

## The Bread of Life

Good morning Cornerstone, and welcome to week three in our series entitled “Fixing our eyes on Jesus: finding our focus in uncertain times”. Although physically separated, we are walking together through an unprecedented year full of disruptions that are touching all parts of our lives. Our relationships, our health, our sense of security, our economic well-being, and maybe even our thoughts about God are all being challenged. And now we are entering the next phase of this pandemic as daily we hear reports of new record-breaking case counts and debates about which restrictions on our lives will be implemented next. Each of us has experienced this pandemic in different ways for we are all unique and our circumstances are unique. Maybe you are someone who has enjoyed, like me, the opportunity to spend more time at home with the family you love. Or maybe you are someone who was forced into isolation and have struggled with the loneliness that follows. Maybe you are someone whose job evaporated when the pandemic hit and you are experiencing financial stress. Or maybe your job became even more difficult and complex because of the new world in which we all find ourselves. On that note, I’d like particularly to put a word out on behalf of our staff. I am thankful beyond what mere words can express for each of the member of the team at Cornerstone. Imagine having to transition to an “on-line” only ministry in one week with little to no notice? And yet they did it with grace, hard work, and excellence that makes me shake my head in wonder and thankfulness. And now as they continue to look to the future and walk through the process of discerning what God will call us to next, I tip my hat to all of them, and I’d invite you to show your appreciation at any opportunity you can.

But what do we do in the midst of all this disruption, which touches each of us in different ways? We “**Fix our eyes on Jesus**”. As Pastor Steve reminded us last week, this is Cornerstone’s bedrock statement taken from Hebrews 12:2. Whenever we are stuck or uncertain and we need to know which way to go next as we try to fulfill the vision and mission to which God is calling us, we **fix our eyes on Jesus**. And so, in this sermon series we are focusing our attention on four pictures of Jesus from the book of John. In week one, Pastor Andrew shared about Jesus, our Good Shepherd who cares for and protects each of us. Last

week Pastor Steve taught about Jesus, who calls us friend and calls us to be friends in his example. This week we are going to look at Jesus, who is the “Bread of Life”.

As we begin, I want to take you back several thousand years to when God was first establishing the nation of Israel. Many of us know the story well, but I’ll review it a bit so it is fresh in our memories. Israel was the grandson of Abraham, and had taken his entire family to live in Egypt during a famine that struck the whole Middle East. His family would live there for several hundred years and grow to over a million people who were eventually enslaved by the Egyptians. But the day came when God miraculously saved the children of Israel from Egypt, ultimately parting the sea so they could walk from slavery to freedom. This initial walk brought the Israelites to the Sinai peninsula, a barren wilderness without enough food and drink to support a million people. It is understandable, then, that the Israelites started to worry about where their next meal was coming from.

Kind of like me at this point in the sermon—asking that same deep theological question, “what’s for lunch?” In a completely unscientific survey of myself, I figure it usually takes me about three minutes into the sermon to start thinking about lunch. Sorry guys—I blame the fact that I am usually sitting in the living room during the sermon! I suspect I am not the only one—if you’ve ever thought about lunch during the sermon, why don’t you admit it to whomever you are sitting with, or post it in the chat? And don’t worry, we’ll get you on your way for lunch soon enough.

But what about the Israelites? How were they supposed to eat? Moses took their concerns to God and we pick up the story with God’s response in Exodus chapter 16.

<sup>11</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, <sup>12</sup>“I have heard the Israelites’ complaints. Now tell them, ‘In the evening you will have meat to eat, and in the morning you will have all the bread you want. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’” <sup>13</sup>That evening vast numbers of quail flew in and covered the camp. And the next morning the area around the camp was wet with dew. <sup>14</sup>When the dew evaporated, a flaky substance as fine as frost blanketed the ground. <sup>15</sup>The Israelites were puzzled when they saw it. “What is it?” they asked each other. They had no idea what it was. And Moses told them, “It is the food the LORD has given you to eat.” (Exodus 16:11-15 NLT).

The Hebrew for the question “What is it?” is actually *man hu*, so the Israelites named the food God provided them “manna”. And for forty years, until they finally arrived in the Promised Land, God sent the manna six days a week without fail.

But why are we talking about this in a sermon about Jesus? Well, fast forward to the time of Jesus. The Israelites, once more a conquered people (though this time by the Romans), are once again in need of salvation. In many ways, they are hoping for another Prophet like Moses or perhaps one of the other great prophets like Elijah to lead them to a new deliverance. In fact, if we study the writings of their time, we see that at least some of their teaching expected this new Prophet to provide them with Manna—a daily provision of food just like what God sent in the time of Moses.

