

“Jesus, The Bread of Life”  
John 6:35–40  
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Prayer:

Father, as we break of the bread of Your Word will You feed us with the bread of Your Son. We confess as we approach this time that we have sought to be satisfied in so many other things. Father, show us again how Your Son is the only true Bread of heaven. I pray this in Christ’s Name, Amen.

I am excited to study God’s Word, for any other reason than it’s just fun. It is fun to open God’s Word to study it and see the treasures that God has for us. We are going to work our way through John 6 in this study as we look at Christ, the Bread of Life, and it may be a familiar passage to some.

On a personal note, before we look at this passage I am the director of the Briarwood Fellows here at Briarwood Presbyterian Church. The Briarwood Fellows exists to develop the next generation of future leaders for the market place. So we are preparing for our next class of fellows and there are two things I would like prayer for. The two critical components of our ministry is one all of our fellows work in the marketplace as we help them find 30 hour a week internships in their field. This not only allows them to start their career but it allows us a context in which we train in Christian marketplace leadership and a theology of work. A request is we need a couple more internships for our incoming fellows.

In addition, our fellows come from all over the United States and when they come here they live with families who are a part of our church. We can’t do this program without host families and two this also creates the context where they live out the Gospel life of a family. So the other request is prayer for more host homes. If you are interested please contact me here at Briarwood. We are really excited about this new class of fellows and their arrival.

Now to our text. John 6 is the feeding of the 5,000 but we know that there is probably more like 10,000 here at this gathering. Jesus has been ministering throughout the day and it gets impossible for the crowd to disperse and go back home. The Disciples notice this problem and Christ having compassion then performs the miracle of feeding this group with the bread from heaven by using bread and fish. That is the context of where we are going to begin. So let’s start by looking at John 6.

There is a particular word that will be used often throughout this text that is important. That is the word sign and the significance of signs. John 6:14–15 says [14] When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “*This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!*” [15] *Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

As we look further into this passage I want to set the cultural and historical context of this passage. Just as any society the Middle Eastern world would have been organized with different groups. For instance there would be groups of social classes, sects, affinity groups, etc. that would be seen during this time as well.

The cultural elites would be those like the Sadducees who had a Jewish heritage but had adopted Greek culture. They were often the land owning class who had adopted Greek thought. Then there would be the political elite which would be those who were associated with Rome or

the Herods who were the puppet kingdom of Rome back then. There would be the religious elites which were those associated with the High Priests or the priesthood and we know as the Pharisees.

These final two classes would most likely be the people who would make up this gathering that Jesus feeds. One of these classes is what I call the frustrated disenfranchised. These would be people who would feel some degree of oppression where they had felt like they had been pushed aside and others would use power against them which would cause their frustration and anger. They wanted to push against the status quo and even wanted to bring upheaval to the status quo of the government even if it meant through force.

Groups like the Zealots would be included in this class of people. Peter was a Zealot and at the end of Jesus' life and ministry Peter pulls out a knife and cuts off the ear of a guard who was in the crowd to come and arrest Jesus in the Garden. Peter was packing heat, why? It was because he was a part of the Zealots who wanted to take the kingdom by force.

There is another group that is indicated in the John 6 text and that is the poor. These people could be bond servants or slaves, the lame or the sick but most likely they were hand to mouth, working class people. So it is these two groups that we get a sense that Jesus is talking to and have been a part of this miracle of the feeding.

So now let's take a look at the grammatical context. In the previous chapter, John 5, we get a clue about the text in John 6. We call Matthew, Mark and Luke the synoptic Gospels and the reason for that is because they tell an orderly and chronological account of Jesus' life and ministry. John's Gospel is a bit different. Though his Gospel is in broad chronological order, John is less concerned about giving an orderly account but making a polemic, an argument. John is writing in such a way to prove a point. That point is the Divine nature of Jesus' life and ministry.

Why is that important? Because of the way John put his accounts together we see the need to ask the question why he put it that way and that's important. What point is he trying to make? Sometimes John would put stories, narratives or texts together that are repetitive in nature where they prove a theme or an idea through emphasis of repetition. Other times he would make contrasts and in his juxtaposition intention, he would then prove a point. In this John 6 text he is going to make a point and then prove that point in how he has demonstrated it.

