

“Christianity Defined,” John 6:22-47 10/27/19 Steve Harden

Good morning.

“On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

²⁵When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” ²⁶Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” ²⁸Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” ²⁹Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” ³⁰So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³²Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

⁴¹So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴²They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” ⁴³Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— ⁴⁶not that anyone

has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life.”

Thank you, Stacy. This is the word of God.

Today we are returning to John 6. We are working through the gospel of John and we are in chapter 6 right now. Chapter 6 is, a little trivia for you guys, is the longest chapter in the gospel of John and the longest chapter in the New Testament. However, I trust this sermon will not be the longest one, we'll keep it short. The story thus far in chapter 6: Jesus had fed 5,000 families from five loaves and two fish. Now that probably equates to something between 10 and 15,000 people that Jesus has just fed. They were impressed. They were so impressed that they wanted to force Jesus to be their king. And so, when that happened, He sent His disciples away, He put them in the boats, He said, “Go to the other side of the sea,” and He went on the mountain to pray. Now when they were on the water a great storm came up and the wind was blowing. They were on the water all night long until the last watch of the day, sometime between three and six in the morning and they were halfway across the sea. They were tired; they were exhausted. Jesus saw them and He came, as we saw before, strolling on the water, just strolling along like He was sight-seeing. He was not affected at all by the waves and the sea. The moment then that Jesus got in the boat, they found themselves on the other side of the sea, so a second miracle.

The next day, where we pick up our conversation today, the next day, after the day that He'd fed all these people, there were still some people around on the side of the lake that Jesus had fed them and they looked around, “Where's Jesus?” They couldn't find Him. They were hungry so they wanted Him to feed them again. They knew the disciples were on the other side of the lake, and they also knew that He had not gone with them. They couldn't find Him anywhere, so they thought, we'll look for Him on the other side of the lake, so they got this little armada going and they went all the way across the lake, and they found Jesus. And that's where we pick up the story today. In verse 27, after having asked Jesus, “How did you get here? We counted the boats and we saw the disciples. How did you get here?” And He wouldn't answer them. Verse 27 is the text that we will anchor our thoughts on for the rest of the morning. We'll unpack this chapter I think by unpacking this one verse. Now I will say, I'll read this in a moment, I will say we're skipping verse 36-46 today. We will come back, but they're really theologically rich so I want to take the time in a day to come.

Verse 27: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give to you.” Do not work for food that perishes. Now, what is He saying, when He says, “Don't work for food that perishes”? Now, let's acknowledge, He's not saying, “Don't work for a living.” That's not what He's saying. “Don't go to work.” Because

that's really what they were trying to do. They wanted Him to provide bread for them as God provided manna in the wilderness through Moses. You see, the rabbis had taught them that when the Messiah came, He would be a greater Moses and He would provide manna for them, so when Jesus provided the bread they thought, "Ah, here is the greater Moses." And He was! But He was so much more than the greater Moses. He was the Messiah. You could see why they drew that conclusion, but they completely missed the boat, so to speak. They missed the boat because they missed the sign that the feeding of the 5,000 should have led them to. They were looking so closely at the provision of bread that they didn't take a step back and say, "Who is this man that can do this? He must be the Messiah." They were more interested in the provision of the bread. So that sets us up here in verse 27, when He says, "Do not work for food that perishes." He is pointing out their misplaced priorities. He is saying: "Don't spend your life seeking the things that will not provide lasting satisfaction. And I don't think there's any greater message that He could have for us today than, do not spend your life seeking those things that cannot provide lasting satisfaction.

He is utilizing the analogy of hunger and food to teach us a spiritual truth. See, they knew, and we know, that bread only gives us temporary satisfaction, right? We are always going to get hungry again. It feels really good for the moment, but over time, we will get hungry again. Just like manna that God provided in the wilderness through Moses, it's temporary. It won't last. This temporary food in Jesus' words exemplifies all the material things that we so run after, that will not provide lasting satisfaction. He utilizes the analogy of bread and hunger to declare to each of us that our longings go much deeper than these temporary things. Our longings for satisfaction, for peace, for beauty, for art, for contentment and meaning and purpose, they go way beyond these temporary pleasures of food and drink. There is an ache within each of us that drives us to seek to have that contentment filled, that satisfaction within. And it's universally acknowledged, perhaps we don't think of it often, but you can go all the way back to Plato and Aristotle and they talk about man's search for meaning and for purpose. We all have our own ways of searching for it. But we will do almost anything to find that satisfaction and contentment. Yet it's really elusive, it's hard to grasp, and it's temporary at best.

