

**I AM the Bread of Life**  
**John 6:26-35**  
**December 7, 2025**

The first summer I moved back to Memphis, I worked for a family whose son had ALS—a long story for another day. But as that disease progressed, little by little Walter was no longer able to go and do the things he used to do. So, occasionally, he'd say to me, "Go to this place and then come back and tell me about it."

So, one day Walter told me about a "hole in the wall" restaurant in Midtown he used to go to all the time. Keep in mind that this is probably 2007. There's no GPS yet, and certainly no smartphones. But, like we *used* to do, Walt tells me how to get there. I take Sam Cooper all the way down. Then, of course, I'm supposed to turn left on East Parkway. And, for those of you that venture down there from time to time, you know my next turn is *probably* going to be right on Madison.

However, if you've taken that turn, you know that it's between two roads that are a good bit easier to spot—Poplar and Union. *Between* those two roads is Madison. A sign is there. I've seen it a bunch of times since. But that sign can be missed. And "miss it" we did. And quite stubbornly we kept driving until we were nowhere near Midtown. I think it's the only time we set out to *eat* somewhere and never made it. All because we missed a sign.

We've talked about signs in Exodus. The cobra on Pharaoh's crown had a particular sign-ificance. Likewise, the Nile was more than a river in Egypt. And into *that* world, Moses grabbed a snake by its tail, in order to *point* to something else. That was a sign. Then the Lord told Moses to pour some Nile on the ground, where it would become blood, sign-ifying something *else* (Ex. 4:1–9).

The sign is not the thing itself. The sign points. The green rectangle with white letters that I missed was intended to lead me elsewhere. In that case, to sustenance.

One of the primary organizing devices in John's Gospel is John's use of signs. Maybe you say, "I thought we were talking about the 'I AM' statements." Well, in this case, the "I AM" comes on the heels of a sign.

Since we've not spent time regularly in this Gospel, we might zoom out and consider the book from a higher vantage point. There are seven signs in it.<sup>1</sup> And there are seven "I am" statements.<sup>2</sup> And when we consider all the signs and "I am" statements *together*, we'd be wise to consider *why* John wrote all of them. Which he tells us at the end of the book, in John 20: **Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name** (John 20:30–31).

Which might take you all the way back to Exodus 3, where God reveals His name, in part as "I AM." And as He continued to make Himself known—not by flame in a bush but in the flesh with a body—we read Him say "I am" yet again. And He does so to explain a sign.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Andreas Köstenberger's *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 333–334.

<sup>2</sup> At least in terms of "I am" statements with a predicate. See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC, 289 and Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 59.

## 1. Bread that Does Not Perish (vv. 26–27)

So, if the “I AM” statement today is **I am the bread of life**, and if it’s *connected* to a sign, what is that sign? It’s the five barley loaves and two fish that became sufficient food for thousands of men, women, and children just a few verses prior.<sup>3</sup> You know that story. Know that it *just* happened.

For more context, earlier in chapter 6 John writes that Jesus had gone up on a mountain, and that the Passover was near (John 6:3–4). Further, *after* the feeding of the five thousand, there’s a supernatural crossing of the sea. All *that* has happened *before* we get to verse 26. I think I know John’s favorite book in the Old Testament. Or at least which book he wants us to be thinking about.

After being fed, the crowds are looking for Jesus. And in verse 25 they find Him, but on the wrong side of the water. So, they ask: **Rabbi, when did you get here?** Verse 26 begins with **Jesus answered them**. But actually, He does *not* answer their question.<sup>4</sup> Instead, He questions their motive for seeking and asking. Verse 26: **Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs.”**

In short, they *missed* the sign. Or, we might say they missed the sign by thinking the sign was the thing itself. For example, simple as it is, let’s say I saw the green rectangle with Madison in white letters on that evening in 2007. But instead of turning there, I *stopped* there, so that Julie and I might get out of the car and wait to be fed.

