

I am the Bread of Life

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[0 : 0 0] Well, thank you so much, Emma. Folks, are we well? Oh, we are quiet this morning. Are we well? It's great. Well, please have those verses in John chapter 6 open in front of you.

As Alistair mentioned, we're starting a new series today that we're going to be in over the next few months seeking to answer the question, who is Jesus? And we're going to spend some time in John's Gospel looking at not so much what Jesus did, but about what Jesus said about himself.

As we see him declaring to the world that he's entered, this is who I am. Now, there are seven of these I am sayings that Jesus makes in John's Gospel.

We're going to be looking at the first of these today that we find in John chapter 6. But before we get to work, let's just pause for a minute and let's pray together. Father God, would you help us today, whoever we are and wherever we are before you and whatever we think about you, to grasp something more of the true identity of Jesus and to see and understand why that identity changes absolutely everything.

And so we ask that you would come and be with us by your spirit this morning. Would your word come alive to us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So if someone was to ask you today, what has been the highlight of your life so far, what would you answer?

[1 : 4 7] So for a very talented 39-year-old Englishman, if you asked him that question, he would undoubtedly point you to this moment in his life. He was Johnny Wilkinson living the boyhood dream.

He's got a job playing the sport that he loves. He's been chosen to represent his country at the World Cup. He and his team have made it to the final of that World Cup.

And in the dying seconds of the game, he slots the drop goal that wins his country, the World Cup, for the first time in their history, becoming the first European team to do so.

This moment is one of the most watched and celebrated clips on YouTube. It's not like the English to go on about a World Cup victory, is it? Here is what Johnny Wilkinson said in the days following that game.

I sat in the changing room in Sydney after that epic battle until pretty much everyone had left. I didn't want to wave goodbye because I didn't want to let go of the moment and give in to its inevitable passing.

[2 : 5 3] I had already begun to feel the elation slipping away during the lap of honour around the field. Is that not a fascinating admission?

Of someone who got to the top and realised as good as that moment was, that not only was it gone in an instant, but that it had no way of bringing lasting satisfaction in life.

Fascinating quote. Why is it that the things in life that we spend ourselves for, because we think they will bring us lasting satisfaction, why is it that those things never do?

Now, if you're of a certain generation, you might remember Keith Richards' famous song, Rolling Stones, putting it well. When I'm driving in my car and the man come on the radio, he's telling me more and more and more about some useless information supposed to fire my imagination.

Deep lyrics, isn't it? The 60s man, lyrics were lyrics. That's what I say. I can't get no satisfaction. I can't get no satisfaction. Because I try and I try and I try and I try.

[4 : 07] I can't get no, no, I can't get no satisfaction. Keith Richards from the Rolling Stones. He didn't write it because he fancied having a vent about annoying radio adverts.

He wrote it because there's something, a deep longing in the human soul for something lasting and permanent that will truly satisfy us. And that's why the claim that Jesus makes in John 6 is huge.

I've loved over the last couple of weeks just spending time in my study with this passage. And it struck me again, what Jesus says here is enormous. Because into our unsatisfied and into our restless worlds has stepped one who's declared, if you've got it there, verse 35 of chapter 6, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. And whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Now, as far as claims go, I don't think you get much bigger than that.

To be able to eternally satisfy and give lasting life to stressing and wandering and searching human souls. And you have to say, it's not as if Jesus has walked in and gone really shy and humble on his claim, is it?

[5 : 26] He's not tiptoed in and he said, hey folks, I know there's some lovely worldviews out there about wisdom and what life is all about. I know it's a bit like Heinz. I know there's 57 varieties. Would you mind terribly if I made it 58?

Right, he's not saying that. He's not offering an opinion. He's declaring the truth. How often that we make Jesus British when he's not British.

He is not offering an opinion. He is declaring to the world that he is so much greater than anyone else. And what he has to offer is so much better than anything else.

And that he is the, not a, he is the bread of life. So what do you make of Jesus' claim today?

Well, I think did C.S. Lewis say that when it comes to Jesus, really we've only got three options. He's a liar, he's a lunatic, or he's Lord. So which is it?

[6 : 28] Let's pick up the story at verse 25. In the immediate context, Jesus, at the beginning of chapter 6, has just fed the 5,000. See, he's done a miracle involving bread to set up a teaching about him being the true bread.

Now this is one of the sign miracles that we get in John's Gospel. And the signs, the things that Jesus did, are designed to point us to who Jesus is.

Now I always love it at this time of year in our city because you go up to the top of the Royal Mile and what do you see? You see lots of people taking lots of pictures of the sign that points to the castle.

