

## John 6:41-51

<sup>41</sup>So the Jews started grumbling about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” <sup>42</sup>They asked, “Isn’t this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? So how can he say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’”

<sup>43</sup>Jesus answered them, “Stop grumbling among yourselves. <sup>44</sup>No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on 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>I am not saying that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God. He is the one who has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup>Amen, Amen, I tell you: The one who believes in me has eternal life.

<sup>48</sup>“I am the Bread of Life. <sup>49</sup>Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup>This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that anyone may eat it and not die. <sup>51</sup>I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

## I AM the Bread of Life

### I.

Two weeks ago in the Gospel for the day we saw Jesus feed 5,000 men, not counting the women and children who were there, with 5 loaves of bread and two fish. That special meal brought out the fantasy writer in many in that crowd. They began to think about the Kingdom of God and what it could mean for *them*. When the crowds wanted to make him King, Jesus withdrew by himself.

The fantasy didn’t stop. The crowd took every prophecy concerning the Messiah they could think of. First they thought about the literal meaning of those prophecies, then they ran it through their own set of filters and began to exaggerate what the prophets had said. They came up with fantastic caricatures of what the coming of the Messiah might bring to them. Being from an agricultural society rather than an industrial one, they thought in terms of trees that were laden with fruit and fields of grain that produced beyond any expectations.

They let their imaginations run as wild as they could to wonder about what King Jesus might be able to do for their lives. They remembered their Sabbath school lessons talking about the “Land of Milk and Honey” the wandering Children of Israel longed to enter. They could visualize that becoming a reality far greater than anything their ancestors could have ever foreseen. The possibilities were endless!

In last week’s Gospel, many from that crowd began a conversation with Jesus in the Synagogue at Capernaum, hoping to continue their efforts to make him their Bread King. He spoke to them about bread from heaven, and finished last week’s gospel by saying: “I am the Bread of Life” (John 6:35, EHV).

In today’s Gospel the fantasies of the unbelieving Jews were starting to be dashed to pieces. “So the Jews started grumbling about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven’” (John 6:41, EHV).

These unbelievers and skeptics had brought Moses into the picture by talking about the manna sent from heaven. They would surely remember the way God identified himself to

Moses: “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: “I AM has sent me to you”’” (Exodus 3:14, NIV84).

Jesus said “I AM” the bread of life? Was he trying to elevate himself over Moses and claim to be the very God that had spoken to Moses? I AM the bread of life?

“Whatever!” was their reply. “They asked, ‘Isn’t this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? So how can he say, “I have come down from heaven”?’” (John 6:42, EHV).

There was some personal context here. They knew this guy’s family. Sure, lots of people considered him to be a great new Rabbi, but Jesus wasn’t really any big deal. Where he had come from was well-known. His parents were humble citizens of Galilee. You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time. This Jesus was insisting he had come down from heaven? Preposterous! They knew his parents. They knew his family. He was not some heavenly stuff sent from heaven, he was just an ordinary guy.

## II.

Was it *really* just a debunking of Jesus’ heavenly heritage? Or was it disgust that he couldn’t—or *wouldn’t*—meet their expectations for Utopia?

Unbelievers constantly grumble that *if* there really *were* a God, he would immediately solve all the world’s problems—especially *theirs*. Even believers grumble when they don’t understand what is happening around them, or that God isn’t eliminating the challenges of their lives. Grumbling exposes dissatisfaction, selfishness, and a lack of trust in God.

“I am the Bread of Life” (John 6:48, EHV).

Preposterous! The humble Jesus? God seems too human for us unless there is a constant stream of miracles to help us. We want divine intervention to do what we want, and to *give* us what we want, when we want it, and as much of it as we can possibly crave. *Our* fantasies are perhaps more exotic than those of the Jews in the synagogue listening to Jesus that day.

Even when we stop fantasizing about “stuff” and focus on God in worship, we still expect something more of God than what we get. We *want* the spectacular and extraordinary spiritual experiences, like those who claim in books to have had a special vision of God in heaven. “Wow!” we think. “What the Bible says might actually be true! There is something other than the Bible that seems to validate its claims.”

But instead of some out-of-body experience, God comes to us in ordinary ways. He comes to us in the true humility of Jesus, who came in familiar and ordinary flesh and blood. He comes to us in the worship service, where he promised that where two or three are gathered together in his Name, there he will be in the midst of us. He comes to us in a special Supper that appears quite ordinary, as we taste and see the goodness of our Lord Jesus, in, with, and under the bread and wine we are given to eat and to drink.

## III.

Again and again Jesus shows us that we put far too much store in physical things, and far too little emphasis on spiritual things. Despite the fact that we are to fix our eyes on Jesus, too often they are locked on ourselves.

“I am the bread that came down from heaven... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:41, 44, EHV). God comes down. Human beings don’t reach up.

What happens when human beings try to reach up? Adam and Eve were the last human beings that lived sin-free, but it lasted only a short time. When they reached up, they plucked a piece of fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in disobedience of

God's one Command to them. Restraining themselves from that one tree out of all the trees in the Garden was the way they were to show love and obedience to their Creator.

Once they had reached up, all was lost. The blame game started. Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent. They lost their home because of their misdeed. If they had returned to the Tree of Life and eaten, they would have lived forever in the world they had marred with their evil. That's what happens when human beings try to reach up.

Last week the people asked: "What should we do to carry out the works of God?" (John 6:28, EHV). We discovered that the premise of their question was misdirected. *They* wanted something to do to get right with God. *They* still thought they could reach up, despite knowing the history of Adam and Eve. Human beings are incapable of doing anything to reach up and get right with God.

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44, EHV). Martin Luther explains this perhaps better than anyone in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostle's Creed. "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel... On the Last Day he will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers."

God himself reaches down. God draws us to himself. If it were left to us, mistakes would be made. Our thinking gets clouded. Our choosing is regularly faulty. God knows what he is doing, calls us to himself, and will at last bring us to our eternal home.

All of this Jesus anticipated when he said: "The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51, EHV). Jesus would die for the sins of excess and for the sins of fantasy of the crowds and of us. He would die for our sins of vanity in thinking we could ever possibly reach up to God. He would die for our sins of desiring the spectacular in worship, rather than the rich nourishment of his Word.

#### IV.

"This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that anyone may eat it and not die. <sup>54</sup>I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:50-51, EHV).

In his humanity, Jesus brought God into our world. God saved us. God cannot die, yet God died for us. The death of his flesh brings life.

Now he invites us to "eat" that truth—in other words, to make that truth our own. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. Have faith. Trust in the Lord Jesus who is your living bread.

In today's Old Testament Lesson, the angel of the LORD brought food to Elijah to strengthen him and prepare him for the difficult path that lay ahead. He needed the strength provided by God to continue to proclaim God's Word to the people, especially the believers God had preserved in Israel.

Be strengthened by the Lord Jesus. He is the bread of life who gives you the spiritual strength to continue your journey through a world that is at times unfriendly to believers. He gives you the spiritual strength to proclaim the message of the Bread of Life to those who are still spiritually starving. Amen.