

Recognizing What Really Matters
John 6:26-36 2021

John 6:26-36 (New Revised Standard Version)

Jesus answered them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.’ Then they said to him, ‘What must we do to perform the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’ So they said to him, ‘What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

When I went to work for a fairly large Fortune 1000 corporation,
after my first few months, I met with my boss for a review,
and I noticed that she was going over my expense account reports.
I’d tried to be frugal, but maybe my business expenses were too high.

Then she looked up and said,
“There’s no way that you can do your job the way we want it done,
without spending at least a thousand dollars each week.
I want you to take your clients out to nicer restaurants,
and I want you to start staying in more upscale hotels.
We are the industry leader and you’ve got to project that image.”

It was expected that I would take clients out to the best restaurants,
not that they would do business with us to get a free meal,
but so that in the quieter atmosphere of a nicer restaurant,
they could relax and concentrate without interruption,
while I explained why and how doing business with us
would help their company grow & be more profitable...

... and that was way more significant than just getting a free meal.

Jesus fed a huge crowd on the hillside with loaves and fishes.
From a boy’s meager lunch, after everyone had eaten their fill,
there had been enough fragments left over to fill 12 baskets.
It was a sign of God’s provision and grace in great abundance.

Later, in our passage today, when the crowd catches up with Jesus,
he recognized that they’re focused was on another free lunch. vs. 26

Jesus answered them, very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw **signs**, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

Now the word, “sign” is a very important detail in this passage
because a sign is used to point to something beyond itself.

In John, the feeding of the 5000 is called a sign, **not a miracle**,

because the point wasn't just to fill all those bellies with food,
but to point beyond the event itself
toward the gracious and loving nature of God,
who sent Jesus Christ to give us eternal life.

Typical of conversations found in the Gospel of John,
Jesus tries to redirect the crowd's attention
with **a warning that they are focused on the wrong bread.**

Rather than food for the belly, seek **"food that endures"**...
or more literally, **"food that abides"**... vs. 27

Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."

So then in the next verse, the conversation continues, vs. 28

Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?"
What do we have to do to qualify for this gift from God?

Do you see the ironic twist here?

Jesus, the bread of life, the gift of God's grace is already there,
he's standing right in front of them, and they are asking,
what is the work that God requires us to do?

What sort of work must we do to deserve and qualify for God's grace?

The answer: You don't earn it or deserve it, and you can't qualify for it. vs. 29

Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, **that you believe** in him whom he has sent."

The lesson is about the nature of grace and our God who gives it.

Grace is all about what God accomplishes for us.

We simply receive, we trust and then we respond.

In the Gospel of John, "believe" is another very important word,
and is way more than simply accepting certain facts as truth.

In Greek, "believe" is related to the word "trust"
and refers to **where** we place our loyalty and commitment.

And the specific verb tense in the Greek means,
"continue the process of believing, don't stop trusting God."

To believe, is to trust God's grace and promises, then to respond,
as a part of God's healing and saving mission to this world,
as an act of gratitude toward the one who first loved us.

In calling them to believe he is making two critical points:

1st Jesus is trying to shift their focus
away from worrying about their next meal,
to the more important truth of God's promises and grace.

2nd Jesus is trying to shift their focus away from human effort
and doing good works to earn or deserve God's favor,
to simply recognizing, receiving & trusting God's grace.

In the John story, the crowd is still confused,
and so they ask, that if indeed Jesus was sent by God,
then they want to see a sign, they want to see some proof.

Still focused on bread for the belly, they connect feeding the 5000

with manna eaten in the wilderness during the exodus... vs. 30-31

So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them **bread from heaven** to eat.'"

So after the feeding of the 5000, the crowd was thinking
that maybe Jesus was the new and improved Moses, version 2.0,
who would provide them with manna or bread from now on.

They were still focused on how to get another a free-lunch.

Typical of John's Gospel, Jesus moves the conversation yet deeper.

Using their phrasing, bread from heaven their ancestor ate,
Jesus points out that manna was from God, not Moses,
just as he was send down from God,
the bread of life that came down from heaven,
the true bread that endures ... the bread that abides...

... and so it's both Jesus provides the bread and Jesus is the bread.

Jesus himself is the gift from God who gives eternal life. vs. 32-33

Then Jesus said to them, Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Still focused on a free lunch, on more bread for their bellies, vs. 34

They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

**The point of this passage is not about the physical bread they ate,
but the mercy and graciousness of the God who freely gives it...
... for our daily provisions are merely the wrappings
around God's blessings & gifts of love and grace.**

Jesus was trying to help them see past
their food-dominated anxiety and fear of scarcity,
and to trust the life-transforming promises of God.

Don't settle for bread to eat when God intends so much more for us.

Life is not about bread that can only satisfy for a short while,
but it's knowing that God feeds and nurtures our souls forever,
and that Jesus is the eternal bread of life, who abides... vs. 35

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

That is not to say that God is unconcerned with the material world,
or that God views our physical needs and desires as trivial,
but that God has so much more and far better for us,
and blessings far beyond the materialism of this world.

The crowd did not recognize or see, understand or appreciate
that something far greater than eating bread had occurred.

**And having missed the point, Jesus continues urging them to seek
something deeper to hunger for more than just food for the belly.**

We too can get out of focus, side-tracked and distracted sometimes.

Our God intends for our lives to be rich, productive and meaningful,
for us to know the joy of developing our gifts, our character,

and the satisfaction of lives lived well by serving usefully,

for our efforts to make a real difference in the world,
and to nurture healthy connecting-relationships...
... for our lives to be lived purposefully in joyful preparation
toward the eternal delight, glory and wonder that awaits us.

Yet instead we use our precious and finite **time, effort & resources,**
feeding the wrong cravings of selfish greed, pride, ego and fear,

gathering outward trappings of success to impress other people,

accumulating silly things that will not survive past the grave,
and none of which can satisfy our true and deepest longings,
or provide our life with meaning, purpose or principle.

That is the message of the John 6 passage we read today.

It's not the physical bread that matters, but the God who gives it.
It's not the bread we eat, but the God who nourishes our soul...

... and if we can get that right, we can be secure and trusting in God,
even amid fearful disaster, uncertainty, danger & tragic loss.

In Europe, right after WW II,
there were thousands of displaced, abandoned and lost children
who had suffered unspeakable depravation, horror and hunger.
The Allies set up hospital camps for these broken orphans,
trying to heal them & restore them back to normal living.

These children had been **so** severely starved, terrified and damaged,
that despite excellent care, encouragement and abundant good food,
they were still so terrorized, anxious and fearful,
that memories and nightmares kept them from sleeping.

At one of these children's hospital and care camps
a psychologist came up with a remarkable solution.

Each child was given a piece of bread as a security,
not to be eaten, but to be held while they were sleeping,
as a promise and assurance that there would be something more.

These war-broken children were then able to rest in that assurance,
just as we rest in the assurance of God's grace, love and promises,
as we gather to remember God's promises at the Lord's Table.

At the Lord's Table, as we eat the bread and drink from the cup,
we are symbolically **remembering the hope and promises of God,**
who alone will feed our hunger, our thirst and our longings,
who alone can satisfy our emptiness, our fear and anxiety.

Today at the Table, let the Lord God speak trust and hope to you,
let the bread and cup awaken a ravenous hunger for more Jesus,
and for the full depth of God's love, blessings and grace.

Today at the Table, consider what it means for you, that Jesus said:

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will
never be thirsty.