

The God we were made for

Well, good evening everyone. Let me gather us together. I hope that was helpful, I hope you are beginning to get some of your questions answered. But I thought it'd be good time to get together and focus on our big topic of the week, and this week we're going to focus on 'The God we were made for'. And I thought we'd begin tonight by asking you a really simple question. Okay, you up for this? Brains working? Simple, simple question.

If you were given the choice between going to watch a giant blue whale swimming in the ocean or watching a giant blue whale stranded on a beach, you know, what are you going to go for? Okay, you've got the whale. You can go on a whale-watching boat, it's there in the ocean, or you can go and watch it stranded on a beach. What are you going to go for? What are you going to go for?

In the ocean, of course, you're going to go for the ocean. Why is that? Because... It's not just giant blue whales, it's not just in the oceans, but when you see a creature in the environment that it was intended to inhabit, that is magnificent, isn't it? If you go and see a giant blue whale in the ocean, you can see it leap out of the water, you can see it swim... It looks magnificent. On the beach, where it was never designed to be there, and therefore it just looks a little bit pathetic, but in the ocean, in its natural environment, it looks great.

Now, why do I tell you all this? Because two thousand years ago, when Jesus was alive, he claimed that you and me, every single human person, has been created to need God. We have been created, if you like, to have a certain environment, that if we're there, if we live in it, then we will thrive. And that environment is to live in God's world and to know God personally. And if we have that relationship, then we will thrive.

And what I want to do tonight is to show you that from John chapter 6. So if you've got your copy of John's gospels, why don't you grab it? And it would be a great help if you would turn to John chapter 6, and if you could find verse 25. And what I want to do is to read to you verses 25-35. Now, a crowd of people have been searching for Jesus, and this is what we're told in verse 25:

"When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, 'Rabbi, when did you get here?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.' Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?' Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.' So they asked him, 'What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."' Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' 'Sir,' they said, 'from now on give us this bread.' Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'"

Now, we're going to focus mainly tonight on Jesus' life-changing claim to be the bread of life. And it is life-changing when you really understand it. But before that, I thought what we'd do is work through the story, and I'll show you along the way some of the really important things that we are told.

Now, the first thing I want to tell you and to highlight to you is what Jesus said to that crowd of people who found him in verse 25. Now, this crowd of people, the day before, had witnessed Jesus do an amazing miracle. With only five loaves of bread and two small fish he had fed a crowd of over five thousand people. Now, that would have been pretty awesome to see, and this crowd, the next day, are desperate to find Jesus. And they eventually catch up with him, but listen... I love

this. Listen to what Jesus says. Verse 26: “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.’”

Now, the key thing to notice is what Jesus describes the miracle he had done before, the day before. How does he describe that miracle? What does he call it? Well, not simply a miracle: he calls it a miraculous sign. Now, why is that? Well, we all know what a sign is. A sign is there to point us to something else. It’s not the end of the story, is it? The sign itself is not the big deal. It points you in a certain direction.

Now, this crowd had been desperately looking for Jesus because they had seen him give out lots of bread. But Jesus says, you know, that is just a miraculous sign. It’s not the end of the story. It’s not the big deal. But this crowd... Well, they were desperate to find Jesus because they thought it was the big deal. But because of that, they were missing out on what Jesus really was offering.

You see, what they should have done is looked at the sign and thought to themselves, ‘What is this teaching us about the identity of Jesus?’ Now, Jesus wanted them to know that he was this promised Messiah, this promised Christ who was going to come into the world. That’s what the sign indicated. But they just liked the bread. But Jesus doesn’t want them to settle for this when so much more is on offer.

Now, can you imagine that? You’ve got a family friend and you meet them and they say, ‘We’re about to go on holiday.’ And you go, ‘That’s very exciting. Where are you going to go?’ And they say, ‘We’re off to the seaside.’ Now, what could be better than a British seaside holiday? It’d be great, wouldn’t it? Now, where’s our local seaside? Where could they go from...where would they go? Bridlington, okay? That is the popular choice. They’re off to Bridlington. You think, ‘Fantastic! Have a great time.’ So you wave them off, there they go, in their family car, and then they disappear.

Now, you go out for the day, and you’re driving along the country roads, and you see in the distance... you see their car. And they seem to have, you know, stopped by the side of the road by a sign that says ‘Bridlington’. And it’s a bit weird, actually, because the whole family are out, you know, see, mum and dad, the kids are there, and they’ve got their table all set, and they’ve got the barbecue set there as well, and they seem to be having dinner. You think, ‘That’s a bit weird, isn’t it?’

