**Bread of Life**

Bethlehem, the city of David, where the Son of David was prophesied to be born was one of the smallest tows in all of Israel, maybe 300-500 people. Bethlehem means “house of bread.” I find it fascinating that Jesus the bread of life was born in the city called the House of Bread.

Jesus claimed, “I am the bread of Life, the Living Bread” in the context of the Passover feast. It was the first ‘I am’ claim in the gospel of John, connected with a noun. He will then go to say,

* “I am the *Light of the world*, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life” (John 8:12).
* “I am the *Good Shepherd*; the Good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).
* “I am the *Resurrection and the Life*; whoever lives and believes in me shall live even if they die” (John 11:25).
* “I am the *Way, the Truth and the Life*; no one comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6).
* “I am the *true* *Vine*; you are the branches. Keep on abiding in me and I in you and you will bear much fruit” (John 15:5).

All amazing claims of Christ, but “I am the bread of life” is hugely audacious! Jesus is saying you cannot make it in life without me. I am absolutely necessary for human existence. You need me as much as you need your next meal. Indeed, more than your next meal!

When Jesus made this claim, John is careful to tell us that “Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand” (John 6:4). The Passover was and still is a time ***to remember*** -a time to remember God’s great acts of salvation when God set his people free from slavery in Egypt. During Passover the Jews remember with sorrow the bitter suffering of their ancestors. During Passover the Jews remember with humility the sprinkled blood of the lambs, blood which protected them as the angel of death passed through Egypt, blood which caused judgement to “pass over” their homes. During Passover the Jews remember with awe the power of God, how the Living God parted the Red Sea so the liberated people could ‘pass over’ to the other side and escape the pursuing armies of Pharoah. And during Passover they remember with gratitude the gracious gifts of God, how God miraculously provided manna from heaven and the flesh of quail, so the people could survive in the Sinai desert.

And the Passover feast was and still is a time ***to*** ***renew hope***. Moses - the one who led Israel out of bondage to freedom, the one who prayed for manna from heaven- this Moses promised that one day God would send another leader, like himself, to speak God’s life-giving word. “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me, from among you… you shall listen to him”(Deut. 18:15). By the first century, there was a growing expectation that during some Passover the Prophet-like Moses would come. And there was the growing expectation that this Prophet-like-Moses would bring with him the same miraculous deliverance and the same miraculous provision of God. There was a saying in the first century, “As was the first redeemer, so was the final redeemer; as the first redeemer caused the manna to fall from heaven, even so shall the second redeemer shall cause manna to fall” (Barclay, Gospel of John, 1:125).

That is the context that Jesus makes his “I am the Bread of Life” claim. Jesus makes his claim within a larger story being told and celebrated in the Feast. This is the case with all that Jesus says about anything. He is speaking from within and to a larger story. A number of important biblical texts were read and reflected on at the Feast. In Exodus 16:4 the text says that God will “rain down” bread from heaven each day. What a promise! Bread from heaven in the desert everyday. And the text says that the people were to go and gather a day’s portion each day except on the day before the Sabbath, when two day’s worth would “rain down.” The point being that God will provide everyday but only one day at a time and therefore the people will need to go and gather the manna one day at a time.

What does this have to do with Jesus’ claim? Jesus says, “I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to Me shall never hunger, whoever believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). The tense of the verbs “come” and “believe” are in the present tense, which emphasizes continual action: “keep on.” Jesus is saying, “Keep coming” and “Keep believing.” Whoever keeps on coming will never hunger. Whoever keeps on believing will never thirst.

The great multitude at Passover understood the “keep coming.” The people of Israel had to go and pick up the manna each new day (Exodus 16:22-30). He is saying in essence, “I am the bread of Life. You need to come to Me every day, keep coming.” When we find ourselves empty and hungering too much for the bread that perishes, it likely means we have fallen out of the habit of the “keep coming.” Keep coming, keep believing. Every day.

