

## Marvel: What Did Jesus Do?

I Am the Bread of Life

John 6:22-59

Mark Vroegop

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*“On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:22–40, ESV)”*

In the front of one of my Bibles is a quotation that is almost two thousand years old. The statement is from a North African theologian named Augustine. He lived from 354-430 A.D., and his writings have deeply influenced Western philosophy and Christianity. Augustine is quoted by both Protestant and Catholic theologians. Some of his books, especially one called *Confessions*, is still read today.

Here’s what Augustine said: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

Augustine knew about a restless heart. By his own admission, Augustine’s desires and his thinking were not just restless; they were self-destructive. Here’s what he said:

I went to Carthage, where I found myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust. . . . My real need was for you, my God, who are the food of the soul. I was not aware of this hunger. I was willing to steal, and steal I did, although I was not compelled by any lack. I was at the top of the school of rhetoric. I was pleased with my superior status and swollen with conceit. . . . It was my ambition to be a good speaker, for the unhallowed and inane purpose of gratifying human vanity.<sup>1</sup>

In 386 A.D., Augustine was gloriously converted. He discovered the true freedom that one finds in Christ. And his desires, especially his lustful lifestyle, and his thinking changed radically. He established a community for spiritual pursuits (a monastery). Augustine fought against deceptive thinking by publishing philosophical books. And he became a leader in the church, serving as the bishop of Hippo.

Augustine exerted an enormous influence on the philosophical and theological landscape of the church as we know it. But it all started with a radical shift in his desires and his thinking.

Thankfully, the change in Augustine's desires and his thinking was not limited to him. That is what happens to everyone who becomes a genuine follower of Jesus. All of our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Jesus.

If you're a Christian, you know what I'm talking about. The miracle of being converted is the way that Jesus changes both what you desire and how you think. The gospel—the news that Jesus died for our sins—alters what we love and why we love.

If you're not yet a Christian, you need to know that this is the hope that Christianity offers you. A relationship with Jesus can change you more deeply than you know. Jesus will change what you want and why you want what you want. But you have to first come to terms with these two areas.

Our text today, in John 6, is a rich text in which Jesus teaches how he is the solution to their misplaced desires and misguided thinking. Or to state it positively: Jesus is what you need. He is the Bread of Life. Let me show you this by looking at two problems and one solution.

### **Wrong Desires**

Let me remind you that John wrote this book to convince people that Jesus is the Son of God so that they might believe and have life in his name. This story fits into John's overarching goal of introducing us to who Jesus is by what he did. These verses show us an important aspect of Jesus's teaching.

The last time we were in John, we learned about the feeding of the five thousand. It was a substantial miracle when they attracted a large following. This mass of people continued to follow after him. Verses 22-24 tell us that the people were seeking him. They boarded boats and traveled to the city of Capernaum to find Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy – God's Triumphant Grace in the Lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 47, quoting Augustine's Confessions.

What follows in verses 25-34 is a series of questions and answers between Jesus and the people who followed him there. According to 6:59, this exchange transpired in a synagogue, a place of Jewish teaching. And we see Jesus confront their wrong desires in seeking him. There are three questions.

**Question 1: “Rabbi, when did you come here” (v. 25)?**

Their question is more than simply a common, generic question. The crowd is confused because they knew the disciples traveled by boat and that Jesus wasn’t with them. They want to know what additional miracle Jesus performed in order to cross the Sea of Galilee. We know what happened. In John 6:15-21, we learned that Jesus walked on the water.

But he doesn’t tell the crowds this information. Instead, he challenges their motivation. Jesus tells them that they are not seeking him because of “signs” that point to the proof of his deity. Rather, according to verse 26, the people are seeking Jesus because “you ate your fill of the loaves.” Jesus charges them with seeking him because he gave them food. They crossed the Sea of Galilee because they desired what Jesus could give them. They were interested in Jesus because he could meet their physical needs.

In verse 27, Jesus challenges them not to “work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal which the Son of Man will give” to them. Jesus then connects his authority to who God is when he talks about God setting his seal on him.

Take note of the fact that Jesus tries to move them beyond their temporal desires to something eternal and directly connected to who he is. But they miss his point. They have no desire to look to Jesus for what they need. Their desires are clouding their judgment and their ability to see.

