

John 6:24-27

²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

Appreciate that something deeper is being shared.

- 1. Jesus uses a points of reference to bring people closer to him.**
- 2. Jesus gives us food that lasts until eternal life.**

Last year a child sat in the crowd of kids at soccer camp and asked me, "What does soccer have to do with the Bible?" I was a little taken aback by how direct the question was especially when it was right before I was getting ready to deliver the devotional thought for the day, but I tried to explain the purpose of the camp. My response was received with some obvious skepticism at the time, but this past week I noticed the same child was at the camp once again this year, and he felt no need to ask that question this time around. Instead he simply listened to each devotion because he had learned from his experience last year that during our soccer camp we use soccer as a point of reference or a teaching tool in order to share the word of God by making connections and drawing illustrations from the game.

You can almost imagine a child, or a curious member of that crowd that gathered around Jesus asking such a question of puzzlement. *What does bread have to do with the Messiah? "If there is bread that does not spoil, give us that bread that endures forever? What do you mean that you are the bread of life?"* Of course Jesus was using a teaching tool, a point of reference, and it was one that would very much be on the minds of his listeners. After all this crowd that was now tailing Jesus had seen Jesus do something amazing with bread. He had fed a crowd of 5,000+ with just a few loaves of bread. This was on their minds and so Jesus used that point of reference to bring a crowd of people closer to their God and to a deeper understanding of their Savior.

Jesus goal was to bring these people from a loose earthly connection to him to a deeper relationship with God. His teaching tool in this particular case was bread. As important as bread was, as vital as food is, Jesus is more important. Bread was his point of reference. Food was his teaching tool.

When describing his soccer bible camp a pastor once used the following phrase repeatedly to describe what made his camp unique. "Something deeper shared." As important as it is to teach kids to use their God-given gifts, as fun as it is to teach kids about soccer, this past week we had the awesome opportunity to share God's Word with them, to lead them to Jesus, and share with them the bread of life that lasts forever.

Each day we sat under the shade of the trees that line the edge of Voelz Field and Maple Street in Danube and we talked about how Jesus wins. Jesus defeats the devil for us. Jesus wins! He defeated every single temptation of the devil and therefore we can resist temptation. What a valuable lesson this is to share with so many children. When faced with temptation they can say, "No!" The devil doesn't win, Jesus wins! At the camp we heard about how Jesus went up against those who tried to trick him and trap him and he defeated each test for us. Jesus willingly endured all of this so that he could carry the burden of our sin and have it nailed to the cross. He ridicule and scorn, he endured suffering and exhaustion; he "played through the pain" so to speak, in order to win the victory for us. He suffered horrible things, he stretched out his body in death on the cross to save us from the guilt and punishment that our sins deserve. And just when it appeared that the devil had won our Savior came back from the dead to defeat death and hell itself for us so that we might have joy and hope and life through him. And our Savior has also promised that he will come back again and bring us to the endless joy of heaven where he will give us the crown of life and victory. Jesus Wins! What wonderful news we have. Jesus Wins and therefore we win too, we are victorious in Jesus.

This is why we gathered on those fields in Danube for five days, so that these children might see Jesus; so that that they might hear his Word; that they might have the bread of life. We were able to offer them the words of God that would serve them well not just for a few days, or a few years, but for all eternity. We gave those who gathered the bread of life that does not spoil but endures to eternal life and as we shared those words of God we too were nourished and refreshed in our faith. Sure, at the end of it all we hosted a cookout and had hotdogs and chips, but most importantly we did our best to work for food that does not spoil, but instead for food that endures to eternal life. We tried to share with our campers something deeper, something that would last for all eternity.

We have been doing the camp for 8 years now, and our biggest groups are always the younger groups. As kids get older their interests change. For a number of children soccer might be fun for a while, it might be a new thrill when they are 5 or 6, they might get a kick out it when they are 7 or 8, 9 or 10, but then they might get a little bit older and their interests change. Our camp, in a way is a testament to that fact. The oldest group has historically been the smallest group. And that ust happens. Some kids continue to love the camp and keep coming year after year. This year I was able to coach some 12 year olds who had been at the camp since they were 5 or 6. However, other 5 and 6 year olds who come to camp eventually lose interest in soccer. That happens.

