Soul Food (Part 1)

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[0:00] Okay, I'd like to go back this morning to the reading we've read from Matthew's Gospel in that next section, and it's a great passage.

And the Bible really is fabulous. The more that we dig into Scripture, into the Bible, the more we see the divine author.
And the deeper, really, and the wider and the higher is the truth that we can find. It's unsearchable. There's always something that's amazing in it.
And the Holy Spirit, who is the author behind the authors, as it were, the Holy Spirit, through Matthew, he beautifully weaves a picture, and is weaving a picture of the significance of Jesus for people, both then and to his first audience.
It was mainly a Jewish audience that he wrote his gospel for, and also for now. And that's really important. And I hope you'll grasp that as we progress through this passage.
[1:03] Because Matthew is trying to get across the reality, and the Bible is getting across the reality that Jesus is for people. And he came into a people who were already set apart for him, the God's chosen people, the Jewish nation, which we learn all about in the Old Testament.

He comes into this small defensive and exclusively minded race of people who were persecuted, and by this stage were colonized by an oppressive world power, the Romans.
They were driven by religious and by political and nationalistic division. They were generally a poor nation, although there was quite a marked, rich, poor divide.
And so that's the kind of nation that Jesus came into. And when He came and when He made His public ministry known, most people didn't really get Him.
They didn't understand Him. Even His claims to be the Messiah that they'd learned about from the Old Testament, He didn't seem to fit into their picture. They couldn't understand His humanity if He was supposed to be God.
[2:17] They knew His family. They knew how He'd been brought up. They knew that He was a carpenter. Even others hated His authority. The people in the story we read today, I'll say a little bit more about them later, they feared that Jesus would be involved in a power grab against their own authority.

They had dreamed that the Messiah would come and would give them political freedom and wealth and would enhance their power. They didn't get this Savior Jesus.
Others, the common people of the country tended to love the drama of Jesus. We read in the first section there, the big, big crowds that came to listen to Him, to hear His teaching.
They stayed for days to hear what He had to say. They loved the drama. They were awed by His miracles. So many miracles we read about even in the passage today.
But for the most part, they totally misunderstood Him. He was an enigma, a mystery. He didn't dance to anyone's tune. He seemed challenging to follow, impossible to pigeonhole, hard to ignore, but easy to reject.
[3:28] It's a strange mixture in the people that Jesus came to save, to be the redeemer of His own people.

People, people. Why did Jesus bother? Why did He bother with people? Why did God the Son come from heaven? The eternal, glorious sovereign God the Son.
Why did He become flesh and blood? Why was He born of a virgin and grew up in this small backwater of the world, as it were, into this small nation?
Why did He become part of the human race? Enduring there, and can we go on to say, our ignorance, misunderstanding, hatred, and for many, ultimate rejection, as it was then and often is for us now.

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Why is that? Well, it's because He is love. It is in His love that He came.
[4:28] He came because sin and death had enslaved us, as the Old Testament picture that I was speaking about with the kids was symbolic of the slavery in Egypt.

Death and sin hold us in its grip, slaves to it, lost in it. We are broken shadows of what He wants us to become, and He loves us.
We're spiritually starving, and He comes to feed us into, and the darkness bring us into His light.
And at the core of our very being, we are empty without Jesus Christ, and He loves us enough to come and deal with that.
We are guilty before His holiness, and apart from Him, we never find out what we're looking for, what we look for, what we strive for in life, never truly satisfies us until we find our satisfaction in Jesus.
So what I want to talk about today, this morning, is Jesus Christ, He came because He loved us, because in His justice and in His love, there was only one way that we could be reunited with Him and live fully and live eternally, is because His love.
[5:48] And in so doing, Christ became the bread of life. Okay, really that's my theme this morning, is Christ is the bread of life. In the evenings, we were looking at the seven I am sayings of Jesus, the first one we looked at was I am, Jesus said I am the bread of life.

