

Good morning. I'm glad to be here. I love this church. I love the pastors of this church. I love the leaders of this church. It has been a great weekend just hanging out with some of your men. Our church in New York City, Apostles Church, is really grateful for this church in the encouragement that we have received and the council and coaching along the way. So thank you for your investment in us.

If you have a Bible, turn to John 6:25- 35. I'm just going to read a very familiar passage for some of us. In John 6, Jesus has performed quite a miracle. He has fed five thousand people with just five loaves and two fish. He has gone off now, but the people have tracked Him down. We pick it up in verse 25 where it says: "When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 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.'" Jesus then said to them, "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." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

Well I want to take this passage this morning, and I want to say a few things about it. But I want to put it in the context of what philosophers call "hyper-reality." Now there may be some philosophers in our midst who could do a better job describing hyper-reality than I can, but I just want to give it a shot this morning. Hyper-reality is an exaggerated life. It's a presentation of life that actually exceeds the reality of life. It's an embellished vision of life created by a media-drenched culture that changes our expectations. It captures our imagination and convinces us that life should be like this. Sociologist Krishan Kumar says it like this, "Our world has become so saturated with images and symbols that a new 'electronic reality' has been created, whose effect is to obliterate any sense of an objective reality lying behind the images and symbols." In other words, the images and the symbols that represent the things that stand behind them are actually overblown, exaggerated and embellished. "In this 'simulated' world, images become objects, rather than reflecting them; reality becomes hyper-reality. In hyper-reality it is no longer possible to distinguish the imaginary from the real, the true from the false." Umberto Eco calls it the "absolute fake." It's an embellished, exaggerated image that is supposed to represent an object but actually outshines the object. So hyper-reality is a world that is presented to our senses through stories, symbols and pictures, and those things that are presented to us are actually more attractive than the things they represent.

Let me give you an example of this. If you go to a bookstore, there on the magazine rack are many magazines. On the cover of those magazines are stunningly beautiful women, and those women become the cultural standards for beauty. What we don't understand or what we don't instantly notice is that that picture was taken by a professional photographer with just the right lens, just the right lighting and with a makeup artist who has decked out this woman who has covered up her blemishes. And then he takes this picture, takes it to his studio and edits it on software, adding more curves, enhancing curves, removing blemishes, puts it on the cover of a magazine and you have an embellished, exaggerated,

enhanced version of beauty that is not real. Women live under the tyranny of that because they have bought into a cultural standard of beauty that is a hyper-real standard. It is embellished. It is exaggerated. And a lot of men buy into that and keep their wives in tyranny, because they're constantly comparing them to the hyperreal visions that they see on magazine covers or in movies.

Let me give you another example of this. I live in New York City, and there are a lot of people, especially young singles, who move to New York City with sitcoms in mind of that their lives are going to look like when they get to the city. "I'm going to have a group of friends, and we're going to live in the same building, across the hall from one another. We're going to always be together. We're going to splash in fountains in our city with soundtracks in the background, and we're going to have amazing romantic experiences. And anytime we have conflict, we'll resolve it in the span of thirty minutes." And then they move to New York City and they realize, "Uh, my life isn't anything like that. I found my roommate on Craig's List, and I'm afraid to go to bed because I don't know if I'm going to wake up alive. The apartment I live in doesn't really look like the apartments I saw in the sitcoms. Because those apartments had more than one room. My apartment has a room, one room. . .with a sink in the corner. . .and I'm using the bathroom down the hall." So it's this overblown vision of what life is like in the city. And then you get there and you experience incredible disappointment, because it's not quite like that. That was an embellished version, an exaggerated vision of what life is like in New York City.

I come from a broken family. I'll spare you all the gory details, but I grew up in that context watching The Cosby Show. When I watched The Cosby Show, I'm like, "Yes, that's what a family is supposed to be!" I had this vision of family life of, "One day, I'm going to have a family like that." Here's the problem with that. He was a doctor, she was a lawyer. . .and they were always home. Did you notice that? That's not reality. And their kids rarely defied them. The husband and wife, Claire and Cliff, always went to bed happy, hugging, laughing, giggling. If you're married, you know that's not reality. You were presented this vision of family life. And then maybe you got married and had kids, and you realized, "Our life is not really like that, because we have family crisis, we suffer trials, we have kids who defy us and we don't always go to bed happy and laughing." I started showing my kids The Cosby Show on Netflix instant. And they used to actually like our family. But now they're like, "Why don't we have a family like that? We're poor." We're not poor. We're just not a doctor and a lawyer. So it's just this exaggerated vision of life.