So you pull the car across and you think, ‘All right?’ And they say, ‘Yeah, we’re having a good time here. And you say, ‘I thought you were going to Bridlington.’ ‘Well, we have, look, there it says, the sign, isn’t it? Now, what would you do? Would you say, ‘Enjoy your holiday?’ No. You would say, ‘No, that’s the sign. You haven’t arrived yet. This is a pointer. Bridlington’s in that direction. Get in the car and keep going. Don’t settle for having dinner by the side of the road, by the sign. It’s not the big deal.’

Now, you see what Jesus is doing. This group of people are so attached to the sign, to the food, that they’re missing out on what Jesus can really offer them. Now, the question is, what is he going to offer them? Well, have a look at verse 27. Jesus says: “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man” – and that is another title for Jesus – “will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

So Jesus doesn’t want them to miss out on what he can give them. And what’s the comparison? Temporary food or eternal food. So this crowd have thrown their heart and soul, their time and their devotion, into getting what? Food that spoils. Temporary food. Food that, if you get it, well, you can’t keep it forever because it will spoil, and food that if you eat it, well, it might last for a moment and keep you going for a while, but you’re always going to need more of it.

And this crowd, they’re keen, and Jesus doesn’t say, ‘Oh, stop being so keen.’ He doesn’t want them to be apathetic. It’s just their keenness is all in the wrong direction. So he doesn’t want them

to pour their heart and soul into temporary food. He wants them to make sure they get their hands on eternal food. Some food that Jesus is willing to give them that will endure forever.

Now, what is Jesus talking about? Well, he's not offering to give them the tastiest baguette that they've ever had. You know, he's not offering to give them the most delicious ciabatta that they could ever put in their mouths. He is offering to give them real nourishment at a deeper level that begins now, and which will last for ever. Now, the question is, what is he really offering? What exactly is he offering to give them?

Well, let's see if we can follow the conversation and see if we can find out. Look at verse 28. They ask him a question. Fair enough, this eternal food sounds okay, but "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Fascinating question, isn't it? It's one of those religious questions which are so full of the 'what must I achieve? How must I perform in order to merit what you can give me? I want to try my hardest. I want to perform. How can I merit this food?'

And I love Jesus' response: it is so refreshing. Look at verse 29: "Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this:'" Ready? Drum roll... "to believe in the one he has sent." So he doesn't say, 'Here's what you've got to do: you've got to keep a great record of achievement. You've got to do this, this and this...'. He simply says, 'Come to Jesus as you are and put him in charge.' That is what it means to believe in Jesus.

Now, at this point we still don't know what the gift is. We know that Jesus is offering a great gift, and we should try and get our hands on it. But the question is, what is this gift that he offers?

Well, I think we're told in verses 30-35. So let's have a look at it. Let's follow the story. Verse 30. The crowd asked Jesus to perform a miracle. They say, 'What miraculous sign then will you do that we may see it and believe it?'

So this crowd have got their Jewish history books open. They remember a time in the history of the Jewish people when they were in the desert under the leadership of a man called Moses. And Moses, they thought, had fed the people and he had demonstrated his leadership by performing miraculous signs. And so they say to Jesus, 'Okay, then. What are you going to do?'

Now I find this amazing, because what had just happened the day before? You know, he had fed over five thousand people with a few loaves of bread and two fish, but they want another miraculous sign. But look at what Jesus says to them in verse 32, because they've got the wrong comparison. They're trying to compare Jesus to Moses, but it's the wrong comparison. Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

So the true comparison should be the special bread that fed the people back then and Jesus as the special person who can give this true, deep life to people today. The bread of God, if you notice, is personal. Now, the people really want some of this, and Jesus just makes it crystal clear what he is talking about. And that brings us to the great claim in verse 35: "Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'" You see he's got to this point and what do we discover? Well, we now know that the gift and the giver are the same. You see that? The great giver gives himself as the great gift. He is the bread of life.

I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but why does Jesus call himself the bread of life? Why does he not call himself the caviar of life? Ever think about that? I don't know if caviar is a regular diet in your house, but it's certainly not in our house, I'll tell you that straight away. We don't have caviar in the cupboards at all. Why is that? Because in the culture of Jesus' day, as it is in many cultures today, bread is not a luxury item. Bread is essential for life.

And what Jesus is claiming is that you and me, every single person, has been made to need what he can give. That is, we have been made to need him. Essentially, every single one of us has certain needs and desires deep down, that only God can meet. We have been created to need God, and only a relationship with Jesus can reconnect us genuinely to the God who made us.