How did they think the *sign* was the thing signified? Jesus continues in verse 26, saying, **you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.** To many of us, “hunger” is the 25 minutes we had to wait before we were offered more food than we could eat. I’m not pointing fingers; that’s me too. But 25 minutes is *not* what “hunger” meant for someone in the Ancient Near East. In truer ways than most of us have ever experienced, they didn’t live to eat, they ate to live.<sup>5</sup>

So, what happened in John 6—to be filled, thousands upon thousands of men and women, with twelve baskets of barley left over, was not an ordinary Tuesday. So, they got in their boats and looked for the Man who filled their bellies. As one man wrote, “Instead of seeing in the bread the sign, they had seen in the sign only the bread.”<sup>6</sup>

Jesus knows that. They’d crossed miles of sea (6:19) to find Him. Clearly, they were already hungry again. And yet, He’s after their hearts. So, He points them elsewhere. Verse 27: **Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures.** In short, there’s bread that satisfies, and *keeps* satisfying. In fact, **the food which endures** *never ceases*, but endures all the way to eternal life.

Where would they get *that*? Jesus says this food that endures to eternal life, verse 27: **the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.** Who is this “Son of Man?” The book of Daniel certainly gives us categories to think in. But for our purposes today, maybe we’d note how John has used the term thus far. In John 3:13, Jesus says, **No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.** Keep “from heaven” in mind. The Son of Man has come from there. And then note what’s next, what I’d call *more* evidence that John thought the second book of the Bible was fairly significant. John 3:14: **As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.**

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<sup>3</sup> Verse 14 of chapter 6 says this, **When the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”**

<sup>4</sup> Carson, 283.

<sup>5</sup> For that reason, among others, in this era rulers often manipulated the hungry with food. Roman Emperors kept the Roman people pacified with bread. Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1, 676.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, 358.

So, who *will* give this food that endures? *He* will—the Son of Man that would be soon lifted up. And what gives *Him* the right to do so? Verse 27 continues: **for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.** In this era, a seal attested to the character of an item's content.<sup>7</sup> It also indicated that the owner of the seal approved. Not to limit this approval to a single moment,<sup>8</sup> but if we're *looking* for a place in John where this “seal” is evident, we might note John the Baptist's words in John 1:33: **He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, “He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.”**

To summarize these two verses, we might say that the crowds sought Jesus; but while looking Him in the face they *still* missed Him. They worked for food that would not endure. He tells them to work for that which does, that which leads to eternal life. For that, they'd need to look to the One on whom the Father had set His seal.

There is bread that perishes. There is bread that doesn't.

## 2. The True Bread—of God, from Heaven, for the World (vv. 28–34)

The crowds *continue* to miss what the sign signified. They *continue* to make wrong turns. While it's fairly obvious that Jesus was correcting the crowd's motive, their blindness concerning the sign, and pointing them to the Giver of bread that endures, they assume Jesus's focus is on *work*. Verse 28 gives us the crowd's question to what Jesus just said about food that perishes: **Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?”**<sup>9</sup> They *keep* missing what Jesus is saying.

And He *keeps* being so patient with them. It's not about *works*, in the plural. But if you want to use that language, Jesus tells them about a singular work. Here is the one thing you are to *do*. Verse 29: **Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”**

Paul would write, **when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman** (Gal. 4:4). I bring that up in part because Jesus's answer in verse 29 is quite Pauline.<sup>10</sup> How might we receive this bread that does not perish, food that endures to eternal life? The work is to believe. Jesus casts aside “works” in the plural and preaches faith alone. To live they are to believe in the One *sent*.

It seems as if they realize that Jesus is referring to Himself—the One they chased down because He'd *just* turned five loaves into a hundred warehouses of bread. Verse 30: **So they said to Him, “What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do you perform?”**

They didn't *need* another sign. What they'd seen *certainly* corroborated what He'd claimed. Yet they'd missed the signs, one after another. They'd missed His statements explaining the signs, repeatedly. So, it's more they want.<sup>11</sup>

That's what unbelief does. It's quite apparent in those that receive every breath they've ever taken from the hand of God, and yet deny His existence. He makes the sun to shine upon them, provides for them, shows mercy to them, and they suppress the truth (Rom. 1). But this seeing yet not believing is *also* something His people struggle with. Our degree of faith often dependent upon

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<sup>7</sup> Keener, 677.

<sup>8</sup> Carson, 284.

<sup>9</sup> Maybe we'd say the question itself is fairly bold—as in, “What do we do? Because *whatever* it is, we'll do it.” Carson, 285.

<sup>10</sup> Because Paul preached the gospel He heard from the Risen Christ Himself.

