

# John 6:25-40

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] What do we really need to live? What do we really need? It's a kind of biology question,! We need air, we need oxygen, we need water, we need three days without water, then we're! We need food. If we've got those three things, we can actually live. They're the three things we definitely need. These have always been the most basic needs for every human being, aren't they? Air to breathe, water to drink, food to eat. And what's the most basic food substance? Well, in the Jewish culture of the first century, and to a certain extent in our culture today, it's bread, isn't it? Bread is the basic staple of life in various cultures anyway. In fact, I had no bread at lunch today, so I was condemned to eating Ravita biscuits instead, because it wasn't the same. Truth is to tell, we had the carbohydrates I needed to at least get me through this far through the day. Now, as we look at this story, remember we're back in an agriculture, an agrarian economy, where people didn't have bank accounts, they didn't have savings plans, they didn't have investments or pensions. They would work each day, and if they earned enough, they'd have bread to eat. So what these people have just experienced was, if I can mix my metaphors for a moment, it was like, all their Christmases coming together. Jesus, the day before, had fed them all they could eat. And so they wanted to make him king. Here is someone who can actually provide what we need. Wouldn't we love it if the government could actually provide for our basic needs like that, and food banks on every corner for anyone who needed them. It would be great, wouldn't it? That's what these people had seen in Jesus. They're like, yes, we can have food to eat. No more hunger. No more worries about where the next meal will come from. No more crisis if the crops fail. We're sorted.

Jesus has satisfied our physical needs. Let's make him king. And of course, Jesus would have avoided them. He'd run away. Chapter 6, verse 15. So they come to find him, still wanting him to provide day by day, to keep them going, to give them their food. They came with a material, physical need. We're missing out on spiritual reality entirely. And yet how often do we come to Jesus with our physical, our material needs? We want him to sort out a new job for us. We want him to sort out problems in our families. We want him to make life that bit easier. We come with all sorts of things we want him to sort out, believing he's able to sort them out, and no doubt he is. But we need to pay attention to this conversation Jesus has with these people. Because in it, he confronts their priorities, but also our priorities. Their preconceptions, perhaps our preconceptions. And their pride, and also our pride. So let's first of all see how he exposes their priorities. Look at verse 26. They come to him, they ask him a question about when he came there, which is really a bizarre question. He's just trying to start a conversation, I think. Jesus cuts straight to the traces. He really says to them, verse 26. Jesus answered them, truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. In other words, Jesus said, what you saw yesterday was a sign. It was a sign, it pointed something. Signs point to things, don't they? You see a sign saying Ealing Borough, as I drive up from Hounslow Borough, I know it's a sign pointed to the reality that this area is Ealing. It doesn't mean the sign itself is Ealing Borough, that would be a very stupid, literalistic way of thinking, wouldn't it? And yet these people have done just that. They see the sign that's pointing to who Jesus really is. But instead of grasping the meaning of that sign, grasping the meaning of the miracle that Jesus had done, instead they're just looking at the physical thing they see, the bread they've experienced. Jesus says, you're not seeking me because you see the sign pointing to who I am. You're not seeking me, you're seeking what I can do for you. You're seeking what I can do for you, not me. I think Jesus is a great bread machine.

Just go keep feeding them. They're missing out on the significance of who Jesus is and what he's actually doing. But notice Jesus doesn't just leave them there, he urges them to get their priorities right. To move beyond the physical and the material to what they really need. So look at verse 27.

Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal. You see their problem? They're just focused on the material, on satisfying their physical needs here and now. They completely neglect that there are bigger issues. There is a bigger thing that Jesus has come to put right for them than just their physical material needs. And that is eternal life. Eternal life is not just a quantity of life, life that goes on forever. It's also a quality of life. It's the life we were made for. The life we were made for in relationship with God. Yet we live in a world that's marked by death, don't we? We all face death. Death is something we all have to deal with. We tend not to think about it because it's a taboo subject in our culture, isn't it? Yet death is the ultimate thing we all have to face. Tolstoy, the great Russian author, realized this. It depressed him greatly. So he once wrote, is there any meaning to my life which the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy? He saw that nothing he did would really last forever, even writing

[ 5 : 29 ] War and Peace doesn't last forever. And he certainly wouldn't last forever. That's why Jesus is saying there's something more important to work for than bread, than your physical appetite, than the eternal life. We all know in our hearts, don't we, that actually material things do not fully satisfy. They do not fill the gaps in our hearts and our lives. Now 50 years, 50 years last May, I think it was, when Keith Richards dozing off to sleep in his hotel room in Hyde Park, started strumming on his guitar, playing a few riffs with a tape recorder next to him, and singing the words that were in his mind, I guess. I can't get no satisfaction. I can't get no satisfaction. Ended up being the Rolling Stones' first number one hit in the US and the UK.

