



from the desk of . . .

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#791

11 February 2018

I AM - 1

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:25-35

Let's begin this morning with a riddle. What do the following 10 people have in common? See if you can pick out the theme that runs through all of their lives.

- Jerry Lewis (X) ... comedian, movie star, host of the Labor Day muscular dystrophy telethon
- Della Reece (X) ... Gospel & jazz singer, star of the TV show "Touched By An Angel"
- Roy Halladay (X) ... Philadelphia Phillies pitcher, 2010 Cy Young award winner
- Roger Ailes (X) ... Chairman & C.E.O. of Fox News
- Judge Wapner (X) ... star of "The People's Court"
- Lil Peep (X) ... American rapper
- David Rockefeller (X) ... billionaire philanthropist
- Monty Hall (X) ... TV game show host
- Aaron Hernandez (X) ... tight end for New England Patriots

- Roger Moore (X) ... British movie & TV actor, the 2nd "best" James Bond

Do you detect the common theme that runs through their lives? (X) ... Okay, who's the smart one? ... Call it out. ... What do they all have in common? ...

Okay, let me tell you ... they were all alive on the 11th of February 2017. But in the past 12 months every one of their names has been added to the list of famous obituaries.

They're no longer with us. They were ... just a year ago. But now we refer to each of them in the past tense. In fact, there's just one "being" in the entire universe who always appears in the present tense. He always is.

3,500 years ago, when He spoke to a trembling shepherd by the name of Moses out in the desert, He identified Himself with these words; He said my name is,
(X) "I am who I am." (Exodus 3:14)

Theologians tell us that God is the one & only totally autonomous being. He's the only one in the universe who doesn't depend on some outside force for His existence.

God just is.

God is eternally present tense. God says of Himself (X) ... "I AM." (Exodus 3:14) God exists.

He is. He always has been. And He always will be.

(The Revelation 1:8)

I want you to keep that in mind as we consider an exchange that took place between Jesus & a crowd of people. He was talking to them about the patriarch Abraham, who had lived 2,000 years earlier. And yet Jesus was speaking of him as if He knew him personally.

So, someone in the crowd objected & said wait a moment ... "You are not even 50 years old -
& you have seen Abraham?" (John 8:57)

Jesus replied, "I am telling you the truth, before Abraham was born, 'I Am'." (John 8:58)

Jesus was making a not too subtle claim to be the eternally existent God! And Jesus' audience, which was a good Jewish crowd, began to pick up stones because they thought that He was spouting blasphemy. (John 8:59)

This morning we're beginning a 7-part series on "Jesus the 'I AM'". (X) And the reason it's going to take 7 weeks is because there are 7 "I AM" statements that Jesus makes in the Gospel of John.

So, here's the 1st one. Good News from John, to you who have gathered here this morning for worship.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

When the people found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they said to him, "Teacher, when did you get here?"

Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles. Do not work for the food that spoils; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life. This is the food which the Son of Man will give you, because God, the Father, has put his mark of approval on him."

So they asked him, "What can we do in order to do what God wants us to do?"

Jesus answered, "What God wants you to do is to believe in the one he sent."

They replied, "What miracle will you perform so that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, just as the scripture says, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

"I am telling you the truth," Jesus said. "What Moses gave you was not the bread from heaven; it is my Father who gives you the real bread from heaven. For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they asked him, "give us this bread always."

"I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:25-35)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

Today we begin with "I AM The Bread Of Life." The key statement is in John 6:35. Read it aloud with me ...

"I am the bread of life,' Jesus told them.
'Those who come to me will never be hungry;
those who believe in me will never be thirsty.'"

There are several aspects of His being the "bread of life" that I want us to consider this morning.

1st ... The bread of life is food that **doesn't spoil**.

Now this ... "I am the bread of life" ... statement comes on the heels of Jesus' "4th recorded miracle" ... the feeding of the 5,000.