It starts when you're a kid and little girls watch these Disney movies where beautiful girls fall in love with a handsome prince, they get married and they live "happily ever after." There is really no hint of marital conflict, a messy house, difficult kids, bills, medical emergencies, seasons of suffering or even despair. So hyper-reality is a life where the exaggerated gets portrayed as normative. "This is what life is supposed to be like. This is just normal life." Everywhere you look, you see hyper-reality, a mirage of life that inflates and overextends our expectations about what life is supposed to be like, how we're supposed to look, the kinds of effortless relationships that we're supposed to have, the money we're supposed to make, the toys and gadgets we're supposed to own, the exotic places we're supposed to travel to, the sexual experience that we're supposed to enjoy and the swank and exhilarating things that we're supposed to be constantly experiencing if we're going to have a life that is happy and fulfilled. That is hyper-reality.

And I wonder today where you may have bought into it. It may be a hyper-real version of marriage, a hyper-real version of your career. It may even be hyper-real version of the Christian life where you're sold a bill of goods often by TV preachers who tell you that becoming a Christian means that your life is not full of prosperity, health and wealth and there's not mention of persecution, no mention of suffering, no mention of God withholding healing. Maybe there's a hyper-real version of the Christian faith that's happening in your mind. But where have you bought into hyper-reality?

Here's the problem with hyper-reality. It creates an intense discontentment in our lives. Hyper-reality creates a disdain for the ordinary, for the mundane and for the everyday routine, and it creates in you a craving for the extraordinary, the

exotic, the cool, the sexy and the glamorous. We get bored with what's normal. We get discontent with the things that are in our lives because they hyper-real version of life is so much greater, grander and more glamorous than the one we're experiencing. So discontentment settles in. We start to just have a disdain for the ordinary and the normal.

I recently saw this. Disney and Forever 21 gave Minnie Mouse a makeover. Check this out. They gave Minnie Mouse a makeover, and the Disney Consumer Products says that the new style, "is fresh and portrays Minnie Mouse in a way no one has ever seen her before, leggy, modern and glamorous." See for yourself:

Now I was doing some research on this, and I was reading a blog called "The Disney Chick." I don't typically read The Disney Chick Blog, so don't judge me. I was just doing some study. And listen to what the Disney Chick writes.

*Sorry, but "Minnie Mouse Off to the Runway" looks like she is on her way back from getting wasted at a Fashion Week after party. The crooked bow, the heavy lids, the off-kilter stance - you've been doing something naughty, haven't you, Minnie? And is she not wearing any pants? Did they actually go so far as to give Minnie white legs? (Minnie, being a mouse, would actually have black legs to match her face.) Or are they supposed to be leggings, which are never - never - an acceptable substitute for pants, and no "glamorous" women would ever wear them as such?*

And if you're wearing leggings this morning, I'm just quoting. All I'm doing is quoting. I don't make fun of people for what they wear. She goes on to write here:

*More distressing, this incarnation of Minnie removes the "mouse" entirely. Apparently no one at Disney or Forever 21 realized that the reason no one has ever seen Minnie as being "leggy" before is because SHE IS A MOUSE. Humans have long leggy legs. Mice do not. Mice-people are creepy.*

*I could write a whole separate post on the problem that Leggy Modern Glamorous Minnie Mouse poses in the message she sends to her target audience, mainly impressionable teenage girls. The stick-insect legs, the heavy makeup, the stilettos - the next thing you know, Minnie will be hanging out with Jessica Rabbit and smoking cigarettes behind the school with the Bratz dolls.*

But do you see what has happened here? We took Minnie and we have to sex her up, glam her up, cool her up, hip her up, fashion her up. Why? Because our culture has grown bored with what's normal, and it has created a hyper-real version of life. It's embellished, it's glamorous and it's glitzed up, and hyper-reality ends up creating this great discontent in us. It presents the glamorous, sexy, exotic, exciting, racy and spectacular as the new benchmark for what is normal. This is the benchmark for our lives. So we end up comparing our everyday, normal, routine lives that are marked by commitment, responsibility and the kinds of things that every generation has and it compares our lives to this hyper-real world. So we have our live and this inflated version of life sold to us by TV, movies, celebrities, advertisers, billboards, red carpets, music videos and commercials, and it just creates this perpetual discontent in us that "Our life must be boring, it's bland, it's ordinary, it's simple, it's everyday, it's routine and it's just marked by responsibilities, obligations and commitments." And this discontentment sets in and we start to wonder, "Man, am I really getting everything out of life? Is there something I'm missing?"

