

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The ancient cry would go up, “*O king, live forever!*” Nebuchadnezzar, Xerxes, and Darius were greeted this way — to be king and live forever doesn’t sound too bad.

But not everyone wanted to live forever. Job didn’t. Speaking from the “*the bitterness of [his] soul,*” Job said, “*I loathe my life; I would not live forever*” (Job 7:11, 16). Elijah didn’t. Assailed by evil queen Jezebel, Elijah fled and prayed “*that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life*” Speaking with a member this past week, someone a mere 92 years old, I asked him “how are you doing?” “Not so good,” he replied. And he told me in the conversation that he was not eating very well; he’d lost weight; he was ready to die. Truly, living forever in this vale of tears can be a daunting prospect.

Thus, when Jesus sets before us “*eternal life*” in this section of His Bread of Life discourse, He is not talking about a life where the consequences of sin wreak havoc on mankind. He is not talking about a life burdened yet by “*the great tribulation,*” but where Jesus shelters us with His presence, where He does not permit hunger or thirst, where the “*scorching heat,*” does not afflict us, where every tear is wiped from our eyes (Rev. 7:14-17).

Yes, where Jesus left off last week, we pick it back up this week, hearing Jesus say to us again, “*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall [by no means] hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*” Of course, Jesus is not talking about never hungering for the food that perishes, even though Jesus in mercy had fed the 5,000 with such bread only a couple days earlier — no guarantee there. Rather, Jesus is speaking about the food that endures to eternal life, a banquet table that He Himself prepares with cups that are filled to overflowing in the eternal house of the Lord.

And this food, Jesus says, is none other than He Himself. Of course, Jesus gave hints of this in last week’s Gospel. He had told the people: “*the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world*” (NASB). The ESV text translates it “*the bread of God is **he who** comes down from heaven*” (v. 33), and, to be sure, it could be translated that way, but I think that’s making Jesus say too much. I think Jesus is leading the people to the understanding that He is that Bread of Life, but He was not being so explicit here.

But Jesus did say that this “*true bread from heaven*” was sent by the Father to give “*life to the world,*” and the people wanted that: “*Give us this bread always*” (v. 32-34).

But as soon as Jesus added more specificity to this heavenly bread, the people started to grumble. As soon as Jesus said, not generically that SOMETHING COMES down from heaven, but that HE HIMSELF is the One who CAME down from heaven,

that He Himself is the Bread of Life that would give life to the world, that the manna was not the true and living bread from heaven, but He Himself was, that's when the people started to grumble. It's little different today.

They grumbled. Who do you think you are, Jesus? Don't forget, we know you. We know your father, Joseph, and your mother, Mary. We know your brothers and sisters (Mark 6:3). Today, people still think they know Him.

Their familiarity with Jesus became for them stumbling blocks. The people weren't grumbling because they had been supplied with bread to fill their stomachs — they'd take all the bread they could get. They weren't grumbling because they didn't want the bread that gives life —they wanted that bread "*always*."

No, the problem came — and the people started grumbling, as they do today — when Jesus said I'm the One. I'm the Bread of Life. I'm the true Bread come down from heaven. I'm the Bread that you eat and never hunger; I'm the One that you look to and believe in, and you'll never thirst any more. I'm the Bread sent from the Father in heaven to do His will on earth. I'm the One that Father draws people to, that I might not lose any that the Father gives me. I'm the One that will raise up on the last day and give eternal life. This message was the source of the grumbling.

Friends, Jesus is the One still today. Although it still can cause a bit of grumbling today, we proclaim no one else. We look for life — eternal life — in no one else but Jesus, certainly not in ourselves. We were born "*dead in our trespasses*" (Eph. 2:5), and all we earn for all of our sinful striving is more death (Rom. 6:23). Not even the manna from heaven for the Israelites could forestall the consequences of sin — the "*fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died*." No, life comes to us as a free gift of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

That's why the Father sent His Son down from His side — to give life to the world — for the Father did not want to condemn the sinful world, but to save it (John 3:17). He did not want us "*cast out*," but wanted to draw us unto Him who is life (John 14:6), and who would lay down His life (John 15:13), sacrificing His sinless flesh for the life of the world. The Father does not want to lose anyone — He takes no "*pleasure in [our] death*" (Ezek. 18:23) — but sent His Son "*to seek and to save the lost*" (Luke 19:10). The Father wants us to live; He desires our salvation (1 Tim. 2:4). And so, He gave His only Son — that we might not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16), as we look to the Son and believe in Him. He gave His Son, not only to die for us sinners, but also to rise again for us, to give us life. It's the Father's will that His Son, the Resurrection and the Life, raise us up on the last day.

Our Gospel text today is part of Jesus' Bread of Life discourse, but what struck me in this reading is the focus on life and resurrection in Christ Jesus. But looking more broadly in the Gospel of John, you also see life in Jesus, received

through faith, throughout. In the first few verses of John, we hear of the eternal Word that became flesh, and John testifies: *“In him was life, and the life was the light of men”* (John 1:4). And at the end of His gospel, John confesses *“these [words] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”* (John 20:31).

If you’ll permit me, I’ll close with this recitation of verses from John — I use some of them in our funeral processions. They are promises from God, promises of life from the Bread of Life:

“The Son of Man [must] be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 3:14-15)

“The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:14)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:24)

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” (John 10:28)

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” (John 11:25)

“This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

And two additional ones from John 6, you’ll hear them next week, the first one from Peter: *“Lord, ... You have the words of eternal life ...”* (John 6:68).

“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:54)

You’ve heard the words of life from the Bread of Life. Come now. Eat and drink of the same Bread of Life in His supper. Eat and drink, *“for the journey”* ahead is difficult; it’s *“too great for [us].”* Eat and drink that the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, may strengthen you in your faith as you journey to the mount of God, looking to the Son, confidently awaiting your life with Him in resurrection glory.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.