

Bread Alone

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Rev. Jeff Mansfield



Preaching on:

Luke 4:1–13

So, Jesus was baptized. The Holy Spirit drives Him out into the wilderness and He doesn't eat or drink for 40 days and 40 nights and the devil shows up to tempt Him. After 40 days and 40 nights of not eating, the devil says, "Hey, look, why don't you turn some of these stones to bread?" Jesus refuses and so, the first big question here in this piece of scripture for us has to be, why? Why is this a temptation? Is there something wrong with bread?

Well, we know that there's not. In a few minutes, later in the service, we'll be praying the prayer that Jesus taught us. What was the prayer that Jesus taught us? Give us this day our daily bread. After that, we're going to be partaking in the sacrament, the meal that Jesus left for us, and 50% of that meal is bread. There's nothing wrong with bread, so why is this a temptation? Why is it a temptation? Jesus says, "One does not live by bread alone." What does that mean? What does that mean to you?

One does not live by bread alone.

Some years back, a married couple came to me for some couple's counseling and they'd basically burned themselves out under the pursuit of the great American dream. They had burned themselves out chasing after the big, important positions at work and going after the promotions and the raises. Just the rat race of climbing that ladder and having a really nice home and stretching themselves maybe a little bit more than they could. Getting the private school for the kids and the boarding school for the kids and just working so hard each and every day to keep up.

I said, "Well, maybe that's the problem," and they said, "No, no, it's a problem in our relationship." I said, "Well, maybe it's a problem with what you're doing in your relationship." They said, "I don't think so, this is what everybody we know is doing." I thought that was very insightful. I thought, "Yeah, they're right. This is what we're all doing." We're all running after the material.

So, I decided to break out the social science. I said, "The social science is very clear about this. The more that people test as materialistic, pursuing those material goals and the less they test in the gratitude spectrum of things, the more likely they are to be depressed. The more likely they are to report anxiety. The more likely they to report lower life satisfaction. The less likely they are to have meaningful friendships and relationships. The less likely they are to be involved in community." I said, "The social science is just telling us the spiritual science that Jesus gave us 2,000 years ago, one does not live by bread alone. When you put bread in front of everything else, things can fall apart."

They said, "But we believe. We're here talking to you and not to a therapist because we believe in Jesus." I said, "You believe in Jesus and I know you do, but is your behavior in line with your belief? Are you layering that belief on top of the American dream? Or are you putting the American dream, the pursuit of that material wealth, keeping up and being on top before God?"

I think that what this couple was facing and what Jesus was telling us when He said, "One does not live by bread alone," is the first temptation that we all face in this culture. It is the temptation to feel material value is the most important thing in our lives, the most important thing to pursue. There is a tendency to get a little bit of a narrow focus rather than a broader focus. To just focus in on what I have, what I need, that treadmill of consumption and going for more and more and more rather than broadening our view and saying, "Yeah, I need a little bit of all that, but what does it mean? What is the value of my life outside of the things and the power that I have collected to myself?"

Right now, all of us are very concerned with two things in the news. The war in Ukraine is at the forefront of our minds and just behind that, we're all thinking about inflation. Man, it's been something to see how messing around with the value of the dollar can bring everybody together. Left, right, conservative, liberal, whoever you are, we all agree, we don't like inflation.

Imagine if we could respond with the same energy that we're responding to the devaluation of our dollar, to the devaluation of our ideals and our values. Imagine if we were able to respond and get behind in the same way the devaluation of our dollar, if we could get behind the devaluation of our democracy, of decency in our country, of proper political discourse, isn't that being devalued? Imagine if we could have the same energy for the devaluation of our environment, the continued devaluation of black lives.

I'm not saying that the dollar doesn't matter, the dollar matters. I mean, people, this has real impact on people's lives, but Jesus said, "One does not live by bread alone." Aren't there other things that we value? I think that Jesus probably worries a little bit about a culture that can only agree on the value of the material and doesn't even know how to talk anymore about the value of the things that go beyond the material, the value of the things that really matter to a people, to a democracy, to a faith.

I think what Jesus is telling us when He says, "One does not live by bread alone," is that, if we have all the bread that we could possibly ever need, our needs are satisfied, that is the time that we need to stop working for bread. If we have all the bread that we could possibly need and something else doesn't happen, if there is still some other missing ingredient, then we are not truly alive. One does not live by bread alone.

If you have all the bread you need, and if you have more bread than you need, but you do not have something else, you are not alive. And so, the question of Lent, is not a question of making yourself miserable. The question of Lent is the core vital question of your life, are you truly alive? Are you truly alive? Where does the value of that life lead? Where is it? Lent isn't about making yourself miserable. It's about re-centering ourselves, re-centering ourselves in God, coming truly alive.

If I have all the bread I need, it's time for me to stop working for bread, and it's time for me to start working for something else. For the deepest hungers, not of my body, but the deepest hungers of my mind and my spirit. The deepest hungers and needs of my community. Once I have enough to support myself and I have a little bit of extra energy for something else, that energy does not go into bread, I start working for God.

That's why Jesus is out in the desert, to work for God. He's just been baptized. He is beginning His ministry. He's got to get His head on straight. He goes out to start His work for God. Lent is a season where we follow Jesus's example. We put down our bread and we align ourselves, we align our spirit, we align our hunger, all of our consent, all of our love to God. We don't just layer it on top. We allow God to take the proper position.

Bread is important, but God rules the material world. I have to work for my bread, but bread does not rule me, God rules me. That's what it means to be human from the Christian perspective. I am not ruled by the material world. I do not serve the material world. I serve God. 100% of the consent of my

soul goes to my savior.

So, I want you to imagine that you're in a desert and you're surrounded by stones all of which could easily become bread through your work. You have just enough bread to live and be comfortable and be safe. What will you do with your energy? What will you do with your time? Will you spend it turning stones to bread or will you choose something else? How will you respond? How will our church respond stones to bread or something more? One does not live by bread alone.