

## John 6:31-71 - "I am the bread of life"<sup>1</sup>

**Before the lesson** – Prepare the handout, John 6:31-59. Have colored pencils used to underline words in the handout.

**Fellowship Question:** (Use *one* of these to break the ice, begin some discussion, and lead into the study):

What was the last piece of bread you ate?

What is your favorite type of bread?

### Information

Today's lesson is a follow-up on the fourth sign that Jesus did as he provided food from practically nothing for over 5,000 persons. It was quite the miracle - the only miracle of Jesus' public ministry recorded in all four gospels. Unlike the other gospels, however, in John, the miracle leads to a sharp challenge from observers and a long rebuttal of their interpretation by Jesus.

After the miracle of Jesus walking on the water, he is confronted by a crowd - possibly the same crowd that saw him as God's prophet and wanted to force him to be king. Here, the miracle of the multiplied food is central to their argument. It reminds them of Moses, as the manna from heaven was Moses' greatest miracle. Still, there is a subtle demotion: when they approach to speak to him, they do not address him as a prophet but as a mere teacher ("Rabbi", verse 25).

- Have a class member read John 6:31-36.

"The crowd would be familiar with the idea of bread from the sky from the story of manna in Exodus 16. The implication of their ancestor's loyalty to Moses had its basis in the fact that he was able to broker for them God's gift of life-giving bread in the wilderness. Thus by withdrawing their honor assessment [that Jesus was a prophet] from the day before and by citing this story, they have sharpened the challenge to Jesus significantly: why should they switch their loyalty from the prophet Moses to Jesus? Moses, like a king, provided them with security and sustenance. What will Jesus do? The stakes in the public challenge are extremely high."<sup>2</sup>

"The citation in John is not an exact rendering of any one Old Testament passage. We may note the following:

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc., 2023. More lessons may be found at [greatbibleteachers.com](http://greatbibleteachers.com).

<sup>2</sup> Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 131.

Ex. 16:4 I shall rain loaves from heaven on you.  
Ex. 16:15 This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat.  
Psalm 73:24 He rained on them manna to eat and gave them the bread of heaven.”<sup>3</sup>

“This is a good example of typical Jewish exegesis. The crowd has cited Scripture: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ In the pattern of Jewish exegesis, the interpreter says, ‘Do not read \_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_.’ So Jesus says, ‘Do not interpret the “he” as Moses and do not read the past tense “gave”; but interpret the “he” as the Father and read “gives”.’ ...By these changes Jesus indicates that the Old Testament is being fulfilled now in his own work.”<sup>4</sup>

- Distribute the handout, John 6:31-59. Distribute colored pencils.

Let’s look at Jesus’ argument in detail. He uses several words, phrases, and images repetitively.

- Write on the board the words Father, bread, life/live, eat/eats/ate.

As you come across one of these words, underline it. Use four colors for the four words.

[Give several minutes for this exercise. When the task is completed, ask...]

What insight do you gain from this exercise?

Who is the real broker between God and God’s people - Moses or Jesus?

“Jesus now tells the crowd that their eschatological expectations have been fulfilled. They have cited the manna given by Moses, but this is only a foreshadowing of the real bread from heaven which is Jesus’ own teaching.”<sup>5</sup>

“This is the first of the seven ‘I am’ statements in John. In antiquity, bread really was a matter of life. Since bread provided 50 percent of the calories available to most nonelite [not elite] people, the metaphor suggests... [that] Jesus is the sustenance of life at his most basic level.”<sup>6</sup>

In verses 41-42, what is the problem the Jews are having about Jesus? Why is this an understandable concern?

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<sup>3</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of John*. The Anchor Bible, Volume 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 262.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, 262.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, 266.

<sup>6</sup> Malina, 133.

“Since the honor ascribed to persons depended on family lineage, where they were from determined who they were and what honor standing they had in the life of the community...If Jesus is ‘from’ Joseph and his mother, two people known to be members of the village nonelite, he cannot be ‘from’ the sky with all the honor status that would imply.”<sup>7</sup>

“Jesus never answers the question about his origins on a human plane; his words in vss, 44-46 are an answer but on a theological plane. He is sent by God (44) and he is from God (46), and that is how he can claim to have come down from heaven.”<sup>8</sup>

“The phrase ‘which (or who) comes down from heaven’ occurs seven times in this discourse. It was taken over in the Nicene creed to refer to Jesus: ‘For us men and our salvation he came down from heaven.’”<sup>9</sup>

Jesus is the bread from heaven that gives us life. That was a difficult leap of interpretation for the crowd to follow. Now, Jesus says that his body is the bread from heaven. One must eat Jesus’ body and drink Jesus’ blood to have life.

There is no Lord’s Supper/Eucharist in John’s gospel, but this passage has certainly been used in many discussions about the Lord’s Supper/Eucharist. There remain deep divisions in the church as to whether the elements in this special service are like the body of Jesus, represent the body of Jesus, or actually become the body of Jesus. What has been your understanding? Can you understand how other Christian brothers and sisters have different interpretations?

In verses 54 and following, Jesus again uses a favorite word of John’s, *menein*. It is translated as “remain” or “abide.” Jesus will have more occasions to teach us about remaining in him, especially in chapter 15.

“A comparison of vss. 54 and 56 shows that to have eternal life is to be in close communion with Jesus; it is a question of the Christian’s remaining (*manein*) in Jesus and Jesus’ remaining in the Christian...And so it is that while the Synoptic Gospels record the institution of the Eucharist, it is John who explains what the Eucharist does for the Christian.”<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, some who followed Jesus for a time choose to no longer *manein*.

- Have a class member read John 6:60-69.

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<sup>7</sup> Malina, 134.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, 277.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, 263.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, 292f.

## **Transformational Exercise**

Every day, we have choices to make. We may choose the way of life or death. When we put Jesus and his teachings at the core of our lives, we receive strength for our souls. His teachings nourish us and sustain us. They are the bread of life.

However, we have the choice to walk away from Jesus. Doing so is a rejection of God's plan for our lives and for the world. God wants reconciliation. That requires our rejection of spiritual "junk food" that does not nourish us. It harms us.

This week, I pray that you will be reminded of our lesson when you buy bread, or make bread, or eat bread with your meal. Remember that Jesus is the "bread of life."

[Conclude in a prayer something like this:] *Bread of life, help us to be faithful to you. Enrich our spirits, nourish our souls, in the name of Christ. Amen.*

## John 6:31-59 - New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

**31** Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' **32** Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. **33** For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." **34** They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

**35** Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. **36** But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. **37** Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away, **38** for I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. **39** 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. **40** This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day."

**41** Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." **42** They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" **43** Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. **44** No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. **45** It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. **46** Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. **47** Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. **48** I am the bread of life. **49** Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. **50** This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. **51** I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

**52** The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" **53** So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. **54** Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day, **55** for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. **56** Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. **57** Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. **58** This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." **59** He said these things while he was teaching in a synagogue at Capernaum.