

Series: Jesus 7 'I AM' Statements

"I AM the Bread of Life"

John 6:35

Big Idea – Jesus desires to give spiritual life-giving food to all who will believe.

John 6:35 contains the first of seven great I AM statements recorded by John, statements that are found nowhere else in the Gospels. (John 8:12; 10:7-9, 11-14; 11:25-26; 14:6; 15:1, 5.) God revealed Himself to Moses by the name I AM (Jehovah) (Ex. 3:14). God is the self-existent One who "is, and ... was, and... is to come" (Rev. 1:8). When Jesus used the name I AM, He was definitely claiming to be God.

1. Jesus fed the 5,000+ crowd physical food – John 6:1-14

Feeding of the 5,000 was a miracle of such magnitude that it is recorded in all four Gospels.

Briefly recount the story of what Jesus did.

Andrew found the boy with the lunch. In Gospels do you know what Andrew was known for? Bringing people to Jesus!

practical lesson is clear: whenever there is a need, give all that you have to Jesus and let Him do the rest. Begin with what you have, but be sure you give it all to Him.

Twice John mentioned that Jesus gave thanks (John 6:11, 23). Matthew, Mark, and Luke all state that Jesus looked up to heaven when He gave thanks.

He reminded the hungry people that God is the source of all good and needful gifts. This is a good lesson for us: instead of complaining about what we do not have, we should give thanks to God for what we do have, and He will make it go farther.

2. Jesus took his disciples safely through the stormy sea – John 6:15 - 21

Jesus compelled the disciples to get into the boat (Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45) because He knew they were in danger. The crowd was now aroused and there was a movement to make Him King.

Did Jesus know that a storm was coming? Of course. Then why did He deliberately send His friends into danger? Quite the opposite is true: He was rescuing them from greater danger, the danger of being swept along by a fanatical crowd.

But there was another reason for that storm: the Lord has to balance our lives; otherwise we will become proud and then fall. The disciples had experienced great joy in being part of a thrilling miracle. Now they had to face a storm and learn to trust the Lord more. The feeding of the 5,000 was the lesson, but the storm was the test after the lesson.

Sometimes we are caught in a storm because we have disobeyed the Lord. Jonah is a good example.

But sometimes the storm comes because we have obeyed the Lord. When that happens, we can be sure that our Savior will pray for us, come to us, and deliver us.

In writing the account of this event years later, perhaps John saw in it a picture of Christ and His church. Christ is in heaven interceding for us, but we are in the midst of the storms of life, trying to reach the shore. One day, He will come for us and we shall reach the port safely, the storms all past.

As you read the Gospel records, note that our Lord was never impressed by the great crowds. He knew that their motives were not pure and that most of them followed Him in order to watch His miracles of healing.

"Bread and circuses" was Rome's formula for keeping the people happy, and people today are satisfied with that kind of diet. Give them money, food and entertainment and they are happy. Rome set aside ninety-three days each year for public games at government expense. It was cheaper to entertain the crowds than to fight them or jail them.

Never be deceived by the "popularity" of Jesus Christ among certain kinds of people today. Very few want Him as Savior and Lord. Many want Him only as Healer or Provider, or the One who rescues them from problems they have made for themselves. "And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40).

3. Jesus prioritized spiritual food over physical food – John 6:22 – 27

The purpose of the sign was that He might preach the sermon. Again, it was a ministry of "grace and truth" (John 1:17). In grace, our Lord fed the hungry people; but in truth, He gave them the Word of God. They wanted the food but they did not want the truth; and, in the end, most of them abandoned Jesus and refused to walk with Him. He lost His crowd with one sermon!

Jesus pointed out that there are two kinds of food: food for the body, which is necessary but not the most important; and food for the inner man, the spirit, which is essential. What the people needed was not food but life, and life is a gift. Food only sustains life, but Jesus gives eternal life. The words of Isaiah come to mind: "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2)

4. Jesus taught the work that God wants – John 6:28, 29

people picked up the word labor and misinterpreted it to mean they had to work for salvation. They completely missed the word give. Steeped in legalistic religion, they thought they had to "do something" to merit eternal life. Jesus made it clear that only one "work" was necessary—to believe on the Savior. When a person believes on Christ, he is not performing a good work that earns him salvation. There is certainly no credit in believing, for it is what God does in response to our faith that is important (see Eph. 2:8-10).

The crowd began by seeking Christ, but then started to seek a sign from Him. "For the Jews require a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22). The rabbis taught that, when Messiah came, He would duplicate

the miracle of the manna (see Ex. 16). If Jesus was truly sent by God (see John 6:29, 38, 57), then let Him prove it by causing manna to fall from heaven. They wanted to "see and believe." But faith that is based on signs alone, and not on the truth of the Word, can lead a person astray; for even Satan is able to perform "lying wonders" (2 Thes. 2:8-10). Note also John 2:18-25; 4:48.

