

**Title: Bread of Life**  
**Text: John 6:25-35**  
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**Date: 13 March, 2011**

Jesus had a way of grabbing people's attention. If it was not the profound nature of his teaching, his miracles certainly made people stand up and take notice. At the beginning of the Gospel of John, chapter six Jesus ends an amazing day teaching thousands who had hung on every word. As the day unfolds Jesus recognises the need to feed the crowd, and with five loaves and two fish Jesus miraculously feeds the very man, woman and child. Demonstrating the abundance of his provision, there is 12 baskets of leftovers. People are gob-smacked.

By the next day Jesus had crossed back to other side of the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. The Bible tells us that the crowds he had fed the day before searched him out there, and so in the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus teaches them about bread that satisfies. Let's hear what unfolds:

<sup>25</sup> When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. <sup>27</sup> Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

<sup>28</sup> Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

<sup>30</sup> So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? <sup>31</sup> Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'<sup>[a]</sup>"

<sup>32</sup> Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

<sup>34</sup> "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. "

(John 6:25-35)

We are born with an appetite. Appetite is simply defined as a strong desire for something. We are born with a healthy appetite for food. Within a few minutes of birth a baby is usually placed on his or her mother's breast to satisfy their God-given appetite for nourishment.

As fundamental as our appetite for food, we are born with an appetite for God. We are created with an appetite, a hunger for God. We are created in the image of God – Imago Dei. We are spiritual as well as physical beings. The writer of Ecclesiastes asserts that God set eternity in our hearts when He created us. In perhaps his most famous observation, Saint Augustine states at the beginning of his Confessions:

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

(Saint Augustine)

Here is another way of putting it: Our souls are starving until they satisfy their hunger in God.

It is the desire for God which is the most fundamental appetite of all, and it is an appetite we can never eliminate. We may seek to disown it, but it will not go away. (Simon Tugwell)

The history of humankind, tragically, is a never-ending story of misplaced appetite. In the beginning our first parents Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with God. Their appetite for God was satisfied by His constant presence with them in the

Garden. But like we have ever since, they believed the lie that God was not enough and so they reached out and ate the forbidden fruit.

Rather than feeding on God's presence they fed on God's provision.

And that is exactly what the crowd following Jesus was doing. They had seen Jesus feed thousands of men, women and children with a few loaves and fish. What a show! And what possibilities! Life in Galilee was subsistence living – every waking hour was devoted to gathering, growing, cooking and earning money for food. Just imagine, the crowd thought, if Jesus could do the trick with the fish and bread again. And not just once, but the next day and the next day and the next day.

The crowd do not have an appetite for God. They have an appetite for free food and entertainment – for bread and circuses. Jesus senses this and says to them:

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.  
(John 6:27a)

You see there is nothing new in the crowd's desire for free food. Their ancestors had a craving for it when they wandered the desert for forty years as they travelled from Egypt to the Promised Land. In the middle of a bleak wilderness God fed them with manna – bread from heaven. The manna had to be gathered and eaten daily as it would become a rotten, stinking, inedible mess if kept overnight.

After only a little while, the people became fed up with God's miraculous provision. They deserved some variety. After all, there was only so many ways you can cook manna. And so they engaged in perhaps their most well developed spiritual gift – the gift of whining. The Bible actually calls it murmuring.

The people wandering in the wilderness had misplaced appetite; they hungered after what God provided rather than God himself.

The crowd following Jesus had misplaced appetite; they hungered after the bread Jesus could provide rather than Jesus himself.

I wonder if we have the same misplaced appetite.

When kids come home from school, what is the first thing they do? They look in the fridge and pantry for food, because of course they are starving! Such in their ability to graze, Sue and I have been forced to hide certain foods in our pantry and fridge. If we don't they consume every biscuit, chocolate and chip. And they will have ruined their appetite for dinner.

We all have an appetite for God. We were created with it. It is fundamental to our identity. But we ruin that appetite when we seek to satisfy our appetite for God not with God Himself, but with one or more of the many good things that God provides.

Author and Pastor John Piper states:

If you don't feel strong desire...for God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great.  
(John Piper)

I want to name four smaller things that compete with the greater things of God for our appetite.

## **Money**

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Here is an obvious one.

We ruin our appetite for God when we seek to stuff ourselves with money and possessions rather than feeding on the One who created all things.

We dine out on the illusory comfort and security that money and possessions seem to offer.

Tim Keller says that as a Pastor he frequently has people coming to him to confess their sin and to seek liberation. They confess every type of sin, except one. He cannot remember any of his congregation coming to him saying, *'I spend too much money on myself. I think my greedy lust for money is hurting my family, my soul and people around me.'*

Even though most of us would say that our world is full of greed and materialism, most of us would think it does not affect us. We live in a state of denial. Most of us would deny we are rich.

We live in a culture where more is never enough. The obsessive pursuit of material comfort dulls our appetite for God.

Jesus asks this haunting question:

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?  
(Mark 9:37)

Even in the midst of a Global Financial Crisis we are rich beyond measure and yet our souls starve for want of God.

## **Love**

Here is a less obvious one.

We ruin our appetite for God when we feast too long at the table of love and romance and sex.

We live in a world addicted to the idea of love. Just imagine if song writers could not sing of love, play writers could not reflect on love and directors could not make movies about love. No more songs about falling in and out of love, plays about unrequited love, no more chick flicks – romantic comedies.

We love the ideal of love.

