

John 6:1-40

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[0 : 00] Please open your Bibles to John chapter 6. Jesus is a brilliant storyteller.

! He's a master communicator.! I don't know whether you noticed in the reading, there's not one long word, there's not one difficult!

In the whole of John 6. Jesus takes simple concepts and makes the most profound points. And so let me take you back to about five hours ago to the lunch table.

As you sat down and ate your meal, maybe your feast, whoever was the host of that table, whoever's table it was, said at the end of that meal, do you want any more or are we done?

And you may have replied, I'm stuffed. Or I'm full. I couldn't eat another thing.

[1 : 12] That's a common human experience. It's probably too common in my case. I'm full. It may be that the cook said at the dinner table, have you had your fill?

I couldn't eat another thing. Your belt groaning under the strain of your growing belly. But that feeling doesn't last, does it? When you go home tonight, you will probably eat again.

You'll be full at lunchtime, but you'll eat at summertime. You might be full, still full from this lunchtime. But when you wake up tomorrow morning, you will eat at breakfast time.

Certainly at lunchtime. Being full physically doesn't last, does it? And that is the beautiful little picture tucked away in John chapter 6.

And the key verse is there in verse 35. Can you see it? My mic is playing tricks on me, isn't it? Is someone, can someone, it may not be echoing for you, it is for me. Verse 35, Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life.

[2 : 15] Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. And whoever believes in me shall never thirst. And so can you see Jesus uses this picture, doesn't he, of physical eating and being full.

And he teaches us the most profound lesson. He shows us our greatest need through the simplest picture. And Jesus gives the answer to satisfaction.

The answer to being full. The key text is there in verse 35. And I'm sure as I read those words in verse 35, those words are familiar, aren't they?

Perhaps they're too familiar to you tonight. But they are profound words. What Jesus wants tonight is that you would come to him.

And that you would recognize that in him alone you can find true satisfaction. True life. And not only in this world. But the life that you were designed for.

[3 : 20] But also in the world which is to come. A life that has meaning and significance and purpose. The opposite to what Jesus is promising here is death. It is starvation.

It is despair. It is purposelessness. And so point one. Jesus is saying to you, it's not this bread, but the bread of life.

Not this bread, but the bread of life. There's four scenes in the chapter. If you were with us last week in chapter five. You'll see that we were in the temple in the capital of the religious body, Israel. The Jewish leaders, far from accepting Jesus as Messiah. Which was clearly the case as far from receiving his words. That he was the son from the father. That he'd clearly demonstrated.

Instead of accepting that, they want to kill him. They hate him. Because he's doing work on the Sabbath. He's doing what the Lord God alone can do. Because he's calling himself God the Father.

[4 : 18] Making himself equal with God. And as we remember, far from backing down. Sorry, it might be my problem. The thing's hanging down. As we remember, far from, instead of backing down, Jesus doubles down, doesn't he?

And he opens up to them his identity. He gives three witnesses to prove his claim. He says, first of all, John the Baptist. The great prophet of the Old Testament. He said, didn't he?

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This man who so clearly turned the world upside down. He was clearly a prophet of God. And he says, Jesus is the one. He's the son of God.

And then there's the evidence of Jesus' works. The way he, with just a word, healed a man. Who'd been lying there for 38 years paralyzed beside a pool. A picture of despair and helplessness. But with a word, Jesus has given him life. And then the ultimate witness. The Father himself. That mind shift of what scripture is all about.

[5 : 17] The testimony of God the Father. From generation to generation, preparing the way for the coming of his son. It's crystal clear who Jesus is at the end of chapter 5. He says in chapter 5, verse 24.

Whoever hears my word and believes him who has sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

But they would not accept him, would they? They would not accept him and they did not receive him because they wanted the glory that comes from man and not from God. And so that was last week.

And now we're back in the North Territory in Galilee in verse 1. And there's four different scenes. Let's track them. Scene 1, verses 1 to 15. We're on the eastern bank of the Sea of Galilee. It's the opposite side to the populated area.

You're in a kind of desert region. Opposite Cana where Jesus turned water into wine. And here in verse 1 to 15, he's followed by an enormous crowd.

[6 : 16] We read that the crowd is 5,000 people, 5,000 men. But when you count the women and children, it's closer to 20,000. I try to think about that in local terms. Think of Brentford's football stadium just off the M4.

It's filled to capacity with a couple of thousand more on the pitch. That's the amount of people that are there. And this 20,000 strong crowd, they follow him out to this unpopulated desert area.

And verse 5, Jesus is up on the mountain with his disciples. He looks up, he sees the crowd surging towards him. Hungry, no doubt, from a day of travel. And in verse 6, he knows what he's about to do.

