

Sermon 6

Topic: Bread of Life

Scripture Reading: John 6: 30 – 35

Let us pray

Father, through your grace we have come to this place in our spiritual journey. We thank you for your grace and patience with us as we adjust our thinking to your way of living. Your love seeks us daily, LORD, reaching out to draw us closer to you. Holy Spirit, continue to speak to our open minds today as we listen to your still, small voice. Speak, we pray, in your mighty name Lord Jesus. Amen.

Introduction

I greet you today in the mighty name of our Lord Jesus the Christ. It is an honour to be able to share with you as we look into the Word of our Saviour Jesus the Christ. We will address the issue of good health. It is difficult to engage in physical activity if our health is compromised. We also have to divert funds from other areas of our budgets to address the issues of our health, and it demands a lot of our time and attention which could have otherwise been spent with our family or friends or on the mission field for our Lord. Today we will look at the topic: “Bread of Life”

Our text is John 6:35. It says: *“³⁵ And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”*

For the Jews in Palestine in the time of Jesus, bread was a staple for their meals. There is little wonder then as to why Jesus chose this staple on Jewish tables to convey to his hearers the impact of his message on their lives. Those who could readily find and provide bread for their families could relate to what having and consuming bread meant for their families; and at the same time those who couldn't readily provide bread for their families could also understand the significance of what Jesus was saying because of the void in their lives. Very little has changed as it relates to the significance of bread to our meal plans in today's world. Although many may contest the place of bread in meals other than breakfast today, we can make a case that could portray the impact of Jesus' message upon today's world. His message provides nourishment for our souls.

The context of this verse affords us an opportunity to understand the broader message Jesus was sending to those listening. He was interacting with them for the first time after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand men along with the added women and children, (which could have pushed the total number of persons eating at over fifteen thousand), from only five little buns and two small fish. With food being at the top of everyone's mind daily, it is little wonder that this miracle-working Teacher who could feed so many from so little, would be approached with questions regarding food. Could it be that this was a poorly concealed request for Jesus to feed them again? I can't say but let's look at that as it may give some more insight into what Jesus sought to convey to those listening. The question directed to Jesus regarding a sign to validate his divine call to leadership was not so much about the food only, it was about the broader issue of deliverance of Roman oppression as well, since they were under tremendous pressure brought on by the heavy taxation burdens, which they lived with daily.

It is instructive that in response to their query as to when it was that Jesus had arrived at the other side of the lake Jesus points out the real issue for them, a steady supply of food that they could eat and share with their families. For Jesus, his mission was about establishing the Kingdom of God in the hearts of the people, not the establishment of a political entity to administer the government of the Jewish people. In pointing this out to the crowds, the issue of his authentication was located in the context of provision of food, since this was the most pressing of their concerns. The Jews were taken back to the wilderness period of their history and directed to the miracle of feeding their ancestors as the proof of God's presence with their ancestors. If Jesus was divinely focused, would he, could he, replicate the divine provision of food daily, as was done by Moses (Ex. 16:1-17)? This was their immediate concern since their present experience mirrored in a number of ways, the psychological uncertainty which their ancestors must have felt at the prospect of providing for their families back then in the wilderness.

This discourse was almost like a contest of tug of war, pitting Jesus and his message of divinity against the people and their existential reality. Even in their concession that they are willing to see this issue from the same point of view of Jesus, they request an unending supply of what they understand/understood to be a second provision of daily bread from God. Such was the significance of bread to the daily life of his hearers. This begs the question as to the significance of food for our daily needs. The attendant issue to this reality goes beyond simply the provision of something to eat, the major issue is what is being provided and what will be the impact on the health of the eater. Jesus offered himself as the bread that will come from heaven, suggesting that his message is that which will redound to their survival. The reality of their survival was critical to the debate then and just as central to our discourse now. What long term impact will the food Jesus is offering have on his hearers today? The truth is our lives are a reflection of what we consume and convert into our system. It is the same way with our physical, psychological and spiritual systems. As they say, “garbage in, garbage out.” It stands to reason that this is the main reason Jesus offers himself and his message as the bread for their consumption and conversion into their endocrine systems.

The first thing I want to share is the importance of healthy eating.

