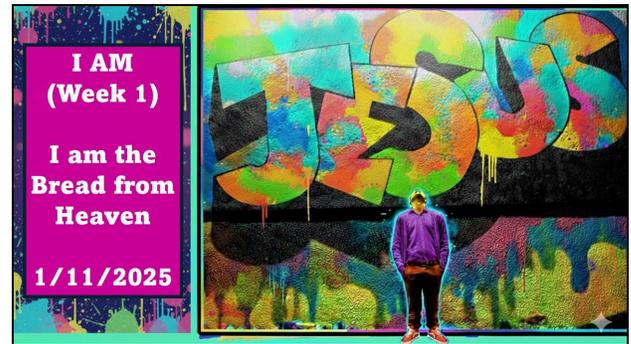


I AM (Week 1) - I Am the Bread from Heaven Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. We'll spend the first part of 2026 looking at a distinctive way that Jesus in the gospel of John describes Himself, His character, His mission, and His importance: a series of statements called the "I ams" of John.



2. The first "I am" statement in John occurs in John 6.

This entire chapter is one big unit (you can read it this week in the next section), and it begins with only one of two miracles reported by all four gospels - the feeding of the 5000. The very next day, the crowds return to Jesus, seeking another miracle or more food perhaps, and that prompts a long dialogue back and forth between the people and Jesus (6.25-65), in which Jesus calls Himself several times "the bread of life" and "the bread from heaven."

3. While there's much to cover and appreciate in this chapter, one fundamental feature that gets at its heart is to recognize that the discussion between the crowd and Jesus is built on a contrast - the crowd's perspective and statements contrasted with what Jesus is saying.

4. On the one hand, you have the crowd. Jesus says that they're laser focused on only that which is "perishable" (6.26-27), and such miss the greater offer being made by Jesus. And in that way, they reveal something true of all human beings in general - we tend to fixate on the next thing that will meet a base need or make us feel better, and none of it lasts. Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament calls this "chasing after the wind" (which is, of course, a fruitless chase). The English writer on Christian spirituality, Evelyn Underhill, describes it this way: "We mostly spend our lives conjugating three verbs - to want, to have, and to do. Craving, clutching, and fussing, we are kept at perpetual unrest."

5. Moreover, you'll notice in the passage that the crowd always speaks in the past tense or looking backward, either to the great miracle of manna during the Exodus or to the feeding of the 5000 the day prior. So their attention isn't on the present moment and what's available to them in Christ.

6. Likewise, "life" is a key term throughout the discussion. Unlike English, there are three ancient Greek words for "life." Jesus uses the deeper, richest, most enduring one (we'll talk about that in a sec), but it appears that the crowd was operating from the least understanding or definition of life, in Greek "bios." This is about mere the mere physiological processes - breathing, eating, staying alive. Their vision for themselves and what's possible in their lives rose no higher than "bios."

7. On other side of this literary contrast is Jesus. What He says forms a stark contrast to the mindset and perspective of the crowd. First, Jesus says that He and what He is making available is no less a matter of life and death than the miracle of manna during the Exodus. Heed what Jesus is saying, believe in Him and His message, and begin to move in that direction...otherwise, continue a merely "bios" existence, which is not unlike being a kind of half-life at best.

8. Jesus is deliberate in His word choice: He as the new manna from heaven is offering "life," not "bios" but "dzoe." He also labels this kind of life "eternal life." What's that mean? Here's how biblical scholar N. T. Wright describes that crucial New Testament phrase: "Eternal life is the quality of life that marked Jesus that is on offer to anyone who believes in Him. "Eternal" tells you what sort of life it is, as well as the fact that it goes on after death. It is the new life of God's future, the life God always intended to give the world."

9. Maybe most radical of all is Jesus' insistence that this "life" was available right now. Remember that the crowd often speaks in the past tense? Well, Jesus almost always speaks in the present tense, or even about the future. For example, He assures the crowds that the life offered through Him, the bread of life," will always be available to them so that, no matter the highs or lows, "life" as God intended it is always possible for them (6.35).

10. So, to sum up, when Jesus says "I am the bread of life," He means that He was like the manna of the Exodus story: without Him, we will starve to death or settle for a lesser definition of life. The life that Jesus offers is the kind of life for which we yearn, and the kind of life we see exemplified in Him. And we can experience that life today, tomorrow, and always. Tertullian, a well-known church father from the early 200s CE, told his parishoners that because they were used to praying for "their daily bread" already (thanks to the Lord's Prayer), they should also be praying for their daily dose and openness of the life offered in Jesus, who is the bread of life.

"The Bread of Life" this Week Scripture reading this week:

- Read the entirety of the John 6 narrative, you can break it up into smaller pieces and read a little every day: [John 6 NRSVUE](#)
- Read the story about manna during the Exodus, given that it forms part of the backdrop of the discussion in John 6: [Exodus 16 NRSVUE](#)
- Pray daily this week what Tertullian advised: Ask God for a daily dose of the "bread of life," and for the awareness and openness to how it might come to you.
- Here are a few devotionals from the United Church of Christ, each on a part of John 6, that you can scatter throughout the week:
 - [You Are What You Eat](#)
 - [What's Your Name?](#)
 - [Loaves and \(Gold\)fishes](#)
 - [What We Don't Know](#)