

I AM the Bread of Life

John 6:1-14, 28-51

The Gospel of John Sermon Series - Part II

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

May 4, 2014

TEXT: John 6:1-14, 28-51

In this second part of our series on the Gospel of John, we are going to explore seven breathtaking statements of our Lord Jesus. Each of these statements flows out of Christ's



divinity and His union with the Father as the unique and beloved Son. Each of the I AM statements of Jesus is to be connected in some very dynamic way with the revelation of God's own name as the great I AM. We are blessed to have this original artwork in the front of the sanctuary reminding us of the times Jesus claimed to be the I AM in the Gospel of John. The smaller banner calls our attention this morning to Jesus, the Bread of Life. In each one of these seven I AM

statements of Jesus, we want to see the relationship of Jesus and the Father. Every one of these statements is a claim of Christ's identity and provision in our lives, just as the revelation of God's name in Exodus 3 reveals His presence for His people.

This morning, we look at Jesus, the Bread of Life. We will follow the scene in John 6 within which Jesus makes this amazing declaration. We want to look first at the sign itself, the feeding thousands of people in the wilderness; then, we want to look at the interpretation that sign; lastly, we want to allow that sign and its meaning to take us to the great celebration of communion. The account of this sign begins in John 6:1:



"Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias)."

There was a short time in history when the Sea of Galilee was called the Sea of Tiberius, named after the Roman Emperor Tiberius. If you're the Emperor, you get everything named after you, so it's the Sea of Tiberius for just a few years. He is eventually forgotten, and now we call it the

Sea of Galilee. A great crowd of people are following Him, and Jesus goes up on the mountain side with His disciples. It is the spring time, it's Passover time, and Jesus sees a great crowd of people, thousands and thousands of people following Him. He looks to Philip, one of the 12, and says in John 6:5:

“Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”

Philip is unsure. He does a quick algorithm, and he realizes in John 6:7:

“Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

Can you imagine if you decided to have 5000 families come to your house for dinner, how much you would need? Philip says eight months' salary is not enough. One of the disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, speaks up and says in John 6:9:

“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

Jesus, knowing what He intended to do all along, instructs the disciples to have the people sit down, 5000 families in all. Jesus then takes the five loaves, gives thanks, and begins to distribute the bread to the thousands and thousands of families. This is a miraculous event. We can't pull back from that. No one but God can give out bread to thousands of people with this portion. Jesus intends, as we've seen throughout the Gospel, to do these works of power, not just to display His strength or to draw a crowd, for there is already a crowd there, but to reveal His identity as the Messiah. They distribute to the thousands of people, and there is even an immense amount left over, so people eat and are satisfied. The disciples then gather 12 baskets filled with the pieces of these barley loaves. The crowd, the people who were actually there and saw the sign that Jesus had done, began to respond appropriately say amongst themselves in John 6:14:

“Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

Their response to Jesus' action is to conclude that the promise of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15 is being played out right before their eyes. Moses, who fed the people in the wilderness, had promised:

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to Him.”

The people who were there recognized Jesus must be He, the promised Prophet, for no one else had ever done what Moses had done until now. They make this connection.

Jesus withdraws across the sea, and there is an intervening scene of Jesus' calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee. The following day, the crowds rejoin Jesus.

We want to pick up the narrative from this point as Jesus begins to explain to the crowds the meaning of what He has just done. The NIV translation of John 6:30 obscures this just a little bit. It reads:

*“What miraculous sign then will You give that we may see it and believe You? What **will** You do?”*

This translation leads you to think that they're looking ahead, asking Jesus what else He can do. In the original language, however, John 6:30 has the verb in the present tense, not the future. The crowds are actually asking Jesus: “What is the meaning of the sign that You **have just** done?” This is a moment where the King James translators really get it right. They recognize the verbs are present tense, and so they say in that lofty style:

*“What sign shewest Thou then, that we may see, and believe Thee? what **dost** Thou work?”*

The crowds do not say to Jesus: “What else would You do?” but rather they ask: “What is the meaning of what You just did? You multiplied loaves in the wilderness. Tell us the significance of that sign.” This is a great question: “What are you showing?”