Several years ago, you may have seen it or heard about it, 60 minutes did an interview with Tom Brady, a quarterback for the New England Patriots. At that point, he had won three Super Bowl rings. Listen to what Brady says, Tom Croft was his interviewer and he asks him about success on and off the field. This was his answer, he said: "There are times when I'm not the person I want to be. Why do I have three Super Bowl rings?" He now has six, right? "And still think there's something greater out there for me. I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, "Hey man, this is what it is." I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me? I think, "God it's got to

be more than this.” I mean, this can’t be what it’s all cracked up to be! I mean, I’ve done it. I’m 27. What else is there for me?” Croft said: “Well what’s the answer?” Brady said: “I wish I knew.”

C.S. Lewis writes about our longing for something more and in fact, he uses this deep internal longing as an argument for the existence of God. He calls it the argument of desire. I quote, Lewis says: “If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.” See, he proposes that creatures are not born with a desire unless the satisfaction of that desire exists. So, he would say, we all feel hunger, and that which satisfies that hunger is food. We all thirst, and that which satisfies that desire is water. Then Lewis makes that argument then, if there is a desire that you have, that deep longing desire that you have for something more, and you can’t find satisfaction for it in this world, then you were not made for this world. It goes way more than this world. Earthly satisfactions, my friend, were never meant to satisfy the longings of the soul. They can only point to its existence and help us to understand why we’re so hungry for peace, for contentment, for purpose and meaning. All of this hunger, all of this yearning is so elusive. My friends, it’s simply pointing us to Jesus. John 6:58: “This is the bread which came down from heaven. Not like the bread of the fathers ate and died, but whoever eats this bread will live forever.” Into our longing for satisfaction, Jesus steps in and says, “I am the satisfaction to your deepest desires.” I have not come simply to sustain your life by providing bread for you, I am your bread. And He will say it over and over again, in verse 35: “I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger.” Verse 41 says, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” Verse 48 says, “I am the bread of life,” verse 51, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven, if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. I have come to satisfy your hunger.” So we know from the Scriptures that the answer to the longing of our soul is found in Jesus, the bread of life. But how? How does Jesus somehow, some way, satisfy our souls? That’s the next part of this verse.

He says: “But work for the food that endures to eternal life.” Let’s look first at what He is saying when He says, ‘eternal life.’ There are two words in the original language of the NT that are translated ‘life’ in our language. The first one is ‘bios,’ which just means existence, it just means living, physical existence. We breathe, our heart beats, we eat, we drink, we exist. That’s the first word, and it’s not the word He uses here. The word He uses here is ‘zoe.’ Zoe speaks of a quality of life, a wellness. It’s not just existing. When He speaks of eternal life, He is speaking about a life that’s worth living, a life that is full of purpose and meaning and beauty. He speaks of joy and elation and happiness, all the good things that could come to you. So, when Jesus says, “I have come to bring you life.” He is saying, I have come to bring you zoe: wellness and

meaning and purpose, life in abundance, a life that is truly worth living. And He comes to bring it forever. Heaven will be marked by this zoe life. And when we talk about eternal life, we just go directly to heaven. It is true, and that is the fullest, the epitome of it, but it starts right now.

You see, in heaven I think we're going to have all these same desires. We're going to yearn for the same things that we have here, and the difference in heaven is that they will be satisfied in full. And then what happens when we are satisfied in full? Then that just gives birth to more desire, and when that gives birth to more desire, He will satisfy that greater desire to its fullest. And it will go on and on and on for all eternity! It will just get better and better and better: more purpose, more meaning, more beauty. But it starts right now. We will never experience, this side of the grave, what we will experience on the other side. That's why we can look forward to it. We will never experience it to the degree we will then, but we can experience it now.

So how do we get filled with the bread that Jesus offers? How can I take Him and be satisfied? Well, Jesus used several expressions of it here in chapter 6, expressions for a life worth living. He says in verse 29, 35, and 47, he says, "Believe in me." Then in verse 35 He says, "Come to me." There in verse 40 He says, "Look at me," in verse 45, "Learn from Me." So, what does it mean to believe and to come and to learn? He's going to give us a picture. Look at verse 51, He says, "'I am living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he will live forever and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.' The Jews then disputed among themselves saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise Him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who ever feeds on me he will also live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.'"

Now what is He doing here? Well first of all, He's freaking some people out. That's what He's doing. He says, well okay, you come to me for bread? Guess what, here it is. And it messes them up, and it drives them away. They say, that's gross, Jesus! And I find it kind of that way too. The Romans would take this passage to discredit the early church; they would say, "Oh, they're just cannibals. When they go in and hide among themselves, they're cannibals. They drink flesh and drink blood and all that stuff," it's almost Halloween right? I do think Jesus is

using the shock factor, for those who came to Him for the wrong reasons. But He's doing so much more.

