

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2010

Sunday Morning, February 21, 2010: Jesus, the Bread of Life

Jesus: The Bread of Life
John 6: 25 – 42.

I. Introduction.

Is Jesus God? This is the question that separates the Christian faith from all other religions.

Many people outside of the Christian faith like to say that Jesus never claimed to be God. They insist that this is a modern development. They claim the church first made this claim about Jesus hundreds of years after Jesus' crucifixion.

Over the next seven weeks, I want to explore seven statements Jesus made claiming to be one with God. These seven statements are found in the Gospel of John. They are commonly called the "I Am" statements. This is significant, because "I Am" is the name of God given to Moses at the burning bush of Exodus 3. Moses asked God for his name. God said, "I Am."

Therefore, Jesus used the Old Testament name of God to refer to himself. Jesus claimed to be one with God.

If Jesus did, in fact, claim to be God, then we must make a choice. We can simplify this by saying it is a choice between "yes" and "no." Either, Jesus is God, or he is not.

However, it is more complicated than that. If the Bible is a trustworthy source for telling the story of Jesus, then we have to accept that Jesus made these claims about himself. This means, we must ask ourselves...Is Jesus a liar? A lunatic? Or, is Jesus the Lord?

Read John 6: 25 – 42.

Our Scripture picks up in the middle of a very familiar story from the life of Jesus. This story is familiar, because it is the only miracle that appears in all four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Jesus and his disciples were traveling through the Northern part of Israel, on the banks of the Lake of Galilee. John tells us that Jesus had performed many miraculous signs that attracted a large crowd. For some reason, Jesus felt the need to provide food for the large crowd.

Jesus first approached one of his disciples named Philip and asked him where they could find enough food to feed the crowd. Philip was originally from this part of Israel, so Philip would know the best way to provide food. However, John tells us that Jesus merely said this as a test—for he already knew what he planned to do.

Philip didn't have a good answer for Jesus' question. Jesus asked "where" they could find food. Philip said they could not afford to feed the crowd. It would cost eight months' wages just to give everyone a small bite of food. There was no way they could afford a complete meal.

Another disciple—Andrew—came forward with a young boy who had brought his own meager lunch. He had five barley loaves (of bread) and two small fish. Andrew brought the boy to Jesus, but he was realistic in his expectations. How far will this small lunch go among so many people?

This is when Jesus performed one of his most famous miracles. Jesus took the bread and fish, blessed it, broke it and gave it to the people sitting on the grass. Philip didn't think they had enough money. Andrew didn't think they had enough food. Jesus performed a miracle. In fact, Jesus provided so much food that his disciples actually collected twelve basketsful of leftovers.

The twelve basketsful leads me to believe this was a true miracle. Others have tried to discount this as something other than a miracle. For example, William Barclay says that Jesus did not multiply the food. Instead, the crowd saw the faith of a little boy, who gave his food to Jesus. Then, other people pulled out their food so there was enough for everyone to eat. Another example is the view that Jesus is here instituting the Lord's Supper. Therefore, this was not an entire meal. It was just a bite of bread and a bite of fish. These interpretations seem far fetched when we see Jesus' concern that none of the leftovers go to waste.

It also seems far fetched when we look at the response of the crowd. The people were so excited about what Jesus had done for them. I understand why they were excited. They received an unexpected blessing. They got to eat without spending any money. I understand their excitement. But, I don't understand their response.

I would understand if the people were so excited that they put their faith in Jesus as the Son of God. I would understand if they had responded by asking Jesus more about faith and the Kingdom of God. That is not what they did. Instead, they tried to make Jesus the King of Israel.

This probably explains why this miracle appears in all four Gospels. The Jewish Rabbis made a connection with the story of Moses in the Old Testament and the coming of the Promised Messiah. Moses was the Redeemer whom God used to rescue the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. Moses spoke for God both to the Hebrew people and to the Egyptian Pharaoh. When Pharaoh let God's go from their slavery in Egypt, Moses led them across the Red Sea into the desert. God's people spent forty years in the desert before they entered into the Promised Land. During those forty years, God provided for all the needs of his people. One miraculous provision was the manna. Six days a week for forty years, the Hebrew people woke up to find bread on the ground. This bread sustained them every day in the desert.

The Rabbis taught that the Messiah would be another redeemer like Moses. The Messiah would be sent by God to rescue his people from the Romans. The Roman Empire had robbed Israel of her identity. As long as Rome was in charge, Israel was nothing more than a colony. Sure, they still had their Temple in Jerusalem...But, they were no longer a distinct people. And, they had no power. When the Messiah came, he would rescue them from Rome and re-establish Israel as God's favorite nation.

When Jesus produced food out of nowhere, the people thought he must be the Messiah. This was one just like Moses. He could ask God for bread, and the bread would come. This must also be the King for whom they had hoped and waited!

Yet, notice what Jesus did when the people tried to make him King by force. Jesus resisted. Jesus did not come to be a political leader. Literally, Jesus hid from the people and escaped to the other side of the Lake of Galilee.

