

I AM the Bread of Life: Knowing God's Satisfaction

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Today, we are looking at the first of the statements Jesus made where he begins with "I AM." Today, we are looking to what Jesus meant when he said I AM the Bread of Life.

What's your favorite bread?

- I discovered a recipe to make the cheese biscuits from Red Lobster, and that's our new favorite bread at home. Simple and yummy; it's a great addition to our table with soup the kids don't want to eat anyway.
- Or there's Sandy's delicious yeast rolls that we get to enjoy for Thanksgiving Potluck or very often at Trinity Heights Night. The only thing better than those is when she makes cinnamon rolls with the dough... yum!
- We went to Olive Garden last week, and enjoyed their garlic breadsticks. They are best right when they bring them out, glistening with the garlic butter slathered on.

Bread is getting a bad rap lately with gluten allergies and insensitivities. But even gluten free bread is getting better than it used to be! Mix this with that and it can become quite a good bread! Some just falls apart and some tastes like sawdust, but sometimes, the baker comes up with a good alternative!

When Jesus talks about being the Bread of Life, he is not being exclusive to those with gluten allergies. Far from it. When Jesus says I am the Bread of Life, he is inviting the people of his time and of our time to look to him to fill our needs and satisfy our souls.

Let us pray.

Are you satisfied? Are you really satisfied with your life?

A Quaker had this sign put on a vacant piece of land next to his home: "THIS LAND WILL BE GIVEN TO ANYONE WHO IS TRULY SATISFIED."

A wealthy farmer who was riding by, stopped to read the sign and said to himself, "Since our friend the Quaker is so ready to part with this plot, I might as well claim it before someone else does. I am a rich man and have all I need, so I certainly qualify."

With that he went up to the door and explained what he was there for. "And are you truly satisfied?" the Quaker asked.

"I am, indeed, for I have everything I need."

"Friend," said the Quaker, "if you are satisfied, what do you want the land for?" *This is from The Heart of the Enlightened, a book of spiritual stories by Anthony de Mello.*

All too often, we find ourselves not very satisfied with life at all.

- If only our kids would be a little better behaved.
- If only we made just a little more money.
- If only my husband would lose just five pounds.
- If only my wife lost her baby weight.
- If only we could afford a better vacation.
- If only we had a bigger house.
- If only...

Advertisers know that this is within us, and they help us out with this sense of not quite being satisfied. According to the International Journal of Management Research and Business Strategy, there are six fundamental principles on which advertising campaigns run. These include:

- To score attention;
- To arouse interest;
- To develop and sustain that interest;
- To create desire;
- To incite action; and
- To create good will.

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.739.8618&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Did you hear that? Advertisements are designed *to create desire*. You have to want their product. And in a culture where we all have what we need, they need to make you desire a product you don't actually need. So they work to make you unsatisfied.

And it works doesn't it? *Psychology Today* reported on a study finding 62 percent of shoppers bought something to cheer themselves up. And there's more products to choose from: Consumer Reports tells us that between 1975 and 2008, the average number of products in a supermarket rose from 8,948 to almost 47,000. That's a lot of products to choose from; a lot of products that can make us happy!

<https://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/how-to/marketing/2017/09/do-we-really-see-4-000-ads-a-day.html>

We live in a society that says there's something better out there. Our advertising reminds us of that, and it's not a new thing!

- Whether it's Calgon that will take us away or McDonald's that tells us that you deserve a break today, we are invited to want something more.
- We can double our pleasure, double our fun if only we chew this gum.
- We can get more if only we use this phone.
- You can get ahead, if you get a hat. (from 1934!)
- It's the best a man can get.
- You, too, can have the Ultimate Driving Machine.
- <https://www.thebalance.com/best-advertising-taglines-ever-39208>

Advertising says there's something better out there, and this takes its toll on us. It's not just about our possessions. We certainly chase something better there. But it bleeds over into other parts of our life.

We end up chasing better relationships. Some would argue that the divorce rate is high in our culture because we're not willing to work to make relationships work. Instead, we begin to wonder if there's someone better out there for us.

We begin chasing better careers. I'm not thrilled with this one; there has to be a better one. Some research says that only 29% of employees working are satisfied with their jobs. That leaves a lot of our work force wondering if there's something better for them out there.

Jesus knew this desire. Jesus knew that we were looking for more. Just look at the crowds who come to him. The passage we read this morning comes right after another encounter with the crowds. The crowds follow Jesus because they have heard about his miracles. So they follow this miracle man and listen to his teaching. Then Jesus feeds them with the lunch of a young boy. Five loaves and two fish feed a crowd of 5000 men plus women and children. They are impressed and they look for him the next day to do more. They want to be satisfied. They want more of the miracles. More of the amazement. More.