And I think that's a big theme in Jesus' mind right through His public ministry. And it definitely impinges on the passages that we've read in the last couple of weeks and the one today.
It's often a theme in the Bible, it's a theme right from the Old Testament, we saw that, the unleavened bread spoke about the life that was cleared from sin and from slavery, as it were, it was a model of that, that Christ, that God in His covenant offered a fresh start and that Jesus offers a fresh start in our lives without the old yeast of sin and the reality of the damage that it does.
And then in the desert journey that they had manna, they had bread from heaven every day to feed them, reminding them of their dependence on God in this new life and this covenant they had with Him.
And bread you see is that essential ingredient, isn't it? It's the essential ingredients. It's not a expensive steak meal that Jesus pictures so much as this daily bread of life, nourishment for our bodies, speaking of nourishment for our souls and food.
[7:15] And that daily food God uses is a reminder of our dependence on Him as the gift-giver. It's never an end in itself, we don't just live for food.

And even His prayer that He teaches us today, our daily bread, is to point to Him as the provider and to our need for more than just daily bread, the provision of life itself and Him as our spiritual bread.
And you see the problem of the heart is that sin deceives us that we don't need Him. We don't need God. We can live by bread alone. That's all we need. We can live by material things.
And so we push God out of the picture, we forget Him. And that's exactly what Jesus was tempted with by Satan in the desert.
Because our substitute, our Savior, faced the same kind of temptation that we faced. Satan said to Him, look, you don't really need God. You don't need to depend on God.
[8:19] You could take these stones and turn them into bread. And you could be, you didn't need to be starving and fasting for these forty days. And Jesus replies to Him, we can't live by bread alone, but we need to live by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

You know, so consciously or maybe subconsciously, there's a voice inside us every day, even as Christians that's saying, look, you don't need God today.
You don't need to consider Him. You don't need His word. You don't need to follow or obey Him.
And that's the temptation we face is to ignore Him or reject Him in our lives, as it is with those who have done that, who as yet have not seen the significance of Jesus as the bread of life.
So we mentioned the miracles that Jesus did and the fact that He was popular, as we see in the early part of this reading.
But then we come to the feeding of the 4000. And I just want to mention or compare the two, there's two feedings, two feedings with bread that are mentioned. John a couple of weeks ago in chapter 14 read about the feeding of the 5000.
[9:34] And here we have another miracle, very similar, the feeding of the 4000. And so we've got a feeding of 5000, a couple of chapters earlier, and then one of 4000.

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Well, why do we need two? Why do we need these two miracles repeated? Is it just the same story, just with different numbers? No, it's not. It's clearly not.
Jesus speaks about the two feedings later in the passage when He's speaking to the disciples. But there is some important realities that the first feeding of the 5000 was done in Galilee among the Jewish people.
And Jesus did that great miracle among them. And then we learned last week that He moved out of Israel into the Decapolis, into the area of Tyre in Sidon, which was Gentile territory, which was not a safe place really for a Jewish teacher and leader to be.
And here He provides the second miracle to all the people who were there, 4000. So He's telling them something very significant that they would later remember to two different nations, to the Jews and to the Gentiles.
[10:49] Now that's not that significant to us, but it was very significant when we understand the Bible and the message of Jesus being not just for the Jews, but for the whole world.

And basically, Jesus is saying with these two feedings, I am here for the whole world. I'm not just here for this small nation, this chosen people of Israel. I'm here for them first, and then I'm going with the message of the gospel to the whole world.
And He wanted His disciples to know that. He is for all people in all times, for first century Romans, for centurions, for leaders, for caesars, for Pharisees and Sadducees, and for ordinary people in first century Israel, and for 21st century Scotland, for the Jewish readership and for the world readership ever since.
And of course, the numbers for the original Jews who would have read this book were significant. Numbers had great significance in the Bible. So for the twelve basketfuls of the five thousand and the seven basketfuls of the four thousand, they were significant.
Twelve, very much a number of completion in the Bible, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve disciples, twelve foundation stones, or seven, often being the number of perfection in the Bible.
[12:14] And Jesus is saying with these two feedings and with these two miracles that He is the bread of life. He's the provider.