He calls over the local boy Philip from Bethsaida. And says, Philip, where can we find a place? Where can we find a kind of food truck, local cafe, restaurant? Where can we feed these people who are so hungry?

And Philip's reply in a loose translation is, are you nuts? We've got 200 denarii, that's 200 days wages. But even that is not going to be enough to feed them. Andrew pipes up in verse 8 and says, look over there.

[7 : 24] There's a guy with five loaves of barley and a fish. But in an act of sheer genius, he admits that that's not going to be enough to feed all the people. Verse 10, Jesus has them all sitting down in a grassy area.

And he has this fish and bread passed around such that it doesn't just provide a bit, but they are full. Full. Can you see what it says?

And when they had eaten their fill. Think back to the lunch table, when they were stuffed. And there are 12 baskets left over. Scene 2 is verses 16 to 21.

The scene is the Sea of Galilee itself. And in verse 16, the disciples have made their way down to the beach side where the boat is. They get into the boat, they begin rowing to the other side, to Capernaum, which is a number of miles away.

Verse 18, it's pitch black. The wind is howling, the sea is churning. They are terrified even though they're experienced fishermen. It's Psalm 77, which we sang earlier. And they're terrified particularly because Jesus is walking beside them on the sea.

[8 : 36] Though they don't realise it. To calm their fears, Jesus announces himself and he says, I am. It is I do not fear.

He's sticking into the boat. And verse 21, all of a sudden they find themselves on the other side. Scene 3 begins in verse 22 and ends in verse 24.

It's the next day. The sun is up. The crowd goes down to the boat, but it's gone. It's not there. The disciples are gone too. And they knew that Jesus didn't enter the boat with the disciples and yet Jesus is no longer there either.

Verse 23, there's a load of other boats from an area called Tiberias, which is the southwest. And they've made this huge journey to try and find Jesus. They've heard of his miraculous feeding. And they want fed too. And in verse 24, the whole crowd confers together. The crowd plus the newcomers hop into a boat in hot pursuit of Jesus. They chase him down.

[9 : 41] The great feeder of people. And they head to Capernaum where he almost certainly is. And that takes us to scene 4. Which runs from verse 25 to the end of the chapter. You're in a busy city.

Verse 59, we learn that they're actually in the synagogue. That's where they've tracked Jesus down to. Presumably he's teaching. Verse 26, Jesus sees their hearts and he knows their motivation. Why have you put so much effort traversing the whole country, going walkabout in the desert, jumping on a boat to track me down? You're not actually seeking me, Jesus says.

You want food. Glance with me at verse 26. Jesus says, truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

But, just as a kind of sidebar, there is a kind of false Christianity, isn't there? There is a kind of Christianity which is the kind of feeding Christianity.

[10 : 51] The kind of Christianity which treats Jesus as a slot machine. Jesus as the man who dispenses the things that we want in this world.

A Christianity that demands gifts, but in the end doesn't have much interest in the giver. And that isn't the seeking that finds the real Jesus.

That kind of seeking is empty. That kind of seeking of Jesus isn't saving. It's not a satisfying seeking. No, the seeking that Jesus wants is a different type of seeking.

We'll think more of that in a minute. The people want more bread. They want their bellies to be full. And the difficulty for us is, in healing, bread is so abundant.

Isn't it? You can go and have sourdough. You can have the seeded GI cob in Lidl, whatever that is.

[11 : 50] Farmer's loaf, sliced white, 50-50. It's on tap, isn't it, all of the time. But of course that wasn't the case in the first century. People prayed, didn't they?

Give us today our daily bread. Because daily bread was a necessity. And each day you would go and buy bread from the wages of the day before. These people desperately needed bread.

They were right. Profoundly right in one sense. In seeking Jesus. They were seeking someone who could provide them with that physical bread. And they're seeking him earnestly, verse 24 and 25.

They are seeking. And in verse 30, they ask for a sign, don't they, to see and believe. They are really seeking in one sense.

But in another sense, they're not. They are blind to who Jesus is. They see him as a prophet.

Earlier on in the passage, verse 14, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.

[12 : 54] He's a miracle worker. He's a bit like Moses on behalf of God, they think. Not God himself. Defeating the enemies of God's people. Giving them what they want. They see him in the next verse, in verse 15, as a merely human king who will come and will overthrow the Romans once and for all.

So that they could have bread in abundance. Without the pressures of an oppressive ruling regime. And in verse 30, can you see it?

They ask for a sign. I think that's extraordinary. They've just had a sign a few verses ago of Jesus feeding 20,000 people. From five loaves of bread and a couple of fish.

But again, their words reveal the reality that they're not really actually interested in a sign pointing to Jesus so that they will believe in him. They're thinking with their stomach.