So in John 5 toward the end of the chapter Jesus is talking about the witnesses of His Divine nature and He is condemning the religious. John 5:42–45 says [42] *But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. [43] I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. [44] How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? [45] Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your **hope**.*

Jesus will demonstrate in this passage that this crowd of people are putting their hope in something. That is what brings us to this idea of the Prophet. When Jesus ascends to the top of this high place preaching declaratively and authoritatively and performs a miracle where He produces bread seemingly from heaven, this crowd would be familiar with Deuteronomy 18. In Deuteronomy 18 Moses himself said that there was going to come One like him and that would be the true Savior, Messiah and Deliverer.

So these people in this John 6 text see Jesus speaking the way He did, acting the way He did and performing this sign and miracle, it ignited this anticipation and expectation in their hearts to the point they said "Surely this is Him, the Prophet, the One we longed for and have

been waiting for.” Then something peculiar happens. They try to make Him King. Jesus recognizing that they want to force Him to be King leaves to go to the mountains. A question needs to be asked here.

How are they going to do that? I guess they could say ‘Jesus, we’re going to kill You if You don’t become our King’ but how were they actually going to make Jesus King? Were they going to overthrow the Roman government? Did they think they could topple Herod’s puppet kingdom? Were they going to reestablish a new temple? How did they think they were going to do this? The Scripture doesn’t tell us but it does give us a little insight at the insatiable nature of this desire and hope they had.

The principle the Bible tells us is that our hearts are a deep well spring of desire. It shows us that whatever we think will save us we will put our hope in. It also shows us that whatever we put our hope in, what we believe will save us, we will give it permission to lord or rule over us and that’s what these people were doing. With that in mind let’s move on in our text of John 6.

It seems as if this next portion of Scripture doesn’t fit but again we have to ask ourselves why John put this here. John 6:16–20 says *[16] When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, [17] got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. [18] The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. [19] When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. [20] But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” [21] Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.*

When I was preparing for this study initially I couldn’t get my head around why this was embedded in the story other than the fact that it just happened. Imagine hovering above the Sea of Galilee at this moment. It was getting late in the day and it’s possible it is already dark by this time. You can see the contrast in which John is showing here. In one area here you have the crowd that has gathered and we imagine they are in camps there spending the night, why? It was because it was too late for them to disperse and go home and that is why Jesus and His Disciples fed them. Plus we know they are going to be there early the next day so we assume that they are still gathered there.

Then we see that Jesus goes up onto a mountain to be alone to pray and His Disciples eventually get in a boat to row across the sea because Jesus had told them to do this. In the other accounts of the Gospels we get more detail. So here we see a contrast where this crowd that has gathered with all these false expectations, afterward Jesus goes off to pray and the Disciples, obeying what Jesus has told them even though they are not entirely certain about what is happening, as they get in the boat to cross the sea.

We are at a place that I call a sermon within the sermon. As I prayed through this I thought there are people who need to hear this. From the accounts of Matthew and Mark we know that from where Jesus is praying He can see the Disciples rowing in the boat and fighting against the wind. In Mark it tells us that as Jesus sees them not making much progress He goes to them. From this we can see three points.

One is that Jesus prays. It tells us in the Book of Hebrews that Jesus is always making intercession for us. One is He does this by His blood as He makes priestly intercession for us and two he does this by praying on our behalf. I have often wonder how my prayers for me look and sound like Jesus’ prayers for me. Jesus is praying.

Secondly, Jesus is looking. Many of you right now are rowing against the wind in your life. Whether it's an aging parent, your own failing health, a situation with your children or something at work, it's something you are rowing and waiting on and Jesus sees it. In those moments we have He often feels the most distant but He is not for He is watching.

In this third point I hope you find the most comfort. Thirdly, when you are rowing against the wind Jesus is walking on water. In the other accounts of this passage you find that Jesus is about to walk past them as the Disciples are rowing feverishly against the wind. What an interesting image to think they are rowing along and then look over and say 'There's Jesus!' I wonder why that is. Again it's that contrast with the difficulty of them rowing against the wind on the eve of Jesus walking on water. Boy, I sure find comfort in that for when I'm rowing against the wind Jesus is walking on water.

Now let's get back to our main text, our main theme here. John 6:22–26 says [22] *On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. [23] Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. [24] So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.*

[25] *When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" [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.* Jesus knew their intentions.