And we don't even need celebrities to compare our lives to because we have social media. So we're always comparing our lives to the edited, digital lives of our peers and friends, wondering if we're missing out on something. In my city, we have a thing called "party envy" and "party anxiety." People actually feel anxiety over whether or not they're at the right party, and they're constantly comparing their Facebook status, their Twitter posts with everyone else's status. They get status anxiety, party anxiety, wondering, "Am I with the right people, at the right place, doing the right things and wearing

the right stuff?" It's just this perpetual discontentment that settles in on us so that we live in constant state of, "I will be happy when \_\_\_\_."

Mark Sayers wrote a book called *The Trouble with Paris* where he talks about hyperreality. He says: "Hyper-reality is an 'I will be happy when \_\_\_\_' existence. The space following the "when" will be different from everyone and will constantly change, but the principle of postponing happiness is the same for everyone who operates in the hyper-real world. So no matter how affluent or comfortable our lives become, we will always be looking over our shoulder at something better. In many ways, this 'I will be happy when \_\_\_\_' culture becomes the ultimate addiction culture as people enter the addictive, downward spiral, always needing a bigger hit to satisfy the growing cravings and becoming less free in the process." Now I'm sure there are some here this morning who would say, "That's me. I live in that world. I'm constantly discontent, constantly comparing my life to everyone else's life, constantly comparing my marriage to a hyperreal version of marriage, constantly comparing my bank accounts to a hyper-real version of bank accounts, constantly comparing my children to a hyper-real version of other people's children. My experiences, my sex life, my relationships, my money, everything is compared to a hyper-real version." And we just live in this continual state of comparison, measuring our lives up against a hyper-real version of life that creates this perpetual discontent in us.

And typically the way our culture handles this discontent is not to renounce an exaggerated expectation of a hyper-real world. That's not how we handle it. We handle it by shopping. You're discontent? Go buy something. So now what we have is a hyperreal world who's created a perpetual discontent in our hearts, exploiting that sinful tendency in us already, and then we try to resolve it in our culture through consumerism. Consumerism is an attempt to fulfill this hyper-real vision of life. Happiness, personal fulfillment, satisfaction can be purchased. So to feel good about yourself, to feel like your life counts, to make the most of it, to feel like you're visible, like you're valuable in this hyper-real world, you need to have the right look, buy the right clothes, have the right shades, the right accessories, take the right exotic vacations and to be fulfilled, happy and relevant. Hyper-reality tells you that you need to be in the right places, with the right people, doing the right things, with the right clothes. It's all about consumption, consuming goods, consuming experiences, consuming people. And marketers know this. They prey upon our perpetual discontent. They present products to us, experiences to us, exotic destinations to us that tell us, "This will finally bring you freedom from your discontentment." We live in a hyper-real world full of marketers selling us these things.

So I know that all this is now starting to birth some questions in you. Some of you have a nagging question in your heart right now. I know you're wanting me to answer it. Here's the burning, nagging question I think that all of us are facing right now. What does any of this have to do with John 6?

You see, I think John 6 is very relevant to this cultural milieu that we find ourselves in. Because Jesus addresses our consumerism in this passage. Jesus not only addresses our consumerism, He invites us out of hyper-reality and into God's reality. So in John 6, Jesus performed this miracle where He fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. And now the people, they like that. They like the fact that He fed them, He filled their bellies. And so they come looking for Him, and when they find Him, Jesus exposes their motives. He says in verse 26, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, . . ." He says, "You're not following Me because you're convinced of who I am. You're not seeking Me because you saw the signs and know I'm the Messiah, the Savior of the world, your only hope. You're not coming to me because of who I am. You're coming to Me because of what I can give you. You've coming to Me because of a consumeristic itch, hoping I'll scratch it. You want more food, you want more bread and you want your bellies filled again. You're consumers." And so Jesus exposes their consumerism and tells them what He tells a hyper-real world that we live in today that is trapped in consumerism, "Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you." And so Jesus is talking to these people who were trapped in consumerism, who might have a hyper-real experience of what religion is supposed to be or what the Messiah