There is another important portion of the Bible read and studied during Passover. It is Genesis 2-3. Jesus works with that text as well when he makes his claim.

At the very beginning God placed Adam and Eve in a garden. In this garden, the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground-trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food” (Gen. 2:9). We see two aspects to this. On the one hand it is attractive—this is the earliest reference in Scripture to beauty. But it is also useful—what grows in the garden provides nourishment and sustenance. The name Eden means “delight or pleasure.” So the garden was to be a place of deep delight, rest, pleasure and provision. God spoke to Adam and Eve, “Eat from any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of that tree you shall surely die.” God wanted Adam and Eve to remember, treasure and enjoy him. They were to live dependent on Him. Every meal was to be a place of remembrance, gratitude and worship! And yet they ‘ate’ for their own pleasure unto themselves and were “cast out” of the garden.

Because of their sin, declaring independence from God, which is what eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil means… because of that sin, humanity is cast out of the garden of Eden. “So the Lord cast them out” (Genesis 3:24). And then the Lord stationed angels to guard the way to the ‘tree of life’ to protect them from living independently forever.

This text is in the minds and the ears of the worshippers during the time of Christ at Passover. Jesus declares, “ I am the bread of Life.” Not just the bread, but the Bread of *Life*. After making this claim, Jesus says next, “All that the Father gives me will come to me. And the one who comes to me, I will certainly not ‘cast out.’ Do you hear Jesus? The way to the tree of Life has been opened. He opened it by dealing with the problem of sin.

Jesus connects the Genesis part of the story another way. In Genesis 2, God warns Adam and Eve not to eat form the tree of knowledge of good and evil. “Do not declare independence from me. You will not make it. You shall not eat of it, lest you die. Eat of it and you will die” (Genesis 2:17). Then in Genesis 3:6, “She took and ate.” And she died, along with Adam and the rest of the human race. ***Eat of it and die-***the phrase is ringing in the minds and ears of the great multitude gathered at Passover.

Jesus says, “I am the bread of Life. Your ancestors at the manna in the wilderness and they died (John 6:48-49). He presses on. Listen! “This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that you may eat of it and not die” (John 6:50). To eat the Bread that is Jesus is to enter into the life we lost at the fall!

That is the context in which Jesus makes his “I am the Bread of Life” claim. Jesus is saying in essence, “I am that without which you cannot live. I am the final satisfaction of the human soul. Come to Me, everyday. Believe in me, everyday. I give you Myself as Living Bread!”

This is why communion is so important in the life of the church. When we meet around the Lord’s table to remember his dying for the sin of the world, he comes to us and feeds us.

“She took and ate.” Took and ate. Those two words do not come together in the rest of the biblical story. We do not find ‘take and eat’ together elsewhere –

Until the Bread of Life says, “Take, eat, this is my body given for you.”

Let’s hear him say to us,

“Not cast out”

“Eat and not die”

“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (John 6:56).

Jesus gives us the practical key to his abiding presence in our lives – eating his flesh and drinking his blood! For Jesus, eating is believing; drinking is believing. He promises eternal life to those who believe in him. Believe what?

Believe that his death — the breaking of his body and spilling of his blood — pays the full the penalty for our sin, and that his perfect righteousness is freely given to us in exchange for our unrighteousness. Believing in all that he gave and all that he accomplished at the cross on our behalf!

This is why he instituted the Lord’s Supper: he did not want us to forget the very core of what we believe.

When the crowd took offense at his gruesome talk, Jesus exposed their unbelief: “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe” ([John 6:63–64](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%206.63%E2%80%9364)).

Let’s make a daily practice of meditating on the cross of Christ, beholding the Lamb and appropriating by faith all the finished work of the cross! And like the early church let’s devote ourselves to the ‘breaking of bread’ (Acts 2:42), coming often to the Lord’s table, remembering and giving thanks! In this manner we will experience his

‘Abiding’ presence in us and among us’

Dr. Jason Hubbard