



## 'I Am the Bread of Life'

Jesus had been talking to people who had been present at the feeding of the 5000 and were interested in having that miracle repeated. Their Rabbis had told them that when the Messiah came he would duplicate the miracle of manna from heaven. Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah. Why, then, should they not expect him to replicate Moses' miracle? So he had to point out that Moses did not give that manna: God gave it – it was God's miracle. Further, the wilderness manna was not the true bread from heaven – it was only earthly bread from a visible sky. And then he declared himself as that true bread which alone satisfies the real hunger of the human soul. *"I am the bread of life!"*

This is the first of seven great "I AM" sayings in John's Gospel, some of them repeated with slight variations. It is a tremendous series of claims, and together they point to someone who is far greater than any mere man. Clearly John has gathered a collection of sayings that show very plainly who the Person of Jesus is and what he came into this world to do. The expression "I am" with the emphatic personal pronoun is the style of deity. It is a reminder of Moses at the burning bush. There the patriarch asked the name of him who spoke to him out of the fire and was told *"I AM THAT I AM"* and that he was to say to the Israelites: *"I AM hath sent me unto you."* (Ex 3:14) Jesus is claiming not only that he can give a great gift, but that he is big enough to give such a great gift. So these words convey his high claim to deity. But in speaking of himself as bread, he was using a very familiar image to convey particular spiritual truths about himself.

### **1. Jesus is Fundamental to Life**

In Christ's day bread was even more essential than in ours, for it was the only staple in most people's diet. But we need not confine the word to the like of a loaf of bread. It refers (as in the Lord's Prayer) to food, without which we die. Food sustains life. Those who go on hunger strike will inevitably die unless they call it off or are forcibly fed. Without food, life cannot go on. It is absolutely fundamental to life. So in making this statement, Jesus was claiming to be the One whom men and women cannot do without. Now this is true in the physical realm; it is in the Triune Jehovah (of whom he is the second Person) that we *"live and move and have our being"*. However by life I mean something far more than mere physical things and existence. You can eat the most rich, exotic and appetising food and leave the table empty in heart, hungry in soul, unhappy in life. And that is because you have been created body and soul. Physical bread may fulfil the needs of the body – but it can never satisfy the soul. There is a spiritual hunger in everyone that can only be met by Jesus Christ.

As a result of the "credit crunch" and recession we are being asked to tighten our belts and to do without things we have taken for granted for so long. And the fact is that that can be done and life will go on, for, when it comes to the bit, life does not consist of "things". But even if you can still pay your mortgage, drive your car and have overseas holidays, Jesus' question is still relevant: *"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"* The fact is that you need Jesus for eternity. You may manage now by yourself, after a fashion, but you cannot survive long-term. *"Dead in trespasses and sins"*, you will remain in that condition – and lost eternally – without Christ. He is fundamental to eternal life.

### **2. Jesus Brings Fulfilment to Life**

He is the true bread from heaven, who brings total satisfaction in the life he gives. He says: *"he that cometh to me shall never hunger and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."* When we

eat food, the fare provided may not be to our personal taste, or we may not feel particularly filled, so sparse were the helpings! Not so with Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is perfectly suited to the needs of all who come to him. He is great enough and glorious enough so that his provision of life can never be exhausted either now or in eternity. He has all that you need. What is more, he knows you and he knows how to meet your need.

So many people today are trying to fill the spiritual lack and hunger that is within them with worldly possessions, pleasures and pursuits. And there is no doubt that the things of this world can have an attraction and pleasure that is real. Hebrews 11 speaks of the seasonable pleasures of sin. And that is the point – the possessions, pleasures and pursuits of this world are seasonable, temporary and fleeting. They have to be renewed again and again. But Jesus gives life that is satisfying. A satisfaction and peace of soul that can never be found anywhere else. Jesus meets the hunger of the heart that no-one else can meet. Are you empty, dissatisfied and unfulfilled in heart and soul? Jesus came to give life and that "more abundantly". He is the bread of life that brings fulfilment to life.

### **3. Jesus is the Formula for Life**

In the Lord's Prayer we pray "*Give us this day our daily bread*". When we put that alongside Jesus' claim to be the bread of life it reminds us that we need him every day – he must be the formula for every day of our life. Sadly, many professing Christians allow the love of the world and the things of the world to intrude between themselves and Jesus and consequently they are spiritually weak, ill and hungry. In the Old Testament we are told that this happened repeatedly with the people of Israel – they desired things instead of God. Therefore, God gave them "*things*" but "*sent a wasting disease upon them.*" (Ps 106:15) Is your condition like that of the Jews – rich in things, but poor in soul?

The fact of the matter is that nothing can replace the immediacy of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When a person trusts Christ as Saviour, that brings them into a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, a relationship that must be sustained by a daily "feeding" upon Christ. Are you devoting your life to satisfying your hunger for objects, but seldom looking to God for spiritual nourishment? Is it any wonder then, that you have little spiritual growth, Christian testimony or satisfaction of soul? It is those who come, initially and then continually, to Jesus, as "the Bread of life", who never hunger or thirst.

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