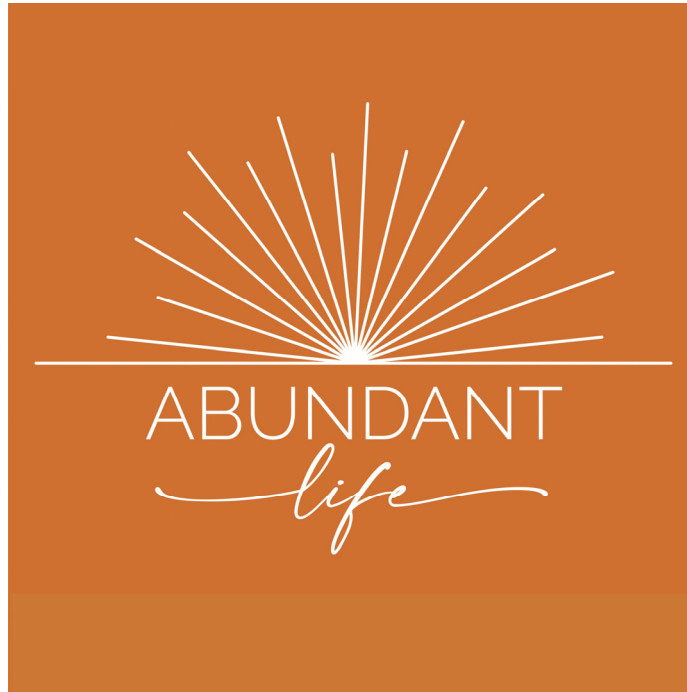


Bread of Life

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



Prayer of Illumination

Gracious God, we do not live by bread alone.
Let the heavenly food of the scripture we are about to hear
nourish us today in the ways of eternal life,
through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. Amen.

Background

Last week we saw how Jesus miraculously fed the 5000 with five barley loaves and two fish. After eating their supernatural all-you-care-to-eat wilderness buffet, the people wanted more: and so they followed Jesus across land and sea to get: more bread, more miracles, more of what Jesus could give them. But when they find Jesus, he doesn't give them what they think they want. Rather, he redirects and reframes their search to an entirely different kind of bread, the "Bread of Life" that will nourish them for abundant life for all eternity.

It's good to seek Jesus, but our motivation for seeking Jesus is of the utmost importance. This involves paying attention to Jesus and to our lives.

Let's hear the Word of the Lord to us in...

Scripture: John 6:25-35 (NRSVue)

²⁵ When they [the crowds] found him [Jesus] on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?" ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

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."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – "Bread of Life"



When the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea, they witnessed one of the greatest miracles that's ever happened. God rescued his people from captivity to Egypt. The sea split. The waters stood like giant glass walls. All Israel escaped to freedom on the other side. It was awesome. *But not for everybody.*

According to rabbinic legend, two of Jacob's sons, Reuben and Simeon missed it. They muddled along among the crowd crossing through the sea. BUT THEY NEVER LOOKED UP. They only saw the ground beneath their feet—and that ground was muddy.

"This is terrible!" cried Reuben. "There's mud all over the place."

"Disgusting!" said Simeon. "I'm in muck up to my ankles."

"You know what?" said Reuben, "when we were slaves in Egypt, we had to make our bricks out of mud—*just like this.*"

"Yeah," said Simeon,

"There's no difference here than being a slave in Egypt and being free here."

And so it went, Reuben and Simeon went whining and complaining all the way across the sea. *For them, there was no miracle—just mud.* They missed it—they weren't paying attention. They wallowed through God's miracle that surrounded them. They might as well have been asleep.

The same idea is at work in our passage. Not about mud, but about bread. *So what's Jesus teaching us through our passage?*



WAKE UP! OPEN YOUR EYES!

Here's the paradox: *God is everywhere. . . and God is hard to find.* Every bush is a burning bush—*only if we're paying attention.*

Like Reuben and Simeon, we can get caught up in the mire of minutia and the muck of the mundane. If we're not careful, we can become consumed by our petty desires and fail to see the bigger picture of what's really going on, right under our noses.



In our story, the people's motivation for seeking Jesus was "off." They had ulterior motives: food, power, and politics. Jesus was just a way to get what they wanted. They wanted to make Jesus "their" kind of king, made in their own image. We can fall into this trap, too—wanting Jesus to baptize our cravings and whims rather than finding in Him God's life freely offered.

The inability to read the signs around us is a form of spiritual illiteracy. We get into trouble when we fail to pay attention and correctly interpret the signs around us. In dating relationships or social settings or at work we need to read the signs accurately. Correct reading of people's body language, words, and social cues is central to healthy relationships and successful living.

In Jared Diamond's book *"Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed,"* he talks about this. What's the main reason for the collapse of societies in history? It's not ultimately economic collapse or destruction of the environment and natural resources—crucial as all of these are. The key factor is the inability of society to properly read and understand the warning signs—*the signs of the times*. Failure to pay attention to the handwriting on the wall and adjusting accordingly leads to a society's collapse. This can happen to us Christians—if we're not paying "attention." !!

