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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN”

John 6:25-51

☑ Recently I came across a recipe for Deep Fried Big Mac. It’s simple: buy a Big Mac at your local McDonald’s; beat several eggs and dip the sandwich in the mixture, being careful to cover the whole surface; roll the sandwich in bread crumbs; and immerse it in a deep pot of hot oil until it comes out golden brown. *Bon appétit!*

It reminded me of the Minnesota State Fair. They do not serve Big Macs there, but they are master fry cooks. You can gorge on churros, deep fried bologna, deep fried candy bars, deep fried s’mores, deep fried twinkies, donuts, elephant ears, French fries, funnel cakes, onion blossoms, onion rings – and the list continues *ad nauseum*.

It is OK to eat this kind of stuff in small amounts, every once in a while. But a lot of people consume large quantities of junk on a regular basis, even daily.

☑ {Mark Hyman} Many North **“Americans are overfed and undernourished.”** We pay for it in obesity, Type II diabetes, heart disease, stroke, various cancers, and dementia. Sometimes these diseases are not avoidable but they often are, and diet is a huge factor.

It is ironic. We all need food to live, yet many of us are killing ourselves with it – or at least, with what passes for food at state fairs and fast food restaurants.

? What about us? Are we eating for life or for death?

{Ge 2:9} In the beginning Eve and Adam could have picked fruit from any number of **“trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.”** The Creator invited them to do so.

If the couple was craving something more than physical nourishment, they might have eaten from the tree of life. That fruit was not off limits – not yet.

{Ge 3:6} But **“when the woman saw that the fruit”** of the forbidden tree was **“pleasing to the eye,”** (apparently) **“good for food,”** and (supposedly) **“desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it,”** and she gave some to the man and **“he ate it.”**

It was like eating slow-acting poison. Death did not strike all at once; but it inevitably, inexorably took more and more of what belonged to us.

{Ge 3:18} The ground, which had been fertile and responsive, began to **“produce thorns and thistles.”**

{Ge 3:17-19} Work, which had been pleasurable and gratifying, was exchanged for back-breaking labor.

{Ge 3:16} Relationships, which had been effortlessly satisfying, became difficult and conflicted.

{Ge 3:19} In the end death came on full force, snuffing out our breath and grinding us into dust – all because the first humans ate the wrong fruit.

? What about us? Are we eating for life or for death?

■ Please turn with me to John 6:35: **“Jesus declare[s], ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’”**

We might find it hard to appreciate the power of this image. What is bread to us, confronted as we are with tens of thousands of items on our supermarket shelves?

Messiah and other first century Jews have no such difficulty. To them, bread is the Staff of Life.

{Lev 24:5-8} When they eat bread they think of the sacred Bread of the Presence. Week by week the priests present twelve fresh loaves in the Holy Place in the Temple, as instructed by the Law.

{Hamotzi} At nearly every meal they pray: **“Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”**

Every Sabbath, observant families recite Psalm 136. Line by line the head of the household testifies to YHWH’s awesome deeds and the family answers, **“His love endures forever.”**

The psalm celebrates the Creation, the Exodus, the parting of the Red Sea, and God’s defeat of hostile forces. It reaches its climax in verses 23-26:

He remembered us in our low estate

His love endures forever.

and freed us from our enemies.

His love endures forever.

He gives food to every creature.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of heaven.

His love endures forever.

{Ex 16:4, 18} When they eat bread they remember that YHWH saved their ancestors from starvation in the desert by causing bread to **“rain down from heaven.”**

{I K 17:1-6} When they eat bread they remember the prophet Elijah. He hid from King Ahab in a remote ravine and the Almighty sent ravens to bring him bread and meat every morning, and again in the evening.

{I K 19:1-9} A few years later Queen Jezebel threatened Elijah. He fled into the wilderness, collapsed under a bush, and begged God to take his life. Instead, God rescued him by sending an angel with water and bread, not once but twice. Thus strengthened, the prophet **“traveled forty days and forty nights [to Mount] Horeb,”** where the LORD revealed himself.

{II K 4:42-44} When they eat bread they remember Elisha, who was tasked with feeding one hundred hungry men but did not have enough bread to go around. God announced: **“They will eat and have some left over,”** so Elisha gave them what he had. It miraculously multiplied **“and they [all] ate [their fill] and had some left over.”**

{Ex 12:1-50} Above all, when they eat bread they remember Passover (or *Pesach*) and the Festival of Unleavened Bread that follows.

