

## Introduction

I discovered through Facebook last year, that *nice-news* sells, but *challenging-news* does not! Whenever I placed a *nice-news* post - a wedding photo, a beautiful winter scene, that kind of thing— I got lots of “likes.” But a few days before Christmas I posted a *challenging-news* post: “When we worry about whether we'll get the right size turkey this Christmas....” followed by a link to the terrible plight of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh— and I only got four “likes”! Of course, no-one is surprised, we all know that *nice-news* sells and *challenging-news* does not.

In today's talk, we remember an event from John chapter 6 where Jesus *lost* many of his followers because he gave them *challenging-news*. The *nice-news* they wanted to hear was, “Jesus can make our lives easy and comfortable by giving us free bread every day! Yeah! Let's make him king!!” The *challenging-news* Jesus taught that day was that he came into the world, not primarily to meet our *bodily needs*, but to meet our deeper *spiritual needs*.

And because Jesus told the people that *their eternal spiritual needs* were more important *than their temporary bodily needs*, he lost many followers! “*From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*” (66)

And here's the thing: Jesus did not chase them down, “Come back, I'll change my message to please you...” He let them go... because truth matters more than numbers.

There is a lesson here us who live in a world obsessed by numbers. Let's remember that popularity - how many “likes” a post attracts or how many “hits” a YouTube clip receives - is no indication of truth. The *few people* who followed Jesus were in the right, *the many who* walked away were wrong.

## The Seven I Ams

During this term, we hope to take a look at the seven occasions when Jesus used the words “I am” to describe who he was...

1. “I am the bread of life” John 6
2. “I am the Light of the world” John 8
3. “I am the gate” John 10
4. “I am the Good shepherd” John 10
5. “I am the resurrection and the Life” John 11
6. “I am the way the truth and the Life” John 14
7. “I am the true Vine” John 15

In the Old Testament, God himself used the words “I am” to describe *himself*, for example in Exodus chapter 3. So whenever Jesus spoke “I am” he was claiming to be God - but in addition, through each of these seven “I ams” Jesus reveals a little more of what he, the divine Son of God came to do. So we should expect to know Jesus better by Easter than we do today!

In each sermon we will set the scene *behind the saying* and then home in on the meaning of the saying for us in 2021.

## The backgrounds

Today's wonderful saying is this: *"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 And there are two background stories behind it.

### Background 1 – the immediate feeding of the 5000

The first is the event that took place the day before Jesus spoke the words, when he miraculously fed 5000 people. (Actually it says 5000 men, so adding womenfolk and children takes the crowd over 10,000). The disciples had no resources to feed such a crowd, you may recall, but they found a lad who had just 5 small loaves and 2 small fish—probably his packed lunch for the day! And since Jesus is able to take *whatever little* we may offer him, *and increase it* for his glory, he multiplied 5 small loaves and 2 little fish into a feast for everyone, so abundant that 12 baskets of bread were left over! The reason Jesus performed this miracle was to show us that he is able to meet *everyone's spiritual needs*. But tragically the crowds could only see free bread and they wanted Jesus to stick around only to make their material lives more comfortable.

### Background 2—Moses and manna from heaven

The other story we need to recall before we can understand *"I am the bread of life"* took place hundreds of years earlier when God provided, daily "manna" which fell on the floor each morning and became their "daily bread" for 40 years in the desert. (The view, not in the Bible, went around Israel that when the Messiah came, the great King the Jews were expecting, he would also bring down manna from heaven just like Moses had, which explains why when Jesus performed this miracle people rushed to make him king.) But the *main purpose* of this ancient miracle was also to show that God can not only meet our material needs but also meet the *spiritual* needs of all his people, and to point forward to Jesus who would call himself the bread of life!

So with that background we should take three truths away from his words, "I am the bread of life." The first a reminder.

#### (1) Jesus is reminding us that we have an invisible soul as well as a visible body

After God created Adam's *body from the ground*, he *breathed spirit* or soul into him. So Adam became an soul-body unity. Not just a body, not just a soul, but an indivisible psycho-somatic, body-soul unity. *We all have a body* that we can see but because of sin it is dying, it is mortal; indeed our bodies start to age when we are, 16, 21, 25? But we *also have an invisible soul*, all those parts of our being we cannot see, the mind, the spirit, the conscious self, the real you and me, if you will. And this soul lives on forever beyond the grave. This is the first truth Jesus is reminding us when he says "I am the bread of life"

And we need a constant reminder of this truth, because like the thousands of people following Jesus, it is all too easy to think *body* and *neglect soul*. The demands of our visible bodies are noisy and clamorous and they easily crowd out the deeper quiet needs of our invisible souls! Whenever we forget the needs of our souls Jesus issues us a gentle rebuke: *"I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs (which would have led them to seeing Jesus as the giver of eternal life for their souls) but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."* (26) Are we like the crowds? Do we live day by day thinking only about food and drink and sex and comfort and health? Neglecting the needs of our precious souls: (i) the need for daily forgiveness for our sins, (ii) the need for purpose in life, (iii) the need for unconditional love, (iv) the need for peace in our hearts, (v) the need for hope in the face of death?

