

# The bread of life

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[ 0 : 00 ] Emma, thank you. So with these verses open in front of us, do please keep it open. A quote to begin. Here's the quote. You must make your choice about Jesus.

Either this man was and is the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord.

And God. That was a man called C.S. Lewis writing in the 20th century. When you hear what Jesus said about himself, you must choose. You've got to choose. Is he a fool? Then shut him up. Is he a demon? Then spit at him and kill him.

Or is he who he claims to be? Then you've got to run to him and believe in him and fall at his feet. And you have to call him your Lord and your God.

Emma's just read to us from John chapter 6. We're diving in right into the middle of the public ministry of Jesus recorded for us here in John's Gospel.

[ 1 : 08 ] John's trustworthy eyewitness account of what took place 2,000 years ago. In this passage, as you might have heard as we read, swirling around Jesus, there is a whole cast of people.

Disciples following him. There's a great crowd who've seen his healing miracles. They're interested, they're attracted, they're asking questions. There are also Jewish leaders already turning against him.

So a whole cast of people with their own fears and agendas and desires. And bang in the middle of them is Jesus himself. I don't know how tall he is.

Five foot something, I guess, of ordinary looking Jewish man. Who makes claims about himself that are so astonishing and so bold.

That they leave every human being back then in the story and every human being now today having to make their choice. You must choose. Is he a fool or a demon to say these things?

[ 2 : 08 ] Or is he the life-giving God he claims to be? It's the beginning of 2024 at St John's Orchard Park. Some of us are at St John's here this morning and we've been Christian believers for 25 years.

50 years almost, maybe, some of us. Some of us here this morning are fairly new and looking into the Christian faith. Interested. Asking questions, maybe.

My hope is, just very simply, that over this next couple of months in John's Gospel, all of us, whatever our Christian experience and background, we will see Jesus with fresh eyes.

Either for the first time or again and more deeply, we'll see something of the true glory of Jesus Christ. Who he is and what he offers us.

And that for all of us, seeing Jesus afresh, we will gladly, all of us, come to him and follow him and love him and say, you are my Lord and my God.

[ 3 : 10 ] Well, with all that in mind, zoom in then with me, with this passage open in front of us, as we begin to John chapter 6. And look down firstly at John 6, verse 35.

Because in the aftermath of the feeding of the 5,000 and many more, which we'll come to, and with the crowd now surrounding Jesus and pressing him and questioning him, I think verse 35 gets right to the heart of this chapter and right to the heart of the claims of Jesus Christ.

It's on the screen here, as well as in our Bibles. Then Jesus declared, so bold this, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

So from this verse and all that takes place in this chapter, two things here this morning for us about Jesus. Who he is and what he gives. First, who he is.

He is the divine son of God. Not merely a prophet or a teacher. Not one religious leader among many.

[ 4 : 25 ] No, no, this man Jesus, the divine son of God. Seven times in John's Gospel we'll see Jesus openly and on purpose declares who he is.

He will say famously, I am the light of the world. I am the gate for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life.

I am the way, the truth and the life. I am the true vine. And here in verse 35, I am the bread of life. And what we need to know is that as Jesus says this, he underlines and he stresses, I am.

I am. And he does so because in the Old Testament, hundreds of years before the coming of Jesus, the creator God of all revealed himself in this same way.

By saying, I am. Right back near the beginning of the Bible, in Exodus chapter 3, the people of Israel are in slavery in Egypt and very famously, the Lord God appeared to Moses and called to him a great moment of revelation.

[ 5 : 41 ] Then God said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. A few moments later, Moses asked God, what is your name?

And God said to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you're to say to the Israelites. I am has sent me to you. Having rescued his people from slavery in Egypt and brought them to himself at Mount Sinai.

In Exodus chapter 20, God gives the 10 commandments to his people. Quote, and God spoke all these words, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

So at these very foundational moments of his dealings with the world, as the eternal and living God stoops down and speaks, this is how he makes himself known.

I am. And so now with all that in mind, you're to feel the force of it. As this flesh and blood Jewish man, John 6 verse 35, declares, I am the bread of life.

[ 6 : 57 ] You shouldn't mistake what he's saying. I am. I am, says Jesus, the eternal God made flesh, standing here in front of your eyes.

But it's not just bare claim. It's not just a claim. Not just something he says. Because the thing is, in John 6, do you see this? The work of Jesus and what he does matches his word.

What did you make of the feeding miracle here in John 6? It starts back over the page, just flick back over the page to chapter 6 and verse 2.

Jesus had crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee and verse 2, a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he performed. In verse 5, this great crowd comes towards him.

