

John – I Am
Part 1
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I am going to ask you to turn in your Bible to John's Gospel Chapter 6. And if you did not bring your Bible with you (it is always good to do so; it's important you know I'm telling you what's here and not making things up because you are not able to check it out) and there are Bibles in the pews, slightly different translation, but covering the same ground.

And before I read to you from John Chapter 6 let me just say that I am going to be looking over a number of weeks at the "I Am" statements that Jesus makes about Himself in the Gospel of John.

He says in John 6 "I am the bread of life." We will talk about that one this morning. Bread is the staple fundamental food in various forms all over the world. And in John 8 He said, "I am the light of the world."

John 10: "I am the door. I am the good shepherd."

John 11: "I am the resurrection and the life."

John 14: "I am the way, the truth and the life."

John 15: "I am the vine and you are the branches."

And these statements are not about the words of Jesus, nor about the works of Jesus, but about Jesus Himself. "This is the role I Myself play," He is saying. "I am these things."

Moses once asked God to give him His name, you remember, at the burning bush. "Who are You?"

God said, "I AM WHO I AM."

"This is what you say to the people. I AM has sent you to them."

That's what God said to Moses. And from that we have our English name for God, Jehovah or Yahweh.

It is not an easy word to translate for several reasons. But it is the eternal present tense nature of God and of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore He is stating His deity when He said in John 8:58,

"Before Abraham was, I am!"

And they tried to stone Him, understandably.

But these statements we are going to look at over several weeks are about His role for us and His role in us.

Christianity makes no real sense until we know that Christ is, Himself, the content, the essential content of the Christian life. It is not a creed that we simply ascribe to. Not doctrine that we hold onto. Not simply a belief system or a lifestyle.

Now of course doctrine is important, but it is like the skeleton of a body that's necessary. Our experience of God, our lives, are the flesh that cover that skeleton. But you can have a skeleton covered in flesh lying in a coffin if it is devoid of the life that gives it its energy and its power and its purpose and its meaning.

And Jesus Christ is Himself that life. He isn't just a giver of life; He is the life that He gives. And that's what makes Christianity more than a religion, more than an ethic, more than a lifestyle, more than the empty dream of an idealist. It is that Christ Himself is God's gift to us.

And so Jesus doesn't say, "I will feed you the bread of life". He says, "I am the bread of life."

Not, "I will switch on the light for you" but "I am the light of the world."

Not, "I will open the door," but "I am the door."

Not, "I will show you the way," but "I am the way."

Not, "I will teach you the truth," but "I am the truth."

Not, "I will give you the light" – "I am the light."

And so on.

Now each of these "I am" statements require a response. None of them are passive.

To say, "I am the bread of life" means we have to know what it is to eat that bread. You can push your nose up against a bakery window and see the beautiful bread and even smell its aroma but that's of no use to you.

You can come to church and we can sing the praises of Jesus Christ, we can talk about Him, we can celebrate Him and be of absolutely no use at all.

We have to eat the bread.

If "I am the light," we have to walk in the light.

If "I am the door," we have to know what is the door from and to, and we have to go through it.

If “I am the vine,” we have to know what it is to abide in the vine, and live in union with Him.

So in each of these messages I am going to just have two simple things I want to talk about.

First of all, His provision – what does it mean, “I am,” in today’s case, “I am the bread of life”?

And secondly, our participation – how do I eat the bread of life and become a beneficiary of it?

Now let me read then from John Chapter 6, and I am going to read from Verse 25 to 35, though I will refer to other parts of this chapter because this whole chapter really is built around this.

In John 6:25, the context for this is that Jesus has just fed the 5,000 people, then He has crossed over Galilee, a crowd has followed Him. They have caught up with Him now in Capernaum and we pick up the story here in Verse 25:

“When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, ‘Rabbi, when did you get here?’

“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.

“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.’

“Then they asked him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’

“Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’

“So they asked him, ‘What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?’

“Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

“Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who 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.’

“‘Sir,’ they said, ‘from now on give us this bread.’”

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

Keep your Bible open there. Jesus and His disciples – Jesus and the Jews, should I say - are talking on two different levels and not being understood.

I remember seeing a YouTube video on one occasion and it was of a man sitting in the control room of the German coastguard. And while he was sitting in there a mayday message came through. “We are sinking! We are sinking!”

And the German coastguard said, “This is the German Coastguard; what can I do for you?”

“We are sinking, we are sinking!”

He said, “What are you sinking about?”

Now I tell you that because you can be talking in cross purposes - two people having the same conversation talking about totally different things but using words that overlap, but which have a very different meaning.

