

Sustenance

John 6:22-71

Key Verse: 6:27

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

In last week's passage, Jesus fed a crowd with five biscuits and two sardines. It was an amazing feat. The whole crowd was fed until they were full and there were still twelve basketfuls of bread left over. That's a lot of bread. If you know me, then you know that I really like bread; I love eating it. The bread that we normally think of when we think of bread is white bread. If you like white bread, I hate to tell you that white bread is not really bread. The only thing that it is really good for is making toast. It is too mushy to make sandwiches or do anything else with it. It is a good thing that we do have a lot to choose from. Just go to a bakery and you will see wheat, oat, sourdough, French, pretzel bread, bagels, cornbread, Asiago cheese bread, pita, naan, and even sweet breads like cinnamon raisin and banana nut bread. And above all these, there is my favorite German rye bread. Unlike white bread, German bread is dense and hearty. A one-pound loaf is about six-inches around. The outside crust is hard and crunchy, while the inside is soft and, yet, not mushy. It's able to hold up to a firm touch without collapsing because of its density. It's a type of bread that can really stick with you and gives you sustenance. It's the type of bread that has been a staple in the diets of many cultures. Historically, this type of bread has been one of the main sources of nutrition for many people. Meat was rare, but bread was plentiful and could fill a person's belly. Unfortunately, the bread that Jesus gave the crowd and German bread, even though it is very dense and tasty, cannot sustain a person indefinitely. Even if you eat a whole pound of German bread, after all the bloating and regret subsides, you will get hungry again. Believe me, I know; it happened to me. But what would you say, if there was a bread that endures to eternal life? What would you do for bread that would sustain you for eternity? That sounds like the ultimate alternative fuel source, but that is exactly what Jesus is offering in this passage: eternal sustenance.

But, let's actually get in to this passage. In the last passage, Jesus fed the crowd, and they were so satisfied that they wanted to forcibly make Jesus king. Well, that was not a part of God's plan, so Jesus slipped away to go pray. At this time, the disciples got in a boat and set off for Capernaum. A little later, Jesus joined them on the lake and they all went to Capernaum. The next day, the crowd woke up, hungry once again. They realized that Jesus and his disciples were gone. **“Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.”** (24) The crowd didn't know where Jesus went, but a good place to start was to go to Capernaum, since that was Jesus' base of operations in Galilee. Sure enough, there he was, Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum (59). When they found Jesus, they asked him about when he got in Capernaum. They didn't want to know how, but when.

Jesus never answered their question. Instead, he saw deeper into their hearts. **“Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.”** (26) The crowd of people was originally looking for Jesus and followed him to the area around Bethsaida because of all the miracles Jesus performed. Then, Jesus fed the crowd of people from five small barley loaves and two small fish. When the crowd was searching for Jesus this time, they were looking for more food. They still wanted Jesus to be their provider king. They wanted to sit back and have Jesus come and feed them bread whenever they wanted it. It reminds me of the time when the Israelites first asked for a king back in the book of 1 Samuel. At that time Israel had no king, and leaders called judges led them. Unfortunately, Israel didn't like that and they asked Samuel, who was the last judge, to appoint a king over them to protect them and fight their battles for them. The Israelites wanted to be taken care of. They didn't want to fight in the battles, but wanted someone to fight the battles for them. They wanted the convenience of a king who would bow to their wishes and the crowd before Jesus was no different. If food were provided for them, then they would have the free time to pursue their hobbies and recreational interests. I'm pretty sure that we all would act that way if given the chance. How many of us would like to quit our jobs and never have to work and still be able to have everything that we want? That's what this crowd wanted. Like I said earlier, the crowd degenerated from wanting to see miracles, great works from God, to wanting to be fed. They wanted Jesus to feed them when they wanted to be fed. My parents have a 15-year-old dog, named Misty. She's a 30+ pound fox terrier, and every day at 5pm, without fail, she wants her dinner. If it is not there for her at 5pm, then Misty seeks out my parents, sits in front of them, and stares at them until someone gives her food. This crowd turned into

Misty seeking out the person who would feed them at the time they are used to. "It's 5 o'clock, where's my dinner, Jesus? I'm hungry. I don't see a plate. You call yourself a king? Feed me now!"

Jesus saw their heart, and he had mercy upon them. He wanted the crowd of people to have something greater and merely bread. Jesus continued, "**Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.**" (27) Jesus said, "**Do not work for food that spoils.**" This doesn't mean that we shouldn't work to make sure we eat, but it does mean that our sole purpose should not be to fill our bellies. We can work for tremendous wealth and create huge storehouses of food, but that will all spoil. We shouldn't put our hope in what will eventually fail. There is a great effort in this and other countries to prolong the human lifespan to an average of a hundred or two hundred years or even to give us an infinite lifespan. You can extend your life through by eating right and exercising all the time. Eating right and exercising are great, but you will still die. Even if you extend your life, you will still die. There are other people who think that maybe looking and feeling younger will help them actually live longer. They use age defying makeup to smooth the wrinkles and if that doesn't work, then they will get surgery or get toxins injected into their skin to make themselves look younger. But all that effort and all that money won't extend anyone's life. They still will die. If you put all your effort into trying to prolong this life or at least making yourself feel like it's being prolonged, then your effort is wasted. These things won't sustain your life to eternity. Just like bread won't keep you full forever, any effort you can think of to make yourself feel younger will eventually stop working. Hip replacement surgery and laser eye surgery only work for just over a decade, after that the effects wear off. The replacement hip needs to be replaced and your eyes will get worse again. We can't put our hope in these things, because they are unreliable and temporary, like food that spoils.