Right? And I see it every time and I think to myself, what are you doing focusing on this sign when the thing that the sign is pointing to is so much more glorious and it's there?

It's exactly the same with Jesus. The signs in John's Gospel. They point us to who Jesus really is. He's just fed the 5,000. And this crowd of people who have either seen him do this or have heard that it's happened are on the hunt to find him.

[7 : 35] Because Jesus has left the far shore of the Sea of Galilee where this miracle took place. And incidentally, having walked on water, he's joined his disciples in their boat and he's arrived with them on the other side of the sea at this little town called Capernaum.

And this huge crowd, they find Jesus. Do you see verse 25? But Jesus knows what has motivated this people to search for him.

Verse 26. They seek him not because they want to believe in him. They seek him because they want his stuff. Now in this instance, the stuff that they want is bread.

Now put your hand up this morning if you had bread in some kind of form for breakfast this morning. Good 60-70%. Now imagine if we went around the room and asked what the different kinds of bread were.

We'd come up with many different answers. I mean, you go into Tesco, this is what you find. You find brown bread, white bread, wholemeal bread, gluten-free bread, cheese bread, olive bread, tomato bread, rolls, croissons, buns.

[8 : 43] And I'm sure there's tons more because bread is so cheaply available and so freely available in so many forms that we sometimes just take it for granted. But that is not the case in first century agrarian Palestine.

Bread comes in one form and that one form is bread. Bread is bread. Bread is bread. And experts estimate, commentators say, that 85% of a person's wage goes on bread.

So put simply, people in this day, they work to eat and they work for bread. So you can imagine if you picture yourself as one of the people who's seeing Jesus, hearing about what he's done, you can imagine your delight when you learn that there is a man who is a bread dispensing machine.

There's no need for us to spend hours on moneysupermarket.com when Jesus can save us 85% of our salary. They seek Jesus not because of who they think he is.

They seek Jesus because of what they think is in it for them. And Jesus takes their wrong motives. And I love how he so graciously but firmly and compassionately does this.

[10 : 04] He takes their wrong motives and he helps them form right ones. Verse 27. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

What a gracious and loving and truthful response. Jesus has come to give them something far better, even though they don't see it. He's come to offer them something far better than stuff.

Okay, they say, verse 28, what must we do to get this bread? Again, they're missing the point. Mindset. How many club card points do we need to collect? How many scout badges do we need to wear?

What do we have to do to qualify ourselves for God's blessings? It's the wrong question to ask. Because no one can earn what Jesus is offering here.

That's why he talks about the Son of Man giving. Can't earn this. Again, see Jesus here taking their wrong motives and helping them form right ones. Verse 29.

[11 : 01] The work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent. That's how they'll get the life. That's how they'll get the eternal life. Not by doing, but by believing in him.

Because Jesus has come to give something far better to these people. He's come to give something far better to the world. And that something far better is him. As John would write in this prologue in chapter 1.

Jesus, the one full of grace and truth. Jesus, the one in whom the Spirit remains. Jesus, the one in whom is life. Now the crowd at this point, I think, understanding what Jesus is both saying of himself and what he's asking them to do.

What do they say? Give us a sign. Moses gave our forefathers a sign, they say. Of course, it wasn't Moses, was it? It was God. But regardless, they say, Jesus, what's your proof to back up your claim?

In other words, Jesus, what evidence will you give me to follow you? Perhaps it's the question in your mind this morning. Why should I trust Jesus?

[12 : 16] Well, if it is, can I suggest that not only is that a good question to ask, but that is the most important question that we can ask ourselves in life. We take our time over big decisions, don't we?

We looked into moving house recently. I tell you, we looked into that decision a lot. We did a lot of homework. How much more should we do our homework with this man, Jesus? Jesus gives two answers to that question.

Here's the first reason we should trust him, because of who he is. Jesus declares, verse 35, I love that. Not suggests, not throws it out there, not chucks out an opinion.

He declares into a world of doubt, death, and darkness. What? Verse 35, I am the bread of life. I am, says Jesus.

In the Greek, it's ego emi. Both words mean I am. So literally, Jesus is saying, I am, I am. That's what he's saying.

[13 : 17] So Jesus is declaring, that's what the crowd are hearing. And it's a deliberate reference to the sacred name of God, the one that God had used to reveal himself to Moses in the burning bush in Exodus 3, where God had said, I am who I am.

This is the title that Jesus uses to declare his identity to the world. He is God. And he, verse 27, you see it, is the son of man. Important title here, because I think it connects Jesus to the figure that Daniel talks about.

But it also connects Jesus to Adam, and it connects him to us. This is who Jesus is. Not fully man, half God. Not half man, fully God. Not even half God, half man.

