

# Who Is Jesus? The Bread of Life

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1

In John's Gospel account, each of Jesus' seven "I am" statements revealed something about His person and work, allowing John's readers to know Him more intimately, clearly, and personally. These statements are designed to bring us back to the foundation of our faith, which is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first of these statements occurs in John 6, where Jesus twice declares, "I am the bread of life." By human standards, the message here could be categorized as the worst sermon Jesus ever preached. When the chapter begins, Jesus is being followed by crowds of possibly more than 20,000 people. At the end, He is left with 12 followers – one of whom is, in Jesus' words, a devil.

In the modern church today, if a teacher loses 99.94% of his audience, he would be deemed a failure. That's why by the world's standards, this message Jesus gave in John 6 was a complete disaster; but by Jesus' standards, it accomplished exactly what He intended it to do – and so it was a roaring success.

The tension of this passage is due to the crowd's refusal to understand and accept Jesus' true meaning when He called Himself the "Bread of Life." Members of the crowd

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following Jesus were hungry, and they wanted our Lord to provide them with sustenance. Jesus, who was perfectly capable of such an earthly minded miracle, had a spiritual focus with His statement, knowing that their eternal destinies mattered exponentially more than the state of their empty stomachs. More than two thousand years have passed since this interaction between Jesus and the crowd, but the same tension and truth remains with us today.

2

John includes two scenes at the onset of this chapter to provide context for the forthcoming conversation and to demonstrate that Jesus is God. Only God can create bread to feed 20,000 people out of five crackers, and only God can overrule the way water and density normally work so that He can walk on water. John's point in the inclusion of these stories is to force us to grapple with this question: 'Who is Jesus?' Is He a human bread factory, ready to meet our temporal needs and submit to our whims and desires? Or is He God in human flesh, the sovereign ruler of all?

As the crowd gathers around Jesus after His miraculous stroll across a stormy sea, the Savior confronts their worldly motives in seeking Him by highlighting their real reason for coming: they didn't want spiritual truth or eternal life; they wanted physical food. This is how many people in this world search for Jesus. In fact, the entire seeker-sensitive movement in the church is built on this premise, that they want to attract a crowd by appealing to their fleshly desires.

Not only does Jesus understand the crowd is only interested in a resolution for their temporal problems, but He also knows they mistakenly believe they have some stake (i.e. works) in the things that only God can do. This crowd only wants to come to Jesus on their terms. They want Jesus to do their will, and they want Jesus to bow to their sovereignty. Jesus confronts his hearers with the truth that He descended to do the Father's will, not theirs. He challenges them to put aside their autonomy, perceived sovereignty, terms and conditions on Him – and to bow before His sovereignty and to come to Him on His terms.

Unequivocally, Jesus demands that this crowd submits to His identity as God in human flesh – as the bread of life. Even though the crowd repeatedly shows it will not believe that Jesus is who He claims, Jesus' response is not to mitigate His teaching, lower the standard, or make it more palatable to the taste of ungodly people; rather, Jesus hits the people around Him with the hammer of truth, asserting that absolutely no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him. That is one of the clearest statements in Scripture about the sinner's total inability to save himself. It's not that sinners will not come to the Son (like the crowd mistakenly believed); it's that people cannot come to Jesus unless the Father draws them.

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As the people in the crowd continue to understand that Jesus is not going to give them actual, physical bread to eat, they become even more upset with Him – especially when He talks about the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. While the crowd was unable to grasp these concepts, we know Jesus meant that we must find our total provision for salvation in Christ alone. Jesus is calling for total dependence on Him.

That kind of belief requires us to give up all sovereignty, autonomy, and demands. We come to Christ hungry and thirsty, and we find our everything in Him. Anything less is not saving faith. Like the members of the crowd around Jesus, there's always an excuse someone can make about why they won't come to Christ, but unless they eat His flesh and drink His blood, they have no life in themselves, because life is only found by believing in Christ.

The question that remains most pressing is how those who heard Jesus preach these words will respond to Him. There are three types of people in the conclusion based on how they respond to Jesus' message. The first group is the deserters. They rejected what Jesus had to say because they couldn't comprehend it, and they didn't really want what He had to offer; they wanted lunch.

Because we are consumed by sin and the flesh in our natural state, we cannot come to Christ unless the Father grants it to us as a free gift of grace. This is how salvation works: it is given by the Father; it is accomplished by the Son through His work and words, and it is applied by the Spirit to those the Father has given to His Son. People don't like this message. They don't like this gospel of total and complete grace. We see that nearly everyone in this story deserted Jesus because of what He had just preached, which is a common response to the truth of Christ as the bread of life.

The second group is the disciples. Peter, as the typical spokesman for the Twelve, tells Jesus that they believe He has the words of eternal life and they have nowhere else to go. This is the heart of a true disciple: there is no other Savior, Lord, religion, sacrifice for our sins, source of life, or God for them. No one else is worth following but Jesus.

The final group is the deceivers. Most pretenders walk away when a message like John 6 is preached, but not always all of them. Judas hung around. He did not believe what Jesus taught – although he pretended he did. He was, however, playing the long game to see what earthly benefit he could derive from following Jesus, and so he was willing to do his best to deceive everyone and look like a real disciple to find some temporal benefit from Jesus. While deceivers may take a while to show who they really are, they always do. Time and truth go hand in hand, and people can only deceive for so long before their true character will come out.

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Jesus' message about being the bread of life is one of the most convicting and revealing in the Gospel accounts. People who are confronted by this message cannot stand in the middle and they cannot pretend which side they are on – at least for long. We all must either recognize that we have nowhere else to go but to Christ or that we are unwilling to relinquish our hold on our illusory autonomy.



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