

The Bread Of Life.

Text: John 6:51-58

Suggested Hymns:

290, 530, 268, 158, 335

1) Jesus is the Bread of Life

2) How the Bread of Life is given

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 6:51-58, ⁵¹ *“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”*

⁵² *The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”* ⁵³ *Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to 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 him up at the last day.”* ⁵⁵ *“For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.”* ⁵⁶ *“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”*

⁵⁷ *“As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.”* ⁵⁸ *“This is the bread which came down from heaven -- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Jesus did not overlook the fact that man has a material body and physical needs. When the sick were brought to Him, He healed them. When the multitude which had followed Him into the wilderness was hungry, He provided food for them by the miracle of the loaves and fish.

From this many people have concluded that Christ’s principal mission was to minister to man’s bodily and temporal needs. They utterly fail to understand the spirit of Christ. Like the Jews of old they are eager to accept as their king a

Jesus who would heal, feed, and clothe their mortal bodies, but are not at all interested in a Jesus who is chiefly concerned about the salvation of their immortal souls.

In the text before us we have Christ's own answer to those who want to make of Him nothing more than a bread king, who seek in Him only material blessings, and whose aim is to transform His Church into a mere agency for social service.

Having rebuked them for their materialism Jesus urged them ***“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life.”*** Now Jesus declares that He is the Bread of Life, sent down from heaven to give eternal life to a dying world. Our theme today is, *Jesus Is the Bread of Life!* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Jesus Is The Bread Of Life!

Why does Jesus call Himself the Bread of Life? The word bread was in the mind and on the lips of Christ's hearers at that particular time. Only the day before they had witnessed a great miracle, and the miracle had been performed on bread.

Out there in the desert Jesus had blessed a few loaves of bread and by His blessing multiplied this small supply so marvellously that it was more than enough to satisfy the hunger of five thousand people.

Since everybody was thinking and speaking of this wonder bread and some one in the audience had referred to the manna, the bread from heaven with which Israel had been nourished for forty years, Jesus uses the term bread as a starting-point and speaks to His hearers of another bread, a bread more wonderful than that which He had given them the day before, a bread more excellent than the manna which fell from heaven in the days of Moses.

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven,” Jesus says. Bread is one of the great necessities of life. We often call it “the staff of life.” ***“Our daily bread”*** is the one material blessing for which Jesus has taught us to ask in the Lord's Prayer. When God gives us our daily bread, He gives us the means to sustain our physical life. We cannot live without it.

Yet common bread is, after all, but a lifeless, perishable thing. It can do no more than sustain physical life for a few short years. Even those who ate the manna which fell from heaven finally died.

Jesus calls Himself the *Bread of Life* because He is as indispensable to the life and eternal well-being of the soul as ordinary bread is to the life and well-being of the body. We read in John 6:33, ³³ ***“For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*** Thus Jesus claims to be the Author and Giver of all life and particularly the Source and Fountain of spiritual and eternal life.

Whoever wants to have life must receive it from Christ. Since only God is the Author of life, the statement of Jesus ***“I am the Bread of Life”*** clearly implies that Jesus is God.

Jesus is the Bread of Life because He has purchased and won life for the world. ***“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. ... and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”***

When Jesus spoke these words, He was standing before the Jews in form and appearance like any other man. He calls Himself the Son of Man. He speaks of His flesh and blood. He was a true man. But since the Jews regarded Him as a mere man, nothing more, they were puzzled, mystified, and yes, even greatly offended.

“Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”¹ This is still the attitude of all those who deny the deity of Christ — how can our eternal salvation depend on this man Jesus?

This is because they will not accept the clear testimony of Jesus, of God’s own Word, concerning the person and the work of Christ, namely, that God sent His only-begotten Son down from heaven that He might be the Bread of Life.

When Jesus was born of Mary, the eternal Son of God came down from heaven, and assumed human flesh and form. It was only by becoming a true man that the Son of God could give His flesh for the life of the world.

The world needed, and still needs, this Bread of Life. By nature all men are dead in trespasses and sins, cut off from God, the Fountain of life. By sinning,

man forfeited the right to live. His first act of disobedience resulted in spiritual death, and from that moment he also began to die physically.

And, saddest of all, man cannot do a single thing to save himself from sin and death. Left to himself, he is utterly unable to return to God, the Source of life. In his blindness he spends his substance for things which are not bread. He endeavours to win God's favour and eternal life with his own works, and they are all evil. If he dies in his natural state, he is doomed to everlasting death. He remains forever separated from God and from life.

It was because man was so greatly in need of a true life-giving bread that God sent His Son down from heaven in order that He might give His flesh for the life of the world. This He did when He sacrificed His sacred body and shed His holy, precious blood on the cross.

Christ's death was not a martyrdom which He suffered at the hands of wicked men. Rather, it was a willing sacrifice which He made for the sins of the world. He gave His flesh for the life of the world. The world — and that includes me and you — had merited temporal and eternal death.

But the Son of God took upon Himself the guilt of all mankind and suffered the punishment which all had deserved. Of such infinite value was this sacrifice that God accepted it as payment in full for the world's enormous debt.

That God is fully reconciled by the death of His Son, He proved by raising Him from the dead. Thus Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. Through Christ all sinners can obtain life eternal; for Christ has by His own death procured life for the world. It is because of this fact that Jesus says, "*I am the Bread of Life.*"

Do you realise your great need of this Bread? Are you terrified at the thought that you must die? Does your soul hunger and yearn for eternal life? Here is One who can supply your great need, who can satisfy your hungry soul, who can give you life: Jesus, the Bread of Life.

