

March 10, 2019

I Am

I Am the Bread of Life

John 6:25-35

Opening words: The Gospel of John is preoccupied with the deity of Jesus. Chapter one sets the tone for the rest of the book. In that chapter, John declares Jesus, the Word, to be God, and goes on to say, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." He announces that in Jesus, the glory of God has been seen, and he further speaks of Jesus as the One who has made the invisible God known. And then, we have the multiple "I Am" sayings scattered throughout John's gospel. The title "I Am" is the divine name revealed to Moses by the Lord in Exodus 3:14 from the burning bush. By taking on this name, Jesus claimed to be the Lord! The "I Am" sayings not only speak of Jesus' identity, but each of the seven "I Am" sayings reveal an aspect of Jesus' mission.

In my newest sermon series, *I Am*, we are looking at the "I Am" sayings of Jesus. They are rich in divine truth. I began this sermon series last Wednesday, Ash Wednesday. We looked at Exodus 3, where God gives Moses his name, I AM WHO I AM. Today, we find ourselves in the sixth chapter of John. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." In other words, Jesus is telling the crowd, and us, how to achieve satisfaction. Our scripture reading for this morning is John 6:25-35. Let me call the message *I Am the Bread of Life*.

John 6:25-35 When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"²⁶ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."²⁸ Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."³⁰ So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?"³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'³² Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."³⁴ "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Her real name was Katherine Brosnahan (1962-2018), but the world knew her by her professional name, Kate Spade. She was an American fashion designer and businesswoman. She seemed to have it all. After working in the accessories department

at the fashion magazine *Mademoiselle*, she and her husband, Andy, identified a market for quality handbags in 1993. They began to manufacture handbags to fill that void. Those handbags grew in popularity and became a symbol of sophistication in New York City in the 1990s. Those handbags sold for approximately \$500 apiece. How successful was Kate Spade? Her business today is worth \$2.4 billion. She seemed to have it all. She was rich and was respected by her peers. That was what made the news so shocking. On June 5, 2018, at the age of 55 years old, Kate Spade committed suicide. She hung herself in her Manhattan apartment. Why would someone with so much to live for take their own life? There is no easy answer, because life can be complex. However, her sad death makes a clear point. There is more to life than the things of this world. If you can agree with that, say, "**Amen!**" Are you chasing after fullness, or are you looking for satisfaction? That question takes us to this morning's scripture lesson.

We find ourselves today in the Gospel of John. It was written by the apostle, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," approximately the year 85 AD. Prior to our reading in the sixth chapter, Jesus has fed the five thousand, with five barley loaves and two small fish. It is one of the great miracles in the Bible. How great was the miracle? The story is found in all four Gospels. There is no way of overstating Jesus's popularity. The crowd was wild about Jesus and they followed him to the other side of the sea. Their question for Jesus was how he got there, but Jesus saw the real issue. The crowd was consumed with the issue of food. There is only one problem with food. Food, and the feeling of fullness, doesn't last very long. Have you ever eaten a big meal and pushed yourself away from table proclaiming, "I will never eat again!", only to find yourself hours later standing in front of your refrigerator looking for something to eat? Jesus has nothing against food, but he knows there is more to life than food. The crowd wanted more loaves and fish, but Jesus offers himself, the bread of life. There is more than this temporary world; there is the eternal. Don't miss the next line. In many ways we play the part of the crowd. Many pursue fullness, not satisfaction. The things of this world may fill us up, but they won't satisfy. Only the things of God satisfy. If you can agree with that statement, say, "**Amen!**" How many people do you know who are pursuing fullness?

In the fifth century, a man named Arenius was determined to live a holy life. So he abandoned the comforts of Egyptian society to follow an austere lifestyle in the desert. Yet, whenever he visited the great city of Alexandria, he spent time wandering through its bazaars. Asked why, he explained that his heart rejoiced at the sight of all the things he didn't need.

There are many in our society who need to ponder those words. We live in a society flooded with goods and gadgets. Each one promises fullness. They are things we can live without, but we must have them. This is the problem: Very few can afford everything. That is one of the reasons credit card debt has become a national problem. How many credit cards do you own? How much credit card debt do you carry? Did you

know the average American holds three credit cards? Did you know the average American is \$5700 in credit debt? On average, Americans pay 16.46% in credit card interest. Americans owe a total of \$1.04 trillion in credit card debt. (Those statistics came from Business Insider.) Don't expect it to get better. Our televisions, radios, mailboxes and newspapers are filled with advertisements or suggestions on what to buy. Each one promises to make you and your loved ones happier. Like the crowd in the Bible story, many buy to make themselves full. Can I ask you a question? How long does your purchase keep you happy? Just like the crowd in the Bible story, there is nothing wrong with buying things. But, don't expect those things to make you satisfied. They are all temporary, not eternal. Our society is chasing fullness, not satisfaction. If you find some truth in that statement, say, "**Amen!**" So, what do the experts tell us is the source of true contentment?

