

Sermon for Youth Sunday March 15, 2015

**Theme:** “Jesus is the Bread of Life”

*Lord, speak to me, that I may speak in living echoes of thy tone;  
As thou hast sought, so let me seek thine erring children lost and lone.  
Oh teach me, Lord that I may teach; the precious things thou dost impart,  
And wing my words, that they may reach, the hidden depths of many a heart. Amen.*

In our Tuesday evening weekly devotion; my fellow colleagues and I were introduced to the “I Am” statements of Jesus which are found in the Gospel according to John. There are seven “I Am” statements which can be seen throughout the Gospel and these we should all be familiar with. Just in case you are wondering what these statements might be, I’m happy to share them with you; but today my focus will be on just one. These statements are:

- (1) *I am the bread of life. John 6:35*
- (2) *I am the light of the world. John 8:12, 9:15*
- (3) *I am the door. John 10:9*
- (4) *I am the good shepherd. John 10:11*
- (5) *I am the resurrection and the life. John 11:25*
- (6) *I am the way, the truth and the life. John 14:6*
- (7) *I am the true vine. John 15:1*

Each one of the ‘I Am’ statements represents a particular relationship of Jesus to the spiritual NEEDS of men and women. Jesus is the Light in the darkness, the Gate to security and the Shepherd that guides. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life for every person and all of creation. In every one of these statements we see that Jesus wants to give Himself to us, NOT for the gifts He can give us, but for what He can BE to us. Right after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus makes the first of the recorded “I Am” statements which I will be focusing on this morning.

“I am the Bread of Life!” What did Jesus mean when He said these words? In **St. John 6:35** Jesus says; *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”* What is this “bread” that He was referring to? When we think of the word bread, the first thing that comes to our mind is food; which is a daily sustenance to life! Bread is considered to be a universal staple that is known to us all over the world. Bread also plays an integral part of the Jewish Passover meal. The Jews were to eat unleavened bread during the Passover Feast and then for seven days following as a celebration of the exodus from Egypt. Finally, when the Jews were wandering in the desert for forty years, God sent “bread from heaven” to sustain the nation. In **Exodus 16:4**; the writer says; *“Then the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or not.”*

All of this plays into the scene being described in **John 6**, when Jesus used the term “bread of life”; He was trying to get away from the crowds to no avail. He had crossed the Sea of Galilee and the crowd followed Him. After sometime, Jesus asked Philip how they’re going to feed the crowd. Philip’s answer displays his “little faith” when he says they don’t have enough money to give each of them the smallest morsel of food. Finally, Andrew brings to Jesus a boy who had five small loaves of bread and two fish. With that amount, Jesus miraculously fed the crowd with

lots of food to spare. This was the point where Jesus had reached the apex of His popularity. In fact, the crowds wanted to take Him by force if necessary and MAKE him their King. As a result of this, Jesus crossed the lake to get away from their demands. Jesus takes this moment to teach them a lesson. He accuses the crowd of ignoring His miraculous signs and only following Him for the “free meal”. *Jesus tells them in **John 6:27** that they should not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give them because God the Father has set His seal on Him.* In other words; they were so greatly pleased with the food, they were missing out on the fact that their Messiah had come.

The Jews went on further to ask Jesus for a sign to prove that He was sent from God (as if the miraculous feeding and the walking across the water weren't enough). They told Jesus that God gave them manna during the desert wandering. Jesus, however, responds by telling them that they need to ask for the true bread from heaven that gives life. We can see here that the crowd was not focusing their attention on Jesus. Rather, he was seen as a means to the filling of their stomachs. You see my brothers and sisters; Jesus did not only come to fill stomachs with food (physically), He also came to fill our lives with the very presence of God (spiritually).

The crowd asks Jesus for this bread that He is speaking of and He responded to them by saying, “I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst”. The text goes on further to tell us that the crowd grumbled, they mumbled, they argued, they whined and ultimately they left in droves. The text gives us some clues as to the kind of people that left Jesus behind when he preached the “bread of life” sermon. Among the crowd were; (1) the Materialists (2) the Legalists and (3) the Sensationalists.

The **Materialists** were the kind of people that followed Jesus because they were hoping for a political savior. They wanted political solutions, free handouts and material goodies. For them Jesus was the latest and greatest gravy train. These people had watched Rome thrive with limited success by instituting a sort of welfare program that they called a “Bread for Peace”. Yet there were many hungry, jobless and homeless people in Rome. So the government tried to avoid riots by buying them off with goodies. The plan back-fired because the demands of the crowd simply grew and grew. Jesus knew that he faced a similar problem the day after He fed the crowd with bread and fish. In fact, when the crowd arrived, look at how He greeted them. He said, *“I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill”.* **John 6:26.**

Missionaries in third-world countries often talk about “Rice Christians”. These are people who will quickly convert to Christianity in exchange for food or some other physical benefit. The problem with “Rice Christians” is that when goodies are gone, so are they. Jamaican Christians are not so different. Too many people use church for business contacts or community status. “Rice Christians” can be found all over the world. These people look to God only for what they can get. They are quick to turn their back on God the first time He fails to deliver. The materialists turned away from Jesus' message. Others would eventually turn away also and can be referred to as the **Legalists**.

