

Anyone Who Eats from the Living Bread Shall Live Forever

John 6:41-59

Instructor: Rev. Tesfaye Tamrie

I. Biblical Context and Historical Background

We know that the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, uses metaphors, allusions, parables, etc. to help us understand the deeper significance, meanings and revelations in Scripture. In John chapter 6, there is reference to “bread” both in the physical and spiritual sense. *Bread is used as a metaphor to highlight the physical as well as the spiritual significance.* Physically, we need bread which comes from the earth. Spiritually, we need “bread” which comes from heaven. *In both cases, it is God who provided the “bread” to sustain us physically as well as spiritually.* Notice also that we need “bread,” *daily.* We need “our daily bread” to be nourished physically and spiritually.

1. **Exodus 15:22-27: The Israelites Grumbled Against Moses.** It happened at different times in their journey to Canaan, the Promised Land. The **grumbling** of the Israelites was connected to **food**. In this chapter, the **grumbling** took place regarding **water**. God was **testing the Faith** of the Israelites in the desert – whether they will trust Him to provide water in the desert for them along the way. *So, God put their faith to the test!*
2. **Exodus 16:1-36: Manna – the Heavenly Bread.** The Israelites **grumbled** again; this time was about **food**. *They craved the food they ate in Egypt as God was leading them to a land overflowing with “milk and honey!”* The Bible says, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will rain down **bread from heaven** for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way, I will **test** them and see whether they will follow My instructions. ... ’” (**vv. 1-5**). We know that God provided **water from the rock** and **manna from heaven** throughout their journey. We also know that their clothes and shoes didn’t wear out for 40 years! *Yet, the Israelites continued to doubt and grumble!* In this generation, God will test our faith in the same way as we journey to our Promised Land which is in heaven! Will we trust God as we press our way to heaven? Will we continue to trust that God will provide food, clothing and shelter all the days of our lives! God will test our faith the same way He tested the faith of the Israelites! “The LORD said to Moses, ‘I have heard the **grumbling** of the Israelites. Tell them that at twilight, you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with **bread**. Then you will know that I AM the LORD your God. That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other ‘What is it? For they didn’t know what it was.’ Moses said to them, ‘It is **the bread** (manna) the LORD has given you to eat. ... ’” (**vv. 11-19**).
3. **Matthew 4:1-4:** Jesus said, “Man does not live on **bread** alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” One of the ways **the devil tested Jesus** was with food while He was fasting for 40 Days. But Jesus defeated Satan by using God’s Word!

4. **John 6:35:** Jesus said, “**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.**”

The Israelites doubted that God could provide for them miraculously in the desert. Of course, God **tested their faith** only *after He performed numerous miracles* before and after He delivered them out of Egypt. The Israelites saw with their own eyes how God opened the Red Sea! They also witnessed how God destroyed the Egyptians who pursued them by the same Red Sea! In this generation, God still wants to know whether **His people** believe that He is the Sustainer of their lives! *God will test our faith the same way He tested the faith of the Israelites.*

- Can God *sustain us* with **The Bread of Life**?
- Could you and I *trust* Christ to provide for our **daily needs**?
- Is God able to put **food** on our tables and clothe on our backs?
- Does God still perform miracles in our lives?

II. The Lesson: Anyone Who Eats from the Bread of Life will Live Forever

1. vv. 41-46: Grumbling is Not the Appropriate Response

In previous Sundays, our Bible teachers taught us about how Jesus supernaturally multiplied “**5 loaves and 2 small fish**” and **fed** over 5, 000 people. We also learned how **Jesus tested the faith of His disciples** (vv. 5-13). The same way God **tested the faith** of the Israelites during the time of Moses, the testing of the disciples’ faith involved **food**. Recall that by this time, Jesus had performed many miracles including the *miracles He performed* when He called Peter, John and James to follow Him (Luke 5:1-11).

In verse 41, the Bible says, “At this, the Jews began to **grumble about Him** because He said, ‘**I am the Bread that came down from heaven.**’” The reason for their *disbelief* is indicated in verse 42. “They said, ‘**Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?**’ **How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’**” Their reasoning is dishonest and misleading because we know from Scripture that:

- a) God manifested numerous miraculous signs and wonders during the birth of Jesus;
- b) The Jews accept the fact that God raised prophets from among them in the past;
- c) The Jews accepted John the Baptist as a prophet according to the prophecies;
- d) The same Jews knew from **Scripture** there were **prophecies** concerning **Jesus**;
- e) God spoke audibly during the Baptism of Jesus;

That is why Jesus said to them, “Stop **grumbling** among yourselves; **It is written in the Prophets:** ...” (vv. 43-45). In other words, Jesus was saying, ‘who are you trying to fool?’

The problem with the Jews was *many fold*:

- a) they say they believed in **Moses** whom they have not seen, but they refuse to believe in **Jesus** who was performing miraculous signs and wonders among them!

