

*Study Notes to accompany 'I am the Bread of Life'
preached 11th October St John's Church Woodbridge*

'I am.....'

Introduction to 'I am' series.

The 'I am ...' sayings of Jesus recorded by John focus the reader on the **identity of Jesus**. In the Alpha course one of the earliest sessions is entitled 'Who is Jesus' and can be read in Nicky Gumble's 'Question of Life' or you could undertake the Alpha course itself in the future or perhaps as a small group consider hosting an Alpha course so that friends and family could attend.

For John the identity of Jesus is crucial to his overall purpose.

*But these are written that you may believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

John 20 v31.

The 'I am' sayings number seven in total, and straddle the two main sections of John's Gospel. John appears to use these sayings to demonstrate that Jesus is....

- *the Christ* (the anointed one),
- *the Son of God*.

The first main section of John's gospel commences with the first 'sign' of the water being changed into wine at Cana (Chapter 2) and concludes with his triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Chapter 12). This section is sometimes called the **book of 'signs'** as specific miracles, some uniquely recorded by John, reveal something of the identity of Jesus. These are sometimes followed by a dialogue with his disciples or 'the crowds'. It is in these dialogue sections that the 'I am' sayings are often located. This is the case with today's reading in which 'I am the Bread of Life' occurs in the dialogue on the other side of Sea of Galilee (6 v25) and is clearly linked to the 'sign' (6v2) of the feeding of the five thousand.

In these dialogues Jesus reveals more and more of his true identity and purpose which often leads into growing conflict with the religious authorities. (*The Jews began to grumble about him v41*). Noticeably in comparison to the other gospels, John records nothing of the ministry of the disciples not even naming some of them, nor their designation as apostles. John records more frequent visits to Jerusalem and the Temple that suggests a ministry of three years (three Passovers) rather than the concentrated Galilean ministry of the other Gospel writers. In other words the focus is clearly on the **identity of Jesus** during his ministry prior to the last week rather than the activities or response of the disciples.

These 'signs' and *I am* sayings increasingly point to Jesus death and resurrection and reach their climax in the 'sign' of the raising of Lazarus. Jesus boldly declares 'I am the resurrection and the life' (John 11 v25) even before he has performed the miracle.

This leads into the long account of the last week which John records in the second half of the gospel (Chapters 12-21). It is noticeable that nearly half of the gospel is given over to the passion of Christ and has been dubbed by one writer as '**the book of Glory**'. Rather than regard Jesus' death as a defeat, John interprets the events and sayings that surround Jesus death & resurrection as **revealing the glory of Jesus**. Once more long sections of dialogue are recorded within which some of the 'I am' sayings are uttered, now in the context of the ultimate sign, that of Jesus resurrection.

In both parts of John's gospel the true nature of Jesus Christ, what theologians term 'Christology, is a clear focus of John.

*The focus on Jesus person is intense
the Christology is high
Jesus is the pre-existent Word
the revealer of God's nature
endowed with supernatural knowledge
and authority to give life and to judge.*

Edwards p7

Share with each other the picture/image of Jesus that you have and where that image comes from?

- Your own 'experience' of Jesus,
- your reading of Jesus from the Bible if so which part,
- the teaching you have received,
- the example of other Christians family, church leaders, historical figures.

This is to help you recognise the prior image you have of Jesus before you come to read the text provided by John.

I am the bread of Life....

Context

The immediate context of this 'I am' saying... has three elements.

Firstly **the popularity of Jesus** is significant as John reports crowds searching for Jesus.

- This was the practical reason for the need for the feeding of the 5,000 because a great crowd had followed him (6v2)
- The crowds search for Jesus in Capernaum after losing track of him when he and his disciples crossed the lake (6 v24)

This popularity is based on what Jesus can do for them. The reason the crowds were following him were because of the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick (6v2).

The reason they continue to follow him is because they have had their fill with feeding of the loaves and fishes (6 v26) and implicitly Jesus hints they just want more and more.

Secondly the historical context of this 'I am' saying is comparable to the Exodus

A little throw away line suggests this as John casually mentions that the feeding of the 5,000 occurred when the Jewish Passover Feast *was near*. (6v4). Of all the Gospel writers John appears to frame his gospel around the concept of the Passover mentioning three Passover celebrations that Jesus attends in his ministry compared to only one in the other gospels. Just as the feeding of the 5,000 is dated in reference to Passover approaching, John also locates the second half of his gospel in the context of the eve of the Passover (John 13v1). The parallel to the first Exodus continues with Jesus walking on water (John 6 v16-21) just as Moses led the people of God through the waters of the Red Sea. The contrast of Jesus feeding the people with bread is compared to the feeding of God's people in the wilderness with the manna. (John 6 v30-33). Wright suggests that in Jesus we have **a new Passover**, one that is both connected to the past but one that is significantly different.

This leads to consideration of the deeper context of this 'I am' saying that is connected to **the identity of Jesus**.

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did (the feeding of the 5,000) they began to say

'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world'

John 6 v14

Remember the question to John the Baptist

'Are you the Prophet?'

(John 1v21)

The expectation was that one like the greatest prophet of all time in their history, Moses, would come prior to the Messiah (Dt 18 v15-18). Jesus fears that they want to make him a king by force but this is not the sort of king that he has come to be. What they wanted, as they did in the Old Testament, was a leader like other leaders of the countries around them. This desire was regarded by God as a rejection of him and his desire to be in relationship with his people. (I Samuel 8 v4-7). Just as in the Old Testament the relationship between God and his people is meant to be of a different order than the relationship of others to their leaders and gods. Sometimes the two were intermingled as is suggested by the crowd's adulation of Caesar and the cult of emperor worship that grew after the life of Jesus and may have been an issue for the first recipients of John's gospel. (cf John 19 v12 & 15)

Tom Wright comments concerning the desire of the crowd to make him king,

*'they would have meant him to be a king like other kings,
a strong this worldly figure
who would lead them in their strong this worldly agenda.'*

Jesus is indeed a king but a king of a very different order. John later draws attention to this in his account of Jesus crucifixion (John 19 v1-16. Notice how many times John refers to Jesus being a king in this passage).

