

The Bread That Satisfies, Part 1 (John 6:22-35)

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I want you to think carefully about something with me. Why are you here? What are you seeking? What are you hoping your presence in this gathering will achieve or accomplish? Perhaps we could broaden the question even further. If you consider yourself a Christian, why are you following Jesus? What compels you to do the things Christians do? To read the Bible, pray, worship with God's people, give to the work of the gospel, serve in the church, or submit to God's Word as your rule for life?

I don't ask that sort of motivational question because it's the start of the new year. I ask it because the God with whom we have to do is not swayed by outward appearances. He is a God who looks on the heart. He is not content with what you do. He is just as—not more—concerned with why you are doing it.

People identify as Christians for all sorts of reasons. For some, it's a family thing, it's part of the culture in which you grew up. For others, it's a therapeutic thing. You find comfort in the notion of a God who loves you unconditionally and accepts you no matter what. For some, it's a matter of convenience. Towing the Christian line makes your spouse happy, keeps your parents off your back, or lets you date the guy or girl of your dreams. For others, it's a matter of religious duty. You feel like a better person when you're doing the things good Christians are supposed to do.

And for still others, it's a way of trying to control your life. You know, if you give God his due, he's probably more likely to watch your back or send a few extra blessings your way. I don't know if any of those scenarios apply to you. The Lord does. But I do know this. Jesus offers you a far greater reason to follow him as a Christian. It's called the gift of himself.

In every one of the examples I just mentioned, who is Jesus? He's a means to some other end. We're trying to use him to get the cultural acceptance, moral assurance, or material blessings we crave. In Jn 6:22-35, Jesus shatters our paltry notions of his identity and worth by declaring he is not a means. He is the great and glorious end.

Yes, he came down from heaven to give life to the world (v. 33), but that life is found in him. For he is "the bread of life" (v. 35). And that spiritual reality has serious implications for our life. It doesn't just sit there as a nice religious idea. It insists on something. It demands something. **Make trusting Jesus the supreme ambition of your life for he alone can satisfy your soul.** Why is that the case? Jn 6 gives us several reasons.

1) PURSUING THE SATISFACTION OF YOUR SOUL IS YOUR MOST IMPORTANT WORK

In John 6:22, a hoard of people is chasing Jesus. On the previous evening, he miraculously fed a crowd of thousands with only five loaves of bread and two fish. But now they can't find him anywhere. They didn't know he literally walked across the Sea of Galilee during the night.

When they finally track Jesus down in Capernaum they ask, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" The question seems innocent enough. But Jesus knows their hearts. And because he loves them, he turns the conversation away from transportation logistics and squarely onto their reason for "following" him in the first place. V. 26, "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 knows it wasn't a spiritual desire that brought them running after him. It was their full stomachs. What was the sign of feeding the five thousand intended to accomplish? It was meant to do what signs are supposed to do – to direct the hearts of the people to believe and trust the deity, power, and sufficiency of Jesus. But it didn't do that. Why not? Because the crowd wasn't interested in the deity, power, or sufficiency of Jesus. They wanted bread and apparently Jesus could create it on demand.

So Jesus calls them out on it. "Guys, you have no genuine spiritual interest in me. You are consumed with one thing – satisfying your bodily desires, in this case, your desire for food." It was the governing ambition of their life. All I want is a comfortable place to live, plenty to eat, entertainment on demand, a rewarding job, financial security, decently behaved kids, friends who accept me for who I am, and sex whenever I feel like it. Is that really too much to ask of you, Jesus? I don't have to be rich. I'm not looking for anything crazy. That's all I need.

To which Jesus says, "You have no idea what you really need." V. 27, "Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life..." Translation? Don't be a fool. Don't choose a fleeting pleasure. Don't choose a satisfaction that quickly fades. Don't spend the best of your time, energy, and resources working to feed your mortal body that will soon perish. Devote the first and best of your time, energy, and resources to the satisfaction and nourishment of your immortal soul.



