

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 27th September 2009

“I am the Bread of Life” (Part 2)

John ch.6:35-71

Introduction

When we started to look at John ch.6 two weeks ago, we came across another feature of this Gospel which John uses to try to convince us that ‘*Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God*’ - the reason why he wrote his book (John 20:30-31). So we have moved on from:

- People who met Christ,
- From the Signs of Christ,
- And we have come now to the Claims of Christ:
And in particular to the ‘Seven *I am* Sayings of Christ.’

I told you that between John ch.6 and ch.15 Jesus claims to be seven things:

- I am the Bread of Life - John 6:35 & 48
- I am the Light of the World - John 8:12 & 9:5
- I am the Door - John 10:7 & 9
- I am the Good Shepherd - John 10:11 & 14
- I am the Resurrection and the Life - John 11:25
- I am the Way, the Truth and the Life - John 14:6
- I am the Vine - John 15:1 & 5

(i) Each Statement begins with the words: ‘I am’ – The Seven ‘I am’s of Christ’

(ii) Then follows the thing that Jesus claims to be – e.g. ‘the Bread of Life’.

(iii) And then following each of the ‘I am’ claims there is a verse stating clearly how we can be saved and how we can know that we have eternal life.

Last time we looked at the first mention of ‘*I am the Bread of Life*’ (John 6:35). So we looked at the first half of the chapter then. We saw that it was set in the context of two miracles: Jesus walking on the water, and Jesus feeding the 5000 with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. That’s why ‘bread’ comes up.

Tonight we’re going to look at the second half of this chapter because Jesus says again in v.48: ‘*I am the Bread of Life.*’ So we’re looking at v.36-71 now.

Remember the Significance of the words ‘I am’?

‘I am’ was the OT name for God, revealed to Moses at the Burning Bush.

So Jesus was claiming to be God come in the flesh! Here on this occasion, as God the Son, he was claiming to be ‘The Bread of Life’ (v.35, 48).

Bread was the staple diet for these people living in Galilee. But the Feeding of the 5000 has reminded these people of their forefathers, the Israelites, who

were fed by manna from heaven during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land (v.30-31).

So Jesus takes them from where they are at in their thinking, and teaches them further, that:

1. It wasn't Moses, but God, who gave them the manna from heaven. (v.32)
2. Jesus was now 'The bread of life' that has come down from heaven. (v.35)
3. Then He points out a difference between himself and the manna (v.48-51a)

Here Jesus says that the Israelites ate the manna in the desert, but they still died. Its benefit didn't last forever. But, by contrast, 'Jesus is the bread of LIFE,' meaning 'Eternal Life', as he says in v.35 and v.48. If anyone partakes of Him, they will never die, but live forever! So...

1. Why doesn't everybody believe in Jesus? (vs.36-47)

I want you to notice the verses that appear in our passage between the two verses where Jesus says, '*I am the Bread of Life.*' (v.35 & v.48).

Jesus says in v.36 that those who had physically seen him, had still not believed in him! You would think with all the miraculous signs he had performed in front of their very eyes that they would have believed in him gladly. But that was not the case. And then he says this in v.37:

*'All that the Father gives me will come to me,
and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.'*

Sometimes we give the impression that Jesus is the only member of the godhead interested in saving people. Sometimes we give the impression that God the Father is a God of wrath, God the Son is the one who wants to save us from the Father's wrath, and God the Spirit just comes into our hearts after we are saved. But it is wrong to divide the 3 persons of the godhead in that way. All are involved in, and interested in saving us.

This verse says, '*All that the Father gives me will come to me...*'

It is God the Father who has chosen from before the foundation of the world, who will be saved (Eph 1:4). It is God the Father who then works in the hearts of those people to draw them to His Son, to open their eyes to see that the Son is the answer to their greatest need, and through trusting in his death for them on the cross, He saves them by his grace.

'*All that the Father gives me*', says Jesus, '*will come to me.*' And then he goes on to say, '*and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.*' As the Father works in people's lives, and draws them to his Son, and prompts them to put their trust in him to save them from their sins, the Son then says these great words of reassurance: '*and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.*'

If you come seeking the Lord Jesus to be your Saviour tonight, because the Father has been prompting you, and moving you towards him, rest assured that the Son will receive you – He will never drive you away or turn you away. He will not reject you. You may have been rejected in your life many times before, but if you come to Jesus, repenting of your sin, ready to put your trust in Him, then he has promised He will receive you; He will not drive you away.