Some of them had political aspirations and they thought 'here is the One who is finally going to set things right and our Man is going to be in the office.' Others had economic intentions which were simply if this Man can make bread like this then we're in the money. We'll never go hungry again. Some were there just for the spectacle of it but nonetheless Jesus knew their intentions.

The point I want to make here is for you to notice how they sought Him out. They realize Jesus wasn't here and there is boat missing. He and His Disciples must have gone across the sea. Let's go after them. They were so intent on making Him a King that they were willing to pursue Him. That is the next point. You and I will always live for what we long for. These people ordered their behavior and were doing what they thought it would take to get what they wanted because you always live for what you long for. You will aim your life at the things you think will save you. You will order your ways around the things you believe is going to make you okay. That is what you will put your hope on.

I want to make this more practical. Some years ago my wife and I were doing a running program. We lived in Maryland where I was pastor there. It was cold because we were doing it in the middle of the winter. I had a routine with the things I used for when I ran. I had gloves, a hat and earphones I used that I put inside the hat so I wouldn't lose them. Do any of you have headphones and phone charger wars at your house? It is a constant theme in my house. So I have had a busy day but want to get home so I can get my run in and after I get changed to run I go get my gloves, my hat and my earphones which should be in my hat so I can listen to a podcast and my earphones are not there. So I called my wife because I knew she was running that day and had probably taken my headphones.

I don't remember exactly how our conversation went but all I remember was when I hung up the phone my last sound before hanging up was 'uuuggghhh.' Later that day after I was convicted, confessed and repented of my sin, I began to think 'why did I do that'. I began to realize it wasn't really about the headphones or that I thought she took the headphones but it was

about looking for the headphones because looking for the headphones is what took up my time and I didn't want to waste my time because I had more important things to do. The reason I was so concerned about these more important things is because I thought I was more important and it was my time that was being wasted.

The reason I share that is because we need to see the thread that links our behaviors with our desires. It is here that takes us to a deeper place of repentance. Paul says this in Romans 7:15, *[15] For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* So if you are in the Spirit you have a love/hate relationship with sin. Yes, when you sin you hate it but you did it because you love it. James 1:14 says *[14] But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.*

So when I come to Jesus and confess my sin it is one thing to say 'Lord, forgive me of my sin' but it is another thing when I say 'Lord, forgive me for loving my sin.' That's where we see the deep transforming power of the Gospel. It's not just that we sin or love sin but He wants to change what we love. The power of the Gospel changes what we love. So we see this principle at work; what you live for is what you long for.

So here's the good news. If you long for the glory of God you will live for the glory of God. If you long to see the nations come to Christ you will live for the nations to come to Christ. When you long for people to be discipled in the faith you will live for people to be discipled in the faith. When you long to see your family be fruitful and flourish you will live to serve your family. When you long to see things that are wrong in your community made right you will live for justice. You live for what you long for.

The beauty in the Good News is that Jesus lived for what He longed for. He lived for His Father's glory. He lived for the Gospel to go forth. He lived to see the poor cared for. He lived to see the unjust made right. The reality is that Jesus didn't just live for the reality of those things or lived for what He longed for, but Jesus died for what He longed for. So we see this infallible principle in our life that we live for what we long for.

Let's go back to the text where Jesus will address the crowd again. John 6:27–34 says *[27] Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.* [28] *Then 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."* [30] *So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?"* [31] *Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'* [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. [33] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* [34] *They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."*

I have one wish. I pray there is this drive-thru movie theater in heaven where I have this magical remote so that I can just fast-forward and watch what it is we read about because here is what I am often interested in knowing. As I read the words on the page I often wish I could have seen Jesus' face when He said it. Can you imagine what Jesus was thinking here? You want a sign? What more do I have to do? I just fed around 10,000 people with two loaves of bread and a few sardines, what else do you want from Me? They want a sign.

Here's the point. I think you will relate to this. Just like them we are often blind to the deep and animating desires of our own heart. We place our hope in what we believe will save us and then we even order our lives around it, but we're often blind while we do it. When I lived in

Colorado I used to climb mountains. I was sitting on top of a mountain one day having a conversation with a good friend.

My friend was in a unique situation. He had lived the tech boom dream. This came about in the late 90s and early 2000's. The tech boom dream was to start a technology company, grow it, make it successful, sell it to a large corporation and make a lot more money. That's exactly what he did. He sold it for a clean million dollars and then after that he went to working doing the exact same job he had always done now making more money that included stock options. Sounds like a pretty sweet gig, doesn't it?