His salvation is going to be complete and perfect for all who put their trust in Him today. And then Jesus is the healer. He's the life giver.
He's the nourisher. He's the king we all need. He's building His kingdom, which Matthew is the theme of Matthew, is the kingdom of God, which is going to transcend borders and nations and tribes and languages and color and creed and ethnicity.
And He is for all peoples, and He is this great bread of life. So we have the responses here in this chapter as well.
We have the Pharisees and the Sadducees who demand a sign from Jesus. They want to test Him. They don't really believe Him. They don't...they're not interested in Him. And it's a very unholy alliance actually between these two people.
[13:17] They were very different, these two groups of people, both socially, politically and religiously, they were very different. But together they perceive Jesus as a threat to their power and their control.

They misunderstood the nature of Jesus' Messiah claims. And they demanded us. Isn't it funny they demanded a sign? But they knew He'd done lots and lots of miracles.
We've just read just in the verses before about the incredible miracles that He had done healing many people, the mute and the crippled and the lame and the blind.
He'd done lots of miracles. And then He'd fed the 4,000. What more did they need? Well, they were really just testing Him. They were making demands of Him. They were probably going to...if He did a sign for them, they would just attribute it to the devil as they'd done before.
And Jesus says to them, look, I'm only going to give you one sign. And it's the sign of Jonah. Now, He'd be saying to them, no, you're good at interpreting the signs of the times with the weather.
[14:22] But He said they had no idea of taking the Word of God from the Old Testament and applying it to Jesus. And He said, but you listen, you watch, you know about Jonah.

Why did He say that? It's very interesting, isn't it? He tells them about the sign of Jonah. Because Jonah was that Old Testament prophet who was running away from God and yet, who God and His mercy didn't abandon.

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He was on a ship because he was told to go to...with a message to Nineveh to tell them to repent. And he ran away to his own people on a boat. He didn't run on a boat, he sailed on a boat.
And but there was a storm and then he was thrown overboard and he was swallowed by a big fish. And then he was spewed out three days later. He must have looked a sight as he wandered towards Nineveh with this message of repentance because of the living God and because of the sins of Ninevite people.
And they repented when they saw Him. And it was a powerful, it's a powerful story, a really powerful story. And it's the only Old Testament story of a prophet going to the Gentile people with this message.
[15:31] And I think that's significant for these Pharisees and Sadducees. But it's pointing forward to a greater resurrection. It's only that Jonah was almost resurrected, wasn't he, from the belly of the fish?

Three days he was there. But it's pointing forward to Jesus and his mind was on his own death and resurrection, a greater death, if you call.
Jonah's been in the whales belly as a death. He's greater than that because it was a real death and it was for three days he was in the grave and then he was resurrected on the third day.
And this was in the mind of Jesus. And he says, that will be the sign that you really need to see and know and understand. There was great patience in what he was saying for them.
He was loving them and saying to them, look, if you look at what will happen in the future, I come to die on the cross to be the sacrifice, the Lamb of God for your sins.
[16:31] And then third day I'll rise again. Not like Jonah who was going to die again after that amazing miracle in his life. But Jesus was to rise triumphant over the grave, never to face death again, and to be triumphant over death for everyone who puts their trust in Him, having died for their sins.

Three days in the grave, remarkable power over death. As a football fan, I always remember the story of Fabrice Moamba who died on the pitch playing for Bolton Wanderers and they reckon he was dead for 78 minutes.
Incredible, incredible. And yet here's Jesus Christ, three days in the grave and yet is raised on the third day to eternal life.
And you see the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they don't want that Jesus.
The Pharisees particularly needed a sign. They wanted something more. Jesus wasn't enough for them and what he'd come to do. Did they want more evidence of God or His love or His purposes or His diagnosis or His cure as needed?
[17:55] Did they want something else? Well, they actually, not only did they want a sign but they added their own works to the mix. They were self-righteous. They thought, I'll get into heaven by the good things that I do.