Jesus is fully God and fully man in one person. Jesus is God in the flesh. This is who he is. He is God incarnate. I was reminded at this point of my friend Ben, who I lived with at university.

Ben's favorite meal to cook when he was trying to impress was that he would take a giant Aunt Bessie Yorkshire pudding, do you know the ones I mean? And he'd fill it with chili con carne. Genuinely thought we were living the dream as students.

[14 : 28] This is what he did. Needless to say, Ben got married after university. This is what Ben did. And he used to say to me, chili con carne, friend. It means chili with meat.

Chili with meat. Friends, the incarnation. God with flesh. That's what it means. God with flesh.

This is who Jesus is. And he is the one, verse 33, who has come down from heaven. And he is the one, verse 38, who has been sent by the Father.

Jesus is I am. But he doesn't just leave it at that. Do you see, he goes on, verse 35, to explain what that means. What does it mean for Jesus to be I am?

So what? Well, it means that he is the bread of life. Now, that's a deliberate echo of the Exodus story, where God, through Moses, had provided manna for his people to eat.

[15 : 26] In the wilderness, there's the journey to the land that he promised he was taking them. Every single day for 40 years. Every single day for 40 years. God had said, take and eat.

Every single day for 40 years. God had said to his people, eat and live. And so here is Jesus donning his coat of Old Testament colors.

And here he is declaring to his generation, in the same way, I am the bread of life. Except, I am better than the manna that God provided for your forefathers in the wilderness.

Because that bread, it fed people for a day. But whoever comes to me will never go hungry. And whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Because I will eternally satisfy the human soul. What a claim. That's an enormous claim. That Jesus makes.

[16 : 29] But we can trust the truth of this claim because who he is. Here's secondly why we can trust it. Because of what Jesus is doing. What is he doing? Follow with me. Verse 38. The will of the one who sent him.

Some rich and wonderful truths about who Jesus is in these verses. What is the will of the Father? Verse 40. To give eternal life.

To save sinners for himself. To give life to dead souls. To rescue men and women, boys and girls around the globe for himself. This is the beating heart of God the Father.

This is the heart that's driving this whole salvation project. He doesn't want people to perish. He wants people to live. He wants to give people eternal life. And to whom will he give it?

We'll see these two paradoxical yet gloriously true declarations that Jesus makes in these verses. Feel the arms of Jesus wide open as he declares twice. Verse 35.

[17 : 29] Verse 35. Whoever. Whoever comes to him. And whoever believes in him. Jesus will give to them eternal life. And at the same time see him declare according to the mystery, the mysterious and marvelous plan of the triune God hatched, conceived in eternity past.

Verse 37. That all those that the Father gives to him will come to him. And verse 39. He will lose none of them. It's to these people, this people.

Of course, they're the same thing, aren't they? This people who believe in the Son. And that the Father gives to the Son. That Jesus will give eternal life. Now how is he going to do that?

Because verse 40. They will be the ones who look to the Son. And what does it mean to look to the Son? Well, later on in this chapter, verse 53, Jesus declares that through his death on the cross.

As John the Baptist declared in John chapter 1, See the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Through his death, Jesus was able to give life. That whoever eats his flesh, whoever drinks his blood, symbolically saying that whoever feeds on him, whoever believes in him, whoever is found in him the bread of heaven, it will be they who benefit from everything that his life, death and resurrection will accomplish.

[18 : 53] This is life. John 17. Jesus will pray to the Father and say that this is eternal life, that they know you, the one true God, and his Son who you have sent.

This is life. Once an enemy of God because of our sin, now we're at peace with God. This is life. Once under condemnation because of our sin, Jesus paid it all.

Now the recipient of outrageous forgiveness. This is life. Once separated from God because of our sin, now gloriously adopted into his family.

This is life. Not stuff. Not things. Not careers. Not even being cured of my illness. Not doing well in my exams.

Not life being plain sailing. Life is a relationship with the God who made us. This is life, says Jesus. I am the bread of life.

[19 : 50] All those things are because of our union with him. It's glorious what he's saying. It's a huge claim that he's making. But it's one that we can trust because of who he is. And it's one that we can know because of what he is doing.

Friends, are you here this morning? Let me ask you, what do you make of Jesus' claim? I remember well the first time it dawned on me that is when I read John chapter 6.

That Jesus tells me this. Not to show off. He tells me this because he loves me. That he's here on earth in my fallen flesh because he loves me.

And he's here because he doesn't want me to settle for things in life that will not satisfy my soul. Because they will not deal with my biggest problem. Why is he telling me this?

