

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

I AM the Bread of Life—John 6:35, 48

Last week we embarked on a new series—the I AM statements of Jesus. Because it was Easter we started a little out of order—we began with “I AM the Resurrection and the Life”. The order in the Gospel of John goes like this:

- I AM the Bread of Life—John 6
- I AM the Light of the World—John 8
- Before Abraham, I AM!—John 8
- I AM the Gate for the Sheep; I AM the Good Shepherd—John 10
- I AM the Resurrection and the Life—John 11 (again, we covered this one last week)
- I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life—John 14
- I AM the Vine—John 15

(We will look at some statements outside the Gospel of John to conclude the series.)

A common criticism people have of Christians is that our claims are so “exclusive”. A couple brief comments about that:

First, it’s more accurate to say that our claims are inclusively exclusive—i.e. ALL are welcomed, invited, and urged to consider them.

But second, and more importantly, they are not “our” claims...rather, they are the claims of Jesus. We didn’t make this stuff up. These statements are straight from the lips of Jesus. So, for those who take issue or exception or offense with these “exclusive” claims, it is more accurately to say they have issue with Jesus, more than they have with Christians. That’s not to say that there’s not plenty of room for critique of us Christians, particularly when we don’t live/act consistently with our beliefs, but the reality is most people are far more ignorant of Jesus than they realize. If they took a good look at what Jesus actually said—as we’ll be doing with this series—they would see that Jesus claims a rather exclusive place for Himself.

With that said, we need to allow these statements of Jesus to hit us full force. To the degree we can, we want to plumb the depths and significance of what He said. These statements are staggering! For anyone to make such claims is audacious and ridiculous...unless they are true. The fact is, Jesus said some really hard, challenging things. For long-time Christians, it’s easy for us to take these statements for granted; we’re rather accustomed to them. So, try to imagine not being familiar with Jesus and try to hear these words for the first time. Who in their right mind would say such things? Only someone who either has an oversized ego, someone who is completely delusional...or someone who is the most extraordinary person ever. (Spoiler alert...we’re going with the third option. But let’s try to be sensitive to those whom this is new and relatively unconsidered.)

Also, we never want to simply take any of these statements as stand-alone, out of context, statements. They are embedded in an overarching story and flow. We want to be cognizant of how they fit in to that larger story...otherwise we'll likely misunderstand them, and/or they just won't make a lot of sense to us.

"I AM the Bread of Life." (John 6:35). Earlier in chapter 6, the day before Jesus made that statement, we see Jesus perform one of His most well-known miracles (as it's recorded in all 4 Gospels) of feeding the five thousand. We're told that afterward, the crowd wanted to force Jesus to be their king. It's easy to miss the connection between the miracle and the response.

We understand that the TYPE of king they wanted versus the TYPE of kingship Jesus was bringing was totally different and incompatible. There are two main ways in which the crowd's expectations were off-base. First, they wanted a king who could lead them in defeating the Romans. Logistically, one of the toughest factors in warfare is supplying troops with provisions and supplies. Typically, whoever could do that the longest would win the war. And here was Jesus, feeding thousands, miraculously with five small barley loaves and two small fish. If He can do that, surely, He could wage war on the powerful Romans...so they thought. Second, if they could have a king who could supply all their needs without them having to work for it, wouldn't that be great?

Though Jesus is the rightful King of the world, He has no interest in power-plays that are typical of human governments, nor is His desire for humans to simply put us all on easy-street. He had/has far better plans in mind.

- Q. The Jews had hopes and expectations of Jesus that we're off-base and misplaced. How, or in what ways, might we have misplaced hopes, desires, expectations of Jesus regarding what He'll do for us?**
- Q. To the degree you can, think back to the hopes and expectations you had of Jesus when you were first introduced to Him, and compare that to your present hopes/expectations. Explain/describe the difference (if any).**

When evening came the disciples got into a boat and crossed the lake. Jesus eventually joined them...via walking on water...but that's a story for another time. The point is, Jesus and the disciples left the crowds...but the next day (we presume), the crowds finally caught up with Jesus on the other side of the lake. If this sounds somewhat stalker-ish, that's because it is. And like all stalkers, they had self-interest in mind.

It is important to note how this particular miracle and this particular statement (I AM the Bread of Life) fits into the larger Biblical narrative. So much of Jesus' ministry actually parallels the history of Israel. God's plan all along was to use Israel to fulfill His purposes for the world. Israel, of course, was a very flawed and unfaithful people, and ill-equipped to be God's mechanism for redemption and reconciliation of the world. In essence, Israel was now represented by one faithful Israelite...Jesus. Upon Him, all that God wanted for Israel, and for the world, would be

fulfilled. So, one of the major themes of Scripture is demonstrating (or perhaps comparing and contrasting) Israel and Jesus. With this in mind, we always want to keep an eye out for anything in Jesus' ministry that parallels Israel's history. In fact, much of the Exodus experience is paralleled in some way in Jesus' life and ministry. We see that in this passage, as Jesus contrasts the manna from heaven that God gave the Israelites in the desert after being delivered from slavery in Egypt, with Himself as the true "bread" from heaven (6:32-33)

What we see in this "Bread of Life" discourse, is the Jewish leaders grumbling, much like the Israelites grumbled in the wilderness....even though God was providing for them. Both the ancient Israelites and those of Jesus' day (and us, too, if we're not careful) essentially took the posture toward God of, "What have you done for me lately?"