Only with the eyes of this world. So verse 30. They said, then what sign do you do? That we may see and believe you.

[14 : 05] 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 I think what is going on there is them revealing what they actually want.

They are blind to spiritual reality. What they're looking for there is some more manna. More physical bread to fill their stomachs.

Verse 27. They only see according to the ways of this world. And not according to eternal realities.

And so Jesus says to them, do not labor for the food that perishes.

But for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you. And this is where we need to kind of zero in. Two points of application.

Jesus says, can you see verse 27? Do not work for the bread that perishes. That is the kind of bread that these people were seeking.

[15:15] All that we think will bring us satisfaction. Jesus says, don't labor for it. Instead, work for the food that endures to eternal life.

Which the Son of Man, which Jesus himself alone can give you. And Jesus has already demonstrated for us, isn't it? That he is the only one who can give everlasting life.

The bread that goes beyond this world. The things that take us from this world into eternity. True eternal life. And that is because in those first two scenes.

He so clearly demonstrates that he is Lord. In the Exodus. The rescue of Israel from Egypt. Do you remember that? Into the promised land. It was an epic rescue.

It was a picture though of the ultimate rescue that is to come in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we don't have a Moses figure who led the people through the sea.

[16:24] We don't have a Moses figure, a prophet. But we have the Lord himself, don't we? We have the one who stepped into history to feed his people in the wilderness with everlasting bread.

To take us from this world into eternal life. Out of the world under judgment. Into the world of rescue and judgment and joy. And scene one shows us that.

And scene two showed us that. Do you notice what Jesus said in verse 20? He says, doesn't he, when they're terrified in the boat, it is I. In other words, I am God's name as it was announced in Exodus 3.

Jesus is doing what God alone can do. In Psalm 77 that we read and sang to start our service.

There's the promise of one who will come stepping on the water. And Jesus is fulfilling it.

Walking on top of the wind and the waves of the sea. Because he himself created it. And of course what Jesus says here is true. Jesus can give us the food that endures to eternal life.

[17:29] He can give us what we actually need. He can give us what satisfies. Because he is the Lord of life. And as he puts it in the key verse, in verse 35.

He and he alone is the bread of life. Verse 35. I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. And whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Or verse 32. Truly, truly, I say to you.

It was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven. But my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. I love that quote from C.S. Lewis. I've quoted it loads of times.

But here it is. If I find in myself a desire. If I find in myself a desire. Which no experience in this world can satisfy. The most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it. That does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it.

[18:26] But only to arouse it. To suggest the real thing. And that's what Jesus is saying to us here. He's saying to you that the desire that you have for satisfaction.

That desire is a good desire. But it will only be met in one place. And that is in him who is the bread of life. For the original readers of John's gospel back then.

Under the pressure of a powerful and impressive Jewish elite. Many of them from a Jewish background. Undoubtedly they were tempted to go back, weren't they? They were tempted to go back on this following of the Lord Jesus.

As they're under attack. But Jesus is here reminding them. You have the real thing. So don't rely on shadows. And pictures that were pointing forward to reality.

In him, the Lord Jesus. You found real satisfaction. And you can see obviously, can't you? The parallels for us today.

[19:33] I think it's so easy. For us. To look outside. To look at our friends in school. To look at our friends in the workplace. To look at the people who live on our streets.

And envy those around us. And think that what they have is the real deal. And if I had what they had. It would satisfy. And Jesus says what they have is the bread which perishes.

Which will not last. And it will not give you satisfaction. And it will not give you life. But it will actually take you from this world.

And Jesus says to you tonight. He says to you. Do not seek it. I don't know if you're like me. But it's so easy in our hearts to seek those things.

Isn't it? The bread which perishes. Whether it's raw money. Or experiences. Or some particular relationship.

[20 : 37] Or an achievement in life. It's a bit like. The person has a great big castle. Or a great mansion behind them. But they're focusing all their time.

On making a little mud hut. On which they're going to live. I was talking with someone this week. And they said they'd been brought up. By a tiger mother.

I didn't have the foggiest clue. What they were talking about. I nodded. I had to go home and Google what it is. And so let me tell you what a tiger mother is. A tiger mother is a style of parenting. That emphasises academic achievement. Life success. And discipline. And that person was telling me about how. In their life. They were kind of defined by those three things.

By this tiger mother. I'm not sure she would like to be described like that. Academic achievement. Life success. Discipline. Being defined by those things.

[21 : 40] Jesus says no. And so it doesn't matter does it. How many distinctions you get in your music exam. It doesn't matter how brilliantly you do in your exams.

It doesn't matter if you become a CEO. Or even a doctor. They're good things. But none of those things will ultimately satisfy.