That is what is happening here in Chapter 6 of John. Jesus has just fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish. And some of the folks were so impressed with that they followed Him across the lake, searched Him out in Capernaum and Jesus said to them,

“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.”

You totally missed the point, He is saying. This was a sign, this miracle was a sign, but you are not interested in the sign, which is pointing to somebody else; you are only interested in the free lunch and you are hoping to get some more. That’s why you have come across the lake.

They had become obsessed with the immediate benefit but have failed to read the sign and see what it was pointing to.

If you were driving off to a town you didn’t know and weren’t quite sure how to get there, you are a little bit lost and you come across a sign that points to the town, you breathe a sigh of relief. But you don’t then stop your car and camp at the sign. Yet this is what Jesus says to the Jewish people they are doing.

“You have been so taken up with the sign you are not following it to where it’s pointing.”

The Jews had seen the sign and they thought this was the end product. And you know we can do that in our Christian life as well.

We can be looking for free meals from Jesus – that’s really the benefit of Jesus to us. They saw Him as the great provider. Others saw Him as the great physician. They looked to Him for the instantaneous provision of need, for the removal of problems, for the healing of diseases, for the multiplying of resources.

But they live on that shallow, superficial level that only thinks in terms of physical wellbeing and doesn't see beyond that these physical images, these physical activities are all pointers to something much, much deeper spiritually.

It is hard to portray spiritual truths in spiritual terms – it's very hard to do so because they seem ethereal, they seem mystical, they seem fanciful, the natural human mind is blind to spiritual truths, the Scriptures tell us.

And so Jesus again and again talks in material terms to portray spiritual truths. He talks about life and we understand what life is physically. He talks about death, He talks about food, He talks about water. He talks about light. And we understand what all these things are in the physical world but through them He is portraying spiritual truths, His parables, His miracles all doing that.

And of course one key to teaching is you teach what people don't know in the light of what they do know. So you start what they do know and then you try and take them beyond that to something fresh.

But these Jewish people to whom Jesus was speaking were locked in on the material and physical and did not allow themselves to go beyond that or see beyond that.

You see our physical needs all express deeper needs of the soul. We have a hunger for love that no other human being can completely satisfy because we are designed to experience the love of God deep within our souls.

There is a hunger for intimacy of soul that we have that no sexual experience can ever meet on a physical level.

We have a hunger for security that all the money in the world cannot provide us with because these are physical expressions of a spiritual need.

Augustine in the 5th Century wrote (this is a famous statement of his); he said to God,

“You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.”

That's why every one of us in this building has a restless soul designed to be such so that we might seek for the only way in which our souls can be brought to peace, which is through Jesus Christ.

Jesus talked about food, about bread. Do you remember when He met the woman of Samaria? He talked to her in very similar terms about water, quenching her thirst. You remember He was travelling from Judea up to Galilee, came through Samaria, found this lady at the well. He asked her for some water, engaged her in conversation and you find this in John's Gospel and Chapter 4 and in Verse 13. Jesus said to her,

“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will be in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

And her response is, “You don’t have a bucket. How can You give me some water?”

She responded only in the physical terms. “You need a bucket to get some water. Where is this magic water that You are talking about?”

But Jesus was talking to a woman who had transpired in the next few verses, had been married five times, and was now living with a boyfriend.

And Jesus did not give her a lecture on marriage and divorce or a lecture on promiscuous sex or criticize her for living together with her latest man because these were only symptoms of a deeper need.

And as Jake said to us in the communion time, if you see the symptoms but don’t know the cause, it can be scary. You just play with symptoms.

And a good physician looks at your symptoms in order to trace it back to a cause.

And Jesus is identifying in this woman, “you are thirsty but the thirst is not for more buckets of water. This thirst is something deep in your heart. You can go on drinking this water,” He said “and you will be thirsty again. You can go through another five men. You can go through another fifty men. And every time you meet a new one probably your heart springs to life and you say, ‘At last, I think I have found him.’ But you will become disillusioned and disappointed because this water will never satisfy you.”

Now these physical material things, relationships, marriage, love, sex, all these things are part of God’s provision for us but as repeatedly in the New Testament when Paul speaks about marriage, he always says don’t look at the marriage as an end in itself. It is a portrayal of something much richer and deeper. Christ is the bridegroom, we are the bride. This is what it’s really about if you want to satisfy your need for love and belonging and contentedness.

And this thirsty lady, like all thirsty people, had been drinking dirty water. You see thirsty people drink dirty water. I have seen them in parts of the world where they drink stuff that would probably kill me, but they drink it.

Hungry people will eat junk food and so many of us get our lives into a mess, not because we are intentionally rebellious or awkward or difficult, because actually we are hungry and we’re thirsty. But we are trying to satisfy those appetites in all the wrong places.

