question, though valid, is so weak. It’s so lacking. It’s so shallow. And Jesus’ answer reveals that.

Let’s give a little background here. Remember, last week, earlier in chapter 6, the people shout, “this is the Prophet who has come into the world.” God had said in Deuteronomy that a prophet like Moses would come. One who would speak God’s words and deliver his people. Jesus, is clearly looking like that guy. And he’s given them bread to eat, which is very reminiscent of what Moses did, calling down bread from heaven, manna, for the people to eat. But here’s the sticking point. The manna came every day. And you gave us bread yesterday. But that was yesterday. So where’s the bread from heaven today, Jesus?

Jesus’ answer blows their minds. He says “you’ve got the whole concept of bread wrong!” Look at verse 32...”Jesus then said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my father 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.”

Jesus, is saying, “what you thought about bread, what you thought about provision, what you thought about what you really need, is all wrong. I know what you need, and more than that, I have it.

Then we really get to the climax of the narrative here... Jesus answers their question... he tells them that the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world... and they respond, “Great! Give us this bread! We want it!”

Here’s where I imagine Jesus sighing... shaking his head a little... and then shouting, “it’s me! I’M the bread of life! That’s what I’ve been trying to tell

you! What you need, what will truly fill you, what will give you real and lasting life is not another sign, not another to-do list, not another free lunch... it's Me! So trust. Believe. And if you do, you'll never be hungry or thirsty again. You don't just need things patched up. You need real life. And what I have won't leave you hungry. Ever.

I had you keep that question in the back of your head—who is Jesus? It's really what we've been asking with this series in John. Who is Jesus. And then, what am I to do with Him?

Well, I hope you are beginning to see the answer to that first question. Jesus is declaring himself to be the one who gives us what we really need. Life. Significance. Value. Security. Fullness. And he is to be fed on... continually taken in so that we might have this life.

That's who he is. He's the one who has declared himself to be the bread of life—the thing we need most desperately.

Let's get real practical here. How do you get that bread that you desperately need? Well, if you aren't a Christian this morning, if you look at your life and realize that what you've been presenting to God is a list of your own accomplishments. Or if you have begun to see the depth of your need and cry out for someone to help. Or if you are simply coming to know the deep longing for connection with God but you don't know what to do about it... let me invite you to cry out to Jesus right now. Tell him you want the bread that will never stop feeding you. That you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner, not worthy of God's acceptance...but that you see the Grace and mercy that Christ offers... cry out to him now.

And if you are a Christian, then the solution is really similar. You come to feed on Jesus where he has said he'll be found. And here are 3 ways—connect to Him. Connect to each other. Connect to the world around you. He has told us that we connect to him through His Word. His table. Through prayer. And he's told us that we are called to be fed in *community*, as we connect with each other. And we also see that this is a meal to be shared, so we connect with the world around us, with our neighbors and co-workers, friends and relatives.

How do we get that bread that we most desperately need? As one writer puts it, “we just come to him, and then come again, and again, and again...”