Yet, we live like this all the time. We beat ourselves at work, so that we can pay for the house or car or phone or phone plan. If you are a student, you beat yourself at school so that you can get a degree to get a job so that you can beat yourself at work so that you can pay for the house or car or phone or phone plan. We work hard so that we can provide for our families or ourselves but then that provision disappears and we have to do it all over again. It's an endless cycle. Now, don't get me wrong. We have to work to eat and take care of our lives. The Bible says, "**The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.**" (1 Thessalonians 3:10) We shouldn't be like this crowd who wanted everything provided to them without working for it, but we also shouldn't be so focused on feeding and taking care of ourselves that it becomes the point of our lives. Instead, Jesus says that we should work "**for food that endures to eternal life.**" And, Jesus actually spends most of the rest of this passage trying to explain it to the crowd, but they never really get it.

Jesus tells them, "**Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**" (32-33) The people were so obsessed with the manna in the desert that was given to them when they left Egypt back in Moses' time, which was about 1500 years prior to Jesus' time. They thought that Moses gave them the manna, but it was really God who gave that bread. But Jesus is telling them now that the bread that now comes down from heaven is bread that gives life to the world. It is not merely taking care of hunger, but it takes care of life. The food that endures to eternal life actually gives life. It rejuvenates the body and the soul, filling us with life from now to forever.

The crowd seems like they was the bread of God. So Jesus tells the crowd, "**I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.**" (35) Jesus tells the crowd that he is the bread from God, and unlike a loaf of German bread, when you come to Jesus and eat you will never go hungry. You will always be satisfied. Your soul will be nourished, and you will never thirst or hunger for anything else. When we come to Jesus and believe in Jesus, then our deepest desire is fulfilled, not because we get everything our sinful selves want, but because our deepest desire, whether we know it or not, is to be with God. We might think that our deepest desire is to please someone or find that special someone or to find a way to get the things we want, but those are only placeholders for what we really desire: God. We were designed to be with God, and the only way we will be satisfied is when we are with God. That's what Jesus promises. All this talk about eternal life means

that we will be spending an eternity with God. Later in the book of John, Jesus says, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

Jesus continues, “All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” (37-40) Jesus, this bread of life, came down from heaven to give eternal life to those the Father God has given him. There is nothing that can prevent Jesus from giving life to those who believe. Jesus says that he wouldn’t lose a single person, who was his. Even if they die, they are not lost; Jesus says that he will raise them up on the last day. There is nothing that prevents us from remaining in Jesus. If we are saved, then there is nothing that can make us lose our salvation. Now, that doesn’t mean that we can do anything we want when we believe in Jesus. I knew some people who thought that it was ok to get drunk at parties, because they were saved. If you are thinking like that, maybe you’re not saved in the first place. Nevertheless, the bread of life sustains us, not because of us, but because of it. The bread of life sustains us and never lets us go. In the joy and in the pain, in the sun and in the rain, Jesus never lets us go.

Unfortunately, the crowd just misses this point and start grumbling. They’ve known Jesus for years and couldn’t believe that he came from heaven. Jesus tells them to stop grumbling and he continues to bang the drum about the bread of life. Jesus is really trying to get the people to understand what he is talking about. “Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (47-50) The people were holding on to the thought about the manna in the desert, but Jesus reminded them that the people who ate the manna all died 1500 years before their time. They desired it, but it was just like any other food: it didn’t give life. But, again, Jesus is different. Whoever eats of Jesus will live forever. It is his flesh and his blood that he gave on the cross. Verses 53-58 go into detail about eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking his blood. It’s symbolism of what Jesus was going to do on the cross. Jesus laid down his life to give us eternal life. His body was broken as the Romans drove railroad spikes into his wrists. His blood poured to the ground as he hung for all to see. Yet, it is this act that is so life giving. It is grotesque and it is hard to comprehend, but if we feed on him, then in his death there is life.

What Jesus means by us eating his flesh and drinking his blood is that we rely on him for our sustenance. We invite him into our souls and we see him as the source of our lives. He gives us strength; he gives us energy that endures to eternal life. On food packaging, there are Nutrition Facts and they give, among other things, the total amount of Calories that food item has. Those Calories are a measure of how much energy that food has: more Calories, more energy. Jesus, the bread of life, has caloric value that will sustain our souls for eternity. There is more energy than a nuclear reactor, more energy than the sun. The sun is predicted to have enough fuel to last a few more billion years, but Jesus will sustain us far longer than the sun could ever last.