As G.K. Chesterton wrote, “*A man going into a brothel is looking for God.*”

But he has replaced this physical intimacy he is looking for and won't find there, of course, but he has substituted that for something much deeper – his soul, his spirit needs to be intertwined with God Himself. That's the real hunger of his heart.

When Jesus speaks of being the bread of life He presupposes, of course, that there is a hunger, there is an appetite.

And these people had confused the physical one for the deeper one. “You are not looking for me,” He said in Verse 26 “because you saw the miraculous signs, because you ate the loaves and had your full. You didn't see the sign and say, ‘Well, how do I follow this sign to find the true bread? No, you have come and you want to see another miracle.’”

It is like Herod. When Jesus was taken before Herod before His crucifixion, he said, “I hear You are a miracle worker. I would love to have a magic show. Just do some things for me. Go on; just do a bit of magic.”

And Jesus refused to do anything or even say anything because “you totally misunderstand what this is about.”

And because they didn't read the sign and follow it and stopped at the sign, Jesus, in effect, says to them, “You have turned Him into a baker and a fishmonger – very successful one – but that is your level of Jesus.”

We need these material things. We need these physical things. Feeding 5,000 with loaves and fishes was in itself a wonderful thing, of course, for those who benefit, but here is something so much more and deeper.

And life can never be fulfilled only in this physical arena. Paul later speaks about this in Philippians Chapter 3. He talks about those whose god is their stomach. And then he says their minds are on earthly things.

So you haven't got anything else to live for except comfort, satisfaction, experience. We need our spiritual eyes open to the deeper things that all of us have and that we can find and enjoy and experience outside and apart from many of the physical things that we are all craving for because that is the real food.

The crowd didn't get that and Jesus rebuked them. So they asked in Verse 30,

“What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?”

That's interesting. He has just fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish with lots left over. They had been witnesses to this. This is the crowd who crossed the lake to follow Him. And they still say, “Give us some miraculous sign then. Let's see another miracle. You know we were impressed last time; let's see another one.”

And then they say to Jesus, “We can go one better than You in our history” because in Verse 31,

“Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

“Our forefathers also experienced the multiplication of bread.” But the effect of this is to say, “But it was much more impressive than what You just did yesterday.”

“It was provided for our forefathers not just once, but every day for forty years.”

I did the math this week – that’s 14,600 consecutive days. Not for 5,000 people but for 600,000 fighting men over the age of 20 plus their wives and their children – at least 2 million of them.

“Moses fed our people for 14,000 days, 2 million people. So come on, You do something now.”

And Jesus said to them in Verse 32,

“I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who 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.’

“‘Sir,’ they said, ‘from now on give us this bread.’

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

You see this manna in the wilderness supplied every day for these 14,000 plus days had got stale right away. There were some who didn’t want to go and get the fresh manna every morning. They kept some in their tent, in the back of the tent, and everybody else went to get the fresh manna, they dug up yesterday’s manna, and it tells us in Exodus 16 that it was full of maggots and it began to smell.

You see this manna; you would get maggots in it very quickly. It was not designed to last. It was temporary; it was here today and gone tomorrow. But it was the sign that pointed to someone greater, the Lord Jesus, who said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry” (unlike the bread in the wilderness) “and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty.”

Here is something so much richer and fuller and more satisfying. This is more than just receiving Jesus Christ into our lives, which is the first step of the Christian life – that is being born again. It takes place in a moment of time. This is feeding.

It is no good me saying, “I had some bread on the first day of the month, so that sustains me for the rest of the month.” No, I need to eat every day. We need to know what it is every day to come and to feast on Jesus, to participate in His provision.

We can temporarily satisfy the hunger and thirst in our souls but it isn't long before we realize there are maggots in it, it is beginning to get stale.

What our hearts desperately need is intimacy with God where our souls are fed with the presence of Jesus Christ Himself.

And if we don't know that, practically – not as a theory but know what it is just to feed your soul on Jesus Christ, you will be eating junk food and you will be thirsty.

And people are eating junk food when alcohol is used to soften the blows of life, when drugs are used to give them a kick and sexual adventuring is a search for intimacy. These are physical symptoms of an unsatisfied spiritual appetite – looking for intimacy with God in all the wrong places and finding only emptiness and discouragement and even despair.

In John 6:32 Jesus said, "I am the true bread. This is the true one, this is the real one, this is the real thing. I am the true bread." And in Verse 49, "I am the living bread." This is life-giving and sustaining.

Now I said at the beginning there are two things: His provision ("I am the bread of life") and secondly, our participation (bread has to be consumed.)

As I have said, you can stand outside the bakery and see the beautiful bread in the window but never eat.

