

The Bread of Heaven

by Mariano Di Gangi

Jesus as the bread of life represents the nourishment we need for spiritual survival, and faith is necessary to receive this nourishment.

Duration: 29:56

Scripture: Exodus 16:4, Matthew 4:4, John 3:16, John 6:12, John 6:27, John 6:35, John 6:40, John 6:51, John 6:54, Romans 8:32

Topics: "Jesus", "Spiritual Nourishment", "Faith in Christ"

Description

Mariano Di Gangi preaches on 'The Bread of Heaven,' emphasizing that Jesus is essential for spiritual nourishment, likening Him to bread that sustains life. He recounts the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, illustrating how Jesus provides not just physical sustenance but also the deeper spiritual nourishment that humanity craves. Di Gangi explains that while people often seek material blessings, true fulfillment comes from recognizing Jesus as the bread of life, the bread of God, and the bread of heaven. He stresses the importance of faith in receiving this nourishment, urging believers to come to Christ and partake in His life-giving essence. The sermon concludes with a call to embrace Jesus fully, as He alone satisfies the deepest needs of the human heart.

Transcript

Reading from God's written word from the Gospel according to John, the sixth chapter, starting at verse 1. Hear now the reading of this portion of God's written word. Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, that is the Sea of Tiberias, and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.

The Jewish Passover feast was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, eight months wages wouldn't buy enough for bread for each one to have a bite.

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. Here's a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many? Jesus said, have the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in that place and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.

Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, gather the pieces that are left over.

Let nothing be wasted. So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world.

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. One of my favorite pastimes, especially on holiday, beyond the matter of taking in a concert, is to visit museums. Museums in London, in Paris, in Rome, in Vienna, the Pizzi and Uffizi galleries in Florence, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, all of these have enriched me in many, many ways.

They are filled with magnificent landscapes. They contain thousands of portraits. They've also got self-portraits which I find fascinating.

Self-portraits of Rembrandt and Michelangelo and Van Gogh. The Gospel According to John is one tremendous art gallery. On its pages are found pictures involving the activities of the day and yet not limited to that time but having an everlasting significance.

You've got very happy scenes like the wedding feast in Cana where Jesus turned water into wine or the raising of Lazarus from the dead in the little village of Bethany. You've also got sad scenes whose texts provided the material for Johann Sebastian Bach in his St. John's Passion. But the gallery of the Gospel of John contains a series of self-portraits in which Jesus describes himself, in which Jesus compares himself to something that people knew.

In the words of our study for this evening, he portrays himself as the bread without whom life becomes altogether impossible. When we think of bread, we think not only of bread but of all the basic necessities of life without which we cannot survive. There's no doubt at all that we need nourishment.

One of the tragedies of the 20th century is that while fewer and fewer people are involved in producing more and more food, in some parts of the world, famine continues to be a deadly scourge in other countries of this globe. Sometimes it's due to poor distribution aggravated by an ineffective bureaucracy, and that today is the case in the Soviet Union. In other places, it's because of prolonged drought that has seared the seed before it could come through bright and green with the promise of an abundant harvest.

In other countries, it is not merely the matter of bureaucratic bungling or even of dreadful drought, but of internal conflict and of aggression from without that has left hundreds of thousands of people on the edge of starvation. And this is the case today in countries like the Sudan and Somalia and Ethiopia. We need the basics of life in order to survive.

That's why the ancients developed the art of making bread. It was an art well known to the Romans, well known to the Greeks before that, well known to the Hebrews before that, well known to the Egyptians before that, and believe it or not, samples of Egyptian bread and the ways in which it was made will be found today as a result of archaeological digs in the British Museum in London. You begin, of course, by sowing the seed of wheat or barley or lentils.

Then you cut it down with a sickle when it comes ripe. Then at the season of harvest, you bundle it together in sheaves. Then you winnow it or thresh it, beating it out with a hand flail and throwing it up with

a pitchfork into the wind so that the kernel remains and the husk is carried away.

Then the milling begins, and either with a mortar and pestle or with wheels that grind ever so slowly, almost like a Presbyterian process, you begin to produce wheat. But it's still rough at that stage, and so you run it through a sieve, and then you mill it again through those grinding stones. And then you've got flour, and you mix it with water or with milk, and you add olive oil, and then you add the yeast, and then you see it rise, and then you knead the dough either with your hands or in some countries with your feet.

I would prefer that they didn't tell me until after I had eaten. Then it would be shaped into loaves or cakes or croissants, and then the top would be sprinkled with aromatic seeds for extra flavoring. And then it would be baked either on hot stones or surrounded by glowing embers or by a pit oven carved out in the floor of a little house, such as I have seen over and over again in the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal.