The **Legalists** asked Jesus what they must do to do the works God requires. **John 6:28.** If these people couldn't get a free lunch, they at least wanted a list of rules they could hang on to. I never

cease to be amazed that religion, by its very nature, draws some people who are actually looking for a dominating, charismatic leader to call the shots and take control of their lives. Throughout Christian history, the church has often fallen into the sin of Legalism. The problem is, it's easier to make rules than to build relationships. Jesus wants to live in the heart of every individual believer. He has sent His spirit to write His Law on our hearts. He calls every one of us, including myself, to study His word for ourselves and learn from Him. When we do that, the church enjoys an amazing unity in morals and principles. That's why you won't find our congregation publishing a list of Do's and Don'ts for believers. Instead, we want to teach the scripture and to encourage everyone to seek a personal relationship with the Jesus. But some people simply don't want a deep relationship with God. (I don't know why that would be the case); rather, they desire a strong leader and a system of memorizing a set of rules. Jesus had no interest in legalists as followers. He came to build relationships, not rules. When the crowd demanded a set of rules or a list of works, Jesus gave this surprising answer: "*The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent*". (**John 6:29**).

As amazing as it sounds, brothers and sisters, Jesus wants a genuine love relationship with every one of us. That kind of relationship can't be bought with goodies and it can't be built on rules. The **Materialists** wanted the goodies more than they wanted God. The **Legalists** wanted the law more than the giver of that law. They rejected Jesus who was the replacement for the rule-keeping religion at that time and made way for the last group that walked out on Jesus that day; these were the **Sensationalists**.

The **Sensationalists** asked Jesus this absurd question; "*What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe You? What will You do?*" (**John 6:30**). Think about it.... Jesus had just fed over five thousand people with two fish and five loaves of bread. The very next day, they are asking Him for a SIGN! Obviously, the miracle of feeding the five thousand gave them enough faith to climb in boats and row all the way across the waters to find Jesus. But yesterday's miracle was not enough to last until the next morning. We have plenty of these kinds of churchgoers in Jamaica today. I like to call these kind of folks "pep rally believers"; that is, keep them "wowed" and you'll keep them around; bore them and they are gone. These people only crave spiritual excitement and love spectacular entertainment. They want new experiences all the time. They want Jesus to take them from one mountain top experience to the next with no valleys in between. They want all kinds of rewards but no responsibility.

You see friends, Jesus did not come to give us endless spiritual highs; He came to give us a chance to know Him; to build and maintain a relationship with Him. Look at the message He gave to the **Materialists**, the **Legalists** and the **Sensationalists** that day: "*The bread of God is He who comes down from Heaven and gives life to the world*". (**John 6: 33**). When you think about it, the people who walked out on Jesus wanted what He could give them in the same way a customer might demand service for pay. They wanted to do business with Jesus "the soup kitchen", Jesus "the cult leader", Jesus the "miracle-worker". But Jesus, the Bread of Life didn't resonate with them so they walked away.

Additionally, as it turned out even some of His closest disciples wanted Jesus only for what they could get out of Him. They had no real interest in a relationship with God. **Verse 66 of John 6** gives this sad indictment: *From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more*. That led to what I think is one of the most poignant moments in the Bible. The message

that Jesus was totally God and also totally human was emphasized. He felt what any of us would feel. He experienced the pain of rejection; especially the rejection of those He had considered close friends. Jesus turned to His disciples with a question that must have been hard to ask; "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Thankfully good old Peter came through for Jesus. He spoke for the group: Simon Peter answered Him, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"

Peter understood what the crowds had missed. Disciples like Peter weren't there for fish sandwiches, or to start a Jewish revolt against Rome, or to find a new list of rules to keep, or to get in on a Jesus pep rally, or to hold a big miracle crusade. They were there because they believed and knew that Jesus was the Holy One of God..... the Messiah..... the Bread of Life. All they needed was what they already had.... Jesus Himself!

Friends, Jesus did not come to feed the world with bread that would only give physical life. He came to give Himself as the Bread of eternal life. In His explanation to the crowd, Jesus points to the Communion Service that He would institute just before His death. Jesus says to them, "*I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in Me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of Me. This is the bread that came down from Heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.*" **(John 6:53-58).**

My brothers and sisters in Christ; Jesus as bread is a very rich image in which we can see connections with God's Word. We are not to "*live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD*". **(Deuteronomy 8:3)**. This Bread which is both spiritual and physical is essential for life. It brings eternal life; it gives us sustenance, satisfaction, and is sufficient enough if we just believe in Him and His word. Let us remember these words as we take Communion today. When we take the bread and the cup, we are partaking of Jesus Christ. We are saying, "**Yes, I believe you are the Bread of Life.**" Jesus himself is the nourishment that gives us eternal life and He is able to feed us both now and for eternity. "*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things*". **(Philippians 4:8).**

**Let us pray,**

**Jesus the bread of life, thank you for feeding and supporting our spiritual life. Without You, we have no strength, no life, nothing. Lord, thank you for your Word which gives us comfort to know that You are the bread of life. Help us to continue to feed on Your Word so that we may grow from strength to strength. Lord, I pray that these few words will resonate on the hearts of many and that they will come to follow You and not be like the Materialists, the Legalists or the Sensationalists but more like Simon Peter who knew no other words but Yours Oh Lord. Continue to be our Bread of life so that we may never hunger or thirst because we have come to know You and believe in Your Word.**

**We pray in Your name. Amen.**