

The “I am” sayings of Jesus. 2. “I am the Bread of Life” John Chapter 6, verses 22 – 51

To put this saying of the Lord Jesus into context we first need to read John chapter 6, verses 1 – 15: – the feeding of the 5000. The next day, as always, the people were hungry again and seeking another free meal! (verse 26). The “Bread” promised by the Lord Jesus Christ in this passage comes from an eternal source and leads to eternal life. The same function as the “Living Water” promised in John chapter 4 which we looked at last week.

Verses 22 – 25 - The people seek Jesus; The setting for the discourse is given in these verses. Maybe it was the storm that kept the people from leaving the place of the miracle. Next day they saw that there was only one boat missing and thought Jesus must still be near. After a search some of them got boats to cross the lake and found Jesus on the other side. It was a mystery to them how Jesus had got across – see verses 16 – 21.

Verses 26 – 34 – The people demand a sign; Even though the people had seen the miracle and accepted it at face value (verse 14), Jesus charges them with not seeing, i.e., not looking beyond the external aspect. They saw only the provision of material substance and felt its satisfaction (verse 26). Jesus contrasts material food which needs labour with spiritual food which is a gift, (verse 27) see also Isaiah 55, verses 1 – 2. The people still do not understand the gift that is available but feel that it can be earned by “works” (verse 28). What is required is faith in the Lord Jesus the Christ of God. To support this special claim the people demand a miracle such as bringing down the bread from heaven. Their request that Jesus should give them the true bread from heaven, opens the opportunity for Jesus to point to himself as the true bread!

Verses 35 – 40 - “I am the Bread of Life”; These verses are the heart of the teaching and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ! Here he claims divine relationship with his Father. Here he claims to be the true bread in contrast to the manna given in the wilderness which “went off” if kept overnight. (Exodus chapter 16, verses 13 – 21). Here he claims to be the life-giving Saviour, fulfilling the will of his heavenly Father. Read these verses again and pray that we may truly “*see the Son and believe in him*”, then, and only then do we enter into eternal life and are enabled to feed on the Living Bread and drink from the Living Water which Jesus gives. (John 4, verse 14).

Verses 41 – 51 - “This is the bread which comes down from heaven”; Again Jesus has to emphasise his relationship to the Father. He is “*the Christ, the Son of God*” (John 11, verse 27 and Matthew 16, verse 16). The Jews knew the human family tree of Jesus but refused to recognise his divine relationship with his Father. The Lord Jesus re-emphasises the claim that the Father himself draws people to him. “*Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me*” (verse 45). Verse 51 looks ahead to the death of Jesus on the cross. In the sacrifice he made there, he gave his flesh and shed his blood for the life of the world.

The whole of this chapter, (verses 1 - 69) anticipates the significance of the Holy Communion Service. In this Sacrament (an outward visible sign of an inward spiritual grace) we receive the Body and Blood of Christ “*only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith*”. (Quote from the 39 Articles of Religion in the F.C.E. Prayer Book and B.C.P. 1662). Remember that Jesus himself said “*It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and Life,*” (John 6, verse 63).

Author of life divine,
who hast a table spread,
furnished with mystic wine
and everlasting bread,
preserve the life Thyself hast given,
and feed and train us up for heav'n.

Our needy souls sustain
with fresh supplies of love,
till all Thy life we gain
and all Thy fullness prove,
and strengthened by Thy perfect grace,
behold without a veil Thy face.

John and Charles Wesley