

I am the Bread of Life

Series: Divine Declarations
Brad Bailey – March 3, 2024

Note: The following notes were too long to share completely, so were moved through in slightly abbreviated fashion but still provide a what could serve teaching through the text.

Intro

In just 4 weekends from now... we will come to **days set apart to remember** the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. **On various Easter Sundays** in recent years... I have expressed how the events of that Friday... and Sunday transformed all who were there... so much so...that it broke out into the whole of human history. Something happened. There is **no explanation of apart from the resurrection...BUT it was not because SOMEONE rose from the dead... the resurrection of merely any human life... it was WHO was raised. Because of who they had claimed to be.**

And this can help us appreciate...that as Jesus comes towards Jerusalem...for the final time...there is a shift. Until then... he had tended to guard his identity ...but now as Jesus begins to approach Jerusalem for the last time...he wants begins to declare and reveal who he is.

So ...in these **next few weeks**...we are going to listen to **what Jesus revealed.**

No statements are more profound than what have become known as **the great “I am” statements.**

“I AM.” - Two of the most powerful words; for what you put after them shapes your reality.

Each is a divine declaration...

“I am”... is the name God had given...**When Moses is called** by God to go lead the people out of Egypt....**Moses says... how do I refer to you...** and God says tell the **“I am that I am”**. (Ex 3:14-15)

(This name...transliterated in four letters as YHWH or JHVH and articulated as Yahweh or Jehovah. Jesus takes the tetragrammaton YHWH, the **verb “to be” in Hebrew**, the name of God who is the I AM that I AM, and applies it to Himself.)

Each of these “I AM” declarations makes clear that **He is one in the same as God.** Which is likely **why he limited such declarations** until his time of confrontation had come.

We may want to believe that the world would welcome God...but the reality is more conflicted.

Each of these statements is also a divine revelation... of what Jesus is providing. He adds a metaphor to explain who he is to us. “I am the **Bread of life.** I am the Good Shepherd. I am **the Vine.** I am the Way. I am the Truth. I am the Life. I am the **Resurrection and the Life.**”

He is the Bread... Light... Vine... Good Shepherd. Each of these speaks to our souls... in different ways... about who Jesus is in relationship to us. Each is **an invitation to know him...** and more importantly...**to receive him as such.**

Let us open our hearts and minds to these life-changing revelations.
Opening Prayer: Want to know you... as you want to know us.

As is often the case, **Jesus speaks into the situation at hand.**

In this case... he had massive crowds following him... and one late afternoon when a crowd followed him across the Sea of Galilee, the obvious need for food arose as it was late and there was no place to get food... Jesus was offered a boys lunch.. and from it miraculously multiplies a few fish and loaves of bread...and fed somewhere between 5,000 to 15,000 lives. He and his disciples then "cross to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee" which is about 8 miles wide. Soon after we come to this dialogue with those who followed him.

Here we have a more extended ...but engaging text...

John 6:25-35, 38-40, 48-58

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." ²⁸ Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." ³⁰ So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" ³¹ Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." ³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "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.

.... ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And 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. ⁴⁰ 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."

...⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life

of the world." ⁵² Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."

Here we have a profound declaration... a profound revelation.

Here he declares that he is **the bread of life**.

With each of the declarations that Jesus makes... he is **revealing who he is for us...** using what could be referred to as **metaphors or metonyms**.

He is the more **ultimate provision of these things**.

Jesus declares that he is the bread of life.

Bread is the **most fundamental** way to **speak of food...**of that which gives life and **sustenance**. People **cannot live without...** as we often **speak of "bread and water"**and Jesus speaks of how he **comes to those who are hungry and thirsty**.

Underlying this exchange is the issue of what the people were seeking Jesus for. The people had been drawn to him by what he provided... healing and now the fish and loaves.

> **This was a "we're back for more bread moment."**

They seek God...but **as the one who provides for their temporal desires**.

They are **hoping Jesus will be** the promised Messiah who will fulfill their primary focus which is **overthrowing Roman oppression** and usher them into a **new era of prosperity**.

He had come to bring signs of God's kingdom...**but not as an end in itself**.

