

Jesus – “I am....”² – The Bread of Life

Reading: John 6:48 “.... *I am the bread of life* ¹

Introduction:

This is the second lesson in the series on the “*I am*” statements made by Jesus in the gospel of **John**. The aim of these lessons is for us to learn more about the nature and attributes of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In the previous lesson, we saw that the Jews had trouble accepting Jesus’ statement about Him seeing Abraham – see **John 8:57**. They saw Jesus as someone who was just another man not yet 50 years old, rather than seeing Him as God in the flesh, the eternal Christ. As a result, many rejected Him, and did not heed His message.

In this lesson, we will see another instance where those listening to Him did not understand what He was saying (**John 6:60**), and as a result, many turned away and no longer followed Him (**John 6:66**). It was the occasion when Jesus said, “*I am the bread of life.*” (**John 6:48**).

LESSON

1) Context

In the opening part of **John 6**, we have the account of Jesus feeding the 5000 from just five loaves and two fish (vs.1-11). After everybody had eaten and were filled, the disciples collected twelve baskets of the leftovers (vs.13). The people were so impressed by this miracle that they were about to make Jesus their king (vs.15). However, Jesus slipped away before they could do so (vs.15a). Overnight, Jesus and His disciples crossed over the Sea of Galilee towards Capernaum (vs.16-21b).

The next day, those who had been there at the feeding of the 5000 also crossed the Sea, looking for Jesus (vs.22-24). When they found Him, Jesus stated to them the reason as to why they were looking for Him – because of the food that they had eaten the previous day (vs.26). No doubt, they were looking for more again today. But then Jesus moved the conversation towards spiritual food.

2) Jesus teaches about the bread from heaven

a) Jesus is the true bread from heaven

Jesus started by saying that they should not focus on physical food, but on “... *the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you*” (vs.27). Then, in response to their question in verse **28**, “*What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?*”, Jesus replied, “.... *that you believe in Him whom He sent.*” That is, the fundamental basis for doing what God wants is to believe in Jesus.

The people then asked for a sign from Jesus so that they may believe in Him (vs.30). After all, under Moses, their forefathers had been given manna in the wilderness as a sign (vs.31).

Note that most of these people were the same people who, only just the previous day, had seen Jesus feed 5000 people from one

¹ All biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

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boy’s lunchbox (vs.9). And now they ask for a sign from Jesus for Him to validate His credentials!!

Firstly, Jesus corrects them with regard to who it actually was that gave them manner in the wilderness – it wasn’t Moses (vs.32a). Moses did nothing miraculous at the time. He simply relayed God’s instructions to the people. It was God who provided the manna – see **Exodus 16:4-16**.

Then, secondly, Jesus tells them of the true bread – it is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (vs.32b-33), *i.e.* Jesus Himself. But the people didn’t seem to pick up on this, so He spelt it out in verse 35;

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

And in verse 40;

“And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Jesus established the link between Himself, the bread from heaven, and eternal life. If the people wanted eternal life, then they needed to believe in Him, the bread from heaven.

b) The people reject Him as the bread from heaven

As we saw in the first lesson in this series, the people saw Jesus as simply another man with earthly parents. They did not see Him as the Son of God. Therefore, they did not accept His statement about coming “... down from heaven” (vs. 41-42).

But Jesus continued speaking, repeating His previous statements that He is the bread of life come down from heaven (vs.48, 51a). He compared Himself with the manna that the Hebrews ate in the wilderness. Manna was physical bread for the physical body – to sustain physical life until they reached the Promised Land (**Joshua 5:12**). It did not, nor was it ever intended to be, the means for eternal life (vs. 49). It is the bread from heaven that “... one may eat of and not die.” (vs. 50). In verse 50, Jesus is, of course, talking about spiritual death, not physical death, because everyone dies², whether they are faithful to God or not (**Hebrews 9:27**).

The real stumbling block for those listening came when Jesus said in verse 51;

“..... if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of this world.”

There are two aspects to what Jesus said in this verse;

- i) He would give His flesh, *i.e.* His body, as a sacrifice for sins so that the world could have spiritual life. This happened at Calvary (**Romans 5:6-8, 15-18**).
- ii) anyone in this world who partakes of Him through belief and obedience will have eternal life (**John 3:16**).

² The exceptions are Enoch (**Genesis 5:24**), Elijah (**2 Kings 2:11**), and faithful Christians at the time of Jesus’ return (**1 Thessalonians 4:17**).