Ernest Becker won a Pulitzer Prize with his book 'The Denial of Death' in which he reflects on our modern obsession in ignoring our mortality. In doing so, many of us have also ignored God. In ignoring God, Becker argues that we look to love and romance to fill the gap:

We look to sex and romance to provide us with a sense meaning and transcendence that faith in God used to.  
(Ernest Becker)

Becker has this wonderful phrase; he says we are caught up in this pursuit of apocalyptic sex – sex that gives us a sense of meaning and transcendence that in the end only God can.

Augustine was a brilliant scholar who was sponsored to University in Carthage by wealthy patrons. While there as a young man he was caught up in the hedonistic lifestyle of his fellow students. He had a lot of sex with a lot of women, eventually taking a concubine who bore him a son. Years later he experienced a dramatic conversion to Christianity. In his autobiography, Saint Augustine wrote of his pursuit of love and intimacy:

I was not yet in love, yet I loved to love...I sought what I might love, in love with loving.  
(Augustine)

With his conversion, Augustine discovered that we have it all around the wrong way. Love is not God; God is Love.

Frederick Buechner put it this way:

To say that love is God is romantic idealism. To say that God is love is either the last straw or the ultimate truth.  
(Frederick Buechner)

Having said all this, I am a hopeless romantic. I am soppy and sentimental and soft. My dirty little secret is that I really do enjoy chick flicks. One of my favourite films is Jerry Maguire. Tom Cruise plays a sports agent obsessed in his work who over time falls in love with Dorothy his secretary, played by Rene Zegweiller. The movie culminates with a scene where Jerry professes his love for Dorothy. He says he can't live without her. He wins her with the memorable line: You complete me. Guys, don't you wish you thought of that one. What a cracker. Whose heart wouldn't melt? The hopeless romantic in me loves it.

There is just one problem – it is a load of rubbish. More than that, it is a dangerous delusion. No relationship, no marriage, no apocalyptic sex, no earthly love – no matter how good – completes us. Only a relationship with our Creator can do that. One of the reasons that many marriages and relationships struggle is that they labour under the burden of unrealistic expectations. If I expect Sue to provide me with a sense of meaning and purpose and identity that only God can provide I will crush her and our relationship with those expectations.

Our world in love with love. All around us are Lives full of romance; but Souls starving for God.

## **Religion**

A few years ago notorious atheist Christopher Hitchens wrote a book called 'God is not Great: How Religion poisons everything.' It may not surprise you that I disagree with most of his thesis - most, but not all. You see, I do believe that religion can poison our relationship with God.

A little religion can be a dangerous thing. Like an immunisation shot protects us from disease by introducing a minute part of that disease into our system, a little bit of religion can protect us from truly opening up to God and feasting on him by injecting just a little bit of God into our lives.

John Wesley was a deeply religious man. His father was a priest in the Church of England, he studied theology at Oxford, became a priest himself and dedicated his life to being a missionary to America. His was an abject failure as a missionary and he was confronted with the reality that he had a head full of religion, but a heart dead to God.

In our modern, western world full of rush and busyness we have become experts at compartmentalising life. We have our family life, our working life, our financial life and our recreation life. And we have our religious life. Churches are full of people who have put God into a box called religion which they take down once a week. Churches are full of people who have experienced a lot of religion but have experienced little of God. In putting God into a box, into a compartment, we keep Him at arm's length where He never makes demands that might mess up our neat and ordered and busy world.

So this season of Lent – this season leading up to Easter, perhaps some of us need to lose our religion in order that we might rediscover our appetite for God.

After John Wesley returned to England he found himself in a room in Aldersgate listening to someone read from Martin Luther's commentary on Romans. He famously wrote in his journal afterwards that as he listened to the words articulating God's gracious love for us, he found his heart strangely warmed. Wesley had to lose his religion in order to gain God.

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And so do we.

Let me clear; there is nothing wrong at all with money, love or religion. They are all good things. But good things can become idols that we give our appetite to rather than God. We feed on the small things and ignore the only feast that can satisfy our souls.

A few years ago, park rangers in Arizona began nursing more than 30 dehydrated, starving and banged-up pelicans. The pelicans were injured when they descended from the sky, sailed low over shimmering asphalt highways, stretched out their feet as though to make a perfect splash landing in water, and then tumbled end over end when they instead hit the pavement.

Due to a drought, the pelicans were starving for lack of food. They had flown hundreds of miles looking for fish. From the sky, the shimmering hot air over the black asphalt appeared to the Pelicans like water. Down they flew for fish and a refreshing dip in a lake. What they found instead was solid pavement, dehydration, hunger, and near death. Reality hit hard.

Much of what we seek to satisfy our hunger for God with turns out to be a mirage; our hunger remains unsatisfied.

But here is the good news; we do not have to fly hundreds of miles to find the food that will sustain us. We find that food represented in this table.

All of these tables pale in comparison to the food offered to us at this one.

Jesus said to the crowd who had gathered looking for bread and circuses:

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.  
(John 6:35)

What a radical promise! The only food that will satisfy our spiritual hunger is found in through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the food that does not spoil but endures to eternal life.

Instead of feeding on food that perishes, we can feed on food that sustains us for eternity. God offers us this food continuously. We receive what God offers simply by believing that Jesus is the Bread of Life and by placing our faith and trust in him.

This Easter season there are some of us who need to lose our religion in order to gain God.

This Easter season there are some of us who need to stop seeking the temporary pleasures of material things in order to gain the eternal pleasure of life with God.

This Easter season there are some of us who need to stop making love our God in so that we might experience the God who is love.