

## The Seven I AM Statements of Christ

*I AM the Bread of Life* (John 6:25-59)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on October 6, 2024

### Introduction

- ❖ This morning we're beginning a new sermon series called *The Seven I AM Statements of Christ*. It's a series focused on exploring the identity of Christ based on his self-disclosure in John's Gospel. **In the fourth Gospel, there are seven occasions where Jesus makes self-referential statements, identifying himself with Yahweh.** The LORD God of the OT. As readers of the Gospel, we were already told, in chapter 1, that Jesus is God become flesh. God dwelling among us. But the characters in John's Gospel are still slowly figuring that out.
  - ▶ One way in which Jesus reveals his identity is through these seven statements where he intentionally used a particular Greek phrase that translates as, "I AM." **It's the phrase *ego eimi*.** The interesting thing is that both *ego* and *eimi* are verbs that could stand alone and express the same thing. They both mean "I AM." **So by pairing them together, the expression literally translates as, "I AM I AM."**
- ❖ And it's in those two little words that we hear a clear echo of God's self-definition in Exodus 3:14, where he instructs Moses to tell the Israelites that "I AM WHO I AM" has sent him. **It's widely held that Jesus meant to import the divine significance of those two little words in his seven statements.** In each instance, he was affirming his oneness with Yahweh. And, in each instance, he was revealing a divine attribute that he manifests as God Incarnate.
  - ▶ **In our case, this morning, Jesus's point – in claiming "*I AM the bread of life*" – his point is to stress that he is the all-sufficient God.** Who has come in the flesh to satisfy the deepest longing and hunger of our souls. So that all those who figuratively feed on his flesh, as the True Bread of Heaven, will be **eternally satisfied** and **eternally secure**. That's the point and the promise found in our text.
- ❖ Which is good news for all of us. **All of us find ourselves working so hard for food that simply perishes.** And not just in a literal sense. Figuratively, the fruits of our labor could be a sense of achievement or public affirmation for your accomplishments. **But while it feels good to be recognized, we know it only lasts for a moment.** The feeling will fade. That plaque you received will be ignored on your wall. That trophy will find itself in a box in a storage closet. **Any material reward you receive for all your hard work – any treasure on earth – will rust or decay.** They never last. They always leave you empty and wanting more.
- ❖ This is why we need to step back and ask ourselves: **What am I seeking? What am I chasing after?** Are you seeking status, respect, regard in the eyes of others? Are you seeking power over others, control over circumstances? Are you seeking prosperity, and comfort in life? Are you seeking security, good health, a stable future? What are you seeking?
  - ▶ And there's the follow up question: **Is it satisfying you? Is it filling that emptiness in your soul?** Or have you come to the haunting realization that – no matter how much you achieve – it's only scratching the surface. And like with every itch, you feel immediate relief, but the itch just moves somewhere else and often gets stronger. **So are you truly satisfied? That's the question we face in today's text.** In response, we find three exhortations: (1) Work for the food that lasts forever. (2) Come to the Savior that never lets you go. (3) Feed on the flesh that gives you eternal life.

## Work for the Food that Lasts Forever

- ❖ Let's consider the first exhortation – **work for the food that lasts forever**. That's what Jesus says in v27, "*Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.*"
  - ▶ Now to put this in context, Jesus had just finished feeding the 5000 (6:1-15). It's one of the seven signs that Christ is recorded to have performed in John's Gospel. It's where he took two fish and fives loaves and multiplied it to *more than* satisfy the hunger of 5000 – with twelve baskets of leftovers to spare.
  