Jesus took a little boy's lunch ... "5 loaves of barley bread & 2 fish" (John 6:9) ... & He multiplied it to feed 5,000 hungry men. (John 6:10) And if we add to that the women & children who were there ... that's quite a meal, a lot bigger than our soup & bread supper that we're having on Wednesday, or our Prayer Breakfast in a couple weeks.

(Imagine being there ... it had to have been one of those heart pounding moments.) And then after the meal, Jesus & His disciples head off for Capernaum, which was on the other side of Lake Galilee.

The next day this same crowd comes looking for Him; & they walk all the way around the Lake ...
they wanted more bread.

When they find Him, Jesus tells them, "You are looking for me because you ate the bread & had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles."

I've told you a # of times over the years that the purpose of Jesus' miracles was to point to who He really was. (John 20:31) The miracles were not intended to draw attention to themselves. (John 6:2)

Jesus' multiplication of bread was not about bread. The bread was a miracle **pointing to Jesus**. Now unfortunately the crowd totally missed that. They were only interested in going to the "all you can eat buffet."

Now Jesus was the one who originally recognized that these people needed to eat something. (John 6:5)
He knew they were physically hungry.

And Jesus also knows that we've been created with an appetite, a built-in spiritual hunger, for God. And nothing short of God is going to fill us up. Bread won't. Sex won't. A cruise won't. A new car won't. A FL vacation won't. Shopping at Kohl's won't. Nothing.

All of that stuff that we work so hard for ... is "food that spoils." In other words ... it's temporal. Oh, it might be initially pleasing ... but it's not ultimately satisfying.

The Prophet Isaiah wrote ...

“Why spend money on what does not satisfy?
 Why spend your wages & still be hungry?
 Listen to me & do what I say,
 & you will enjoy the best food of all.” (Isaiah 55:2)

As a boy I'd come home from school & want to eat a bunch of junk. My Mom, who was preparing a wonderful dinner, said ... “You'll ... (*spoil your appetite*).” When we fill ourselves up with “**stuff**” it takes away our “**appetite**” for the “**bread**” that gives life.

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.”
 Jesus is the food that doesn't spoil.

2nd ... Jesus is the “food” that delivers **sustenance**.

There was an expectation in Jesus' day that when the Messiah would come He'd repeat the miracle that Moses did with the manna.

So, these people had just witnessed Jesus feeding 5,000+, & they did this mental comparison between Moses' manna & Jesus' miracle. And in their estimation ...
 Jesus comes up short.

- Moses ... daily food for 40 years, in the wilderness
- Jesus ... bread for a one-shot meal
- Moses ... fed a couple million people (Exodus 12:37)
- Jesus ... fed 5,000+

- Moses ... manna had fallen from Heaven
- Jesus ... bread was passed around in baskets

So, the people were thinking that if Jesus wants to prove that He's in the same league as Moses,
He's going to have to do a few more miracles.

Jesus says ... "Wait a moment, you've missed the point entirely. I am the real bread. Moses' manna was just food. It was useful for breakfast, or lunch, or dinner ... physical nourishment, nothing more. But the 'bread' that I'm talking about will sustain your soul.

It represents the true presence of God."

The word "gives" (δίδους) is a present tense verb ... in other words, it "keeps on giving;"
it gives & gives & gives, day after day after day.

Moses' manna ... we need it today, but we're going to need more tomorrow. Not so with Jesus' bread, it sustains life forever. And it's for "the world" ... whereas Moses' manna was simply for the ancient Hebrews.

Now up until this point Jesus has been speaking of this new bread in the 3rd person. But then He makes His amazing statement, (& we can almost hear a drum roll), "I am (1st person) the bread of life that I've been talking to you about."

And throughout the remainder of this discourse ...
35 times He uses "I" or "me."

Do you want nourishment for your soul? ... "Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty." In the literal Greek Jesus doubles up on the negative, "you will not go hungry never; if you believe in me you will not be thirsty never."

I read recently about a Christian speaker who was holding a series of meetings in a community. True story.