The quotation in John 6:31 is from Psalm 78:24, a psalm that records the unbelief and rebellion of the nation of Israel.

In His reply, our Lord sought to deepen the people's understanding of the truth. It was God, not Moses, who gave the manna; so they must take their eyes off Moses and focus them on God.

Also, God gave the manna in the past, but the Father is now giving the true bread in the person of Jesus Christ. The past event is finished, but the present spiritual experience goes on!

5. Jesus said He was the Living Bread that gives life – John 6:35 - 58

In His reply to their request, Jesus used two key words that often appear in this sermon: come and believe. To come to Jesus means to believe on Him, and to believe on Him means to come to Him. Believing is not merely an intellectual thing, giving mental assent to some doctrine. It means to come to Christ and yield yourself to Him. At the close of His sermon, Jesus illustrated coming and believing by speaking about eating and drinking. To come to Christ and believe on Him means to receive Him within, just as you receive food and drink.

John 6:37-40 contains Jesus' explanation of the process of personal salvation. These are among the most profound words He ever spoke, and we cannot hope to plumb their depths completely.

He explained that salvation involves both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The Father gives men and women to the Son (John 6:37, 39; 17:2, 6, 9, 11-12, 24), but these men and women must come to Him, that is, believe on Him.

He assured them that nobody who came to Him would ever be lost but would be raised at the last day. Even death cannot rob us of salvation! (In regard to the "last day," see John 6:40, 44, 54. Jesus was referring to His return and the final events that climax God's program for mankind.)

From our human and limited perspective, we cannot see how divine sovereignty and human responsibility can work together; but from God's perspective, there is no conflict. When a church member asked Charles Spurgeon how he reconciled these two, he replied, "I never try to reconcile friends." It is the Father's will that sinners be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) and that those who trust Christ be secure in their salvation. Believers receive eternal life and Jesus can never lose them.

Our Lord's statement "For I came down from heaven" (John 6:38), disturbed the religious leaders, for they knew it was a claim of deity. They thought they knew Jesus, who He was and where He came from (see Matt. 13:53-58; John 7:40-43).

Even in the days of Moses, the Jews were known for their murmuring (Ex. 15:24; 17:3; Num. 14:2). Perhaps the leaders and some of the crowd had now moved into the synagogue to continue the discussion. The main issue was, "Where did He come from?" Five times Jesus used the phrase "came down from heaven," but they would not accept it.

Jesus further explained how the sinner can come to God: it is through the truth of the Word (John 6:44-45). The Father draws the sinner by His Word. Jesus quoted Isaiah 54:13 (or perhaps Jer. 31:33-34) to prove His point: "And they shall all be taught of God." It is through the teaching of the Word that God draws people to the Savior. (Note John 5:24 and its emphasis on hearing the Word.) The sinner hears, learns, and comes as the Father draws him. A mystery? Yes! A blessed reality? Yes!

When Jesus called Himself "the Living Bread," He was not claiming to be exactly like the manna. He was claiming to be even greater! The manna only sustained life for the Jews, but Jesus gives life to the whole world. The Jews ate the daily manna and eventually died; but when you receive Jesus Christ within, you live forever. When God gave the manna, He gave only a gift; but when Jesus came, He gave Himself. There was no cost to God in sending the manna each day, but He gave His Son at great cost. The Jews had to eat the manna every day, but the sinner who trusts Christ once is given eternal life.

It is not difficult to see in the manna a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. The manna was a mysterious thing to the Jews; in fact, the word manna means "What is it?" (see Ex. 16:15) Jesus was a mystery to those who saw Him. The manna came at night from heaven, and Jesus came to this earth when sinners were in moral and spiritual darkness. The manna was small (His humility), round (His eternity), and white (His purity). It was sweet to the taste (Ps. 34:8) and it met the needs of the people adequately.

The manna was given to a rebellious people; it was the gracious gift of God. All they had to do was stoop and pick it up. If they failed to pick it up, they walked on it. The Lord is not far from any sinner. All the sinner has to do is humble himself and take the gift that God offers.

Jesus closed this part of His message by referring to His flesh, a word that will be used six more times before the dialogue is concluded. John 6:51 is a declaration that the Son of God will give Himself as a sacrifice "for the life of the world."

