

The I Am Sayings: “I Am the Bread of Life”

Moses! Moses! the voice cried out from the burning bush.

Here *I am*, Moses replied. By the way, who just said that?

I did. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and Jacob, and **I am** sending you to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

Who *am I* that I should go to Pharaoh and bring my people out of Egypt? Moses replied.

Don't worry about who you are, said God, because I will be with you. And this will be your sign that it is I who sent you- Once you bring my people out of Egypt you will worship God on this mountain.

But suppose I go to my people and tell them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you’ and they ask me, ‘what is his name?’ what then shall I say?

I AM WHO I AM, said God. Tell the people I AM has sent you.

God's Name- I AM

The personal name for God in the Old Testament is Yahweh. We translate it in English as LORD. Every time you are reading your Bible in the Old Testament and you see the name LORD written in *ALL CAPS* you will know that you have just read the Hebrew personal name for God.

The reason we put LORD in “all caps” is because it is to remind us that the personal name for God was considered to be so sacred and holy to the Israelites that they would not verbally pronounce it when they encountered it in the scriptures. Instead, they would verbally substitute the word *Adonai* in its place, which means “Lord.”

As we learned from God's conversation from Moses his name is both intimately personal and it is mysterious, evasive, and can not fully be encapsulated by human language.

God is not generic. He has a personal name just like you and me. When we speak to one another we don't normally call one another “man” or “woman.” Rather we call each other by our personal names. Our names signify that we are unique and can be intimately known.

Likewise it is the same with God. He has a personal name and because God can be personally known we are given the privilege of speaking to God on a personal level (as opposed to speaking to God in generic terms). The personal name that God gives to himself in the Old Testament (only God can name himself) is Yahweh, the LORD.

That name is also evasive, mysterious, and it can not be fully plumbed by finite human minds. This too we learn this from God's conversation with Moses.

The personal name for God, Yahweh, the LORD, is based off the verb “to be.” That’s why God told Moses I AM WHO I AM. *I am* a God of action. *I am* a verb and *I am* always on the move, and you Moses are a puny little human being. You may have the privilege of calling me by my personal name but do not think that just because we are on personal terms that you could possibly ever fully understand who *I am*. I AM WHO I AM, but you are a mere mortal.

Jesus’ Name- I AM the Bread of Life

Now what in the world does all of this have to do with our scripture text from the gospel of John this morning? I will tell you.

In v. 35-38 of the text Jesus says, “*I am* the bread of life... and I have come down from heaven in order to do the will of the One who has sent me.”

By referring to himself as *I am* he has used the Hebrew personal name for God, thus saying to his hearers that he is God in human flesh. He has said something that is either true or false. Either he is God or else he is a madman.

For sure, to hear Jesus refer to himself as “I am the bread of life” must have sent shivers into the hearts of his detractors.

John tells us that when the crowds heard Jesus say this they began to grumble saying, ‘Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? We **know** who his mother and father are. (*His mother is promiscuous and daddy is a blue-collar carpenter.*) How in the world can he say that he came down from heaven?’

Not only that, but who does he think he is when he says that he is the great *I AM* who fed us in the wilderness for forty years, or that he is **greater** than Moses our prophet?

The fact that Jesus made these audacious claims was bad enough in the eyes of his detractors, but to add insult to injury not only did Jesus make these radical claims, he also did it during the Passover Feast.

This is significant because by Jesus doing what he did on Passover it was as if he were saying to his detractors, “Look, you guys don’t get it. You think Passover is a big deal, but you ain’t seen nothin’ yet. **I am** the bread of life and **I am** the one who actually fed your ancestors when they were wandering in the wilderness (though you did not know that) and not only that, but the miracle I am now doing for you is far greater than the miracle of Israel having manna to eat in the desert. That was just physical food, but I give you spiritual food that gives you eternal life with God and neighbor. My food gives “spiritual rebirth” (If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation- II Cor. 5:17) and it takes away the sin problem and that is why you need to work for the food that gives eternal life. And the way you work for that food is by believing in the one the Father has sent, and that is me. I am the bread of life, not Moses and not the manna that your ancestors in the desert ate, but I, Jesus Christ, am the bread of life!

Do you see this incredible claim that Jesus was making and do you see how the words of Christ, as recorded in Holy Scripture, compelled the church to say that Jesus Christ is God? Not like God, but God fully and completely in human flesh? It was this radical claim by Jesus that got people so upset. It still gets people upset today. When the church has the courage to unabashedly (but respectfully) say the same thing that Jesus said about himself in Holy Scripture it will make some people angry.