As I researched that question this week, I found a variety of lists. They were all different, but they were all the same. I decided to condense those lists into my own list. Here are four things personally satisfied people do:

Personally satisfied people keep investing. I am not talking about financial investing, I am talking about investing in relationships. Sometimes those relationships are family members. Sometimes those relationships are friends. Research tells us, if you have a friend from a different generation from yours, it is a bonus. Our friendships keep us mentally and physically strong. Our friendships help us weather the bad times in our lives. Our friends help us improve the quality of our lives. God never designed us to live in isolation. We are social animals. One of the great fears in our lives is loneliness, so go out and spend time with people. Personally satisfied people invest their lives in other people. If you have one good friend, then you are a rich person. If you have at least one true friend, say, "**Amen!**"

Personally satisfied people keep learning. What do you still want to learn? The day you stop learning something new is the day you become irrelevant. Lifelong learning helps you prepare for the unexpected and expands your profile. Lifelong learning boosts your confidence and generates new ideas. Lifelong learning will change your perspective and cultivate your leadership skills. The choice is yours. You can be part of the modern world, or you can be as relevant as the Amish. Personally satisfied people keep learning. What do you still want to learn? If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

Personally satisfied people keep dreaming. What do you still want to do? God never intended us to live in the past. God never intended us to worship the past. God designed us for a purpose. God expects us to embrace today and dream of a better world tomorrow. Our dreams or goals build our self-confidence, hold us accountable, and help us live our lives to the fullest. Are you living, or are you just waiting to die? What do you still want to do? If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

Personally satisfied people keep trusting. How far do you trust Jesus? Go back to the scripture with me one more time. Jesus had just fed the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish. It was a great miracle and it was a great moment in the lives of the five thousand. When they had finished eating, they couldn't hold another bite. But, a short time later they were hungry again. They looked to Jesus to feed them again. Jesus saw the problem. The crowd was preoccupied with earthly food, but Jesus was more interested in eternal food. The crowd wanted to be full again, but Jesus wanted them to be spiritually satisfied. With this in mind, Jesus tells the crowd and us, "I am the bread of life." In a world that is running after fullness, we long for satisfaction. That is why we will never stop trusting in Jesus. Eternal satisfaction only comes from him. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

It became part of my Sunday night routine. After a busy morning and a slow afternoon, I would turn my television on to CNN at about 10:00. Kathryn was down for the day, so I would watch alone. Regularly, I would watch *Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown*. Have you ever watched it? The show won ten Primetime Emmy Awards and one Peabody Award. It is a travel and food show, but it was more. Bourdain (1956-2018) would slide in his own opinion on various human conditions around the world. I found Bourdain's own story fascinating. It was as diverse as his show. The former cocaine, heroin, and LSD user graduated from the Culinary Institute of America. He was considered one of the most influential chefs in the world. Some of his shows were dark, but some of the shows sucked me in. I had been to some of the places he was visiting, and I longed to go to others. This is the truth: He was living the life I wanted. While I was spending most of my life in the shadows of Youngstown, Ohio, Bourdain was traveling around the world, eating wonderful food, drinking intriguing drinks, talking to bright, insightful people. Through my eyes, Anthony Bourdain seemed to have the perfect life; he had it all. That is why the news was so shocking. You remember. Three days after Kate Spade's death, on June 8, 2018, at the age of 61, Anthony Bourdain committed suicide. He hung himself in France. I couldn't believe it. He left behind a young, pretty wife and his only child, a daughter. I was in shock, and I think I'm still in denial. When I tried to watch the reruns after he was gone, I found myself emotionally upset. Why would a guy who had everything in this world take his own life? The answer is in our scripture lesson for this morning.

The answer is, everything in this world isn't enough. We live in a world that is chasing after fullness. The problem is, the state of being full is only a temporary situation. Only Jesus will satisfy you for eternity. Let me end with this question: How satisfied are you? And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"