And so we come to Jesus. By the time we get to chapter six in the book of John, many people have chosen to follow Jesus—mostly because of the miraculous signs he has performed and the compelling authority with which he teaches. In fact, at the start of chapter six, a crowd of thousands has gathered on the east side of the Sea of Galilee to hear him teach. But the disciples are starting to worry about how they are going to feed them all. Sound familiar? John writes,

<sup>7</sup> Philip replied, “Even if we worked for months, we wouldn’t have enough money to feed them!” <sup>8</sup> Then Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up. <sup>9</sup> “There’s a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?” <sup>10</sup> “Tell everyone to sit down,” Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) <sup>11</sup> Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup> After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, “Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted.” <sup>13</sup> So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves. <sup>14</sup> When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, “Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!” <sup>15</sup> When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself.” (John 6:7-15 NLT)

That night, the disciples and Jesus crossed back to the other side of the lake. But the crowds figured out where they went, and followed them to the synagogue in Capernaum—partly because they had eaten the miraculous food, but partly to try and figure out who this Jesus is. They prod Jesus: “Moses gave our ancestors manna in the wilderness, so what does you have to offer?” Jesus replies that it wasn’t Moses, but God himself provided who the

manna, and besides, their ancestors all died after eating the Manna. But Jesus is offering them a different kind of bread that will give them eternal life. The people begin to argue about whether or not they can trust Jesus. Is he the Prophet that they have been waiting for? Or is he yet another disappointing pretender? Some wonder how they can trust him: “Isn’t he just the son of Joseph, the carpenter?” Finally Jesus cuts off the debate with this declaration, that will be our focus for today:

<sup>47</sup> “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> Yes, I am the bread of life! <sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. <sup>50</sup> Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.” (John 6:47-51 NLT)

This teaching was too hard for some of Jesus’ followers. What could he possibly mean “this bread is my flesh?” Though the day before they had been ready to make him king, today, they are confused and unwilling to accept him, and many leave him:

<sup>67</sup> Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, “Are you also going to leave?” <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter replied, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. <sup>69</sup> We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:66-69 NLT)

The primary issue before us today, is what will we do with Jesus’ declaration that he is the bread of life? Will we, like Peter, decide to put our faith in Jesus? Or will we, like so many in Jesus day, decide that following Jesus is too hard and turn away? To answer that question, I’d like to focus our attention on Jesus’ words in verses 47 to 51 and pose three questions for us to answer together.

### 1. What does Jesus offer us?

The first question is, “What does Jesus offer us?”. When Jesus says I am the bread of life, what exactly is he offering? These verses are very clear.

<sup>47</sup> “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes **has eternal life**. <sup>48</sup> Yes, I am the bread of life! <sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. <sup>50</sup> Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, **will never die**. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread **will live forever**; and this bread, which I will offer **so the world may live**, is my flesh.” (John 6:47-51 NLT)

Four times in our five key verses Jesus says that his offer is **life**—specifically, eternal life. But what does this “eternal life” look like? In the context of chapter six, it must be a life in which Jesus, who provided food for a crowd of thousands, will provide for all of our needs. For most

of us in the modern age, bread is just one of many items we buy at the grocery store—something that some people choose to go without. But in Jesus’ day, bread was a symbol for the basic needs we all share, the most fundamental staple on which we depend for our physical well-being. If you had bread, you would live. If you had no bread, you would die.

But Jesus is trying to get the disciples to think beyond just their stomachs. Since he is the one who created us, he knows *everything* we need—even better than we do. Yes, he knows our physical need for bread, for food and drink, and he will make sure we have those. But we are also spiritual beings, so elsewhere in the book of John Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit, our comforter to walk with us and guide us and remind us that we belong to him. And we are social beings so when we come to Jesus we are joined together into his family, a new family of brothers and sisters in Christ who together form a body that works together to accomplish God’s purpose of establishing his kingdom on earth. He offers us meaning, and purpose and joy and peace. And it is also an eternal life, one in which even death itself has no power over us, one that will continue into forever. What does Jesus offer us when he says “I am the bread of life?” An abundantly full and eternal life. Our second question is a simple one: What does it cost Jesus?

## 2. What does it cost Jesus?

When God sent the Israelites manna in the wilderness, and when Jesus fed thousands by multiplying a few loaves of bread, there was no apparent cost to God. He was, after all, able to create the universe with just a word. But when Jesus offers himself as the Bread of Life—eternal life that is rich and full of God’s love and provision, the cost is very high indeed.

47 “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. 48 Yes, I am the bread of life! 49 Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. 50 Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and **this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.**”

The chances are that many of you know the answer to this question: what did it cost Jesus? In these verses Jesus gives us a hint: “this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, **is my flesh**”. These words that caused so many to turn away from him are not talking about literally eating his flesh. Instead he is speaking symbolically of the offer of his body as a sacrifice for the

forgiveness of our sins. Now is not the time to talk about the sacrificial system in Jesus day, but we do need to pause a moment and recognize that when Jesus called himself the “bread of life” he was offering everything he had for our sake. How far would Jesus go to provide us eternal life—to the cross of calvary where he suffered and bled and died for us. How far would he go to bring us a life that is full of peace and joy and fellowship, to make us his own body? He would give us everything he had. And in a few minutes we will join together in communion, where we pause to remember together the sacrifice that Jesus made for our sakes.

### 3. What does Jesus ask of us?

So Jesus offers us eternal life at the cost of his own life. Our third question concerns our response to him: “What does Jesus ask of us?” The answer: he invites us to believe in him—to believe that he is, in fact, the Bread of Life.

