

Satisfying Soul Hunger

Hunger is an interesting thing. How does your body know that you need to eat? The body, I'm told, has a hormone called ghrelin. Ghrelin is produced when your stomach is empty, and it sends the signal to your brain that it is time to eat. When you are full, there is a hormone called leptin that tells your brain you are full.

But there is more than one kind of hunger. There is not only bodily hunger, but soul hunger. The French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal once compared the human heart to a deep hole, an infinite abyss. Man feels this emptiness, and tries to fill this hunger with things, or with pleasure, or achievement, or power, or success, or fame, or wealth. But the problem with mankind is not that our desires are too strong; it is that they are too weak. It is not that we are too hard to satisfy; it is that we are too easily satisfied. We ignore our soul hunger, by just satisfying other smaller hungers.

But Pascal said that the infinite abyss of the human heart “can be filled only with an infinite and unchangeable object; in other words by God himself.

Soul hunger requires something much greater than passing, temporal things to satisfy it. Soul hunger requires some kind of ultimate, eternal, final thing or object to satisfy it. That's what John 6 is all about: satisfying soul hunger.

John 6 records a fairly intense dialogue that took place between some so-called disciples of Jesus and Jesus Himself. It is structured around exactly seven questions that they ask Jesus. Within the answers that Jesus gives, Jesus teaches three life-changing truths: real life, real faith, the real Messiah. Get ultimate life by feeding on the ultimate food.

²² On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone—²³ however, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks—²⁴ when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵ And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “[Rabbi, when did You come here?](#)”

In the morning, the crowd that was determined to make Jesus king is looking for Him. The crowd had seen the previous evening the disciples get into that one boat, without Jesus and head out, without Jesus in the boat. But we remember Jesus had gone up alone into a mountain, and then joined the other disciples on their other boat by walking on water. The crowd probably expected Jesus to be in the area, or coming down from that mountain. When they didn't see him, they realised He must be with the disciples in Capernaum. Some other boats were now there, probably blown across the lake by the previous night's storm. So they get into them, head across to Capernaum, which they know is where Peter lives, and where Jesus made His home-base during these months of Galilean ministry. They arrive, and it seems a few of them go to the synagogue in Capernaum, and find Jesus there. It might have been a day or so since the miracle, as this is probably the Sabbath, if Jesus is in the synagogue.

Question # 1 – A Question of Curiosity

Their first question is simply “Rabbi, when do you get here?”

Jesus does not answer their curiosity, but instead exposes their motives.

He says in verses 26 and 27, “You are seeking me, not because you saw the sign I did, and looked at what the sign was pointing to. You did not see the spiritual meaning and significance of what I did. You are simply seeking physical food.”

“Instead of seeing in the bread the sign, they had seen in the sign only the bread¹

The crowd has a carnal outlook, and so they want a carnal messiah: a leader who will give them feasts and sensuous banquets, and defeat the Gentiles with humiliating defeats.

So now Jesus seeks to draw their understanding from the physical, visible, temporal, to the spiritual, the eternal, the ultimate.

And the analogy He is going to use is food, and eating and drinking. Food and drink sustain physical life. But there is more than this mortal life, with its mortal food.

²⁷ Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” (John 6:27)

There is everlasting life, eternal life, that comes from eating the heavenly food. **This is the first major theme of this whole discourse: What you really need is real life = eternal life.** There are 25 references to life, living, everlasting life, living bread, bread of life, resurrection, living Father, Spirit. Jesus is teaching them how to stop living for a narrow, temporal life, and pursue eternal life. Real life is eternal life.

They spend their lives working for food, and that is fine. But they are carnal in that they expend no focus, no effort, no will towards the eternal food that sustains eternal life.

So, for maybe an instant, they lift their heads from the feeding trough of carnal living to see if there is a bit more to life.

Question # 2 – A Question of Religiosity

So here comes the second question: Then they said to Him, “[What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?](#)”

Okay, you want us to be a little more religious. What religious rituals or duties should we complete to be more respectable that way? Give us a list of things to do, commands to keep, and then come and be our Bread-Making King. Here's the answer Jesus gives:

²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

Jesus corrects them. It's not works, it's faith. In fact, He replaces their plural works with just the singular work. If you want to do something, the only thing you can do, is believe on the sent Messiah, Jesus. **Now this is the second major theme of the discourse: You can only have real life through real faith.** Throughout this discussion, there are over 26 references to belief and faith. But what Jesus does is use more than one term for faith. He does not only say “believe”; He also uses the term “come” - to approach or draw near. To believe is to come to Jesus.