The crowds make the connection between Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes in the wilderness and the feeding of the multitude in the wilderness generations ago, a miraculous sign of God’s provision. They say in John 6:31:

“Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'”

Exodus 16 is the narrative which recounts God's miraculous supernatural provision for His people. It's 45 days since Israel miraculously came out from Egypt by the hand of God. The 15th day of the second month, they are in the desert and the community is grumbling against Moses and Aaron because they are hungry. Exodus 16:3 says:

“If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

It's kind of like when you go on a family vacation. You've spent a lot, you reserved the hotel, and you've gone to great efforts to get there. But, as soon as you arrive, instead of the gratitude you were expecting, your children say: “We're hungry. When are we going to eat?” Likewise, Israel comes out of Egypt, complains to God, and the Lord says in Exodus 16:4:

“I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.”

Moses and Aaron then speak to the Israelites in Exodus 16:6-7 and say:

“In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because He has heard your grumbling against Him.”

God speaks through Moses and Aaron, and they tell the Israelites: “God will provide for you bread from heaven. It is the provision of God that you may know that He is the Lord. You will experience the I AM: ‘I am the Lord; I am Yahweh, who causes to be, who is forever, and who is the living, sustaining, covenantal-present God to you.’ You will know this by God's provision in the wilderness. If God does not provide for you in the wilderness, you will perish.”

Are you tied in this morning to your need for God's provision? If God does not provide for us, surely we will perish. In Exodus 16:13-14, we read:

“That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.”

The people look up; they see the glory of God. God supernaturally provides them meat to eat through quails, and then in the morning, they go out and see the ground is covered with dew. The dew dries, and there are thin flakes on the ground. Bread has rained down from heaven, the supernatural provision of God. In Exodus 16:15, the Israelites go out and see this and they say to each other:

“‘What is it?’ For they did not know what it was.”

Paraphrasing, they say: “What in the world is this?” In Hebrew, the word is *manhu*, *what is this?* In the Greek version, it is translated *manna*, and that's what we call it, manna. It's food to eat in the wilderness. God's provision comes, and it comes daily. We are tempted to ask God for a ten-year provision, a lump sum, for our discipleship. “Oh God, would you provide for us a lump sum so that we can have that the rest of our lives?” But God knows us better than we know ourselves, and manna comes down daily. Jesus teaches us to pray in the Lord's prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread,” because God is I AM, the eternal one, self-sufficient, and yet covenantally present with us as His people. You and I are not designed to go for days, weeks, or years apart from God. No, our very lives hang in the balance of God's daily provision. The people eat and are satisfied; they call the bread *manna*. God caused Israel to remember this provision of manna. In Exodus 16:32, He says:

“Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.”

This provision of manna, this provision of bread from heaven, is part of God's people's story from generation to generation. It makes a permanent mark on the people. It is remembered in

Scripture over and over. Deuteronomy 8:3 says:

“He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the [I AM, of Yahweh].”

Psalms 78:24 says:

“He rained down manna for the people to eat.”

Nehemiah 9:20, remembering God's faithful dealings with His people, says:

“You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold Your manna from their mouths, and You gave them water for their thirst.”

God's provision from heaven marks the community. Manna is not an ordinary occurrence, but something to be remembered forever. The meaning of manna in God's people's story is both remembered and then anticipated again. There is reflection during the time of Jesus, that just as God provided bread from heaven in the time of the Exodus, so in the days of the Messiah, manna would rain down again. Some rabbinic teachers said that just as manna was given in the wilderness, so manna will be given again in the messianic age. Around the time of the New Testament, in the text called the 2 *Apocalypse of Baruch* 29:8, one of these thinkers says it this way:

“The treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have arrived at the consummation of time.”

It will happen after these things when the Messiah comes, that manna will come again from heaven. There is no other account of provision of manna from Exodus until John, and in John 6, Jesus provides food again by His very own word. It is into this moment, in this plea for what the meaning is of what He just said, that our Lord answers clearly in John 6:35:

“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.”

Jesus is the Bread of Life, the bread of God come down from heaven to give life to the world. Jesus says that the one who comes to Him will never be hungry, and the one who believes will never be thirsty.

“I have come down from heaven.” So, according to Jesus, the manna that comes during the messianic age is not just physical bread, but the bread actually turns out to be a person. God's ultimate provision for your life and mine is not thin flakes like coriander seed, but it is the Lord Jesus Himself, the beloved Son, the Bread come down from heaven. This is not easy to understand, and Jesus knows that. When He speaks these words clearly, those in His first

hearing stumble. We read in John 6:41:

“At this the Jews began to grumble about Him because He said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’”

They are confused, perplexed, as we read in John 6:42:

“They said, ‘Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He now say, “I came down from heaven”?’”