And so we see that the Father and the Son work very closely together in the work of salvation. In fact Jesus goes on to say in the very next verse (v.38):

*‘For I have come down from heaven not to do my will
but to do the will of him who sent me.’*

They work in very close co-operation, because the Father and Son are one. But what is the ‘will’ that the Son is seeking to carry out for the Father? Well v.39 tells us:

*‘And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none
of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.’*

Isn't that a great encouragement?

That if we have been given to the Son by the Father's drawing power, then the Son is not going to lose us, or let go of us, he is going to hold onto us by his power, and he has promised to raise us up to be with him at the last day.

And again in v.40:

*‘For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes
in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.’*

Again it is as simple as that for each one of us to be saved: Just look to the son, believe in Him, and you will live, you will have eternal life, and you will be raised up at the last day! This is God's plan of Salvation – Father and Son together, working in harmony. So we are doubly secure.

This is wonderful – this is good news – it is great news – and yet in the next verses (41-42) we hear the Jews grumbling!!

They refused to believe that he had come down from heaven at all!

As far as they were concerned, this was just Jesus of Nazareth – he was just the son of the carpenter, Joseph. They knew his father and mother well, so how did he think he had come down from heaven. He was nobody special, as far as they were concerned. Sadly their eyes were still blinded to the truth, that Jesus of Nazareth, who they had watched growing up, was actually...
‘the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!’ (John 20:30-31).

In v.43 Jesus tells them to stop grumbling among themselves. He is not put off by what they have just said, by their lack of faith, and their spirit of unbelief.

He goes on to say in v.44:

*‘No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him,
and I will raise him up at the last day.’*

He is still driving home this point – salvation belongs to our God.

It is God the Father's prerogative to save whom he will. No-one can come to Jesus for salvation unless the Father draws him.

Read on into vs.45-47.

It is God the Father's work to draw us to his Son for salvation, but if and when we come and believe in Him, we will have eternal life that very moment (v.47). And that brings us to the end of that section, and to the second mention of Jesus saying, 'I am the Bread of Life' in v.48. He then goes on to talk about us eating his flesh and drinking his blood! Which begs the question:

2. How are we supposed to eat Jesus flesh and drink his blood? (49-59)

Jesus points out the difference between himself (as the bread of life) and the manna (the bread which came down from heaven in the OT) which the children of Israel ate in the wilderness (Read v.48-51a).

Here Jesus says that the Israelites ate the manna in the desert, but they still died. Its benefit didn't last forever. But, by contrast, 'Jesus is the bread of LIFE' - eternal life. If anyone partakes of Him, they will never die, but will live forever!

He actually says in v.51:

*'I am the living bread that came down from heaven.
If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.*

This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'

So does Jesus expect us to eat his flesh and drink his blood?

This flesh is obviously his body which he was going to give for the life of the world, when he died for us on the cross at Calvary.

Jesus has stirred up a hornet's nest, because now in v.52:

*'The Jews began to argue sharply among themselves,
'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'*

And the hornet's nest wasn't just stirred up in the Synagogue in Capernaum 2000 years ago. It was stirred up again 500 years ago at the time of the Reformation, when the Reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Zwingli and others all debated with the established Roman Church, the significance of the Mass, or Holy Communion or the Breaking of Bread.

In what sense was the bread Jesus' body, and in what sense was the wine Jesus' blood, and in what sense do we eat his flesh and drink his blood when we partake of these emblems?

To this day the Catholic Church would look to this passage as the foundation for their belief in *transubstantiation* – the doctrine that when the priest performing the mass rings the bell, that the bread actually becomes the body of our Lord, and the wine actually becomes his blood.

This explains why they venerate the consecrated host thereafter.

Are they right?

Well, let's look further at what Jesus says here:

Just listen to some very offensive words that Jesus spoke in v.53-58.

*'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. **For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.** Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, **so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.** This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.'*

He told us to eat his flesh and drink his blood!

So are we supposed to be cannibals?

Of course not!

And yet in the First Century, some of the propaganda that was spread by the enemies of the Christians, accused them of this very thing, because of language like this.

What are we to make of all of this?