II. Missing the Point.

It didn't take long for the crowd of people to find Jesus and his disciples on the other side of the lake. The disciples traveled by boat. Jesus walked across the top of the water. We don't really know how the crowd travelled. They could have taken boats. Or, they could have walked around the lake. However they traveled, we know they found Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When the crowd first approached Jesus, he chastised them for missing the point. He had just performed a miraculous sign. And all they could think about was more bread.

One interesting characteristic of the Gospel of John is the way John organized his Gospel around Jesus' miracles. John tells us that Jesus performed numerous miracles, but he doesn't tell us what they are. He readily acknowledged that he left out part of the story, because it would be too long. However, John describes seven of Jesus' miracles in great detail. He just doesn't call them miracles. He calls them signs. Like the feeding of the five thousand. This was one of Jesus' seven miraculous signs.

John carefully selected seven miracles and described them as signs. A sign is something that points to something else. In other words, the feeding of the five thousand is a miracle. But it is also a sign. It does not simply deal with Jesus' power over the earthly and physical. It tells us about Heaven and the spiritual realm. We are not simply to focus our attention on the miracle. We are to look beyond the miracle and focus on what the miracle tells us about Jesus.

The best way I know to find the significance of this sign is to compare it to two things Jesus said earlier about bread and food.

In Matthew 4, Jesus went into the desert to be tempted by Satan. Satan's first temptation was to tell Jesus to turn stones into bread. Jesus was at the end of a forty day fast, and he was hungry. He probably wanted to eat. He probably thought the stones looked pretty appetizing—especially if they were loaves of bread. Yet, Jesus resisted this temptation by quoting from the book of Deuteronomy.

In Matthew 4: 4, Jesus said, “It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

In John 4, we read the story of Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus witnessed to this woman while his disciples went into town to buy some food. When the disciples returned, they were shocked to find Jesus at the well, engaged in conversation with an unclean, foreign woman. When the woman went off to tell her friends and family that she had met the Messiah, the disciples tried to get Jesus to eat something.

John 4: 31 – 34... Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?” Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work...

In other words, bread and food are important to physical life. However, bread and food are not the

most important things in life. There is something even more important than food. There is something even more important than eating.

THIS is what the sign points toward. Just as physical food keeps your physical body alive, there is a spiritual food which is more important than bread. Jesus himself is the bread of eternal life.

III. The Bread that Is Better than Bread.

After Jesus chastised the crowd for looking for more physical food, they reveal their ignorance by asking for a sign...

John 6: 30 – 31... So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

These verses are thick with irony. They asked Jesus for a sign. Isn't that what he had just performed? He fed a crowd of five to ten thousand people with five loaves of barley bread and two small fish. Then they asked him for manna. Barley loaves were too common. They wanted something they had never tasted before. Ironic.

Before we judged the crowd, we need to acknowledge that we make the same kinds of requests of Jesus. We pray, "Jesus, if you will heal my grandmother, then I will believe you and commit my life to you." "Jesus, I don't ask a lot of you, but I really need to make a good grade on this test (or win this contract at work, or excel at my job interview). Just do this one thing for me, and I will forever serve you."

Jesus has every right at this point to say, "Look at what I have already done!" But, he resisted. Instead, he points to himself. There is a Bread that is better than bread. There is something Jesus can give us that is beyond what we could ever ask of him.

John 6: 33... For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

We are just like the crowds. Jesus has performed miracles and signs all around us. Yet, we insist that what Jesus has done is not good enough for us to believe in him and trust him with our lives. Jesus has already given us his very best. If we will not believe and trust him based on what he has already done for us, then no miracle will cause us to believe and trust.

IV. Jesus Is the Only Thing that Satisfies.

The people wanted physical bread that would not last. Jesus wanted to give them spiritual Bread that would last eternally.

Jesus described a Bread that is better than bread...not barley loaves, not wheat loaves, but Jesus himself!...Jesus is the only Bread that will last eternally.

The Greek word for bread was often used for food in general...But in this culture, bread was the most basic kind of food available...Meals were made up of piece of bread and maybe some beans or vegetables...Often entire meal was nothing more than bread...Meat was only eaten by the extremely wealthy...Common folks only ate meat at festivals...

Jesus defined himself as the most basic food in their diet...In other words, the most basic thing people were to rely on for their existence...Without bread, a person would lack proper physical nourishment and potentially starve to death...Without Jesus, a person would lack the proper spiritual nourishment and therefore have no spiritual existence. . .purpose, reason for living. Jesus has called us to depend on him for our very existence...He is the one who gives us sustenance, survival.

Jesus is not the Ribeye Steak of Life. . .he is the Bread of Life...Jesus is what is common, ordinary, daily, mundane...Jesus is what we should depend on daily

V. Conclusion.

This story ends with a division in the crowd. Some of the people believed Jesus and followed him. Others thought Jesus was a liar or a lunatic.

What about you? Will you make a choice this morning? Jesus claimed to be God by telling us he is the source of life on earth and the source of eternal life in Heaven. Was Jesus telling a lie? Was Jesus acting like a lunatic? Is Jesus the Lord?