

The Bread of Life

John 6:35-71

Rev. Brian Bill

February 6-7, 2016

For my dad's 80th birthday, my four sisters and I met in California two weeks ago to surprise him. I think we pulled it off. I came to the front door with a bunch of balloons so he couldn't see my face and declared, "*Happy Birthday.*" I think he thought I was a delivery boy. I then moved the balloons to the side and my dad exclaimed, "*What are you doing here?*" My mom then came to the door and had a similar reaction. While they tried to gather themselves, my sisters snuck in the back door and took their seats in the kitchen.

Here's a one-minute video of what happened next.

[Play Video]

BTW, my dad had a health scare last Sunday but is fine. Thanks to many of you for praying for him. We had a blast as a family. We walked through the redwoods at Muir Woods, crossed the Golden Gate Bridge and visited Alcatraz. And, we ate...a lot. It's interesting how important food is when you're with family and friends, isn't it? One of my favorite memories is eating clam chowder out of a sour dough bread bowl at Fisherman's Wharf.

[Take bite of bread]

I'd like you to think about food right now. For some of us, that's not all that difficult to do. In fact, some of you started planning your lunch as soon as the service started and you can't wait to chow down before and during the big game. I learned this week that Super Bowl Sunday is America's second-biggest eating day, after Thanksgiving. Here's what we'll consume:

- 1.2 billion chicken wings. That's enough for everyone in America to have three wings apiece.
- 12.5 million pounds of bacon.
- 11.2 million pounds of potato chips.

According to Cornell University, the average American will eat more than 6,000 calories on Sunday. Not surprisingly, antacid sales increase by 20% on the Monday after the big game.

During our team time this week I asked the staff to shout out their favorite food places in the QCA. Restaraunts included: *Johnny's*, *Brady Street Chophouse* and *Biaggi's*. Nominees for best bread: *Panera*, *Olive Garden*, *Texas Roadhouse* and *Red Lobster*. And for desserts: *Lagomarcino's*, *Old Towne Bakery*, *Aceine Allen*, and *Whitey's*. Did you know that Conde Nast Traveler has recently declared Whitey's the best ice cream in the world? They beat out others on the list from California, the UK, Texas, Michigan and New York.

Have you ever noticed that even when you eat your favorite food, you still get hungry again in a few hours? Some of us have been on a search for something that will satisfy and we've

come up short. A few of us have tried partying, relationships, purchasing things, or rooting for a favorite sports team! In the long run, we're still starving as we search for satisfaction. Ravi Zacharias writes, *"With all our ingesting and consumption, our hungers are still many and our fulfillments are few"* ("Jesus Among Other Gods," Page 83).

As we launch a new series today called, "Metaphors of the Messiah," we come face-to-face with the Bread of Bethlehem. He's the Savior who alone who can provide satisfaction. Some of you are experiencing spiritual hunger pangs that nothing in this world can fill. C.S. Lewis put it like this: *"If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world."*

If we settle for material things, we'll hunger again. If we partake of the Bread of Life, our hunger will be taken care of and all of our needs will be met.

We're going to focus on each of the "I Am" statements found in the Gospel of John and one from the Book of Revelation. Didn't Pastor Tim do a great job preaching the past two weeks? I'm still pondering the question he raised last weekend: *"What are you saying 'no' to?"*

Here then is how Jesus identifies Himself:

- **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 Way, the Truth and the Life**
- **I am the Vine**
- **I am the Alpha and Omega**
- **I am the Resurrection and the Life.** We'll have 5 instead of 4 services Easter weekend. Our titles is *"The Comeback."*

We're return to our study of Mark after Easter.

The pronoun **"I"** means it comes from within and is very personal. The word **"am"** is in the present tense, not I "was" in the past, or I "might be" in the future, but I am...right here, right now. These metaphors of the Messiah are rich in meaning and are very comforting and yet there's more to them than what meets the eye. I hope you're ready to go deep today.