- ❖ And then, in John 6:16-21, we're told he crossed over the Sea of Galilee by walking on the water, catching up with his disciples in their boat. So when he lands in Capernaum, the crowds are confused as to how Jesus arrived before them. They were carefully tracking his whereabouts. They saw his disciples take off in a boat without him, so they figured he was still on their side of the sea. But when no one could find him, they returned to Capernaum, only to find him there! Leading to their question in v25, "*Rabbi, when did you come here?*"
  - ▶ To which Jesus responds in v26, exposing their motivation for seeking him in the first place. "*Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.""* **In other words, they were impressed by the results of the sign – all those fish and loaves – but they entirely missed the significance of the sign.** They were looking for the next free meal. For his next miracle. They had witnessed a multiplication of bread, but they lacked the imagination to picture what that could mean.
    - They're thinking, "Wow, this guy can satisfy our hunger. He can meet our needs. Let's follow him." While failing to ask, "What does this mean? And, by doing this, who is he claiming to be?"
  
- ❖ **The significance of the sign and the identity of the one performing it – that's what they're missing.** And that's what Jesus is getting at. In v26, he tells them that you're seeking me – you're following me – but for the wrong reasons. It's because I satisfied your physical hunger. **But what about your spiritual hunger?** Your belly might be full. But your soul is still empty. Why aren't you concerned with that?
  - ▶ That was the problem. **The crowds were too easily satisfied by a full stomach.** That's all they wanted from Jesus. They were unconcerned with their souls. Unconcerned with eternal life. That's why he says, in v27, "*Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life.*"
  
- ❖ **In other words, don't just settle for a materialistic Savior who has come merely to satisfy your material needs.** Don't just follow Jesus because you want him to heal you or heal a loved one. Don't just follow him because you hope he'll solve your problems at school or in the workplace. Don't just follow him because you want him to save your marriage or to restore a relationship with your children. Don't just follow him because your life is a mess and you need some direction. **Because, friends, all of those needs – as important and valid as they may be – all have an expiration date.** They perish.

- ❖ Don't just work for that which perishes. Go for that which lasts forever. **Seek after eternal life.** Which is found in Christ – in a relationship with the Great I AM. Here's another way to put it: **Don't just seek after the perishable gifts when the imperishable Giver makes himself available to you.** He wants to satisfy your soul forever. Don't settle for less.
- ❖ Now hear me out. **I don't want you to get the wrong impression – thinking that Jesus could care less about your material needs.** It's easy for us to read this passage, in our comfortable context, and quickly conclude that these crowds were too concerned with food and empty stomachs. But that's because most of us have never known hunger. Many of us have not experienced chronic pain or a debilitating illness. Many of us have not gone through a financial crisis in life where we're not sure how to pay the bills.
  - ▶ But those of you who have can sympathize with the crowds. Who hope that the good news Jesus brings has at least something to say in addressing material needs. **And the fact that Jesus does feed the hungry, heal the sick, restore the broken, and provide daily bread – that proves that he cares and that he addresses our needs, even the perishable ones.** But the point is that he does so much more.
- ❖ **You see, the real problem is *not* that you have these deep desires and cravings.** All these hungers. All these wants. That's the mistake many religious people fall into. Thinking that being religious (godly) requires you to suppress those desires, to curb those cravings. A lot of people think that's what Jesus wants of us. That that's what Christianity teaches.
  - ▶ **When, in actuality, Jesus is saying that the problem is *not* that you *have* desires and cravings – but that your desires and cravings are not strong enough.** They're too easily satisfied. You're content with a full stomach. Satisfied with an empty soul.
- ❖ C.S. Lewis made a similar point when he said, "***Our Lord doesn't find our desires too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.***" In other words, don't be content to work for food that perishes when an offer of food that endures to eternal life is on the table. Don't settle for less.
- ❖ If you see yourself as a follower of Jesus, then ask yourself: **What do I actually want from Jesus? What am I actually seeking?** Even if I do enjoy his good gifts, will I settle for anything less than the Giver himself? If I had good grades, a good job, a good marriage, good kids, good health, good finances, good friends in a good church – but lacked a good, abiding, daily relationship with Christ – would I be content with my experience of Christianity?
  - ▶ Just like that crowd of followers that day, we need the Great I AM to confront us from time to time. **Challenging us to reconsider why we're following Jesus.** Is he just a means to another end? Do we just find him useful? Useful to get what whatever it is we're really after. **Or is Jesus himself the ultimate object of our search?** Is he what we want? **The point is to *not* settle for perishable gifts when a relationship with the ultimate Giver is on the table.** When eternal life is being offered.

