

I Am the Bread of Life

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 0 0] We've just finished a series in Romans, and we are now going to start a new one from John's Gospel, which is just simply entitled, I Am.

Jesus said on a number of occasions, I am the bread of life, I am the good shepherd, I am the light of the world, I am the vine. So we'll be looking at some of those over the next few weeks.

So Ralph is going to read for us. John chapter 6, starting at verse 1. John 6, verse 1. Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, that is, the Sea of Tiberias.

And a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover feast was near.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him, he said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? He asked us only to test them, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

[1 : 0 8] Philip answered him, Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite. Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?

Jesus said, Make the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about 5,000 of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted.

He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted. So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world. Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

And verse 51. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world.

[2 : 2 9] Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves. How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, unless you can 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 living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven.

Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever. He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Pipernium. Thank you very much for reading.

So please keep your Bibles open. Follow along. There are notes, or you can use the back of the news sheet if you want to jot down anything. And if you do have any questions about anything, please do talk to me afterwards.

[3 : 38] There may be things you don't agree with, and that's perfectly fine, and you want to discuss them afterwards. Please do. Or if you don't want to talk to me, you can drop an email.

Either way, we can discuss it. Well, let's pray together as we ask for God's help as we look at his word together. Father, we thank you for the food and the drink we have just had.

something that nourishes us. Something that nourishes us physically and refreshes us. And as great as that is for us, we long, Father, that we would be nourished and refreshed spiritually.

that we would be able to eat and drink your word so that it would change our lives.

that it would build us up into the people you call us to be. that as we feed on you, that we would see the wonder of the life that we can have in you.

[4 : 55] We ask for your help. We ask for your help. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Un Gorta Moore, for you Irish speakers, is the Great Famine.

That's right, which was responsible for a million deaths over a period of seven years from 1845 to 52. In 2002, the population in Ireland dropped by almost 25%.

A disease known as the potato blight killed off the annual potato harvest. And at that time, over a third of the population was entirely dependent on the potato for food.

It wasn't like today. It wasn't like today. If you run out of potatoes, well, you go to the cupboard or down to the shop and you get some rice or pasta. Not so during the famine. No shops about.

In fact, the potato was their diet. There was no other food for most people. For the vast majority of people, you had potatoes for breakfast, dinner and tea.

[6 : 09] So quite simply, without the potato, people died. And that's what happened. Now, what the potato was to the Irish in the mid-19th century, bread was to the Palestinian in the first century.

Bread was the staple diet. You had bread for breakfast, dinner and tea. Sometimes you might get a little bit of fish or meat.

But primarily, you ate bread. It was essential to life. And it was very simple that without bread, people died.

Now, with that significance in mind, John 6 tells us that Jesus has just been feeding a huge crowd with five rolls of bread and two small fish.

In fact, we know from Matthew's Gospel, where the same story is recorded, that the figure of 5,000 did not include women and children. So when it says 5,000, here we're looking at a crowd of at least 15,000.

[7 : 22] That's almost the population of Karagaline. You could imagine the population of Karagaline all heading out to Karabini and one man feeding them with five bits of bread.

Well, on the back of that amazing miracle, Jesus says in verse 35, I am the bread of life.

And then over at the end of verse 58, he says, He who feeds on this bread will live forever.

Now, could you imagine being in that crowd when those words were spoken? In a society, in a culture, where without bread you died, and somebody says, I'm the bread of life.

If you feed on this, you will live forever. It was massive. But what did Jesus mean when he said to the crowd, I am the bread of life?

[8 : 30] Well, firstly, Jesus was saying that he is the source of true life. Because of this amazing miracle, Jesus was becoming quite an attraction.

Crowds were following him everywhere, so he did his best to get away from the people. Look at verse 25. But when they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, Rabbi, which means teacher, when did you get here?

Jesus answered, I tell you the truth. You are looking for me not because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and you had your fill.

Now, Jesus isn't stupid. He understands what the people's true motive is. You don't want me. You want more food.

And as we've said, bread was essential for life. And in those days, 80% of your income went on buying food. So if some bloke turns up one day and starts feeding you for free, surely you'd want the same guy to do the same again tomorrow, wouldn't you?

[9 : 39] You think of the amount of money you would have left over to buy everything else instead of food. There's this guy down the road. He's going to feed us for nothing. So Jesus is on to them.

In fact, the miracles that Jesus is doing is not for their convenience. John calls them, do you see there in verse 26, a miraculous sign.

In other words, they are signs pointing beyond itself to who Jesus is and what Jesus has to give.

So he says in verse 27, Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man, that's Jesus, will give you.

He's saying to the crowd, Look guys, we can eat bread all day long. And I can feed you bread all day long. But at the end of the day, you're all going to die.