R.C. Sproul points out that the Greek word rendered **"I am"** normally uses one verb form. When Jesus said, **"I am"** He does something very extraordinary – He takes two verbs and puts them together. While it may sound a bit redundant, the literal meaning is this: *"I am, I am..."* or *"I, even I, am..."*

This is the way Exodus 3:14 is translated in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, where we read, **"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'**" Every time Jesus uses one of the "I AM" metaphors, He is emphatically stating that He is Yahweh, the great "I AM" of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

While my dad was in shock and totally surprised when we showed up, we should be in awe and astonishment when we hear Jesus make these stunning statements.

Let's admit something. Most of us focus on what *we* think of Jesus and often our understanding is tainted by our experiences in the past or our expectations in the present. Instead of looking at what He can do for us, my prayer is that we will have a fuller understanding of *who* Jesus is and what He demands *of us*.

I was struck in my Bible reading some time ago when I came across a passage in John 18. Jesus was about to be arrested by a group of soldiers, priests, and Pharisees. He knew what they wanted but He asked them a question in verse 4: "***Whom do you seek?***" They replied, "***Jesus of Nazareth.***"

Verse 5 tells us that Jesus responded with a phrase that is reminiscent of how He introduced the Messiah Metaphors when He said, "***I am He.***" Notice what happened in verse 6: "***When Jesus said to them, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground.***" When these enemies came face-to-face with the majesty of the Almighty, they dropped to their knees! The New Living Translation says that they "***all fell backward to the ground!***" These men were armed with weapons, but they dropped like bowling pins in His presence.

Brothers and sisters, we should be filled with wonder and awe as we respond humbly to the One who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Let's not approach Him flippantly. The absence of awesomeness unfortunately describes the church in America. May that never be said about Edgewood!

I haven't read it yet but I love how Paul Tripp entitled his latest book, "*Awe: Why it Matters for Everything We Think, Say and Do.*" Here's a summary of what he says, "*Humans are hardwired for awe. Our hearts are always captured by something—that's how God made us. But sin threatens to distract us from the glory of our Creator. All too often, we stand in awe of everything but God.*"

I like what Keith and Kristyn Getty pray on a regular basis, "*Lord, don't let me lose my wonder.*"

Please turn in your Bibles to John 6. As Jesus often does, He loves to start with the material in order to get us to think about the spiritual. He talked about natural birth with Nicodemus in chapter 3 in order to explain the necessity of the new birth. With the woman at the well in chapter 4, Jesus started with water and ended up talking about worship. In chapter 6, He moves from physical hunger to spiritual satisfaction. Before we get to the text, here's some background about bread.

Bread Background

- **Bread was the most important part of the meal.** [Take a bite]. When we go to a restaurant we generally focus on what kind of entrée we're going to order, and the basket of bread on the table is usually secondary (unless you're at Olive Garden or

Texas Roadhouse or Johnny's or Red Lobster!). In Jesus' day, meat was simply a side dish, and bread represented the major part of the meal. When Jesus says that He is the bread of life, He's saying that He's the most important part of life.

- **Everyone had access to bread.** Poorer people used barley to make bread while the wealthier used wheat, but most everyone had the means to make or buy bread. By using this metaphor, Jesus is saying that He is available to everyone.
- **Bread was the means of fellowship.** In that culture, when you broke bread with someone, you were friends for life. Jesus likewise offers a friendship with us that will never end.
- **Bread symbolizes God's presence.** Bethlehem means the "house of Bread," and the temple was continually filled with the showbread (Numbers 4:7). This can be interpreted as "show up bread" or in Hebrew terms, "face bread." This bread was a heavenly symbol of God Himself, and a reminder to His people that every time they eat bread, they should think of Him. Interestingly, if a person would see a scrap of bread on the road, he would pick it up and put it on a tree branch for the birds to eat. Bread was never to be trampled under foot in the common dust because it carries with it an element of mystery and sacredness.

By the way, I visited 8 places that sell bread this week to see if they would donate some for the sermon. I was glad to find out that many of them give their leftover bread to food pantries.

In the first 15 verses of chapter 6, we read about Jesus turning a boy's *lunchable* of five small barley loaves and two sardines into a feast for over 5,000 people. We don't have time to study this in detail, but I do want to point out a few things.