And so the ancients produced bread. They produced the basic which enabled them to survive. Have you ever noticed in the story of the prodigal son, after he had wasted his inheritance with the gamblers, the drunkards, and the prostitutes? After he had ended up in the far country? After he had been reduced to becoming a keeper of swine? After he had the kind of hunger that made him think of home? What was it that stirred in him a longing to get home? In my father's house the servants have bred enough and to spare.

The smell of freshly baked bread from his mother's oven in his father's house was one of the things that drew him from the far country back home again. And we all know that there's nothing quite so wholesome and appetizing as the smell of freshly baked bread. Man needs bread to survive.

And as believers in Jesus Christ, we have learned that man does not live by bread alone, though bread he certainly needs. He also requires the word of the Living God. We need nourishment.

And God provides nourishment. In the days of the Old Testament, when Moses had led the Hebrew people out of the land of Egypt, they heaved a great sigh of relief and sang hymns of praise to God for the fact that they had been liberated from slavery. But it didn't take long before they forgot all that and they began to complain.

Why have you brought us out here in this wilderness to die of hunger? At least in Egypt we could have three square meals a day. Things were far better when they were worse. And the people complained and Moses took it to God and God, in his graciousness, opened the sky and fed his people with manna.

Day by day the manna would fall and six days of the week they were to gather it up and on one day to gather double to make up for the Sabbath day when they were not to do that kind of gathering labor. God provided his people with manna in the days of the Old Testament, following the Exodus for 40 years en route to the land of Canaan. It was a marvel of the mercy of God.

In the New Testament, one of the signs that Jesus provides to attest to his claim of being the Messiah is that with a few loaves and a few fishes, blessed in the presence of God the Father, he then distributes to others and they are fed in terms of thousands to overabundance and the leftovers are gathered in as testimony to that abundant provision. The people fill their stomachs with the bread that Jesus had miraculously multiplied and they immediately began to consult together and to say, this is the kind of leader we've been waiting for. They had a materialistic concept of his messiahship.

We're going to take him by force, he is our candidate, he's going to be drafted, and an era of plenty will come. How they misunderstood the basic mission of Jesus. That was happening right through the gospel, in the gospel of John.

Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about being born again. Nicodemus takes it in a purely naturalistic sense. Can a man, when he is old, enter again into his mother's womb and be born a second time? He didn't realize that Jesus was speaking about spiritual rebirth.

Jesus speaks to the woman at the well in John chapter 4 and he tells her that he will give the kind of water that slakes the human thirst forever. And she misunderstands it as meaning that he has dug a deeper well than her forefather had done. Here we have people who see the miracle performed by Jesus and come to the wrong conclusion, namely that he is a political messiah who will bring an abundance of material blessings and they miss the fact that he had come to satisfy the deepest hungers of the human heart.

A materialistic concept of the mission of Jesus is a mistaken concept that demeans the dignity of the errand on which the Father sent him into the world. And Jesus went on from the miracle that occupies the first part of the sixth chapter of John's gospel to spend more than 30 verses right to the end of chapter 6 to set things straight. He tells them in just so many words.

You need nourishment? God has provided you with nourishment. I am the bread you really need. You can have all else but failing me you will perish.

You can lose all else but feeding on me you will live forever. Christ is absolutely indispensable to our spiritual survival in this world and the next. And he portrays himself as it were in a triptych.

We open and see the three panels before us. He says, I am the bread of God. I am the bread of heaven.

I am the bread of life. Are these expressions synonymous? Not at all. For each of them has a distinctive meaning that will enrich our understanding of the text.

Jesus says, I am the bread of God. This is parallel to that expression used by John the Baptist when looking at Jesus. He says, behold the lamb of God.

That is the lamb that God provides to be slain upon the altar of the cross to make atonement for the sins of his people. And so when Jesus says, I am the bread of God, what he is saying is, I am the bread which God has provided to feed the hunger of the human heart. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever would believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Or as Paul puts it in the eighth chapter of Romans at verse 32, God spared not his own Son but gave him up for our everlasting benefit. He is the bread of God. God's provision for your need and mine.

He is the bread of heaven. And throughout the balance of this chapter, seven times Jesus is going to refer to the fact that he is the bread that has come down from heaven. As the manna fell silently from the sky to the earth beneath to be gathered up, so Jesus has come from highest heaven to get alongside of the likes of you and me in the wonder that the theologians call the incarnation.

This is his condescension. This is his self-humiliation. He makes himself of no reputation.

Though he is equal with God in heaven, he comes down to earth. He becomes a man. He becomes a servant.

