

Eat the Bread of Life!

- I. What does that mean?
- II. How does that happen?
- III. What benefit does it bring?

<sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. <sup>37</sup>All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. <sup>38</sup>For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup>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. <sup>40</sup>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." <sup>41</sup>At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup>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'?" <sup>43</sup>"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. <sup>44</sup>"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. <sup>45</sup>It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.'<sup>46</sup> Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. <sup>46</sup>No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup>Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup>I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup>Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. <sup>50</sup>But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. <sup>51</sup>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."

Tell me, would you say that for the sake of your health, you try to eat a healthy diet? Do you give some thought to the types of food, or at least the quantities of food, that you do or don't put into your body? A lot of people these days do. Whether you're on a vegan diet, or the Keto diet or the Paleo diet or the Mediterranean diet, the goal is the same, namely, to extend our lives, to take care of the bodies God has given us. For years my wife and I have followed a diet that fits on a sticky note on our refrigerator. It simply says, "Eat real food, mostly plants, not too much." Now there's a diet that even I can remember. But did you know that no matter what diet you're on, in the end, it's going to fail you. There is always going to be something that brings your life to an end. The mortality rate for human beings has remain unchanged for thousands of years. It's 100%. No diet will allow you to live forever. No diet except one. There is one superfood that will allow you to enjoy a life that never ends. One thing that, if you make it a staple in your diet, will guarantee you a life that is eternal. What is that super food? No, it's not broccoli or spinach. It's actually...bread. It's something that Jesus calls the Bread of Life. Here in our text for today, Jesus says that if we want to live forever, it's critical that we do what? That we:

Eat the Bread of Life

As we study these words of Jesus in John chapter 6, we'll seek to answer three questions:

- I. What does it mean to eat the bread of life?
- II. How does that happen?

### III. what benefit does it bring?

Our text for today is part of a longer section of scripture sometimes referred to as Jesus' Bread of Life discourse. If you remember from last Sunday's sermon, this whole discourse takes place after Jesus had miraculously provided food for over 5,000 people. When the people again come to Jesus looking for him to fill their stomachs, what did Jesus say to them? "*Do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.*" (John 6:27). In fact, Jesus goes on to define what that food is, when he says, "*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*" (John 6:35) And again a little bit later, Jesus says, "*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.*" (John 6:51) So with those words, Jesus is drawing a distinction between the physical bread that he provided for the crowds, which could nourish their bodies but, in the end, would leave them hungry again, and the spiritual bread which if they ate it, would give them eternal life. The question is, exactly what does Jesus mean when he tells us to eat that bread of life?

Well, I'll tell you that a lot of people would assume that Jesus is talking about the Lord's Supper, that is, the sacrament of Holy Communion. I mean, Jesus says here in our text, "*This bread is my flesh.*" Isn't that almost exactly what Jesus in the upper room, when he took that piece of bread and said, "This is my body?" Is Jesus talking about the same thing? Is eating the Bread of Life the same as partaking of the body and blood in the Lord's Supper?

Actually, no, it's not. Why do I say that? Well, look closely at Jesus words. Jesus says, "*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.*" Tell me, do those words apply to Holy Communion? Does whoever eats the bread on this table live forever? Not necessarily. While it certainly true that if you come to the sacrament with a repentant heart, if you acknowledge your sins, if you recognize that in, with and under the bread and wine, is Jesus' very body and blood, given and poured out for you, then that gift of forgiveness is absolutely yours. And, as Martin Luther once wrote, "*Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.*" God gives eternal life through this sacrament.

But here's the rub. Along that tremendous gift also comes a warning. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "*Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.* (1 Corinthians 11:27). And again, "*those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ, eat and drink judgment on themselves.* (1 Corinthians 11:29). In other words, if you come to this table and eat this bread without being prepared, that is, without recognizing and renouncing your sins, or without believing that Jesus' body and blood is truly present in the sacrament, you'll not only not receive the benefit of the sacrament, you'll actually harm yourself. You might say that eating this bread comes with a warning. When Jesus talks about eating the bread of life here in our text, there is no warning. There is no preparation required ahead of time. There is only a promise. *Whoever eats this bread will live forever.*

So that kind of brings us back to our original question. If eating the bread of life is not a reference to receiving Holy Communion, then what does it mean? Again, look back to Jesus' words. In the very first verse of our text, Jesus explains what eating the bread means. Jesus says, "*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*" (John 6:35) In other words, Jesus is saying that to eat the bread of life simply means to believe in him. To believe that Jesus is exactly who he said he is, the one who came down from heaven not to do his will but to do the will of his father. The one who said, in

reference to his own crucifixion, that he came *“to give his flesh for the life of the whole world.”*

That’s what Jesus was asking the people of his day to believe about him. Some believed Jesus. But many did not. The question is, why is that? If some people believed and some did not, what made the difference? Or to put it another way, when it comes to eating the bread of life, now that we know I. What it means, let's ask, II. How does it happen?

