

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	54		Gary L.W. Johnson
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### I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

My esteemed teacher, the late S. Lewis Johnson, Sr., in his exposition of John's gospel highlighted the importance of the *I am* sayings: "These seven great *I am* statements found in the gospel of John reveal the perfection of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and identify him plainly with the God of the Bible, the triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, and the person sharing in the one essence. Listen to what he says, *I am the bread of life*. In John 6:35 (<https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/John%206.35>). In John 8:12 (<https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/John%208.12>), *I am the light of the world*. *He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*. In John chapter 9, he repeats it in the fifth verse that he is the light of the world, and then in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter in the 9<sup>th</sup> verse, using another figure he says, *I am the door by me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture*. In verse 11 he says, *I am the good shepherd*. *The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*. And then in chapter 11, at the time of the restoration of Lazarus in verse 25, he says, *I am the resurrection and the life*. *He that believeth in me though he were dead yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die*. *Believest thou this*. In John chapter 14, in verse 6, he says, *I am the way the truth and the life*. *No man cometh unto the Father but by me*. Notice the exclusiveness of the salvation that Jesus Christ claims to possess. And finally the last of the seven great *I am* statements in chapter 15 in verse 1, *I am the true vine*. So here is the passage in which the first of these remarkable statements, which begin with *I am*, is found."<sup>1</sup>

- I. **THE MESSAGE & ITS MEANING.** "The sixth chapter of John's Gospel," wrote A. B. Bruce, "is full of marvels. It tells of a great miracle, a great enthusiasm, a great storm, a great sermon, a great apostasy, and a great trial of faith and fidelity endured by the twelve. It contains, indeed, the compendious history of an important crisis in the ministry of Jesus and the religious experience of His disciples – a crisis in many respects foreshadowing the great final one, which happened little more than a year afterwards, when a more famous miracle still was followed by a greater popularity, to be succeeded in turn by a more complete desertion, and to end in the crucifixion, by which the riddle of the Capernaum discourse was solved, and its prophecy fulfilled."<sup>2</sup>
- II. **THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS.** G. Campbell Morgan gives this summary, "*I am the living Bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: yea, and the bread which I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove one with another, saying, How can this Man give us His flesh to eat? Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For My Flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in him.* In this memorable discourse on the true sustenance of man's spiritual life, while not declaring in detail, no argument is needed to prove that He was speaking out of the consciousness of that Cross by which He would give His flesh for the meat, and His blood for the drink of the world. So far the references have been indirect, proving the consciousness of the Cross in His own mind. Those which follow are clearer, because they

come after Peter's confession, and are subsequent therefore to His clear announcement of the Cross as the issue of His work, to His own disciples."<sup>3</sup>

