

The Gospel of John – Week 5

Welcome to week 5 of our series exploring the gospel of John.

This is one of those great series where it feels like every message builds on the one before and we're starting to see these really cool themes weaving throughout the book: themes of light and life and surrender and grace.

John is full of **really stark dichotomies**, and one that has shown up for the last couple of weeks is that of perishing and eternal life. It's going to show up again today, so I want to take a second to remind us what we mean when we say that.

In John, "**perishing**" (it's the Greek word *apollymi*), it does mean death, but it means the death of potential. Of what might have been.

It's like a loaf of bread that's gone moldy. It was meant to be enjoyed, but now it's wasted. *Apollymi*.

According to Jesus, we are *perishing* when we live lives completely focused on ourselves - our needs, our desires. But we were made for *more*.

We were made for what he calls "**eternal life**." The life of the age to come.

Again, this is not just super long life after we die. This is a **New Creation kind of life** right now. Abundant and peaceful and overflowing. True life that spreads life to others.

John 3:16

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

As with everything in John, the question is not whether this statement is true or false. John *knows* it's true. His question to us is, *do you believe it?*

A DIFFERENT KIND OF WORK

Today we're going to explore yet another angle on this dichotomy as Jesus

teaches that he is the “bread of life.”

Please turn with me to **John 6:26, Page ____**.

[PRAY]

A little bit earlier in the chapter, Jesus performs a pretty amazing miracle.

He’s out in the countryside being followed by thousands of people. There’s no food out there, so Jesus takes **5 loaves of bread and two fish**, and divides them up in such a way that all 5000 men there, and all the women and children with them, have more than enough to eat.

It says this in verse 12.

John 6:12

*After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, “Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is **wasted**.”*

I bring this to your attention because that word “wasted” is the same word as “perish” in John 3:16. *Apollymi*

So he’s fed people, but he’s fed them with bread that can perish. File that away, because he’s going to come back to this image in just a moment.

So after Jesus feeds the huge crowd, they start chasing him all around the Sea of Galilee. Ostensibly because they want to hear more of his teachings, but let’s be real... it’s hard to turn down a **free meal**.

They finally catch up to Jesus and here’s what he tells them:

John 6:26-29

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. But don’t be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval.”

They replied, “We want to perform God’s works, too. What should we do?” Jesus told them, “This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the

one he has sent.”

Here again we see the same dichotomy from John 3:16. Perishing vs. eternal life.

“Don’t be concerned about perishable things, but seek eternal life.”

Literally, what he says is “don’t *work* for food that perishes.”

This idea of work is important. Remember, the vast majority of the people following Jesus at this point were **substance farmers**, fishermen, shepherds, etc. The work they did every day was just enough to earn their family food for another day or two.

It makes sense that folks back then would work and work and work to survive. To get another mouthful of bread.

But Jesus says, “don’t work for that kind of bread - the kind that perishes, that loses its potential... Work for food that endures... work for eternal life.”

They reply in verse 28. “Alright, let’s say we want to do that kind of work - God’s work... **what are we supposed to do?**”

And Jesus says, “This is the only work God wants from you - this is the work of God - **to believe** in the one he has sent.”

So right out of the gate, in a food insecure culture, talking to *literally* hungry people, Jesus is saying **this scramble for survival**: this slaving away for another mouthful of food - is not the only way to live.

There’s another way: to do the work of belief.

Alright, so what does that even mean? What does it mean to believe?

NOURISHMENT

Well, let’s keep reading.

John 6:30-38

They answered, “Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in

you. What can you do? After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, 'Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they said, "give us that bread every day."

Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But you haven't believed in me even though you have seen me. However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will."

This looks a lot like last week with the Samaritan woman at the well. In both cases, they're taking Jesus too **literally**, and they're mostly just concerned with **their own physical needs**. Water. Food. Nourishment.

But just like John 4, Jesus is talking about something bigger than just surviving another day.

It's interesting that the people bring up **manna from heaven** in v.31, because Jesus takes that image and runs with it.

In case you're not familiar with the story, in the book of **Exodus**, the people of Israel are freed from slavery in Egypt but then spend 40 years wandering in the desert.

While they're wandering, God provides food for them. Bread, actually. It's called "manna" - a kind of bread that shows up on the ground like dew every morning.

The people could eat that and survive.

But eating manna from heaven required **a lot of trust**. If they tried to collect more than they needed for one day, it would go moldy and have maggots in it.

They had to take just enough for the day and trust that more would be there in

the morning. Every day for *40* years. **That's a lot of trust.**

All that to say, when these Galilean subsistence farmers talk about manna from heaven, they're looking for **another free meal**. When Jesus talks about manna, he's talking about **trust**.

They're saying, "Hey, if you are who you say you are, why don't you give *us* some bread from heaven?"

And in verse 35, Jesus is saying, essentially, "Yeah, that's what I'm doing. **That bread from heaven is me**. Do you trust me?"

"Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever *believes* in me will never be thirsty."

There's that "belief" word again. It's easy to hear the word 'believe' and think that Jesus is saying we've got to agree with some theological facts about him so we can go to heaven when we die. Like that's what belief means...

But think about the context here. Jesus says *he* is the bread of life. The manna from heaven. The Israelites never went hungry in the wilderness. But they had to trust every day that God would provide.

The "work" of belief here is **not an intellectual assent**. It's not just some theological idea to agree with. It's a choice to live every day as if God actually will meet our needs.

It's a **lifestyle of dependence and trust in Jesus**. "Don't work for food that perishes."

Belief means surrendering our own self-sufficiency and trusting in something beyond ourselves. It means being nourished daily by what God provides, not what we can.

