

Jesus called Himself the “bread of life.” He told us to pray, “**Give us this day our daily bread.**” Bread is a simple type of food. It is thought of as a “staple”; an essential part of the food groups. Bread is served all over the world; no matter what country you are in. Usually you will offer people a piece of toast when they have upset stomachs and they are trying to recover from the flu, because bread is very simple and yet nourishing food. So when Jesus compares Himself to bread, perhaps we can think of the simple sustenance of it.

Some people prefer simple foods. They are afraid of exotic dishes; things like eel or cow tongue or rocky mountain oysters. When I was younger I wouldn't have tried most of them. I always wanted peanut butter and jelly. Sometimes mom threw in a chicken sandwich or maybe a meatloaf sandwich to liven things up a bit, and most of the time I didn't like it. I just wanted the basics; peanut butter and jelly on white bread. Our children are the same way. You make something different and some of our children will pick around at it and say, “I don't like it” before they even try a bite; because the texture is different or it smells weird. It is angering because you put a lot of time and effort into a meal and you want your child to enjoy it; and all they want is the same thing day after day. Then again, if it isn't broke, why fix it? When it comes to Jesus, we want people content with Him as the bread of life and to stick with Him.

Jesus called Himself the bread of LIFE - the bread of eternal life. Think about when people offer some new drug or food that is supposed to make you think clearer or lose weight. Beer makers will promote their beer with a special type of hops that are grown in the soil of Germany that gives it a specific flavor; a unique blend. The same is said of coffee with beans from Brazil or cheese made in Wisconsin. Jesus didn't proclaim to be a bread that could prolong your life or keep you cancer free. He didn't proclaim to have some special nutrients that could make you think clearer. He didn't just claim to be a little different or have a special flavor to Himself. He went with the most bold claim of all - that He was the bread of eternal life.

He wants to feed us generously! He wants to do it graciously and freely! Think about how soft and gentle and caring the angel of the LORD; who was the pre-incarnate Christ; was with Elijah as he was fleeing from Jezebel. Elijah was running for his life and running to the Lord at Mt. Horeb. When he was in the middle of the desert God saw His prophet lying there starving and afraid. He woke Elijah up twice and fed him with baked bread over hot coals; knowing that Elijah needed food and sustenance for the journey ahead. He didn't charge Elijah anything for the bread or even have him cook it. He prepared it, woke him up, and told him to eat it. This is how our God is. He wants to feed us.

A friend of mine told me about how she was dating a polish boy from the south side. When he brought her to his grandma's house; the grandma kept saying to her, “Eat! You're too skinny!” She ate and ate until she almost burst! This is how our God is. He wants us to eat and have our fill of Jesus. He doesn't charge us a thing! He wants us to come week after week. Jesus tells us, “**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled!**” What a meal we have here as we get to hear the Word of God and partake in the Lord's Supper! It fills us to overflowing with complete and full forgiveness; the words of eternal life - that Jesus is our Savior.

So Jesus says in the Lord's Supper. “**Take and eat, this is my body, which is given FOR YOU!**” When you give a child a wafer of unleavened bread that is used for communion in preparation for the Lord's Supper; most

of the time the children are surprised over how bland and flavorless it is. It doesn't taste like anything more than paper or cardboard to them. But think about what the Lord's Supper is. It is the body and blood of the Lord under the bread and wine that we receive for the forgiveness of sins. I tell them, "Don't worry about the flavor!" Jesus didn't want us to focus on the flavor of the bread or the wine. The power is in the promise of Jesus, who told us that hidden under these seemingly bland elements that He Himself would reside. The blandness of the bread leaves us with no choice but to focus on the power of the promise in the Word of the Lord. God doesn't want us to get distracted by the flavor of the bread; but to focus on the One who is hidden in the bread; the crucified and risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; who comes to us through time and eternity to give us the very thing that He used to pay for our sins.

Jesus told us to eat him and drink Him; His flesh and blood. Think about the picture that He is drawing with this. He was not asking for a simple fist bump or a wink. He wants to do more than hug us or to be our life coach. He wants us to eat Him and drink Him. Think about the intimacy of that picture. When we went to India some of our friends were given some sort of a chew like a tobacco or something from some Indians. They couldn't understand what they were saying. They made a motion for them to put it in their mouths. My friends didn't want to be rude, so they started chewing it and then they began to swallow it. Immediately the Indians waved with their hands, "No! No!" My friends spit it out and the Indians were all laughing; my friends laughed about it too. So think about that with what Jesus tells us to do. If you are going to put something in your mouth and swallow it; you are risking sickness and perhaps even death if something is wrong with it; if chicken isn't cooked fully through you can get food poisoning from it. So you smell it, cut into it, take a little nibble of it, and then decide whether to swallow it or not. Medicines are made to be swallowed or injected and to go through your blood system to cleanse your body and make it whole. You can't just be cleansed by looking at it. You have to eat it and drink it.

