

# The Bread of Life

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Date: 23 January 2022

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Amen. Well, this evening, as I say, we are coming to John chapter 6 in our series through John's gospel. It's a long chapter and a wonderful chapter in this gospel. And I hope once we get into it, we'll see it's fairly straightforward for us to understand and to respond to.

It follows and it builds on what we saw last Sunday, that Jesus is God's Son who gives life. He can bring us back from the dead here and now spiritually, and he will do so again physically when he comes. And we saw Jesus can do that because of who he is, God's Son, doing God's work, bringing God's kingdom. And so he is our only hope in life and in death. He is our only rescuer.

But tonight we're asking, what kind of rescuer is he? What kind of rescue does he bring? How does he rescue us? In this chapter, John answers those questions for us. And we'll see he did it, he does it in the same way that he did it last week. Firstly, by showing us signs that point us to the truth. And then by giving us Jesus' full-length explanation of those signs for us to grasp the truth. And then by inviting us to respond to that truth. And I suppose to short-circuit this sermon, here's the take-home truth that Jesus gives us and invites us into. It's there in verse 35.

I am the bread of life, he says. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Three courses tonight then, beginning with our starter. Firstly, John shows us the signs that point us to Jesus as the new Exodus rescuer. The new Exodus rescuer. Now, I reckon if we were to go out on the street and ask around in Rosemount tonight, what is Jesus' most famous miracle, I think probably the two that we find at the start of this chapter would be, if not the two most famous, then at least in the top three. Okay, they are well-known, aren't they? Jesus' best-known works, multiplying the loaves and fishes and walking on the water. And they are incredible miracles.

And I wonder if their popularity in some way maybe has numbed us to their power, to the wonder of them. Who can do things like this? Well, only God himself can do it. As great as these miracles are, they are signs, says John, and they won't hit home for us unless we follow them to where they're pointing. And that's how a sign works, isn't it? You can have the best, most flashy neon sign you like, but if you don't follow where it's pointing ye, well, you will have missed the point.

[ 3 : 1 0 ]     And if you take the sign out of its context, out of position, well, it stops working as a sign at all, doesn't it? I was on holiday last summer with Susie and a friend of ours. And opposite the cottage where we were staying was a sign that gave information about an ancient Iron Age fort.

And behind the sign was a big hill, a mound of rocks and heather. And I thought, putting two and two together, well, the sign is speaking about this mound. This must be the ancient fort, I thought.

Right? Well, wrong. Because we found out a few days later that the fort, in fact, was a few miles down the road. And the sign was an old sign that somebody had picked up and brought home as a nice keepsake. And I was mocked mercilessly for my obvious stupidity. But that's what happens, isn't it, when we take signs out of context. And it's very often what we do with Jesus signs in this gospel. And so to follow these signs, to see the point of them, we need to put them back in position, back in context. So take a look there at verse four. It was coming up, we're told, to the Jewish Passover festival. Now, Passover was a time for the Jewish people to remember how God had gloriously rescued their ancestors from slavery in Egypt in the past. And we read part of that from the book of Exodus this morning in our service, if you were with us. But it's hard for us,

I think, today to get our heads around just how important Passover was for these people. Passover was such a big deal that when the rescue first happened, it reset the whole national calendar.

This will be the first month of the year, God said to them. The rescue defined who they were as a nation. But notice, or I wonder if you did notice, and if we can notice here, that in these signs, John gets us to retrace the steps of the Passover, but in reverse and with a new rescuer.

[ 5 : 23 ] Okay, verse three, Jesus has gone up on a mountainside. Verse five, Jesus poses the question, what is everyone going to eat? And then verse 11, Jesus does a miracle and gives them plenty of bread.

Verse 16, his disciples start to cross the sea, but it is very stormy. So verse 19, Jesus does a miracle and crosses the sea. And crucially, verse 21, brings them across the sea with him.

Okay, is this ringing any bells? Does it remind you, I wonder, of that other famous rescue in reverse? If you've not seen it yet, glance down at verse 14. What did the people think when they saw this?

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world. They think instinctively, this is a new Moses. They're thinking of Deuteronomy chapter 18, verse 15, where Moses, who at the first Passover, led God's people across the sea, gave them bread from heaven and went up a mountain, says, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you. You must listen to him.

Okay, so they have seen the signs in context and put two and two together and conclude that Jesus is here as a new Moses to bring a new Exodus rescue. And of course, it's almost Passover, the big bit of the rescue.