- ❖ Now, in v28, the crowd misunderstands Jesus. He was telling them not to work for that which is fleeting but that which endures eternally. His focus is on eternal life. But they focus instead on the kind of work you're supposed to do to obtain eternal life. Apparently they assume they're able to do whatever work is required of them.
  - ▶ **But Jesus makes it clear that the only work that God requires is to stop working and to start trusting.** Look at v29, "*Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."*"
  
- ❖ **But before they're willing to believe in him, they expect Jesus to prove himself.** As if he hasn't done enough. Their argument in vv30-31 is that – back in the OT during Israel's wilderness years – Moses miraculously provided bread from heaven to feed God's people. He gave us manna, which was perishable. **So if you're offering something imperishable, then what sign will you perform to prove that you can give us something better than Moses?**
  - ▶ Well, in vv32-33, Jesus responds by reminding them that Moses actually didn't get anything. But rather God was the ultimate source of the bread. And that he's sending down the True Bread of Heaven that gives life to the world. To which, they respond in v34, "*Sir, give us this bread always.*" That word *always* could also be translated "*from now on.*" From now on – supply us with that kind of life-giving bread. We'll change up our diet and eat that from now on.
  
- ❖ They still don't get it. They're still thinking too small. **They can't imagine that the True Bread of Heaven is so good, so satisfying, so sufficient – that it only needs to be given once.** Because, once you partake of it, you will never hunger or thirst again. Look at v35, "*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."*"
  - ▶ Friends, have you tasted and seen? Have you experienced Jesus in this way? **If you're feeling spiritually empty – if your soul is still famished – then perhaps you have yet to partake of the True Bread of Life.** Maybe you've enjoyed his gifts. But have you actually come to embrace Jesus himself and to satisfy your soul in him. The invitation stands. He welcomes you with open arms.

### **Come to the Savior that Never Lets You Go**

- ❖ That leads to the second exhortation in our text – **come to the Savior that never lets you go.** That's an honest-to-God invitation to who hear this gospel promise. **All who come to Jesus will be welcomed into the arms of a Savior who will never perish and will never let you perish.** That's what's promised in vv37-40.
  - ▶ But start in v36. Jesus acknowledges that many in the crowd of followers don't actually believe in him. "*But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.*" They see him as a miracle worker. As another messianic figure. Some, back in v15, wanted to take him by force to make him king. Because they don't believe, they don't see the Great I AM before them. They don't see Yahweh in the flesh.

- ❖ But just because they have direct access to Jesus – to witness his signs and yet don't believe – that doesn't mean his mission failed. As if his signs didn't work. **Jesus makes it clear, in v37, that his Father's will never fails.** “*All that the Father gives me will come to me.*”
  - ▶ **So God the Father apparently has a specific group of people in mind that he has given to God the Son** (cf. 6:39; 10:29; 17:2; 18:9). And since they've been given by the Father to the Son, then they *will* come to him and not hunger. They *will* believe in him and never thirst. There is a sense of inevitability. It doesn't say they may come to Jesus. Now they're allowed to. It's stronger than that. It says they *will* come to Jesus.
  