When Jesus says, "Do not labor for the food that perishes," he's not discouraging physical work to earn a physical paycheck to provide for physical needs. Work is a good thing. God created us to work, and we can bring him great glory through our work. So what is Jesus doing? He's challenging our priorities.

What is your supreme ambition, friend? What is your primary focus in life? What do you fall asleep desiring and wake up eager to pursue? Which kind of work functionally calls the shots, governing how you spend your time and money? The physical work of caring for your mortal body or the spiritual work of nourishing your immortal soul?

Know this. If you choose the former, if you devote your life to the American dream you are wasting your life no matter how many people applaud or esteem you. The next 40, 50, or 60 years of your life on earth are nothing compared to the weight of eternity.

The fact Jesus exhorts us to "labor" for the food that endures, for a spiritual satisfaction that lasts, is instructive. It tells us the activity necessary to satisfy our soul is going to feel like work. It will feel like hard, active, sweaty, painful, tiring labor. It will require tremendous effort on your part.

1 Tim 6:12 concurs. "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called..." Matt 11:12, "The kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force." 1 Cor 9:24, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it."

We forget as much to our peril. We find our souls strangely dissatisfied and think, "God must not be real," or, "God doesn't love me," or, "This whole Christianity thing works for some people but not me," when the real problem is our unwillingness to do the necessary spiritual work.

We're spiritually lazy. We want the unshakeable joy of a heart that is at peace, a heart that is at rest, a heart that is satisfied, both now and for all eternity, but we refuse to do the hard work necessary in order to feed our souls. We need to stop concluding our spiritual dissatisfaction is an indictment of the goodness of God and take a humble look in the mirror. Pursuing the satisfaction of your soul is hard labor.

There's an important application here for those of you who are retired or about to retire. The most important work in your life isn't going away. In fact, it is the greatest work God has called you to, friend, the labor of seeking the satisfaction of your soul. Don't think of

your retirement as a break from work. It is an opportunity to double-down on the most critical and valuable work you will ever accomplish.

So what must we do to achieve it? Exactly how do we “labor for the food that endures to eternal life?”

2) THE SATISFACTION OF YOUR SOUL IS ONLY OBTAINED THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS

V. 28, “Then they said to [Jesus], ‘What must we do, to be doing the works of God?’” What sort of labor does God require in order to experience a joy and satisfaction that runs deeper than your last vacation, your last date, or your last purchase on Amazon? Jesus tells them. V. 29, “This is the work of God...” This is how you secure the satisfaction of your soul. “You believe in him whom he has sent.” That’s the work. That’s the labor. Locate your faith, fix your trust, in the person and work of Jesus.

Why? Because the satisfaction of your soul isn’t something you can create or merit for yourself, friend. It is something that is given to you as a gift. What does Jesus say at the very end of v. 27? Labor 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.” As the Father’s authorized representative, the Son has exclusive responsibility and authority to satisfy your soul. No one else can. No one else will.

And the satisfaction of soul he offers isn’t earned. It’s received, which is why Jesus says in v. 29 that laboring for as much is an act of faith. It’s coming to God with the humility of an empty hand, a heart that says, “Jesus, I am done with trying to satisfy myself. I am done with looking to other people and things to satisfy me. I need you to give me what I do not deserve and cannot earn. I need you to be my joy. I want you to be my delight. Give me life and forgive me for ever thinking I could find it anywhere else.

Isa 55:1-3 is a beautiful picture of why we should trust Jesus to satisfy our souls. Listen to the invitation the Lord holds out to his people. “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live...”



How do you buy something if you have no money? If the price has already been paid. That's how. And it has, friend. Jesus has completely and decisively accomplished all that is necessary to satisfy your soul for all eternity. But we must lay down our material demands, lay down our confidence in our own good works, lay down the arrogant insanity of telling the Author of Life that we know where to find life and it has nothing to do with him. We must lay all of that down and say, "Jesus, I despair of satisfying my own soul. Do it for me, Lord. I need you. I trust you." Not once or twice, but every day.