God valued care for people... and **in our current state...however mortal it may be...God heals... God feeds**.

But God is the God of eternal life... and Jesus is the bread of life...ultimate life.

Jesus reveals that there a more ultimate bread to provide for a more ultimate life.

And there are **a few important things that Jesus** now brings forth.

This bread is divinely preexistent.

Several times Jesus explained that **this bread came from where?** That this is the bread that **"came down out of heaven."** [1]

33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

38 For I have come down from heaven

50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

The point is that he didn't come into existence. He came down out of heaven. You cannot ever reduce Jesus to a created being. Yes, His body was prepared by God for Him, but as a person He is the eternal Son of God. He is part of the eternal existence with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

That's why **John 1:14** says,

The Word became human and made his home among us. ...And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. – John 1:14 (NLT)

How we receive Jesus...is what reflects our relationship to God. As Jesus explained in shortly after this:

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me." - John 8:42

You can't truly encounter Easter without Christmas. You can appreciate what is at hand in the upcoming death and resurrection...without the incarnation.

In the coming of the bread, secondly,

There is divine purpose.

There is divine purpose, He was sent for a purpose. He came because the Father purposed for Him to come. It's not casual. Verse 32 at the end of the verse,

"It is my Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven." - John 6:32

Verse 38,

"I have come down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." - John 6:38

And again in verses 39 and 40 and 57.

God... the eternal source of all life has sent Jesus ... for a purpose.

And what is the divine purpose?

For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." -- John 6:33

Life to the world.

Life, zoe. Not *bios*, not biological life. Zoe, spiritual life. That's why He came. The promise connected to the bread is spiritual life. And He is the **only bread of God**, the only **living bread**, the only **bread of life**, the only one who has come down, the only source of life for the whole world.

And it **culminates in declaring a resurrection**. Several times Jesus says, "**I'll raise him at the last day**. I'll raise him at the last day. I'll raise him at the last day." It is a union that will not only be a union in spirit, but it will be a union in spiritual body. As the Apostle Paul would describe:

He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.
- Philippians 3:21 (NLT)

If we truly receive Jesus ... welcome him to live in us... enter a union with Christ as Lord.... we join his eternal existence.

And as we read in John 10, no one is powerful enough to break that union.

So the bread of life is heavenly bread. The Lord Jesus Christ comes from **divine eternal preexistence** into time and into space to **fulfill the divine purpose** of the Father, **which is to provide life...** everlasting life with God.

What does Jesus call us to do?

In verse 35, He says,

"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." – John 6:35

So the **first requirement** is to come.

"Those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them." - John 6:37 (NLT)

Secondly, Jesus says we are to **Look...and grasp who he is**. Notice...verse 40,

“My Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him,” – John 6:40.

The word being translated “to look”... means to **“look intently”**...to gaze... **...so that you grasp who he really is.**

Jesus is calling us to come...fully before him... and grasp his divine glory.

And thirdly... there’s **another word** that’s really the critical word.

“he who believes in me will never be thirsty. – John 6:35

“everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life” – John 6:40

Believing is eating. Taking in, receiving, appropriating.

This is why Jesus begins to speak of eating his body...Verse 53,
Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” – John 6:53

That can **sound really weird**. And it sounded weird then.

There is no doubt about what Jesus meant... it meant we need God back within us. If it **sounded like some weird sacrificial ritual**...it was because it was about **something even more horrific**... he was the sacrifice... he would **atone for our sin if we receive that sacrificial life... body and blood... come live within us/**

Maybe we who live after the events that took place... have a hard time appreciating how lard it was to take this in.

That had come to believe that they were living in the story of being chosen for earthly privilege...and earthly provision. They hoped for earthly privilege...and earthly provision.

If that is the story...then give us earthly bread.... be a provider of manna like Moses. If that provider tells us he is going to die... naturally we react negatively... if he says that he will die because the enemies will kill him... we would reject such a potential.

That’s why **his own disciples**... were **fighting against this**. When Jesus said, “I’m going to die,” They said.... No way. (His most passionate disciple... Peter... said he would never let that happen. **Peter was ready to die for him...but he was not ready for Christ to die for him.**)

What Jesus is engaging... is that **they understood themselves to be of this world...** and were focused on being **blessed on earth...** so they **sought his blessings...** in their prosperity...in their national identity.