If all we concern ourselves with is the body today, Jesus urges us: *"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you."* (26-27) Start on a spiritual quest today! "Work for food, seek for food that endures to eternal life."

So, Jesus is teaching that we have eternal souls which have spiritual needs, as well as mortal bodies with all their rowdy demands, secondly,

## #2 Jesus is claiming to be the only one who can satisfy our spiritual needs

If we try to satisfy our spiritual needs with religion, achievements, relationships, hobbies, sport, fame or music, we will discover that they all fail to satisfy the God-shaped hunger found in every human soul. *King Solomon* went on a long quest to fill his empty heart with all these things and came back with the verdict:

*“Meaningless! Meaningless!  
Says the teacher,  
Utterly meaningless!  
Everything is meaningless!”*

Buzz Aldrin with Neil Armstrong was the first man to set foot on the moon. What an achievement! Surely enough to satisfy the heart! No, he says in his biography, as soon as the spacecraft returned to earth, he was struck with *“peculiar feeling of loss.”* (Moon shot, 261). And soon after this historic achievement, his life fell apart, *“There was no goal, no sense of calling, no project worth pouring myself into. I had started drinking more. Life seemed to have lost it’s shine. On some days I couldn’t even find a reason to get out of bed. So I didn’t ...”* All the great achievers in history, from Solomon onwards, say the same thing, when they reached the top of the world - there was nothing there.

There is nothing in this world, not money, not possessions, not achievements, not love, not family, that can fill the empty void in our souls. But Jesus 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*

If you come to Jesus, he promises to satisfy the needs of your soul completely!

- *His atoning death* will give you the complete forgiveness of your sins you need
- And will *reconnect you with God* in whom you will find meaning and purpose, because made to know
- Jesus’ *resurrection from the dead* will give you hope beyond the grave
- And his *presence with you by his indwelling Spirit* will comfort you all the days of your life with his unconditional love

*“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*

Summary

(1) We have invisible souls as well as visible bodies,

(2) Jesus can satisfy the needs of our souls, and finally:

#3 Jesus offers spiritual life to everyone who believes in him

*“...He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” John 6:35*

If we feel our souls to be hungry and empty all we need to do is to come to Jesus and to believe in him, and he will give us this free spiritual bread. We don’t need to *work* for this spiritual bread—that is the error of all religion: *“What must we do to do the works of God?” Jesus replied, “The work of God is this: to believe (just believe) in the one he has sent, that is Jesus.”* No, to receive this free bread of life, all we need to do is to believe in Jesus Christ, come to him, follow him.

**Seekers:** so here this morning is a word for those who are spiritually empty and hungry: come to Jesus, believe in Him and you will never hunger or thirst again. Don't walk away like the crowds did, offended that Jesus should urge you to put your spiritual needs above your bodily ones.

**Believers:** And for those of us who already believe, a constant reminder that if we have Jesus Christ we have all we need to meet the deepest needs of the human soul.

*Jesus, Thou Joy of loving hearts,*

wrote Bernard of Clairvaux a 1000 years ago, and no-one has put it better before nor since.

*Jesus, Thou Joy of loving hearts,*

*Thou Fount of life, Thou Light of men,  
From the best bliss that earth imparts,  
We turn unfilled to Thee again.*

*Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;  
Thou savest those that on Thee call;  
To them that seek Thee, Thou art good,  
To them that find Thee, all in all!*

*We taste Thee, O Thou living Bread,  
And long to feast upon Thee still;  
We drink of Thee, the Fountain-head,  
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill!*

*Our restless spirits yearn for Thee,  
Where'er our changeful lot is cast;  
Glad when Thy gracious smile we see,  
Blest, when our faith can hold Thee fast.*

*O Jesus, ever with us stay,*

*make all our moments calm and bright;*

*chase the dark night of sin away,*

*shed o'er the world thy holy light,*