

Bread of Heaven
John 6:30-36, March 24th, 2024

Do you children remember the story of the Exodus? After 430 years of slavery in Egypt, the Lord saved his people with an outstretched arm and mighty hand by sending 10 terrible plagues. From the rubble of the empire, through the miraculously parted waters of the Red Sea, a million Hebrews followed God in the pillar of cloud and fire into the wilderness, praising Him as they went. But their singing quickly gave way to grumbling as they grew hungry. They cried, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” (Ex 16:3) Despite their ingratitude and faithlessness, the Lord fed them with bread from heaven. Each day, as the morning mist cleared, the Hebrews woke to find the ground blanketed with a fine, flakey manna. It was biscuit white & tasted like honeyed wafers. In Ps 78, Asaph called it “the bread of angels.” By this daily bread, the Lord not only sustained the strength of his pilgrim people for 40 years as they wandered through the wilderness to the Promised Land, he encouraged their hearts with daily tokens of his loving power and provision.

But in our passage this morning we see that manna served an even greater purpose in God’s plan of redemption. It was a billboard pointing forward to the coming of the true bread of life, TLJC, who would save & satisfy the hungry souls of his people forever. ***Jesus is the bread of life.***

First, this passage reveals ***the insatiability of unbelief.*** Last week we watched as the multitudes whom Jesus fed in the wilderness, sailed across the Sea of Galilee seeking Jesus. But like the friend that only calls when they need something, Jesus knew it wasn’t really him they wanted; only what he could give them. MH said “they wanted his loaves, not his love.” So, Jesus urged them to seek instead the imperishable, soul-food which he gives to those who put their trust in him. But the crowds’ response is truly astonishing (30-31).

In the 90’s film, *Hook*, Peter Pan has left Neverland and grown up to become a self-absorbed, cellphone-addicted, workaholic. But when Cpt. Hook kidnaps his children and forces him to return to Neverland, he must convince himself and the Lost Boys who he is if he’s going to save them. With Tinkerbell’s help he squeezes into his old green tights, and recovers his happy-thought-fueled power of flight until at last, the Lost Boys believe in him. Even their leader and Peter’s chief skeptic, Rufio, falls to his knees in surrender, and confesses, “You are the Pan.”

We expect the same or much more from these thousands who saw Jesus’ wonderous healings in Jerusalem, who ate the bread & fish he miraculously multiplied before their eyes, and who now knew that Jesus crossed the stormy Sea of Galilee on foot. *But were they convinced by the abundance of evidence?* No. They were “an evil and adulterous generation [seeking] a sign;” like Pharaoh who witnessed ten irrefutable proofs of God’s existence but still refused to repent, like Judas who watched Christ call Lazarus up from the dead only to betray him anyway, like the Roman soldiers who saw the angel descend and roll the stone away from Christ’s tomb but refused to believe. *In the face of such evidence, how could they doubt Jesus?*

As a high school senior, I dreamed of following in the footsteps of my father & brother to the USNA. I wanted to be a pilot. And as a part of my application, I needed to be medically examined at the local naval base. They checked my lungs, my heart, my ears, and lastly my eyes. The doctor held up a card on which there was a circle filled with multicolor dots. He asked, “*what number do you see?*” “I don’t see any number” I replied. “Just dots.” That was my answer for 18 of the 20 cards he showed me. I learned that day, I’d never fly, not because there was something wrong with the cards, but because there was something wrong with my eyes. The doctor could have shown me a million cards, and still I wouldn’t have been able to read them correctly.

Such is the condition of fallen man. “The god of this world,” Paul said in **2Cor4:4** “has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” What’s worse, not only is man *unable* to see the truth of God’s word and come to Christ in faith, they are *unwilling*, **Rom8:7** “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.” Their hearts are seared shut in rebellion. They love their sin and hate God’s holiness. Though it be written on their hearts, they hate his law. They hate knowing (and they do know) that one day they will stand before God, as we all will, and have to answer for the life they lived.

Is that you this morning; justifying your insatiable unbelief with a “lack” of evidence? Friend you & I both know that it’s not a lack of proof holding you back from Christ, it is your sin. Sin is not just breaking God law, it is any and all want of conformity unto it. The Bible says “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...[buuut]... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9). That means all your sin, guilt, shame can be forgiven forever if you would only look to Christ in faith and to his cross where he bled and died to take away your sins.

There’s a word of instruction for Christians here as well. Sometimes, it’s all too easy to play the Pharisee and look down on our unbelieving neighbors, coworkers and classmates, friends and family members, saying “I thank you O Lord that I am not like them!” Sometimes we think, “*Why can’t they just get it together? Why can’t they change?*” *But if they can’t come to Christ because they can’t see him, because they’re blind, shouldn’t our hearts overflow with pity for them instead? And since the Lord alone can open their eyes to behold both the horrors of wretchedness & the beauty of Christ, shouldn’t we pray for them, asking God to bless our gospel witness to the conversion of sinners?* Yes, we should pity them and pray for them.

