

JOHN 6:1-15  
BREAD OF LIFE!

Bread – the staple of our diet. It comes in all shapes, sizes and kinds now: you can buy bread with cranberries in it, 6-grain bread, bread with honey or cheese are all to be found in the shops and even more exotic things than that. There is still bread that makes soggy white sandwiches, or whatever your bread of preference is. Maybe you make your own bread, with your bread-maker, so you can suit yourself as to what kind of bread you make. For people right across world, bread is the staple diet; others may not have the choices of bread that we have; indeed bread maybe the only food some people in our world have to eat. A 10-year old boy coming home from school, and is hungry; what does he have to eat till tea time but a jam sandwich; bread satisfies his hunger. Do we still talk about the *breadwinner*? I remember at school reading a short story called *The Breadwinner* about a 14-year old boy who was coming home with his first pay-packet at end of his first week's work down the pit and the conflict it caused because his father wanted the money; against the grain, the boy was the breadwinner, the person who provided for the family. Bread somehow represents everything we need to live; it is the staple of our diet and has come to stand for everything that satisfies.

Bread is at the heart of our picture of Jesus today in two ways: first of all, the story of Jesus feeding 5000 people has five loaves of bread at its heart; whilst not seeming to be enough for that crowd, in Jesus' hands, anything is possible, as we shall see. Secondly, Jesus' understanding of Himself is centred on the picture of bread; there is a connection to the story, but the conversation that follows late in day centres on Jesus as bread. "Will the real Jesus please stand up?" is our theme and has been for these last few weeks; we come to end of that series today. What does this story tell us about Jesus? John has been telling these stories about Jesus to show us something about Jesus, that He is the Son of God, the Messiah – here is something to believe; and then, that believing makes a difference to our lives, it brings life, the life of the age to come breaks into our world, into our lives by faith in Jesus. There is more today from John, though this is the one story of Jesus, other than Easter, that features in all four gospels; why did they all tell it? Did it stick in all of their minds? No surprise if it did, because it's such a powerful story.

Jesus is in Galilee, in the North, in home territory. The story takes place near the Sea of Galilee, in the hills above it, hills suggested to be the Golan Heights, on the border with modern-day Syria. He seems to want to be alone with the disciples, but John is keen to tell us about the crowd. "A great..." (*John 6:2,3*) There is something significant for John about the time as well: it is near to Passover time and here's a story about bread; the feast that is about unleavened bread, the feast that Jesus will celebrate just before He dies and in it bread will feature heavily! The crowd is coming: "When Jesus..." (*John 6:5*) Yet, John again adds a little editorial: "He asked..." (*John 6:6*) Jesus has the situation in hand; He knows how it will end; but does Philip have any answers?

**The Crowd** – what is it with these crowds? They are going to great lengths to find Jesus. He's not exactly in the middle of town; He's on top of the hill on the other side of the lake from where they stay; yet off they go to find Him. They are taken with His miracles and these miracles draw them to Jesus, but the other gospels tell us that they came wanting to listen to Jesus, wanting to find words that will help them, words that will lead them to God and to faith. They are a lost and leaderless people, sheep without a shepherd, yet they recognise, in Jesus, One who has words that lead to life, words that will satisfy their deep-seated hunger for God, for faith, and for understanding the deeper issues in life. The reality of our world is that people are still

being drawn to Jesus in huge numbers because people across world recognise Jesus as the One who satisfies the deepest needs of our hearts and minds. The part of the world where that is happening least is Western Europe and within Western Europe the place where this is hardest to see is the UK. Why? Who knows! But Jesus is still drawing people, because people still recognise in Him the One who satisfies their spiritual hunger for God, faith and life.

**The Solutions** – There are three solutions on offer. First of all, there is Philip's solution – go and buy food, but that won't work. *"Philip answered..." (John 6:7)* Philip comes from these parts so maybe he knows where to go to buy bread, but even he realises that his solution won't work; "we don't have enough money to go out and buy food for this number of people!" Secondly, there is Andrew's solution – here's a little boy, but that won't work either: *"Another of..." (John 6:8f)* We have enormous sympathy for Andrew because we've all been there. The little boy has a packed lunch of five small loaves, the size of scones probably and two little fish, enough to keep him going till the end of the day, but not enough for the crowd; it's just hopeless. We see a situation and want to sort it, but we just don't have enough resources and our heads fall, feeling helpless.