**Question 2: “What must we do, to be doing the works of God” (v. 28)?**

The next question is a response to what Jesus said in verse 27. He told them to work for the food that endures to eternal life. But they missed the next sentence: “which the Son of Man will give to you.” They only heard that they should work for eternal food. They are guilty of selective hearing. They only hear what they want to hear.

They say to Jesus: “Tell us what God requires and we’ll do it.”<sup>2</sup> Both their arrogance and self-trust are quite evident.

Therefore, in verse 28, Jesus answers them directly: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him who he has sent.” Entrance into the kingdom of God takes place by belief. But not just belief or faith in general; we must believe in who Jesus is—as the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

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<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 285.

Instead of believing in their efforts or their ability to know what they should do, Jesus calls these people to believe in him. Their desire to have their needs met collides with the reality that they must deal with Jesus personally. In other words, will they trust Jesus to meet their needs? That's the issue.

Well, we see their response in another question.

**Question 3:** "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe? What work do you perform" (v. 30)?

What do they want here? They want proof! In fact, they come back to this "bread thing." One commentator explains that the crowd was likely connecting to a belief by the Jewish religious leaders that the Messiah would call down manna from heaven as Moses did for the children of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

But Jesus corrects their wrong understanding of the Scriptures. Oh, friends take note of how your desires distort your understanding of what the Bible says!

In v. 32, Jesus corrects their wrong interpretation. They are elevating Moses to a place that is simply not accurate. It was God the Father who gave them the bread. Their desires create the wrong conclusions. They don't see things clearly or accurately.

And then Jesus connects himself and this discussion in verse 45: "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Jesus is the true bread. He's been sent from God. He's the thing people need. He's the gift and provision that's been sent by God.

The crowds are missing Jesus because of their desire to have their needs met, to do it on their own, and to have Jesus prove himself to them. Aren't you glad that this problem went away in the first century? What a joke! Nothing has changed. One of the greatest barriers to coming to Jesus is that we come with wrong motives ("just fix my kid, give me a better job, or get me out of hell"). Or we think we can do it in our own strength. Or we wait for Jesus to "write it in the sky."

If you are a Christian, do you remember when your desires held you like this? It's crazy to consider because you didn't know how blind you really were That's the great tragedy! We are blind while we're convinced we can see!

And notice how this text ends: "Sir, give us this bread always." What a frustrating statement! They don't "get it." Their desires have clouded everything, and it leads them toward a dangerous self-confidence.

Oh, here is the great tragedy of mankind! We confidently condemn ourselves with our broken desires when Jesus is what we really need.

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 285–286.

## The Bread of Life

This passage is far from over. However, John records one of the most important statements that Jesus makes in the entire gospel right here. Jesus attempts to break through the seekers' misplaced desires by offering one of the most profound statements about his authority in all the Bible. Just follow what he says verse by verse.

Jesus tells them who he is. He does so plainly and with a promise. Mark this down: *The person of Jesus comes with the promise of Jesus.* Or you could say it this way: *The promise you need is found in the person of Jesus.*

It sounds like this (v. 35): "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." Now, this is the first of seven "I am" statements in the gospel of John. Others include "I am the light of the world" (8:12), "the gate" (10:7), "the good shepherd" (10:11), "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "the way and the truth and the life" (14:6) and "the true vine" (15:1). By calling himself the Bread of Life, Jesus is connecting himself to the provision of God as in the manna in the wilderness. Manna was from God, and it sustained the life of the people.

Jesus says, "That's me!" And by coming to him, our deepest needs are met. Consider the desire for food and water. How do you create these desires? You can't. They are innate. But they can be satisfied with the right supply. And the message from Jesus is that he is that supply. Greater than manna in the Old Testament and greater than any provision of food, Jesus meets a need that is deep in the heart of men and women.

However, according to verse 36, the tragedy is that the crowds still do not believe. They see with their eyes, but they do not believe. This is the general condition of the human race. We have eyes but we don't see the right things spiritually.

That's why verses 37-39 are in the Bible. It sounds like a hopeless situation. But Jesus explains the grand mission of God. Jesus talks about one of the great mysteries and comforts in the Bible: the sovereignty of God. In order to understand this, you have to keep two truths in tension: God draws us, and we believe.