Man’s unbelief is insatiable. That means you can no sooner satisfy an unbeliever’s heart with proof than you could fill the Grand Canyon with bbs. It’s not *proof* sinners need, it’s a *person*, the Lord Jesus Christ, **the Bread of Life**. One of the most breathtaking features of John’s gospel is the series of seven, “I Am” statements. These statements encapsulate both the transcendence and immanence of Christ. *Transcendence* refers to God’s otherness, his separateness as the uncreated Creator from the rest of creation. But *immanence* means, “nearness,” “familiarity,” “intimacy.” Every other religion serves a deity that is either transcendent (Allah) *or* immanent (Zeus) but only Christianity praises the God who is both. We see that transcendence in the words “I Am,” “Ego Eimi.” In the Septuagint, that is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible used in Christ’s day, when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and gave his name, he said, “Ego Eimi.” This name refers to God’s eternality and self-sufficiency...like a bush burning without being consumed. But Jesus welds this transcendent divine name to the most familiar, ordinary things: I am the door, way, shepherd, light & this morning, “bread.” He didn’t say filet mignon. He didn’t say gruel. He said bread; the universal fare of all mankind.

Jesus is the heavenly Bread (**32-33**). Heavenly bread is that which is firstly, *of heaven*. It is a spiritual bread which feeds the soul. *You know, you can have a full belly & a hungry soul?* The manna in the wilderness only fed the body, but the true heavenly bread nourishes & strengthens the hungry soul! But this heavenly bread is also *from heaven*. When I was a youth leader, I held a blindfolded taste testing for the students. One of the challenges was to differentiate between a Krispy Kreme and a “regular” glazed donut... by touch, smell & taste every person knew the Krispy Kreme donut, *because there’s nothing else like em!* Well, in an infinitely greater way there’s nothing and no one else like Jesus. As we consider his person and work, as we marvel at his impeccable moral purity and unassailable righteousness, his zeal for God’s word and worship, his gentleness towards the guilt-laden and holy wrath towards the proud and hard-hearted, his miraculous displays of divine power over the elemental forces of nature, and the

authority and truth of his teaching it is abundantly clear that he is not from this world. He is the Everlasting Son of God, come down from heaven to earth, taking to himself, the “true body and reasonable soul” of our authentic humanity. *Why? V33.* To give life to the world.

The ***Life-Giving Bread***. Sometimes, receiving a kindness implies a problem. Occasionally, at church functions where I’ll be speaking closely with lots of people, Jordan will, discreetly hand me a piece of gum and flash a knowing smile. Because sometimes a kind gesture implies a problem. The problem implied by Jesus here is much more grave than stale preacher’s breath. *Why would the bread of God come down from heaven to give life to the world, unless that world, meaning the people in it, were starving and dying from the consuming plague of their sin?* Yet, it is in the face of that death, the just consequences for sin, the Bread of Heaven gives life.

Have you ever made bread? We have fancy equipment today but the basic process is unchanged from the time of Christ. Harvested wheat would be threshed to separate the grain kernel from the husk. That grain would then be poured into a stone basin where a stone wheel would be pulled by a donkey round and round until the grain was ground into a powdery flour. That flour would then be kneaded with water, oil, yeast, and salt, left to rise, and then baked to perfection.

Well, the Bread of Life was made in similar fashion. For upon the cross, as Jesus bore all the sins of his people, he was pulverized and ground into dust beneath the infinitely holy & heavy hand of God till every last sin was paid for. Upon the cross, he was plunged into the heart of hell, the furnace of the wrath of God burning with righteous hatred for evil. We confess, “he descended into hell...” where upon the cross Jesus suffered until all the sins of his people, the fuel of God’s good anger were burned away, and their debt was paid. Manna wasn’t enough to keep the those who ate it from dying. But when we take and feast upon the bread of life in faith, our sins are put to death and we are put to everlasting life with God in paradise.

It’s no wonder those who heard Christ speak of this bread of life said in v.34, “Sir, give us this bread always.” But they still didn’t understand that the true manna was the man, Christ Jesus. And to eat the bread of life was to trust and obey him from the heart. So, Jesus explains in v.35.

Jesus says the bread of life is the last meal you’ll ever need; it satisfies like manna never could. You know, manna had a short shelf life. The morning after manna was gathered, Ex16:20, “it bred worms and stank.” But not Christ. He never grows stale. He is ever fresh. When tempted by Satan in the wilderness Jesus said, “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God,” and though the grass withers and the flower fades, “the word of our God stands forever.”

But there’s one last thing. The more the people ate the manna, the more they grew to hate it. They even cried to Moses in Num21:5, “we loathe this worthless food.” But Christ is different. The more we feast upon him the more we hunger for him. The more we delight ourselves in his grace and glory and goodness the more delicious he becomes to us. That why we can sing, “When we’ve been there 10,000 years bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise then when we first begun.”

Can you smell the fresh baked bread of God’s grace wafting from this passage? Even now Christ Jesus offers you the bread of life. He is offering you himself promising, “I will have you. And I will save you from your sins and satisfy your soul’s deepest hunger with my love forever. If you will have me.” *Will you take him? Will you eat the bread of life?* Jesus said, “whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” “Whoever” means, whatever you’ve done, wherever you’ve been, and however long you’ve been there... Jesus bids you “Come to me. Believe in me.” *What say you?* Cry out to Christ, even now, “Sir, give me this bread, always.”