In other words, exactly how does a person become a believer? Is there something a person must do to start being a true Christian? You realize that there are a lot of people who would say, “Yes, to be a true, born-again Christian, you need to open your heart and accept Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord. You need to make your decision for Christ.”

Now, even though that may sound logical, that everyone has the choice to accept or reject Jesus, the fact is, it’s not scriptural. The Bible tells us that we do not have the ability to accept Jesus in and of ourselves. The Bible teaches that every human being came into this world spiritually dead. We were all born as enemies of God. By nature we don't have the ability to come to God. In fact, the only way that any of us can ever believe in Jesus is if God does all the work for us. Isn't that what Jesus means when he says here in our text, *“No one can come to me unless the Father has who sent me draws them.”* (John 6:44) Literally, that word “draws” could also be translated “drags”. You know, like what fishermen do to keep their boat from floating away. They drag them up on the shore. In that situation, is the boat doing half the work? No, the boat is 100% passive. It’s the fishermen who are doing all the work.

So it is with your faith in Jesus and mine. When God first drew you to himself, when he first called you to faith in Christ, you were 100% passive. You didn't do anything. Chances are, you just lay there in your mother's arms while someone poured water on your head in connection with those powerful words of God, namely. “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” At that moment, you went from spiritually dead to spiritually alive. You were born again. You might say that you ate the bread of life for the very first time.

But even if you weren't baptized as a baby, even if you came to believe in Jesus later in life, your faith is still not something you did, but rather something God did in you. God worked faith in your heart through his word, or more specifically, through his gospel, that is, the message of his undeserved love for you in Christ. Isn't that the truth? When the Bible says that *no one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws them*, it reminds us that it's not an awesome display of God's power that draws us to Christ, but and rather an awesome display of God's love. When the Lord of the universe, the one who can do anything, the one who knows everything, including every sin you ever committed, when that God chooses to be punished in your place so that you can know that your sins are forgiven, you are all right with God and you're going to spend eternity with your Father in heaven, that's the kind of love that sends us running into Jesus' arms. It's the love that compels us to put our trust in Jesus as our Savior and our God.

So, that's what it means to eat the bread of life, namely, to believe in Jesus, and how it happens, namely, by God calling us to faith through the gospel. The only question that remains is: III. What benefit does eating the bread of life bring?

Well, Jesus answers that question in our text, when he says to the crowds, *“I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here (referring to himself, 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.”* (John 6:48-50) Unlike any other diet in the world, a diet made up solely of Jesus, produces in you a life that never ends.

Actually, the Bible uses two different words for life. One word is Bios. It's what gives us

the English word biological. Biological life is when your heart is beating and your lungs are breathing. You are physically alive. But if that's all that God is promising to give you when you eat the bread of life, is that all that great of a gift: to simply exist in the condition that you are in right now, living in a body and in a world corrupted by sin? After a few thousand years, don't you think that kind of life will feel a lot more like hell than heaven?

Fortunately, that's not what Jesus is promising here in our text. Jesus doesn't use the word Bios. He uses the word Zoe. Zoe is more than just a physical existence. Zoe is a word that stresses the quality of life. Zoe is the word that Jesus uses when he says in John 10, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* Zoe is life without any of the effects of sin. No death, no sorrow or sickness or pain. No worries or temptations. Zoe is a life where our bodies are restored to what they were like before the fall into sin, back when Adam had the mental capacity to name all the creatures of the world. That's beyond our ability to comprehend. That's just a glimpse of the quality of life that we will enjoy. Zoe also encompasses the environment in which we will live. Scripture speaks of it as new heaven and a new earth. The prophet Isaiah describes it as a world where the lion and the calf will lie down together, where the wolf will be friends with a lamb and a child will cuddle with a cobra. In other words, a life where there will be no fear or hostility. But most important of all, Zoe is a life where we will live in the presence of God forever. We will see our Lord Jesus face to face. He will be our glorious groom and we will be his radiant bride and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Or as the psalmist David put it, *You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures as your right hand. (Psalm 16:11)*

My friends, if you're looking to extend the length and quality of your life on this side of the grave, there are any number of different diets that will help you achieve that goal. But if you want to enjoy the best life of all on the other side of the grave, then there's only one diet that will do. It's the bread diet—the Bread of Life. Today your heavenly Father draws you into the arms of your Savior who spread those arms on the cross to prove his love for you and who now has made you the promise, *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever."* Believe it. Feed your faith on the Bread of Life and you will enjoy Zoe forever, and ever. Amen.