

## Address on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020 – The ‘I am’ sayings of Jesus

### John 6:22-59 I am the bread of life

#### Introduction

Today we begin a new sermon series looking at the ‘I am’ sayings of Jesus. The ‘I am’ sayings are all in John. St. John’s gospel stands apart from the other three. Though similar in length to the others and in essence addressing the same thing, the life and death of Jesus, its content is largely distinct. Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the synoptic gospels because of the similarity of their content. You can lay out these gospels side by side and see many of the same stories, sometimes almost word for word, but John’s gospel differs in a number of ways:

- He has a different structure. Whilst in the synoptics Jesus doesn’t come to Jerusalem until near the end of his ministry, in John he is there in chapter 2.
- John has stories which are not in the others and vice versa (for instance the ‘wedding in Cana’ is recorded only in John, whereas ‘Jesus’ stilling of the storm’ is recorded in each of the synoptics but not in John).
- John refers to miracles as ‘signs.’ I like this. It reminds us that the miracles point us to a truth. They are like theological signposts.
- John has the ‘I am’ sayings, which the others don’t.

#### What is special about the ‘I am sayings?’

What made people sit up when Jesus used the phrase ‘I am’ is that this is how God revealed himself to Moses. After Moses had spoken with God on Mt Sinai, he asked God (Exodus 3:13), “who shall I say I have been speaking to?” and God said, “I am who I am.” God revealed himself as ‘I am’. So, when Jesus used these two small words, they would have packed a punch. He was in effect claiming to be God.

In all there are seven ‘I am’ sayings and we shall be looking at each of these over the coming weeks. Have a look at this term’s sermon card for full details.

Today we come to what is literally the first of the ‘I am’ sayings, **I am the bread of life.**

#### Looking at scripture in context

Have you ever been to the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square? I can vividly remember the first time I ever went there. We went through the main doors and as I glanced right, I was looking into the room with the impressionist paintings. I was absolutely amazed that here I could see for real, wonderful paintings that I had seen before only in books.

I have always loved the impressionists in particular. Up close it is sometimes difficult to see what the artist has painted. In some cases, it can be just dots on a canvass, but stand back and all becomes clear. I want to suggest to you that this is also helpful when it comes to the Bible. Very often it helps to stand back from the passage we are looking at to look at the passage in its context, to ask what comes before and after this passage and how does that help our understanding of it.

When we look at this first ‘I am’ saying this way, we see that it comes after the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on the water.

The second of these explains why the people, once they had found Jesus on the other side of the lake, asked him “how did you get here?” They had seen the disciples leave in a boat and

they knew Jesus wasn't with them so how could he have got across the lake? We know the answer, but they had no idea.

The feeding of the 5,000 forms the background to Jesus telling them not to crave for food that perishes but for food that endures to eternal life. In other words, what they needed was not physical bread, but spiritual bread. Jesus was not denying that bread is important for life but using this idea to teach them about a spiritual reality.

Naomi and I were discussing this passage and she pointed out that when you go into a supermarket these days the bread aisle is full of different types of bread. Bread is still very much a staple of our diet. It was even more so in Jesus' day. Bread was vital to life and health. So, when Jesus says he is the bread of life he is saying that he is vital to our spiritual well-being. If we want to be alive spiritually then we need to feed on him.

"Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and died," Jesus told them, "I am the living bread that has come down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die."

Clearly there is bread for the body and bread for the soul. Jesus is bread for the soul.

### **Feeding on Jesus**

One way to feed on Jesus is to read the Bible. Interestingly we talk about 'devouring' books. It is when we read that we learn, we are challenged, we are moved to think or act and sometimes to laugh or cry. Books are powerful things, and none more so than the Bible. If we want to feed on Jesus, then we need to feed on his word. If we are going to take this saying seriously then we need to read our Bibles regularly.

I was preaching once on this passage and I got carried away. I was convicted by what I was reading and so said to the congregation that I had decided to read through the whole Bible in a year. I had no idea how many chapters that would work out per day. Turns out it is three. Three chapters a day doesn't sound too difficult. The problem is when you miss a day and then have six chapters to read, or miss a week, and then have 21.

Hard as it may be at times to read our Bibles we should not give up. Jesus says he is essential for life. It is no coincidence that one of the sets of Bible notes that is available is called Daily Bread. We need a daily dose of God's word. We need to feed on Jesus and what he says if we are to grow into mature Christians. May I commend Bible notes to you and encourage you to buy some and give them a try if you don't already use them as an aid to reading the Bible daily.

Jesus says he is the bread of life. Let us not neglect to feed on him each day.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, you are the living bread who came down from heaven that we might have life in all its fullness. Give us faith to trust in your promises, to live daily in your presence and, as we feed on you, to grow more like you day by day. **Amen**

**Rev'd Anthony Smith**