He's teaching us what it means to believe, what it means to be a Christian. He's teaching us these things. So, what does it mean then, to feed on Jesus? To feed on His flesh, and to drink His blood? Well think, normally we run to the Lord's Table with this text, but I don't think that's the primary meaning. It's the same meaning, but it's not the primary meaning from John 6. Eating is ingesting, right? We understand that. You chew up some food and you take it in. It becomes a part of you. If you eat a bite of bread, you chew it, you swallow it, and from there your body begins to digest. From there, it's assimilated into every cell of your body. Every cell is affected by what you eat and what you drink. It is nourished, every cell. It is kept healthy, because of what you eat and what you drink. Likewise, to believe on Jesus, to feed on Him is to assimilate His life into yours. To take Him in and in effect, allow Him to control every aspect of your life. Just like food and drink assimilates to every cell, so to believe in Jesus, to look to Him, to come to Him means that you are accepting Him and assimilating Him in every element of life, you are Jesus saturated. You are Jesus indwelt. You are in union with Jesus; you are united with Him. Do you see?

This is really important, I believe, in our day. Because I fear there are many who proclaim the name of Jesus, who even consider themselves Christians, who will not attain eternal life, and that's tragic. Because they have not fed on Jesus, have not assimilated Him into their existence. You see, it's not feeding on Jesus if all you do is consider and analyze His words. If you're a bystander looking at what He has to say, that's not feeding on Jesus. It's not feeding on Jesus if you just understand and affirm His ethics. That's not feeding on Him. It's not feeding on Jesus to be knowledgeable and be an erudite theologian, to have all your systematic theology ducks in a row. That's not feeding on Jesus. To feed on Him means that you must embrace Him, be saturated in Him, in all of your life you've got to buy in and say "He is my life, I take Him into every element of who I am." To be a Christian, you may not be an impassionate observer. You can't sit on the sideline and scrutinize what is happening and feed on Him. There is this feast set before you, but you must take and eat. The feast is set before you and if you admire it from afar and you never eat, you starve. It's very simple. If you do not eat, you do not believe. You may know the truth, you may speculate about the truth, you may talk about the truth, but until Jesus is your food, you do not believe, and you have not come to Him.

For example, I love books. I have a lot of books. I own a lot of books. I've given away a lot of books. But I also have a lot of books I've never read in my library, on my shelf, and I promise you some of them are really precious to me. It's kind of strange, isn't it? It may be

idolatrous but I'm not going there, right? Because there's guys I respect like Jonathan Edwards and Spurgeon and so many of these great guys that I revere, and yet, I've not read their books. I treasure them. But you see, no matter how much I prize those books, until I read and understand them, I have not fed on them. Say tomorrow morning I go in and I pull off one of these books from the shelf, and I begin to read, and I get captivated by it, and I start understanding it. The great lines remain in my memory, I understand the truth that it's teaching, and it moves me to tears, moves me to wonder and excitement and amazement. I'm changed by the truth that is within the book. You see, I'm feeding on the truth of the book. The truth that I find there becomes real to me. The great lines remain in my memory. I meditate on them; I chew on them. You see, the truth has gotten inside of me and it changes me. Once the book was outside of me, I was unable to feed on it. I admired it, I enjoyed looking at it, I touched it every once and awhile, but I had not fed on it. So it is with Jesus. So long as He is a Jesus out there in the book, you're not feeding on Him. If He is no more than a storybook character to you, a historical figure, you have not fed on Him. You see, we must savor Him and draw life from Him. That's feeding on Him. Allow the words of Jesus to begin to influence and change you. Let it affect everything you think and you say and you do. It's only when He affects all parts of your life, that you're feeding on Jesus. That's when He makes a difference: to ingest and be permeated and saturated and filled with the life of God Himself. Like the air that I breathe, He is in me, and I am in Him.

To sum it all, to feed on Jesus means to contemplate and meditate and commune with Him. Digest Him, and you begin to understand and assimilate Him into your life. Can we just get real for a bit? Jesus, my friend, bids you come today. Come to Him. If you're here this morning and none of this sounds remotely like your existence, Jesus says, "Come." He bids you come and eat freely. He who is without money, come and eat. Perhaps you understand something of the longing for satisfaction that goes beyond the temporary things of this world, that are material in nature. There's a deeper longing in your soul for beauty and for goodness, and you've never found it. You've never been satiated or satisfied. Come to Jesus. Every person in this room was at one time alienated from Him, and after having hearing about His offer to feed on Him, I ask you to consider and to think and to study Him, and if you do I trust that the alienation that you feel from Him right now will turn to a desire for Him, a desire and a yearning for Him to become your Savior and your King. Coming to Jesus is simply a motion of your heart toward Him, an inclination of your heart to Him. Trust Him. Feed on Him.

