

**John 6:24-35** When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. <sup>25</sup>When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” <sup>26</sup>Jesus answered them, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: You are not looking for me because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. <sup>27</sup>Do not continue to work for the food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” <sup>28</sup>So they said to him, “What should we do to carry out the works of God?” <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God: that you believe in the one he sent.” <sup>30</sup>Then they asked him, “So what miraculous sign are you going to do, that we may see it and believe you? What miraculous sign are you going to perform?” <sup>31</sup>Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” <sup>32</sup>Jesus said to them, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the real bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” <sup>34</sup>“Sir,” they said to him, “give us this bread all the time!” <sup>35</sup>“I am the Bread of Life,” Jesus told them. “The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Maybe you’ve heard somebody say that they can’t see the forest for all of the trees. What that means is that someone is so hyper focused on some small detail that they miss out on the big picture. I always imagine someone at the edge of the forest with their nose pressed against a tree. What does the forest look like? No idea, but there’s a lovely bit of bark here and, oh look, an ant!

That’s the kind of thing that people do with the Bible all the time. They learn a passage or two and assume that they know it all. They will pick out a time when God’s judgment came in the Old Testament and then proclaim, “I could never believe in a violent, judgmental God like that.” They completely overlook all the passages where God called them to repentance, when he gave them years, generations, even centuries to change their ways. If God is guilty of anything, it’s not being judgmental. It’s being patient.

The crowd in this text missed the forest for all the trees. Jesus had fed the 5,000. They looked at the food in their hands and thought, “Yummy!” That’s the farthest they ever got. They didn’t see that this was powerful proof that Jesus is exactly who he claims to be. He is God. He is the Savior of the world. Jesus Is What You Need, not anything else and not something you work for, because no one else lasts.

The day before this text Jesus had fed the 5,000. Then they crossed back to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Once again, the crowds followed. They asked, “**Rabbi, when did you get here?**” They really weren’t interested in his travel plans. They wanted to be fed again. Jesus had left them because they wanted to make him a king. They figured if he was ruling over them, they’d never have to worry about food again!

It’s interesting that John writes, “<sup>26</sup>**Jesus answered them**” even though he doesn’t really answer their question. He does get right to the heart of the matter, “**Amen, Amen, I tell you: You are not looking for me because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled.**” The feeding of the 5,000 should have proved that Jesus is true God, just like he said. He is the Savior. But they were so focused on eating that they missed the whole point.

I’d like to say that we are smarter today, but, well, we aren’t. Too often we want God to be our own personal ATM. We want to have a pretty easy life. When we face problems, we act as if suddenly God doesn’t care. We’re only looking at the earthly things and completely ignoring the far greater spiritual gifts that God gives. Maybe it’s because we’ve heard the message of forgiveness so often that it loses some impact on us?

We need to hear the same message that Jesus spoke to the crowds in this text, “<sup>27</sup>**Do not continue to work for the food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.**” Because people misused the name “Messiah” Jesus preferred to use the name “Son of Man” which has the same meaning. He has come here to be one of us to save us from sin and open up heaven.

The things that the people were looking for didn’t last. Jesus fed them yesterday, but now they are hungry again today. If you finish a meal but didn’t finish all the food, you need to get it into the fridge as soon as possible so that it doesn’t begin to spoil. After we lost power for almost a full day I had to dump almost everything out of the fridge. It hurt to do that, but I didn’t want food poisoning.

That’s the way it is with everything. Clothes wear out. We just got our Chevy paid off, but I know that eventually it will succumb to some mechanical failure or good old fashioned Michigan weather and salt. I’ve got family members who aren’t with us anymore. I’ve even got a number of classmates who have died. One day I know it is going to be my turn too.

Jesus talks about another food that he wants to offer. He used the picture of feeding the 5,000 to teach them and us a deeper spiritual truth. Just like we need regular food to survive physically so also we need to food that Jesus offers to survive spiritually. He doesn't leave us hanging as to what this food is. Toward the end of this text he says, "**I am the Bread of Life.**"

Only Jesus can give us what we truly need. Only Jesus can give us the forgiveness we so desperately need each and every day. Only Jesus can assure us that we are God's children, not just for this life but for eternity. Only Jesus can open God's throne room so that we can go to him at any time and any place with any need or concern we might have. Only Jesus can give us the confidence that not even death can separate us from his love.

Jesus Is What You Need, not anything else and not something you work for.

The crowd in this text was a little slow on the uptake. They asked, "**What should we do to carry out the works of God?**" Jesus had just told them about all the wonderful things he has to offer them. Instead of accepting those things, they acted as if they hadn't heard a single word that he said. We can thank Pharisees for that. They turned the Law into this steep, tricky ladder that everyone had to try to climb to get into heaven.

That was never God's purpose behind the Law. He wanted it to be like a curb to keep our sinful desires in check. He wanted it to be like a mirror that showed us clearly how far short we fall of his standard of perfection. It does not exist to make us feel good about ourselves. It exists to show us how desperately we need the Savior that God provides. It drives us to our knees to beg, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

The crowds in this text are showing what theologians call the *opinio legis*, literally the opinion of the law. Ever since the fall into sin, humanity's minds of have been darkened, warped, and twisted. We can't see the right way to go. We assume that we must do something, anything, to get ourselves into God's good graces. We forget that even our best efforts don't bring us any closer to him. They only push us farther away.

