

2021-08-08 John 6:35, 41-51 Jesus the Bread of Life

35 Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

41 Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' 42 They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' 43 Jesus answered them, 'Do not complain among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

The natural world is amazing. One of the things that always fascinates me is the ability that animals appear to have of knowing what it is that they need to eat and exactly where to find it. Of course some animals need to be taught but many of them seem to just know what it is they need. How different it would be if a creature did not know that it needed to feed itself or was not able to do so. Of course it would not survive for very long and the whole species would become extinct.

Jesus, speaking in our reading, says that it is a bit like this for human beings. We have a need for spiritual nourishment but in our natural state it seems that we are blind to that. We all seem to be able to recognise physical hunger and have a strong motivation to do something about that, but spiritual hunger seems to be much more difficult to pin down and satisfy. And the danger is that if we are not spiritually fed we will spiritually die.

The incredible claim that Jesus makes - following his miracle of the feeding of the multitude with the bread and fish - is that Jesus himself is the Bread of Life. He claims not just to be able to provide physical food as he has just done, but to be able to provide food that satisfies our need for eternal sustenance.

To eat earthly bread sustains life for a time, but the person who eats will ultimately die. To receive the spiritual Bread (that is Christ) gives one eternal life.

A common theme in the gospel of John is the inability of people to be able to see spiritual reality. The crowds are able to see that Jesus is a provider for physical needs and we learned last week that they were motivated to make him their king, presumably in order to provide for the needs that they knew that they had. But the people were not able to see that Jesus was more than the fulfiller of superficial, earthly needs, but the One who could fulfil our deepest, eternal needs.

Jesus' listeners were spiritually blind and as a result remain spiritually hungry, because they don't recognise that Jesus is the Bread of Life.

The challenge is the same, though, for all of us. Even if we recognise that Jesus is more than a mere man, we can still get caught up with seeing him as the provider merely of our temporal, earthly needs, and not the one who fulfils our very deepest, eternal needs. We risk approaching him much as we would a magic genie, to grant us our wishes, instead of coming to him as the one in whom all things were created, and in whom all things hold together, the one who fulfils all our deepest longings.

We have to choose how to respond to the claims of Jesus. Much as we need to decide whether or not to eat food placed before us, or to buy from the supermarket and bring back to our meal table the food that promises to give us energy and health. We only benefit nutritionally once we take food and eat it. Similarly we can only benefit from the eternal life that Jesus

offers to us if we take hold of Jesus by faith, making him Lord of our life, and trusting him with our eternal destiny. We have a crucial part to play.

But it is also true that we can only play our part in response to the part that God plays in drawing us to him. God is the initiator of all things - of the universe itself, of biological life, and of spiritual salvation. It is the Father who draws us, but we, then, who choose to respond and to and be taught by God - taught to eat the Bread of Heaven, to put our faith and trust in Jesus. Salvation, living eternally, is a result of both God's will and ours.

Jesus goes on to explain to his hearers that while the manna given to sustain the Israelites in the during their wilderness travels was a picture of his coming, Jesus the Bread of Life sustains us to eternal life. Earthly bread sustains us for our time on earth, spiritual bread sustains us for eternity.

It is sometimes said that 'you are what you eat'. If we only eat physical food, we only benefit for this life. If we eat eternal bread we live eternally.

As with the manna in the desert, the bread of life is a free gift of God. Salvation is provided to us at no cost to us. That does not mean however that it is without cost. Our salvation have been bought for us at great cost. As Jesus says "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh". Jesus paid the ultimate price for the food that we need to live forever. Jesus's death is our life.