- 1. Jesus cares about our felt needs.** Jesus knew they were hungry and so He took care of their physical needs. Jesus is concerned about every area of our lives.
- 2. Jesus wanted to stretch their faith.** He specifically asked Philip a question about where to buy enough bread because he wanted him to exercise his faith. Without being asked, Andrew spoke up and offered a young lad's lunch.
- 3. Jesus takes what we have.** When we give Jesus what we have, no matter how little it is He will multiply it for great purposes. *Even the little that you have is worth a lot to God.* Or, as we learned from a sermon last month: *You have more than you think when you offer the little that you have.*
- 4. Jesus provides satisfaction.** It's interesting that verse 11 says the people "*ate as much as they wanted.*" Verse 12 says that there were even leftovers. God is not stingy with his grace. Our cups overflow with His blessings if we will but receive them.
- 5. Jesus takes us deeper than we were planning to go.** It's very significant that there were 12 baskets of leftovers. This was an object lesson for the 12 disciples so that they should never doubt the power of Jesus. But there's another reason why there were 12 baskets of bread. According to Leviticus 24:5-9, the priests put 12 loaves of fresh bread in the temple each Sabbath day. When the people saw the 12 baskets of bread they would have thought

about the bread of presence at this point. I'm sure their eyes got big and they probably started talking among themselves. I wonder if some of them made the connection that God was present with them through Jesus the Savior, the living showbread.

6. Jesus is more than we think He is. Verse 14 tells us that the people viewed this as a miracle and wondered if Jesus was the promised prophet. During that time, there was a belief among the Jews that the Messiah would provide bread from heaven much like Moses did. When they saw the loaves multiplying in front of their eyes, many of them wanted to make Jesus king on the spot. After all, if He was their king, He could feed them every day and wipe out the Romans at the same time. But Jesus had other plans. Verse 15 says that he withdrew to a mountain by himself.

Right after this miracle, the disciples get into a boat and head to Capernaum in verse 17. When they are about halfway across, a storm arises and starts buffeting their boat. It's at the moment of their greatest need that Jesus performs another miracle as He walks on the water and comes to them. He speaks words of comfort to them in verse 20: ***"It is I; don't be afraid."*** In other contexts this phrase is translated as ***"I am."*** Once again we're reminded that when we're in the presence of the great I AM, there is no need to be anxious. Verse 21 records another miracle when we read that as soon as Jesus got into the boat, they *immediately* reached the shore where they were headed.

The crowd, eager to get their stomachs filled again, found Jesus in Capernaum. Jesus stopped them in their tracks and blew away their plans for a breakfast buffet when He said in verses 26-27: ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."***

Like many of us, the people thought they needed to do some sort of work in order to earn God's favor. I love the answer Jesus gives in verse 29: ***"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."*** If you insist on working, here's your job description: **BELIEVE IN THE ONE HE HAS SENT.**

These hungry people had the nerve to ask for another sign instead of believing. We do the same, don't we? We continuously ask God to do something for us while forgetting what He's already done. Our needs were met yesterday but we want to know what Jesus is going to do for us today.

In verse 31, the crowd lays out a challenge for Jesus. Essentially they were asking Jesus to prove Himself. In their minds, Moses provided bread for over 3 million people for 40 years; Jesus had only given them bread once. The bread from Moses came from heaven; Jesus used earthly bread and multiplied it. Their trouble was that their growling stomachs had blinded them to the ache in their souls.

Check out how Jesus responds. Once again He's unpredictable. He arrests their attention with this stunning statement in verse 32: ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven."***

God was the giver of the Manna, not Moses, and it was the Father who sent the true bread from heaven.

I love how our children's ministry focuses on teaching the Bible so that kids can grow in their faith. Doesn't Sheila do a tremendous job? This past Wednesday Sheila invited a team of pastors to compete against some Awana clubbers in a mock Bible Quiz. She called it, "Are You Smarter Than an Awana Clubber?" In her email to the pastoral team she asked, "*Any brave volunteers?*" I quickly replied, "*I'm in...as long as you give me the answers ahead of time!*" I started to get nervous when she didn't cough up the answers.

