

Bread of Life: John 6

Greentree Community Church, Fall 2010

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Overview: To show, *via* the “I AM” statements, how Jesus radically re-orientes our lives to his Mission to bless the nations. When Jesus speaks using ἐγώ εἰμι, he is not speaking ‘lightly’. With each statement, he is saying something about his person and work. Though he may not *explicitly*, mention it, a radical reorientation is expected.

INTRODUCTION:

A brief re-cap, as I understand it, of your next 3 months or so together is to answer the general question, “Who was Jesus?” Now, that is admittedly trite (in some sense), so we’ve tried to ask the question with a bit more *πίεζα* by expanding the context within which the question is asked. I’ll put it another way. Opinions abound on who Jesus was. Some of these statements are pretty far afield, while others are closer to the mark. What people believe about (or who) Jesus was also come to us in silhouette-fashion by the way people actually *live* their lives. In other words, you can ask people to tell you who they think Jesus is/was, but you can also—and, frankly, more accurately—discern what they think about Jesus *by the way they live their lives*. Here is an example...

AS IT RELATES TO WHO JESUS IS...

If you are not familiar with the book Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers, you might like to know that its authors polled and analyzed what American teenagers believed about the broad topics of religion and God. The findings have rattled the Youth Ministry world and the broader church too, because of what it showed forth as some of the key tenets of young Americans. In short, Smith & Denton (the authors) suggest that the core beliefs of American Teenagers (some of whom label themselves as Christians) can be summed up with the original phrase Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). “The creed of this religion, as codified from what emerged from our interviews, sounds something like this:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.”¹

And elsewhere they write, “God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process,”

AS IT RELATES TO WHAT JESUS DID...

Said another way, author Philip Yancey comments on the crucifixion and death of Jesus ponders the rationale behind such a heinous act. “How would telling people to be nice to one another get a man crucified? What government would execute Mister Rogers or Captain Kangaroo?”

¹ Denton & Smith, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford Press) 2005, pp.162-63.

It appears then that Jesus was no mean figure of history. And, that what one believes about who he was what he did always affects lives, no matter in a positive or negative way.

In light of all of this, I want to suggest something like this for our time together today. **Taking Jesus at his words, rightly understood, will demand of our lives and actually evince in them, the radical reordering of all that we do and think.** So what can we say then about our time together today?

This morning we are going to look briefly at what Jesus says *about himself*. In other words, the I AM statements peppered throughout John's gospel are Jesus' self-professed identity statements. They are comments about who Jesus saw himself as. In light of this, I'd like to pursue the route of looking at this statement about from 3 vantage points, namely: **What this statement reveals about who Jesus is (His Person); what this statement reveals about what He has come to do (His Mission); and lastly, what this statement invites us to.**

"BREAD OF LIFE" AND THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

This reference tells us (at least) crucial truths:

1. That Jesus saw himself as on par with God the Father (*i.e.*, He claimed He was God)
 - a. As the "bread of life" (v.48). Here, he is seen as the one, when 'consumed'—whatever that may mean (we'll look at it in a second)—will lead to eternal life.
 - b. Secondly, as the *ἐγώ εἰμι* ("I am"). This statement harkens back to the Greek OT (LXX) where Moses stood before the burning bush in Ex. 3:14 (God said to Moses, "I AM who I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'")
2. Christ saw himself as the necessary, sole provision for nourishment for his people (v.50, 56)
 - a. This comes from understanding what Manna (Exodus 16) did in the OT. It was to feed and sustain God people.
 - b. Jesus is linking belief in the "one whom he has sent" (v.29) with "feeding on him" (v.54).
3. What are the implications of this? **Great time for questions.**
 - a. People left Jesus at this point (v.66). Why?
 - b. A moral example? A good teacher? These don't square with what Jesus is saying about himself?

"BREAD OF LIFE" AND THE WORK OF JESUS

This reference tells us (at least) these crucial truths:

1. To give eternal life to those who would feast on him (v.50).
2. To preserve, to keep those that the Father gives the Son. (vv.37, 39).
 - a. Just as the bread of life came for the preservation of God's people in the wilderness (Ex. 16:3), so Jesus has been given to God's people for their preservation.
 - b. Application/Question: **In light of this, what is the Christian's recourse when wondering about/doubting the loving-kindness of the Lord?** To look to Christ. To put it another way, where do you need to take a fresh look (and feed upon, so to speak) to Jesus today? I'll ask a tougher one for us, "Where have you found what God has given you in the person of Jesus as not enough? Where have you found Jesus lacking? Ouch!"

3. But we must remember...The provision of Manna in the wilderness was not the end (the goal or point) of God's Mission with his people. He didn't bring them out of the Egypt for to have a cookout in the wilderness for 40 years. No, it was to continue his task of blessing the nations through Israel. And Jesus work, too, was not for *mere* preservation *per se*, but for the continuation of God's mission. In as much as the Israelites were brought out of Egypt *so that* (Gen 12:3) they would be a blessing for the nations, so Jesus will preserve this same people for that same mission.

WHAT THE BREAD OF LIFE INVITES US TO:

1. Belief in a distinct object (v. 29, 47), Jesus, with hearts ablaze! Here explore John's (20:31) purpose statement—that you might believe and this isn't a merely cognitive exercise, giving assent to some propositional truth. Rather 'to believe' in John's mind carries with it a visceral owning of the object of that belief. It is belief in something such that we order our lives around it.
 - a. Illustration: Take for example the confidence you place in your socks...but even this fails! Why because your socks are not something that gets your deepest affections. Chances are your deepest affections aren't stirred when thinking about what your socks do for you. *There is a pseudo-type of Christianity that is characterized by a "believing in Jesus" that is akin this "believing in socks," but it is not the belief that John refers to as necessary for salvation.* For John, to believe that Jesus is the Messiah is to believe it at the level of the affections, the loves, the delight-center of our being. It the belief of personal investment.
 - b. It is, to say it another way, to have a *hunger*, at the level of the heart, for the "one whom he has sent." Hunger pains for God himself come from none other than God himself. And God never leaves a hunger for Himself unmet.
 - c. "A sense of his absence is a sign of his presence." –Keller
2. An everlastingly secure fellowship with, and sustained by, the Father (vv. 37, 39-40): This is important for the following. John tells us, "[M]any of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." (66). The *irony* is that it is word of security and preservation that cause people to fall leave him
3. Mission: Finally, the astute reader will ask *for what purpose* has God provided, sustained, and kept us for? Why, in other words, do we have the promise of never being hungry or thirsting? Why are we called to feast on Christ at all?
 - a. Because the Mission hasn't changed one bit! And each of us has a role in it! The Mission *of seeing the nations brought to the Triune God*. It's fuel, it's food (to play the pun) for the Mission!
 - b. You and me are meant to be sustained by feasting on the excellencies and beauties of Messiah, as we continue on God's own Mission to reach the nations. This process of delighting in Jesus for who he is and what he has done *as and in end himself*, is what the Bible calls worship.
4. So we might end with a question like this? What is that to which Jesus invites us, in light of calling himself the "Bread of Life"? It is a call to feast with a heart-raging delight in God's provision to us in the person and work of his Messiah, his *Christos*, his Christ, unto the end that His Mission would seek it's completion.