



"I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE"

Can you identify where the following breads come from?

- Bagel (Europe, US Jewish)
- Baguette (France)
- Ciabatta (Italy)
- Corn bread (US)
- Pitta (Turkey, Middle East)
- Naan (India, Pakistan)
- Laobing (China)
- Tortilla (Mexico)
- Johnny cake (Jamaica)
- Himbasha (Eritrea, Ethiopia)

Bread is seen as the staff of life – hence 150 different varieties! Whether wheat-flour or maize-flour or rice-flour, bread is essential to mealtimes around the world.

But sometimes, bread can take on a much deeper meaning – as we'll see today ...

John 6:25-59

Jesus has just fed 5000+ people with 5 barley loaves and 2 small fish, and this has got everyone pretty pumped. Not just because it's a free lunch, but because this is a sign that Jesus is the long-awaited prophet like Moses, who had fed God's people with manna in the desert (Deuteronomy 18:18). So they follow Him around the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum, where they crowd around a local synagogue.

It's against this backdrop that Jesus says this:

Anokhi hu, lechem ha'chayim. "I am the bread of life."

In fact, Jesus refers to Himself as "bread" no less than 7 times in this chapter. Why is this? What is He saying about Himself? These 4 things:

1) He's More Enduring Than Anything Else (vs26-33). Why did the crowd follow Jesus? Basically, because He'd fed them! And miraculously, too. But they failed to get that the bread was a picture of something far, far greater: a bread that will last forever. A picture of Jesus Himself.

Which is why Jesus says, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life." Every loaf of bread, even the supernatural bread that God gave to the Israelites during the exodus, has a shelf life (in the case of manna, 1 day, or 2 on the eve of the Sabbath). You either eat it, or it turns mouldy or stale, and you have to throw it away or feed it to the birds.

Sadly, the same is true of everything we fill our lives with. Pleasures, possessions, positions, professions, even the people who are closest to us. We can't take it with us, as the saying goes. Our diets have to include something else – something eternal. They have to include Jesus.

Or we're in danger of being left with nothing at all.

2) He's More Nourishing Than Anything Else (vs34-40). Jesus' listeners respond by saying, "A never-ending food-source? That sounds amazing! Yes please!"

So Jesus says: "You're looking at it. I am the bread of life." Then He adds, "He who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty." Which means we have a hunger that ordinary bread *cannot* satisfy. Not a 'second stomach' hunger – when the kids are too full up for dinner but not ice-cream. Jesus is talking about a 'spiritual' hunger. Because we are more than just material beings – we are spiritual, too (as the average Millennial or Zoomer will tell you).

However, not all 'spiritual' food is necessarily good for us. Just as you can eat stuff that is *physically* bad, you can also eat stuff that is *spiritually* bad. Just take a look at the Mind, Body & Spirit section in *Waterstones*. People are raiding bins when we've been invited to a banquet!

Because yes, there's a hole inside of us. But only Jesus can fill it.

3) He's More Life-Changing Than Anything Else (vs41-51). Jesus' listeners do the same thing as their ancestors in the desert did. They grumble! Why? Because like manna, Jesus is not the kind of bread they want.

This is still true today. People want to be told that they're alright, that everyone goes to heaven regardless, that the way we live and what we believe about Jesus doesn't really matter. Problem is: that's what we *want* to hear, not what we *need* to hear. And what we *want* to hear isn't going to change our lives for the better. Jesus gives us what we *need* to hear. And the message is this:

"If the Father is calling you – and you're listening – you will come to Me. And I will give you a life you can never lose."

Praise God, I may not be the person I should be, but I'm not the person I was, either! I'm a work in progress! But it's not down to *my* works, *my* goodness, or *my* take on things. It's all down to Jesus. The bread of life.

4) He's More Demanding Than Anything Else (vs52-58). Lastly, He tells them they have to 'eat His flesh / drink His blood.' Which is pretty hard for anyone to hear, let alone an observant Jew! What is Jesus saying here?

Well, He's not having a 'Hannibal Lector' moment – He's not talking cannibalism. Nor is He talking a molecular transformation of bread and wine, as per the Roman Catholic Mass. He's saying, "You have to make Me a part of who you are, just as your body does with the food you eat."

For too many, Jesus is a side-dish, a 'take-it-or-leave-it' part of a meal. Jesus is saying, "I'm not the side – I'm the main!" Because it's all about Jesus, right? Or should be. Our marriages should be about Jesus. Our families. Friendships. Jobs. Hobbies. Churches. Lives. He must be our 'all-in-all.'

How? The Israelites had to take the manna into their tents; similarly, we have to receive Jesus into our lives. In praying, reading, meeting, sharing.

Because it's not enough to just *know* about Jesus. We have to *receive* Him.

Come, And Eat

We are constantly being told, "Buy this or own that, and you'll know happiness and fulfilment." In fact, we have a standard of living that people could not have imagined 100 years ago – and yet people are not content. Why? Because we're missing the staff of life – Jesus.

As Jesus said to Satan when He was being tempted in the desert: "Man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

So is there a hunger inside of you today? A hunger that nothing of this world can satisfy? A hunger of the spirit?

Jesus says what God says in Isaiah 55: "Listen, listen to Me, and eat what is good." I.e. "Put your trust in Me."