It was pretty intimidating. Before we began Ed talked some smack to get the other teams off their game. Some of the kids in the front row were giving us "thumbs-down" signs. People laughed at us when we got the answers wrong. When the scores were tallied, we came in third place...out of three teams. I saw some of the kids in the gym later and they were all laughing at me. One of them said, "*I thought you were smart.*" Props to the Awana kids for knowing their Bibles better than their pastors!

Our Awana clubbers go deep, don't they? Jesus wants us to go deep as well.

Jesus then defines this true bread in verse 33: "***For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.***" Manna could only solve physical hunger; the Bread of God gives life to all. Do the you see the pronoun "***He***"? It was Jesus who came down from heaven. Their appetite is now whetted and in verse 34 they respond: "***Sir, give us this bread always.***"

Jesus then said to them in verse 35: "***I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.***" The crowd came with a one-upmanship challenge for Jesus to match the Manna from Moses. They were not expecting an answer so jarring. Ravi Zacharias points out that Jesus "*intended to lift the listeners from their barren, food-dominated existence to the recognition of the supreme hunger of life that could only be filled by a different bread*" ("Jesus Among Other Gods," Page 79).

In verse 41, we read that many began to grumble about Jesus because He said that He was the bread that came down from heaven. It's very interesting that the Israelites grumbled when God provided manna generations earlier. I guess human nature hasn't changed much because many of us still grumble at God today. In verse 42, they reveal the reason behind their grouching. They knew all about Jesus but couldn't believe He was more than He appeared.

Their real problem was that they had grown too familiar with Him: "***Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'***" Some of us are in danger of doing the same thing. Maybe you grew up in a church, attended Awana, know a few Bible stories, you know what happened at Christmas and at Easter, and you think you have Jesus all figured out. Be careful that you don't allow what you know *about* Him to keep you from actually *knowing* Him.

[Eat some more bread].

The Israelites ate the manna and were famished the next day. Jesus repeats this metaphor in verse 48: ***“I am the bread of life.”*** He then reminds them that even though people ate manna in the dessert, they eventually died. Material things have a built-in mortality. No matter how much we exercise, how good our diet is, we’re eventually going to die. If you want something that lasts for eternity then you must partake of the one who alone is eternal. Look at verse 51: ***“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”***

This is really a startling statement. Verse 52 reveals that his listeners begin to argue sharply among themselves. The word used reveals that they almost break out into a fist fight. They’re stumped because Jesus is making it seem like they must commit cannibalism. Instead of backing off, His statements get more deliberate and even harder to swallow (no pun intended).

Once again we see that we can’t put Jesus in a nice and neat package and think we have Him all figured out. What He is saying in verse 58 is that we must take Him into the very core of our being: ***“This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”*** We must believe in His finished work on the cross and receive Jesus into our lives.

Time to Decide

Whenever an individual encounters Jesus, a decision has to be made. We see this in the closing verses of chapter 6.

1. Disruption (60-65). The first thing we notice is that Jesus always disrupts us. Look at verses 60-65: ***“When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?’”*** The word ***“hard”*** means that the teaching of Jesus as the Bread of Life is difficult for them to accept. This was too tough for some of them to hear. And as a result, many wouldn’t accept it.

The issue here wasn’t that they couldn’t understand it. *They just didn’t want to accept it.* Many times we think someone just needs more information about Christ before they can be saved. While this may be true, more often than not, it’s not a matter of needing more data; it’s an issue of deciding who will lead your life. In other words, the problem is not intellectual, it’s moral. Let’s face it; some of you do not *want to* fully surrender your lives to Christ because you don’t really want to stop doing the things you’ve been doing.

It’s striking that Jesus doesn’t adjust His teaching to make it more palatable to people. In fact, He challenges them some more when he asks in verse 61: ***“Do you take offense at this?”*** In verse 62, he suggests that they wouldn’t believe even if they saw Him ascend to heaven with their own eyes.

The real Jesus is not always easy to listen to or to follow. Are you bothered by what the Bread of Life is asking you do? Good. Do you feel like Jesus cramps your style? He does.