Today, I choose to believe in you as a husband, trusting that you will complete the good work you have begun in my wife. I choose to believe in you as a father, trusting that my children's future rests firmly in your wise and sovereign hands. I choose to believe in you as a pastor, trusting that your power builds this church. You will provide every resource that is needful to fulfill the mission you have given to us.

I choose to believe in you as a citizen, trusting that no matter what the "other" political party does, you reign. I choose to believe in you as I live with a broken body, trusting that one day you will make me whole. I choose to believe in you as I live in a broken world, trusting that one day your perfect justice will right every wrong.

The satisfaction of your soul is only obtained through faith in Jesus. It is the great work of the Christian life. Here's the most important question you can answer in whatever situation you find yourself in 2021: What does faith in Jesus, wholehearted, obedient trust in the Son of God look like right now?

The Jews heard Jesus' call to trust him, but they weren't persuaded. "Trust you, Jesus? Believe you? That's the secret to experiencing a satisfaction of soul that endures forever! If that's the case, then you're going to have to give us a sign. We need to see a work that proves that God sent you just like he sent Moses. Moses gave us manna in the wilderness, bread from heaven, 6 days a week, for 40 years. Show us what you've got. What work do you perform?"

It's a shockingly arrogant response. Why? Because they had just witnessed firsthand the 4th major sign in John's gospel, the feeding of the five thousand. Jn 6:14 flat out says the crowd "saw the sign that he had done." It was enough for them to chase him down for more bread. But it failed to convince them Jesus was worthy of their trust. In fact, on that front, it was as if Jesus had done no sign at all!

The pride of human reason is never satisfied, friends. When we're living in unbelief, we fancy ourselves as spiritually objective. "I don't trust Jesus because I don't see a good

reason to trust Jesus. Therefore, there isn't a good reason to trust Jesus and I'm not going to trust Jesus. If you want to take a blind leap of faith, go for it. I'm going to stick with what I can see." Here's what we forget. Unbelief actually keeps us from seeing Jesus for who he really is. It blinds us, which means left to ourselves, we will never choose to trust Jesus.

Jesus refuses to play along with their unbelief. He knows full well no number of "signs" is sufficient to change their hardened hearts. So he directs their attention back to the only source of spiritual satisfaction and the faith we need to experience it – God himself. V. 32, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven," implying it was ultimately God himself who fed the Israelites in the wilderness. "But my Father gives you the true bread from heaven."

What is the true bread from heaven? What is the true spiritual food that completely satisfies the soul of man, the antitype to which the physical bread in the wilderness, manna, pointed all along? The bread of God (v. 33) isn't a thing, an experience, or an achievement. It's a "he." It's a life-giving person. The food that endures to eternal life is "he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Like many of us, the only needs the Jews see and thus the only satisfaction they can imagine, is crassly material. Where's the bread? So Jesus replies in v. 35 with a magnificent summary of what he's been saying all along and will develop for the rest of the chapter. Listen to me. "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

3) JESUS SATISFIES YOUR DEEPEST LONGINGS THROUGH THE GIFT OF HIMSELF

When Jesus says, "I am the bread of life," he's saying that the self-existent Creator, the God who revealed himself to Moses in Ex 3:14 as the great I AM and took on human flesh in Mary's womb, isn't just true or right or real. He is the One who satisfies the deepest desires of our heart. He is the only source of true life. He sustains, strengthens, and thrills our souls with the ravishing fullness of his divine perfections.

In Jesus we encounter the God who knows us fully and loves us completely, whose perfect justice will not allow the guilty to go unpunished, and whose boundless grace took our punishment upon himself. It's what his life, death, and resurrection accomplished. He made a way for sinners like us to know the joy of relationship with the infinitely glorious God through faith in Jesus.