is supposed to be. Remember that they had all these expectations about a Messiah. "He's going to come to rescue us from Rome, establish the kingdom and we're going to be the global power that God intends us to be." And that was a hyperreal vision of what God would do at the time. He was going to do it, but at the time they had an exaggerated, inflated expectation of the Messiah and His first coming. They created this consumerism. "Hey, You're the king who is going to set up Your kingdom. The kingdom is going to come, and it's going to flow with milk and honey. There is going to be bread for everybody in the kingdom." And Jesus addresses this consumerism and says, "Don't work for food that perishes." In other words, "Don't spend your energy, don't spend your live, don't spend your resources pursuing and hoping in experiences that actually have a shelf life and can't sustain your soul's joy." Jesus says, "Don't expend your life pursuing and hoping in these experiences, hoping that you'll satisfy you." Because we know they won't. We know this food perishes. We know all the things that a hyper-real world promises us to alleviate our discontentment, those things are food that perishes.

The novel gets old, today's fashion is just tomorrow's Good Will drop off, the trip ends and all your left with are pictures and credit card debt. This constant attempt to maintain the feelings you felt when you were there at that destination spot, the sexual experience afterward can quickly become this emotional detonation of regret, shame, insecurity and false hopes, because you were expecting something that was never promised to you by that person. That's food that perishes. Food that perishes does not ultimately satisfy. It does not ultimately cure us of our perpetual discontentment by bringing a contentment into our lives. It's food that perishes. Now I'm not saying that trips are bad, I'm not saying that fashion is bad or that any of that is bad. What I'm saying is, those things will ultimately fail us if we put our hope in them to cure our perpetual discontentment from promoted by a hyper-real culture. It's food that perishes.

Jesus says, "Don't labor for food that perishes. Labor for the food that endures, that doesn't have a shelf life. A joy that's deep, meaningful, lasting and eternal, it's food, it's bread that gives life." And Jesus says, "That bread is Me. I am the bread of life." Now in the Greek, there are two words for "life." There is bios. We get biology from it. It just means organisms, living life. It's just means "existence of life." And then there's the word zoe. Zoe means "life to its fullest." Hyper-reality is trying to sell you a version of zoe that is an inflated version that lies to us. It can't secure it. Jesus says He's the bread of zoe, the full life, meaningful life, abundant life, fulfilled life and eternal life. Jesus says, "It's not found in anything hyper-reality is selling you. It's found in Me." He's the One who gives life to the world. Now here's the contrast that is set up. The food that perishes, the food that hyper-reality is selling you and creating this perpetual discontent that leads to consumerism, that kind of bread perishes. You have to labor for that bread, but it perishes. But then Jesus says, "Labor for the food that I will give to you." You see, consumerism says, "If you want to have life, you've got to exert your energy, you've to deplete your resources." You have to go broke in an attempt to find the life that consumerism promises you. But Jesus says, "No, I'm the bread of life that will be given to you. You don't have to deplete your resources. You don't have to exert your energy. You don't have to go broke to have this bread. In fact, I'll exert My energy. I'll deplete My resources. You don't have to go broke for this. This bread will be broken for you. You don't have to earn it, work for it, labor over it. You have to receive it. I'll give it to you." You see, consumerism says, "You've got to find life at cost to yourself." Jesus says, "I'll give you life at cost to Myself. I'll be broken so that you can be made whole. I'll be cast out so that you may be brought in. I'll be condemned so that you can be forgiven. I'll be rejected so that you can be accepted. I'm the Son of God, but I'll be treated like an enemy of God so that you, who are the enemies of God, can be treated like sons and daughters of God. I'll do this at cost to Me, not cost to you." Jesus says, "Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you." That is the generosity of this great God.

Here's the other problem with hyper-reality. It's all surface. There's just an unbearable lightness to it. It's all about form, it's all about image, it's all about surface and it distracts us from the deeper and weightier things of this life. Hyper-reality never touches on the deep, weighty and meaningful things of this life. Hyper-reality doesn't think about God, sin

or alienation. It doesn't think about guilt, shame, fear, confusion or brokenness. It doesn't think about our brokenness, the world's brokenness. It doesn't think about things like injustice, oppression, death, judgment or eternity. Hyper-reality doesn't have the courage or the resources to address those things. It wants to stay on the surface of things like cool, sexy, glamorous, hip, chic and exotic. It wants to stay on the surface of all these things but never deals with the ultimate issues of life like God, sin, guilt, shame, alienation, judgment, death, heaven and hell. It doesn't touch on these things, not at all.