³⁵ And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who **comes** to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives Me will **come** to Me, and the one who **comes** to Me I will by no means cast out.

1 Morris, L. (1995). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 317). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

⁴⁴ No one can **come** to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, *'And they shall all be taught by God.'* Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father **comes** to Me

Of course, these people had come to Jesus, seeking Him. But they had only come to Him physically. They had not drawn near to Him for who He was, and for what He was truly giving. They came to Him because they wanted to eat and drink.

But Jesus also uses another image for believe, and that is eating and drinking. Since the whole discussion is about seeking eternal life, not just temporal, seeking eternal food, not just temporal, so Jesus wants them to do a spiritual kind of eating and drinking. Eating and drinking Jesus Himself is another way of saying faith. You take food and drink into you for sustenance and life, so you must receive the Person of the Son as your eternal life.

⁵¹ I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone **eats** of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

Jesus has told them, stop being carnal, thinking only of your belly. What you really need is eternal life. Work towards that. They say, "what work should we do?" Jesus says, "The only work is to believe in Me". Come to me, feed on Me. But they don't have real faith, because all of this just brings about their third question.

Question # 3 – A Question of Perversity

Therefore they said to Him, "[What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?](#)" ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, *'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'*"

Here these carnal sign-seekers are looking for more entertainment. They just saw a sign of Jesus feeding about 20 000 people. If they were interested in faith, they would have interpreted that miracle correctly, and led them to faith.

It seems they are hinting that He should repeat that sign. Feeding the thousands was a similar miracle to the manna which fed the Israelites every day in the desert. So, they seem to be saying, do it again! Give us a food miracle.

But no sign will be given, because they didn't get the first one. They didn't interpret it rightly, so why should Jesus amuse them, or fill their belly?

But Jesus seeks to get their focus off signs, miracles, and a fixation on the temporal.

³² Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

His response is that the real heavenly bread is Himself. Jesus explains that what Moses gave was not true bread from heaven. God is the giver, and it is not past-tense gave, but present-tense continues to give.

Jesus is the real food miracle. Jesus is what has actually come from heaven. **This is the third theme: the object of faith must be the real Messiah, the Heavenly Bread.** Eighteen times we read the words the Father sending, willing, giving the bread, and the Son coming from heaven, from the Father, the bread from Heaven. **Real life comes from real faith in the real Messiah.**

So they respond in verse 34, just like the woman at the well, “Give us this Heavenly bread”. They don't seem to get that Jesus is speaking about Himself.

³⁵ And Jesus said to them, “**I am** the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

Here is one of the I Ams of the Gospel of John. I am the bread of life. He will say it again in verse 48. In verse 51 - “I am the living bread”. These are claims to deity, to coming from God, coming from heaven, being the Father's Son, and being the I AM. This is all about identity – the identity of whom you place your faith in.

So now they have the whole gospel: real life, comes from real faith, placed in the real Messiah.

³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (John 6:35–36, 38)

³⁹ This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰ And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:39–40)

But now their hardness and unbelief begins to show. This leads to their fourth question.

Question # 4 – A Question of Identity

⁴¹ The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.”

⁴² And they said, “**Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven’?**”

How can He claim to be the ultimate Miracle – the Man from Heaven? We know His family! How can He claim a heavenly origin? He's one of us! He grew up here in Galilee! We've seen Him for years and have never seen any sign that He is the Bread from Heaven.

Jesus's response? He explains their unbelief.

³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. (John 6:36)

⁴³ Jesus therefore answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.

They say, we don't believe you! Jesus answer is, the reason you don't believe, is that the Father has not opened your eyes. This is sub-theme of this debate: **God's sovereignty gives true faith**. Only God the Father can open their eyes to see the heavenly, eternal, spiritual truth about Jesus. The reason they don't believe, Jesus says, is that all they have is their carnal vision. For them to see Him as He is, to come to Him for who He is, they need the drawing, teaching, enlightening work of the Father.

Notice, there is both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. God the Father must draw you, and then you must come. God the Father will teach you, you must hear and learn.

³⁷ All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. (John 6:37)

Putting verse 37 and verse 44 together, we learn that sinful man never thinks it is a good idea to come to Jesus. God has to put it into your heart, and when He does, you will definitely come. When God cures you of the rabies of unbelief, you will lick his hand instead of biting it; when God removes the insanity of unbelief in your mind, your clear-thinking mind will come to Jesus. And when you do, Jesus will never turn you away.

Proud human hearts say, “Jesus, we haven't chosen you!” To those proud hearts, Jesus says, “If God had chosen you, you would have chosen me.”

