

“I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE”: WHAT OUR HUNGER TELLS US ABOUT HOW TO BE SATISFIED

Some memorable claims start with the words ‘I am.’

Muhammad Ali, reckoned to be one of the most exceptional sports champions of all time, famously proclaimed: “I am the greatest!”

Charlotte Bronte’s character Jane Eyre refused to be controlled, saying, “I am no bird, no net ensnares me. I am a free human being with an independent will.”

And who can forget one of the most famous movie lines? Darth Vader’s words to Luke Skywalker: “I am your father.”

Most of us shy away from making ‘I am’ statements. To say ‘I am’ is to nail your colours to the mast – to make a statement about yourself that isn’t tied to a moment, but for all time.

It’s noteworthy, then, that Jesus often made ‘I am’ statements. Far from being just the wise thinker or the hippie philosopher many people assume, Jesus confidently talked about *himself* – making ‘I am’ claims that still address our hopes, desires and questions today.

The first of Jesus’ ‘I am’ claims occurs straight after one of his miracles. After feeding thousands of people, simply using bread and fish from a boy’s packed lunch, Jesus makes an astonishing claim:

I am the bread of life.

Imagine someone making a similar assertion, and we sense how strange Jesus’ claim is.

“*I am* the broccoli.” “*I am* the Big Mac.” “*I am* the birthday cake.”

What is Jesus doing – claiming to be *bread*?

He is telling the assembled crowds that *he* is their true food.

Here's the idea. Even the best meals don't fill us up forever. We're soon hungry again, in search of a snack. Our hunger reminds us that we're dependent creatures. We can't live without nourishment. Like phones in need of a charger, we need to be filled up from outside – or, eventually, we will die.

According to Jesus, our sometimes-full, soon-to-be empty stomachs picture our sometimes-full, easily-empty souls. Our hunger pangs and rumbling tummies mirror the ache we have to be *satisfied*.

We must be filled from outside – or we will die.

This is why university feels so hectic. We're never quite sure what will fill us up. So we join societies and go on nights out and try new things. We fall in love and take up causes and (hopefully) go to lectures. They're all good things – yet they make life so busy, we struggle to keep up.

We find it hard to say no to *anything*. What if *this* is where life is found? What if I say no to something... and I'm left hungry?

Let's return to Jesus' words:

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never grow hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Jesus is claiming to satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst, if we will come to him.

He is all the bread we need.

Jesus' claim actually follows on from other imagery in the Bible about bread. Up until now, bread was largely that – a picture, designed to point God's people forward to something better that was coming.

For example, about fifteen hundred years before Jesus, God miraculously provides bread for his people, living in the desert. But the idea was never that they'd *stay* in the desert. God was guiding them to a land full of natural resources to farm and enjoy. Bread in the desert was temporary, a sign that he'd provide for them in the long term if they depended on him.

Yet even after his people have settled, God continues to speak about bread. He sends messengers – prophets – who return to the theme of bread from heaven. They tell of a time when God’s people will enjoy bread from his own table, when death will be swallowed up forever.

And now, claiming to be the bread of life, Jesus is saying: that time has come.

He is this bread. *He* provides the life all other bread points towards. Because *he* reconnects us with God, the life source we were made to know.

Later, Jesus says:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Jesus brings us life with God by giving his flesh for the world. As he dies, Jesus is torn apart. Through dying the death we deserve, in our place, Jesus offers us life.

As Jesus makes it clear throughout this chapter, we receive this life through believing in him. But what does it mean to *believe*?

Jesus uses a shocking picture: we must *eat* him.

It’s a gory image. But think about its implications.

Jesus is saying that we’ll never find life if we think believing involves simply *thinking about him*. We’ll never know satisfaction if we think we’re just called to rehearse *facts* about him.

No, we must be *fed* by Jesus, depending on him in the same way a starving person depends on bread. Believing in Jesus means turning to him and saying, “You are my only hope of life. Without you, I die.”

And if we feed on him, he will give us life.

Bread, of course, isn't a light food. It's dense and heavy. When you eat bread, you're quickly filled. You don't need to look for food elsewhere, at least for a while.

Jesus fills us in the present. He satisfies us now. But his provision won't run out either. *Jesus* will keep offering himself. He will be our daily bread throughout university, throughout our lives... and even as we face death.

If we feed on him, he will raise us to life on the last day.

So *Jesus* can free us from endlessly running around, looking for nourishment, trying to be filled.

In fact, as we feed on him, we'll start to sense he's too good to keep to ourselves. We'll want to tell others about him.

Why?

Because as someone once put it: telling people about *Jesus* is like one beggar telling another beggar where to find free bread.