[ 7 : 03 ] Stay tuned for Easter. So what is Jesus here to bring? He's here to bring a rescue. What kind of rescue? A new Exodus rescue, a new Passover. That is a rescue from slavery and darkness and death not only physically as it was the first time around, but ultimately, spiritually. He would bring a rescue from the iron-fisted rule of sin in the lives of his people and a rescue from the curse and the consequence of that sin. That is the death of his people. And brothers and sisters, that is where these signs, these miracles point us in John's gospel. It's this rescue from spiritual slavery.

And the evil that lives within us and eternal death. And to Jesus as the rescuer who can give us that kind of supreme, complete and forever rescue. A rescue and a rescuer to reset our very lives, to redefine our existence, begin a new life in us and among us.

Jesus is that rescuer and can perform that rescue for us tonight. For any who would simply ask him, he will save you. But how does he do that? How does he rescue? Well, to answer that one, John gives us Jesus' own explanation of these signs. So for our main course, which is of course the biggest, Christ, we see Jesus explain that he has been given for the life of his people.

The crowd, he ate the bread, wake up the next morning and find Jesus isn't there. They know he didn't get in the boat with his disciples, so they go looking for him. And when they finally find him, they're baffled, aren't they, to find him on the other side of the Sea of Galilee? Rabbi, they ask, when did you get here? And just like last week, we see Jesus give the crowd more than they bargained for. It would have been mind-blowing enough for them, wouldn't it, to be told, well, I just walked across the sea. But instead, Jesus says this, verse 26, 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. Do not work for food that's spoiled, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

Sure, he says, you're only here for your breakfast. You're here for more physical bread. But if you'd understood what the bread was saying, well, if you'd followed the sign properly, you'd be coming to me to give you life forever. Spiritual food, that would mean you would never be hungry again.

[ 9 : 59 ] He said last Sunday, didn't he, the works the Father had given him to do, prove who he is. They testify to him. So again, this wonderful work with the loaves and the fishes is God's stamp on Jesus' life, that he is who he says he is. He is the one who gives eternal life.

But have this crowd really seen that? Have they followed the signs all the way to that point? Well, two things tell us they hadn't. Firstly, that they are only there for more bread.

They don't want more than that. Jesus tells them, doesn't he, he could give them eternal life if they wanted it. And see how they respond to him there in verse 30. They asked, well, what sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?

Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness. It's written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. You can give us eternal life, they say. Well, prove it. Give us a sign. Like, for example, bread from heaven. How about that one? Do it again, they say. He did it only yesterday.

But they want a repeat performance. And you get the feeling, don't you, that if he had done it, then they'd be back for dinner as well. Because in the end, the kind of rescue they want is in the here and now, the immediate, the physical need. Did you notice what they tried to do with Jesus at the first time round? Jesus, knowing they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew to a mountain by himself. They saw in Jesus only a chance to grasp at the immediate, the physical, to overcome their political needs, their physical, their hunger, their physical needs.

[ 11 : 55 ] What Jesus is holding out to them is ultimate forever rescue from their ultimate and forever needs. But as long as they get fed and watered now, they are not interested in those needs or in that rescue.

And it's so easy, isn't it, brothers and sisters, to share that way of thinking about our lives, for our big worries and our big concerns to be our physical health, our political situation, perhaps our finances, our relationship status, our work-life balance.

And you know, don't get me wrong, those things require careful and prayerful thoughts. And we should pray and bring all our needs and anxieties to our heavenly Father. But if in and among those here and now needs, we lose sight of the far bigger and better and lasting and ultimate rescue that Jesus gives us, well, we have missed the reason why he came.

Friends, if you're not a praying person here tonight, well, no doubt you're still a worrying person. We all worry, don't we? But before you bring your worries to God, well, here's the first prayer for you to pray. Dear Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for my sin. Please rescue me from it, forgive me, and give me instead eternal life. I believe. Please help my unbelief.

Come to him for the real rescue he came to give, not the rescue you think you need. Do not work for food that spoils, says Jesus, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

[ 13 : 48 ] But the second thing that tells us this crowd has looked past the sign is because they see Jesus only as a new Moses. But they had forgotten, hadn't they, that it wasn't Moses who rescued Israel the first time round, but God himself. Jesus tells them that in verse 30 to you, very truly, I tell you, it's not Moses who's given you bread from heaven.