It is difficult to understand; it’s a holy mystery, and yet Jesus in John 6:43:

“Stop grumbling among yourselves.”

Don't argue or dispute amongst yourselves. Jesus says in John 6:44:

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Jesus' words have an attractive power for all who believe, and Jesus says: “You come to Me by the very power of God.”

Earlier this spring, we spoke of the role of the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ, and here in John 6:44 Jesus says it is the will of the Father, the work of the Father, to draw us to Christ. Christ looks strange to unbelieving eyes; Christ’s words sound strange to unbelieving ears; and yet one of the ways that you can know for sure that God is at work in your life is if Christ’s words begin to sound pleasant; if the sight of Christ begins to be attractive; and you find yourself pulled toward Christ. Theologians call this *irresistible grace*. It is like being dragged towards Christ by a Power not your own. It’s a strange attraction, not so much that I find Christ, but that I am found by Him, and I am pulled. Jesus says we are pulled towards Him. This is the fulfillment of God's promise through the prophets, that in the end times, the latter days, we will be taught by God. To be taught by God means to be drawn to Christ. Jesus says in John 6:49-50:

“Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.”

Jesus says, “I am the living bread come down from heaven. If you eat of this bread, you will live forever.” Now He makes His meaning abundantly clear. He says in John 6:51:

“This bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

It is My person, My body broken, given for the life of the world. In John 6, Jesus claims to be the Bread of Life, the fulfillment of that to which the manna from heaven points. Jesus is the ultimate provision of God to satisfy the hunger of the soul that you and I possess.

Ernst Haenchen, a German theologian who lived through the horrors of WWII, saw the rise and

fall of the society, and he wrote this about John 6:

“This claim ‘I am the Bread of Life’ assumes that the world can never satisfy man. Everything that the world has to offer in modern terms fast cars, beautiful women is unsatisfying, alienating, or better, makes one restless. Man is afflicted with dissatisfaction, boredom, anxiety, and care. He is unable to find that authentic rest, that true peace, that goal for which it is rewarding to live and strive.”

We find this satisfaction in the Bread of Life.

Dale Bruner wrote a reflection on an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times*. The *Los Angeles Times* contains a weekly feature that recounts one celebrity’s great weekend. People hang onto every word about what the celebrity did over the weekend. Bruner writes, after reading many of these, that eating was at the center of most of these interviews with rich and famous people in Los Angeles. Eating was a major avocation for most of these people. A focal point of the weekend's grand activities was their favorite meal. Bruner writes profoundly:

“I have felt sorry for most of those interviewed because of the absence of the choicest conversation, meal, and restaurant in the world in their interviews, the Church’s Word, fellowship, Meal, and prayer. Jesus seems to be saying in our passage that he himself offers and he is himself the premier meal, the real feast, the best restaurant.”

Jesus claims to be the Bread of Life, and whatever you are trying to fill your appetite with, nothing can satisfy like Christ. The hunger that we have within, is hunger for Christ. It is a hunger that can be met only by union with Him.

Communion:

The Scripture teaches us that Jesus is present in this meal. This meal is a sacred meal, a feast. It is symbolic of His broken body and shed blood. It is that body which Jesus said to His disciples on the night in which He was betrayed: “This is My body, broken for you.” The Bread of Life. Jesus says: “This cup is the New Covenant in My blood poured out for your forgiveness.” Through this meal, Jesus offers us Himself. Ignatius of Antioch says that this meal is the meal of immortality, a bread that will satisfy forever.

I want to invite us this morning to prepare for this feast. It is a miraculous feast. It is a small piece of bread, a small cup, and yet, according to the word and promise of Jesus, this is the bread that satisfies. It satisfies, not because of an extraordinary quality of this loaf or this cup, but it satisfies because partaking of this meal unites us with Christ and allows us to eat of Him and be in union with Him. We share in this bread of life and drink of His sacrifice as a sign of our bond of peace around the table of the King. As a minister of the Gospel, I offer to all who

believe in Christ, this life-sustaining bread, and I trust Jesus' words that this one taste, this one drink, will satisfy and feed the deepest hunger we possess. So prepare your hearts with me.

Precious Lord Jesus, You are the Bread of Life come down from heaven. You are the provision of manna in the messianic age. Lord, we refuse to order yet again worldly foods that do not satisfy, and we open our hearts to You. Feed us now, Lamb of God, as we prepare for the table of the King. Amen.