He serves. He serves faithfully even to death, even the death of the cross. The bread that comes down from heaven, the bread that comes down to earth, God's equal who becomes our brother, who associates himself with us in our joys and in our sorrows, and though sinless, will also burden himself with your iniquity and mine.

The bread of God provided by God, the bread of heaven that comes down to earth in the great condescension, the great dive and humiliation of the incarnation, and he is the bread of life. Feeding upon ashes, feeding upon the junk food that this world can concoct and market with great skill, feeding upon lies and deceptions, we die, but when we feed on Christ, we live. Jesus says that if we feed on him, we will begin to experience a new quality of life, life that is everlasting, beginning now and not on the other side of the grave.

For if we believe in him, we have, present tense, present possession, eternal life. And the eternal life that begins now is one that will have its counterpart when at the last day he will raise these mortal bodies of ours from their debility and their deformity in death. He is the bread of life.

Feeding upon him, the spirit lives. Feeding upon him, even the body will be raised immortal and incorruptible at the last day. These, then, are the things that Jesus stresses in the balance of this chapter in order that people who had witnessed the miracle should not miss its tremendous meaning.

You have hunger, you will perish without help. God has provided nourishment, the bread of God, the bread of heaven, the bread of life in Jesus Christ. The concluding emphasis that needs to be made is that faith, and faith alone, receives the nourishment that God provides.

You can look at the most magnificently golden loaf of bread, whether it's wheat or whole wheat or rye or pumpernickel, and it won't do you a single bit of good as long as it's on the other side of the glass in the bakery shop. You can buy it and take it home and put it on your table and you will still faint with hunger. If you simply walk around it and look at it, having bought it, you've got it.

It will not give you the nourishment that you need until you actually break and take and eat. How do we do that with Jesus Christ? Later on in this chapter, he's going to say some things that are scandalous, crude, offensive to some. He's going to say, the bread that I give is my life.

If you feed upon my flesh and you drink of my blood, you will live forever. What does he mean? What does he mean? He means I am the bread of God, I am the bread of heaven, I am the bread of life, and I will have to be broken upon the cross. And when you take me in and I become bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh, then you will be nourished.

As long as we walk around Christ, as long as we behold him through a glass from a distance, he will do us no good. We need to feed on him, on the virtues of his broken body and shed blood. We need to take the benefits that he won at the cross and make them our very own by faith.

The Puritans of the 17th century were right on target when they said that faith is the apprehending organ of the soul by which we reach out and take and appropriate what God offers to the whole wide world. What God offers to all becomes ours individually and personally when we reach out with the hand of faith. But before they had done that, John Calvin had put it even more plainly.

When he said, faith is the mouth of the soul. And as in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, our mouth takes in bread and wine, so by an act of faith, our soul takes in the saving virtues of Jesus Christ. Listen to

the way that Jesus himself puts it later on in this chapter.

John 6 verse 35. I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry.

He who believes in me will never be thirsty. We see then that the important thing is to come to Christ, to feed on Christ, to believe in Christ. All of these things are synonymous.

They are all descriptive of what it takes to have the life of Jesus become our life. We must come to him. Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will refresh you.

That is the invitation of Jesus. He might as well say, come unto me all you who are hungering and thirsting and I will satisfy the deepest need of your soul for a sense of forgiveness, for a sense of peace, for a sense of friendship, for a sense of security. All you really need, I am willing to provide, but you must come to me.

And you must feed on Christ. He who comes will never go hungry. He who believes will never be thirsty.

The two expressions are synonymous. Faith is moving in the direction of Christ. Faith is reaching out to Christ.

Faith is taking in all that Christ is. It involves believing on him. There is a very sad postscript to this whole message found in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to John.

In the Gospels it is written, you do not believe. When Jesus offers us himself, we must come and we must believe and we must draw upon his saving benefits. And if we decline to do so and we defer and delay to an indefinite time that will never come, or if we obstinately and in our pride feel that we have no need of him, we will grow faint and ever weaker and perish in our folly and in our pride.

Jesus has portrayed himself before our wondering eyes. May we listen. May we come.

May we believe. May we feed on him by faith. And so experience life that is new, life that is eternal, life that is lived in fellowship with God, life that will be climaxed with the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, you know the hunger of our hearts, our hunger for the forgiveness of sins, for peace with God, for the assurance of being right with God, for the friendship that dispels loneliness, for the security that protects us against the assaults of the evil one. These are the basic things without which we cannot ever survive, and God has provided them all for us in you.

Lord, we take steps of faith and move in your direction. Enable us so to live that we shall enjoy fellowship with you and glorify you in this present world. We ask it in our Savior's dear name.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/30/SID30669.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/mariano-di-gangi/the-bread-of-heaven/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net