Back at the beginning of the passage, the crowd, not fully understanding what Jesus was meaning, asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” (28) They wanted eternal life and they wanted to know what they had to do to get it. “Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’” (29) There is nothing that we can do to gain eternal life. There is no list of duties that we can perform to get life. There is no ritual that we can perform that will bring us closer to God. All that is required is that we believe: that is the work of God that we have to do. We might think that we have to do this or have to do that or I have to give this, but we really have to examine ourselves to see if we believe in Jesus. You might try to fool other people, but you can’t fool God. He knows your heart. You might as well be honest with him.

Simply believing is not something that is easy for us. We want to do something to earn our salvation, but in reality there is nothing that we can do. Eternal life is simply an act of grace, and that confounds people. There are so many people in the church who try to do things hoping that it will bring

them closer to God, and when someone tries to tell them that salvation is only by grace, they struggle and become defensive, and maybe even leave the church. I know that this is true because the passage says so too. "On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'" (60) Now, this isn't the crowd that is saying this, but his disciples. People close to him, who followed him to learn, could not accept that God would give eternal life purely out of grace and having to believe. It offended them, as Jesus said. "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." (63-64) There were many that did not believe, even though they were disciples, and they left Jesus. He had a crowd of thousands, but they dwindled down to but a handful. So many in the church did not believe. It was too hard to accept grace.

This really begs the question on why people really have a tough time accepting grace. Most of the time, people love free stuff, but when it comes to freely accepting God's grace, people balk. This is because believing requires us to surrender to God. If there were some ritual or set of duties to perform, they may require a sacrifice to perform them, but those rituals can become mindless and habitual. On the other hand, we cannot be mindless and habitual in believing. To believe in Jesus requires us to surrender our thoughts and our lives and our will to Jesus, but that is something that, in our pride, we don't like doing. We like to hold on to at least some part of our lives, but believing requires that person surrender everything. When people don't want to let go, they leave because they can't make that step. That's what happened when many of Jesus' disciples left him.

After a big number of people left, Jesus, then, turned to the Twelve, the core group that remained, and asked, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" (67) Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." (68-69) Peter was speaking on the behalf of the Twelve and he professed their belief in Jesus. However, Jesus cautions them that one of the Twelve does not, in fact, believe and he is actually a devil who would betray Jesus. Peter's words do hold some truth, though. Jesus words are words of eternal life. Jesus said that a few verses above this one. Believing in those words are essential to having eternal sustenance. Surrendering our lives, and looking and marveling at Jesus is what brings eternal life, and Jesus never lets go.

I'm a person that has a hard time accepting compliments and gifts. I don't like receiving things for free. I don't like the lottery or raffles or a chance to win something. I don't like free food or pretty much free anything. I like to earn what I receive. I work hard and I get a paycheck. I don't work, I get fired and I don't eat. I was hard for me to accept unemployment checks because I felt very ashamed to receive a check without working. I say this because it is hard for me to accept that eternal life is by grace alone. I want to do something to prove myself worthy. I'll accept the initial grace, but now I think that I need to make myself better to pay back that grace. I need to quell my anger. I need to make myself a better husband and better father. However, if I try to take care of these things on my own, then I will fail. I cannot sustain myself. I don't have the strength or the energy to change my nature. I need to stop looking at myself and start looking at God. He is the one that freely gives eternal life. He is the one who changes me for the better. Jesus is the source of life. He is my bread, my sustenance, and I just need to believe, to surrender myself, to eat.

We spend a lot of time trying to figure out how a passage in the Bible applies to us. What is our application of this passage? Many times there is a direct application and other times, the passage is simply to direct our eyes up to heaven to get to know God better. This is one of those passages. It is entirely about Jesus and who he is and what he does. The crowd was trying to make it about themselves and they couldn't understand what Jesus was saying. Most of his disciples couldn't accept what he was teaching. If you look at the passage, you see that Jesus spends the majority of time talking about himself. Jesus talks about how he sustains, how he gives life, to those who come to him and eat, and it culminates in verse 62, "Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!" Jesus gives life so that those who are his can have that deep desire of being with God fulfilled and they will see Jesus ascend back to his throne in heaven.

Jesus is the source of life, and his words are life because Jesus is life. Jesus is the bread from heaven; he is our true sustenance. German bread, for all its goodness, will get burned up and we will get hungry again. However, Jesus is the bread that nourishes our body and soul for eternity. Jesus brings us to God and we never have to be hungry to thirsty again because our deepest desire will be fulfilled. To me, that is just marvelous. If I spoke correctly, then your eyes should be returning to God, but if you start thinking and talking about what you need to do, then you missed the point and I failed to speak God's word. If you are wondering if you truly believe or not, you are wasting your time. Stop wondering about whether you believe, and start believing. If you don't like that thought, then you do not believe. Look to Jesus and see who he is. Jesus is the bread of God that sustains us to eternal life, and we will never be lost because we are in him and he is in us. We live because of him.