Because he loves me. Do you find it true in your own life that how often we just get caught up in just chasing stuff? Chasing things.

[20 : 55] Expanding ourselves. Expanding ourselves in the pursuit of things that we think will make us happy, will make us whole. Why is it those things never work? Remember my brother and I, when we were young, we got our first ever mobile phone.

And my mum and dad said, you can't have two phones, you have to have one phone. So we worked together to get this phone. Do you know what we did? It was a Sony Ericsson, if you ever remember the Ericsson phones, right? It held ten text messages, but you only could have nine because then the tenth couldn't get in.

Ten text messages, big aerial. This was the Ericsson phone. Do you know how we got that phone? We collected 30 Coke ring pulls. Do you know where we got those ring pulls from, the most of them?

We were sifting through bins. That's how we got our Coke ring pulls. At last the phone arrives. We got this phone in our hands. We're absolutely delighted.

Honestly, we thought we were the bee's knees. You see, six months later, when everyone in my class had a phone that was so much better than the Ericsson phone. I remember looking at it, holding it, thinking, I did all that for this.

[22 : 04] I put myself through all that for this. I went through bins for this. Live long enough and you realize that it's not just true for the little things in life.

It's true for the big things. Why is it that the things in life that we spend ourselves for because we think they will bring us lasting satisfaction never do?

C.S. Lewis nailed it, I think, as he said, We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us.

Like a child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. So we are because we are far too easily pleased.

Here is Jesus declaring to a world that is far too easily pleased that I am the bread of life. Now look what the majority of this crowd say at verse 60 when they hear Jesus say this.

[23 : 09] This is a hard teaching. Not hard as in Jesus is talking in riddles. Hard as in this message is offensive. It's offensive because Jesus is saying by implication that without him I'll die.

Because it's hard many walk away. It's one of the striking things about John chapter 6 that John chapter 6 starts with a huge crowd following Jesus and it ends with just the 12 at verse 67.

Remember, one of those 12 is Judas. So are they going to go too? That's Jesus' question. Are they going to go too? Well, look how Peter responds at verse 68.

Some of the most breathtakingly brilliant words, I think, in all of Scripture. Where else will we go, Lord? Not as in we've got nowhere else to go, like the premier in at Capernaum is closed for refurbation and we've nowhere to stay for the night.

Rather, we've nowhere else that we want to be than right here with you, Jesus. Because we know that you are unlike anyone else we've ever met.

[24 : 17] And you have the words of eternal life. These are not the words of a confused heart. These are the words of a satisfied soul. Friends, can I say to us this morning that right here where Peter is, is the most freeing place that you and I can ever find ourselves in life.

That in Jesus Christ we've got everything. When we can come to know and say for ourselves what St. Augustine wrote in his confessions all those years ago, you have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

Let me just ask us two questions as we work towards a close this morning. Firstly, are you here this morning and you've not eaten the bread of heaven? You're here today and you're toiling, you're sweating, you're working it out for food that spoils.

Living for things that are going to be here one minute and gone the next. Are you here today and your soul is restless? Could it be that God is irresistibly drawing you to himself by his spirit this morning through his word?

Come and eat. Take and eat. As a side note, see how Jesus is undoing the take and eat that all went wrong in Genesis 3. Maybe you feel an inner prod this morning to find out more about that baptism service where you can publicly say, nailing your colours to the mast, saying to the world, this is the man that I follow.

[25 : 48] Come to the bread of life. Secondly, are we delighting ourselves? Are we satisfying our souls every day with this bread of heaven? Feasting on God's word, filling our souls with scripture, delighting ourselves in who Jesus really is.

Friends, is Peter's confession, as we see it hit us here, is this our confession? You know, Johnny Wilkinson, he retired from rugby in 2014, international rugby rather, and here's what he said as he reflected on his career.

To say that I have played through four World Cups, two Lions Tours and 91 games after a ridiculous number of injuries and other setbacks gives me an incredibly special feeling of fulfilment.

But by now I know myself well enough to know that I will never truly be satisfied. Jesus says, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. And whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

[27 : 09] That's what you make of his claim this morning. Let's pray together. Amen. And so, Heavenly Father, in this silence now, we would ask you to search our hearts and to prune any branches, to do any work in our hearts, to refine us that you need to do.

Father, would you strip away the things of the world that will not last that creep into our lives? Father, would you replace it with that overwhelming sense of the greatness of the person of Jesus? Father, thank you so much that you love us.

And so, Lord, we ask that you continue with us now, that we would continue, whether for the first time or the hundredth time, to turn and to eat and to savour Jesus, the bread of life.

Father, thank you that you hear us, because we pray in Jesus' worthy name. Amen.