One of our greatest flaws as humans is wanting God to give us stuff, provide for us, make things easy for us, to do stuff for us...as opposed to simply wanting God Himself. God created us to be in relationship with Himself, not simply to provide for our needs and allow us to run amuck being little tyrants (which is essentially what human history portrays). To paraphrase St. Augustine, God has made us for Himself, and we are restless until we find our rest in Him.

Q. Do you/we want God or what God can provide? Elaborate. Do we celebrate that we know God or do we simply celebrate what God has provided for us?

Q. From what you can tell, when people think of Christians, do they think something like, "Oh, those people totally enjoy God; they are totally into Jesus; they are the most content people in the world because they have all that they want out of life because they have Jesus."? Or to ask it a different way: Are Christians generally considered the most peaceful, rested, contented people because they have Jesus and aren't striving after anything else? Explain.

Jesus basically chides the crowd for being shortsighted and misguided. They wanted food in their bellies (and whatever other provision Jesus might be willing to give them), and they wanted it done miraculously (both for the sensational "wow" factor, as well as the not having to put forth effort themselves for it factor). But Jesus reminded them that their forefathers were miraculously provided for with manna from heaven...and they died. In other words, they got what they wanted, but it didn't do them any good, namely because they wanted the wrong thing. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?...For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well."* (Matthew 6:25,32-33)

As was mentioned in the sermon on Sunday, in Greek there are two primary words that are translated "life"; "bios" and "zoe". "Bios" has more to do with physical/biological life and the duration thereof; or the state of existence. "Zoe" which has to do with the quality and vitality of life; the elemental principle of spirit and soul. "Zoe" is used in the New Testament over 130

times; “bios” a mere 11 times. It’s obvious which one the various authors of the NT were concerned with.

Jesus’ caution to the crowd in this passage is basically about looking for life (zoe) in the wrong places and things...which is something we humans have been prone to do since the get-go. We look for life in accomplishments and achievements, in status and position, in wealth and accumulations, in various relationships and what we think they can provide for us. The late, great Henri Nouwen said there are three big lies we have a tendency to believe:

- I am what I have.
- I am what I do.
- I am what others think or say about me.

Our identity, and thus our lives, are not found in these things. Rather, life comes from Christ!

Q. Jesus is the source of life. He is the sustainer of life. Again, Jesus says this about Himself by saying that He is the Bread of Life. Can you imagine someone, anyone, saying this about themselves? How would you respond to someone who said such a thing?

Jesus got rather graphic in how serious He was about being the Bread of Life, for He went on to say, *“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 on at the last day.”* (6:53-54)

Clearly Jesus was not advocating cannibalism or vampire-ness, but no doubt He was trying to be shocking and provocative. In fact, the whole idea/image of drinking blood would have been revolting and profane for a kosher Jew. But Jesus was making an important point. Back in Leviticus 17:10-11 we see, *“Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood—I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”* So, by Jesus saying drink His blood, He is alluding to/foreshadowing the atonement He would make through His blood.

Also keep in mind that by the time John wrote his Gospel, the early church had been around for 50-60 years. They had plenty of time to reflect upon Jesus’ teachings. They could see by this point—even if not when originally hearing it—how Jesus was also foreshadowing the implementation of a new sacrament—the Lord’s Supper—the bread symbolizing His body, the wine symbolizing His blood.

Four times in the passage (between 6:35-54) we see Jesus use the same phrase...*“I will raise them up on the last day.”* (6:39, 40, 44, 54) This was just as shocking, just as controversial, perhaps more so, than saying He was the Bread of Life. Why? Well, to nicely complement an “I AM...” statement (which was jostling in itself), we see an “I WILL...” statement. While

theologically debated at the time, the idea of resurrection was very much on people's radar. Would God raise people up at the "last day" or not, was a hot topic. But that's not really the focus here, rather "I WILL..."!!! Something we need to realize about most of the "I AM..." statements is that Jesus was taking upon Himself a role reserved for God. (Which is exactly the wonderfully shocking point...JESUS IS GOD!) The strong emphasis/focus on the divinity of Jesus is the Gospel of John's unique contribution to the New Testament.

Q. Describe your experience of looking for life in ways (or things or people, etc.) that cannot provide it.

The life of heaven, eternal life, the heavenly quality of life is available to us NOW, through Jesus. We partake of that life by believing in Jesus...which means following/obeying Him. He is our life!

Q. From what you can tell, what is the main reason people become Christians/follow Jesus?

Q. Would you describe Jesus as "your life" or as "part of your life"? Explain.