This is hardly what this crowd wants to hear. They think of themselves as good people, good Jews, and here Jesus is telling them that they are carnal, seeking only this life, that they don't believe, and they don't believe because they have not been drawn.

Real life comes from real faith – given by the Father – in the real Messiah, Jesus.

So now Jesus pushes back against their carnal desires for food, and now He uses the ideas of eating and drinking.

⁴⁷ Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. ⁵⁰ This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” (John 6:47–51)

Now once again, we have a scene in John where the hearers of Jesus cannot see the spiritual meaning of His Words. When He said, destroy this Temple and I will build it in three days, He meant the Temple of His body, not the physical Temple. But they misunderstood Him. When He said to Nicodemus, you must be born again, Nicodemus thought Jesus mean re-entering your mother's womb to be born a second time. When He told the Samaritan that He could give water that would become self-replenishing, she thought it referred to a special kind of physical water. But again, He meant Himself.

So, predictably, their fifth question is just like those previous misunderstandings.

Question # 5 – A Question of Incredulity

⁵² The Jews therefore quarrelled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us *His* flesh to eat?”

Jesus answers by simply pushing the image even further.

⁵³ Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you **eat** the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever **eats** My flesh and **drinks** My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶ He who **eats** My flesh and **drinks** My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who **feeds** on Me will live because of Me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who **eats** this bread will live forever.”

Jesus doesn't mean cannibalism. Drinking blood was forbidden and abhorrent to the Jews. And He is not referring to communion or the Lord's Supper. He has not yet died, and the Lord's Supper is a memorial. Nor would this crowd have remotely connected eating the Passover elements with Jesus'

own flesh and blood. No, Jesus is speaking spiritually of consuming Him, taking Him as your all, as your life.

Let Me become your nourishment, your permanent means of eternal life.

Again, He is teaching the themes of this chapter. One: what really matters is eternal life, not temporal life. Two: to have this life, you must believe. Three, you must believe in Jesus, who comes from the Father, from Heaven, which is why He can bring eternal life.

But the response is unbelief, and it brings the sixth question.

Question # 6 A Question of Rigidity

⁵⁹ These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. ⁶⁰ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, “[This is a hard saying; who can understand it?](#)”

In other words, “who can accept this teaching that we can't just get miracles out of Jesus, we have to accept Jesus Himself? Who can accept the idea that we have to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Heaven-sent Son of God, the spiritual food we need, the key to eternal life.” We need to not use Him, or try to make Him a carnal king, we need to bow the knee, submit to Him, and then take it from there.

In response, Jesus asks his first questions.

⁶¹ When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶² What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

Does my teaching offend You? Would you believe if you saw me ascend to heaven? I am giving you spiritual teaching, from the life-giving Spirit, not fleshly teaching that profits nothing. And then Jesus returns to that fourth theme of why they don't believe:

⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. ⁶⁵ And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.”

Now comes the sifting of the superficial disciples from the true disciples.

⁶⁶ From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. ⁶⁷ Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?”

As the crowd thins out when they realise that Jesus is calling for a radical, all-or-nothing commitment, Jesus now asks the twelve, whether they also wish to quit, and throw in the towel.

But Peter's answer is the seventh question in this dialogue, and it is in some ways the very best question of all.

Question # 7 A Question of Fidelity

⁶⁸ But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Six questions of unbelief, and finally, the seventh question of faith and trust. Lord, who could we go to besides you? If we abandon You, where to from there? If you are not the answer, then who is?

Even if we wished to go, we are constrained by the reality of who you are. And here Peter sums up the whole teaching of chapter 6 in two sentences. You have words of eternal life – there's the theme of life. We have come to believe – there's the theme of belief, that you are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God – you are the Heaven-Sent Messiah, you are the Son, the Bread from heaven.

70 Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" 71 He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve. (John 6:33–71)

Jesus knows that Peter is overstating it when he says "We have come to know and believe", speaking for all the twelve. Jesus wants the twelve to know that even among them, the deceitfulness of unbelief and rejection is present. Even among them, there is one, chosen a while back, but all along, just like the carnal crowd – seeking this life only, seeking only money and food, unable to see beyond to eternal life. One of them is still unable to see Jesus as the bread from Heaven, and has still not fed upon Him. And yet, there is one, who is not given by the Father, drawn by the Father, taught by the Father. How do we know? Because had he been, he would have already come, believed, eaten and drunk Jesus and obtained eternal life.

Ultimate life comes from feeding on the ultimate food. Real life comes from a real faith in the real Messiah. That's what satisfies soul hunger.

Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."