

John 6:28-40 I am the bread of life

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Being a Christian is about following Jesus Christ.

That should be an uncontroversial claim.

But let me make it a little bit more challenging for you.

If I say being a Christian is about following Jesus Christ,

then I am saying being a Christian is more

than just believing the truths we find in the creeds.

You can believe something is true and not act on it.

Following Jesus Christ is an action.

You follow.

So being a Christian can't be less than believing the creeds.

You wouldn't be following Jesus

if you denied things he told you to believe.

But in order to follow him,

you would have to act like what Jesus told you was true.

You would have to follow.

OK let me make it a bit more challenging for you.

If I say that being a Christian is about following Jesus Christ,

then I am saying that being a Christian

is more than following the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Now I understand that following Jesus Christ

and following the teachings of Jesus Christ sound very similar.

But you see lots of people think

they can extract the moral and ethical framework of Jesus' teachings,

and then they have Christianity.

I mean that's how other religion's work, right?

Buddhism is about following the teaching of the Buddha.

No one is trying to have a personal relationship with Buddha.

But Christianity is actually about a personal relationship with Jesus.

It's about what Jesus did for you and for me on the cross,

to restore our relationship with his Father.  
This is a lot more than an ethical framework.  
It's about one person saving another person because they love them.  
Jesus loves you.  
You might have sung the song.

But if being a Christian is about following Jesus,  
and that's about a relationship with a person,  
How can I get to know this person?  
I can't have a coffee with him.  
A key way to get to know Jesus is from the pages of the Bible.  
So what we are going to do for 7 weeks,  
is to get to know Jesus through some things that he said about himself.  
In John's gospel there are 7 "I am" sayings.  
Seven times that Jesus said, "I am" something or other.  
And I think we can get to know someone  
when they talk about who they are.  
So we begin with "I am the bread of life".  
Jn 6:35 "I am the bread of life.  
Whoever comes to me will never go hungry  
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

What does Jesus mean when he says,  
"I am the bread of life"?  
Well I have three points.  
And the first is,  
"Real religion is about Jesus personally."  
So Jesus didn't get up in a pulpit one day  
and just say "I am the bread of life" out of nowhere.  
He said it in answer to a question.  
Here's the question.  
6:28 "Then the crowds asked Jesus,

"What must we do to do the works God requires?"

Remember I said at the start,  
being a Christian is about more than following the teachings of Jesus.

Here the crowds are asking Jesus,

"What are the things we have to do to be a bona fide Christian?"

They want a list of little boxes to tick off.

Jesus, just give us a little list

so that when we've done all the things on the list,

we will know that we've made the grade.

"What must we do to do the works God requires?"

It's like when I do the grocery shopping.

Cherida writes me a list and sends me off to Bayside.

Here's the things you need to get from Aldi.

Here's what I want from Henry's fruit and vege shop.

And if there are some really good specials then get those too.

And I know that when I get home,

if I've got all the things on the list,

then I will have a happy wife.

The crowds wanted a spiritual shopping list.

So they could know that if they tick everything off the list,

then when they die,

God will be pleased with them.

Jesus has to disappoint them.

6:29 "Jesus answered, "The work of God is this:

to believe in the one he has sent."

In other words,

true religion is not about ticking things off a shopping list.

It's about believing in Jesus.

And the kind of believing Jesus is talking about

is a whole of life faith commitment.

It's what I called earlier, following Jesus.

In a sense this is both easier and more difficult

than what the crowds ask for.  
It's more difficult in the sense  
that you can't just tick off all the boxes and say, "I'm finished now."  
Following Jesus is something you do till you take your last breath.  
When you are following Jesus,  
the challenge that God has for you right now,  
may just be the preparation for the next challenge he has for you.  
But we shouldn't look at these challenges as God being demanding.  
Rather it's a privilege that God gives to us  
to keep working in us to make us more like Jesus.  
The challenges we face in life  
the challenges we face in following Jesus  
are signs that God hasn't finished with us yet.  
So if you are looking for a quick and easy reassurance  
that you've made the grade,  
sorry it's more difficult than that.  
It's about following Jesus for as long as you've got.  
But it could also be easier than what the crowds were asking for.  
Easier and sometimes scandalously easier.  
You see, if you get given a list of boxes to tick,  
what happens if you just can't tick one of the boxes?  
Muslims have a list of boxes to tick.  
Pray five times a day.  
Remember the poor in your giving.  
And once in your life you must do the Haj,  
a spiritual pilgrimage to Mecca.  
But what if you are a Muslim in Bangladesh and you are dirt poor.  
There's no way you will ever make the Haj.  
You just can't tick that box.  
Now clearly from a Christian perspective,  
what a Bangladeshi Muslim needs  
is a missionary to come and tell them the gospel.

So he can believe in Jesus and be saved.  
But from a Muslim perspective,  
that poor Bangladeshi faces a very uncertain eternal future.  
He can't tick the boxes that are required of him.  
And in that sense the answer that Jesus gave to crowds is very reassuring.  
"The work of God is this:  
to believe in the one he has sent."  
There are no boxes to tick.  
Put your faith in Jesus and you have done all that is required.  
The thief on the cross next to Jesus.  
How many boxes could he tick  
between when he met Jesus and when he died?  
None.  
He had not long at all left to live.  
And he was somewhat inconvenienced when it came to doing good works  
by virtue of being crucified.  
But he still heard those beautiful words,  
"Today you will be with me in paradise."  
Imagine how scandalised the Pharisees were  
when they heard Jesus say that!  
And look, it's not just the thief on the cross.  
One of my ministry colleagues has a severely disabled son, Brendan.  
What can Brendan do to serve Jesus?  
How many boxes can he tick?  
Absolutely none.  
He can't talk.  
He's in a wheel chair.  
He can't do anything.  
Everything has to be done for him.  
He can understand a bit.  
And he smiles and moves a bit to the music in church.  
That's all he can do.