The substitutionary death of Jesus Christ is a key doctrine in John's Gospel. Jesus would die for the world (John 3:16; 6:51), for His sheep (John 10:11, 15), for the nation (John 11:50-52), and for His friends (John 15:12). Paul made it personal, and so should we:

"Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). We must not limit the work of Christ on the cross. He is the sacrifice not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

Striving (vv. 52-59). The word striving means "to fight and quarrel." Being orthodox Jews, the listeners knew the divine prohibition against eating human flesh or any kind of blood (Gen. 9:3-4; Lev. 17:10-16; 19:26). Here we have another example in John's Gospel of the people misunderstanding a spiritual truth by treating it literally (see John 2:19-21; 3:4; 4:11). All Jesus

said was, "Just as you take food and drink within your body and it becomes a part of you, so you must receive Me within your innermost being so that I can give you life."

Some interpreters tell us that Jesus was speaking about the Lord's Supper, and that we eat His flesh and drink His blood when we partake of the elements at the table, the bread and the cup. I do not believe that Jesus had the Communion (or eucharist) in mind when He spoke these words.

For one thing, why would He discuss the Lord's Supper with a group of disagreeable unbelievers? He had not even shared that truth with His own disciples! Why would He cast this precious pearl before the swine?

Second, He made it clear that He was not speaking in literal terms (John 6:63). He was using a human analogy to convey a spiritual truth, just as He did with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman.

Third, Jesus made it plain that this eating and drinking were absolutely essential for eternal life. He made no exceptions. If, then, He was speaking about a church ordinance (or sacrament), then everybody who has never shared in that experience is spiritually dead and is going to hell. This would include all the Old Testament saints, the thief on the cross, and a host of people who have trusted Christ in emergency situations (hospitals, accidents, foxholes, etc.). I personally cannot believe that our gracious God has excluded from salvation all who cannot participate in a church ceremony.

Another factor is the tense of the Greek verbs in John 6:50-51, and 53. It is the aorist tense which signifies a once-for-all action. The Communion service is a repeated thing; in fact, it is likely that the early church observed the Lord's Supper daily (Acts 2:46).

It is significant that the word flesh is never used in any of the reports of the Lord's Supper, either in the Gospels or in 1 Corinthians 11:23-34. The word used is "body."

If a person holds that our Lord was speaking about the Communion service, then he must believe that somehow the two elements, the bread and the fruit of the vine, turn into the very body and blood of Christ; for He said, "So he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me" (John 6:57, italics mine). How does this "miracle" take place? What is the secret of accomplishing it? Why is it not apparent?

Our Lord's messages recorded in the Gospel of John are filled with symbolism and imagery. To take them literally is to make the same mistake the people made who first heard them.

Departing (vv. 60-71). Our Lord's teaching was not hard to understand but hard to accept once you understood it. The Jewish religious leaders both misunderstood His words and rejected them. They were "offended" by what He taught. (The Greek word is "scandalized.") They stumbled over the fact that He claimed to come down from heaven. They also stumbled over the idea that they had to eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to be saved. But if they stumbled over these two matters, what would they do if they saw Him ascend back into heaven? (John 6:62)

Jesus explained that His language was figurative and spiritual, not literal. There is no salvation in "flesh." In fact, the New Testament has nothing good to say about "the flesh." There is nothing good in it (Rom. 7:18) and we must not have confidence in it (Phil. 3:3).

How, then, do we "eat His flesh and drink His blood"? Through the Word. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). "And the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). Our Lord said the same thing: "He that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life" (John 5:24). The scribes who knew Jeremiah 31:31-34 would have understood the concept of receiving God's Word into one's inner being.

The result of this message was the loss of most of our Lord's disciples. They went back to the old life, the old religion, and the old hopeless situation. Jesus Christ is "the way" (John 14:6), but they would not walk with Him. This was no surprise to the Lord, because He knows the hearts of all people.

When Jesus asked His 12 Apostles if they planned to desert Him too, it was Peter who spoke up and declared their faith. Where else could they go? "Thou hast the words of eternal life." Peter got the message! He knew that Jesus was speaking about the Word and not about literal flesh and blood.

Peter was one of several people who declared their belief that Jesus is the Son of God (see John 1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 9:35; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31). The only mistake he made was to bear witness for the entire group. Peter was sure that all of the Apostles were believers, which shows how convincing Judas was. Even Peter did not know that Judas was an unbeliever!

The preaching of the Word of God always leads to a sifting of the hearts of the listeners. God draws sinners to the Savior through the power of truth, His Word. Those who reject the Word will reject the Savior. Those who receive the Word will receive the Savior and experience the new birth, eternal life.

Do you feel your need because there is a spiritual hunger within? Are you willing to admit that need and come to the Savior? If you will, He will save you and satisfy you forever!