Well, notice that Jesus said all this while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. It was in a Jewish context. Among people who had known him from birth – who had seen him physically growing up among them as the carpenter's boy. Back in v.41-42 it was them who had got stuck in the physical realm when Jesus had been trying to teach them figuratively or spiritually that he was the *'bread that had come down from heaven.'*

But Jesus often spoke in parables in public, but only explained the spiritual meaning in private afterwards – cf Matthew 13 – the parable of the sower, etc. He did so, to get people thinking, to get their attention, to stir them up, and that's exactly what has happened here again.

3. Jesus explains this privately to his own Disciples (vs.60-65)

In vs.60-61 it appears that his own disciples are going to get stuck in the physical, and not get Jesus' spiritual meaning, either!

Many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'

What Jesus has just talked about in vs.53-58 about eating his flesh and drinking his blood is offensive. And that's exactly what Jesus now admits in private to his disciples in v.61.

*'Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this,
Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you?'*

Of course it did!

But the next verses 62-63 hold the answer to this difficult passage:

'What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?'

His body wasn't going to be around for us to partake of literally. He was going back to his Father shortly after his body was physically mutilated on the cross! He couldn't have meant us to understand what he had just said physically. One human body could never go around every member of his worldwide Church anyway! It's impossible for us to take a literal meaning seriously here!

So Jesus goes on to explain to us that he is speaking spiritually, not literally, in v.63:

***'The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.
The words I have spoken to you are spirit[ual] and they are life.'***

Jesus was using provocative language, yes, but that was in order to get a reaction out of these complacent Jews in Capernaum, who could only think of him as the carpenter's son. Those who were truly his disciples, true believers in Him as their Saviour and Lord, should not have been thrown by this talk. But the amazing thing was, that Jesus has to admit in v.64,

*'Yet there are **some of you** (my own disciples) who do not believe.'*

Some of his own disciples were actually wavering over this teaching. They hadn't grasped that he was speaking spiritually and not physically. Look at the explanation that John gives us in v.64b-65:

'For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, 'This is why I told you that no-one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.'

In other words - unless the Father gives us spiritual insight into such truths.

Therefore in v.51b – the bread that Jesus speaks of is his flesh that he would give for the life of the world. i.e. he would lay down his physical body in death on the cross for us. So there was no way we could physically eat of it.

Now compare v.54 with v.40. They are very similar – in fact they are parallel. N.B. 'To eat Christ's flesh and to drink his blood' (v.54) equals 'to believe in and appropriate what Christ has done for us on the cross by dying for us and shedding his blood for us.' (v.40)

Taking the mass, or even going to the Lord's Table or Communion Service, will never save anyone. Only by believing in what the bread and the wine *represent* can we be saved. In other words, by putting our trust in the fact that Jesus died for us and our sins on the cross and that He shed his blood to cleanse and forgive me for my sins. That's the only way anyone can be saved.

(v.40) Therefore *'If I look to the Son and believe in Him, I will have eternal life, and I will be raised up at the last day.'*

That's why Jesus could say in v.35:

'I am the bread of life, He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.' He tells us to simply come and believe!

Come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Accept who he is – 'I am' (v.35) – God himself.

Yet he came down in flesh from heaven (v.51)

And he gave his body over to death on the cross for our sins (v.51)

- For the life of the world. So come now and believe.

Believe that he died on that cross for you personally and for your sin.

Believe that he rose again and now lives to be your Saviour.

Believe he will take away your sin if you ask him.

Come to him and believe in Him.

Conclusion

I want to read vs.66-69 as we close, because even some of the disciples were offended at what Jesus had said. In fact, many turned back and stopped following Jesus from this point onwards.

(v.67) Jesus then gave his **Twelve Disciples** the opportunity to go away and stop following Him too. But look what Peter says:

***'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.
We believe and know that YOU are the Holy One of God.'***

That was quite a statement from Peter's lips – and he was absolutely right. He had got the message of John's Gospel – *'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.'* We don't need anyone else. There is no-one else for us to turn to! Nobody else can give us eternal life – but Jesus.

And for the first time in this Gospel, we are then told that one of his own disciples, Judas Iscariot, is going to be the one who would betray him.

Jesus was using provocative, offensive language, to get a response, to make people sit up and take notice of what he was teaching.

Well he got a reaction, and maybe it exposed more than he thought.

Even some of his own closest disciples, weren't really true believers!!

So where does that leave you and me?

Peter got the bottom line: Jesus is the only Saviour.

It may at times be difficult to follow him. But we don't really have any other option. There is no other way to be saved, except to trust in Jesus –

So come and believe in Him, and find eternal life in Him tonight. Amen.