I can't get no satisfaction. It's true. I try and I try and I try, they're saying. And they still can't, they still say that. In Nick Hornby's book, *A Long Way Down*, it's a book about four people who meet, because they're all on the roof of a multi-storey car park on New Year's Eve, attempting to commit suicide. And none of them do, in the end they come down and hence the novel goes on. One of the characters is a TV presenter, who has had a great fall from grace. He's been exposed in a sex scandal, and so he's lost his family, lost his career.

And at one point his character says this, if you're a DIY enthusiast, then you'll know that occasionally you come across holes that are just too big for filler, especially in the bathroom. The guy who did a lot of work on my house previously, obviously, took this approach. When that happens, the sloppy way to do it is just bung the holes up with anything you can find. Broken matches, bits of sponge, whatever you can find. Maybe that is what we all need in life, whether we're suicidal or not. Maybe life is just too big a gap to be plugged with filler. So we need anything we can get our hands on to fill it up. Some people do try to fill it up with all sorts of things, don't they? Well, the whole novel resounds with emptiness and doesn't answer the question it poses. We're only looking at material things, just like matchsticks and junk to fill up the holes. We are made for something bigger. See, Jesus is exposing our priorities. So don't get fixated with just material things. There are bigger questions. There is something bigger. Be busy with what lasts for eternity. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will gift you. Now, that's not a piece of advice. It's a command. Work for, seek the things which endure for eternal life. Don't spend your life flittering away on material stuff, because there is something beyond this world. But notice the promise there as well. Food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will gift you. That's Jesus himself. For on him, God the Father has set his seal. Why is the priorities exposed? Then Jesus gets to their preconceptions. Because what Jesus has just said opens up another assumption, the preconceptions this crowd has. Look at verse 28. They miss the fact that Jesus had talked about giving them what endures to eternal life. Instead, they pick up on the thing about working for it. Look at verse 28.

[ 8 : 53 ] Then the crowd said to him, what must we do to be doing the works of God? That's a great question, isn't it? What is the work of God? What is it that God requires of us? What is it that God wants from us? People give us all sorts of different answers to that. Some people think it's going to church. It's being there regularly. It's giving money. Or it's being kind to the environment. It's doing nice things. Being a nice person. Being tolerant. Not being too extreme. But what does Jesus say? How does Jesus answer this question? Verse 29. Jesus answered, this is the work of God, that you believe in him who he has sent. That's the work.

That's what God requires. He has sent his Son as a rescuer to give us life, to restore us to himself, to save us from our sin. The work he requires. It's not to change ourselves.

It's not to pull our socks up and be better. It's to believe. It's to believe. The Father has endorsed his Son. Jesus' baptism, the voice came from heaven. This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. All Jesus' life is marked out as having the Father's approval until he died on the cross. So Jesus is saying, believe in me. And you get this gift of life. And do you notice, this is not just a general spiritual belief. It's not just a belief there is a God out there. It's not just a belief in goodness or niceness. It's a very specific belief.

Believe in him whom he has sent. So this is a Christian belief, a Trinitarian belief. It's belief in God the Father who has sent Jesus Christ the Son into the world. And the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead. This is what we're, this is God's work. It's what God demands of us. To believe what he has done in Christ. So the big question for you and me here today is not, are we nice people? Are we feeling fulfilled in our lives? Are we going to church? Are we coming to lunchtime? That's not the question. The question is, do we believe that God the Father sent the Son? Do we believe that? A few years ago, a very good friend of mine came to a Christianity Explored course. We worked through this basic Christian teaching. At the end of the course, Thomas asked me a question and kind of summed up for him the Christian message. That we're all separated from God by our rebellion against him. That God sent his own Son to pay the punishment for that rebellion. Raise him to life so that we can have new life if we will trust in him. And Thomas looked at me and said, it can't be that simple. It can't be that simple. Why did he say that? He was a very smart man. He was a very successful man. He did very well in his career. But for him, I think part of it is the idea that he simply had to believe this message and trust this message just sounded too easy. It sounded like he ought to be able to do something more than that for himself.