[10 : 43] So stop thinking about temporary things and start thinking about eternal things. And 2,000 years later, I think we're all still the same, aren't we?

We're obsessed with the here and now. We're obsessed with the physical. The amount of programs and books and everything else there is on health and fitness and well-being.

As if we were going to be in our bodies for an eternity. And we're concerned for the material as well. Money, success, and the accumulation of gadgets as if we are going to be on this planet for an eternity.

And we have to entertain ourselves with all of these things. And into the mix of all of this, Jesus comes along. And to us, Jesus is just some kind of miracle worker who obeys our orders and does what we tell him to do to get what you want.

Do another miracle, Jesus, for my life. But what Jesus wants us to do is to look beyond the present, beyond the physical and the material, to the future.

[11 : 55] He wants us to see beyond the miracles of all the different things that Jesus can do. He says, look beyond it and look what I really have to offer you. Stop thinking about filling your bellies today and start thinking about your eternal destiny tomorrow.

That's what really matters. But the point is for these people, and like ourselves, we're always thinking about the here and now. And they're thinking about food for their bellies.

How many of you are thinking about what you're going to have for lunch? Are you listening? Look at verse 28. Then they asked him, what must we do to do the works God requires?

We'll do anything, Jesus. Just tell us what we have to do so we can get what you've got on offer. Verse 29. Jesus said, the work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.

It's not about doing anything. It's all about me, says Jesus. He's drawing attention to himself. It's about faith in me. Verse 30.

[13 : 07] So they asked him, what miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Do you see they're still avoiding Jesus?

All they want is for this Jesus person is to do another miracle. But how many miracles do they actually need? Back in chapter 6, verse 1, we read that he had healed the sick.

And if we read on from verse 16, we'll read that Jesus was walking on water. And he fed the crowd with just a few loaves. How many more miracles do they actually need before they believe?

And now they want Jesus to do what Moses was doing before. In verse 31. They say to Jesus, our forefathers ate the manna in the desert.

As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. If you can remember back to the story in the Old Testament of when Israel were rescued from Egypt, they ended up in the desert with no food.

[14 : 13] So Moses, on behalf of the people, prayed out to God and God provided manna. And manna was a bread-like substance. Every morning and evening, manna would fall on the ground and the people would all go out, gather it up, and they would have enough food for that day.

So they come to Jesus and say, come on, Jesus, do the same. Remember what Moses did? You do the same. Provide us with lots of food. Verse 32.

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. And he tells us who that is, verse 33.

Are they not getting it? It is not about Moses, he is saying. It is all about me. It is not about the physical and material. It is about the spiritual and the eternal.

It is not about physical bread to eat. It is all about the true bread that comes down from heaven. And he tells us who that is, verse 33.

[15 : 18] For the bread of God is he, that's Jesus, who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. You see, we need to get back to the source.

We need to get back to Jesus himself, to that which really matters. As one writer put it bluntly, it is immensely stupid not to live with eternal values in view.

We need to get back to Jesus and what he really has to offer. Well, what is it that Jesus offers? Jesus, well, he could repeat the feeding miracle.

There is no doubt about that, couldn't he? He could take them all off again out and feed them with a few loaves. But then, he would have to do it again the next day.

And they would eat again and they would be hungry again the next day. And this would just go on all the time. The bread that they would get would only be enough for the day. What they want and what they need is very different.

[16 : 32] And I think it's true of us. What we want from Jesus is very different to what we actually need. Well, let's see what Jesus has to offer. Verse 34.

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, the life that Jesus offers fills and satisfies. There's no need for us to go looking and searching for anything else or anyone else.

Because we have all that we need in Jesus. Now, for most of our lives, we spend it trying to fill it with all kinds of things and all kinds of people.

We crave joy. We long for happiness. We want to be satisfied. That's the nature of us as people. But whatever we have and whatever we do, never ever seems to be enough.

[17 : 39] But look what Jesus promises. Do you see it at the end of verse 35? Come to me and you will never go hungry.

Now, that's quite a promise, isn't it? Jonathan Reid, who was speaking at our weekend last week, quoted from C.S. Lewis.

And I think it's worth quoting again. You may remember it. C.S. Lewis says, We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us.

Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum, because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

We are far too easily pleased. And so we fill our lives with things and people, instead of coming to Jesus, who has to truly offer something that will satisfy us completely.

[18 : 49] So we don't need to go looking to anyone else or anything else. But, verse 36, As I told you, you have seen me, and still you do not believe.

Why don't they believe? It seems so straightforward and so simple. Well, we're going to come back to that, because that's a big question. But let's see what else is promised.

It's not only life that satisfies, it is life that is secure. Look at verse 37. All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I will never drive away.

Now, Jesus is giving a sure and solid guarantee that the life he offers is forever. See it there in verse 37. Everyone that is brought into Jesus will never be driven away from Jesus.

