

THE GREAT “I AM’S” of JESUS

by

John Caylor

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CHAPTER ONE

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

AFTER a busy period of service in Jerusalem where Jesus performed miracles of healing and held many discourses, teaching the people, the Lord went into what might have been a time of rest and retirement. Crossing the Sea of Galilee, He found that a great crowd of people had seen Him leave the eastern shore of the lake and had gone by land in the hope of seeing Him on the other side. As Jesus sat down with His disciples on the mountainside up from the lake shore, He looked over a multitude, assembling to hear Him. They had come because of His miracles. **“And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased”** (John 6:2).

The miracles of Jesus had created such a stir in Jerusalem that it was necessary for Him to leave that area if He were to teach His disciples. Here on the shores of Galilee, He found that as He taught the disciples, there was a waiting multitude whom He must satisfy. These people had come because they had seen or heard about His miracles of healing.

Time slipped away until it was near the close of day. From the time the multitude had left home, the people had not eaten. They had forgotten their hunger, but Jesus did not fail to recognize their need. He spoke to His disciples about the opportunity. Philip and Andrew had suggestions but little faith. It was the latter, who found a lad who had been thoughtful enough to bring a lunch. Jesus took the boy’s lunch and provided a feast for the five thousand people waiting to be fed.

Jesus commanded the disciples to organize the crowd so the people could be served. Then He multiplied the loaves and fishes and gave them to the disciples to distribute among the thousands until all were satisfied.

The result of the feeding of the five thousand was that many of the people believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They said: **“This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world”** (John 6:14).

The Jews had the idea that when their Messiah came into the world, He would reign over an earthly kingdom. They would think of Him as prophet, priest and king. Now that they believed that Jesus was the prophet who was to come, the multitude sought to make Jesus king.

“When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone” (John 6:15).

Unlike men with earthly ambitions, Jesus was not tempted by the flattery and honor bestowed upon Him by men who had a wrong conception of His purpose and ministry. He slipped away into the mountains.

On a former occasion, Jesus had been tempted by Satan to assume the role of king and express His authority. It was the short way to accomplish the divine purpose, Satan had assured Him. Now that the people wanted to crown Him king, Jesus went away from them into the mountain to pray.

The disciples started across the lake. In the midst of the night Jesus joined them in the boat. The next morning the multitude followed Jesus to the other side of the lake. There they found Him and inquired about His voyage across the lake. They had seen the disciples go by boat. They saw Jesus with the disciples on the other side and asked, **“Rabbi, when comest thou hither?”** Jesus knew what was in their minds. They were interested in His miracles. They wanted to know how to multiply loaves and fishes. Jesus wanted them to know that life goes deeper. When they wanted to know how to do the works of God, they were told, **“This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent”** (John 6:29).

Then the people wanted a sign. They spoke of the miracle of the manna in the desert. Moses gave them manna, what did Jesus have to offer? Yesterday they had wanted to crown Him as king; today they wanted another miracle for further proof that He was worthy.

Instead of encouraging the multitude to believe in His miracles and further enhance His popularity, Jesus immediately tried to turn their minds from the physical to the spiritual.

“Moses gave you not the bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven,” said Jesus. He continued, **“For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world”** (John 6:33). The disciples cried out, **“Lord, evermore give us this bread!”**

Jesus declared, **“I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst”** (John 6:35). The manna which Moses gave to the children of Israel had to be renewed every morning. The bread which Jesus offered, Himself, was given once for all. Of course, there is a renewal of fellowship with Jesus every day. It is necessary to commune with Him constantly in order to get the greatest benefit from His life-giving sustenance.

Besides, Jesus declared to His listeners, it was not Moses who gave the manna every morning; it was God. **“And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day”** (John 6:40), Jesus declared emphatically. This led to the definite issue. Were the Jews to receive Jesus as the bread of life or were they to have bread through His miracles of creation?

There is a vast gulf separating the spiritual and the physical. The audience, which had listened so patiently to Jesus when He was speaking about loaves and fishes and bread which they could eat, then turned away from Him because He was talking about heavenly manna. **“The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven”** (John 6:41).

The crowd began to identify Jesus as **“the son of Joseph.”** They could not understand how He could have come down from heaven. It was easy enough to see how manna could be given by a heavenly miracle, but here was a man whom they could not accept. It is one thing to eat bread; it is quite another to accept a man as the way of life.

Jesus was not asking the people to accept a mere man. He identified Himself as the Son of God. He, the Son of God, was and is the bread of life. Whoever eats of that bread will never hunger. He will have eternal life springing up in Him like a well of water springing up with refreshing strength.

As bread is necessary to the sustenance of life, so Christ is necessary to eternal life.

There is no way to live except through daily nourishment. Life comes through eating. There is no way to have eternal life except through Jesus Christ the Lord. He is necessary to life.

As bread is suited to all, young and old, weak and strong, savage and civilized, so Jesus is suited to all who are suited to Him.

- The rich and the poor need Christ.
- The illiterate and the educated must have Jesus for everlasting life.
- The savage and the civilized must come to the feet of Jesus.

The story of airmen stranded on cannibal islands in the Pacific was repeated over and over during World War II. As the airmen approached a village expecting to find cannibals, they were met by saints, who gave them food and shelter. Out of such experiences some American airmen came home as Christians. Others found the Lord more precious to them and yielded to a divine urge to give their lives in missionary service.

When Christ was preached to cannibals and savage men were converted, they became citizens of a heavenly kingdom and hosts to men in need on their earthly island. So is every man who eats the bread of life and receives heavenly manna through Jesus Christ.

As bread is necessary for daily food, so daily communion with Christ is necessary for spiritual growth.

To the child bread is necessary for growth; to the adult bread is necessary for daily strength. So to feast upon Jesus is necessary for growth. Daily to communicate with Him is essential to spiritual health. Jesus as the bread of life is necessary for daily food.

As bread satisfies the hungry body, so Jesus satisfies the hungry soul.

The multitudes looked to Jesus for physical bread. He pointed the people to the bread of life and to the sustenance of spiritual feasting. It was a difficult transition for the people to make.

They could understand physical bread; they could not understand spiritual bread. They had heard about the manna of Moses, but the bread of life was something new to them.

How different were the Jews in Jesus' audience from us? We are able to understand things we can weigh or measure; it is difficult for us to understand spiritual matters.

As bread is prepared. So was Jesus prepared before the foundation of the world to give Himself a ransom for the sins of men.

Bread grows as wheat, ripens as grain, is cut down in the harvest, is ground into flour, and is subjected to the oven's fire for finishing. Jesus grew from a babe, became a boy, ripened into manhood, was cut down by His enemies, and was ground into sacrificial death as the bread of life. He can give sustenance to all who believe on Him.

Jesus offers the bread of life, prepared from the foundation of the world. It is available to those who are prepared for it through accepting Him personally as Saviour and Lord.

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