You can participate in church every week. You can read your Bible but never be eating of Jesus Himself whenever you are participating.

So how do we do that?

Let me finish with two things in this chapter. One is spiritual; one is practical.

The spiritual is in Verse 53 to 58.

"Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

"For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

"Just as the Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."

He speaks there of “feeding on Me, eating My flesh, drinking My blood.” Now this of course sounds bizarre, doesn’t it?

When the early church was persecuted in the Roman Empire at the end of the 1st Century, one of the accusations they made against Christians was that they were cannibals on the basis of verses like this, on the basis of the Lord’s Supper, which we have already participated in this morning.

“This is My body; eat it. This is My blood; drink it.”

What does He mean?

Well we need to look at this carefully, but only very, very briefly.

Think about it. When Jesus said to them, “Unless you drink My blood, you have no life in you.”

That must have shocked the Jews – shocked them no end, for this reason: there was a law under the Old Covenant that no Jew was ever allowed to drink blood. It was forbidden strictly.

Why? Is it because the physical ingredients in blood are somehow unhealthy? No, I don’t think so.

We are told why they were forbidden to drink blood.

In Deuteronomy Chapter 12 and Verse 23:

“Be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat.”

You see under the Old Covenant there was no provision for life, there was no regeneration, there was no receiving the life of God Himself under the Old Covenant. There were things done for you to make you acceptable before God but not done in you in this way where you become the recipient of life.

And so to “drink My blood” is a physical metaphor for “receive My life into your life.”

“Eat My flesh” is a metaphor for “assimilate and appropriate My humanity into yours.”

So as Paul says in Galatians 4 that the goal of the Christian life is that Christ be formed in you. “I am in travail until Christ is formed in you,” he says. Not until you are a better imitator of Christ – that’s a waste of time – that’s religion – but Christ Himself is formed in you.

How is that? By our going on being fed by the Lord Jesus Himself.

Later in John’s Gospel: “You abide in me; I’ll abide in you. Remain in Me; I will remain in you.”

John's epistle: "We live in Him and He lives in us." This is our union with Christ. And it is this which quenches the deepest thirst and satisfies the deepest hunger where every day we can say, "Lord Jesus thank You for Your presence, thank You for Your life in me, Your sufficiency, that You Yourself are my strength, You are my wisdom, You are my righteousness, You are my redemption. In fact it is what You are that is the transforming process in my life." And you relate every situation to Him in trust.

But the second thing is the practical thing. When you go back to the feeding of the 5,000 which precipitated this whole conversation, you find in Chapter 6 and Verse 10 that Jesus said,

"'Have the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them."

Why do you think John gives that little detail? How do people sit down?

Mark's Gospel, which gives the same account of the feeding of the 5,000, says,

"Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties."

Sit down to receive this. This is not fast food. Jesus Christ does not feed us with spiritual fast food. It is not food to go. You take and make a place to sit down.

Let me ask you: do you have a place where you sit down with Jesus and you meet with Him?

Yes, in the Scriptures, in prayer, but beyond the written word of God is the living Word that you are engaging with?

Hans Peter Royer was a good friend of mine from Austria and he came here to speak several times. He would often say, "*Go and have a cup of coffee with Jesus.*" Go and just sit down alone somewhere, because you will not have your soul fed on the run.

Amy Carmichael was a missionary to India whose writings enriched many people. She said,

"Those who do most in the day, who always have time for one thing more, are those who know what it is to sit down on the green grass. It is not the bustling, chattering people who do most for others; it is those who know most of quietness."

Before He can feed us we must sit down on the green grass. It takes time to commune with Christ. It takes time to hear His voice. It takes time to go through the written Word to meet the Living Word.

And if we are not doing that, if you don't have time to do that, you will have appetites that will begin to express themselves in all kinds of unhealthy and poisonous ways because you will be eating junk food and drinking dirty water.

But we cannot do it without finding a piece of green grass where we can sit down and meet with Him.

I don't want this just to be theory. This has to become life to us.

When you came in this morning you were all given in your bulletin a blank sheet of paper. I want you to take this out please - a half-size sheet.

And I want you to participate in a response. You will need a pen. There are some pens in some of the pews. If nobody has one – there's not enough for everybody - but there are a few there.

And I would like you to write on the top of this piece of paper the words that are on the screen behind me. "I am the bread of life." Just write down that, "I am the bread of life" in the quotations marks. That's a statement of Jesus.

If you have got a phone, or can do it on your phone, that's good too.

There has to be a big "So what?" behind everything we have said. So what?

And I want you to write underneath that, "What does that mean to me?"

We are going to have just a few minutes of silence where just write down, "What does that mean to me?"

Let's do that in silence.