There's a story told of two old friends who met each other on the street one day. One looked sad and almost on the verge of tears. His friend asked, "What has happened to you, my old friend?"

The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, my uncle died and left me forty thousand dollars."

"That's a lot of money," said his friend.

"But you see," the sad man continued, "two weeks ago, a cousin I never knew died, and left me eighty-five thousand dollars, free and clear."

The friend replied, "That sounds like you have been very blessed."

"You don't understand!" the sad fellow interrupted. "Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million from her."

The friend was really confused and said, "Then, why are you so sad?"

"This week I didn't get anything!"

This is the human condition! We are searching for more! More of the miracles. More of the blessings. More to satisfy us. But Jesus refuses. Jesus refuses to be a trained monkey who does miracles on demand. He knows that's not what the people need. He knows that won't satisfy them. You see, Saint Augustine describes us as having within us a God-shaped hole that only God can satisfy. Within each of us is a hole that only God can fill. Sin at its core is trying to fill that hole with anything other than God. With a new relationship. With a new career. With more possessions. We try to fill that hole with so many other things. But nothing will satisfy.

This morning Jesus tells us: you don't need more miracles. You don't need more bread from Red Lobster or more clothes from Cedar Closet. You don't need more. You need *me*. How can we experience Jesus as the source of our cravings? How do we properly fill the God-shaped hole in our heart? How can we keep from being consumed by our appetites?

There are some suggestions to try.

First, go back to last week. Last week we talked about looking for God's blessings around us. Look at the right now and see where God is and what God is doing. That can help us to find satisfaction as we see what's already going on around us. But there are more ways to find satisfaction.

Try the spiritual discipline of simplicity. At its essence, simplicity is defined as having a clear purpose in life, and then prioritizing the spending of time and resources in accordance with it. Let go of the stuff that you're hanging on to, and stop trying to fill your home and your closet with things. Embrace the space and the emptiness and not be weighed down by things.

Or try the spiritual discipline of fasting. Fasting dates to ancient times, is common to nearly every religion in the world, and is mentioned in the Bible more times than baptism. Fasting is at its essence abstaining from something for a time. While there are physical benefits to fasting, as a spiritual discipline, we are seeking to connect more closely with God. Fasting is most often connected with prayer. When you fast, you pray. While fasting from food, when you're hungry, pray. When you might have eaten at mealtimes, instead spend that time in prayer. Fasting fosters humility. It's a good chance to reflect on your mortality and finitude — your weakness, neediness, and brokenness. You're a fragile creature that relies on the constant intake of external sustenance to function. Go for several weeks without it, and you're dead. You're not all-powerful. You're not completely self-sustaining.

Or try fasting from *something* rather than food. Fast from anything in your life that's taking up more space, attention, power, or influence than you'd like. Fast from those things that are disordering your loves; consider fasting from anything that's detracting from your higher priorities and needs to be rebalanced in your life. Maybe it's a fast from watching the news. Or a

fast from Facebook. One year for Lent, we did a fast from mindless TV watching. We watched three shows, but that was it. No more flipping channels and having the TV on because we were bored. It not too late to try fasting for the rest of Lent.

(More information on fasting can be found here. <https://www.artofmanliness.com/2017/11/20/spiritual-disciplines-fasting/>)

Or try adding a discipline to your life. When you crave something, try taking time to study the Bible and to meditate on God's Word. Spend time reading and reflecting. Try journaling. Try reading some of the classic writings of our faith.

Jesus offered to the crowds a bread that could satisfy. Jesus offered the crowd a feast that would fulfill their needs in a way that manna and loaves and fishes could not. The work of God through Jesus Christ is to fill that hole within us that craves God. And Jesus can satisfy.

One final story: A man became envious of his friends because they had larger and more luxurious homes. So he listed his house with a real estate firm, planning to sell it and to purchase a more impressive home. Shortly afterward, as he was reading the classified section of the newspaper, he saw an ad for a house that seemed just right. He promptly called the realtor and said, "A house described in today's paper is exactly what I'm looking for. I would like to go through it as soon as possible!" The agent asked him several questions about it and then replied, "But sir, that's your house you're describing."

Everything that you desire is within your reach. No, not the physical things our culture says we need. But the soul satisfaction we truly desire is within reach. You simply need to ask God to give you the bread of heaven. To fill you with the satisfying presence of Jesus within you. To fill the God-shaped hole within you.

Will you feast on the bread of life that Jesus offers? Will you allow God to fulfill your desires rather than chasing other things? Will you allow Jesus to fill you?

Let us pray.