The local atheist challenged him to a debate. The speaker said, "That sounds like a great idea. And to add a little color to it, here's what I'd suggest we do. I'll bring with me 100 people whose lives have been transformed by my message. And you bring 100 people with you who have been impacted by what you believe."

... The atheist bowed out.

I suspect that I could do that this morning. I could invite a # of you to testify that though you were "hungry & thirsty spiritually" ... Jesus has filled the void in your life that nothing else was able to fill.

Jesus is the bread of life who delivers true sustenance.

3rd ... Jesus is the "food" that demands **savoring**.

"I am telling you the truth: he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died. But the bread that comes down from heaven is of such a kind that whoever eats it will not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven.
 If you eat this bread, you will live forever.
 The bread that I will give you is my flesh,
 which I give so that the world may live."

"This started an angry argument among them.
 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they asked."

"Jesus said to them, 'I am telling you the truth: if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man & drink his blood, you will not have life in yourselves. Those who eat my flesh & drink my blood have eternal life, & I will raise them to life on the last day. For my flesh is the real food; my blood is the real drink. Those who eat my flesh & drink my blood live in me, & I live in them. ... In the same way whoever eats me will live because of me.'"

(John 6:47-57)

It's not difficult to see that the major emphasis here is the verb "eat." It appears over & over & over again.

But what's a little harder to understand is what Jesus means when He talks about the "eating" of His flesh & the "drinking" of His blood. ... Now some people understand this as a description of what takes place when we have Communion, The Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist.

Our Roman Catholic brothers & sisters believe that the "eating" of Jesus' flesh & the "drinking" of His blood is a literal thing. It's the "Miracle Of The Mass."

The bread or the wafer actually becomes Christ's Body, which is then eaten. And the wine becomes His blood. Some of you may know that as the doctrine of transubstantiation.

But, Jesus isn't talking about His actual body & blood here. His imagery of eating & drinking is not to be interpreted literally.

"Jesus said to them, 'I am telling you the truth: if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man & drink his blood, you will not have life in yourselves. Those who eat my flesh & drink my blood have eternal life, & I will raise them to life on the last day.'" (John 6:54)

If Jesus is talking about the Communion celebration, if He's talking about the Eucharist, then what He's saying about the Lord's Supper is that it's a required religious activity that we have to participate in ... in order to receive eternal life. But that stands in direct contradiction to everything else that the N.T. teaches.

Scripture is very clear that we are saved by **grace** through **faith** & not by **works**. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Jesus Himself taught that. "So the people asked him, 'What can we do in order to do what God wants us to do?'" And Jesus answers ...

"take communion the 1st Sunday of every month."

... No, that's not what He says.

"Jesus answered, 'What God wants you to do is to believe in the one he sent.'"

What we have to do is **believe in Jesus**.

"Eating" in this passage is a metaphor for "believing." The words are almost interchangeable. "All who see the Son & believe in him should have eternal life.

And I will raise them to life on the last day." (John 6:40)

"Those who eat my flesh & drink my blood have eternal life, & I will raise them to life on the last day." (John 6:54)

Eating Jesus' flesh & drinking His blood means putting our faith & trust in Him. The great Christian theologian Augustine wrote ... "Believe & you have eaten."

But why does John use such a graphic picture to describe believing in Jesus? ...

What Jesus wants to communicate is that He's got to be ingested. He's got to be taken in just like food. Jesus has got to **become** a part of our very self.

The problem today is, for many people, "believing" has become so watered down that it means nothing more than agreeing on some basic theological facts:

- I believe Jesus was the Son of God
- I believe He was born of a virgin
- I believe He lived a righteous life
- I believe He died on the cross

- I believe He rose from the dead
- I believe He forgives sin

In fact, we can even go beyond those beliefs to some basic religious routines:

- We can go to Church
- We can pray
- We can occasionally read our Bible
- We can tell God we're sorry from time to time

But we never "ingest" Jesus into our life.