It is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. And so Jesus is bringing a new rescue, a new Passover, but not as the new Moses, not even as the new God, so to speak. He's not standing in for God, even though he is God.

Who or what is Jesus in this rescue? We see it there in verse 35. Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. In this ultimate rescue, this Exodus rescue, Jesus says he is the bread.

The very thing that was given by God to give us life. Even the miracle bread from the first rescue was small in comparison to this, he says. See that in verse 48, I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. Here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. See, saying that bread that we sung about earlier in our service, the bread that kept God's people fed on their journey through the wilderness, well, it didn't stop them from dying.

[ 15 : 35 ] But here he is, bread from heaven that gives eternal life, and anyone who eats of it will never die. Well, this then is how he rescues us. He, Jesus, is given to us by the Father to believe in him, to receive him, and so to have eternal life.

But notice, he says, the opposite is also true. God, the Father, has given Jesus to us, but he also gives us to him.

See that in verse 37? All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. See, God, the Father, is running this whole operation, he says.

The Father gives the Son and gives us to his Son. Now, it's possible that that's just one more thing that you worry about. Has the Father chosen me? Has he given me? How can I know?

But listen again to what Jesus says. All the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. Countless Christians, some even in this room, have found great confidence before God in these words.

[ 16 : 52 ] Because they tell us that the only way we know we've been given to Jesus is when we come to Jesus. And so, in a sense, we could say anyone who wants to be saved can be saved.

Because no one ever comes to Jesus to be saved and finds that they have not been chosen. Finds a closed door. Gets turned down.

What is it Jesus says? Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. That's God's promise to us. Because whoever he gives to Jesus comes to Jesus, and whoever comes to Jesus will never be cast out.

And so, if that question bothers you, if what Jesus says here about the Father giving us to him bothers you, well, let me, in the most reverent way possible, suggest that you set that question to one side for the moment.

And simply come to Jesus. Come to him. Come to him. There's a lovely illustration of this. Like so many illustrations. I can't remember who first said it.

[ 18 : 07 ] But they said coming to Jesus is like going under an archway. And over one side of the archway are written the words, believe and you will be saved. That's the side that we go through, we go under.

But once you've gone through, they said, you turn back and find written on the other side of the archway, the words chosen before the foundation of the world. Both those truths are true.

They go hand in hand. But if you're still standing on the outside, well, let me suggest you only need to worry about one of those truths. And it's whether you have believed in Jesus to be saved.

And particularly, as Jesus goes on to teach us, whether we trust in his death. How is it Jesus rescues us? Well, have a look down at verse 51.

Maybe these words really startled you. I'm 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.

[ 19 : 13 ] Now, if you're thinking, that is really odd. Well, you're not alone, are you? That's how the crowd also reacted. The Jews began to argue sharply among themselves.

How can this man give us his flesh to eat? It's shocking, isn't it? But Jesus insists on that point. Very truly, I tell you, he says, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day. Now, to be really clear, Jesus is not talking about cannibalism here, nor is he talking about what happens in the Lord's Supper with the bread and wine.

Now, Jesus is saying the same thing as he said back in verse 40, where he said, 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 on the last day.

See, he's using this eating and drinking his flesh and blood language as a powerful way of talking about us trusting in his death, believing in him.

[ 20 : 30 ] Notice, if you were to glance down and look at it later, but the outcomes of verse 40 and verse 54 are exactly the same. Whoever does what he's saying will have eternal life, and he will raise them up on the last day.

So how does this great rescuer, Jesus, rescue us? Well, God gave him to us so that he might die for us, so that trusting in his death, we might have eternal life.

Remember, this is a new Passover rescue. And at the heart of the Passover was a death, the death of a lamb instead of the firstborn sons.

So at the heart of a new Passover is the death of God's Son instead of his people. Remember back, what did John the Baptist say when he first saw him?

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. And he would do it through his death, by taking our sins and taking the Father's wrath.

[ 21 : 39 ] And so finally, how will we respond to his rescue coming to our final course? The response is to trust in Jesus' death for your eternal life.

We've already seen that the crowds were looking for quite a different kind of rescue, and a different kind of rescuer than Jesus turned out to be. And the idea that they would need to trust in his body and blood, his death, was too much for them.

And their response is to grumble about it. See that verse 41? They began to grumble about him. And perhaps if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian here tonight, you're feeling the same way yourself.

How can you expect me to take this seriously? You might think that's the only right and rational response to someone telling you that someone needed to die to sort out your real problems.

