

## JOHN 6.35: I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

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*'Let's consider your age to begin with', said the White Queen to Alice in Lewis Carroll's classic novel **Through The Looking Glass**, "How old are you?"  
'I'm seven and a half exactly'.  
'You needn't say "exactly", the Queen remarked: 'I can believe it without that. Now I'll give you something to believe. I'm just one hundred and one, five months and a day'  
'I can't believe **that!**', said Alice.  
'Can't you?' the Queen said in a pitying tone. 'Try again: draw a long breath and shut your eyes'  
Alice laughed. 'There's not use trying', she said: 'one **can't** believe impossible things'.  
'I dare say you haven't had much practice', said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast'*

This morning I want to talk about Christian believing  
Or to be specific, I want to talk about believing in Jesus.  
To non-Christians, **what Christians believe about Jesus seems quite extraordinary**.  
God entered this world and became one of us!  
Alice could be excused for calling it impossible.  
Yet Christians do not feel that they are forcing themselves to believe the impossible.  
They do not see themselves playing a game of *'Let's pretend'*.  
They believe that in Jesus they have found **truth** - not mere philosophical or theological truth, but truth **which has changed their lives**, & which can change the lives of all who believe.

On recent Sunday mornings we have begun to look at some of the claims of Jesus found in John's Gospel  
Today we are looking at the claim of Jesus to be **"the bread of life"**. Jesus went on: **"Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty"** (6.35).  
That's a pretty staggering claim, which takes some believing.  
After all, even after the heartiest of Christmas dinners, when we may well & truly have stuffed ourselves, a few hours down the track we always seem to have room for yet another mince pie.  
In the ordinary course of events, we always want more - but Jesus claimed that we would never want more once we had found him.  
That is a staggering claim - which takes some believing. Yet Jesus suggested that the only way we can found out whether or not this claim is true is to begin to believe.  
The fact is that the proof of the pudding is in the eating

**"I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty"**

When Jesus made this claim, **he had just fed a crowd of 5000 people with 5 barley loaves and two fish**. That too takes some believing.

- Bear in mind that the loaves more like buns, rather than the large loaves we buy at the supermarket.
- Furthermore, the fish weren't gigantic in size. More the size of sardines, and almost certainly pickled at that.

Some have suggested that the boy who gave his lunch to Jesus simply set an example to others. The rational part of me would love to accept such a solution. Certainly, I am sure that some people had brought along their packed lunch – otherwise there wouldn't have been 12 baskets to fill at the end.

But certainly not everybody had brought along some food. Indeed, it is clear that neither John nor indeed any of the other three evangelists saw this as anything but a supernatural event, in which loaves & fish were literally multiplied.

The fact is **we need to resist the temptation to cut Jesus down to size**, but rather accept the Gospel story as it stands.

In the words of William Temple, a former Archbishop of Canterbury: "*If the Lord was indeed God incarnate, the story presents no insuperable difficulties*".

**Yes, if we can accept the miracle of incarnation, then anything becomes possible.**

In a way that defies our imagination Jesus literally fed 5000 people.

Indeed, John tells us that the crowd "**all had as much as they wanted**" (v11).

Amazingly, they all became "**full**" - literally "**they gorged themselves**"!

John goes on (v12), "**When they were all full he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces left over; let us not waste any. So they gathered them all up and filled 12 baskets with the pieces left over from the 5 barley loaves which the people had eaten**". This was a miracle indeed! It takes some believing!

But then, if Jesus were truly God's Son, nothing is impossible.

However, John didn't record this particular miracle in order to document the fact that at a particular time in a particular place Jesus fed 5000 people

Rather John was seeking to point to the fact that **Jesus constantly feeds people - not with 5 barley loaves & 2 fish, but with the Bread of Life**.

All the miracles in John's Gospel point to who Jesus is & what he does.

It is for this reason that **John calls the miracles he records 'signs'**.

So toward the end of his Gospel John wrote: "**Jesus performed many other 'signs' (i.e. miracles) which are not written down in this book. But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, & that through your faith in him - through believing in him - you may have life**" (20.30,31)

We see here John was no mere historian - he was an evangelist - **he wants us to believe!** For **believing is the way to life!**

So what does John want us to believe as a result of his telling the story of the Feeding of the 5000? In the first place he wants us to believe that Jesus is "**the Son of God**".

## 1. JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

Clearly Jesus was no ordinary person - for no ordinary person could have fed 5000 people with five barley loaves.

Certainly those who experienced the miracle realized they were in the presence of somebody special. For them the miracle was a clear "sign" that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, whom God would send to restore their nation's fortunes & liberate them from the Roman occupying power.

But unfortunately they drew the wrong conclusion.

Although Jesus was the Messiah, he was not into power-politics

John tells us that "when Jesus realised that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king" (NRSV) "**he went off again to the hills by himself**" (v15).

As he later said to Pilate, "**My kingdom is not from this world**" (NRSV Jn 18.36). Jesus was no political messiah.

The crowd got it wrong - but before we dismiss them as a bunch of fools, we should at least give them credit for realising that Jesus was no ordinary man.

They saw that you cannot explain Jesus by saying, "*He is just a good man*".

There is a Latin tag which runs: "***Aut deus aut homus non bonus***".

