

Introduction:

Here's a question for you all: Between 20-25 times a week, we are all doing the same thing at just about the same time. You've already done it once this morning, and before a couple of hours have passed you will all do it again; and believe it or not, before bedtime, you will do it again. For some of you here it represents the most time-consuming activity of your day. It occurs no less than twice and sometimes 4-5 times a day on festive occasions, during the passing of one single day. What is it? EATING!!

Psychologists tell us why we do it: Because the basic drive in man is self-preservation – and eating is basic to that. Criminologists tell us that the most dangerous creature on earth is a hungry man. Wives would testify to that fact on a number of occasions. I've never seen a travel brochure that doesn't present the highlights of what you will be eating! Oh, how we love to eat, and food companies exploit that feeling within us with all their TV advertising especially at around dinner time.

1 Timothy 6:8 says, "But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." Contentment rests upon two essentials: sufficient food and sufficient clothing. You have that – you are content. However, half the world isn't content. To realise how discontent we are in Australia you only need to step off a plane, view a documentary, or even read a book about many countries. Countless masses of people live in impoverished conditions which would absolutely rock you to your core if you just stopped to think about it. The problem we have here in Australia is that though we splurge on material goods, emotionally we are poverty-stricken. Though we wine and dine at the finest of restaurants, inside our spirits slowly starve.

Just as there is a physical hunger that only physical food can satisfy, so there is a deeper, spiritual hunger in the pit of the human soul that only spiritual food can nourish. In this chapter, Jesus teaches us not to *"work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to the eternal life"* (John 6:27). He echoes the advice of Isaiah: *"Why spend money on what is not bread, and you labour on what does not satisfy?"* (Isa. 55:2).

1. PRELIMINARY EVENTS

I want you to think back a few weeks to our lesson of the feeding of the 5000, we'll remember that the mass of people returned the next day wanting more food. It would be easy to criticise and rebuke them for not seeing the spiritual significance of Jesus multiplying the food. However, we must be reminded of the fact that it was a Middle Eastern land that was an area of hunger – vast hunger.

The Scriptures stress that He gave them as much as they wanted. It was an incredible experience. For once, these people went to bed full of food. What a marvellous thought it must have been for them. But as you and I have experienced, even after going to Sizzlers at 6pm and getting our \$25 worth and much, much more (and walking out 5 kgs heavier!), the next morning we still wake up hungry – in fact, if you're like me, starving! Or, if you're also like me, by the time you come home from Sizzlers at 9.30pm you feel like another sandwich! Well, that's how it was with them. They woke up hungry and so they sought the Saviour, the fish maker, the bread baker, the food man. They thought that if He did it one day, He'd do it the next. But Jesus had more for them than just food that next day.

2. PRE-EMINENT ISSUES

Now, there are some important issues that the miraculous feeding of the 5000 raised.

A. Clarification of motives (vv.22-27). First and foremost, we see the crowd's motivation for seeking Jesus. Notice v24 ends with the people in search of Him, and in v26 Jesus tells them that they are not there for the truth but rather for another smorgasbord.

Notice the important contrast drawn between the two types of food in v27. There are two types of appetites in this world and two kinds of food. There is the physical appetite which everyone has for food which will spoil whether eaten or not. There is not one person here who doesn't have such an appetite. But there is another appetite, however, that is not that widespread. It is a spiritual appetite that is satisfied only with food that endures forever. And you cannot buy it in a supermarket! Jesus' point is that all these people are interested in is physical satisfaction – they're more interested in their stomachs than in their hearts, more intent on the here and now than on the hereafter.

Let me clarify something here: The majority of us here know what it is to be satisfied spiritually. We have met Jesus Christ face-to-face by faith; our hearts have become linked to Him by faith. We have given Him our lives and we have experienced in that marvellous moment – known as conversion or salvation – new life, eternal life, a new dimension of life, that is satisfied and continues to be satisfied on a day-to-day basis. But for some of you, you come with only one appetite. You've never yet come, by faith, to Jesus Christ. You've heard of Him, especially in churches or gatherings where His name is being magnified as Lord of all. Maybe you're married to one who's had that taste satisfied, or you're related to one, or you knew someone at school or work that came to know Christ – but to admit today, "I've never known Jesus as Lord of my life", would be an honest admission for some of you today. Jesus offers food that endures, food that takes you through a concentration camp experience, food that helps you endure the news of a terminal disease in you or a love one, food that satisfies when all friend fail and there seems to be no-one who cares – He offers the food that satisfies.