In verse 37 Jesus indicates that God is on a mission to save people. According to this verse, God draws people to himself. Jesus even uses language like "all that the Father gives me will come to me." In other words, God is not passively sitting in heaven hoping that people understand who Jesus is. He's not trying to develop a better marketing plan or a sales pitch to "hook you" into his plan. God is moving in the hearts of people who have misplaced desires. He is opening their eyes. God is wooing their hearts. He is lining up the circumstances of their life such to point them to Jesus.

Now, some of you immediately run to a "fairness principle." How is that a fair that God woos some hearts while others seem to be unmoved? I can't answer that entirely for you other than to tell you that God is God (see Romans 9:14-18). I can tell you that Jesus is not addressing fairness. He's addressing overwhelming unbelief. And he's saying something really important.

When it looks like unbelief rules the day and hearts seem darkened and eyes seem blinded—don't forget that God breaks through the deadness of humanity and calls people to new life. That's why Jesus says, "I should lose nothing of all that he has given me . . ." (v. 39). Jesus is not only saying that he's the *Bread of Life*, but he's also saying that he's the Bread of *Life*. So rather than being some fatalistic text that diminishes your hope, this text should make you shout for joy!

Unbelief doesn't rule the world—Jesus does! Exasperating failure to see who Jesus is and how he satisfies isn't ultimate—Jesus is! A lifetime of blindness to what Jesus is all about is not ultimate—Jesus can break through. "Everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life and I will raise up on the last day" (v. 40).

Therefore, John's gospel calls you to believe. Don't allow your wrong desires and your misplaced affections to rule you one more day. But also, don't think for a moment that you'll be able to fix your own problem. Believe in Jesus.

And when you trust in Jesus and you fear the old desires may come back to haunt you, rest in this promise rooted in the sovereignty of God: "Whoever comes to me I will never cast out" (v. 37). Jesus is the Bread of Life. He is the food we need for the life we must receive.

### **Wrong Thinking**

Now you would think this is where the story ends—on a high note. But it doesn't. Jesus doesn't pull a "mic drop" moment here. On the contrary, we find even more rejection. However, this time, the issue is how the people are thinking. Jesus confronts their wrong desires but also their wrong thoughts. John wants us to see the tragic condition of mankind.

In verse 41, John references "the Jews." This reference is likely to the leaders of the synagogue where Jesus was teaching. They could not believe in him because he didn't fit the mode of what they expected in the Messiah: "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?"

These leaders are making the tragic mistake of thinking that their thinking is sufficient to lead them into the future. One commentator put it this way:

'So long as a man remains, and is content to remain, confident of his own ability, without divine help, to assess experience and the meaning of experience, he cannot "come to" the Lord, he cannot "believe";<sup>4</sup>

The former crowd lived according to what they wanted. They trusted their "gut." These leaders are trusting their intellect and what they know.

That's why Jesus reiterates the truth about God drawing people in verse 44 and adds a statement about being taught by God in verse 45. The people need God to teach them what they cannot understand. And

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<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 293.

then Jesus reiterates that he is the Bread of Life (vv. 47-51) while also connecting bread and his body/flesh.

The Jews (again!) are confused. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v. 53). It makes you want to scream. And Jesus reiterates the centrality of his life, his body, and his death as the means necessary for eternal life in verses 53-58.

Jesus is using a metaphor here when it comes to eating his flesh. He’s not speaking about cannibalism, nor is he referring to the Lord’s Supper. He is talking about the satisfaction and delight that can only be found in him.

We use the same language with something special. We might say that we devour a book, ruminate on an idea, chew over a matter, or eat our words. If you are a grandparent, you may have even said that you were eating up your grandkids this weekend.<sup>5</sup>

The point is simple and yet profound. And it is one that every one of us must address. Have you found your satisfaction in Jesus? Is he your bread? Do you live on him? Or are you walking through life and living on your desires? Are you trusting in your ability? Are you relying on your ability to figure it out?

Augustine said, “You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.” But he also said something more as it relates to this text. And it was something he experienced, which I hope you have as well: “Believe and you have eaten.”

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

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<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, [\*The Gospel according to John\*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 279.