So when Jesus told His fellow Jews to eat Him and drink Him as the bread of life; He wanted them to consume Him and feed on Him; to trust Him in their body and soul that He was their life. He wanted them and us to digest Him as their one and only God and their one and only Savior; sent from heaven. He's more than a prophet or a gifted man. He doesn't want you to just walk through His pastures and look at His story as if you were going through an art gallery. He wants you to see that His whole story is for you to eat and to drink; His birth, death and resurrection were for YOU. He wants you to see how He went to the cross to die under your sins. He wants you to believe that when you were baptized you were crucified and raised with Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews used the food illustration and chastised the people because they didn't want anything but milk. They didn't want to progress in their faith. If "Jesus loves me" is all God wanted you to know, the Bible would have been three words long. But it's much longer than that. Christ crucified and risen is the bread; or we might say the meat and potatoes of the Bible. But that doesn't mean that there isn't more to Jesus than that. There's a lot more to chew on and digest.

Think about His discussion with the Jews in today's text. Jesus tried to move them into a deeper knowledge of who He was - this bread of life. He told them that He came from heaven; He was sent by the Father; so that He existed BEFORE He took on flesh; before He was born of the virgin Mary; before Joseph adopted Him as his own. They couldn't swallow it. They wouldn't swallow it. They spat Jesus out of their mouths.

There are many people who swallow the Jesus who feeds people and the Jesus who talks about not judging and the Jesus who tells us to turn the other cheek. This Jesus seems to be kind and passive and just a nice guy. But what they can't swallow is the Jesus who told people to repent; who spoke of people burning in hell and how those who rejected Him would be damned for an eternity. They can't stand the Jesus who condemns even looking at a woman lustfully or says that slanderers will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. He is too judgmental for them to swallow. They would rather that Jesus just be a bland kind of guy with a generic type of love who just loves everyone and everything without any call to repentance or faith in anything.

But when you dig into the bread of life; He is anything but bland. Some restaurants specifically sell their brand by preparing and cooking the food in front of you. It adds to the excitement and understanding and appreciation for what you are eating. Even in making bread there is a process that is involved. When you buy something that is "homemade" and you realize what ingredients are used; it can even set bread apart and make some bread far superior to others.

Jesus was telling the Jews and telling us; "I am special. This Person you are talking to, I am from heaven above. I am God's Son in the flesh." So when we see Jesus being whipped and mocked and dying; this is no generic type of love story. This is God dying. When He is crucified He is also being rejected by the Father on behalf of humanity. He isn't just dying for His friends; He is dying for the world. We then see this God-man raising the dead; healing the sick; speaking the Word. He was full of life - He created the world; and He was put to death; but raised to life. This is no normal bread. He looks normal on the outside; but He is far from normal on the inside. This bloody man of a man on the cross is my Lord and my God. He has given Himself for me to chew on and digest; to believe that He is my Lord and Savior.

So although He might appear at first glance to be like any other bread, this is the most rare dish indeed! In comparison and unlike any other god or legend; He does not rule and conquer through unbridled and destructive power alone. He does not commit adultery with women. He does not rule with an iron fist or set up a kingdom on earth or even give riches and fame. He suffers and dies for us. He offers us a free salvation; bakes up the perfect dish; and lays it before us and says, "Eat." He doesn't make us earn it. He offers me the only way to heaven; through faith and not by works. He is the rarest dish; the seemingly most disgusting dish to human reason; the weakest dish in the world and yet the most powerful and tasty dish we have to eat. If we refuse to eat Him and drink Him; to swallow what He says about Himself; we will be damned to hell.

Do you crave this dish? Do you hang on His every word? Do you appreciate how rare and beneficial this bread is? Think about the recent attraction to Donald Trump. Even though the man is sometimes rude and offensive and full of himself there was a sold out arena in Birch Run to hear him speak. A part of his charisma is his political incorrectness and his willingness to say what he thinks without backing down; how he will put China and Russia and Mexico under control. The media loves playing sound bites from him and people are eating it up. Compare that to how you respond to Jesus' words. Such a simple and yet loving meal of grace He offers. Think of the dog at the side of the table. Put up a piece of meat. Flash it back and forth. The dog will look and drool and bark, shake and sit, all for a little bite. Is that how you crave Jesus? When so many disciples left Jesus for saying that He was the bread sent from heaven, it was Peter who said, "**To whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**" Oh, that we would crave Your Words like that Jesus.

When Elijah ran from Jezebel and had been fed for the journey. He finally arrived at Mt. Horeb, the same place where Moses had spoken with God and received the Ten Commandments. God asked him a simple question? What are you doing here? Elijah came to hear from God. He ran miles and miles through a desert to encounter God. What did God do to revive Elijah's spirit? He spoke to Elijah with a gentle and small whisper. He comforted Elijah with promises of protection and fellowship that he didn't even realize existed. He spoke to Elijah with His living word.

What are you doing here? What are you running from? What are you running to? Out of all the people that are starving in the desert of death in this world; God has brought you here for one purpose, to feed on the bread of life. This is a place where you find the most wonderful meal of all; of the God made flesh to live and die for you. Here you listen to His voice. Here you sing His Word to one another. Here you receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. In a simple and yet magnificent way; the Lord Jesus talks to you here; to revive your soul and give you life in Him as you digest the most wonderful bread of life - and His name is Jesus Christ. Amen.