Searching for Satisfaction
John 6:22-40

We're looking at the Gospel of John, and last week we saw Jesus feed a crowd of 5000-plus people from 5 loaves and two fish, and then walk on the sea that his disciples were struggling to row across.

But the passage we're looking at today happens the day after all that. Because some of the crowd follow Jesus back across the lake and, according to v59, find him in the synagogue, or at least, that's where this interaction we're looking at happens, v59: 'Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.'

And the people want to clear something up. They know that when they last saw him, his disciples had left in the boat without him, so how did he get here to Capernaum? Verse 25, 'When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"'

Now, when I was an undergraduate, my physiology supervisor taught us basic exam technique. And he said something like, 'the problem with you students is that you read the question on the exam paper, you don't have a clue what the answer is, so instead you write everything you know about something totally different in the hope of impressing the examiner.' Ever done that? 'The problem is' he said, 'you're not fooling us, it doesn't work.'

Or take politicians. At least in the UK, one of their habits is that when an interviewer asks them a question, they don't answer that one, they answer the one they want to answer.

And is that what Jesus does here? The people ask him, 'How did you get here?' And Jesus replies, v26, "Truly, truly I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."

Yeh, but that's not answering the question, Jesus. Except, whenever Jesus says, 'Truly, truly, I say to you…' you know he's not about to duck a hard question, you know he's about to sock it to you hard. Because it's not Jesus travel arrangements they need clarity on, but something much deeper.

So we're going to look at three things: the Search for Satisfaction, the Offer of Satisfaction, and the Security of Satisfaction.

The Search for Satisfaction
And in v26, Jesus aims straight at their underlying issue - the issue that's driving them, the real reaon they're looking for him: "Not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."

Now, if you've been tracking with this story you might respond, 'but it's *precisely* because of the signs Jesus has been doing that they're looking for him! I mean, John said exactly that back at the start of the chapter: v2, 'And a large crowd was following him, *because* they saw the signs that he was doing.' Plus, they've just seen him feed a crowd the size of Morges using a boy's picnic. Plus they were so impressed by that that they reckoned he must be the Prophet Moses had promised. Plus, they were so sure of *that* that they'd wanted to make him king.

So surely, the whole reason they're seeking him, is because they'd seen signs.

But Jesus is saying, sure you've seen signs, but what you've not seen is what they signify.

Imagine you invite friends over to hang out on a Saturday afternoon. And you agree a time, but they don't show. And after a bit you get your phone to text them, only to see that on their social media feed they've posted a selfie of themselves, standing right outside your house, beside your post-box, with your name clearly visible on it. And they are all smiles, and the caption reads - 'had an amazing time with *blank'* - fill in your name - hashtag/best of friends. You'd think that was pretty odd wouldn't you?

Or imagine you're talking to a colleague about what they got up to over the weekend and they said, 'I went to Rome.' And you go 'Great, did you see the Colosseum?' 'No'. 'The Vatican? The Sistine chapel?' 'No'. 'The Forum, or the Circus?' 'No'. 'Oh. I know, this was more a religious pilgrimage, you went to the Mamertine jail where St. Paul was imprisoned.' 'No'. 'Did you actually go to Rome??' 'Sure', and he whips out his phone and shows you a selfie of him beside a road sign, saying *Rome 5KM*. What would you say? 'That's not Rome', - 'well it says it is', 'yes, I know, but it's just a sign pointing you to Rome.'

And Jesus is saying to them, 'the miracles you're seeing, even you being fed with food till you could lie back in the grass feeling full, are pointing you to something beyond the miracle itself. To something deeper and grander. But you're not coming to me for that. You're coming because I gave you food to eat.'

So what's driving them, what's motivating them to seek out Jesus, is to have their physical needs met. And like your friends at the post box, or your colleague at the road sign, they stop there. But Jesus is saying, 'this miraculous meal, and you feeling full and happy after it, is pointing you to something that will satisfy a hunger deeper than physical hunger.'

Verse 27: "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you."

In other words, you can look to physical stuff to satisfy you. Stuff you can see, hear, feel and touch. But you are more than see, hear, feel and touch. You're more than physical. Because if Jesus says that the food we need endures to eternal life, then our real hunger is for eternity. That as the wrote of Ecclesiastes puts it, God 'has put eternity into man's heart.' (3:11). That whether you realise it or not, what drives you, what you're searching for, is life and love and meaning and worth that last for ever. That's eternal.

But we try and satisfy those longings with temporal physical stuff - like good food and wine. Or a relationship. Or the tangible, solid things money can buy. Or you can look for it in the less tangible. And we talk of someone who is thirsty for love or attention; Or someone who's hungry for power or fame. Are they physically hungry? Are they physically thirsty? No, but there's this need inside that drives our behaviour.