But Jesus is the bread of life. He is God's answer to all of this. He is God's answer to a hyper-real world that doesn't have the guts, the courage or the substance to ask the questions that need to be asked. Jesus is the bread of life. He is the answer to all of this. In Him, we have forgiveness. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Our guilt is removed. Our shame is removed. In Him, we have adoption, so that we could become sons and daughters of God who are safe in the hands of God. In Him, we can have peace because we know that God is for us. And if God is for us, who can stand against us. If He did not spare His own Son but willingly gave Him up for us, will He not graciously give us all things (Romans 8:31-32)? We know He's for us, so there's peace because He's working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28). Jesus is wisdom to guide us, so that we don't have to live our life in confusion. He is wealth to provide for us. He is strength to help us persevere through suffering and trial. Jesus is our example and gives us the inward counsel of His Holy Spirit that He has purchased for us by His cross. It is the Holy Spirit who leads us in the way of Jesus, so we know how to handle relationships, we know how to handle money, we know how to handle sex, we know how to handle power and we know how to handle our enemies. Jesus gives us all of this to us. And here's why He is the bread of life. He gives us the assurance that, thought we die, we will not perish. Though death slay us, He will raise us. Jesus is the bread of life that answers all the questions that hyper-reality is afraid to ask. And we're not just in Christ sitting around waiting for heaven, but He gives us a people to belong to, a purpose to embrace. We have something bigger to live for than name brands, consumerism and amusement. In fact, He frees us from living for the world's goods and unleashes us to live for the world's good. He gives us this great purpose. Hyper-reality is all about the world's good, and Jesus and His kingdom are all about the world's good. This is the life He invites us into. So this bread of isn't anything hyper-reality can sell you. It's someone who is not of this world who was broken for the world and gives life to the world.

So Jesus invites these people out of hyper-reality, out of consumerism and into God's reality of having Jesus, having this bread of life. And He invites them to response, not to work but to believe, to give up on every other savior they would be tempted to trust in. All of us are looking for a savior. We want someone to rescue us from guilt, from shame, from insecurity, from boredom, from our seeming invisibility, from our sense of worthlessness and from our own brokenness. And to believe in Jesus means that we've given up on every other savior, we're trusting in Him and pushing all the chips in the middle of the table and saying, "I'm putting everything on Him. I'm closing with Him. I'm settling with Him. I'm fully embracing Him." Now notice the language of full embrace. Flip on ahead to verse 47. Notice the language that Jesus uses when He talks about believing in Him or coming to Him. Starting in verse 27, Jesus says, "'Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.' The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.'" This sounds like something out of Twilight. What's going on here? What's He talking about? When Jesus is talking about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, He is talking about the full appropriation of all that He is, not simply tasting Jesus but really fully appropriating Him into our lives. He's talking about a full embrace, a continual feasting. Jesus is

describing a continual feasting on all that He is. This is not casual. This is not flippant. This is not a spasm of belief or mental assent. This is a continuous conviction in Jesus that results in a full embrace of who He is and a full embrace of His way. This is what it means to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of God. It's to be so convinced that life is found in Him that you fully digest Him, you fully embrace Him, you fully give yourself to Him with full conviction. This is what gives us life.

Now when we talk about this full embrace, what Jesus is inviting people into is covenant. He's actually using the language of a covenantal meal, the Passover, taking bread and wine. So this is the language of covenant, a full embrace of Jesus, to enter into covenant with Him, to experience covenantal living under the rule and reign of God. Now we've been talking about covenant with our men this weekend here at the Village, and this idea of a covenant being an unbreakable and unchanging commitment. And when Jesus is inviting us into this, He's inviting us into vertical covenant. He's saying, "I want you to live in covenant with Me and the Father and to have this covenant sealed with the Holy Spirit." So enter into covenant with the Triune God, living in covenant with God, delighting in His promises, responding to Him in faithfulness. And Jesus models this perfectly for us. Look at verse 38 of John 6. "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me." Jesus models perfectly for us what it means to live in covenant with the Father. We don't do our will. This isn't about our will. This is about us yielding ourselves to the Lordship of Christ and being fully committed to the will and way of God. This is what it means to fully embrace Jesus, to enter into covenant with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit and say, "Not my will, but Your will be done." Jesus modeled this perfectly. This is the way He lived His life. He did all that was in the Father's heart for Him to do. He carried out covenantal living under the reign of His Father. So the night before His death, He looks into the cup of God's wrath against our sin and says, "Father, if there's any other way, let this cup pass before Me. Yet not My will be done but Your will be done." This is covenantal living, to say, "Not my will but You will be done."

