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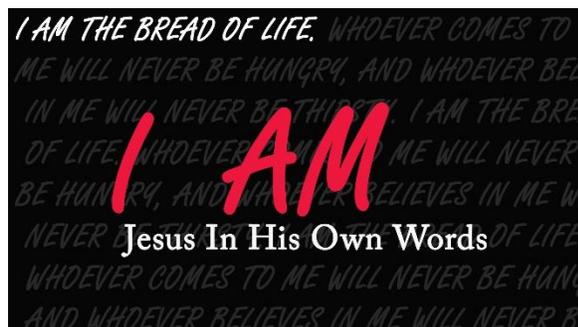
Title: I AM Bread of Life

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Text: [John 6:25-35](#)

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Today we begin a series of sermons on the seven 'I am' sayings in John's Gospel. 'I am the bread of life'; 'I am the light of the world'; 'I am the gate'; 'I am the good shepherd'; 'I am the resurrection and the life'; 'I am the way, the truth and the life', and 'I am the vine'.

The recently retired senior minister once told me that a sermon series should be kept to a MAXIMUM of four in a series. Any more will get tiring both for the preacher and the listener. So, this is a series of seven. I thought about boiling them down - combining two sayings into one but that didn't seem right. They're seven standalone sermons that happen to have the same overarching theme. At least that's what I'm telling myself today on week one! Ask me again on week seven.

Many times, we are guilty of making our Jesus fit who we want him to be for us. Hopefully, a study like this will allow us to hear about the identity of Jesus directly from Jesus himself in his own words. It's a good practice, not just in scripture study but across our lives, to go to the source of the information rather than relying on what someone else told you what they thought they overheard someone say that they thought they saw on social media. So, "Jesus In His Own Words."

All seven of these "I AM" sayings of Jesus come from the Gospel of John. They are found between chapter 6 where we begin today and chapter 15 where we'll end up. John is less concerned about the WHEN and WHERE of Jesus' ministry like Matthew, Mark, and Luke and more concerned about the HOW and WHY. But before we jump straight into John, let's ground ourselves in the Old Testament and specifically, the name for God in the Old Testament. It will inform our study today and in the weeks to come.

The most common and the most important name for God in the Old Testament is a name that our English versions of the Bible never know quite how to handle. In Hebrew, the name had four letters — YHWH — if you add

some vowels, it's pronounced "Yahweh." Whenever you see the word LORD in all capital letters in your Bible, you know that this is the name to which it refers. It occurs 6,828 times in the Old Testament. The most important scripture for understanding the name 'Yahweh' is in Exodus 3. God has just commanded Moses to go to Egypt and to bring his people out of captivity. Moses tries to cover his bases and asks God what happens when they ask God's name. What then?

"God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "This you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations." (Exodus 3:14-15).

God gives three answers to the question, "what happens if they ask your name?" 1. "I AM WHO I AM." 2. "I AM has sent me to you." 3. "The LORD (or Yahweh) ...has sent me to you." Yahweh is used interchangeably with I AM in successive verses. ¹

All of this is to say that God has a name and that name is "I AM." Today is called Trinity Sunday. The three points of the Trinity are God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit. Last week, on Pentecost, we focused a lot on the Spirit. For the next seven weeks, we'll focus on a lot on Jesus but separating God from Jesus is going to get harder especially when Jesus starts telling the disciples who he is – in his own words. The key in all of these seven is the phrase, I AM. Those two little words in some ways are even more important than what comes after them. These seven "I AM" sayings all indicate that Jesus is somehow making God present. Jesus is speaking as God. They are one. They share a name. In these sayings, Jesus is saying, "I too am the God who is 'I AM who I am.'"

Our scripture today comes right after the feeding of the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish. The crowds were fed, and they are compelled to follow this miracle worker. They had seen enough of Jesus to know that whatever he had, they wanted more of it. Jesus had given them more than free bread. Now they wanted more, or at least they wanted a repeat performance.

But then Jesus makes a bold move. Jesus begins with "I am the bread of life" and there is confusion. You? But, that bread you gave us on the other side of the lake was so good. But this is different. Jesus identifies himself with Yahweh, the great I AM. He identifies Yahweh as the bread of life for the world in contrast to the bread which feeds but satisfies only temporarily. But how is Jesus the bread of life? How does Jesus satisfy hunger and thirst?

In the Mediterranean world of Jesus' day, bread was the most important and basic part of the diet. If you had bread and water or a little wine, you had a meal. If you had, in addition to bread, some fish or a few dates you ate very well. When Jesus said "I am the bread of life" he was not saying, "I am like a freshly baked loaf of Wonder Bread" but rather "I am what you need to live. I am the only one who can nourish you along life's journey."