Now, let me try and expand on what this means. What kind of needs or desires are hardwired into us, that only God can meet? Well, let me mention four.

First of all, the need for security. The future is so uncertain, and human beings seem to have this inbuilt desire to be secure, the need to be safe. I think that's one of them. The need, secondly, for pleasure. We know this, don't we? We strive after joy and deep, lasting pleasure. We have almost this hardwired, inbuilt need for joy and pleasure. Thirdly, the need for significance. You know that as well as I do, that desire and that need to mean something, to be worth something, to be valuable. To be noticed. To be important. And the fourth one, I would point out to you, is the need to be loved intensely. And those needs seem to be built into us, hardwired by God into our very being, and Jesus is claiming that only he can meet those needs.

And yet here's the problem: when God is not there, when God is not in our lives, what happens to those desires? What happens to those needs? Do they suddenly just... go? Not at all. God might not be there, but those deep desires are still there, and we look in other places to try and meet those needs. We look for what I call 'God-substitutes'.

Now, what is a God-substitute? A God-substitute can be anything or anyone. Take money, why do people crave money? Well, for some people it's for the security that they desire. They think money, if they've got enough of it, it can provide certainty for the future. For some people it's what money can buy them. And they can therefore get all the things that they think, if they own them and possess them, will make them very happy. So money becomes this God-substitute.

Or there are many other examples. You think of careers. The time and energy people devote into their work or to their job, and for many reasons. For some, they think, 'Well, if I really get this promotion and do this and this, well, the joy will come. Or maybe my family will appreciate what I've done, or I'll be recognised as having made some important contribution.'

Or it can be other things. It can be a relationship with another human being. That need to be loved intensely. How many people do we see looking to other human beings to try and have that need met?

Or even, what about this one? What about image and beauty? Some people are so obsessed with looking the right way or having the right clothes because so many people in our culture have been told that if you have this elusive beauty or this image then you will feel good and you'll be significant and worth it.

God-substitutes can be anything or anyone. And a lot of people have more than one, don't they? I mean, we kind of cram our lives with quite a number of God-substitutes to try and meet those different needs. But let me tell you a few things about God-substitutes.

The first thing I'd love to tell you about God-substitutes is that they were never designed to meet our ultimate needs. And what this causes us to do so often is to settle for too little. You know, God is not this cosmic killjoy who wants to ruin our day and spoil our fun. But if you throw yourself into a God-substitute, it was never designed to give us the pleasure that we crave, and so many people just end up settling for too little.

And the other thing that happens when we throw ourselves into God-substitutes is that we can end up ruining and wrecking a good gift of God. I think this is true when people look for that intense love in another human being. So this hardwired love into our system that only God can meet, but what happens? So many people think, 'Well, the next relationship I have, well, that'll meet my need

for intense love.' But that relationship was never designed to bear the weight that people place on it. And what happens? It snaps. It breaks.

Now, that's just what God-substitutes do to us. But have you ever asked about... what about God? How does God feel about the way we pursue these substitutes? Is God happy about it? Well, the Bible's picture of how God relates to all this is of a jilted lover. If you think of a husband and wife in a marriage, and the wife goes off and commits adultery with another person, how does the husband respond to that? Is he happy? Does he smile? Not at all! He is angered by that. And does he have a right to be angry? Of course he does.

And yet this is the great news that we've seen over the last few weeks on Identity. That God so loved the world that Jesus is sent on a great rescue mission so that he can do everything necessary to bring us into relationship with the true and living God. And when he is here, what does he say? "I am the bread of life." We can be reconnected with Jesus, and so reconnected with the God who made us.

Now, my last question, then I'll send you back into your groups. When does bread do you any good? Think about this, okay? Here I am, you can imagine me holding my loaf of bread. Now, what could you do with this loaf of bread? You could stare at it all night. Would that be exciting? Would you like to do that? You're looking at the bread. Is it going to do you any good? No. You could store it away, you could put it in your cupboard and you could bring it out every night, couldn't you, and think, 'Wow! Look at that. It's bread.' Is it going to do you any good? Absolutely not. For bread to do you any good, you've got to eat it. And that is a way of describing what it means to believe in Jesus. It is active trust in him, where we come to him as we are and put him in charge. And when we do, Jesus says, 'I promise you, at a deep level, your hunger will be satisfied.'

Well, I'm going to send you back into your groups to chat about that. See what you make of it, and then in a few minutes I'll jump up and answer our big question of tonight. So, off you go. See how you get on.

Identity – Who is God? Who are we?

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