

## Sermon

It used to be said that if you wanted to sell your house, when the prospective purchasers came round you were to have a coal fire lit in the hearth and bread baking in the oven! That gave out all the right signals about warmth, comfort, security, and good food! And the house would sell!

When Jesus says “I am the living bread” he is using a powerful image for people to grasp hold of – the picture he paints is not of the white thin-sliced supermarket bread we usually eat, but the solid, life-giving, home-made bread eaten in former generations. This bread contained many of the nutrients, vitamins, and good solid food-stuffs that are essential for life.

Jesus wants people to grasp that the life he offers is not an add-on extra, but core value that radically changes a person – working from the inside out!

***“I am the bread of life.” He says, “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”***

So what is this “life” that Jesus offers?

It really is something new.

It’s exactly this that St Paul illustrates when he writes to the Christians in Ephesus. Paul’s life was changed when he met Jesus on the Road to Damascus. He became what he could only describe as a “new” person – someone completely changed. He reminds the Ephesian Christians

that this is, in actual fact, what has happened to them. God has turned their lives around and changed them.

They were living in darkness, but now they are living in the light of Christ. Or to put it in the way that Jesus says – they were living on very meagre rations but now they are feasting on the true life-giving bread that he alone offers.

We watch the news and we are horrified by what some people do: they plant bombs, rape women, molest children; they steal, lie, cheat, and so on. We are right to be horrified but we shouldn’t be surprised. St Paul says that that is just what he would expect!

Without God people’s judgement is clouded, they are ignorant of the truth, they are insensitive to the feelings and pain of others. They think only of themselves. They give themselves over to satisfying every whim and desire that they have. Basically they are greedy – just wanting to indulge themselves. It’s a pretty terrifying list of things – thank God that many people who are not Christians are not that bad!

But tragically today Christians [and others] have forgotten that Jesus Christ changes people for the better. He makes bad people good; and greedy people generous; and hate-filled people forgiving.

Christian people are to be different – not odd! They have been given a quality of life that is attractive to others: because it comes from the inside. St Paul writes about Christian people having a “new attitude” which he says

reflects the quality of God himself: an attitude of integrity and care.

Earlier this week I was at a meeting when Roger Corbett [the CEO of Woolworths] was speaking. He was talking about what qualities he thinks are important for a Christian [as he is] who is a business leader. He gave just two and they were those I've been speaking of "care and integrity". He talked about care for colleagues, care for staff, care for customers, care for the environment – both the environment in which staff work and the wider environment in which we all live. He spoke about an open honesty so that leaders are transparent in what they do. "Care and integrity" might seem obvious and easy, but he went on to say that in order to live-out these qualities you can't take your eye off the game for a moment.

This is exactly what St Paul is saying? He spells it out simply!

He tells these Christian people – who are still young in their faith – not to live like they used to before they became Christians. He wants Jesus to change them – they are to live the "new humanity" he's been talking about in earlier chapters. He lists of four ways that will change the quality and character of our lives.

These things are simple, practical and they make a big difference!

1. **Don't tell lies, but instead tell the truth** [v25]. There is nothing like lies or falsehood to undermine trust and fellowship. We should be

attentive to speaking the truth and to countering falsehood. My Mum often used to say to me when I was in trouble, "I don't care so much about what you've done wrong, but you must tell me the truth." Christians don't lie, they tell the truth.

2. **Don't lose your temper; but instead ensure that your anger is used positively** [v26-27]. There's nothing wrong with having deep feelings about things, nothing wrong with being passionate, but we must control our anger. If there is to be radical change in the world then we need the anger of Martin Luther King against racism or Nelson Mandela against apartheid. Paul is telling us to have deep feelings, but to be in control of them. That takes practice! Repressed anger produces bitterness – even depression, but anger that is used positively can make a world of difference – for good. Christians should not lose their temper, but they should be positively passionate!
3. **Don't steal; but instead work so you can be generous** [v28]. The eighth commandment was "Don't steal" but Paul wants people to look beyond the simple prohibition and consider a positive outcome. For Paul it isn't enough just to stop stealing and so provide for your family. He wants people to be generous – to stop sponging off people, to have the satisfaction of doing honest work and then go beyond the call of duty and so generously provide for the needy. Christians will know that if we fail to be generous towards the

needy then we are really stealing from them as well!

4. **Don't use your mouth for evil; but instead use it for good** [v29-30]. Words, not only outright lies, can damage and destroy people. This is a challenge! Everyone who's lived in a village or small town knows how damaging gossip can be! Paul says that instead of hurting people with our conversation, we can speak in a manner which helps people, encourages, comforts, or cheers people. I know a man who refuses to pass on rumours about people, or even repeat bad things that are true about people. If he can't say something good, then he'll remain silent. Paul suggests that our rotten words about other people grieve the Holy Spirit of God. That should make us think! Christians will use their words carefully for the good of others.

Finally Paul summarises what he's written in this chapter:

**Don't be unkind or bitter, but instead be kind and loving** [v31-32]. The character of Christ sets before us a model which is inspiring and worth living up to. The kind and loving life is marked by forgiveness and compassion.

Our ordinary human nature makes us look inwards and think, "What can satisfy me? How can I indulge myself?" We are empty and when we indulge ourselves then for a moment we fill that emptiness.

But the life that Jesus gives is one that is kind, generous, loving and forgiving.

We can live that kind of life because he gives us the bread of life. That's why being a Christian is so important! That's why we need the Christian message so much in our society today! That's why the church must spread the good news about the way Jesus changes lives for the better!

People today are empty and hungry, but when we are satisfied by the life that God gives us, then we can look beyond ourselves and think of the needs of others.

*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

Let us pray:

Grant, O Lord,  
that we may turn from every false satisfaction  
to feed on the true and living bread  
that you have given us in Jesus Christ.  
And so may we go from here in the power of your  
Holy Spirit to live and work to your praise and  
glory. Amen.