That's what it means to believe.

Jesus is the bread of life. Do we trust him to sustain us?

NOURISHMENT

Are you with me so far? Jesus is about to take this metaphor a bit deeper and it's about to get *weird*. Let's go. Skip down to verse 47.

John 6:47-58

"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. Yes, I am the bread of life! Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh."

Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant.

"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they asked.

So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever."

"My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink... anyone who feeds on me will live..." This is one of the more uncomfortable teachings of Jesus. It sounds like cannibalism!

It's no surprise that a **bunch of his followers peace out** at this point. "No thanks. This is getting weird."

And we might be tempted to do the same. But hear me out. Because in light of what we just talked about - Jesus as the bread of heaven - inviting us to trust him to provide... this is actually really profound.

We'll start with this. What does it mean to eat his flesh and drink his blood?

You're probably thinking about **communion** - the eucharist. And you're right to think that.

It's a ritual that every Christian community has done together since the very beginning. Taking the bread and wine that represent the body and blood of Jesus.

He taught his own followers to do it on the night he was betrayed to be crucified. "This is my body... this is my blood... Do this in remembrance of me." It's in **all the other gospels**.

But interestingly, John never mentions that teaching moment. This *is* how John talks about communion.

Why would he do it this way? Because I don't think he's interested in explaining the *ritual* of communion itself. I think he's interested in **what the ritual represents**.

And what it represents is **surrender and trust**.

The same kind of surrender and trust that Jesus himself displayed. If you look back at verse 38, Jesus says,

John 6:38

I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will.

Here in verse 57, he says,

John 6:57

I live because of the living Father who sent me...

Right after talking to the Samaritan woman, Jesus told his disciples,

John 4:32-34

I have a kind of food you know nothing about... My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work.

Over and over Jesus makes the claim that **he's not living for his own purposes**. He's not doing the things that he thinks are right. He's not sustaining himself - toiling away every day for another mouthful of bread.

No. He is submitting himself to the will of his Father - what God desires - and *that's* what nourishes him.

I mean, think about what the bread and wine of communion represent. They represent his **body and blood sacrificed on the cross**. The ultimate act of surrender. The ultimate act of trust in God's plan.

Listen to what Jesus prayed that night.

Luke 22:42

Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.

Like I said, it's the ultimate act of surrender. And when take the elements, we are participating in that. When we are nourished by Jesus, we are joining Jesus in what nourished him!

And what nourished him? **Surrender to the will of God.**

That's what it means to "feed" on the body and blood of Christ. It means being **fed and nourished by his sacrifice** and allowing his **posture of surrender** to become our own.

"Not my will, but your will be done..."

Surrendering our own plans. Setting aside our own desires. No longer *perishing* but trusting in the bread of life to sustain us.

But this isn't just something that happens when we take the elements once a month. The act of communion is a reminder that we are to be **communion people** every day.

Verse 57. "I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me." **Eternal life**. The life of the age to come. In us, through us... Now and forever.

The surrender of Jesus can sustain us.

COMMUNION

Now, look. I know this is all rather heady and theological. It's a lot to chew on (Pun intended, I guess).

It's in these moments it's tempting to either avoid all this weird stuff, or to just boil everything down to a couple of simplistic **Jesus-ey life tips** for the week.

But I'm not going to do that, because John didn't do that. No. The things he wrote about and captured from Jesus' ministry were **meant to be wrestled with** and meditated on and discussed for a lifetime.

That said, in a few moments we are going to take communion together. This ritual that has been done for 2000 years. Perhaps I can give you some things to think about as we do it.

First, if you're **someone who has not yet surrendered your life to Jesus**, I want you to think about the life you lead.

Those subsistence farmers were looking for a free meal because their number one priority was their own hunger and survival.

Is yours? Are you caught in **the daily grind** of seeking your own satisfaction? Are you toiling away trying to make yourself happy? Trying to make yourself rich?

As we take communion, I want you to ask yourself: **Is there more to life than this?**

Remember what Jesus said to those farmers scraping by for another meal.

John 6:29

This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.

God has a vision for your life and **it doesn't involve the hamster wheel of self-sufficiency**. What would it look like for you to trust in that?

Second, **if you believe in Jesus** - maybe you've been walking with him for decades - I want to ask how you're doing with the practice of daily surrender.

Remember, with manna in the wilderness it was God who provided, but the people had to trust.

You've experienced the life of Christ within you. But are you still believing any lies about your identity? Are you trying to take matters into your own hand with that broken relationship?

Have you allowed self-sufficiency to creep back in at all?

As we take communion, think about this: What might it look like *today* for you to share the posture of surrender that Jesus had on the cross? "Not my will, but your will..."

What is God calling you to surrender today?

Finally, if you're someone who has **fallen away from your faith** or perhaps you're deep in a time of deconstruction and you feel like you're lost and confused about things that once seemed so real.

As I've said, **it's ok to doubt**. It's ok to wrestle. It's ok to be skeptical. Those can be really healthy things, but I don't want you to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Don't give up on Jesus. Don't walk away. Just a few verses after Jesus talked about eating his flesh, John says this:

John 6:66-69

At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?" Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God."

"Lord, to whom would we go?" The disciples were wrestling too, but they knew Jesus had the words of life.

If you're in that time of deconstruction, I know you wouldn't be here if there wasn't something - some spark - which once gave you life. So as we take

communion, I want you to ask yourself:

What was it that once nourished you?

Because even though you may have a lot of unanswered questions, I believe **the bread of life can nourish you again.**

Do you believe?

[PRAY]