At the original Pesach, the Hebrews marked their door frames with lamb’s blood, and ate a meal of roasted lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread.

That night the LORD struck down every firstborn Egyptian, but he **“passed over”** the homes that were marked by blood. He spared Israel and the Pharaoh released them from the living death that is slavery.

Ever since, the people of Israel have celebrated *Pesach* and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days they do not eat any bread with yeast in it.

I have been using the word “remember,” but this is not mainly about commemoration. Many Jews believe that as they keep *Pesach* and the Festival of Unleavened Bread, they are literally participating in the original events alongside their ancestors.

☑ In the immortal words of William Faulkner, **“The past is not dead. It’s not even past.”**

● Pesach and Unleavened Bread are at the forefront of their minds when Jesus calls himself **“the bread of life.”** We know this because, according to verse 4, **“The Jewish Passover Festival [is drawing] near.”**

All of this meaning, and more, is wrapped up in Christ’s declaration: **“I am the bread of life.”** You would not think he could top that claim, but he does!

■ John 6:33: **“The bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”** And then verse 41: **“I am the bread that came down from heaven.”**

★ This is not merely information about where he comes from; it is a revelation of *who he is*. **“Heaven” describes his place of origin and also his essential nature.** He is **“from heaven”** or **“of heaven”** (the Greek can be translated either way). Jesus of Nazareth is ‘heavenly’ as God Almighty is heavenly.

{Jn 1:4} **“I am the bread of life,” “the bread that came down from heaven.”** This is a profound theological

statement. As physical bread sustains the body so He sustains the spirit, for **“In him [is] life.”**

And not just any life, the life of the Godhead! The Living God is giving himself to the world in and through his **“bread”** Jesus. Psalm 34:8: **“O taste and see that the LORD is good.”**

“I am the bread of life,” “the bread that came down from heaven.” This is also an invitation.

Messiah feels the craving in our soul and says **“[believe] in me.”** He feels our heart’s desire and says, **“[come] to me.”** He feels our inward hunger and says, **“I am the bread of life.”**

● {Jn 6:51} **“I am the living bread...from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.”** The opposite is also true: **“unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man ...you have no life in you”** (John 6:53).

■ {Is 55:2} In verse 27 the Lord urges, **“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”** **“Why spend money on what is not bread...?”**

{The Feast} But who would **“spend [their] sweat on filler and fluff”** without substance? Who would choose deep fried bologna over steak? Who would **“starve to death while growing fat on that which is not bread”**?

● Most of the crowd! In verse 36 Christ laments, **“You have seen me and still you do not believe.”**

? What about us? Are we eating for life or for death?

☑ {Blaise Pascal} **“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.”** Yet we are sorely tempted to give ourselves over to fake food.

? How can we discern **“the bread of life”** and consistently choose **“the bread from heaven”**?

☑ When I was diagnosed with Type II Diabetes, the nutritionist told me, **“We crave what we eat.”**

At first it was hard. I was in the habit of filling up on potatoes, pasta, rice, pizza, sweets, and other foods that are high in carbohydrates. That is what tasted good to me.

Yet as I disciplined myself and made better choices, my cravings changed. Now my mouth waters at the thought of a salad topped with crunchy raw vegetables, or an omelet with onions and peppers and cheese, or a nicely done steak or piece of chicken.

I have my setbacks. But for the most part it is a pleasure to eat for life.

The strategy is simple: fuel your hunger for wholesome food by eating more of it; and, at the same time, starve your hunger for what isn't wholesome by eating less of it. **“We crave what we eat.”**

This is equally true of our souls.

“Taste and see that the LORD is good”!

Share in Christ's life. Join with him. Be united with him in intimate relation – not just on Sundays, every day.

Seek fellowship with him in study, in service, in prayer, and in worship. Do this alone, and do it in community with us and other Christ Followers.

Feed on him and you will want more!

Meanwhile, cut back on things which are good, but which dull your appetite for Jesus. Entirely eliminate every bit of junk that promises life but delivers death.

We will have setbacks. Yet we will increasingly eat for life, and we will be satisfied.

Messiah declares: **“I am the bread of life.” “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”**

This is the word of the LORD.