They wanted bread because they **had bodies...**but **they are beings....spiritual being created by God to exist with God forever.**

For them... eternal life was secondary matter... but for God... it is THE what matters most.

What does this mean for us?

1. We come with hunger for the Bread of Life

The people who eat are the people who are what? Hungry! What is hunger? It's the aching of the heart of one who knows he's empty. That's **the work of the Holy Spirit** to make the heart hungry. That's where the Father starts to draw.

The underlying challenge was that the people were focused on the earthly bread.

Jesus said everything begins and flows from our hunger... thirst... need. [2]

"Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied." - Luke 6:21

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink." – John 7:37

"Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do." – Luke 5:31 (CEV)

And this is what the season of Lent offers us.

It is a time of **shifting our hunger... our attachments.**

All of our current searching for meaning in life and satisfaction through power, wealth, influence, education, and health is like manna in the desert— we may be able to survive awhile, but in the end we are going to die and be no more. **All the things on which we feed**, which are supposed to provide meaning and a good life, **will be gone.** Only one thing, one person can give true life—Jesus Christ.

Fasting is NOT about trying to deny our earthly hunger...

Jesus had just done what? Fed the people when evening had come.

In a model of prayer... Jesus said we should prayer "*Give us this day our daily bread.*"

Why? **Because our temporal existence needs it.**

> Fasting is not about rejecting the gifts of food and water... or any other gifts...but rather connecting with more.

John 6:26-27

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ **Do not work for food that spoils**, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the

Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

Jesus challenges the people to **work for food that will not disappear** overnight. He doesn't mean normal effort... he means striving... because it will all come to an end.

Jesus declares...

“Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died.” – John 6:49

They ate and died. Everyone who ate the bread he had provided... everyone he healed... **still faced the limits of this temporal life.**

> All the **feeding and healing he bore** in this age **was temporal... signs that pointed** to something that transcends life as we know it. This points to what is so vital to grasp: **we long for something more.**

Manna was never the ultimate bread of life...**never the living bread.**

St. Augustine rightly observed that **everyone** has a **God-shaped vacuum in their soul.** We can attempt to fill that cavity with a host of other things, but **only God can satisfy this God need.**

As *Larry Crabb* described...

“Ever since God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden, we have lived in an unnatural environment, a world in which we were not designed to live. We were built to enjoy a garden without weeds, relationships without friction, fellowship without distance. But something is wrong, and we know it, both within our world and within ourselves. Deep inside we sense we're out of the nest, always ending the day in a motel room, never at home.” - Larry Crabb

So Lent... is a season many seek to detach from some of our temporal attachments...in order to cultivate our eternal attachments. We allow ourselves to face our emptiness...that reveals our hunger for God.

- **Fasting is a means of freedom from the distortion that we are merely physical creatures.**

Some of the most dissatisfied people in the world live in the developed countries of the world. We who have more than enough to eat and a comfortable place to live are not satisfied. There is a deeper hunger. There is a restlessness which says, **“There has to be more to life than this.”**

While its great to eat because I'm physical... to work because I'm rational & functional... Jesus came to liberate us from the distortion that these are the deepest nature of our life. Our eternal spiritual nature is found in PRAYER, and often sharpened and enhanced by FASTING... which focuses our attention. In this way we can understand fasting.

- **Fasting isn't about pain, but perspective.**

- Fasting **isn't about renouncing** the goodness of food, but **recognizing the spiritual sustenance** in God.

...The hungry heart sees the bread.

We see the Bread of Life

It means we **don't try just keep our distance** so that we can **dismiss him as just another religious figure...or some vague religious teacher.**

It means we **dare to look...** and see that he is indeed the Bread that has come down from heaven... whose life source we need.

It means we will see that what lies in the death and resurrection of Christ as the real story. The Bread of Life has come down. We see the glory of God in Christ.

How important...as we prepare to remember what Christ will bear for us.