Poet John Ciardi said, *"We are what we do with our attention."*

Poet Mary Oliver puts it this way, *"this is the first, wildest, and wisest thing I know, that the soul exists, and that it is built entirely out of attentiveness."*

Christian philosopher Simone Weil said, *"prayer is paying attention."*



Signs point to things, not themselves.

If the highway sign says, *"Tucson 25 miles,"* you don't camp under the sign thinking you've arrived at the destination. No, you read the sign and keep going in the direction of Tucson. Signs point to the reality—*signs aren't the reality itself*.

Jesus was using bread as a signpost to...himself. Jesus came to earth to do a lot more than just feed people's stomachs. Yes, that was part of it—but there's so much more going on in his mission. Look where the bread is pointing...to the Bread of Life.

Don't just think of the bread that you ate today. Don't look for daily bread, look to the GOD who GIVES the daily bread. Look also to Christ who gives food for eternity that fuels LIFE in us. It's in the breaking of bread that Jesus is revealed.

Jesus gives us this bread...meaning Jesus gives us himself. Jesus gets below the surface—he doesn't want a surfacy faith. Don't just look at what *Jesus can do* for you. Look at *who Jesus is*.

There's something different about Jesus. God's seal is upon him—God's seal of approval is the Spirit that came upon Christ at his baptism to perform miracles and banish evil.

God's miracle-working power, active in Christ, shows that he's authorized to make these claims and do these amazing works that bring LIFE to all that he touches. Jesus doesn't have the Midas' Touch. Jesus has the Jesus' Touch—all he touches comes alive. Including you and me.

And so Jesus gives us some good life counsel:

“Do not work for the food that goes bad, rather work for the food that endures for eternal life, which I will give to you.”

They say a can of SPAM, if stored properly and remains unopened, can have an indefinite shelf life. Thank God Jesus is so much better than, so much tastier than, Spam.



Jesus doesn't remain closed. He's sealed by God, but not sealed shut. He's sealed open. He's opened the way of life to us. He is life itself and he's defeated death. Jesus endures for abundant, eternal life—out in the real world. Freshly baked—not half-baked. Never moldy, crusty, musty, or spoiled. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Being a Jesus-follower isn't a half-life. It's where the action is. If it's boring, you've got the wrong Jesus. He gets us *off the shelf, on the table, and out in the world*. He opens wide our eyes and our heart for the world.

Jesus tells us what God wants from us, what God wills from us:

Believe in me. BE-LIVE in me.

Believe in God, not yourself.

Look to me for the life-giving energy you're really looking for. You can't find it anywhere else.

What God did through Moses with the Red Sea and Manna, God is now doing through his Son Jesus, the Bread of Life. Jesus is our New Passover, our New Manna, our New Exodus, our New Moses. In him, you'll find the abundant life you're longing for. Trust God for all your needs. Trust in God's Sent One. Have faith in what he says. He's trustworthy. Put everything in his hands. Your resources. Your relationships. Your very life. In handing that over, you'll find what you're looking for... LIFE, ABUNDANT LIFE, LIFE to the FULLEST. He's the very Source of Life.

In Christ, we can live for what's real and lasting. If you feel sidetracked or that you're missing it, ask God for a divine breakthrough. Ask God to break through your misconceptions about life, your misconceptions about God. Ask God to break through your pursuit of unsatisfying answers. Ask God to break through your self-centered world.

If you think you have Jesus figured out or pinned down—BEWARE. He's alive and well, escaped out of our box and is on the loose. He wants to lead us back on track—just like he did for the folks in our story.

When Jesus says, “**I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE**,” he's also hearkening back to Moses and the Burning Bush where God revealed his name: **I AM who I AM**. Jesus is not only **I AM WHO I AM**, he is our **ALL in ALL, our sustenance and nourishment**. Jesus is our companion—he breaks bread with us, communes with us. **He's our Host, the Bread from Heaven broken for us**. Jesus' life, like bread, is life-giving and nourishing.



One of America's worst famines is the **poverty of attention**. We live in an **attention deficit culture**. We're distracted with our phones and unlimited shiny objects to chase after. And we're stressed, isolated, and feeling empty and worn out as a result.



Jesus gives us focus. Meaning. A mission. He teaches us to pay attention to WHAT matters, and WHO matters.

- When you pay attention to your body, it comes to life.
- When you pay attention to your kids, they come to life.
- When you pay attention to your spouse, he or she comes to life.
- When you pay attention to a plant, it comes to life.
- When you pay attention to your circumstances, they speak to you.

When we pay attention to Jesus, he brings LIFE, lasting life. And we bring His life to our world.

Christ, the Bread of Life, rises in us and works in us to pay attention, to believe, to really live for what matters. Jesus is authorized by God to sustain us and energize us, in this life, and the life to come.

Amen.

Painting: *"Crossing the Red Sea"* by Cheryl Rose

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition Bible, copyright © 2021 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.