Well, how can we be so sure if we come to Jesus that we'll never be driven away from Jesus? Well, look at verse 38. Jesus says, For I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me.

[20 : 11] You see, the eternal life, the life that Jesus offers, is based not on our performance, but the perfect obedience and performance of Jesus.

Jesus has come into this world to do the Father's will. And what is his will? Look at verse 39. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

That's his will, is to hold on to, is to keep all those that come to Jesus. Now, does Jesus fail to obey the will of the Father?

Does he? Does he ever fail in doing what the Father asks him to do? Absolutely not. He obeys perfectly and completely.

Excuse me. Therefore, the promise of eternal life is secure. Verse 40. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

[21 : 24] So it's absolutely secure. So it's absolutely secure. It's based on the performance of Jesus who does the will of the Father. So the life that Jesus offers not only satisfies us, it is not only eternally secure, he's not going to take it from us.

He will lose none of those who come to Jesus. Well, that brings us back to the question we were just asking from verse 36.

Why is it that it seems so simple and so straightforward, why is it that they still don't believe? Jesus is saying, believe me.

It sounds quite exclusive. Come to me. I'm the bread of life. Well, why don't they do it? Why don't they just come and why don't they just believe? Well, they were having difficulties with what Jesus was saying and they started to grumble.

Verse 43. Stop grumbling among yourselves, Jesus answered. And here's part of the answer why they don't believe.

[22 : 38] No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Now, if you find that hard, you're not alone. Look at verse 60. That no one can come to the Father unless he is drawn. Do you find that hard?

I do. And we're not alone. Look at verse 60. On hearing it, this is the teaching of Jesus, many of the disciples said, this is a hard teaching.

Who can accept it? At one level, it's not difficult to understand, but it is hard for us to accept.

If you want this life from Jesus that he is offering, the only way it's going to happen is if the Father draws you.

[23 : 40] It's not dissimilar to what it says in verse 37. All that the Father gives to me will come to me. Salvation, the gift of eternal life, is ultimately a work of God.

God must enable us to come to Jesus, otherwise we never will. Well, you're thinking, that can't be right. There's another side to it, isn't it?

What about my decision and my choice? Well, of course there's a decision and a choice on our part. But that choice and that decision to follow Jesus is never possible unless God draws them in the first place.

Well, how does he draw us? How does that happen? Well, let's go on in verse 45. It is written in the prophets that they will all be taught by God.

Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. Now that's a quote from Isaiah. Isaiah. And in that whole section in Isaiah, it's looking forward to the day of restoration and renewal, when the Holy Spirit is going to come.

[24 : 59] And the Spirit is God's teacher. The Holy Spirit wakens up our minds, opens up our eyes, unblocks our ears to be able to see that we desperately need Jesus.

He speaks to us in the inmost part of our lives. So we can say from this, if we are followers of Jesus, it's not because you chose him, but because God chose you.

Is that difficult to understand? It's not difficult to understand, but it's hard to accept.

So, you're thinking, well, if I want this life of Jesus, and I've got to be drawn by God, is he going to draw me? What about some of my friends and families?

Is God going to draw them? Is it kind of just pick and choose randomly what's going on here? Well, look at verse 46. Jesus says, no one has ever seen the Father except the one who is from God.

[26 : 12] Only he has seen the Father. Of course, that's Jesus, isn't it? Verse 47, I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.

Now, we can't see God. We can't see the Father. Only Jesus, who has been sent, has seen the Father. So, as Jesus comes into the world, he comes to show us the Father.

He comes to do what the Father does. And the Father draws us. God draws us in. And so, Jesus has come to draw us into the Father.

So, he's saying to this grumbling, unbelieving crowd, he says, you can't hear the Father. You can't even see the Father. But you have me. You can listen to me.

Here I am. Hear my words. Accept me. Verse 48, I am the bread of life. So, God had sent his Son, God had sent him into the world.

[27 : 16] To be that drawing love of God. The drawing love of God that would pursue us and chase us like a lover who's trying to get the one who's running away.

And try and bring them in, challenging us, inviting us, doing everything possible. So that we might come and receive the life that he alone can give.

And as we read these words, he is still doing exactly the same. Come to me. The invitation is open to everybody.

And if we want to believe, and if we want our friends and family to have this same life, we must simply show them Jesus.

We must let them hear his words. And as we let them hear the words, we must pray that God would teach them by his Holy Spirit.

[28 : 20] And draw them in by his love that they may receive and know that life. And the truth is, we must say, is that God's words? And the truth is, we must say, is that God's words? Difficult to understand? Difficult to understand?

Not really. We may have to think about it. Hard to accept? Yes, it can be. But this is God's words. So how do the crowd and how do we respond to what Jesus has just said?