For those of us who are already Christians today, this passage is still for us. I call upon you as well as I call upon myself, to feed on Jesus. Feed on Him. I think you're tempted just like me, to work for that food that perishes and to long for the satisfaction that it promises, but that only Jesus can truly provide. We're even prone to praying that way. "Oh Jesus, I believe in You

and what You say is true. You are my king. But if you could just fix these couple of things in my life, then I would be happy, then I would be content. If you just fix these things, then I'll be happy. Maybe you could get me out of debt. Boy, when I get out of debt, Dave Ramsey and I will both be happy, right? Maybe you could just give me a spouse, then I'll be content, then I'll be happy, then my soul will be satisfied. Maybe if you give me a job, or health, or freedom from my addiction, then I will know satisfaction in my heart." It's how we pray sometimes, right? And it's not wrong to pray for those things, but do we not first need to look to Jesus to feed on Him and ask Him to be the satisfaction of our hearts? Then add the rest of the things to Him? Contentment and satisfaction comes only from Christ. If we had every single thing fixed that we want fixed, if we're not feeding on Jesus, our soul's desires are still not met. Maybe life is not playing out the way you want it to, and you're grumbling and complaining, "Jesus, my life is so hard! Please remove this circumstance, or this person, as the case may be. Then I'll be satisfied." No, my friends, first find satisfaction in Jesus and then let Him take care of the rest of these things. To those who are His children, He calls us to come to Him.

So, the question for all of us is, what will you do with Jesus? What will you do with Jesus, today? The crowds found Him, they found the bread of life, and then they walked away. They heard His offer, and they said "Thank you, no thanks." Last night as I was going over this passage, there was a verse that came to mind, and I just want to share with you. It was Jeremiah 2:13: "For my people have committed two evils, they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." Here's the picture that Jeremiah shows, he says, on the one side there is a fountain of living, cold, hurt your teeth type water. It is pure and abundant, springing out from the ground with no end, always in abundance, there for us where all we have to do is take and drink. And yet, there on the other side he says, instead of drinking from this living water, drinking our fill, we tend to turn from that fountain and start digging in the dirt to make a cistern, a hole in the dirt so that when it rains, this little cistern, this little hole will fill up with muddy water, and then I can drink. A cistern of my own making. And Jeremiah says, how foolish is it, to turn away from the fountain of living water where all we have to do is drink, and dig for ourselves cisterns that can hold no water. When we do not come and feed on Jesus, we turn from Him and dig cisterns that can hold no water. Let's pray together.

Father, we admit to you and acknowledge that there are times when we don't feed on you. That we do turn to those cisterns of our own making. We seek deep satisfaction for our own efforts and things that won't satisfy. We confess our sin to you and ask that you would forgive us our sin. Father, place within us a longing to know you, to feed on you, to ingest you. We would be permeated by you, change our hearts today. We don't have the strength to do it on our own.

Frankly, we probably don't have the will to do it on our own. But You can. Would You do that for us today? I pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Now is the time that we take communion, we celebrate the Lord's death and resurrection. Every week the sermon closes about this time and we find ourselves once again at the table of our Lord. Every week we consider together just how what we've been addressing in the sermon ties to the broken body and the shed blood. What brings us to the table is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Today we've been at the table the whole time. The bread that we partake of reminds us of Jesus' body and how it makes it possible for every longing that we could ever desire to be filled. The bread that He gives, His body, gives life to a dying world. His flesh was broken and torn that we might have life. When we eat this bread, we are declaring to ourselves and all those we observe, that we come to Jesus for that satisfaction.

It is said, that the Lord Jesus on the night that He was betrayed, He took the bread and having blessed it He broke it and He said, "This is my body which is given for you." He took the cup after supper in the same manner and He said, "This is the new covenant in my blood. Drink it in remembrance of me." Every week we have a great privilege to stop and to think about what Christ has done for us on the cross of Calvary. Communion is for all those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, who trust Him and Him alone for their salvation. If you're here this morning and what I was saying earlier just doesn't click with you yet, you've never trusted in Jesus for forgiveness of sin, I would ask that you would take this time right now to consider your place with Jesus. He is bidding you come. We ask that you not partake of the elements.

Would you all get in place now? What we're going to do is much like what we used to do, we will come to the center aisle and go out around the outside, and feel free to take Communion, the bread and the wine. The offering baskets are there on the side for your connection card or your offering, put them there. I will be back in the back if you just want to pray with me or to talk to me about anything. I'll be back there; I would love to pray with you. So, if you would, stand with me, and let's celebrate the Lord's Table.