Only coming to the Lord Jesus. The true bread who feeds us now. Who feeds us now and keeps us for eternal life.

And the opposite Jesus makes really clear is starvation and death. And finally judgment. And that is coming to all those who will not feed on him.

And the bread that he offers. What will give you the satisfaction that you so desperately want and need. Is not the bread of this life.

[22 : 45] But the bread of Jesus himself. The bread of life. And we could finish there. But I think there's a second theme. Which is really important in the passage. Which I want to finish on. If Jesus is the bread of life.

How do we get him? How do you get him? How do you get hold of this bread? Well the answer is. By not doing. But by depending. Not by doing. But by depending. Look at verse 28 with me. If you're still awake.

Verse 28. Then they said to him. What must we do. To be doing the works of God. And these people are good.

They're good Jewish people. Good Jewish Jews. And they followed the law of Moses. As it was understood. They'd begun to do the works. A whole load of religious works.

[23 : 40] In order to get eternal life. That they thought they could achieve. By keeping the law of Moses. And now they're asking their new guru. The new guy on the block. What work do you.

Want us to do. What law keeping. Do you want us to keep. And that is the way of religion.

But that is also the way of this world. What you do. What you do. What you do. Gives you the outcome. You deserve. Isn't that the light. Isn't that the message. Of the world.

And that is right. In so many ways. Is there. What you do. Gives you the outcome. You deserve. So true. In so many areas of life. But that isn't how.

The economy of God works. John told us. At the start of the gospel. The law came through Moses.

[24 : 37] But grace and truth. Came through Jesus Christ. And so here is the thing. To receive. The bread of life.

There is nothing you can do. There is no work. That you can achieve. To earn. The eternal life of God.

That will only satisfy. And so there is nothing. That you can do. The only way. To receive the bread of life.

Is receiving. And depending. On him. You see it in verse 35. Verse. Verse 35. Jesus said to them. That I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me. Shall not hunger.

And whoever believes in me. Shall never thirst. And so how do you get eternal life. There is two things there. It is really simple. By believing. Relying. Trusting.

[25 : 36] It is the opposite of doing. It is the opening. Of the hand. And receiving Jesus. And the life that he offers.

John explains it in another way. Doesn't he. He talks about coming to him. Coming to him. Empty handed. Coming to him. At your wits end. Coming to him.

Recognising that you have nothing. And no resources in yourself. Spiritually speaking. You know that you are under the judgement of God. And rightly so. Because of the way you have lived. In God's world. Without reference to him.

And so believe in him. And come to him. For the grace he promises. Believe. Come. And then one more word. That helps us know.

How we can receive him. Verse 40. Jesus says. For 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 day. On the last day.

[26 : 29] Jesus is deliberately pointing you back. To the old testament. He is alluding to that bronze serpent. In numbers. Where the people of Israel. Were poisoned. As an expression of God's wrath.

But God provided a substitute. A bronze snake. Who was lifted up. And as the people looked to him. They were healed. It was nothing.

In themselves. They were healed by. But in looking to the substitute. That God had provided. And back in chapter 3. Jesus likens himself.

Doesn't he. To that snake. Who was first lifted up on the cross. And on the cross. He bore the judgment. And the poison. And the wrath of God. That we each deserve. And as we come to him. Depending on him. Looking to him. Trusting him. We are healed of all our sins. Past and present and future. And that is what it is. To believe in him.

[27 : 27] To look to him. To look to him. Not just on the cross. But one day. In resurrection power. As he is now. So he will come one day. And he will receive those.

Into his eternal kingdom and life. Because of his death and resurrection. And that is the magnificent news. But there is more. Isn't it? Verse 34. All those who receive Jesus. And trust him.

John 6 verse 34. That is the wrong verse. It is verse 37. He says this.

All that the father gives me. Will come to me. And whoever comes to me. I will never cast out. I will never turn away. That means tonight.

You can relax. You don't have to work for your salvation. Jesus has done it. You will never be cast out. Do you have a doubt.

[28 : 32] That you will really make it. Because of your sins. I do. Jesus says to us tonight. You will never be cast out. Or again. The father's own words. Verse 39. And this is the will of him who sent me. That I should lose nothing.

Of all that he's given me. But will raise it up on the last day. And so if you're worried. That your sins will count against you. You have the will of God. He will not.

And he cannot allow you to be lost. And so what a privilege it is. To be a Christian tonight. And what an opportunity it is. For those who maybe are not Christians.

This isn't about your works. It isn't about what you do. But about resting in the work of Jesus Christ. And receiving eternal life. The bread of life. Which satisfies. For life and eternity.

And we can be absolutely certain tonight. Because. That this is the case. Because it's guaranteed. By the one who has risen from the dead. And the father who has sent him. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[29 : 32]