Our camp aims to be an enjoyable experience for younger kids and older kids, but we understand that some kids will grow out of it. What we pray, however, is that they will never grow out of the message that they hear at our camp. We pray that at this camp these words of God that were shared, the truths of Scripture, the Biblical assurances, and gospel promises stick with all our campers in some way or another and their faith is built and maintained. We pray that they think back fondly to this camp and think about how Jesus wins and they win too. That when they are faced with temptation they can resist, because Jesus has defeated the devil for them. That they know that sin, and death, and hell have all been defeated by Jesus and eternal life in heaven is God's free gift in Christ.

As this year's camp has now come to end these are the results for which we once again pray. We pray for the work of the Spirit, that through the means of grace he may be busy transforming and building up and strengthening their hearts and minds. We pray that this work of the Spirit continues throughout their entire lives, even after these children are so old that they are no longer able to compete in athletics anymore. That the word of God would continue to do its work until these children are old and grey and that the words we shared this past week has some small part in all of it. That goes for the children in the camp as well as the young men and women who volunteer to coach and help with the camp. We pray that they may recognize and appreciate that something deeper was being shared and that these truths of Scripture may go to work in their hearts and minds as well. That they may know that Jesus wins for them too.

Jesus wins! That was our theme for camp this year. As Christians we know that truth quite well, but as human beings sometimes we want so badly to change that spiritual truth into more of a temporal convenience. We fall into the desire and the assumption that things will generally go smoothly for us, because, well, we are Christians. We follow Jesus and Jesus wins, and so that should be very apparent in our lives. Like that crowd that was following Jesus for what seemed very much like the wrong reasons, we fall into that same type of misguided thinking. After that crowd of people tracks down Jesus on the other side of the lake you can almost sense a bit of annoyance in their collective voice when they ask him, "“Rabbi, when did you get here?”"

When things don't go smoothly, when things take a rotten turn, when life gets difficult, when our tears are real and bitter, when life is hard or even just ordinary we might ask, "*What gives? Jesus where are you? Why aren't you here doing the things that I want you to do? Why aren't you here fixing all my problems like I want you too?*" Jesus wins, right, why can't I catch a break and win at life more often and more clearly?" God's Word talks about the LORD pouring his riches out his people. He talks about blessing them and showing them favor. How often don't we get so focused on the here and now that we desire, expect, and even demand that God would bless us in some material and earthly way, and when he doesn't we despair and doubt our God because he doesn't seem to be there in the way that we want him to be. When we do this we overlook our God's promises that he will take care of us, he will give us our daily bread, and we

downplay the rich spiritual inheritance that he has given us as we are so focused on our earthly dreams, or troubles, or worries.

At camp we touched on such issues and we looked at how Scripture tells us and Jesus warns us that we will have to endure pains and troubles in this world. But even though we might not be richly blessed in physical and material ways our victorious Savior assures us that he will give us our daily bread, but more importantly we are blessed with every spiritual blessing. Our Savior assures us that indeed the final victory is ours through Christ's saving work and the final and complete realization of this is coming when Jesus returns or we depart this life to be with him.

One could compare it to a game that one team is winning by a hefty margin. It doesn't mean they stop trying or that they will never get kicked in the shins or have to work hard or feel pain or frustration or disappointment. Even though the outcome is in hand, even though the victory is ours because Jesus wins, there will still be plenty of hard work, and pain, disappointment, sin and trouble and sorrow that we will have to endure until Jesus comes back and that final victory is given to us and enjoyed in full measure in heaven.

These truths help us as we fight the good fight of faith. As we strive to live lives of thankful obedience in this, at times, very difficult and uncertain world, we are given this sure hope found in God's Word about Jesus. This message is continual and dependable and has real and lasting meaning. We are given the sure hope in Jesus that is more important and more precious for it is everlasting. That is what Jesus was expressing when he declared. ***"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."***

As we look at these words let's appreciate something deeper is being shared. God's Word and our faith is more than just a way to ensure that we are physically well fed, it is more than a superstitious search for good fortune, or a part of therapeutic technique, or some childish ritual that we follow just so that we can make it through the day. Jesus is vital, is essential, for Jesus is the very bread of life. His Word is the very nourishment that we need and he is there to grant us more than mere temporal blessings, which come and go, but rather he grants us eternal salvation and everlasting life.

As we celebrate another year of soccer camp, let's give thanks not just for growing numbers and a good fun week of instruction. Let's give thanks for the spiritual blessings, the connections to God that are being strengthened by instruction in God's Word. Let's give thanks for a Savior who gives us more than temporal blessings, but one who grants eternal nourishment and victory. Jesus Wins! We win too, because he satisfies our greatest need for all eternity. Jesus is the bread of life! Amen.