For there is only thing that will ultimately satisfy your soul, friend. It's not a spouse, a child, a job, a cash windfall, a new body, or even a sin-free world. It's God himself. He is the food and drink the Lord promises at the end of Isa 55:3, "Come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David." Covenant relationship with the eternal God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He is the summit of all glories, the crown of all satisfactions, the pleasure to which every good thing points, and his name is Jesus.

The language of v. 35 couldn't be stronger. There are two words in Greek that mean "no." When you want to say "no" in the strongest possible terms, you put them together. Jesus does that not once, but twice in v. 35. Translated literally, whoever comes to me shall certainly not hunger and whoever believes in me shall certainly not thirst, no, not ever. He's not exaggerating, friends. It's true.

If you're not a Christian, take care that you don't condemn a pleasure you have never experienced. For there is a satisfaction in knowing Jesus that the greatest suffering in this world cannot take away. He satisfies our desire for love. He satisfies our desire for meaning. He satisfies our desire for hope. He satisfies our desire for purpose. He satisfied our desire for freedom, peace, security, justice, and joy in the midst of a broken world.

All of those longings are meant to lead you to God. He created them. He sanctifies them. And he satisfies them with himself, not in part, but fully and completely. Your spouse could leave you, your friends could disown you, like Job you could lose your wealth, your children, and the praise of men. But if you have Jesus, then it is well with your soul and so you can say with psalmist, even through tears, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps 73:25-26).

There are times, even as Christians, when we lack a conscious awareness of Christ's sufficiency, when our emotional experience of spiritual satisfaction grows cold. Many times, it's due to our failure to trust the Lord. Sometimes it's because the Lord, in the mystery of his will, withholds a conscious experience of spiritual satisfaction not because our faith is weak but because he is lovingly committed to making it even stronger by teaching us to trust his heart when we don't see his hand.

But what do we know in all of those circumstances? There is no spiritual hunger or thirst in your soul too great for Jesus to satisfy. You may think what you really need is a



change in your circumstances. What you really need, friend, what you will always need, and what you can have forevermore through faith in Jesus, is God himself.

D. A. Carson says it well. "The hungry and thirsty person who comes to Jesus finds his hunger satisfied and his thirst quenched. This does not mean there is no need for continued dependence upon him, for continued feeding upon him; it does mean there is no longer that core emptiness that the initial encounter with Jesus has met."

It's why we keep our eyes on him and keep coming to him and obediently trusting him even as our experiential awareness of joy in him ebbs and flows. We know Jesus is the answer. We know Jesus is the only one who can give us life. So we refuse to look away.

CONCLUSION

Friend, I don't know what you're longing for in 2021, but there is one thing you need more than anything else. You need the bread of life. You need the satisfaction of knowing Jesus. It's not a box we check. It's a relationship we pursue.

Many of us make all manner of sacrifices to labor for the food that perishes. We get up earlier. We go to bed later. We take on more responsibility even though we're not getting paid more to do it. We sacrifice our physical health. We sacrifice time with our family. Not all of those sacrifices are good. Regardless, we know what it means to labor to feed our bodies.

Here's the critical question Jn 6 lays before us. Are you willing to work just as hard to feed your soul with the bread of life? It's not glamorous. It means opening your Bible and meditating on the truth of Jesus even when you don't feel like it. It means pouring out your tired heart to the Father in prayer, even when you struggle to know what to say. It means relentlessly pursuing community with your brothers and sisters in Christ, even if COVID makes it easier to pull away. It means living out obedient faith in Jesus by making hard moral choices in private when no one else is watching.

Why? Because you know something. Jesus is the bread of life. So stop looking to anything else but Jesus to give you life. Make trust in him your supreme ambition. Make doing whatever it takes to see your soul satisfied in him your highest priority. For only Jesus can satisfy your soul.