Well, if we think that's kind of hard to get our minds around, he says something else which really seems quite strange and almost grotesque.

Look at verse 51. Jesus says, I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world. Now naturally, such a thought was going to create arguments and a whole heap of discussion.

[29 : 26] Verse 52. So the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves. How can this man give us his flesh to eat? He's telling us to eat him. What on earth does Jesus mean that we are to eat him?

Well, a lot of people think that this is a reference to the Lord's Supper. But that doesn't happen until John chapter 13. So I don't think it's anything to do with the Lord's Supper.

One commentator who's done an awful lot of work in John's Gospel, Don Carson, illustrates it very well like this. It's a very helpful illustration. He says, But if you go out to a nice restaurant and you order a gourmet burger, what are you eating?

Well, everything that you are eating is dead. The bread or the bun is dead wheat. It's been harvested. It's been crushed, turned into flour, baked in the oven.

It's dead. The meat in the middle is a dead cow. Somebody has slaughtered a cow, chopped it up, minced it up, fried it away.

[30 : 39] It's dead cow. The side chips are dead potatoes. Somebody's picked them, harvested, cut them up, boiled them in 100 degrees of oil.

They're dead. They're dead. So what we could say is, the food you eat died for you. In other words, unless the food dies, we would die.

We would have no food. Unless the cow dies, unless the wheat dies, unless the potatoes die, we wouldn't have anything to eat. And that's the point of Jesus' words.

He's saying to the people, either I die or you die. Verse 53.

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

[31 : 39] Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. Jesus is driving us and the people towards the cross.

That's where he's heading in John's Gospel. He's heading towards the cross. He offers himself to us as the bread of life. But if we are going to eat the bread, he must first die.

He must die in our place. He must die our death, so that we may participate in his life. Verse 57. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

Now, of course, it's not a literal eating of Jesus' body. We're not literally eating his flesh and blood. To eat Jesus, his invitation here to eat of him, is to trust him completely.

It's to rely on Jesus' death for life, for eternal life. Verse 29 said the same thing. The work of God is this, is to believe in the one he has sent.

[32 : 58] It's the same in verse 35. He who comes to me. It's an invitation to put your life, trusting yourself into his care. So unless we are trusting in Christ alone, we have no life.

And so Jesus comes to the crowds, and he comes to us. And through us, he speaks out into the wider community of Carigalline.

And he says, you must taste of this bread. You must eat of it. You must trust in Christ if you are to have life.

For the person living in the first century, without bread, you died. For us living in the 21st century, without Jesus, the true bread of life, we will die.

Remember we said about the feeding of the 5,000. About 15,000 popular people there. That's the population of Carigalline.

[34 : 14] They'll all have their food to eat today. Nobody will be hungry in Carigalline. They could have the choice of about 50 different types of bread.

How many know the bread of life? People must come to Christ to eat the bread so that they may live forever.

Let's pray. Our Father God, we thank you for Jesus.

We thank you for his amazing, miraculous signs. For his healings. For his walking on the water. For feeding so many people with just a small bit of food.

But yet all of this pointing to who he is and what he really has to offer. Life in Christ. Eternal life.

[35 : 21] Life that satisfies and fills and completes. Help us to be eating of that bread each day. To be taking in of Christ.

And help us to offer the bread of Christ to the world. That they too may know him. And enjoy the life that he has to give. In Jesus name.

Amen. Well, we're going to sing together. And this song is going to be used in a way of preparing and helping us to focus our minds afresh on the Lord Jesus.

We are going to share together in the Lord's Supper in communion together. And so this song is one that talks about sharing in the bread of life.

And drinking of his sacrifice. It's about our trust completely in the Lord Jesus. We're going to sing the first three verses. And then we'll share communion.

[36 : 35] And then we'll sing the remaining verses afterwards. Let's stand together as we do this. Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away slain for us.

We'll sing the first three verses. And we'll sing thekatch. Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away slain for us. And we remember the promise made that all who come in faith.

Remember the promise made that all who come in faith find forgiveness at the cross.

So we share in this bread of life and we drink of His sacrifice at the sight of our bonds of peace.

Around the table of the King. The body of our Savior Jesus Christ, torn for you.

[37 : 57] Heed and remembered the wounds that heal the death that brings us life. They look right to make us small.

So we share in this bread of life and we drink of His sacrifice at the sight of our bonds of peace.

Around the table of the King. The blood that cleanses every stain of sin shed for you.

Drink and remember. He drained that cup that all may enter in to receive the life of God.

So we share in this bread of life and we drink of His sacrifice at the sight of our bonds of peace.

[39 : 23] Around the table of the King. Please do take a seat.

We're going to come back to that song in a little while. But here we are as God's people gathered around the table of the King.

It was a supper.