The bread Jesus offers gives spiritual life and quenches spiritual thirst. Coming to Jesus for this bread involves believing; coming to Jesus involves the desire to find something deeper, something life-giving despite the circumstances of life. Jesus is the bread of life and he gives this bread to those who believe in him. In this 'I am' saying, and all the others, Jesus is the focus. Jesus is the good news. He is the one who offers bread that truly satisfies.

I played a game when I was growing up called "The Game of Life." It wasn't about life really, but life as we were told it ought to be. You had choices along the way: go to college or not, get married, have a career. There were pitfalls and shortcuts to "retirement" which was the finish line. But the goal was not to finish first. Rather the goal was to finish with the most. Whoever had the biggest stack of cash at the end was the winner.

But the money wasn't real. At the end of the game, after a winner was declared, the game would be put away. Like Monopoly, the money accumulated was just worthless paper, and it disappeared until the next game when the pursuit of "bread" in the form of money would be repeated. Years later, I noted the game didn't count death as a part of life. The real end in "The Game of Life" if the truth be known is always a tie. The proposed "purpose" in life to gather a large stack of money turns out to be an illusion.

Like those in the first century, we seem to be chasing a Jesus who will continue to give us the bread that perishes. The manna lessons from the wilderness were important for the people of Israel. They learned that Yahweh would give them the things they needed. They also learned not to hoard their bread. It would smell if you kept it for more than a day. In John's Gospel, the chasers of Jesus remembered the manna, but not the lessons of the manna. So, Jesus begins to teach them again about what the true bread from heaven does.

Everything we are and have is a gift from God, including all our material blessings. Jesus' teaching constantly reminds us that there is something more important than money, homes, cars, holidays, and even family - a relationship with God revealed in Jesus Christ and made present through the

Holy Spirit. If we want life in all its fullness, then we need the bread that Jesus alone can give – not rye and sourdough and wheat and white – but nourishment as a follower of Jesus Christ. Only this can sustain us along life's journey and prepare us for the life to come.

On a purely human level, these sayings of Jesus, especially this one – I am bread - are strange at best. When the divine level is factored in, the "I Am" sayings begin to coalesce into a vision of such utter clarity as to be startling. Jesus did not come into the world to give bread but to BE bread. Like the crowd in the story, we often come to Jesus only to get what we can from Him. But God is not a mere helper to make our lives better; God is life. Jesus did not come to meet our earthly desires; Jesus came to change our desires.

Could it be that Jesus' words to those chasing him across the sea those many years ago still have truth today? "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which Jesus will give you."

A brilliant image of this is found in a novel that, like the play, resounds with the gospel - *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo. After being granted parole the convict Jean Valjean struggles to find work. He is filthy and ragged, rejected and forsaken by society but above all, hungry. But to his surprise, he is graciously welcomed by an elderly bishop. The bishop gently invites him to dinner and treats him as an honored guest. Jean Valjean is overcome by the grace of the bishop and speaks to the bishop:

"Monsieur...you are goodness itself. You don't despise me. You take me into your home. You light candles for me. Even though I didn't hide from you where I've been or the fact that I'm a poor cursed man." The bishop was sitting next to him and he gently touched his hand. "You didn't have to tell me who you were. This is not my house; it's the house of Jesus Christ. That door does not ask who enters whether he has a name, but whether he has any pain. You are suffering, you are hungry and thirsty; you are welcome. And don't thank me, don't tell me I'm taking you into my home. No one is at home here except the man who is in need of refuge. I'm telling you, who are passing through, you are more at home here than I am myself. Everything here is at your disposal. What do I need to know your name for? Besides, before you told me your name, you had one I knew." ²

Valjean opened his eyes in amazement. "True? You knew what I was called?" "Yes," replied the bishop. "You are called my brother." The overwhelming grace the bishop gave Jean Valjean mirrors the overwhelming grace Jesus, the Bread of Life, gives to hungry sinners like you and me.

If today you, like Jean Valjean, “are suffering, hungry and thirsty,” you are welcome here. Because the good news of the gospel is that your Jesus is faithful and will provide. He “gives you the true bread from heaven.” Jesus said, “I AM the bread of life.” It is a promise that remains true in this moment of this hour of this day and always.

¹ Commentary analysis by John Piper in commentary on Exodus 3. Found at www.desiringgod.org, “I Am Who I Am.” September 16, 1984.

² Hugo, Victor (Julie Rose, translator), *Les Misérables* (Modern Library Classics) Paperback, 2009, Modern Library publishers. page 66