- ❖ Throughout the NT, this group of people the Father has given to the Son is called by different names. They're called God's elect (Mt 24:22, 24, 31; 1 Pet 1:1). Or God's chosen ones (Mt 22:14; Col 3:12). **And what stands out is how all the electing and choosing and giving between the Father and the Son occurs *prior* to our believing, our choosing, our coming to Jesus.** “*All that the Father gives me (present tense) will come to me (future tense).*”
  - ▶ So if you're a Christian, this means the Father gave you to the Son *before* you came to faith in the Son. **You were chosen before you chose to believe** (cf. Jn 15:16; Acts 13:48). **You were elected before you elected to follow Jesus.**
  
- ❖ Later in **John 10**, the elect, the chosen, are also called Jesus's sheep, his flock. He goes on to say that he knows his sheep and his sheep know him. **They know their Shepherd's voice and they listen to that voice. So when he says, “Come.” They come.** In 10:24-26, his critics gather around Jesus and ask, “*How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.*” <sup>25</sup>*Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, <sup>26</sup>but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.”*
  - ▶ **That's the opposite of what we would've instinctively said.** We would've said, “You're not part of my flock *because* you don't believe.” We assume it's your exercise of faith that determines whether you're one of his sheep. But Jesus flips it around. **You don't believe *because* you're not part of my flock.** Apparently being counted as Jesus's sheep is what determines whether you're going to believe. So going back to John 6, this explains why many in the crowd saw his signs and still didn't believe. Because they weren't part of the flock given by the Father to the Son.
  
- ❖ Now why is this concept – that the Father gave you to the Son prior to your coming and believing in the Son – **why is that point so important to stress?** Because of how v37 concludes, “*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*” **All whom come to the Son – who are welcomed into his kingdom – will never be cast out.** Jesus will preserve us till the end.
  - ▶ Christian, your peace and security in the everlasting arms of Christ rests on the glorious truth that you ended up there because God the Father wanted you there. **He chose you; and set you apart along with an entire flock; and gave us all to his Son.** That Christ would die for our sins and give us new life in his kingdom. That's a secure position. For he will never cast us out.

- ❖ **And in v38, we're told why Jesus is never going to let us go.** Why he'll never cast out those the Father gives him. Because his mission was to come to earth to do his Father's will. *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me."*
  - ▶ And what's his Father's will? Look at v39, *"And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day."* **The Father's expressed will is that his Son should not lose anyone he's been given.** That all will persevere and make it to the final resurrection. So the Christian's perseverance is the Father's will, and the Son's mission is to carry out that very will.
    - Do you realize what that means? **That means your eternal security is entirely riding on Jesus's ability to faithfully obey his Father and execute his will.** I think you're going to be just fine. You're in good hands.
  
- ❖ **Brothers and sisters, it's important to understand that it's normal within the Christian life for your assurance of salvation to wax and wane.** Some days, some seasons, you feel so close to Christ. Safe and secure in his everlasting arms. But there will be some days, some seasons, where you feel distant and disconnected from Christ. Unsure and insecure about your future. It could be a result of unconfessed, unrepentant sin.
  - ▶ But it's not always the case. **It could just be God's will to put you through a wilderness experience – a dark night of the soul.** Where you're being tested to see how you'll respond. Where you have to face the question of why you follow Jesus. Is it because you merely find him useful to get what you need? Or is it because Jesus himself is all that you need?
    - **Friends, if Jesus is your all in all, then put *all* your hope in his promise to never let you go.** Later in chapter 10, he says that the sheep his Father has given him *"will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."* (10:28). You're safe in his hands.

### **Feed on the Flesh that Gives You Eternal Life**

- ❖ I hope you're starting to see that this idea – of the Father having a chosen people for salvation that he gives to the Son to rescue and preserve – **that this teaching is meant to buoy your confidence, to strengthen your assurance.** But I realize that, for some people, it has the opposite effect. **They start to worry that maybe they're not a part of God's elect.** That they're not counted within his chosen sheep. Since those are realities ultimately rooted in God's will – and not our own – it makes them anxious.
  - ▶ If that's your response, I understand. But I want to encourage you by pointing you to Jesus's own words. Notice how the crowd begins to grumble at his teaching. And in v44, we hear him say, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."* (cf. 6:65)
    - **Now how does he want people to respond to that?** Does he expect listeners to throw up their hands and think, "Well, since it's not up to me, then I've got nothing to do. I sure hope the Father draws me one day because I sure would like to come to Jesus." No, that's not how Jesus expects people to respond.