Does it seem like His teaching is hard to accept? It is. The question now becomes, “*What are you going to do about Him?*”

2. Desertion (66). We can’t help but feel a little sad at this point. The crowds had listened to his teaching, they had been fed bread and fish, they followed Jesus across the lake to hear more of his teaching and then many of them listening to Jesus had enough. Look at verse 66: “*After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.*” The word “*disciple*” here means a follower or a student, not necessarily one who was a true believer.

They didn’t get what they wanted, so they left lacking what they needed. They left because Jesus offered what they needed and not what they thought they wanted. In a similar way, we often want things that won’t benefit us and all the while we need things we never give a thought to. As a result, we bail instead of believing.

I’m sure this happens during every sermon at Edgewood. Listen. I’d rather have people walk away than compromise the Word of God. We will keep preaching the fundamentals of the faith, whether people follow or not. I’m reminded of the encounter Jesus had with the rich young ruler in Mark 10. Jesus challenged him to turn from his idols but the man walked away in verse 22: “*Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*” It’s interesting that Jesus didn’t chase after him or soften the message. Instead, he declared, “*How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!*”

Will you walk away when the Word is too tough? Will you bail or will you believe? Will you desert or will you become a disciple?

3. Declaration. As Jesus looks around and watches the crowd thin out, He turns to the twelve in verse 67 and asks, “*Do you want to go away as well?*” Peter speaks up in verses 68-69: “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.*”

Peter is saying something like this: “*Lord, you are not easy to hang out with. You embarrass us and, at times, you frighten us. We don’t always understand you, and yet, your words are the most remarkable that we have ever heard. They explain who we are and they make us understand life itself. We are satisfied by you and are held here by our desire for more of you. We have put our faith in you. You fit the prophecies and fulfill the predictions. You are the Great I AM. Where else would we even think about going?*”

As World War II was drawing to a close, the Allied Armies gathered up many hungry orphans. [BTW, we’re doing a new shoe drive for gypsy children in Romania] These orphans were placed in camps where they were well fed. Despite the great care they received, they couldn’t sleep at night because they were nervous and afraid. Finally they came up with a solution. Each child was given a piece of bread to hold in bed. [Hold piece of bread] They were told to hold on to it, but not to eat it. An amazing thing happened. These orphans slept soundly because they knew instinctively that they would have food to eat the next day.

Friends, the Bible says we are orphans because of our sin. And God wants to give us bread to hold on to. But there's more. Jesus *is* the bread of life. And you and I must partake of Him by asking Him to come deep down inside. Some of us are just holding him at arms length. You may even comment on how good the bread looks and how sweetly it smells. [point to the bread machine] But it will do you no good unless you take Him in and digest Him as the very food for your soul. It's time to believe and receive.

Friends, you don't have to *do* anything to be saved because it's all been done for you. But you do need to respond. Will you believe? Will you receive Him? Will you say yes to Him right now? When He disrupts your thinking, will you desert Him, or will you declare Him to be the very Bread of Life?

It's Time for Supper

Several years ago, I was grazing through the channels and came across a so-called "Reality Show" called, "Fear Factor." As part of the competition, the contestants had to eat moldy cheese covered with live maggots! It was really gross. Some of them refused to participate in this segment and others gulped, swallowed, and almost heaved on national television. I think only two were left standing (I'm not sure who won because I was so nauseous I had to leave the room).

As I thought about that show, it struck me that this is a picture of all the things we try to cram into our lives. They might look good, and even taste delicious, but compared with what Jesus wants to give us; it's nothing more than a bowl of moving maggots on moldy Limburger.

Do you remember what happened to the manna when the Israelites tried to hoard it? When they became selfish and untrusting, Exodus 16:20 says, "*it was full of maggots and began to smell.*" Some of you are shoving smelly stuff into your life. Sure, it might look good on the outside, but it's really moving with maggots if you look closely.

We want to conclude our service this morning with a different kind of meal. One that tastes much better. The night before Jesus was betrayed, He had supper with His disciples...and He invites us to participate in that meal right now.

As we prepare to celebrate communion, let's remember the manna, let's remember the miracle of the bread and fish, and most of all, let's remember the Messiah, who alone is the Bread of Life.

[Hold up bread]

Thank You Jesus for the Cross

This song starts with confession and then moves to profession.