Now remember Jesus is addressing this to a group of people who aren't thinking in those terms. They're thinking in terms of consumerism. Consumerism says, "I come to Jesus, and He gives me what I want. I've got some desires, some appetites, some cravings, a consumeristic itch and some dreams and hopes I want fulfilled. I'll go to Jesus and maybe He'll give them to me." That's treating Jesus as a means to your own end, instead of treating Jesus as the ultimate end. That's saying to Jesus, "I want to come to You because of what I think You'll do for me or what You might give to me," instead of coming to Jesus for who He is. Instead of coming to Him and saying, "This is what I want from You," it's coming to Him and saying, "I want You. You're the food. You're the drink. You're the bread. You're the wine. You're life. And so I want You." I'm not coming to Him with my hands full of dreams saying, "Jesus, help me fulfill my dreams." I'm coming to Him empty-handed saying, "Jesus, I don't want to lay a hold of anything but You, and I want You to weave dreams, purposes and intentions into my heart. But I'm coming empty-handed. You're not the means. You're the end." This is what covenantal living is like. It's saying to Jesus Christ, "I'm not coming to You for what I can get from You. I'm coming to You to get You. You are the prize. You are the treasure. You're the end, and I want You, no matter what means I've got to take. No matter what I've got to die to, not matter what I have to leave behind, no matter what I have to forsake and repent of, by any means, I want You as my end." That's what it means to fully embrace Jesus, not coming as a consumer but coming in covenant with Him and saying, "I want You to be the end of all things for me." And so Jesus is inviting us into this vertical covenantal living that abandons consumerism. The only hope of finding the cure for perpetual discontentment is not in consuming the products of a hyper-real world, but it's in receiving the bread that Jesus gives us Himself.

Now Jesus is also going to point us to a horizontal element of this covenant. Look at what He says in verse 37. He says, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." Do you know what this means? Do you know what Jesus is saying? Jesus is saying, "When you come to Me, you're going to find a God fully committed to you." He says, "When you come to Me, I will not cast you out. I will never cast you out. I'm fully devoted

to you. I'm going to be broken for you. When you come to me, I'm not going to cast you out. I've given Myself fully for you, and I fully embrace you, even as you fully embrace Me. I'll never cast you out. I'll never turn you away." So the best way for us to reflect a covenant keeping God to this world is to be covenant keeping people. The best way to say to the world, "This is what our God is like" is to live as covenant people who keep covenant with God by being faithful to Him and keep covenant with one another by actually being committed to each other, by saying, "Just as Jesus does not cast me out when I perform poorly, I'm not going to cast you out when you perform poorly." You see, consumerism is rooted in a radical individualism, and radical individualism says, "I want minimum commitment with maximum return." That's the life of consumerism. But a life of covenant says, "I'm giving you maximum commitment even when I get minimum return." Isn't that what God has done for us? Hasn't He given us maximum commitment? In the Son of God coming for us, being broken for us, bearing our sins, dying in our place, taking on the full fury of the wrath of God so that you could know the acceptance and love of God, hasn't He shown full commitment to you? But doesn't He often times get minimal results from us? And yet even when we're faithless, He is faithful. This is what it means to be a covenant-keeping God. He gives maximum commitment to us, even when He gets minimum results from us, minimum return from us. And He says, "I want you to reflect that kind of heart to this world, by being a covenant keeping people.