<sup>11</sup> Further, the emphasis is on *sight*. They seem to *not* understand the nature of faith. Morris, 362.

what we *assume* the Lord's done recently. Without asking out loud, maybe we long for *another* sign, another visible "answer," so that we might believe.

Yet, the sign that *forever* confirms His love and care for His people is the truth that He came for them. The Father purposed it. The Son put on flesh and pursued a people. As one man wrote, "Man's Maker was made man . . . that the Bread might hunger, the Fountain thirst, the Light sleep, the Way be tired on its journey; that the Truth might be accused of false witness, the Teacher be beaten with whips, the Foundation be suspended on wood; that Strength might grow weak; that the Healer might be wounded; that Life might die."<sup>12</sup> He came to us, for us—born to live, to die, and rise, that we might too.

What *else* would it take to convince you that God Himself loves you?

But these crowds are hungry. And again, "instead of seeing in the bread the sign, they had seen in the sign only the bread."<sup>13</sup> So, after asking for *more*, we're taken to—once again—the book of Exodus. Verse 31: **Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread out of heaven to eat."**

The crowds bring up the fact that for forty years, six days a week, manna rained down out of heaven. Because *one* of the problems with the feeding of the 5,000—if someone were *looking* to critique it—is that it happened a few days back. And it didn't happen every day since. Again, they were hungry, *again*.

Once more, Jesus is patient with them, both with their motives and with their questions. And He shows them that, like the bread from a few days back, the manna was something that pointed to something else. And that's because the source of it was *not* who they implied it was. Verse 32: **Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven."**

Because they read Exodus wrongly, they missed the Giver of it. One danger in Exodus is wrongly exalting Moses. In this case, because they missed the One that *sent* the bread out of heaven, they don't seem to realize that Exodus 16 was a shadow, a type. That it *too* was food that perished. And because of that, they missed what the manna pointed to.

It wasn't Moses that gave it. The Father gave it. But Jesus doesn't merely say *the* Father. He says **My Father**. And what does *His* Father give? He gives **the true bread**—no longer shadow, but substance.

Not insignificantly, the verb tense for "give" actually changes here. It's no longer in the past, as in, He *gave*. Instead, Jesus says that His Father—in the present tense—*gives*. In other words, Jesus is no longer talking about something God did in Exodus 16. Mercifully, He's telling these crowds what God is doing *now*. He is *giving*.

And verse 33 doubles down on that emphasis: **For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.** Like the manna, this bread too comes from another place. It comes from a place not limited by time. Yet, unlike the manna, this bread doesn't grow old, nor does it perish. When it gives life, it keeps giving life. But Jesus also declares that this bread, unlike the manna, isn't limited by place. It doesn't descend and land in one spot. This food that endures is given to all.

After that, we might say that—in one sense—the crowd finally responds rightly. Verse 34: **Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."**

Jesus just described the true bread—from God, sent from heaven, bread that gives life to all. And then He **said to them, "I am the bread of life"** (v. 35).

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Jonathan Gibson, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. 71.

<sup>13</sup> Morris, 358.

### 3. He is the Bread of Life (v. 35)

He was the true and better manna.<sup>14</sup> That manna was given *only* to a particular people in a particular place. That manna went away. Those that ate that manna died. There's a food that perishes.

But Jesus says this about Himself in verse 35: **he who comes to Me will not hunger.** We just heard Him say that the Son of Man gives food that endures—food that endures to eternal life.

And He does so for those that do what He'd *just* instructed them to do, that is, believe. For those that exercise faith in the One sent from Heaven, He gives a further assurance: **He who believes in Me will never thirst.** “Never” is emphatic. So is the “not” in the previous clause,<sup>15</sup> as if He says, “never *ever* hunger,” and “never thirst, *ever*.”

### Conclusion

Which might remind us of the invitation of God in the book of Isaiah: **Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat** (Is. 55:1). Which might push us to the words of the Psalmist: **O taste and see that the Lord is good** (Ps. 34:8). Which is not unrelated to what Jesus said of those who hunger and thirst for God Himself: **they shall be satisfied** (Mt. 5:6).

So, don't miss the sign. And see the One it points you to. **Believe in Him whom He has sent** (v. 29). Because to His people, the Lord's given this bread *always*. The significance of it, the substance—the *true* bread—is life in Christ Himself.

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<sup>14</sup> Mitchell Chase, *40 Questions about Typology and Allegory*, 140.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, 366.