2. How The Bread Of Life Is Given

Jesus is the Bread come down from heaven to give life to the world. But how does He give it?

First of all by His Word. The entire chapter from which our text is taken presents an excellent illustration of the manner in which, and the means by which, Jesus offers and imparts life to dying sinners.

He speaks to the people about Himself as the Bread of Life. He tells them what it is and what they must do to possess it and partake of it. He bears witness concerning His divine person and His work of redemption. He reasons with the sinners. He meets their objections. He pleads with them earnestly to accept life at His hands as a free gift. That His Word is a means by which He offers and conveys life to men He expressly states when He says in John 6:63, ***The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.***

Jesus still offers eternal life to the famished, dying souls of men by means of His Word, the Gospel-message, which He has commanded His followers to proclaim to all the world. He once said to His disciples as He sent them out to preach the Gospel, ¹⁶ ***“He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”*** ²

Paul writes concerning the Gospel of Christ which he preached, ***“It is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.”***³ In the Gospel-message that is being delivered here at this very moment Jesus is offering to you the living Bread sent down from heaven, food for your hungry soul, never-ending life in heaven.

Do not despise it because this message comes to you from the lips of a poor, weak, sinful mortal like yourself. Remember that the bread which Jesus had so wonderfully provided in the wilderness was distributed to the hungry multitude by His disciples, who also were poor, weak, sinful men. It is one way He has of dispensing life.

But it is not the only way. Jesus offers and conveys life to us also by means of His written Word, which He has given us in the Bible, the Holy Scriptures. For He says in John 5:39, ³⁹ ***“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”***

Secondly, The Bread of Life is also dispensed in the Holy Supper. Here Jesus assures every guest at His table, as it is written in Matthew 26:26-28, ²⁶ ***And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”*** ²⁷ ***Then He took the cup, and***

gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

And “*where there is remission of sins, there is also life and salvation.*” Do you desire to feed your sin-starved soul? Do you long for positive assurance that blessed, eternal life awaits you beyond the gloomy gates of death? Then use diligently the means by which He dispenses the Bread of Life, His Word and Sacrament. Despise them, and you will not see life; you will die in your sins.

If bread is to sustain life, it must be eaten. The fact that Jesus by a miracle provided an abundance of bread and offered it to the hungry multitude would not have satisfied their hunger had they failed or refused actually to eat this bread.

Thus we, too, must eat the Bread of Life if it is to nourish, and give life to, our soul. Jesus says in our text, *If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever ...* ⁵⁴ *“Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Carnal-minded as they were, the Jews regarded these words as sheer nonsense. *“How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”* Would this mad Rabbi have us turn cannibals? Had they paid reverent attention to His words, they might have known that Jesus was not speaking of a natural, physical eating of His flesh.

Being supernatural food, the Bread of Life can of course be eaten only supernaturally. What Jesus meant by this eating and drinking He had clearly stated earlier in John 6:35, ³⁵ *And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.* And in John 6:47, ⁴⁷ *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”*

When your hungry and thirsty soul hears this message, *“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*⁴ or the words of the Sacrament, ²⁸ *“For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins,”* and your heart responds,⁵

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,

And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.

you eat His flesh and drink His blood worthily.

In short, if you trust with all your heart that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is your Saviour, who died for you that you might live, your soul has been fed with the Bread of Life.

Such eating of the Bread of Life by faith imparts life, eternal life, to the believer. ⁵⁸ *"This is the bread which came down from heaven ... He who eats this bread will live forever." If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.* ⁵⁴ *"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.* Faith makes us partakers of the fruits of Christ's death and resurrection.

By faith we become so intimately united with Christ that even death cannot separate us from Him. ⁵⁶ *"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.* ⁵⁷ *"As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.*

The food we eat becomes a part of us. Thus Christ, the Bread of Life, and the believer become one. The Christian can say with Paul in Galatians 2:20, *Christ lives in me.* With Christ in his heart, he possesses eternal life even here and now. It is the beginning of that glorious, blessed, endless life which will reach its full consummation in heaven.

By virtue of his fellowship with Christ the true believer has a wonderful, hidden life, of which the world has no understanding. He enjoys a heavenly peace and happiness beside which the pleasures of this earth become stale and superficial.

When his soul hungers and thirsts for righteousness, Christ in his heart assures him: *I am your Righteousness.* If sin disturbs his peace of mind: *Jesus comforts him, saying: "Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven."*⁶ When the burden of the cross grows too heavy for him to bear, the Spirit of Christ whispers in his heart, *"I will give you rest."* *"The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*⁷

Oh, there is nothing in the wide, wide world that can satisfy the hungry soul but Christ, the Bread of Life, who came that we might have life, and that we may have it more abundantly.

From this blessed, heavenly life only those are excluded who in unbelief reject Christ, the Bread of Life. Hear Jesus' solemn warning in our text, "***Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.*** And in John 3:36, ***he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*** Unbelief spells inevitable and eternal death.

Listen to the heart-stirring appeal which the Saviour addresses to the poor, blind, unbelieving world in its vain striving to satisfy its starving heart with filthy husks and perishable treasures of this earth already in the book of Isaiah.

² Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. ³ Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live.⁸

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,⁹

Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find.
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick, and lead the blind.
Just and holy is Thy name. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 6:42

² Luke 10:16

³ Romans 1:16

⁴ John 1:29

⁵ Hymn 335

⁶ Matthew 9:2

⁷ Romans 8:18

⁸ Isaiah 55:2-3

⁹ Hymn 158