But there is another contrast. Circle the words, in the same verse, *work* and *food*. Jesus says not to *work* for that food – He'll *give* it to you. Jesus lived in a society of people that worked for their bread. There wasn't, as there is today, the man who could eat without working – a social welfare system – if a man doesn't work, he doesn't eat. Unless he begs, then then might eat scraps. Especially is that true and justifiable if one is able to work. And often the harder we work, the better we eat. Usually, the more diligent we work, the more God rewards us with better conditions, better promotions, better salary, better diet. There are some inequities in life, for sure, but often that is true.

Now listen carefully: For those of you who have never had that spiritual hunger satisfied, there is the tendency to think that now you must work hard for that – for what? – for God's favour. So what do you do? You begin to attend church faithfully, you begin to put little New Testaments into your children's hands, you give away a lot of money, you begin to carry a Bible, you start to pray and you begin to fast, etc, all the while thinking that God is tipping His hat and saying, "Now, that's impressive!" Especially the part about giving. And so by working, working, working, some think that when they stand before God, He'll say, "I'm pleased with all your efforts. Step into My presence. You've earned your way in."

Illustration: Jesus makes it abundantly clear that spiritual satisfaction, that enduring food, salvation, is a free gift of God. You either accept that or you reject it. Imagine that you've asked me and Jenny over to your house for dinner one night and you've really cooked up a scrumptious feast. You've got the roast turkey with gravy, roasted potatoes, corn-on-the-cob, rice with bacon pieces and steamed vegetables. Mmm, mmm, mmm. You've spent 3 hours cooking it and we devour it all in 3 minutes... and have such a lovely meal together. Now, just before we're about to leave, I pull out my wallet and say, "Oh, by the way, how much do I owe you?" How do you feel? What an insult! You'd say, "I... I gave that to you. To pay for it ruins it! Even to offer to pay for it leaves a bad taste!"

You see, it fouls up the whole plan. Man is engaged day in, day out paying for a meal that's already been paid for, and in the process is insulting God! God says, "I want to give you this." "Oh no, I've got my pride. I'm no freeloader. I earn what I get." Well, sorry friend, but you'll be in hell because God's offer to heaven is the gift of His Son, and if you cannot accept His gift then you refuse the only way possible to gain eternal life.

B. Discussion of miracles (vv.28-51). Now, look at what question the crowd responds with, which shows their need for instruction (v28). They are asking, "What kind of work should we do in order to please God?" Jesus responds by saying, "If it's works you want to do, then all God expects is that you believe in the Son of God – and I am He." But the crowd then says, "Oh yeah? Prove it.... by giving us more miraculous food.... FOR FREE! (v.30). Isn't that amazing?"

I am always so amazed at how easy we forget what impossible situation God has just delivered us from. You know David could whip Goliath the giant so easily? Because of a vivid memory of the God of yesterday that enabled him to kill a lion and bear. He said that the same God who handled the lion and the bear could handle this uncircumcised Philistine. He remembered what God had done, these people couldn't remember what Jesus had done just yesterday! Don't ever allow yourselves to become like these people. **READ V28-35 THE LIVING BIBLE PARAPHRASE.**

These people wanted to see a sign – preferably of the food variety! So they recalled the stories they were raised on and Moses was brought into the limelight. This Jewish group digressed from "prove it" to "top this, if you're really who you say you are." Jesus makes it clear that Moses wasn't responsible for the manna – God was. His point was that the bread of God was a gift, whether it was shaped into manna or the Messiah (vv.32-33). Still listening more to their hunger pangs than their spiritual conscience, the crowd would rather have another loaf of bread than the abundant life within their reach (v34). Like the woman at the well, they were missing what He was actually saying. Instead of grasping the gift of salvation offered them, they hold tightly to their scepticism with closed minds and clenched hearts (vv35-51).

C. Reaction of the multitude (vv.52-59). All these Jews can do is grumble and argue. The mistake is as basic as a child might make. They don't understand that Jesus is using a figure of speech, a metaphor. He wasn't literally a piece of toast any more than He was literally a fluffy lamb or a furry lion, or any other symbol used to describe the Messiah. He uses the symbol of bread because people of the Middle East saw it as the means for sustaining life.