"*Either God or not a good man*". Or as CS Lewis put it:

*"A man who was merely a man & said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, & is, the Son of God; or else a mad man or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him & kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet & call him Lord & God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to".*

CS Lewis was right. You cannot simply call Jesus a great moral teacher.

Jesus was a deluded megalomaniac - or at least he was, if he was not what he claimed to be, the Son of God.

- Just look closely at the dialogue which develops after the Feeding of the 5000. Jesus talked about himself as much as about God. E.g. in just seven verses (vv34-40) Jesus uses the words "I", "me" or "my" 17x - most of us would consider it bad manners to talk so much about ourselves. But Jesus does not seem in the least to be embarrassed about it
- Instead he went on to make the most extraordinary of claims about himself: "**I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty**" (v35); "**I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever**" (v51)

***Who is Jesus?*** Not only this miracle, but the Gospels as a whole raise the question.

The fact is that ***to believe that Jesus was & is the Son of God*** is not as outrageous an act as first it may appear - indeed, strangely enough the evidence would suggest that believing Jesus is the Son of God is actually ***a reasonable act!***

But John does not want us just to believe that Jesus is the Son of God - he also wants us to believe that, precisely because he is the Son of God, Jesus can meet our deepest needs.

## 2. JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE

**"I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty"**

There are two kinds of hunger:

- physical hunger, which physical food can satisfy;
- spiritual hunger, which physical food can never satisfy.

John's Gospel was written at a time when the luxury of Roman society reached its peak. It was at this time that the Romans served feasts of peacocks' brains and nightingales tongues.

It was a time when they discovered the habit of taking emetics between courses that the next might taste better; meals costing thousands of pounds were common place. And yet ***there was a deep dissatisfaction with life.***

Barclay: "*They sought for anything for a new thrill and a new taste in life, because they were appallingly rich and appallingly hungry*".

***That same hunger is with us today.***

Although compared to past generations we have so much, we still want more. We are never truly satisfied, however many times we may visit Lakeside or Bluewater.

Karl Marx described religion as an opium to keep the poor content with their lot.

But the truth is the very opposite. It is ***materialism*** that is ***the real narcotic.***

It is materialism which anaesthetises people to the reality of real satisfaction. But it is not a permanent anaesthetic - people 'come round', as it were, and find themselves 'hungry' for something more..

***We are victims to spiritual hunger*** and no amount of natural bread will appease it.

Jean Paul Sartre, the French novelist, was an atheist. But he once wrote of this human dilemma with painful honesty: "*That God does not exist I cannot deny, but that my whole being cries out for God I cannot forget*".

*The Sunday Times* [6 /9/ 09] had an article headed: '*We are born to believe in God: research suggests evolution has hardwired mankind to have a faith*'.

The cry of the human spirit for something eternal around which to integrate itself is universal. We all feel it.

In the words of an OT preacher: God has "***put eternity into our hearts***" (Eccl 3.11 NIV).

Jesus says: **"I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty"**.

Jesus claims to meet our deepest needs. He claims to meet our need for God.

Do note, Jesus didn't say: "*I am the cream gateau of life*" - or whatever may have been the 1C equivalent of a cream gateau -

He isn't a luxury with which some of us more Spartan types could dispense

***Jesus is the essential without which real life can neither begin nor go on***

He is the bread of life.

He is the one who alone satisfies. He is the one who alone can give life.

It may take some believing, but it is true!

### 3. BELIEVING IS THE WAY TO LIFE

Believing is the way to dealing with our deepest needs - for believing is the way to Jesus - believing is the way to experiencing the life Jesus has to offer - believing is the way to God himself.

Listen again to Jesus: "**I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who BELIEVE in me will never be thirsty**" (v35)

If we are to experience the life that Jesus came to give, then we must believe.

As Jesus said to his contemporaries: "**What God wants you to do is to BELIEVE in the one he sent**" (v29)

This morning I wish to encourage each one of you to believe.

- To believe that Jesus, the Son of God, came from heaven to deal with your hunger and your thirst for God.
- To believe too that, in order to deal with your hunger for God, Jesus not only became one of us, but also died for you: "**I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. The bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live**"

The metaphor is almost strained to breaking point.

But nonetheless let's develop it, if we can

It is not enough to look at a meal, to admire it, smell it, photograph it, but never sit down to it. We must sit down at the table, take the food which is before us and actually *eat* it.

Nor is it enough to keep on looking at Jesus, examining this facet or that facet of his life and ministry, without ever actually coming to a decision about him.

The moment must come when we actually come to Jesus and believe in him.

I believe that today could be the moment for somebody here this morning.

If you have yet to experience the life Jesus offers, *hear the invitation that Jesus is giving you.*

Jesus invites you this morning to take the step of faith and believe in him

He invites you not to hold your breath, shut your eyes, & think the impossible - but rather to put your trust in him.

- To say, Yes Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God.
- Yes Lord Jesus, I believe that you came into this world to live and die and then rise for me.
- Yes, Lord Jesus, this morning I want to come to you - give my life to you, as you gave your life for me.

It is this which underlies the baptisms of Marion and Barry this morning.

They will be demonstrating their faith in Jesus for all to see

They will be giving themselves to Jesus, who gave himself for them.

Jesus said: "**I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty**"