Thirdly, Jesus' solution: *"Make..." (John 6:10)* and you can hear the disciples saying "Why? What's the point?" *"Jesus..." (John 6:11)* So Jesus fed the crowd with the little boy's packed lunch and there was more food left over at the end than there had been at the beginning. All four gospels tell us that Jesus fed 5000 and more with five loaves and two fishes. In trying to make sense of all of this and make it seem more 'likely', there are people who will tell you that something different happened. Some will try to interpret this story as the little boy bringing out his packed lunch and then everyone else did the same so that this became a giant picnic in which the crowd had all brought their sandwiches and brought them out only when Jesus showed them the little boy. That's not what the story says! That's not what John saw. The story has a decided miracle to it; Jesus did this even if we don't have a clue how He did it; but then how did He change water into wine? How did He heal the sick? There is a whole side of the gospel that takes these events and miracles as signs; signs of what?

**The impact** – The crowd saw the sign and misread it! *"After the..." (John 6:14f)* We need to go back to Moses and to a hope and a promise from a long time before Jesus came, that God would send another prophet, someone who would bring God's word to the people in a dramatic way and who would be a great leader of Israel. The popular view was that this great leader would be a king, a political leader and in the politics of the first century, he would overthrow the Romans and establish Israel again as a free people. When the crowd saw Jesus perform these miracles they saw Jesus as this great leader, sent from God to set His people free and to do that, they would crown Him as their King. He ran away. To some extent they were right; the signs were telling them that Jesus was sent from God to save them, but they were going about it in the wrong way; this is not Jesus' way!

There's another impact of this sign: it is in a conversation that takes place later, all about bread! *"I am..." (John 6:35)* This is the first of seven sayings in Jesus where Jesus uses "I am" and then a picture of some kind: light, the vine, a shepherd, the gate etc. What does He mean when He describes Himself as 'the bread of life'? We go right back to beginning of this sermon, as we thought about bread and what it does. The little boy is home from school, and the jammy piece satisfies his hunger; people across the world whose meal is bread and that's all they have and it satisfies their hunger. Jesus is One who satisfies the hunger of the human heart for salvation, grace, peace and all the other human needs that we might describe. Jesus satisfies these deepest needs and that is why millions of people across the world come to

Jesus and believe in Him. They see, know, and are persuaded that Jesus is the One who satisfies the deepest needs of the human spirit. The crowd coming looking for words that will inspire them and Jesus teaches them – the “bread of life” in action. A man comes looking for healing for his servant and Jesus heals the servant – the “bread of life” in action. A woman comes looking for forgiveness for her faults and failings and Jesus speaks words of forgiveness – the “bread of life” in action. A young man comes looking for hope when his life is a mess because of the wrong choices that he’s made and Jesus guides and shows him the way – the “bread of life” in action. The person abused through life, bullied and looking for freedom, self esteem, and peace from feelings of guilt and she has read of Jesus in the gospels and finds same Jesus healing her wounds – the “bread of life” in action.

Here are 3 affirming statements made by Paul in Philippians 4; how easily we make these same affirming statements? *“Do not...” (4:6) “I have...” (4:11) “I can...” (4:13)* This is understanding Jesus as the bread of life, the One who satisfies his deepest needs. Paul’s sense of contentment and being supplied with everything he needs doesn’t come from having an easy life and a life that is sorted; his life was anything but easy or sorted; his life was full of hardships and trials and testings; this letter is written from prison. Still, he can write about being content and his needs being met and not being anxious because he knew Jesus and believed in Jesus and so promise Jesus made comes true – *“He who...” (John 6:35)*

What is it that you need? Some people go through life without any sense of need; they have everything and think they can sort themselves out. Most of us have a sense of need at some time in our lives. What is the issue in your life that needs to be resolved? Is it a need for forgiveness to get rid of guilt? Or a need to be set free from being bullied, being a victim? Or a need to find hope in the dark places of despair? Or a need to find peace to calm your fears and anxieties in life? Whatever it is that you need, whatever issue that you are dealing with, Jesus can satisfy that need. It may sound simplistic, but it is true. It may not be sorted all at once, but Jesus can give us the resources of grace and strength that we need to deal with all of these deepest issues of our human spirit. Do we have all we need? Jesus is the bread of life!

People were right to see Jesus as the God-given Messiah; John’s gospel is written to see the signs and point us in that direction. They got it wrong because for Jesus messiah-ship would mean service, sacrifice and the cross; at the cross He would complete His task and He would be the Saviour of the world. Will the real Jesus please stand up? Is this the Jesus we believe? This is the real Jesus: the Son of God, the Messiah, the One come to save the world. People saw Jesus and saw the signs and believed. We read the stories, we see signs and we are challenged to believe. We tell the stories to others in the hope that they will see the signs and believe. That’s what Jesus does – He draws people to Himself and they find for themselves that He satisfies their deepest need! This is the real Jesus – bigger than we know, God present in the world; *“I am the bread of life...” (John 6:35)*