And sometimes, we can begin to recognise that we want that thing - that latest gadget or that word of affirmation, or that relationship just that bit too much, and we won't be satisfied without it. Exactly, Jesus says, your longing is for eternity, but you're trying to fill it with stuff that's less than eternal.

And you could pursue any of those things, or as Jesus calls it here 'work for' them, without any reference to God, or without ever taking a step near Jesus. Or, like this crowd, you could come to Christ hoping he'll give them to you. If I come to church, or pray hard enough, or read my Bible, he'll give me that relationship I want, or I'll get that job, or my physical health will recover. And Jesus does care about our physical needs. After all, it was him who fed the crowd until the last man standing said, 'I can not eat another crumb! I am rammed!'

And relationships, and kind words, and having a job, and being physically healthy are all great goods, but you can have all those things and still long for more, because ultimately, v27 again, it's 'food that perishes.' It fills us for a bit, but it doesn't last, or it has a sell-by date. Because if you're looking to a relationship to fill you, one day you'll discover that neither you nor the person you're looking to, are perfect, they let you down and you let them down. If you're looking to stuff, the engine burns out, the clutch goes, the battery runs down or another model makes it obsolete.

No, if you really want to be filled, Jesus says, if you really want your longing for eternity, for meaning and life and love and worth to be satisfied, you need a food that endures for eternity, that fills that deeper hunger.

But what becomes obvious from their response is that there's an alternative route to try and find satisfaction other than just the physical, and it's the religious. Because Jesus says, don't *work* for bread that perishes but for that which endures; and they reply, v28, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God."

Just look at that: *Do, doing works*. You see, like them, you can get that the answer to your inner desires is not ultimately going to come from physical stuff and instead begin to look to God, but then think you have to earn it. 'Ok, Jesus, we understand we shouldn't work for bread that let's us down, so what *works* should we *do*? What *should* we be *doing* for God so that he gives us the bread we need?

And that's what religion's like isn't it? If you want to attain enlightenment, or reach paradise, or be absolved of your sin, if you want to have God approve of you and meet your inner spiritual needs - here are the 8, 5, 7 things you should do, do, do.

But Jesus is saying that if that inner longing for eternity will never be satisfied by stuff, it also won't be filled by religious doing. Because the bread of God is not a to-do list. It's a gift.

The Offer of Satisfaction

Look at v29, 'Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."' So the way to true satisfaction, Jesus says, the way to having that longing for life and meaning and a sense that you matter answered, is by faith.

Now I was talking this week to a friend of mine who's a senior doctor in a university hospital and a Christian. And he was saying how he'd received an email from a colleague referring to him as 'a person of faith.' And you hear that phrase used, don't you - as if it's just having faith, in something, whatever that is, that makes the difference.

But here, Jesus isn't talking about or of being *a person* of faith, but of faith in a person, a very specific person. The One whom God has sent. Himself. And so having the deepest longings of your

heart satisfied doesn't come by believing in anything provided you're sincere, but by trusting in him, that it's Christ who can fill you.

Now, have you ever been in a meeting where someone asks a question and it becomes rapidly apparent that they've not been listening to what the speaker's been saying? Because they've just asked the question that the speaker's already answered. And you roll your eyes and think, 'he just said that'.

Verse 30, 'So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."'" Now there's a theory, which may be correct, that given this is the time of Passover, the Bible reading they've just heard in the synagogue was of God providing manna in the desert through Moses. So they're thinking, well Moses provided our fore-fathers with bread from heaven, so if we're to believe in you, Jesus, what bread from heaven miracle are you going to do?

And you think, have they really forgotten already what Jesus did only yesterday? Are they not paying attention? But just ask yourself, has there ever been a time when God was trying to teach you something, but it wasn't until the second, third, or fourth time that you finally got it? And you keep coming up against relational problems at work, or patterns of temptation in private, or arguments with someone you love. And it's only after the umpteenth time that you begin to realise, 'oh, maybe it's me who's got the problem.'

But think what else they're doing. Because only a moment ago they wanted to know what they had to do to prove themselves to God and earn his favour. And now, they're asking Jesus to prove himself to *them* to earn *their* favour. And that's what legalistic religion does to you, doesn't it. You've got to spend your life proving yourself to God, and others have to spend their lives proving themselves to you.

But so does God. And all the time God is answering our prayers, or giving us a good life, or things are going the way we want, we give him our time. But when he stops performing the way we want, we withdraw and harden our hearts. We may still go to church, but our heart is far from him.

Instead, Jesus says, v32, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

So we long for eternity, we're hungry for heavenly realities that make sense of life and love and gives us a sense of meaning and worth that lasts, but you won't find it in the things of this world, though they point you to it, Jesus says, and you won't find it in rule keeping religion. Instead, it's God your heavenly Father who can give you that bread of heaven. And he gives it in the one who came down from heaven.

And their response? Verse 34, "Sir, give us this bread always."