You see, in a hyper-real world of consumerism and radical individualism we see a breakdown of this kind of life, a breakdown of covenant. We live in a world that has been called a post-covenantal culture desperately afraid of commitment when there may be minimum return. It's a consumeristic culture. We're seeing this in marriage. We're seeing a lot of young men delay marriage. And do you know why women are delaying marriage? Because men aren't pursuing them for marriage. We have a lot of men who are delaying marriage. Why are they delaying marriage? Because of a fear of commitment, an extended adolescence, wanting to play video games, wanting to spend their money on their own stuff and wanting to entertain themselves to death, yet they're not willing to step up and say, "I'm going to be a covenant-keeping man who marries a woman, stays committed to her, raises children and embraces responsibility" something every culture has considered a great joy, except our own. We're seeing a breakdown of this kind of covenant. We see it in marriage. The New York Times recently had an article called, "The Happy Marriage Is the 'Me' Marriage." Here's what Tera Parker-Pope says in her article. She writes, "in modern relationships, people are looking for a partnership, and they want partners who make their lives more interesting. [A couple of professors at a university in New Jersey] have studied how individuals use a relationship to accumulate knowledge and experiences, a process called 'self-expansion.' Research shows that the more self-expansion people experience from their partner, the more committed and satisfied they are in the relationship." Now there is some truth to that, and there are some okay things about that, but did you hear the language? We use relationships for our own self-expansion and our own well being and our own personal happiness. Again, it's consumerism. It's using people to build up and enhance your life instead of saying, "I will lay my life down to build up and enhance someone else's life." It's consumerism.

Apple Inc. is genius. Because when Steve Jobs talks about one of their products, he doesn't use the definite article. He doesn't say, "The iPad or the iPhone..." He says, "iPad does this. iPhone does that." He speaks of the iPad and the iPhone as if it's a person. Now the reason they do that is because Apple is kind of a cult, but it's actually kind of genius. You take commodities and you personalize them. But you know what I've discovered? The flip side of that is true as well. What we're seeing is the commodification of persons. We're beginning to treat people like goods that we consume for our own joy and pleasure. So we use people. We don't enter into relationships saying, "How can I enhance this person? What can I bring to this relationship to make this person more of what God dreams and intends them to be?" We ask the question, "What can I get out of this?" That is not the question of a covenantal God, and it's not to be the question of covenantal people. Consumerism trumps covenant in our culture. We're seeing this breakdown of relationships, post-covenantal attitudes expressing themselves in various ways, anti-commitment allergic to responsibility. We see it when it comes to language of spirituality. So we talk about church shopping, as if the church is a place that doles out religious goods and services. So it's, "Go where the product is the best. Go where the music is the best. Go where the preaching

is best. Go where the kid's stuff is the best. Go where the youth stuff is the best. Go where is the best programs and the best products." But it's not a commodity. It's a people that you enter into covenant with and say, "We're going to join our hands together, lay our lives down for one another, love each other, serve one another and not cast each other out when we perform poorly but give ourselves fully to one another for the sake of Christ's mission here on this earth." We're a people who are in community and covenant, not consumers. But this is the way we are. "As long as you're helping me, as long as you're bringing something to the table, everything is good. But the minute the relationship becomes difficult, the minute I feel like you're a threat to my personal fulfillment and expansion, the relationship gets terminated." The church is to be the one place on this earth, the buttress and pillar of truth and faithfulness where covenant gets clearly defined and displayed.

So let me wrap this up by asking a question. Why is it devastating for us to buy into hyper-reality and become a people who are consumers and choose consumerism over covenant with God, the bread of life, and one another? The further you move away from covenant, the further you move away from becoming this person of covenant who lives in covenant with Jesus Christ, the full embrace of who He is and lives in covenant with His people, the further you move away from covenant, the further you move away from being Christ-like. The further you move away from being Christ-like, the further you move away from your intended humanity, and you diminish as a person. You don't grow as a person through consumerism. You might increase the number of goods and valuables you own, but you diminish as a person. Consumerism cannot cause you to increase as a person. Only covenant can do that, because that's the kind of God we have, and that's the image in which you were created not to be consumers, but to live in covenant with God and live in covenant with His people. So subvert hyper-reality by calling it what it is. It's a mirage and a culture who continually craves more. Call it out, subvert it as a mirage, renounce the food that perishes and choose the bread that endures through eternal life. Entering the covenant with Jesus Christ and entering a covenant with His people, it's what you're made for. Embrace Jesus, embrace community and embrace His mission. Let me pray for us to that end. "God, take these words, massage them deep into our hearts. I pray that the people of the Village would be people of covenant who say to you, 'Not our will, but Your will be done.' I pray that they be people who are ready to give maximum commitment to one another, even when they see minimal return. I pray, God, that You would free them from the mirage of hyper-reality and help them step into Your reality that Jesus Christ has come, He's been broken for us, His blood has been shed and poured out that we might have food and drink that endures to eternal life. God, work this in our hearts for Your glory, for our joy and the city's good. We pray in Christ's name. Amen."