The Anger of People and the Sovereignty of God in Salvation

Those who are angry will say, “How can you say that? I can accept the idea that he was a compassionate man, or that he is a wise teacher, but I can **not** accept the claim that he is God! That is absurd and I certainly can’t accept the idea that Jesus is Messiah to the exclusion of all other pathways to God.

Why is it that some people get so angry and respond negatively to the claims of Christ?

The scriptures, not John Calvin or Saint Augustine, give us a very trembling reason for why some people respond in such a manner.

The text tells us that when the people began to get upset about the claims Jesus had just made about himself that Christ turned to his detractors and said, “Quit grumbling amongst yourselves.” Don’t even bother wasting your breath and don’t even bother getting your blood pressure all worked up. The reason you are so angry and do not believe is because my Father has not drawn you (wooded you) to me.

Look at v. 43-44. “Stop grumbling amongst yourselves. No one can come to me (Jesus) unless the Father has drawn him.”

The obvious implication of this statement is that those who are angry with Christ have not been drawn by the Father; otherwise they wouldn’t be so hardened in their hearts against God (something that they are totally responsible for) nor would they be so mad!

Jesus said earlier in this dialogue that “all that the Father gives to me will come to me,” and “whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” (v.37)

Once again, the implication is that those who are angry with Jesus are only angry because the Father has not drawn them (wooded them), because if the Father had drawn them they would come to Christ and not be so mad. Remember, “All that the Father has given me will come to me.”

What you have heard, once again, is the Biblical doctrine of election and predestination and the doctrine of limited atonement- the idea that Christ only died for the elect, because if Jesus had died for every single person then every single person would come to him since “all that the Father gives to him **will** come to him.” But we know that many do not come to Christ.

But what about John 3:16? It says, “For God so loved the world.”

The Reformed tradition, in this instance, historically speaking, has understood the “world” to mean that Jesus died for all different types of people, meaning different races, different nationalities, different cultures, people of different social/economic status, and people in different times and places, etc... etc... but not for every single person because if he died for every single person then every single person would come to him since “all that the Father gives to him comes to him,” but it is obvious that today, just as it was in the gospel of John’s day, that **not** everyone believes.

Hearing me say this might make you very angry or deeply grateful- overwhelmed to the point of tears that God the Father would have chosen you- a sinner with no hope of saving yourself and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ because of the darkness in your heart- and quickened you and enabled you to do the good work of believing in “the one the Father has sent.” Imagine that. God the Father, out of sheer mercy and grace, has placed your life into the hands of his Son and the Son (Jesus) has said, I will never let go of you, I will not loose you, and I will bring you all the way home! For “it is the will of the Father who sent me that I should loose none of all that He has given me.” (v.39)

Conclusion

Dear friends, our Lord says to us today that you can not loose what is not yours to loose, namely your salvation. “I am the bread of life” who gives it to you and only I can take it away, but I choose not to.

So which is it today? Are you angry or grateful?

If you are angry then be angry with Jesus, not me. I’m just the messenger and (humbly speaking) I think I have accurately communicated the meaning of the text to you. If I have a different opinion then I will gladly hear your take on the text. But if I have got it right then you must take up your complaint with Christ!

But remember what his answer is: “Stop grumbling amongst yourselves because no one can come to the Father unless the Father who sent me draws him.” (v.43)

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, the salvation, the bread we receive from Christ is a total gift from God. It is by sheer grace that we are saved. We can’t earn our salvation and we certainly can’t claim it as our own unless our Heavenly Father- from before the very foundation of the world- chooses to elect us for salvation in Christ and enables us to believe on him. Faith is a gift. Why? Because our hearts are “dark” and “the light of Christ must overcome it.” (Jn. 1:5)

Paul says in I Corinthians 12:3 that “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

When Simon Peter made his great confession of faith, “You are the Christ the Son of the Living God,” Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man (flesh and blood), but by my Father in heaven.” (Mt. 16:17)

Trying to figure out why it is that Jesus gives this bread of faith to some yet passes over the hearts of others is like trying to figure out why “bad things happen to good people” and “good things happened to bad people.” It is futile. It’s a mystery, but it is **not** as if God has been unjust; for no one deserves salvation.

If someone says we do deserve it then he or she totally denies the necessity of Christ’s work on the cross. So our response should not be, “Why **not** them? But rather, “Why me? Why did Jesus choose to save me, a wretched sinner, out of all the peoples of the world?

So I say to you here this morning, “Stop grumbling among yourselves (if you are grumbling) because no one can come to (Jesus) unless the Father who sent (him) draws him.” (v.44)

Quit asking why and simply do the good work that God has charged you to do: “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” (v.29)

Would you believe on Christ today?

Amen.