

Not quite 24 hours elapsed since the crowd left the hillside. The taste of fresh fish and bread was still with them. It certainly wasn't a typical meal. Jesus filled their stomachs, all 5,000 of them, with just two fish and five loaves of bread. But the next day, when the crowd got hungry again they came searching for Jesus. They fully expected him to do for them what Moses did for their forefathers in the desert; give them free handouts of food.

In the gospel this morning Jesus stopped to share with them that earthly food does nothing for spiritual hunger. Food for the soul is more important than food for the body. But this isn't the kind of food you can get at the local Crest Foods. Spiritual food isn't miraculously multiplied. It comes from God in heaven. More than that, the true bread of God is a person who comes down from heaven.

**This bread satisfies
Only one draws us to God
Only one gives eternal life**

No one that I know has ever been on a TV show. My sister was on the news once in the background. I remember watching it thinking, there's no way that could be her. She's on TV! It's the kind of reaction the Jews had for a local boy who grew up to make some spectacular claims. Jesus claimed to be bread from heaven. The Jews called him on it. **"Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven.'"** They were asking for bread from Jesus. They wanted more of what he provided to eat. The problem was these Jews were thinking with their bellies and their reason, not with faith.

Jesus was trying to get them to think past food. **"Stop grumbling among yourselves."** Quit thinking with your stomachs and think about your relationship with God. What would keep them close with God? Their obedience to God's laws? Their ability to try hard and not violate one of God's commands? Any confidence they had was gone when Jesus said, **"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."** Spiritually these people were hungry, and no amount of bread would satisfy. Turned out they weren't as well connected to God as they thought.

What about your relationship with God, how spiritually hungry are you? Maybe you're thinking you're pretty full because of how hard you've worked lately to stay close to God. You spent all last week being nice to your parents, doing things around the house when they asked, cleaning your room, watching your younger siblings. But in reality that was just making up for a week where you disobeyed them all week. Maybe you thought that if you signed up for the cleaning schedule at church and you put in extra offering money you would be close to God. But a relationship based solely on our abilities is a relationship doomed. Rather than being close to God we're dangerously far away in sin. We're hungry because we're taking the wrong way to get close to God.

You need the bread of life from heaven that draws us to God. Who is that? Only one, Jesus. He promises he did the hard work we couldn't to please God. Who claimed to be sent by the Father? Only one, Jesus. From the beginning Jesus was the plan to save sinners the Father came up with. Who has seen the Father and testifies about it? Only one, Jesus. No question Jesus is the bread of life. Without question he is the only one who draws us to God. **"Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me."** You've been in the Word, heard the promises, and you've heard the claims of crucifixion and resurrection. You've been drawn in to a right relationship with God through Christ. You're saved and satisfied only in Jesus.

There are people around us who are hungry too. Frantically running around exhausting every human possibility to solve their problems only to find they were never in control of the situation in the first place. Then with no other options they turn and kneel before God hoping that he will listen. And you know what, he does because of Jesus. I know you know these people because sometimes you are these people. Jesus longs to win you with his promises and draw you close to God by his power. Jesus longs to have you share him with these hungry people too because this bread satisfies.

The miracle was still fresh in their minds; Jesus on the mountainside breaking five loaves of bread into enough for 5,000 people. But this miracle was about more than a food distribution for the masses. After all they'd be hungry again. The crowd thought if only they could keep Jesus around. He could supply bread whenever they needed it. Jesus had other thoughts. The miracle was really to showcase something else. He was from heaven, from God's side. He came with a purpose. Yes he was the bread of life; he was here as the only one who draws people into a relationship with God. But something wonderful still happens. Because Jesus is the bread of life, he's the only one who gives eternal life.

Movies and books often portray the desert as one of the most challenging places to live on the planet. It's a daily struggle for water and for food. Maybe some of you have traveled to a desert before and you know firsthand. Such an inhospitable environment is just where the Israelites wandered for 40 years. And for 40 years every day they were supplied with food. The Jews Jesus was talking to remembered, **"Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"** Like clockwork the bread like substance was on the ground like dew and each day the Israelites simply went out and scooped up what they needed.

Jesus was familiar with the Jewish peoples' heritage of bread eating. He knew about the miraculous manna. But he also knew that even miracle bread couldn't keep them alive. **"Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died."** This bread came through Moses directly from God so they would have something to eat. Day and night they ate it, for 40 years. Still it wasn't enough to keep them alive. Better bread was needed; spiritual bread that could satisfy and give eternal life.

Lunch today for you might be a nice restaurant, might be soup and a sandwich at home, or it might be whatever leftovers are in the fridge. Your whole life you've eaten a variety of foods, yet not one piece of food can or will keep you alive indefinitely. None of it ever came by way of miracle and certainly none of it spent any time in heaven. So we don't eat miracle food, we don't eat heavenly food. If the manna the Israelites ate couldn't save them and keep them alive what hope do we have for eternal life?

Think of Jesus standing there with those Jews. He's talking to you. **"But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die."** You're looking for something to give you eternal life and Jesus says you've found it. Right there, in Jesus is the food that keeps people from dying. It will take Jesus living and dying to accomplish. But he's willing to pay it. He did on the cross, empty because the payment has been made. The tomb, empty because the payment was accepted. Those facts have immediate meaning for your life, today. Bread like that also impacts your eternal life.

Having a life that goes on eternally changes how you interact with others today. Relationships will change. Where you have wronged people you apologize. Where you're in a strained relationship you seek reconciliation. When you're hurting you remind yourself of God's forgiveness towards you. In these ways you'll feed the hungry around you with love flowing from Christ Jesus. Share his promises and bring others eternal life.

The most popular lunch for students going back to school is sandwiches. I eat them, you parents probably take them to work, and kids love them in their different varieties. Over a lifetime that's a lot of bread. But whether its covered in peanut butter and jelly or layered with ham and cheese no amount of bread will satisfy. At least not to satisfy anyone for the rest of their life. For that there's only one bread that satisfies. The only bread that draws people into a right relationship with God. The only bread that can give eternal life. The only bread that truly satisfies is Christ Jesus our Savior.