But remember that this grumbling crowd had only yesterday eaten bread that Jesus himself had miraculously given them then. Remember, the grumbling Israelites that we sang about earlier in the desert, they ate bread every day that God rained down from heaven to keep them alive.

[ 22 : 59 ] And yet, though they saw the miraculous signs, they felt quite right to grumble because of what God, what Jesus was saying to them through the miraculous sign.

And so we have to ask, was it right, really, for them to grumble about that? Was it right for them to complain because they didn't like what the wonderful works were saying?

Is it right for us, friends, to grumble or push back against what Jesus is saying because we don't find it tasteful or palatable or crowd-pleasing?

What Jesus says about us being rescued is no more popular today than it was then. The truth is, Jesus' teaching about trusting in his death for our rescue is never, ever going to be crowd-pleasing.

It's offensive, isn't it, to our pride, to our self-respect, to think we needed somebody to die for us, for us really to have life. Perhaps you struggle with that this evening.

[ 24 : 07 ] But that doesn't make it untrue. And so, before you push back against Jesus' words, ask yourself, really ask yourself, why do I feel like that?

And ask yourself again whether there's the slightest possibility that you might need to listen again and take it in again. I'd love to talk to you about that, if that's ye.

Perhaps you would call yourself a Christian, but likewise, if you're honest, you feel like grumbling too. On hearing it, verse 60, many of the disciples said that this is a hard teaching.

Who can accept it? And they grumbled about it. Well, let me say, if that's ye this evening, that this is ultimately the test, really, of whether we are Christians or not.

One of the big points John comes back to again and again in this gospel is the difference between true belief and false belief. And so, if you glance down at verse 63, Jesus says, these words I've spoken to you, they are full of spirit and life, yet there are some of you who do not believe.

[ 25 : 18 ] See, Jesus is saying to reject what he's saying here is to reject him. The cross is at the very center of true Christianity, and if we move the cross away from the center, well, it's no longer Christianity.

That's why, verse 66, when Jesus said this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him, because these words leave us no room for following Jesus without trusting wholly in his death for our forgiveness and life.

Perhaps this evening, that's the challenge that you need to take home and think on and pray over. Because the only right response to what Jesus has taught us tonight is the response that Peter gives in verse 68.

The crowds have drifted away. One by one, his former disciples go as well. And with only the sound of footfall and the quiet murmur of grumbling in the background, Jesus turns to the twelve and says, do you want to go away as well?

And just look how Peter responds. Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

[ 26 : 40 ] We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God. Where else would we go, says Peter? Who else is there?

Only you have the words of eternal life, Lord Jesus. Peter has come to believe in Jesus, to trust in his death, because he knows that he is the Holy One come from God to give life to those who believe.

And Peter's words are a wonderful prayer for us this evening. They're a wonderful prayer for us when we struggle with Jesus' words.

And when to trust in his death goes against our instincts. To remind ourselves that there is indeed no other rescuer. No other rescue, no other name given under heaven by which we may be saved.

To focus our hearts back on him alone. To feed on him and abide in him. To come to him and have life in him. To thank him and to worship him for his death.

[ 27 : 47 ] For our sins. To be a man and to worship him for his death. So let's do that now. As we pray together. Let's pray. Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life. And we have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God. Lord, to whom shall we go? And our Father, this evening, we simply want to thank you for giving us your Son.

We praise you, our Father, that you looked on us in love even when we were dead in sin. And in your free and unmerited kindness, you gave us Christ.

To be our Passover lamb. To be the sacrifice whose blood would save us. From the slavery of our sin. From the darkness of our souls.

And ultimately, from the eternal death and condemnation that awaited us. We thank you, our Father, for him. You gave his life for our lives.

[ 29 : 00 ] And we pray, Lord, that you'd help us never to be ashamed of his death. Lord, his words are shocking. And his claims are ultimate. And we pray, Lord, that you would give us faith to believe him.

We pray you would help our unbelief. Lord, we pray that as we go out, Lord, into the world tomorrow, that you would help us not to be ashamed of who you have made us to be in him.

Not to be ashamed of his rescue. Not to be ashamed of his blood. Lord, for he is indeed our only rescuer. And our only hope in life and in death.

And we pray, our Father, that as this message, this good news resonates out, Lord, in our lives from our church. Lord, that many people would come to hear it and believe it.

And to look on him. And to have eternal life. And we ask all these things in his great name. Amen.