I think it's very distressing to think that those Jews were offered salvation personally by Jesus in the flesh, and they rejected Him. I can think of something equally tragic – that some of you will leave here today knowing that you yourselves have not accepted Christ's offer of salvation. Or worse, you think you have received salvation by reciting some prayer, but there has been no change to your heart and your lifestyle, there is still no desire to draw near to God, to holiness, anymore than there was before you ever repeated some prayer that you never were serious about in the first instance. Let me urge every one of you, I urge you to receive the gift of Jesus Christ with all your heart. Call out to Him, repent of your sins and be baptised, and the word of God says you will be saved.

3. PERSONAL IMPACT

I want to show you three types of attitudes demonstrated by these people and how we still see the same attitudes in our society today. You see, even though technology changes, even though advances are made in modern medicines... the hearts of people haven't changed and what happened back then still happens in people's hearts now.

A. Open defection (vv60-66). Many people were attracted to Jesus for the food He was handing out. But when He got to the point of His sermon – that they need to receive and believe on Him as the Messiah, that they need to give control of their lives to Him and obey what He had to say – they then retreated to the back pews, and some even walked right out the doors. It was too difficult for them to accept. Not that it was unclear, but that it was objectionable. “I can't tolerate that thought. You want to talk about taking care of people's needs, or the world's problems, or about nice gatherings where we sing and have a good time of fellowship – that's great. But don't ask me to limit my faith to the plan of Jesus Christ and Him only.” You see, when the thumb of God begins to bear down on your will and your life, some people don't want any part of it. When I read this gospel, I see Jesus say, “Believe in Me only – I'm your only hope for eternal life. There is no other way. Worship Me.” I read in *Acts 4: “It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

B. Firm determination (vv67-69). Even though Peter makes a lot of blunders and we pick on him from time to time, he makes a statement here that is worth a million bucks. First, he says the futility of leaving Jesus. Second, he gives the reason for staying. Next, he shows the order of our relationship with God. First we *believe*, then God *proves* Himself and we then *know*. Man keeps saying that if God will prove Himself, then he'll believe. But that's not God's plan. His offer comes first, and the proof comes later. To whom will you go when trouble comes into your life? To whom will you go when you or a loved one receives news of a terminal illness and there is nothing the doctors can do? To whom will you go? For Christ's closest disciples, their determination was firmer now than ever. He was the only one!

C. Subtle deception (vv70-71). Its this third one that bothers me the most. Standing right in the midst of the chosen band of men was one who *looked* and *sounded* like the most sincere disciple. His name was Judas, a name which has itself become a metaphor for betrayal. I'm sure he was the first one to say, “You tell it like it is, Peter. Amen. Preach it, brother! That's the spirit, Peter, that's the spirit!” But that's what even some of you may be doing. You may be doing this or that in the church, and have so many badges on your chest for all the things you've done for the church – but you've never met the Saviour. And so, you live under a lie, just like Judas!

So....which category do you fall into? Is your life like the grumbling crowd – one of open defection? Or is your life like Judas – one of subtle deception? Or is it like Peter and the other disciples – one of firm determination to serve Christ?

Conclusion

I'll be upfront with you all right now... this is a very serious message. I'm sure that you've caught the idea by now that I'm talking to each one of you. I'm talking to you my friend – to the stewards, to those on the worship team, to those involved in various ministeries, to church men, to church women, to those who have been in and out of churches all their lives. Let me tell you something profound: *visiting the supermarket isn't the same as eating a nutritious meal, and attending church isn't the same as receiving Jesus Christ, the bread of life.* I don't want anyone to leave here spiritually hungry, so I'm asking you to invite Jesus Christ into your life.

Jesus said in *Matthew 7*, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*

I don't want that happening to any one of you here today. If you cannot think back to a day, or even a period of time, when you called upon the Lord Jesus to come into your life and take control, then friend, you need to do that now.... NOW! Do not let it go another day! I cannot do that for you. You, and you alone, must accept God's provision to pay the price for your sins, confess your need for God and tell Him how grateful you are to accept His gift of Jesus Christ as your Saviour. Trust on Him and no longer on yourself. Then let Him welcome you into His family, as His very own child.

Let us pray.