Have you ever done that? ... Have you made Jesus a part of your life? ... If you haven't it's like going to a restaurant & simply reading the menu. We have to place our order ... we have to eat the food.

That's what Jesus is trying to communicate here.

And not only must He be ingested ... He must be enjoyed.
He must be savored/appreciated.

Think for a moment how we use "eating" as a metaphor. We talk about devouring good books, drinking in music, swallowing wild stories, chewing over important matters. Some doting grandparents (not me, of course) talk about eating up their grandchildren. It's metaphorical language. This is the sense in which Jesus wants to be "eaten". He wants to be regularly enjoyed.

Actually, the verb He uses is present tense, (φάγητε).

It's a continuous action.

It's to be done again & again ... day after day.

I remember my grandfather saying after he'd eaten a good meal ... "I could get into the habit of this." That's exactly what Jesus is suggesting here.

He wants our "eating" of Him to become a regular habit.

Which brings us to today's important question ... does this describe your relationship with Jesus Christ? ... Is your "Christianity" more than just list of beliefs? ... Is Jesus a part of your daily life? ... Maybe you've ingested Him, but are you daily enjoying Him? ...

Perhaps junk food, food that spoils, has crowded Him out. During Lent, will you give up "Twinkie" activities & replace them with "bread of life" encounters? ...

There's one final point here.

Jesus said ... "This, then, is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the bread that your ancestors ate, but then later died.

Those who eat this bread will live forever." (John 6:58)

Jesus is asking, "Do you want manna, food that spoils? Or do you want me?" ...

"Many of his followers heard this & said, 'This teaching is too hard. Who can listen to it?'" (John 6:59)

The word "hard", (σκληρός) means, that this is "heavy stuff." "We're not sure we like what you're saying."

And as a result, many of His "so-called" followers left Him at this point. (John 6:66)

So, do you want the "bread of life", or do you prefer food that spoils? ... The truth is, we don't really want the bread of life unless we're hungry for it. So, are you hungry for Jesus? ... Do you want more of Him now than you did on 11 February 2017? ... I truly hope so.

Jesus is the bread of life. Only He can **satisfy**. Material possessions, physical cravings, temporal pleasures, worldly achievements can never bring us true peace & contentment.

They just don't last; they're gone in an instant. (2 Peter 3:10)

J.C. Penney (X) was a man of advanced years before he committed his life fully to Jesus Christ. He had been a good, honest, hardworking man, but he was solely interested in becoming a success & making money.

"When I worked for \$6 a week at Joslin's Dry Goods Store back in Denver it was my ambition to be worth \$100,000. When I reached that goal, I felt a certain temporary satisfaction, but it soon wore off & my sights were set on becoming a millionaire."

J.C. & his wife worked hard to expand their business, but one day Mrs. Penney caught pneumonia, & it claimed her life. It was then that J.C. realized that money was a poor substitute for what was important.

"When she died," he said, "my world crashed about me. To build a business, to be a success in the eyes of men, to accumulate money ... what was the purpose of life? What had money meant for my wife?

I felt mocked by life, even by God Himself."

After several more trials, J.C. Penney was financially ruined & naturally, in deep distress. That's when God could deal with his self-righteous nature & his love for money. After his spiritual conversion, he testified,

"I had to pass through fiery ordeals before reaching glimmerings of conviction that it's not enough for me to be upright & moral. When I was brought to humility & the knowledge of dependence on God, a light illumined my being. I cannot otherwise describe it than to say that it changed me as a man."

J.C. Penny came to a place in his life when he realized that uprightness, morality, honesty, success, & wealth could not ultimately satisfy. Only Jesus Christ, the bread of life, would bring him eternal satisfaction.

2,000 years ago, after Jesus made His claim, the crowd around Him prayed ... "Sir, give us this bread always." ... When that becomes your personal prayer of faith, Jesus promises to satisfy your spirit so that you will never ever hunger or thirst spiritually again.

And He will raise you to life on the last day ... Halleluiah!

MARANA THA