

Is Jesus Enough?
John 6:25-35, 48-51, 60-69
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John 6 records one of the most well-known stories in the Gospels, what we often call the “feeding of the 5000.” It occurs at a time when great crowds were traveling with Jesus. He was at the height of his popularity. Word had spread about miraculous healings and inspirational teaching, so huge crowds had gathered to get a glimpse of him and see what all the hoopla was about. On this particular occasion, we’re told that there were 5000 people on a hillside. After a full day, they were getting hungry, so Jesus initiated a conversation with his disciples, asking them what all these people would do for food. 5,000 is a lot of mouths to feed.

One of the disciples, Philip, told Jesus that even if they had six months wages, it wouldn’t be enough money to buy bread for everyone to have just one bite. From Philip’s perspective, this wasn’t the disciples’ problem, and even if it was, there really wasn’t anything they could do. But, another follower, Andrew, had been scanning the crowd and told Jesus of a boy who had five loaves of bread and two small fish. I wonder what Andrew was thinking as he made this report of meager resources to Jesus. Did he say it expectantly, anticipating that Jesus might do something extraordinary? Or, was he dejected, affirming Philip’s assessment that there really was nothing they could do to fix so large a problem?

We know, of course, that Jesus took the boy’s sack lunch and with it, fed the entire crowd. The Bible tells us that even after everyone had their fill there was still plenty of food left over.

After dinner the crowd decides to camp out for the night so they can be with Jesus the next day, too. These are gung-ho fans. The next morning the crowd wakes up and they’re hungry again, and ready for a little breakfast. They look around for Jesus, a.k.a. their meal ticket, but he’s nowhere to be found. Eventually they figure out that Jesus and his disciples have crossed over to the other side of the lake. Instead of going home, they make the trip across the lake, too. The crowd seems to have no higher priority than being with Jesus. Maybe these are more than fans after all.

By the time they catch up to Jesus they're starving. They've missed the chance to order breakfast and now they are ready to find out what's on the lunch menu. But Jesus has decided to shut down the all-you-can-eat buffet. He's not handing out any more free samples. In vs. 26-27 Jesus says to the crowd: "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." And so right here and now, Jesus decides to have the DTR talk with this crowd—the Define the Relationship conversation. He knows that these people are not going to all this trouble and sacrifice because they are following him, but because they are following the food. How will they respond when the drive-through window closes?

In verse 35 Jesus offers the greatest gift he can give—himself—but the question is, will that be enough for the crowd? "Then Jesus declared, '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.'"

Why did Jesus make such a big deal about this distinction between bread for the stomach versus himself as the living bread? First and foremost, when Jesus is the only thing on the menu, you find out if he is one you were really hungry for. When there are no other options, that's when you find out if Jesus is enough.

Here's the bad news: the way this choice usually gets put before us is through suffering. We lose our job or our health or a loved one and we find that we are no longer self-sufficient. Someone lets us down or betrays us or deserts us, and we experience loneliness, bitterness or depression. We pour ourselves into some endeavor—launching a business, parenting or developing a talent we love, and in the blink of an eye, something goes horribly wrong. And, when these times come, something happens. Suddenly, a little bit of religion doesn't cut it. Suddenly, the spectacle—the loaves and the fish, the Sunday morning service, isn't enough. When life strips us of something we value and couldn't imagine living without, when Jesus is the only thing left on the menu, we find out that he is exactly what we need. He becomes more than a great teacher or an inspirational preacher. He becomes our only hope.

So, here in John 6 the crowd has to decide if Jesus is enough. Are they hanging around for the perks, or is it really about the relationship? We read the end of this story on the first Sunday of this series. Do you remember what happened? The fans in the crowd turned around and went home. "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." (John 6:66)

We're not really surprised, are we? Scripture tells us that the road that leads to destruction is wide. And it's crowded. A lot of people like the idea of heaven. They like the miracles. They like the bread. They like the free show and the community. They like the excitement. But when Jesus wipes all that off the table and offers Himself, they aren't interested.

After many in the crowd leave, Jesus turns to his twelve disciples and asks, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" I don't know how he said those words, whether he was frustrated or angry or disappointed or sad, but I can't help but wonder if it didn't break his heart to watch people turn and reject him, to know that they only cared about him as long as he was meeting their needs and expectations.

Maybe Jesus was holding his breath, asking these men he was closest to, whether or not they, too, were going to leave. Would his most devoted friends turn out to be fans who weren't willing to stick around when things got tough? Was this group more focused on the crowds Jesus attracted than on his message of life in God's kingdom? Would they abandon him, too?

"Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'"

Peter's answer sums it all up, doesn't it? That one question, "to whom shall we go?" actually asks thousands of questions. Who could love us like you do, Jesus? Who could teach us with wisdom like yours? Who could possibly bring us closer to God? Why would we ever want to leave the Messiah? Who else is worth following compared to you?

Fans will bail on Jesus when His teaching gets difficult. When he asks us to sacrifice. When he asks us to take up his cross or to die to ourselves. When he asks us to love our enemies, to not hold a grudge against the person who has hurt us, to spend our time on his priorities rather than our own. That's when fans take off. And, yes, perhaps it is partly because they prefer their comfort, as we talked about a couple of weeks ago. But, I wonder if it isn't more about control. Think about this: if someone was 100% guaranteed that following Jesus would lead to an eternity of joy and love and worship in the presence of God, if they knew it with every ounce of their being, they'd stay and follow, wouldn't they? I mean, who wouldn't make that choice, right?

The problem is that we don't know the way we wish we could, so we don't believe the way we should. We wish we could have it all laid out. If only God

would send *us* an angel, do some miraculous sign in *our* lives or speak audibly so *we* could hear it, we'd have an easier time trusting that God is alive and Jesus is his son and this is really all going to work out okay someday.

But life is not like that, is it? We know what Paul meant when he said we see through a glass darkly. Our empirical methods of proof don't work with God, and that leaves us with a nagging sense of doubt. Eventually, to believe requires a leap of faith, and here's the thing—that was true for the 12 apostles as well. Even with Jesus physically present with them, even seeing all the healings and all the miracles, at some point they had to define the relationship, to make a choice about who they believed Jesus to be—was he who and what he claimed to be or was he just another religious kook?

Unless and until we settle that question, we will never move from being fans to being followers. No, we do not and will not have the kind of guarantee that our science and technology driven culture demands, but Jesus does make some promises to us. Jesus promises that he will never leave or forsake you. He promises that he will never fail you. He promises that he will be living bread to you, that he will truly satisfy the deepest desires of your heart. He assures you that if you take that leap of faith and stake your life on his message of life and faith based on who God is, that he will stake his life on your eternal destiny, your eternal life with him in his kingdom.

So, men and women, what will it be? Will you be a fan or will you choose to be a completely committed follower of Jesus Christ? I believe Peter got it right. Where else can we go but to Jesus? He alone has the words of eternal life. We believe and know that he is the Holy One sent from God to show us who God is, what God is like and what God is up to in our world. He is the one who invites us to participate in the grand adventure that is the kingdom of God. He is Jesus, and he is asking us to follow him. What will you do?

Amen.