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But the people were still thinking in physical terms, failing to see the spiritual message in what Jesus was saying. They thought that He was saying that they should eat His literal flesh (vs.52). The end result of their failure to grasp what Jesus was really saying was that many turned away and followed Him no more (vs.66), missing the opportunity to learn more from Him.

3) Clarifying the term, “*Eat the flesh of the Son of Man*”

a) What Jesus was NOT saying

When Jesus said in **John 6:53**, “... *eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood ...*”, He was not saying that we should eat of His literal flesh, nor drink His literal blood (vs.53). That would amount to cannibalism. Partaking of literal blood was forbidden under the Old Covenant (**Leviticus 17:10, Deuteronomy 12:16**), and the same principle applies in the New – see **Acts 15:29**.

Some in the religious world today claim that when we take what we call the Lord’s Supper, the bread and the wine change into the literal body and blood of Christ. However, there is nothing in the New Testament to support this claim. When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He broke literal bread, and drank from the literal fruit of the vine (**Matthew 26:26-29**). When breaking the bread and saying, “*This is my body*”, the context indicates that He was using the term figuratively³. There is no indication from any of the New Testament records of this event that the apostles and other New Testament writers took His words about “*eat(ing) the flesh*” and “*drink(ing) His blood*” to be literal. Nor (in **Matthew 26, etc**) did the disciples react in the manner of the Jews in **John 6**.

b) What Jesus WAS saying

The context of **John 6** is about believing in Him (vs.29, 36) and doing the works of God (vs.28). Physical bread sustains physical life, just as physical water also sustains physical life. But Jesus was not talking about physical life. He was talking about spiritual life; eternal life (vs.27, 40, 47, 51, 54, 58). And for that, we need spiritual food and spiritual drink.

In **John 4**, Jesus said to the woman at the well that He would provide living water that will become “... *a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.*” (vs.4:10, 14). We understand that He was not referring to literal water – He was using a metaphor⁴ to convey a spiritual teaching. It is the same here in **John 6**. He was using His physical body as a metaphor in a spiritual context – He was not talking about eating His literal body. This is made clear in verse **63**;

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”

³ In the same way as when Jesus said, “*I am the door*” (**John 10:9**), we understand it to be symbolic/figurative. We don’t interpret it to mean that Jesus is a literal door that is mounted on a building, etc.

⁴ A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance, as in “*A mighty fortress is our God.*”. Ref - <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/metaphor>

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When Jesus said, “... *eat the flesh of the Son of Man ...*”, He was saying that He is the spiritual food for the soul. He is the spiritual food that leads to eternal life (vs.47-51). We partake of that spiritual food when we believe in Him (vs.47); when we learn of Him (**Matthew 11:29**); and when we do our best to obey Him (**Matthew 7:24-25**; **Hebrews 5:9**).

4) Application

The Jews followed Jesus in **John 6** because of the physical food that He had given them the day before (vs.26). It appears that when Jesus spoke about eating His flesh, their mindset was still on the physical. As a result, they did not understand what He was teaching them. They complained; they were offended; and for many of them, they followed Him no more (vs.41, 52, 60, 66). But when Jesus asked the twelve if they also wanted to go away (vs.67), Peter replied in verse 68;

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

There is no-one else to whom we can turn for eternal life. Jesus is the only way (**John 14:6**; **Acts 4:12**). Jesus gave His physical flesh and blood as a sacrifice so that we could have forgiveness of our sins (**Ephesians 1:7**) and have eternal life (**1 John 5:11**).

But to take advantage of these blessings, we have to do our part (**Romans 2:6-7**). The starting point is to believe in Jesus – not simply that He exists, but who He is – the Son of God (**John 20:30-31**). Then, we need to act on that belief, because simply believing (or having faith) is not sufficient on its own (**James 2:20, 24, 26**). Obeying the gospel is just the first step (**Acts 2:37-38**). The rest of our lives need to be one where we regularly feed on the bread from heaven – Jesus and His word.

As we know with physical eating, we don’t just put food into our mouths. We need to swallow it, and the body needs to digest it in order to renew and sustain the body. So it is with spiritual feeding. Not only are we to take in knowledge from the Bible, we are to meditate on it, *i.e.* think about what it is saying to us (**Psalms 1:2**), and allow it to change (transform) our lives (**Romans 12:2**). For example, **2 Peter 1:5-9**;

⁵But also for this very reason, add to your faith virtue (moral goodness), to virtue knowledge,

⁶to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,

⁷to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

⁸For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹For he who lacks these things is short sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”

Jesus is the bread of life. Feed on Him.