Healthy Eating

The question is not just one of is there something to eat, it must be a more critical question of what will be provided to eat? Jesus challenged those asking him to feed them daily to be selective in what they eat. Jesus did not go into the nutritional content of various foods because his hearers had no frame of reference to grasp the import of his message. Today we do need to know the five food groups and the items in each group. We have knowledge of the constituent parts of the meals we consume and more importantly the benefits to our bodies and ultimately to our health, of these food groups. Jesus knew this and in offering himself as being the divine answer sent from God was stating his message would give their lives the nourishment, they needed to be healthy in body, mind and spirit. Research through the centuries and especially by the FaN project¹ has reached the point today where

¹ <https://food4changecaribbean.org/fan-about-the-project/>

we realize and appreciate the linkages between what we eat in our bodies, what we think in our minds and what we feel in our hearts, in relation to the ideal of good health. Gone are the days when we understood good health to simply be a strong, disease-free body.

Jesus sought to teach this truth to his hearers, to submit to them the importance of consuming emotionally and mentally uplifting food so that their bodies/whole being could be strengthened. A healthy mind, free from worry, can lead to a quality of life that results in true happiness. It can deliver the inner peace that we yearn for and the development of love that strengthens our immune system. Could it be that Daniel was aware of this when he told the Eunuch charged with preparing the meal for the young men upon whom the future of the Babylonian economic prosperity lay, that he and his three Jewish friends would not defile themselves with the array of things laid out for their consumption? (see Daniel 1:8ff) These four young men revealed a knowledge of the human system that appears to belie their age. I too will readily concede that their refusal to defile themselves stemmed in large measure from their spiritual upbringing and a strong drive to retain their identity. The Babylonian empire sought to remove their identity and replace it with a Babylonian one but they chose to retain theirs, including their diet. The end result was a scope of knowledge far superior to that of all the other young men. From this can we surmise the importance of diet to our lives cannot and must not be understated? I say yes, it must not be understated since what we eat and drink will affect the functioning of every cell in our bodies. Similarly, what we think and feel will affect our mood and stress levels.

Jesus knew exactly where he was leading his hearers. The concept of selective consumption can be lost when the more pressing need of whether we can have anything to consume at all is primary. But it is at such a juncture that this selectivity becomes all the more important. There is an expression that comes to mind as the possible working rule for many, that expression is: "Any port in a storm." It seems a handy rule and no doubt can be the very rule that is needed in many a circumstance. ~~but~~ Jesus' emphasis on selectivity in their context, however, must be ~~center~~ central in our thinking. It goes without saying that Jesus not only knew of their contexts, he understood the contexts in which they lived because his ministry was not one that came to Palestine from Europe. That means it was not based on a vastly different cultural, political and religious background. Rather, he was born and raised

in their context so he knew the hardship of daily survival. This makes his answers to them all the more important to us today as we seek to navigate the contexts of our own lives. What we consume is of vital importance and should not be compromised on the basis of expediency.

A second thing that emanates from our text is the benefits that can come from eating healthy.

Healthy Benefits

Nutritionists such as those in the FaN project have for decades been shouting the benefits of healthy food consumption. After years of ongoing research, at FaN they have found a link between the foods we eat, the things we drink and the thoughts we dwell upon, and our overall general health and wellbeing. Caribbean culture is varied and dynamic, and our culinary heritage has been one of the pillars of our culture. Interestingly, our Caribbean cuisine has been a double-edged sword for while on the one hand it is delicious and exciting on the other hand it has resulted in a surge in non-communicable diseases in our region. The challenge facing our nutritionists and food scientists is one faced by Jesus as he interacted with the crowds in our texts.

How can we convince those listening to us that some of what they are now consuming, like fast food, has little nutritional benefit to them in the long? How can they learn that the information being provided by FaN and others have significant long-term benefits to their bodies and thus to their lives?

Jesus was sure that what he offered would transform their lives immensely. He said to them: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). A bold claim but one he was prepared to make because he was convinced of the power of what he was offering. No doubt he phrased it this way because he was aware of the social challenges being faced by his hearers and knew such a statement would pique their curiosity. Be that as it may, he challenged them to test it out. He had made a similar offer to a lady he waited on at a well to meet. In *John 4*, John tells of a lady who came to that particular well in the heat of the day to escape the prying eyes and whispered comments because of her life choices. He offered her a similar proposal, take a drink of water which would quench her thirst for life. She jumped at the thought of never being exposed to the vulnerability that coming to the well and facing the community carried with it. She

misunderstood Jesus' offer but she revealed that what she was presently consuming was inadequate and was prepared to try what Jesus was offering.