- ❖ Because in the same discourse to the same crowd, he says something similar but with a different emphasis. **Making it clear that you do have something to do in response.** Look at v40, *“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”* Look at how both verses end. Notice the parallelism. **But notice how – while v44 is emphasizing God’s sovereignty in our salvation – v40 is emphasizing our responsibility.**
  - ▶ Yes, it’s true that no one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws them to his Son. **But all you need to worry about – all you’re responsible for – is to look on the Son and believe.** He stresses that again in v47, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.”* And then Jesus goes on to use rather vivid imagery in the remainder of our text to stress our responsibility. Leading to our third exhortation – **feed on the flesh that gives you eternal life.**
  
- ❖ It’s probably no surprise that the language Jesus uses led to a lot of confusion. A lot of horror and disgust. Because, once again, the crowd keeps interpreting him so literally. **They miss the significance of his signs and the figurative meaning of his words.** Some of them think he’s actually promoting cannibalism.
  - ▶ They miss his point. When Jesus spoke of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, it was said in light of all the earlier allusions to God’s miraculous provision of bread during Israel’s wilderness years (v31, v49). With that in view, he says in v51, *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”*
  
- ❖ We’re told that the Jews took issue with that. **They thought he was actually offering his flesh to eat.** In response, starting in v53, Jesus doesn’t make it easier to swallow. He keeps using the same metaphorical language. *“<sup>53</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup>Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*
  - ▶ But had they been listening carefully they would’ve noticed how v54 ends with that same repeated phrase, *“and I will raise him up on the last day.”* **Which means, in each instance, he’s driving home the same point – with just different emphases or different language.** So earlier in v40 – when Jesus promised that *“everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him will have eternal life,”* – his use of plain language there is meant to prepare us to rightly interpret his use of metaphorical language starting in v53. **In other words, feeding on his flesh and drinking his blood is just a figurative way of saying “looking on Jesus and believing in him.”**
  
- ❖ **Friends, if we can just avoid getting distracted by Jesus’s use of vivid, metaphorical language, we just might be able to receive the promise he’s making.** If anyone here wants to come to Jesus – if you want your soul eternally satisfied in him – there’s only one question that matters. And it’s not whether you think God has chosen you. **It’s not whether or not the Father is drawing you to the Son.** Yes, Jesus said you can’t come unless he does.

- ❖ **But the only question you need to answer is whether or not you're willing to feed on the Bread of Life. Whether or not you're willing to believe in Christ and follow him.** That's the only question you're responsible to answer for yourself.
  - ▶ But, listen, it's not that simple. Too many have claimed to believe, claimed to follow. **But, to them, Jesus is merely a useful Savior – useful to get them what they need. While not recognizing Jesus himself as the only One they truly need.**
  
- ❖ **If people truly understood the gravity of what it means to believe and follow the Great I AM, I think such an invitation to come and believe would be heard as even more shocking, more provocative, than asking people to eat his flesh and drink his blood.**
  - ▶ To believe and follow Jesus means you recognize him as the hunger-gratifying, thirst-quenching, soul-satisfying, highest object of your desires. To such a degree that if all those other good gifts in your life were to be taken away – that good marriage, those good kids, that good job, your good health or finances. **Take it away and if you can still say, “It is well with my soul because my soul has been satisfied by the Bread of Life.” – that's how you know you truly believe and follow the Great I AM.**
  
- ❖ For some people, consuming actual flesh and blood would be more realistic than to ever get to a point where they can trust Jesus that much. That's asking them to place too much hope, too much faith, in one man. But what about you? Who is Jesus to you? Is he worth it to you?