Jesus consequently withdraws to be on a mountain by himself as he has done on previous occasions (*withdrew again...* v15) because his kingship is very different from the one that he has come to be. **He is not here to satisfy our wants and desires.**

Our relationship with Jesus is not to be based on what he can do for you and me but rather it is based on who he is.

Tom Wright states

*What matters is not what Jesus can do for you:
what matters is who Jesus is.*

p79

In what ways are we tempted to want Jesus to be like leaders in our society or to be in the image that we project onto him?

So who is Jesus?

1) Jesus is the one who has the seal of approval from God the Father (v27)

A recurring theme throughout John's gospel is the close relationship between Father and Son.

The 'Word' is the one who came from the Father (1 v14), he has been sent by the Father (5 v37) the Father who sent me (6 v44)

- He is described as being at the Father's side (1v18)
- His mission is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work (4 v34)
- He only does what he sees the Father doing (5v19)
- He is loved by the Father (5 v20)
- He is entrusted to judge by the Father (5v22, 27)
- He is to be honoured like the Father (5 v23)

Moses may have been great but Jesus is greater because he is the Son.....(5 v46)

A seal represents the authority and authenticity of the one whose seal it is. In other words the Father put's his seal on Jesus so it identifies who he belongs to and in whose name he acts. The Father is putting his seal of approval on Jesus and his mission.

Jesus is the one who comes from God the Father who sent him and who has the authority of God as revealed in these signs.

In what ways does our relationship with Jesus recognise his divine origins? In what ways do we sometimes come into his presence a little glibly?

In what ways do we recognise his authority in our lives?

2) Jesus is the one who demands a new way of living that is based on relationship.

Belief in him personally is the key rather than a relationship based on a contractual arrangement, and a continual meeting of our needs (v29)

We sometimes just demand things of God when the work of God includes us in the process. It is not just a one way process often revealed in the comment 'why doesn't God do something?'

*'The work of God is this:
to believe in the one he has sent'*

John 6 v29

'Belief' is a constant theme in John and central to his overall aim.

that by believing you may have life in his name

John 20 v31

There seems to be a significant shift in the relationship between the people of God and God the Father in John's gospel. Previously this was based on being born of the people of God but now it is to be based on being born of God. (John 1 v13). This is brought out in the encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus is told even though being a prominent person within the Children of Israel that he needs to be born again.

'No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again'

John 3 v3.

This is the activity of the Spirit and John is indicating that this is based on 'belief' rather than relying on an accident of birth.

*Yet to all who received him,
to those who believed in his name
he gave the right to become children of God*

John 1v12

To *believe in the one he has sent* goes beyond gazing at an image of Jesus or pondering his word. It means to base one's whole life around this Jesus whose identity is being revealed. This demands a change of heart and not just a change of mind or behaviour. It is passive in the sense that it is a movement of the Spirit 'The wind blows where it wills' John 3v8

Yet it is active in that like Jesus we are to do the Father's will.

In the verses that follow this saying Jesus is clear that he is seeking to do the Father's will

*For I have come down from heaven
not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.*

John 6 v38

Application

Putting our belief in Jesus is the work of God.

In what ways do we recognise the work of the Spirit in our lives (that which we have to passively accept and simply receive)?

In what ways do we actively believe by not doing what we always want but ensuring we obey the Father's will? Share a recent example where what you wanted to do and what God the Father demands was in conflict!

3) Jesus is the one who brings the offer of eternal life for everyone.

(v35)

he will never go hungry

he will never go thirsty

I will never drive away

The contrast is between the passing benefits of the feeding in the desert with the manna which only sustained for a day at a time.

It lasted only for 40 years and even though symbolised at the heart of Judaism (an omer of manna was placed in the ark of the covenant to remind them of God's provision for them), it was incapable of sustaining the relationship between God and his people.

So when Jesus says that he is the *Bread of life* he is meaning that he brings nourishment for ever. He is the one who sustains us through ever circumstance and is not limited even by death itself.

This emphasis on 'life' is one of the most frequent concepts in John's Gospel

It frames the whole gospel from beginning to end.

- *In him was life and that life was the light of men. John 1v4*
- *These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name John 20v31*

It reoccurs throughout the gospel and emphasised at pivotal points in the narrative.

For ourselves as we head towards Alive 10 this has a particular relevance as our strap line is 'Live the Life....' and based on John 10v10

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full

Just as there is no limit to those who may believe in Jesus so there is no limit to the sustaining of Jesus for those who believe.

Conclusion

*He who comes to me will
never go hungry
never go thirsty*

The invitation is to all as Jesus is for everyone and those whom the Father has given him he will *never drive away*.

As one writer puts it '*we never cease to be dependent upon him*' (C K Barrett p292) and as I might add *he never ceases to supply all that we need to sustain us*.

The words of that old hymn perhaps capture the essence of this first 'I am' saying

Guide me O Thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty
hold me with thy powerful hand
Bread of heaven
feed me now and evermore.

(For those with a more modern taste in Christian Music cf '*The Desert Song*' on Hillsongs 'United')

(Perhaps a small group might like to sing this hymn as a closing act to this study)