What Jesus offered the crowds in *John 6* was similar, an offer to meet the existential needs they were grappling with. His offer purported to address once and for all a vexing and recurring issue that beset them daily. Again, like the lady John spoke of earlier in Chapter 4, they too misunderstood Jesus. But of significance to us today is the promise associated with this offer to satiate our basic needs. Never to hunger again or thirst again is an honour too good to pass on and some may argue, too good to be true. Since hunger and thirst are basic drives, we can agree that Jesus is suggesting something entirely spiritual, but we must not lose sight of the larger picture, the fact that we can benefit significantly by the things we consume and we can also be left ever lacking by the things we consume. What Jesus offers is wisdom and understanding that builds up the mind of the believer. He offers a lifestyle that satisfies the intellectual, emotional and psychological needs of those who will adopt/accept his offering, an offering that will also have physical spin offs to the believer. Just as Daniel and his three fellow Jewish compatriots revealed, a diet that adheres to proper dietary guidelines results in physically healthy outcomes in our bodies.

The prospect of peace, joy, absence of sickness and long life for the beneficiary should be enough today to spur anyone who so desires to implement the lifestyle choices Jesus suggests. We agree we should ideally take our devices to the manufacturers for repairs and only use them in the manner suggested by the manufacturer. It follows then that our bodies and their nutrition should be approached from the point of view of the manufacturer and our body's use follow the guidelines of the one who made it.

So far, we have considered

- Healthy Eating
- Healthy Benefits

And now we will finally consider Healthy Choosing.

Healthy Choosing

I have deliberately captioned this point “Healthy Choosing” to highlight the importance of recognizing there is the need for us to see making healthy choices as a principle by which we must live our lives. This is a discipline that must be intentional if we are to benefit from it in its entirety. Paul reminds us in Chapter 4 of his first *Letter to Timothy* of the impact of a lifestyle that observes the discipline of healthy choosing. In verses 6 to 8 Paul tells Timothy:

“⁶ If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. ⁷ But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. ⁸ For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”

The message in these statements focuses on the value and significance of discipline in our daily life. If such discipline becomes a habit then our lives will be made the richer for it because of the approach to evaluating the choices placed before us. Although the statement made by Jesus in our text was made decades before Paul’s, the implication is similar – choose carefully.

By identifying himself as the Bread of Life and delineating the benefits that accrue to the believer from selecting him as their source, Jesus recognizes there are other sources for sustenance, nourishment and existential satisfaction. Implicit in this statement is a warning to be careful in their choices. In suggesting that his hearers **come to him** there is the recognition of choice in the public sphere. With all the choices for nourishment in the public sphere the matter is revealed to be bigger than simply finding the cheapest source and thus getting the greatest number of items to take to our family. It becomes a question of what am I getting in return for what you are offering? In opting for healthy choosing as a lifestyle pattern, what Jesus presents as the benefits of his offer takes on greater importance. It may cost more to get what he is offering, it may also require greater output and significant consistency, but the discipline of healthy choosing drives us to make the sacrifices and push ourselves to get it. This is the approach we are advocating today even if or especially when we are the only ones who see the importance and value to be gained from getting what Jesus offers.

The same obtains in our choice for nourishment in other areas of our lives. Healthy choosing as a discipline will not let us settle for just five minutes of casual walking two or three times a week or allow us to roll over in bed and draw the covers around us more snugly because it is cold and we don't feel like exercising today. Healthy choosing disciplines us to say no to that delicacy in that buffet because we know it is not good for us and our health situation. Healthy choosing motivates us to read something educational, whether in our field of study or specialty rather than watch Netflix for the umpteenth time or go on Facebook or one of the other social media platforms for a good feeling. We become accustomed to the sacrifice and the price to be paid for healthy living and because we have chosen to develop the habit of healthy choosing, it becomes second nature to seek out the options that will improve our health and not be willing to compromise our health. Let us choose Jesus and pursue good health. Jesus offers what the world and its delicacies cannot. He is the Bread of Life and is not to be confused with the world's delicacies of death. Let us choose Jesus today and every day. Amen.

Let us pray

Father, thank you for your gift to us in Jesus, who comes as the Bread of Life to give us the gift of Healthy Eating, Healthy Benefits and the option of Healthy Choosing. Help us to develop the discipline of choosing Jesus in every situation in our life so that we can benefit from a satisfied life. In your name we pray Lord Jesus. Amen.