[12:07] But actually, he couldn't. He couldn't. I can't. And you can't. And neither could this crowd. We see why, as we go on to the next part of the conversation, as Jesus exposes their pride. Look at verse 30. They said to him, then what sign do you do that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. And again, back to the Old Testament, where God had rescued Israel from Egypt. And during their 40 years in the desert, being led by Moses, he'd fed them every day with manna from heaven. They said, come on, Jesus, we'll see you something like that. Show us that we can believe in you. Now, this would be comical if it wasn't so tragic, wouldn't it? I mean, after all, what had happened 24 hours before? Jesus had taken five loaves and two fish and fed 5,000 of them. But they have seen everything they need to see. Except with their blindness, they didn't really see what had happened. You see their problem here? They want Jesus to bow to their pressure and perform, instead of them bowing to his power and worshipping. They want to set the agenda for Jesus, instead of letting him set the agenda for them. They might have said we're just being rational people. We're not going to commit ourselves to something we don't have evidence for. The truth is not a lack of evidence. The truth is their pride and spiritual blindness.

You can see that more clearly if you look down to verse 42. They, the crowd, said, is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I've come down from heaven? No, it's Jesus. You're just like us. Don't try and make yourself bigger than you are. We don't believe you. The problem, really, is pride. The problem is pride. Because there are many people today who will say similar things. I would believe in God if only there was evidence. I believe if Jesus had answered my prayers, I would believe by now. And what do they do? They're wanting Jesus to meet their agenda, instead of submitting to his agenda.

They're wanting Jesus to perform, rather than for themselves to bow before his power and authority. It's not a lack of evidence that keeps people away from Christ. It's pride. It's pride. But having exposed their priorities, their preconception, that they need to do something to impress God, and now their pride, Jesus then gives them this great promise. And it's a promise for us as well. Verse 35. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

This is the great promise. You can have life, says Jesus. You need to come to me. You need to take me as I am. You need to accept me as the one sent from the Father. You need to believe in this great promise. And do you notice who exactly Jesus thinks he is? He is the bread of life. He's not the ice cream of life. He's not the canapes of life. He's not the champagne of life. He's the bread. He's the thing you and I need for real life. Not for a bit of glitz on the top, not for a bit of fun around the corner. Not to make our dreams come true, but to give us real life. Bread is a fundamental thing, isn't it? There is no life now, no eternal life without Jesus. Look at how he goes

on, verse 36. I said, but I said to you that you have seen me, and yet do not believe. But all the Father gives me who will come to me, who ever comes to me, I will never cast out. If we will humble ourselves and believe, he will never cast us out. We will have this rescue, we will have this life and be satisfied.

Now maybe a couple of questions in your mind at this point before I close. Some of us might say, well, hang on, I still feel spiritually hungry sometimes. I have come to Christ, yet I don't yet seem to have everything I want. It doesn't seem to be quite right. Well, it could be, it could be that you haven't really trusted in Jesus and come to him on his terms, but like this crowd, you're expecting him to meet you on your terms. Or it could be that actually there is some thing in your life, some sin in your life or my life, where we're actually ending up looking for fulfilment in one of the world's ways, rather than in Christ.

[16:43] And he will not let us find fulfilment in those things. He loves us too much. So dissatisfaction now may be something that the Lord is using to turn us back wholeheartedly to himself.

And also it's important to say the full satisfaction, the full riches of sharing in a meal served by Jesus. We get tastes now that will not come until he comes back, until he raises us up on that last day.

So if you feel like you too, remember that song, I still haven't found what I'm looking for? And keep looking at Jesus. He is the bread of life.

But maybe you're reading verse 37 and panicking. All the Father gives me will come to me. Maybe you're sitting there thinking, well, how do I know I've been given by the Father? Maybe I'm not. Maybe I've not been chosen. Maybe I've not been called.

Well, focus on the second half of the verse instead. Whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. If you will call out to Jesus and come to him as the bread of life, he will never cast you out.

[17:50] What will he do? Verse 40. This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life. And I will raise him up on the last day. That's the promise. That is true.

So the question for us, questions for us are, what are we really looking for? And what do we really believe? Let's pray.