But he believes in Jesus.

He can communicate enough to make that clear.

"The work of God is this:

to believe in the one he has sent."

That's all.

And that's the first thing it means that Jesus is the bread of life.

Real religion is about Jesus personally.

Here's the second thing.

Jesus is for Christians what manna was for the Israelites in the desert.

So the crowds asked Jesus a follow up question.

OK, you say that real religion is about you personally.

In the old days, when someone like Moses claimed to speak for God

he did signs like giving the people manna from heaven,

so they would believe he was sent from God.

What are you going to do?

And how did Jesus reply?

Moses gave you manna, huh.

Bread from heaven.

OK.

Guess what?

That was only al cheapo bread from heaven.

You want the real bread from heaven.

That's me.

I am the bread of life.

What was the point of the manna in the wilderness?

It was so the Israelites didn't starve.

There were 600K of them and they didn't have any food.

You can't just find food for 600K in the desert.

Not even Bear Grills could do that.

But God sent them manna so they could live.

What Jesus is saying is that he is sent by God so we can live.

Without Jesus, it's like you are in a spiritual desert.  
There is no way for you to survive.  
But with Jesus you can have life.  
It's that stark.  
No Jesus, no life.  
But if you know Jesus with a k,  
then you will know life with a k.

But the similarities between Jesus and manna don't finish there.  
When the Israelites ate manna in the wilderness,  
what sort of experience was that for them?  
Well it forced them to trust God.  
When you plant grain,  
and then harvest grain,  
and then grind the flour  
and bake the bread,  
it's easy to think that you are eating because of your own hard work  
and not because God provided.  
And when winter comes and you still have flour,  
it's easy to think you still have flour because you planned well  
and stored up flour for when there's no more grain to harvest.  
But when you go to sleep at night with no food in the tent,  
and wake up the next morning  
and there's manna on the ground for you to pick up,  
you know that you are only eating because God provided.  
And when you can't store up enough manna for a week  
because it goes bad.  
So you have to collect manna every day except for the Sabbath.  
Then what you are learning  
is that you need to rely on God to provide you with life every day.  
And Jesus is like that.  
The life he provides is not because of our own hard work.

It's just a gift from God.  
The bread from heaven couldn't be earned.  
You couldn't make it by growing grain.  
You just had to be given it.  
Wake up in the morning and collect your food for the day.  
The spiritual life that Jesus gives us can't be earned.  
You just have to accept it as a gift.  
And like the manna had to be collected each day,  
you have to keep receiving life from Jesus as a gift.

It's easy enough to accept the gift when you first come to faith, I suppose.  
You've lived a life where you've made mistakes.  
You recognise you need forgiveness.  
But what about when you've been faithfully serving for decades?  
You might be admired by everyone because you are a pillar of the church.  
Is it easy to slip into thinking you have earned your forgiveness then?  
Yes it is.  
But can you earn it then?  
No you can't.  
It still has to be received as a gift.  
So here's the second thing.  
Jesus is for Christians what manna was for the Israelites.

Now the third thing that Jesus is the bread of life tells us.  
It's about when we fully experience the life.  
Jn 6:40 "For my Father's will is  
that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him  
shall have eternal life,  
and I will raise them up on the last day."  
There is a now and a not yet to the Christian life.  
We shall have eternal life now.  
We will be raised up on the last day future.

Now there's a big debate amongst Christians  
about how much of our life from feeding on the bread of life we get now  
and how much we need to wait for.

I have eternal life now.

What does that mean for my present relationships,  
prosperity, spiritual gifts, healing from sickness, or success in my work?

It must mean something,

it can't mean everything,

and where the truth is between those two extremes  
is a discussion for another day.

What must be true

is that nothing we say

about how much of the blessings of eternity

we can lay claim to in the present

can be allowed to cast any shade on the martyrs.

Lots of Christians die for their faith.

We must never say they died

because they were somehow failing to feed on the bread of life.

We are hoping to bring some refugees from Afghanistan out to Australia.

All of the families we are looking at

have had someone convert to Christianity.

All of them have had to flee with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

Did God not bless them because they were unfaithful?

Of course not.

They have been faithful in ways that you and I cannot imagine.

Many of them have lost friends or family members as martyrs.

Not everyone escaped the Taliban.

How is Jesus the bread of life?

He will raise them up on the last day.

Whatever else happens,

he will raise them up on the last day.

It's not that nothing else matters.

Things in this life do matter.  
But the truth  
that Jesus will raise up everyone who believes in him on the last day  
brings everything else into perspective.  
He is the bread of life.  
He will raise them up on the last day.

Being a Christian is about following Jesus.  
We want to get to know the person we are following.  
We can get to know Jesus by reading what he said about himself.  
Jesus said, "I am the bread of life."  
What does it mean for Jesus to be the bread of life?  
It means that he's resolutely focused  
on raising his followers up on the last day.  
You look at Ash Barty's eyes when she's playing tennis.  
They are focused.  
She is concentrating on what she's got to do.  
As you read through this passage about Jesus the bread of life,  
you detect the same kind of resolute focus.  
Jesus will not be distracted from raising us up on the last day.  
That's what he came to do.  
That's what he's going to do.  
And for us,  
all we can do is feed on the bread of life.