

Gospel of John #9

John 6: The Bread of Life

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At one point, I was going to make different breads to sample today...but this didn't happen; I have small children. I do enjoy bread making, though.

John, the author of the Gospel of John, is a little like the chief of staff to the President. This position is given to an intimate friend; it's not really a political assignment. The chief of staff hears everything and when they write a book after it's all done, they don't start with the president's childhood but they would most likely focus on the years of the presidency. Likewise, it might not be chronological but more like chapters on foreign policy, infrastructure, etc.



This is similar to the Gospel of John: John grabs themes and stories from Jesus's ministry years. For example, the prologue, turning water into wine, clearing the temple, eternal life (conversation with Nicodemus), the woman at the well, the pool of Bethesda (do you want to be healed?), and last time, which was about finding honor.

Today is about Jesus being the bread of life.

John 6

1 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), **2** and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. **3** Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. **4** The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

The geographical context here is the Sea of Galilee: the east side has wilderness, the west side is populated. A crowd of people have followed Jesus to the east side when the Passover Feast was near. This feast celebrated the freeing of God's slaves from Egypt hundreds of years before. Pharaoh finally let the Israelites leave after the final plague of putting blood over the door to protect a household from the death of their firstborn.

Every morning in the wilderness, the Israelites ate Manna and drank the water that God provided. The Red Sea represented chaos and darkness when Pharaoh changed his mind and came after them. God opens the Sea for them to walk through. This freedom is what Passover celebrates and they are steeped in these stories from childhood.

Close your eyes and imagine the following story:

5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” **6** He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

7 Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages[a] to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, **9** “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

10 Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). **11** Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” **13** So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

14 After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, **17** where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. **18** A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. **19** When they had rowed about three or four miles,[b] they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. **20** But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.” **21** Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

22 The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. **23** Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. **24** Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.\

As you think about what stands out from this passage, I will offer that the boat and the rough waters stood out to me. When the disciples saw Jesus, they didn’t want to let him in the boat until he said, “It is I.” (I found this humorous!) Before this, Jesus fed thousands of people so they had enough: It wasn’t just a little bit of food but instead they were satisfied. These people spent the rest of the day in the wilderness and even slept there: they didn’t realize Jesus was gone until the next morning because they were so satisfied with what Jesus gave them from the 5 loaves and 2 fish.

John wants them to know about a new freedom during this Passover time: they were thinking of freedom from slavery, manna in the wilderness, and crossing the Red Sea. The two stories John tells about are Jesus feeding the people in the wilderness and then walking across the stormy waters where Jesus provides a way for his disciples to cross the lake and navigate the storm.

Then they go back towards Capernaum and the people realize he isn't there and they set off to find him. This starts the next story:

John 6:25 When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

26 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. **27** Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

28 Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

29 Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

30 So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it

and believe you? What will you do? **31** Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ [c]”

32 Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. **33** For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

34 “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

35 Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. **36** But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. **37** All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. **38** For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. **39** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. **40** For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

These people traveled to Capernaum to find Jesus: They wanted to find Jesus because he fed them: they were looking for more of the satisfying bread. But Jesus makes a statement that he is greater than Moses: Moses didn't give them manna, God gave them manna. Jesus isn't there to give them bread that will go bad the next day; he is there to give them bread that will never go bad. This is tied into an Old Testament passage in Isaiah:

Isaiah 55:

1 “Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
2 Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare

Again, Jesus declares he will bring eternal, abundant life, the life that animates us not just for today but into the age to come.

Next, they have questions about this. (Note: the Jews in this passage refers to those following Jesus from Judea, not necessarily ALL Jews.)

41 At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” **42** They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’”

43 “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. **44** “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up on the last day. **45** It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ [d] Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. **46** No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. **47** Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. **48** I am the bread of life. **49** Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. **50** But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. **51** I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will

live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

53 Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. **54** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. **55** For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. **56** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. **57** Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. **58** This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” **59** He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Is this about Cannibalism? Their first question is about Jesus coming from heaven: they think they know Jesus and his family. How can he say he is God's son? Jesus pushes back and says he is the bread of life, not just someone who gave them temporary food. In fact, this is his flesh! This doesn't make any sense! They are clearly upset about this. The cannibalism is about him being greater than the liberation stories: the manna in the wilderness. He wants them to see that all these stories point to Jesus. The truth is that my debt is paid but even more so is the gift of life that Jesus gives us through his sacrifice. His flesh and blood are given that we might have eternal life. This is fully satisfying which won't give us cravings in this life.

As you come and take communion, reflect on the state of your heart. (We don't want people who aren't believers to take part in this part of the service.) If you are a believer, ask where you are seeking to be filled apart from God. Are you coming to Jesus just to have another meal in the wilderness or are you coming to find full and lasting satisfaction through the blood of Jesus?

John 6:60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? **62** Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! **63** The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit[e] and life. **64** Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. **65** He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."

66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. **69** We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

70 Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" **71** (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

Of course, we are reading this backwards because we know the end of the story. We know about the cross and his sacrifice but these people don't have this knowledge.

Key verse: **68** Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. **69** We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

This is a beautiful confession. As you take communion, I have printed out a confession to speak out loud when you take the bread and wine. Please read this together! There is nothing in this world that can truly fill us up! Amen.