He said, no, you don't need to add to the work of Jesus. And then sometimes, you know, we're the same, you know, maybe our good works we think will get us into heaven.
But also maybe we think if it's my good works and if I only, if Jesus would only do a miracle in my life, would only answer a prayer in a miraculous way, if He'd only show Himself to me, then I would believe in Him.
If He'd show me a sign, we'd test Him because we don't think Him claiming to be the bread of life is enough for us. You know, we don't react like the Canaanite woman that we saw last week who said, well, even the crumbs will do for me.
The thing is, we find that Jesus is the bread of life is just not enough. We want more. We think the cross is too bleak, too stark.
[19:04] We want to offer Him our goodness and our life as well. And we want to live our own way and maybe as well as Jesus because my own way is much more exciting and sin is much more exciting in reality.

Because bread is so boring and dull and we often think Jesus is like that. I wish He would give us something more because we don't understand Him and who He is.
None of us do, fully. It's not enough for you. Jesus is not enough for you. Or could it be like the Sadducees here for whom Jesus is too much, actually?
Sadducees were different from the Pharisees. They didn't like Jesus' teaching of another kingdom in the same way as the Pharisees, but they were very different from the Pharisees. They were quite

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aristocratic.
They were of the priestly tribe, really. They allied themselves with the Roman authorities. They colluded quite often with the Roman authorities. They didn't like some of the Old Testament teaching and indeed certainly didn't like Jesus' teaching about the afterlife, about the resurrection.
[20:12] They didn't believe in angels and demons. They didn't believe in final judgment. I don't know what, actually, they didn't believe, to be honest. But so they were scared that Jesus was just too much for them.

Too much teaching about spiritual realities that they couldn't see. His truth of the heart was challenging their position in society, their aristocracy in society.
And I think we can often be like that. And I think you can be like that if you're not a Christian this morning, that Jesus is too much for you. The supernatural teaching that He speaks about, the unseen spiritual world that He talks about, the starkness of your need and of mine, the exclusivity of His offer, the jealousy of His love, the power and the glory that is due to Him.
Sometimes you feel that that's just, it's too much for you and you walk away. You don't want that reality and you just, you suppress it and you don't deal with it.
But in so doing, you're denying what your soul spiritually needs, what your life needs. What we as Christians have found to become life changing, the bread of life, Jesus Christ Himself, the satisfaction and the nourishment that enables us to live life in abundance, eternal life, spiritual life.
[21:43] Is He not enough for you? Is He too much for you? And that's the response of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. But what about His disciples?

Because disciples were followers, but they really, and we are like this so much, we have sluggish appetites for Jesus as the bread of life. They're really slow to understand.
You see, in verse 12, Jesus says to them, then they understood, and that word understood means that they finally came to understand what Jesus was teaching.
They were really slow. When Jesus says, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they thought it was about bread, physical bread. He says, Jesus says, it's not about the fact that you forgot to take bread with you.
I'm taking a picture here, Jesus is saying. I'm talking about spiritual realities. They were so slow to understand. And that's the picture, isn't it? We often get in the gospels that they, and we like them, don't get so much of what Jesus says, we're so slow to understand.
[22:49] We do fail to realize the danger or how deeply sin affects our life and our hearts and our appetites. We hold loosely to Jesus Christ because we don't really think we need Him.

And we feel that He's kind of, He's great to have as an added extra in our lives, but we don't understand so much of who He is.
His love and His patience is unbounded for us, but we're not to take advantage of that. And it's only as we know the truth of Jesus Christ in and through His person and work that we can know Him and that He can set us free.
There's nothing else that we need. And Jesus says, beware of the teaching of the Pharisees in the Son. Beware of anything that takes you away from depending and relying and trusting on Jesus Christ.
So the question we ask ourselves when we read a passage like this as Christians is, what is it we're hungering and thirsting for? What places Jesus in our lives?
[24:06] Do we realize we have competing appetites? Do we recognize that? Even as saved people, even as Christians, that we have remaining sinful desires that can be strong and can be damaging if we don't put them to death, if we don't hunt them down in the same way as the leaven was hunted out and taken away from the houses of Old Testament believers as they remembered the Passover meal so that every day was a new day of beginning for them.

