

## John 6:41-51

<sup>41</sup> At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” <sup>42</sup> They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’”

<sup>43</sup> “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. <sup>44</sup> “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>45</sup> It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. <sup>46</sup> No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. <sup>50</sup> But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Are you getting tired of bread yet?

If you've been in church the last couple of weeks, you've probably begun to notice a continuing theme. Most of our Scripture lessons have had to do with *bread*. Two weeks ago we saw how Jesus fed the multitude with five loaves of bread and two small fish. Last week we saw how God fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna, bread from heaven, and how Jesus called himself the bread of life. This week, we see how God feeds the prophet Elijah with bread, and again, Jesus calls himself the living bread that comes down from heaven. And I'll tell you right now, after today, we're still not done with bread.

So I'll ask you again: Are you tired of bread yet?

Bread is one of our staple foods. You can eat it for just about every meal in one form or another. I suppose it would get kind of tedious eating the same kind of bread every few hours week after week. But the great thing about bread is you don't *have* to eat the same kind all the time. Wheat, white, rye, pumpernickel, sourdough, flatbread, cornbread, pretzel bread, baguettes, biscuits, croissants, banana, zucchini, raisin, and Amish friendship bread for when you have more friends than room in your stomach—not to mention all the gluten-free alternatives these days—you could probably try a new variety of bread every single day and never run out of good stuff to eat. And even if you're getting tired of bread, I guarantee you'll feel hungry again once you smell it baking.

Are you tired of bread? Or are you still hungry?

God's Word is the bread that feeds our souls. We fall into thinking that God's Word is all the same or at least very similar across the board. You can open the Bible to any given page or listen to a sermon any given week, and it'll all be pretty much identical. But how false! Jesus says his Word is like a storeroom where you'll always find new treasures as well as old! Like earthly bread, God's Word always has something new to offer, some new taste, some new truth that fills and satisfies the soul just as much as those familiar tastes, the favorite truths.

That's the case with our text this morning. It's the latest in the series of texts called the “Bread of Life Discourse,” where Jesus talks about being the bread of life for our souls. Maybe it seems a little repetitive, but each week focuses on something a little different. With this portion, Jesus is focusing on who he is and where he comes from.

If you haven't been here lately, let me get you up to speed. The day before, Jesus had miraculously fed a crowd of thousands with five small loaves of bread and two small fish. The crowd has been following him around looking for more. In response, Jesus has been teaching them not to focus on earthly things but on spiritual things, and especially on him, Jesus himself.

And so now, we come to the very heart of the matter. Yes, the focus is still on Jesus, and how he is the bread of life. But today we see why he's such great bread. What makes Jesus so special? What makes him better than all the other prophets and teachers that have come before? Who is he really, and where does he come from? Jesus said he came down from heaven. Jesus called God “the Father,” showing that he himself was God's Son. And he pointed to the prophet Isaiah, “They will all be taught by God,” showing that he was God himself.

Where do you get your bread? What's in it? We're very careful about what we put in our bodies. We make sure we look at our labels, our lists of ingredients. We want to know how many calories, how many carbs, how much sugar, how much salt, the fat, the cholesterol, organic, all-natural with no artificial colors or flavors. We like to know where our food comes from. Locally grown, humanely raised, freshly harvested. If we have allergies, we have to be even more careful about all of this. Healthy food makes for healthy bodies.

Healthy spiritual food makes for healthy souls. Who is Jesus? Where does he come from? He is God's one and only Son, true God and true man, our Lord and our Savior from sin. He came down from heaven as the prophets foretold and as God promised, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Now there's a bread that's truly heavenly, literally divine—the best stuff in heaven and earth. If we're so careful about earthly food, which we can eat and still die, doesn't it make sense to joyfully partake of this heavenly bread, which we can eat and not die?

Jesus reminded the people of how God provided for the Israelites in the desert: “Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died.” That God-given bread preserved their earthly lives, but it didn't, couldn't, save them. God gave bread to the prophet Elijah to strengthen him for his journey to Mount Horeb, but it wasn't that bread that gave Elijah eternal life in heaven.

Aside from his resurrection, every single miracle Jesus performed was temporary in nature. Miraculous as they were, they wouldn't last. Jesus healed the sick, but that wouldn't keep people from ever getting sick again. Jesus drove demons out of people, but those people would still have to deal with the daily temptations of the devil. Jesus raised the dead to life, but those people would only die again one day. Jesus fed great multitudes of people, but for each person who ate it was only a single meal—and as these folks are talking to Jesus, it's probably getting on toward lunchtime.

The crowds were looking at Jesus' miracles as nothing more than a way to help them in this life. Healing the sick? Feeding the hungry? Great! Sounds good! Let's keep this Jesus guy around so life will be a little easier. But Jesus points out the problem with that way of thinking: You're still gonna die, and then how will these miracles help you?

God provides. Whether he provides through miracles or through ordinary, everyday ways doesn't really make a whole lot of difference. And yet, even though God provides what we need for every day of our lives, he doesn't provide forever so that our lives never come to an end. He provides what we need for today, so that we can use today to glorify him. And it's only in his eternal Word and his eternal Son that he provides for eternal life.

So what are those earthly things we're so careful about? The earthly things that *are* important? Food? Exercise? Work? Family? Politics? The world situation? Yes, they're important, and they're worth being careful about—but only for this life. When we die, as all sinners must, earthly things won't matter ever again. Jesus, the bread of life, matters eternally. When your soul is empty because of your sin, here is your bread. When you hunger, eat of him and his Word and eternal life is yours forever. Amen.

SDG