I'll never forget, sitting on top this mountain, looking out on the view, my friend said 'we can never go back.' I said 'What, I'm going to have some Gatorade and head back to the truck but I don't know about you. What do you mean by that?' He said 'Me and my wife had all these aspirations, all these things we wanted to do but because of all the money that I've made we have built this lifestyle and there is no way we could ever do them now. I could never give up what I have now to go do that.' We can never go back.

A year later, I found out that he was having an affair with another leader in their Sunday school class and that his wife was having an affair with her husband. While they tried to make it work they eventually divorced and I can't help but think there was a connection. Somewhere along the line as he was living out this desire and ordering his life on that hope, all the while he was blind to it. If you were to ask him today was it worth the trade and would he do it again, all the while he was blind to it.

I think a point here is unless God's Spirit opens eyes and turns the light bulb on you will always be blind. That is the truth for you. I pray that as you read this today Jesus is turning the light bulb on in your mind so that maybe for the first time it is starting to make sense. What about those who have walked with Jesus? I am concerned that those who have walked with Jesus for a while, can become spiritually blind. I want to close by making these two points.

The Scriptures say that the Word is a mirror in which we can gaze into and see ourselves. How is your time in the Word? I normally instruct young people to think of their time in the Word like a healthy breakfast. I love oatmeal with maple syrup, brown sugar and some walnuts on top. I think about how good it is, it's nutritious and I want to consume it. If I think about time in the Word like a filet mignon then most mornings it's really not that way, but sometimes it is. Sometimes God gives you that little sweetness every now and again. So think of your time in the Word as a wholesome, nourishing meal to feed on God's Word.

Perhaps some of you reading this fall into the other ditch, where your time in the Word can become like brushing your teeth. Yep, got out of bed, made my bed, brushed my teeth, check! I read my Bible, Chicken Soup for the soul, check! We are busy people, I get it. Yet the thing that most of you need is a second cup of coffee, not just to wake you up but that you have more time to sit, simmer and savor Jesus offered in the Scriptures to you, to engage the Word. Lord, show me who I am today as a real offering of myself, an exposing of myself. Lord, I tend toward blindness so show me today.

There is another thing that is important that both the Scriptures and our experience demonstrate what wars against spiritual blindness. That is genuine relationships that really know you. I am talking about men and women who really know you and have the freedom to ask. I am so thankful for men like this in my life who just have an open policy to ask and I have the freedom to share. God has used those men mightily in my life. So it is God's Word and relationships that help us war off against blindness.

Lastly, John 6:35–37 says [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. [36] But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. [37] All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*

It is not your political power or religious power or cultural power or those false hopes and aspirations or those wrong expectations or those things that you built your life on or the things that have animated your choices or the things that you are aiming at that satisfies you. It’s Me who satisfies.

When I was in college there was a sitcom on T.V. that I’m not endorsing although it was pretty funny, but in this particular episode if you went to this particular restaurant and ordered soup, if you didn’t order the soup in just the right way the guy behind the counter would say ‘No soup for you.’ If you didn’t ask just the right way you didn’t get the soup and you left hungry and shamed. Jesus never says ‘no soup for you.’ Jesus says ‘If you’re hungry and you recognize your real hunger and you come to Me as the One who only and truly is the Bread of Heaven who really can satisfy, I will never cast you out.’ That is Good News church!

In conclusion, John 6:38–40 says [38] *For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. [39] And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. [40] For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*

Notice the direction of this passage. Over and over again in this text we hear ‘I have come from heaven to earth, the Father has sent Bread from heaven to earth’ for the direction is always from heaven to earth. It is never the other way around – from earth to heaven, why? It is because it is always the grace and goodness of God that is unmerited that falls on us who has set our hopes, dreams, desires, expectations, selling everything else in this world to save and satisfy us and it is His grace that pursues us and to satisfy us in His Son. That is Good News! Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, we love You and we thank You that You have come and sought us out that You might show the glory and wonder of Your satisfying grace that when we have sought so many false satisfactions and expectations and built our hope on so many other things, You have pursued us to show the glory of Your Son that He is the only One who can satisfy. Help us look upon the Son. Help us to believe it Lord Jesus, Amen.