It says in verse 10, about 5,000 men were there. So including women and children, you're looking at 15,000 or 20,000 people streaming towards Jesus Christ.

[ 8 : 09 ] I don't know if you've been to see Cambridge United play at the Abbey Football Stadium. The Abbey Football Stadium on Newmarket Road, have you ever been? It can fit 8,000 spectators in, maximum.

It's not often filled, but with every place filled and all people stuffed in all around the pitch, 8,000 in the stands. It's a big crowd. Here in John 6, this is twice as many, at least, flooding towards Jesus. And seeing them in verse 5, Jesus says to Philip, where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? Jesus says that. He knows what he's about to do. And Philip answers, verse 7, it would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite.

And then Andrew speaks up, verse 9, and says, here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish. Okay, two times the size of Cambridge United with everyone packed in and five small loaves and two small fish.

And Andrew says in verse 9, how far will they go among so many? And so the stage is set. But on purpose.

[ 9 : 31 ] Can you imagine it? There's this great crowd and five bread rolls and a couple of tiddlers. What are you going to do? And whether you've read this for the first time just now or for the umpteenth time, it is spectacular what takes place.

And told so simply, verse 10, Jesus said, make the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in that place and they sat down. 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. Can you imagine that? Bread and fish given out and handed along the rows and around the stadium and the second stadium's worth of people until every single mouth is full.

Not just a little bit, but there's more coming. There's as much as you want from these five loaves and two fish. There's a serious amount of nonsense written about this kind of incident.

Of course, the greatest miracle here is the miracle of sharing, someone says. As though Jesus sets an example and suddenly everyone is inspired to pull out their packed lunch and share it around.

[10:49] It's just rubbish that. It's stupid. No, no, this is a straight up miraculous feeding. As Jesus, the divine son of God, multiplies these loaves and fishes with unstoppable creator power.

That is the one through whom all things are made bends his creation to his will and forms and molds molecules together and gives an overflowing abundance of miraculous food to meet their hunger.

And it is overflowing. Because you see at the end, they gather 12 baskets full of leftovers from the five little rolls. It's here recorded for us.

What do you make of that? What do you make of Jesus here? This is God at work. This is God in the flesh at work in his world so clearly.

Even so, all the more if you realise that when the Lord God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt all those centuries before, he parted the sea, he brought them through, he led them through the wilderness to himself.

[12:08] when he did that, the Lord God fed them with miraculous bread, with manna that fell from heaven and each day the people were filled.

That's what happened in history. The Lord, the great I am and you can put it like this, one of his signature moves to feed his people miraculously.

And so, with that in mind, now see Jesus providing as much as this great crowd wants. Look, in verse 14, after the people saw the sign Jesus performed, because it's a sign, it's pointing to who Jesus is, they began to say, surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world.

They wonder if he is some kind of Moses-like human leader, but he's so much more than that. You see that in verse 16 onwards, this is no mere human being.

Look, the disciples go down to the lake and they set off a cross and a strong storm brews up and in verse 19, when they'd rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water and they were frightened.

[13:23] But he said to them, it is I, I am. Don't be afraid. Who is he who provides miraculous bread and rules the sea beneath his feet?

He is, I am, the eternal and divine son of God come down from heaven now in flesh appearing. What shall we say about this?

in a sense, in a sense what we're talking about this morning is so very basic to the Christian faith and may certainly not be new to many of us.

But it's here in John's Gospel for us and I wonder if you can sense maybe again how significant it is that Jesus is God the Son. very simply it puts Jesus Christ in a completely different league from mere humans.

If I can say it like this I don't mean to offend in any way other religions but here is Moses here is the Dalai Lama here is Confucius here is Muhammad here is the Buddha who were simply human beings claiming some kind of connection with the divine or spiritual things or deep knowledge but Jesus is not with those people Jesus is not one among the many human leaders out there Jesus is not just someone who happens to be the religious leader that a handful of people like me in the west like to follow so it seems no no down here is every merely human religious leader every spiritual guide every wise philosopher creatures small limited knowing so little and here by himself is Jesus

