

Bread From Heaven

Exodus 16:14-35; John 6:51-58

Sunday, August 18, 2024 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

13th Sunday after Pentecost

- **Introduction: Faith as focus**

Today's message is called "The Bread of Life" because of the passage in which the Lord Jesus calls Himself by that title, but the core of the message is the importance of being faithful, and first of all, being faithful requires focus. There were two boys who learned about this while playing outside on a winter's day.

"Two boys were playing in the snow one day; when one said to the other, 'Let us see who can make the straightest path in the snow.' His companion readily accepted the proposition, and they started.

One boy fixed his eyes on a tree, and walked along without taking his eyes off the object selected. The other boy set his eyes on the tree also, and, when he had gone a short distance, he turned, and looked back to see how true his course was. He went a little distance farther, and again turned to look over his steps. When they arrived at their stopping place, each halted and looked back. One path was true as an arrow, while the other ran in a zigzag course.

'How did you get your path so true?' asked the boy who had made the crooked steps.

*'Why,' said the other boy, 'I just set my eyes on the tree, and kept them there until I got to the end; while you stopped and looked back and wandered out of your course.'"** There is an element of focus and perseverance to faith. Let's look at the texts for today.

- **Set the Stage**

Now before we spend any time considering the element of perseverance in faith, I want to reflect on the passages in Exodus and John. Back in Exodus, Israel has left over 400 years of slavery behind them only to find themselves in the middle of a harsh desert with no visible means of support. The people complain, and God tells Moses that He will send quail at twilight and bread in the morning. They would get fresh bread every morning, with extra on Friday so they could observe a Sabbath rest. God kept this up until they reached the border of the land of Canaan many years later. The Lord promised them bread and they received bread for as long as needed.

According to the Spirit Filled Life Bible, Roman emperors tried to placate people with free bread and entertainment. Jesus had other plans for bread. In John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus picks up on this theme of bread and claims that He is the bread of life. He says it plainly throughout this passage but particularly here in verse 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." Now this is symbolized in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, which would not be instituted for another year. I say "symbolized" because I do not believe that the bread and cup literally turn into the body and blood of Christ. Consumption of blood is forbidden in both Testaments (Leviticus 17:14; Acts 15:29) but the image of eating someone had a certain significance. In the apocryphal book of Sirach 24:19-21 Wisdom invites people to eat her, and what she means is to listen to her, learn from her, follow her, do what she says. Wisdom said that once you ate of her, you would always want more. Jesus said that if you eat of Him you will be satisfied forever. . (Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible)

- **Faith as Perseverance**

I mentioned earlier that faith has an element of focus and perseverance, and one of the best examples of perseverance involved the wife and partner of one of the most famous of English missionaries, Hudson Taylor. Here's her story. *"Maria Dyer was born in 1837 on the mission field in China where her parents were pioneer missionaries. Both her parents died when Maria was a little girl, and she was sent back to England to be raised by an uncle. The loss of her parents, however, did not deter her young heart from the importance of sharing the*

gospel. At age sixteen she, along with her sister, returned to China to work in a girl's school as a missionary herself. Five years later, she married Hudson Taylor, a man well-known today for his life of ministry, faith, and sacrifice.

*Hudson and Maria's work was often criticized—even by other Christians. At one point Maria wrote, 'As to the harsh judgments [sic] of the world, or the more painful misunderstandings of Christian brethren, I generally feel that the best plan is to go on with our work and leave God to vindicate our cause.' Of their nine children, only four survived to adulthood. Maria herself died of cholera when she was just forty-three. But she believed the cause was worthy of the sacrifice. On her grave marker these words were inscribed: 'For her to live was Christ, and to die was gain'" ***

- **Main Point**

Here's where we reach the main point for today. The passages, so full of meaning, point to faithfulness, but not the very legitimate call for the Christian to be faithful, but rather that Christ is faithful. He was faithful to the wandering Israelis for 40 years in the Sinai when they had no visible means of support. He was faithful to be the Bread of Life, even at the cost of His own life for the sins of the world. He is still faithful to us today. The faithfulness here described is the faithfulness of Jesus. He is the one with the laser focus on us. He is the one who perseveres for us always in prayer.

- **Application**

I think the application is to meditate on faithfulness, but not necessarily our faithfulness to Christ, as relevant as that may be. Rather, spend some time thinking about Christ's faithfulness; faithfulness to the Children of Israel so long ago and faithfulness to us, now and forever. There is a passage in Revelation (22:2) speaks of the Tree of Life, forbidden to Adam and Eve, made available to us forever in heaven. Whether we need to eat of it literally, I don't know, but if Jesus said that He is the Bread of Life, we can count on it, for He is faithful.

- **Conclusion**

Like every passage we consider, both the passage in Exodus and in John's Gospel give us much to ponder, but underlying all of it is the poignant statement that Jesus is the Bread of Life, made all the more precious by faithfulness, not ours, but Christ Himself. He was the bread of life in Exodus, He is the bread of life now, He will be the bread of life forever.

* <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/making-a-straight-path-in-the-snow>

** <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/sacrificial-love>