Now, if that's their response, what's yours? Because the truth is many people deny or ignore those longings, don't they. They experience a moment of transcendence before some stunning mountain scenery, or are humbled to silence by the sheer vastness of the starry night, or they have this

dawning realisation that their longing for love will never truly and totally be met by another, but they never trace that sunbeam of revelation back to the sun. They don't see what the sign is pointing to.

But if you do, Jesus says, you will be filled. Verse 35, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believe in me shall never thirst." It's the first of the seven 'I am' sayings of Jesus. I am the bread of life. I'm the one who can satisfy you, I'm the one who can meet your inner longing for eternity, for that longing to know that you are seen and that you matter; that longing for love that you've made bad choices trying to fill; that longing for something to worship that you've directed at sport stars, pop stars, or even politicians. Come to me, he says, and I will fill you.

You see, you can see Jesus and yet not see him. You can have a measure of him in your life, but still not see him for who he really is. Verse 36, "But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe." And they've seen him as a worker of miracles, who can meet their physical needs. They've seen him as a prophet, as one who speaks God's word and leaves them thinking, 'oh yeh, that makes sense, I could live my life by that teaching.' They've even seen him as a king - if he was in charge, oppression and injustice would be over - if only people followed his example the word would be a better place. And maybe for some of you, that's how you see him.

But they haven't seen him as he really is: The only one who can truly satisfy.

But what if you are coming to him for life? How can you know it's not just a spiritual flash in the pan, or a religious phase in your life? Or if you've seen a friend fall away from faith, how can you know Christ will be your life for you life?

The Security of Satisfaction

Now sometimes you can watch a film, or read a book, and there are these inside jokes, or famous lines that are lifted from some other story, and when you know that other story you know what the writers are doing and the links they're trying to get you to make.

Well, whether you've noticed it or not, from the feeding of the 5000 on, there are all these things in this account that are getting you you think of another story. The story of God rescuing Israel from slavery in Egypt and bringing them out into freedom. Because both happened at Passover. And in both bread was provided. And here the people recognised Jesus as a prophet, the prophet Moses promised would come. And Jesus goes up a mountain alone, just like Moses went up Mount Sinai alone. And Jesus walks on the sea like dry ground, like Moses and the people walked through the parted sea on dry ground. And here the people are slow to believe, just like they were slow to believe Moses in the desert.

But jump down to v40 and you'll see one more. "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

What does it mean to look on Christ and believe in him? Well, in the wilderness, after God had brought them out of slavery, the people of Israel sinned and as a form of judgment God sent a plague of snakes among them - in which multiple people died. Today, there's snake venom antidote,

back then God provided the antidote by telling Moses to make a bronze serpent, stick it on a pole, and whoever looked at that serpent lived.

In other words, when they looked at the thing made like the thing that was killing them, they lived.

Now, what has that got to do with looking at Jesus and believing? Well, that snake held up in the air was also a sign pointing to something far greater.

Because when he was lifted up on the cross, Christ became sin for us. He became the very thing that's killing us, that's robbing us of the life, and the meaning, and the eternity that we're longing for. He took upon himself all our efforts to fill that longing with things other than him. All that miss-placed worship, all those broken relationships, all that using of others; all that self-medicating; all that religious pride that demands God and others prove themselves. At the cross, he emptied himself so that we might be filled. He who knew no sin became sin for us. The One who is life itself died, so that we might live. And he was laid in a tomb that we might be raised from ours. Because his resurrection secures our resurrection.

And Jesus is saying, as you see me lifted up, look, believe, and live. And as you do, you can know not just a deep satisfaction, but a deep security. Verse 37, 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.'

Now, the fear of rejection is powerful, isn't it? It can make us do and say things we should never do, or not do and say things we should do. But when you know that whatever anyone else says and does, Christ will never reject you, it fills you with a peace and a courage like nothing else can.

You see, as you see Christ dying for you, and rising again for you; as you trust him that he's the one who can feed and fill you, you can know that you're coming to Christ because God your heavenly Father has drawn you to him. That those whom God gives to his Son, come to the Son and he will never send them away.

You see, when Jesus was crucified, he was crucified outside the city walls. He was cast out from Jerusalem, the city of God. Why? So that you might be brought in to the city. And he was cast off, that you might be held tight.

So Jesus doesn't just promise to satisfy your deepest longings for all eternity, he promises to keep you for all eternity.

So if this morning you're not yet a Christian and you realise you don't yet look at Christ and believe, and that bothers you, cry out to him that you would believe, that he would open your eyes so you *can* see. And as you do you can know you're on the right path. The Father is drawing you, so keep coming.

And if you are a Christian, and you look at him and you believe, but you recognise you've been looking to other stuff too much to fill you, confess that to him, and then thank him. Thank him for drawing you, and filling you, and keeping you.