

I Am the Bread of Life

St. Mark Lutheran
Two services

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Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." John 6:32-35

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Today we look at one of the "I Am" statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. What does it mean? Surely you are acquainted with other "I Am" statements of Jesus. He said, "I am the Good Shepherd..." He said, "I am the Vine..." They are all important. This one is super important.

Many of you will recall that not long ago we read the account at the start of Chapter 6 about Jesus feeding the 5,000. Jesus withdrew from the crowds after this miracle. John 6:15 tells us that he withdrew because "they intended to come and make him king by force". That was one of the problems in Jesus' ministry. Most people were not looking for forgiveness of sins. They were looking for an earthly king. They were looking to be rid of the Romans. Sometimes we are looking for the wrong things from Jesus also.

That night Jesus walked on the water and the boat crossed the lake to the other side. The next morning, the crowd that had been fed by Jesus the night before went in search of him. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." (John 6:26)

In other words, he is telling them he offers something much better than food that will eventually spoil. The food he offers leads to eternal life. That is much more important than temporary satisfaction.

But most scholars would say that Jesus is also saying more than just that. What bread is to the stomach, Jesus is to the soul. Probably all people struggle at some time finding meaning and purpose to their lives. We struggle with questions about the meaning of life and our purpose and our worth because there is something missing. God created us to be in relationship with him, but because of sin we have been separated from our Creator. We are not living the kind of life that we were meant to live. St. Augustine described it as having a sort of vacuum or empty space in our soul. Jesus, the bread of life, brings us what we need to that fill that empty place.

When Jesus fed the 5,000, none of them earned the meal they received, did they? It was given to them freely. But that was not the greatest gift Jesus had to give. He offered them eternal life. But look how they responded to this offer. First they asked, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" They don't get it that the gift of eternal life is free. They want to do what they have to do to earn this gift. Jesus answers this by saying, "This is the work of God, that you believe in whom he has sent."

That was their first reaction. What was their second reaction? They wanted him to prove it. They asked him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?" They wanted him to do a miracle. They wanted him to do something sensational to validate what he was saying.

This still happens today. It has happened to me several times. Some argumentative person says to do a miracle and he will believe. That's not necessarily so. During my years at Kent State University, one of my friends was stealing things from the cafeteria and I told him to stop. He claimed to be a Christian and I told him a Christian shouldn't be doing those things. He became angry and said words to the effect that the whole thing about God was a lot of baloney. I assured him it was not. Then he said that if God put a new car for him in front of our room that night, then he would believe.

Now we would not expect God to respond to taunts like that, but what if he did? What if God had arranged for a new car with my friend's name on it to be put in front of our room with the keys in it? Do you think my friend would have believed? I greatly doubt it. He probably would have accused me, or one of our friends down the corridor, of setting the whole thing up! As David Meece sang in his album Count the Cost back in 2012, "Some People They Never Believe", and he gave a whole list of things that God and Jesus have done throughout history and many STILL have not believed!

If I had it to do over again, I would do it another way. Using what Jesus said about repentance and confessing sins, I could at least have showed him a way out. You see, the Word of God is much more powerful than our word. My friend had been taught about confession in his church, and I should have encouraged him to confess his sins to God.

That worked for Jesus. His word changed some hearts. When they cited their fathers receiving bread from heaven, Jesus said this: "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who came down from heaven and gives light to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." (John 6:34)

Human nature is still the same. People are more in love with the things of the world than with God. They form their image and understanding of God based on their own sinful thinking rather than checking out what God has revealed to us about himself. Proverbs 14:12 tells us, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

A young man was ready to graduate from college. For months he had admired a beautiful sports car, and that was well known to his father, who was quite rich. He waited and waited for his dad to "surprise" him. On the morning of his graduation, his father called him into his private study. His father told him how proud he was to have such a fine son and how much he loved him.

He handed his son a beautifully wrapped gift box. Curious, but somewhat disappointed, the young man opened the gift. He found a lovely, leather bound Bible in it, with the young man's name embossed in gold. He was angry, and he screamed at his father, "With all your money you give me a Bible?" He then stormed out of the house leaving the Bible there. He didn't come back.

Many years passed. The young man married and had a nice family but never returned to his home. He had not seen his father since that graduation day. He realized that his father was getting old and thought perhaps he should go see him. But before he got around to it, he received a telegram that his father had died. He had willed all of his possessions to his only child. The young man needed to come home and take care of things. Sudden sadness and regret filled his heart because he had waited too long.

Upon arriving at his father's house, he began to search through his father's important papers. He found the still new Bible. With tears he opened the Bible, and he saw his father had carefully underlined a verse, Matthew 7:11. It read, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him." Then, suddenly, from the back of the Bible, a car key dropped out. On the tag was the date of his graduation and the words "PAID IN FULL".

Like the young man in the story, I wonder if anyone here has missed God's great gift because of looking for the wrong things in life. As for the crowd, it's normal to want to see a miracle, but Jesus IS the miracle. No other person in the history of the world has had the most important details of his life written down before he was even born. Jesus laid aside his majesty and became one of us so that he could die on the cross for our sins. His ministry on this earth included one miracle after another. Even his enemies admitted that. He capped it all off by rising from the dead and showing his power over death.

Jesus is still offering the gift of salvation today. Maybe you are here today or reading this message and are still searching. You recognize that something in your life is missing. Jesus alone can satisfy your needs and bring you through the gates of death and into heaven. He says the same thing to you that he said to the crowd so many years ago: "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." Amen.

