

I Am the Bread of Life

Proper 14

Pastor Josh Frazee

John 6:35-51

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Foreshadowing is something that God does repeatedly in the Old Testament. The Passover, for instance, foreshadowed the meal that Jesus would later share with His disciples at the Last Supper. The sacrificial system foreshadowed Jesus' death on the cross as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. David's earthly kingdom foreshadowed Jesus' eternal kingdom. Just to name a few.

Today, we're looking at how the manna from heaven was a predecessor to something as well. In the Old Testament, the manna was given as food for the Israelites who were hungering in the wilderness. Although this food miraculously appeared on the ground each morning, it, like the other events and things which gave way to something greater, would be surpassed later.

In our text, Jesus proclaims to the Jews listening to Him that He is that which is greater than the manna in the wilderness. Indeed, He is far greater than everything that had happened before or anything that would come after Him.

Verse 1

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 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 last day.’”

As he does multiple times, John reminds his hearers that Jesus is God, the great “I Am.” More than that, He is the Messiah to come. He is the fulfillment of the foreshadowing of the Old Testament. He has come to do the will of His Father. The problem is that even though the Jews to whom He was speaking had seen Him, they did not believe.

Jesus tells them that they had seen Him; and also that they had not believed. In other words, “(t)he perfect ‘have seen’ implies that what they saw is still before their eyes, i.e. the miracles of the past days together with all that Jesus reveals to them (Lenski, p.462).” Earlier, Jesus had told 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 both places, Jesus is teaching these Jews that they're missing the point. It is not the bread or the signs to which they should be looking, but to Him as the fulfillment of the promise of God. He tells them plainly that they should not “‘labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life.’” He is that food—the one and only food. Jesus told them “‘I am the bread of life.’” *The Bread of Life*—the one and only. There is no substitute. He is the Bread of Life that endures to eternal life.

Jesus tells them these things so that they realize that they are not looking for the right thing. Whenever we get to looking at the wrong things, Jesus is always there in His Word telling us where to look—namely, to Him. Unfortunately, too often we do not look to Him. Instead we try to figure things out for ourselves, just as the Jews were doing as we continue our text.

Verse 2

“So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ They said, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, “I have come down from heaven”?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, “And they will all be taught by God.” Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.’”

Jesus tells the Jews to stop their grumbling. He knows that it is not possible for any of them to be reasoned into believing. They must hear the Word. As Luther put it, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel...” Jesus knows that it will be in this way that any of these Jews who will come to Him will be drawn to Him. Only in this way they will be drawn and only in this way they will be “taught by God.”

So Jesus speaks the Word to them—the Word about Himself. Once more Jesus points them to Himself, rather than to the mere physical bread they had received earlier or to their intellect in puzzling about His origins. They must focus on Him and Him alone.

In the same way, our focus must be on Jesus and Jesus alone. It is He alone who can and will raise us up on the Last Day. It is not for us to try to figure Him out or to put Him in a box. He doesn’t fit into any of the patterns of which our minds can come up. The good news is that Jesus doesn’t let others try to figure out how things might be; He tells us how things are. He tells us that He is the Creator and we are the fallen creation. We do not keep Him first and we look to all the wrong things. Only He can, and does, correct us with His Word.

Verse 3

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Here Jesus connects Himself to the bread from heaven, the manna that the forefathers of the Jews to whom He is speaking ate in the wilderness. The manna was indeed a miraculous feeding given by God, but it had its limitations. The manna itself was no better than earthly food. The Israelites who had eaten of it died the temporal death. It was not a food that would cause them to live forever. It had no power even to save them from temporal death, let alone eternal death.

But Jesus tells them that whoever would eat of the Bread of Life would have life eternal. This Bread would save from eternal death. And as Jesus has pointed out three times in this text, He is the One who will raise us up on the Last Day. He is the Bread of Life. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies; the fulfillment of the Old Testament foreshadowing; and the fulfillment of the Scriptures themselves. It’s all about Jesus.

And rightly so. Jesus told them in another place that they searched the Scriptures because they believed that they would give them life—and it is they, the Scriptures, which testify about Him. He is the One, the only One, who can and does give life forever. He is the One who would go to the cross. He would pay the price for our sins—even the sins of trying to reason everything out ourselves instead of turning to Him and trusting Him alone. He would pay the price for all sins of all time in order to give those listening to Him in our text,

everyone else who would ever live, and you the forgiveness of sins so that they and you might believe to eternal life. All sin has been paid for by His death on the cross, but only you who believe will receive life eternal. Thanks be to God who has given us not only His Son, the Bread of Life, but also the Spirit to believe it. In Jesus' Name. Amen.