As we remember **Jesus heading to Jerusalem where he will be crucified...**we see that **it is God heading to Jerusalem...** when Jesus begins to bear the weight of **separation / abandonment...** when Jesus is **mocked / beaten... tried / condemned... nailed / raised up ...** it is God...embodied among us.

And we gaze not simply with horror...but with humility; not with the gall of what others did...but with gratitude for what God did.

We receive the Bread of Life

We must receive... or eat and take him in.

It is shared...but it is also personal.

Eating is personal. I can come to a feast that is shared...but choosing to eat is a choice I have to make.

People can do a lot of things to help you. But they can't eat for you. You can't eat by proxy. Eating is personal.

And it is important to hear Jesus be so clear...that HE is the bread of life. Life is not found in the principles of Jesus... or the programs of Jesus... but the PERSON of Jesus.

He is Himself the Bread of Life. He doesn't give it. He is it. And to have it, one must have Him.

This is **so vital** for us to grasp **amidst a culture** that speaks of **religious ideas as if they alone offer power** when they are just ideas. We can ask each other what we believe and we answer in such a way that reflects that we have some quality that leads to eternal life.

When asked what we believe we may think **we are being asked who will get our vote....** As if there is a god who could be lucky enough to get our vote. **We must accept that we have a need for the bread of life... and it is from God.**

As the Bread of Life... he reveals that **not only** is he the **source of life...** but that **we receive this source as intimately as bread infuses the body.**

He says we must eat his life given for us... take it in... it is a matter of digesting him. Food becomes the fuel on which we live.

- Like gas to a car... no power until it comes in and becomes effective.
- Same as food to the body.

C.S. Lewis [3]

“A car is made to run on petrol [gasoline], and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on himself. He himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way... God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.” - C.S. Lewis

To consume him... take him in as the food that is metabolized in us.. implies a **PERSONAL** relationship.

We say even now that one is what one eats. Jesus is speaking here about total assimilation of, a complete identification with...his very nature reflected in his truth and love.

Closing: Invitation to come... see... and receive.

Do you have a personal relationship?

Do you have a personal relationship... where you are learning from him... finding peace with him... changing in relationship to him.

Maybe we can identify with those who came focused on earthly bread. ... focused on the short-term, perishable, unfulfilling stuff ... the kind Jesus calls “food that spoils” and tells them not to go after.

Jesus saws... come...see...and eat.

Communion...

He is the bread... and **he is broken for us.**

Resources: In returning to this text and declaration once again, and desiring to focus on the tinction implied regarding Jesus and the appropriation (as part of the Lenten season), I have drawn from John McArthur’s flow in “I Am the Bread of Life” message, particularly in identifying the three distinctives before how we appropriate / eat. This allowed getting to the Lent focus at the end.

Notes:

1. In response to Jesus saying, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven”... it is clear that the religious leaders understood the implications. In verse 42, they are wondering how this man whose parents they know can say, “I have come down out of heaven.”

He states this six times in the full course of this exchange...and even sharpens the point that only he has seen God the Father (v. 46)... and that if they have seen him...they have seen the Father.

2. This cry for a lasting bread is also heard through the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 55:1 - "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?"

3. C.S. Lewis (Mere Christianity; Harper Collins, 1952; p.50)

Furthermore, Lewis explains: "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire; well there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire for which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

As we have seen, C.S. Lewis, more clearly than most writers, has sensed the uniqueness of God-inspired desire and of having God as the object of desire. In his book, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, he says that the experience of intense longing is distinguished from other longings by two things:

In the first place, though the sense of want is acute and even painful, yet the mere wanting is felt to be somehow a delight. This hunger is better than any other fullness; this poverty better than any other wealth. In the second place, there is a peculiar mystery about the object of this desire. Every one of these supposed objects for the desire is inadequate to it. It appears to me therefore that if a man diligently followed this desire, pursuing the false objects until their falsity appeared and then resolutely abandoning them, he must come out at last into the clear knowledge that the human soul was made to enjoy some object that is never fully given—nay, cannot even be imagined as given—in our present mode of subjective and spatio-temporal experience. -Houston, "In Search of Happiness"