47 “I tell you the truth, **anyone who believes** has eternal life. 48 Yes, I am the bread of life! 49 Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. 50 Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.”

This is both a simple invitation and a vast life changing offer, so we will consider it carefully. What does it mean to “believe in Jesus”? I would suggest it includes at least two things:

- A. First, **“we must get to know who Jesus is”**. For almost twenty years I made a living writing software or managing software teams in the broadcast technology world. But I was never trained for this job; I learned it along the way, on the job. Honestly, I was somewhat embarrassed because my only academic training is actually two degrees in theology, which was always an awkward conversation for me when people started to get to know me professionally. But I remember coming to peace with it a few years ago when I was at a new company, and I was meeting people at one of those terrible social events I would rather not attend. One of the people I met that day was the Head of our radio product group, and I was head of R & D for a new product group. He asked me why, given my role, I only had training in theology. I panicked as usual, then decided I would just give him my honest opinion, which is this, “I think the most important question that every one of us

needs to answer in life is who is God, what is he really like?" And this morning I would pose that very same question to each one of you: who is God? What is he like? Before I answer that question, why don't you take a moment to think about it yourself, or share with those around you, or in digital the chat room. Go ahead. What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of God? Have you shared your thought? Ok. I can tell you how I answer that question: to know who God is, and what he is like, you need only to look at Jesus, because Jesus *is* God, the creator of the whole universe, who came to earth to save us from our sins and give us eternal life. I believe that the God who provided the people of Israel with 40 years' worth of manna in the wilderness, the same God who took five loaves of bread and two fish and fed thousands with it—that same God knows our names, our stories, our every need, and has counted every hair on our heads—in my case, all 238 of them. He loves us with the love of a shepherd and friend—a love that will never fail no matter what we do *because that is who he is*. He is with us through every storm of life, he has forgiven every one of our sins, and if we will put our faith in him today we will be with him forever when we die. That's what I believe. What do you believe? I hope that you too have known the joy that comes with discovering a God who loves you with all his might, but maybe some of you aren't there yet—you are not ready to say, yes, I believe that's who Jesus is. That's cool—I was once with you. But I would invite you NOT to do what so many of the people in Jesus' day did: don't walk away disappointed. Stay engaged, and learn more about Jesus. This really is the ultimate question in life. I would challenge you specifically to read about Jesus. Get a copy of the New Testament and read one (or all) of the Gospels and you will see a picture of Jesus that I believe will truly inspire you to put your faith in him.

- B. But beyond getting to know who Jesus is, there is a second part to believing in the bread of life, which I will call **"putting our faith in him."** To "believe" in Jesus isn't just to agree that something or some list of things is true about him, it is to put our trust in him—to follow him as the disciples did. It is to say with Peter, "where else would we go?" It means making changes in the way we act because of what we believe. It means that in the midst of this crazy Covid year, no matter what comes our way, we trust that Jesus is walking right

beside us, that he loves us, and that he will see us through. It means that even though I don't have a job to go to tomorrow, I trust that Jesus is working out circumstances so that when the time is right, I will find the right job. It means when our kids go off to schools that are doing all they can to keep them safe but are faced with a relentless virus and fiscal, social, and physical limitations, or when they grow up and move out on their own, we spend a lot of time in prayer asking God himself to take care of them because we desperately want to protect them but we can't. But God can. It means when Covid runs around the world killing millions of people, that even though we don't understand why God is allowing it to happen, we fall to our knees and ask him to protect the ones we love. It means when we have been hurt and beaten by life in this broken world, that we throw our lives into Jesus' hands and ask him to carry us through. It means when we trip and fall, we ask him for forgiveness and let him pick us up and set us on our feet again. He is our Good Shepherd and friend who cares for us and gives his life for us. And he is the bread of life, who poured out his own life so that we could have life—eternal and abundant life. Make no mistake, although Jesus has promised us a good life, although he has promised to be the bread that sustains us through life, he has not promised us a life free from trials and tribulations. Which is why these days we need to remember to fix our eyes on Jesus, the Bread of Life. And that is exactly what we are going to do, together, as we move into a time of Communion.

What did it cost Jesus to offer himself as the Bread of Life? It cost him his life. The night before he died, he gathered his closest followers together to share a meal. We often call it the Last Supper. As you get your communion elements ready, I will read the familiar words for us from the book of Matthew:

<sup>26</sup> As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body."

<sup>27</sup> And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, "Each of you drink from it, <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many. (Matt 26:26-28 NLT)



Even though we are all in separate places right now, each with different crackers or bread and juice or wine, these are still symbols of the great sacrifice Jesus made—his broken body and the blood that he shed. And that sacrifice binds us together into his one body—in spite of our separation and it brings us life. So today as we join together in remembering Jesus, I would like to invite each one of us to let go of all the things that trouble us—our concerns for the future, for our loved ones, for the world around us—let go of them at least for this moment, and fix our eyes on Jesus, the bread of life. Together, as the body of Christ, with our eyes fixed on Jesus, let's join now in remembering his sacrifice.