[15:36] Christ the infinite son of the father who at a moment in time became flesh God come down to us the almighty creator of all now a five foot something Jewish man walking and speaking here in John 6 if this is true and it is because look at him it changes everything it should do it must do Jesus Christ is not a guru for me to plug into for a bit to listen to and to use Jesus is not a spiritual option whom I can pick for a bit and then discard when he doesn't say what I'd like or help as I think he should no no no if I'm a creature and I am this is my creator walking the earth and acting in power and speaking with total authority will I listen to him in 2024 will I listen to my Lord and God as he well what what does he say this Jesus what is he about what does he offer us at the

beginning of the year well I said two things this morning about

Jesus who he is and what he is what he gives who he is he's the divine son of God secondly this morning what he gives he gives eternal life it's striking in John 6 why people come to Jesus what they want to do with Jesus what they want from Jesus back in verse 2 people follow him because they saw the healings he performed maybe Jesus can make us better in verse 15 those who saw the sign intended to come and make him king by force maybe Jesus can be the political ruler we need the solution to all our elections in verse 25 the crowd find Jesus and Jesus says verse 26 I tell you you're looking for me not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill maybe Jesus can keep feeding us and meet our material needs but here in John 6 and in reality the son of

God won't be used by us to fix our mini problems or to meet our short term desires because he has come to give something so much better and so much greater look with me at this verse 27 do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life which the son of man will give you this divine son of God has entered our world to come and give us unspoilable and eternal life in verse 33 Jesus puts it like this the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world sir the crowd said always give us this bread and then Jesus declared I am the bread of life whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty

Jesus is saying here I am life-giving bread I am eternal life-giving bread bread do you know what that means in the first century there is no tesco stocking pasta and nachos and pork pies and sushi and whatever you want no bread is the basic staple food you need bread to eat to live it is vital for life as it was when God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt and led them through the wilderness to himself feeding them with bread from heaven with bread the Lord sustained his people in a rescued forgiven relationship with him living and ongoing he gave them bread from heaven to eat and they walked with their God knowing him now here Jesus says I am the bread of life when you come to him and you believe in him he gives you life he gives you life with God a rescued forgiven restored relationship with your maker that endures forever that's what Jesus means he comes into the world to offer and give us restored life with our God forever in verses 35 to 40 lastly this morning Jesus begins to open up for his listeners what this eternal life with God is like look at this verse 35 it is satisfying life whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty like you read those words that is so enticing isn't it as human beings we're wired up with appetites and desires and needs which drive us almost constantly we get hungry and thirsty for food for drink for acceptance for approval for fulfillment by ourselves and on our own we will never be truly satisfied satisfied and we will always be hungry and verse 35 is a promise whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty that is as someone said a century ago or so there is only one being who can satisfy the last aching abyss of the human heart and that is the Lord

[ 22 : 17 ] Jesus Christ only he can satisfy you do you know that satisfying life to be known by God and to know him next verses 37 to 39 secure life Jesus speaking here to those who still don't yet believe in him and yet his words are absolutely full of the offer of life all those the father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never drive away another wonderful promise that when you come to Jesus Christ and follow him as your Lord and God he will never ever drive you away he won't get to know you better and discover more of what you're like and then drop you leave you divorce you turn away from you push you away get away from me he's not like that you will be secure with him because verse 38

I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me and this is the will of him who sent me that I shall lose none of all those he has given me when you're a person who is given to Jesus Christ and you come to him he will never lose you he will always hold you fast and this is something of the eternal life he gives satisfying life secure life and finally in these verses everlasting raised on the last day life if I can put it like that from verse 39 this is the will of him who sent me that I shall lose none of all those he has given me but raise them up at the last day 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 them up at the last day that is when you come to the bread of life when you look to Jesus Christ and believe in him this satisfying life you're given will last forever it will because even when you lie dead in the grave you will still be secure with your God and Jesus Christ will never ever let you go and it says here this is the father's will and God the son will do it that on the last day

on a future day the Lord Jesus Christ will raise you bodily from the dead and you will enjoy life forever with your God it's a promise and he will do it C.S.

Lewis wrote a hundred years ago or so less than that you must make your choice about Jesus I hope and pray that through these chapters in John's gospel we will choose or go on with him but to say very simply this morning at the start of 2024 do you see who he is do you see what he gives who he is it's unmistakable it's true he says it and he shows it do you see what he gives and offers more than anyone else in the world more than any other leader he offers life eternal when you see who he is and you see what he gives come to him look to him believe in him fall at your feet and have him as your lord and your god and this son of god says to you that you will never ever go hungry again and you'll never be thirsty!

again for all eternity let me lead us in a prayer and then we're going to sing together this is the father's will that everyone who looks to the son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise him on the last day our Lord and our God at the beginning of this year we have so many needs and sadnesses and desires the troubles of life surround us we praise and thank you that your son Jesus Christ came into the world he our saviour fully God and fully man thank you that this son made flesh gives his flesh for the life of the world that we might enjoy forgiven restored life with you for all eternity please would you help all of us this year to grab hold of the promises of the [ 27 : 34 ] Lord Jesus Christ and to cling to them and may we be those who enjoy the satisfying secure and everlasting life that he gives we pray in Jesus name amen