

Food That Endures

What are you hungry for? Mike Benson tells how one night, his eight-year-old daughter left six green beans on her plate during dinner. She was usually a great vegetable eater, so he said to her, "What's with the beans?"

She said, "Dad, I'm full to the top. If I try to eat one more bite, I'll pop."

Her dad said, "You won't pop."

She said, "Yes, I will pop." (Parents: is this sounding familiar?)

Then Mike remembered something. They were having his daughter's favorite dessert that night, pumpkin squares. So, he said to her, "How would you like a double helping of pumpkin squares with two dollops of whipped cream on top?"

She said, "That sounds great!"

He said, "How can you have room for a double helping of pumpkin squares and not have room for six green beans?"

His daughter stood up and pointed to her belly and said, "This is my vegetable stomach. This is my meat stomach. They are both full. Here is my dessert stomach. It is empty. I am ready for dessert!"¹ Eight years old!!!

So, what are you hungry for? In John chapter 6, we find recorded three of Jesus' most famous miracles: the feeding of the 5,000, His walking on the water and His calming the storm. All three of these appear to have happened within one 24-hour period. What we need to see here is two things: we need to see that there are three miracles, all with one purpose, AND after the miracles, we need to see that Jesus gives the people one choice. So, are you ready? First...

I. The Three Miracles with One Purpose.

Last December, when we were talking about the miracles of Christmas, I shared this definition of a miracle with you:

A miracle is "a special supernatural work of God... which is not explicable on the basis of the usual patterns of nature."²

All three of the events of John 6 fulfill this definition of a miracle. Unfortunately, there are people today, even some theologians, who try to call these happenings 'miracles,' but they aren't using this definition. For example, some liberal theologians say that what happened at the feeding of the multitude is that, when all the people saw this young boy voluntarily sharing his lunch, it inspired all of them, who also had lunches, to share theirs too and the result was that there were twelve baskets of leftovers. So, it was a "miracle of the heart," not of the food.

Well, first, that's not what the text says. This miracle, by the way, is one that appears in all four gospels. In Matthew, it specifically says that Jesus took the "...five loaves and the two fish" and blessed them and broke them and gave them to the disciples to distribute. So, if what really happened was that all the people shared their lunches, then these liberal theologians have a bigger problem than trying to explain a miracle. They have a text written by liars!

No, the problem isn't with the text, the problem is with the faith of the liberal theologians. C. S. Lewis, who once doubted the miracles in Scripture himself, wrote:

This is the first thing to get clear in talking about miracles. Whatever experiences we may have, we shall not regard them as miraculous if we already hold a philosophy which excludes the supernatural... We can always say we have been the victims of an illusion; [and] if we disbelieve in the supernatural this is what we always shall say.³

And those who say that have put their faith in the natural world and not in the Creator of the natural world. But if the One who created the world would show up in the form of one of His own creatures, wouldn't He be capable of manipulating the elements of His own creation any way he wanted to?

The answer to that is an obvious, Yes. Which points us to the purpose for which Jesus did these and all other miracles while He was here. That purpose can be stated in this sentence:

The purpose of every miracle is to bring glory to God by confirming the reality of supernatural power which also meets a real human need.⁴

Do you see that in these three miracles? They all met a real human need – people were fed, the disciples were saved from a storm. But they also pointed the people and the disciples to the supernatural power of God, who WANTED to meet their need! And all of this together had the overarching impact of turning those people's hearts to God to honor, respect and adore Him.

So, the big picture here is that these three miracles are real and had one purpose. Each one was a *"special supernatural work of God... not explicable on the basis of the usual patterns of natures"* which revealed the glory of God and met real human needs. Now, secondly...

II. After the Miracles, Jesus Gave the People One Choice.

Verses 14 and 15 give us some interesting information. Verse 14 says:

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

Now, that sounds good, right? It sounds like they're starting to recognize who Jesus really is. And that's good, isn't it? Well, Jesus sees what we can't see. Verse 15:

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Okay, so they want to make him king. Is that really so bad? I mean, weren't these miracles a great spiritual victory to be celebrated? If the people wanted to lift Jesus on their shoulders and carry Him into town, what would be wrong with that? Why couldn't He let the people celebrate a little?

The next day, after Jesus performs several more miracles with the disciples, after Peter even walks on the water and after Jesus calms the storm, the next morning the people find Jesus over on the other side of the lake. They ask Him, *"When did you get here?"* He replies:

... "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." (John 6:26, 27a)

You know, hunger is an interesting thing, isn't it? Every person on earth is no more than three or four hours away from being hungry. Jesus knew hunger and even proved, by fasting once for 40 days, that hunger was not His master. He now points out to the people that, when

you're hungry, you have a choice. Like the little girl who was hungry for pumpkin squares rather than green beans, these people are hungry for bread that won't last. Jesus is offering them food that endures to eternal life, but they're passing on that and choosing instead something that won't actually be good for them. They're choosing pumpkin squares over soul food.