And we work out through Christ and in His strength the importance of renewing our appetites and feeding ourselves on Him and deepening and broadening and developing our love for Him as we root out sin and as we feed our lives relationally on Jesus Christ in prayer.
That His Word, His teaching is what we are governed by and driven by and molded by, that we feed in His Word, that we are aware of any teaching that is contrary to His truth.
It's leaven, it's like sin that affects our whole lives destructively. If we are to be transformed, we have to have an open heart, an open ear, an open Bible where to be our minds are to be, we are to have the mind of a student following Jesus as disciples and learners, preaching does matter and

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preaching needs to be based on God's Word.
You need to be praying as you hear the preaching of the Word that it will trouble your conscience, heal your soul, redeem as God uses it, studying the Bible, reading it one to one with others as well.
[26:04] Being in a Christian home, having Christian parents, being mentored, having examples, being in a community of believers, hearing the teaching of Christ and learning of the example of others who follow Christ, it matters.

It matters that we feed our lives on the bread that is Jesus Christ and that we are aware of any teaching or lifestyle that separates us from Him.
Worship is the chief end of our lives, glorifying God, and so we seek to flourish as we relate to Him. That's why we're sad that we can't celebrate the Lord's Supper because the Lord's Supper is another visual representation of what it means to feed on Jesus and on His flesh and blood metaphorically, His broken body on the cross and His shed blood.
On our behalf, we eat the bread. This is my body. You know, we see Christ in Him crucified, and what it means for us personally, He died for our sins so that I can know life and be resurrected to eternal life.
Jesus is the bread of life. And His mission as He is teaching His disciples here is to reach out with His message and His finished work on the cross and His resurrection as an ascension, not only to the disciples and those around Him, but to the whole world.
[27:38] That's His great commission to us. It's to every single person. That's why our Sunday evening videos are important because we're seeking to reach out to a new audience with Jesus.

I know it's online and I know it's imperfect. I know it's not the finished article, but as we pray through it and pray for it, we want to reach out to people with the gospel of Jesus who is the bread of life. Do you believe that? Do you believe that message? And as Christians, do we live as if He is the bread of our life, that He is the one that we need every day?
Yeah, we've got a great hope in the future of feasting. There's the occasional feast here now. And the more we know of Christ, the more the bread becomes rich and glorious and almost like a feast. And it is a feast, but there will be a day in the future when we will feast with Him. And He uses that analogy a lot about the new heavens and the new earth. But now do we recognize Him as a bread of life, that He matters every day and that we need Him every day?
[28:45] 1, 6, verses 47 to 50, it's so important when we remember the I ams of Jesus that we're looking at in the evenings. Truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life, I am the bread of life.

Your fathers ate the man and the wilderness, they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that no one may eat of it and so that one may eat of it and not die.
Jesus is the bread that came down from heaven. So you truly believe that and will you put your faith and trust in Him? And as believers, will we nourish our lives on Him day to day because of who He is?
I hope and pray so for myself and for all who are listening this morning. Let's pray together. Father, help us to be nourished in You and on You. Help us to understand these pictures, to make sense of them.
Remind us of the sacrament and why it is so important that just as the sign of Jonah was pointing forward to the death and resurrection of Christ, so the sacrament points back and reminds us of the centrality of a crucified and risen Savior.
[29:57] Help us to understand that more and not just let it trip off our tongues. Help us to understand the cost that Jesus paid to set us free.

And may we live with gratitude to be opened up to Your great love and to the wonderful reality of a God who wants to transform us and deal with the cancer of sin in our lives which destroys us and which is death.
And help us to stay close. I pray that for our people today that they would come close and stay close. I pray it for myself and I pray it for all who listen that all of us will come close and be close to Jesus.
Amen.

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