- b) they didn't have any problem believing **John the Baptist**, but refused to believe in **Jesus** about whom John himself testified about!
- c) they believed in the prophets of the old, yet, they didn't believe in the *manifestation of their prophecies* – **the Messiah** who performed miracles among them!
- d) They didn't have any problem eating “**the bread and the fish**” Jesus **provided supernaturally**, yet, they refuse to *believe Him who just fed them!*

Therefore, in the same way **God tested the faith** of the Israelites **with food**, Jesus **tested the faith** of the people after He **fed** them **mannna, supernaturally!** They were supposed to *see the connection* between the **physical bread** and the **God who provided it supernaturally!** Instead of **grumbling**, those who believe in God should utter words of **Thanksgiving!** Instead of **grumbling**, those who ate the food He provided should praise Him with words of **gratitude!** ***Grumbling is Not the Appropriate Response!***

2. vv. 47-51: Jesus is the Bread of Life

To state the obvious, in the natural world, food is very critical for the survival and wellbeing of animals and people. *That is why God provided us with sources of food in great quantities, varieties and places on this earth.* The vast oceans supply us with great quantities and varieties of sea food as do the lakes and rivers. The lands supply us with all kinds of food ranging from vegetables, fruits, crops and meat. Of course, God is the Creator and Sustainer of all that we enjoy in this world. ***For the people of God, problems begin to arise when they begin to think the food that they eat has nothing to do with the God who supplied!*** God has a way of reminding His people that there is a *direct link* between the food that we eat and the One who supplied it! ***God's people always had the propensity of rejecting The Bread of Life while they continue to enjoy the bread that He provided! God's people have the proclivity of dissociating the Bread of Life from the bread that they enjoy eating every day! That is why when Jesus said that He is The Bread of Life, they began to grumble!***

Jesus also made it clear that for anyone one to inherit Eternal Life, they must believe that He is The Bread of Life. That is why in verses 47 through 51, Jesus emphasized that only those who, “believes in Him will have eternal life.” They must believe that He is the Bread of Life! That He is the “Manna” sent from heaven! The difference from the “manna” God sent during the time of Moses and now is that Jesus is the Living Bread! But the “manna” God sent during the time of Moses signified what was to come in the future! Foretelling of His Death on the Cross, Jesus said, “I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (v. 51). When they heard Jesus speaking in this way, the Jews went from **grumbling** to **arguing** among themselves! Instead of grumbling and arguing, they could have just asked Jesus to help them understand! Why didn't they do that? **Ignorance got in the way!** Instead of grumbling and arguing, they could have just asked Jesus to explain what He was saying! Why did they ask Him to explain His sayings? **Pride got in the way!**

Well, Jesus is the Bread of Life! No grumbling and arguing can change that!

3. vv. 52-56: Don't Take It Literally! Jesus Spoke in Metaphors!

The Bible says, the Jews “began to argue sharply among themselves.” What baffled them can be gleaned from **the question** they asked each other in verse 52: “**How can this man give us his flesh to eat?**” To really get at the **revelation**, we must understand the *implications* in the *question itself*. This question is similar to the question Nicodemus asked in John 3:4 “**How can a man be born when he is old? Surely, he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born?**” In both cases, the Jews took the words of Jesus *literally*! Also, recall that the Jews who considered themselves **the experts** of the Old Testament were the same ones who refused to accept Jesus as the Son of God! They often challenged Jesus about what He taught! Jesus exposed their ignorance by exposing their lack of knowledge and understanding of the same Scriptures they were quoting!

Even today, there are people who *misinterpret* Scriptures for the same reasons! Even today, there are Christians who “argue sharply” for the exact same reasons! We must *distinguish* between the **figurative** and the **literal** language of the Scriptures! Jesus often spoke in **parables** in order to explain **spiritual matters**.

- Whereas Jesus spoke **figuratively**, the Jews took it **literally**!
- Whereas Jesus used the **physical** “bread” to *signify* the spiritual “bread,” they misunderstood Him *literally*!
- Jesus spoke in **metaphors**, the Jews thought He spoke **literally**!
- **Don't Take It Literally!**

4. vv. 57-59: Those Who Eat the Bread of Life Won't Die!

Because the Jews insisted on believing in Moses while they rejected Jesus, He referenced the fact that those who ate “the manna” during the time of Moses **died** before they entered the Promised Land! We also know from Scripture that the “manna” God provided during the time of Moses was good only for a day. If they tried to store in, it spoiled the next day! Even though the “manna” came from heaven, it was only **physical food** which pointed to the God who provided it! The **physical** “manna” was intended to point to the **spiritual**! The physical “manna” is perishable! The spiritual “manna” is imperishable! Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life! Jesus said, “I am the Living Bread!” **Those Who Eat the Bread of Life Won't Die!**

III. The Application

1. Those who preach and teach the Bible must be careful how they **interpret** the Scriptures. They must understand the difference between the **figurative** and the **literal** expressions.
2. There are **several genres** in the Bible: **Historical** (Exodus, 1 Kings 2 Kings, Acts, for example); **Poetry** (Psalms, some sections in the prophets); **Proverbs**; **Prophetic** (Jeremiah, Isaiah, etc.); **Revelations** (parts of Daniel, Ezekiel, Revelation).
3. The Scripture uses metaphors, simile, symbols, parables, etc. We need to *identify* them and *understand* them for what they are.