During the time that Jesus was on earth, Rome was the one world power. The city of Rome itself was the center of the known world and included a very diverse population. The rulers came up with an ingenious scheme for diverting the attention of the general population from the drudgery of their day-to-day living conditions. One historian has labeled that scheme "bread and circuses." Rome set aside 93 days each year for public games at government expense. And they also provided free bread. They found that it worked wonderfully and was cheaper to feed and entertain the *hoi polloi* than to fight them or jail them. ⁵

Ninety-three days a year for public games. Isn't that kind of like our weekends! We have 104 weekend days a year. How do we use them? Most church services fall on weekends, have you noticed that? Church attendance across America has been declining for decades now. Since the 1970's, weekly church attendance is down over 30%. From 2004 to 2010, depending on the denomination, Sunday school attendance for kids dropped from 8 to 40 percent. According to a *Forbes Magazine* article, this was mostly due to youth sports which, as recently as 20 years ago, were never scheduled on Sunday. ⁶

Why am I bringing this up? Am I saying that kids should never play sports on Sunday or that adults and families should never miss worship here at Valley? No, I'm not saying that. Team sports can be a really healthy thing for our kids and corporate worship doesn't always have to be on Sunday. But what I am saying is this, what's your goal for your kids? And what do you think makes up a healthy spiritual diet for yourself and your family?

When the people came looking for Jesus the day after He fed them the "miracle meal," He basically said to them, "You're exhausted and frazzled and spiritually hungry again just one day after I fed you. Do you know why? Because you ate the wrong bread! You filled up on the bread for your physical body and you passed on the bread I offered you for your soul."

They said:

... **"What must we do to do the works God requires?"** (John 6:28)

And Jesus says, "Wrong question!! That's exactly the wrong question!! God doesn't require certain works, certain actions that will make you 'acceptable' to Him. It's your heart!! Where is your heart? It's what you hunger for that matters. Your actions are just a demonstration of what you're hungering for and I'm telling you that the bread you're hungering for right now is not going to satisfy you. It's bread that will spoil. In hours you'll be hungry again. You need food that endures to eternal life."

So they respond:

"Sir" ... "from now on give us this bread." (John 6:34)

And Jesus says:

... **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."** (John 6:35)

I mentioned the decline in church and Sunday school attendance over the last 50 or so years. Well, guess what's been on the rise with children and adolescents over that same period? Anxiety and depression – alarmingly so. Let me read you a quote from a secular UK website on clinical depression:

Twenty years ago depression in children was almost unknown. Now the fastest rate of increase in depression is among young people. Again, this backs up the fact that most depression is not caused by chemical imbalances, whether in adolescents, teenagers or adults.

What we are seeing are changes in society where basic needs for companionship, healthy goals, responsibility, connection to others and meaning are not automatically met... Meaning is attached to what they have, or look like, rather than what they do, or achieve. ⁷

What does Sunday school or youth group provide your young people? It defines their world as having meaning. It describes for them that, with Jesus, they will have the Holy Spirit inside them to guide them in responsible behavior. It focuses their attention on God's Word that gives them godly, healthy goals for life on this earth and a guarantee of eternal life with God after they die. Is this not exactly what these secular psychologists say is lacking in our children and adolescents today and that lack is what is causing their anxiety and depression?

When the people asked Jesus what work they should do to be accepted by God, what Jesus specifically said was:

... "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:29)

What does it mean to "believe" in Jesus? I've said this before, but I'll say it again. It means:

1. That you believe that Jesus is God.
2. That you admit that you have separated yourself from God by your disobedience but, if you will ask Him, Jesus will cause His death on the cross to pay for your sin and you'll become a son or daughter of God immediately and forever.

That's what it means to believe in Jesus.

Now, let me be perfectly honest with you. I love bread! I do!! Ask Liz. And there are more and more great bakeries around. And I also love the circus whatever form it takes. It's exciting and fun to be entertained or to watch a great sports match or to go and see it live rather than just on TV. But I've learned that what Jesus said on the Sea of Galilee this day is so very, very true. Bread and circuses don't last. They don't really satisfy. They just leave you wanting more. That's why my heart will not let me miss even one week of worship, even when we're on vacation! Why? Because the food I get to eat with God's people fills me up and nourishes me and clears my head of all those crazy thoughts and fears that seep in during the week. My heart makes me put worship and Christian community above everything else.

At the end of this section of John 6, Jesus makes a promise to everyone, young or old, who eats the bread of heaven. Listen to it from the Living Bible:

...those the Father has given me... I will never, never reject... For I have come here from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to have my own way. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them to eternal life at the Last Day. For it is my Father's will that everyone who sees his Son and believes on him should have eternal life – that I should raise him at the Last Day. (John 6:37b-40 The Living Bible)

I don't need a winning sports team to give my life significance. I don't need a more daring circus act to fill my life with adventure. In Jesus I've already been declared a champion and following Him fills my life with purpose and hope. He is the bread of life. Amen.

In each of our worship locations, your site pastor will come now and close in prayer...

¹ [PreachingToday.com/illustrations/2000/June/Hungry for God?](http://PreachingToday.com/illustrations/2000/June/Hungry%20for%20God?)

² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, '84, '85), p. 406

³ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 25

⁴ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 409

⁵ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Alive* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1986), ebook screen 4

⁶ "How Youth Sports and Activities Are Killing Sunday School," Bob Cook, onforb.es - 3/29/2015

⁷ "Teen Depression," Clinical-depression.co.uk