That's why what Jesus says next is so striking and shocking, "**This is the work of God: that you believe in the one he sent.**" Or to put it another way, the work that God wants you to do is to stop trying to work your way into heaven. Why are you wasting your time and effort trying to work for something that God gives you for free through your Savior Jesus? Just accept what he's trying to give to you with humble thanks.

Right before this, Jesus had to say this about himself, "**For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.**" We heard that at his baptism and we will hear it again at his Transfiguration. God the Father himself declares Jesus to be his beloved Son. They didn't have God's approval because they were ignoring what he was telling them. Jesus did because he was carrying out his Father's will perfectly.

Sometimes people say that all religions are just different paths to the same God. Nothing could be less true. Every other religion says that you have to do something—maybe it's a little, maybe it's a lot—but you definitely have to do something to earn God's favor. That's not the message of the Bible. At all. The message of the Bible is that what we could never do, Jesus did for us. God does all the work. We get all the benefits. Yes, we still want to live for God, not to earn his favor, but because we already have it.

Sometimes people ask silly questions. This one is a doozy, "**So what miraculous sign are you going to do, that we may see it and believe you? What miraculous sign are you going to perform?**" Um, remember yesterday? Remember how Jesus took one person's lunch and made it go around for thousands of people? What more are you looking for? That was exactly Jesus' point earlier. They were so focused on the food they ate that they missed the point entirely.

I'm sure that all of us have wished that we could see some miraculous sign. We think it would make it easier for us to believe. But look throughout the Bible. This crowd saw a miracle but it didn't sink in. The Pharisees knew that Jesus raised Lazarus so they just plotted to murder them both. Miracles do not create faith. They never have and they never will. God speaks to us in his Word—full stop. His Word creates faith and sustains faith. If we don't listen to his Word, we will remain just as blind as this crowd was.

Jesus Is What You Need, not something you work for because no one else lasts.

The crowd was really hoping that Jesus would provide for them every day just like God had done for their ancestors when they were on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. In the first lesson for today we learned about the manna God provided for them. They could go out and gather enough for that day. God gave them that miraculous bread every day for 40 years.

That's what they wanted. If God would just feed them directly every day then they would have nothing to worry about every again. Wouldn't it be great? Unfortunately for them they only remembered some of their Bible history. They forgot that their forefathers were not thrilled about having manna every day to eat. They whined and complained about it. Why beg Jesus for something that the people before them really didn't want?

Jesus showed them what they really needed, **“Amen, Amen, I tell you: Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the real bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”** You don’t need someone to feed you every day. God has given you the ability to take care of that yourself. You need someone to feed you spiritually because no matter how hard you try, you can’t do that.

Jesus says that **“the bread of God...gives life to the world.”** The Bible clearly shows us that we are born dead. Oh, our hearts were beating, our lungs were breathing, synapses in our brains were firing. Those are all signs of physical life, but there were no signs of spiritual life to be seen. Jesus couldn’t be more clear, **“Whatever is born of flesh is flesh,”** in other words, big sinners give birth to little sinners.

People don’t like to hear that because babies look so pure and innocent. If they don’t have any chance, what hope does any of us have? That’s precisely the point. Apart from Christ we have no life, no future, no hope. But with Christ we have real life—earthly life with real meaning, spiritual life with God, and eternal life in heaven. With Christ we have a future filled with God’s comfort and blessings. With Christ we have a real and living hope for this life and eternity.

Jesus gave us life by taking our death on himself when he went to the cross. Through the Word and through Holy Baptism, God made us alive with Christ in his resurrection. Through the Word and Holy Communion, God keeps strengthening the life he created in us. This good news isn’t just for us. God wants everyone to know. He doesn’t want anyone to waste their lives trying to earn what he gives us for free in Christ.

Jesus ends with these beautiful words, **“I am the Bread of Life...The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.”** This is one of Jesus’ great I AM statements. Remember that when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush he said that his name is I AM. Jesus is showing that he is the exact same God who appeared to Moses so many years ago. That’s why we can believe what he says.

Think of the best meal you’ve ever had in your life. As delicious as it was, you were still hungry the next day. It can’t satisfy you forever. Jesus can and Jesus has. We don’t have to waste our lives trying to find out how in the world we are supposed to make God happy with us. Jesus has taken care of that. St. Augustine wrote, “Our heart is restless until it finds rest in you.” The search is over. Jesus meets all of your needs for this life and for all of eternity.

Jesus Is What You Need, not anything else and not something you work for, because no one else lasts. Jesus doesn’t want us to miss the forest for all the trees. He doesn’t want us to focus on the miracle, as if that was the important part. The important thing is his message, **“I am the Bread of Life.”** All of God’s other blessings are wonderful but none are better or more important or more lasting than our Savior.