### III. *JESUS' RESPONSE TO THE MURMURING CROWD.*

- A. *The Source of Life and Resurrection* (John 6:43-44). The answer to the question, "How do we come to the Lord?" is found here. The answer, as we shall see, is through efficacious grace. That secures the saving call of God. It is a divine influence on the human spirit, operating immediately, or directly, on the mind and spirit in the context of the teaching of the Word of God. It is a supernatural influence from the Lord, which overcomes man's deadness, blindness, deafness, and hardness of heart. In answer to the murmuring of the Jews Jesus said, "Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." It is clear that Jesus does not really answer the arguments of the men, but he rather goes straight to the heart of the matter. His point is clear: They must be "taught of God" to come to Him! No man can of himself come to Jesus Christ, and in this fact is taught the important truth of the inability of man. This is the unanimous teaching of the Lord and His apostles as G. C. Berkouwer has shown. "To hear, to learn, to be drawn, to be given, and then to come – that is the evangelical incursion of all synergism. It is the reference to God's electing grace (cf. John 3:27), which in faith and experience is understood, not as a coercion and an annihilating superiority which takes away man's very breath, but as divine liberation. This absoluteness of giving, drawing, and learning we meet in the radical and exclusive testimony of Paul when he says, for instance, that *no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit* (1 Cor. 12:3). The message of Scripture repeatedly accentuates that human inability. The impotence of man is not something pessimism has discovered; it is most literally described in Scripture (cf. John 3:27; 1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:5, 6, 7, 8)."<sup>4</sup> (NSRV). Note the four verbs in these statements: *draw, taught, heard, and learned*. A person cannot come to Jesus if he has not been drawn by the Father, taught by the Father, heard the Father, and learned from the Father. The Father is the initiator, attractor, and teacher of every person who comes to Christ. No one can claim to have come to Christ by his own initiative, volition, and power. If the Father draws, the person comes. This is Jesus' clear teaching backed up by the Prophets (see Isa. 54:13; Jer. 31:34; Mic. 4:2).<sup>5</sup> The salvation of a soul does not arise from the decision of man's free will. It is the Godhead that seeks and saves (cf. 4:23; Luke 19:10). What is stated plainly here has been implied in verse thirty-seven (cf. 12:39).
- B. *The Real Cause of Salvation*. The Greek verb *helkō* ("draw") is found in the Old Testament Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in the sense of the divine attraction of Israel to Yahweh, or in the sense of efficacious grace (cf. Jeremiah 31:3, "with loving kindness have I drawn thee"). In its uses, two things may be of interest. In the first place, there is usually involved a certain resistance on the part of the thing or person drawn (cf. John 12:32; 18:10; 21:6, 11; Acts 16:19). But, as Morris has pointed out, "There is not one example in the New Testament of the use of this verb where resistance is successful."<sup>6</sup> The words "no man can come" point up the total inability of man, but the same God who sends Christ draws men to Him. Occasionally readers of the Bible and theology draw from this doctrine of man's inability the mistaken notion that, therefore, there is no hope for man. Warfield's strictures are important at that point, "We may point out, therefore, that the doctrine of inability does not affirm that we cannot believe, but only that *we cannot believe in our own strength* (italics mine). It affirms only that there is no strength within us by which we may attain to belief. But this is far from asserting that on making the effort we shall find it impossible to believe."<sup>7</sup>
- C. *The Support of the Teaching* (John 6:45-46). The following statement, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God," a reference to Isaiah 54:13, explains that

the drawing of the Father is a biblical teaching. In context the passage in Isaiah refers to the messianic community of Israel, and the force of the passage is simply to say that those who belong to the Messiah need no instruction **from men**, since they carry within themselves the effects of the divine instruction. The very fact that they belong to the Messiah means that they have been taught of God. All of His have been the recipients of preeminent instruction. Thus, our Lord is simply saying that, if His listeners were readers of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, they would know that all the saved are unable to come to Yahweh of themselves and must be first illumined and taught of God to come to Him for salvation. The “all,” then, is the Messianic community in its Old Testament context. The words in Isaiah are, “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord,” and one notices that “thy children” are omitted (lit., **thy** sons), perhaps because in the New Testament context they might be misunderstood to mean that simply all Jews would be taught of God. To be “taught of God,” then, is simply to be “drawn by the Father.” The following words, “Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh to me,” individualizes the “all” of the previous clause. There are three steps, then, in the drawing of the Father: (1) He teaches; (2) they listen and learn; (3) they come. John 6:46 corrects a false impression. It might be thought from the preceding that one must see the Father to be a listener and a learner. This is denied, as 1:18 has indicated. Only one exception exists to the general rule that no man has ever seen God; that exception is the Son of God. He shares the vision of God with no mere man.

- D. ***The Proof of Unconditional Election.*** (cf. John 6:37, 44, 65). There is in this passage an airtight case for the doctrine of unconditional election. It sounds the death knell of Arminianism. It is found in comparison with v. 47 thrown in for good measure. In logic, a *necessary condition* is a circumstance in whose absence a given event could not occur, or a given thing could not exist. A *sufficient condition* is a circumstance such that whenever it exists a given event occurs or a given thing exists. A *necessary and sufficient condition* for the occurrence of a given event (say, for example, divine election) or the existence of a given thing (say, election to salvation) is, therefore, a circumstance in whose absence the event could not occur or the thing could not exist, and which is also such that *whenever it exists, the event occurs or the thing exists*. In other words, when we have a necessary and sufficient condition for the occurrence of a given event existing, then the event occurs, or the thing exists. The reason that the existence of a necessary and sufficient condition for the occurrence of a given event, or the existence of a given thing, makes for an airtight case for the event or thing is that it provides a complete induction and admits of no exceptions. In John 6:37 Jesus says, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” We have here a *sufficient condition* for coming to Christ. If the individual is “given,” then he will come. Every single individual given shall come. There is no failure in coming, if one is given. It is sufficient to be given to come or, to put it a bit more clearly, in order to come one must simply be given. All the given come. Now in John 6:65 Jesus says, “Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were *given* unto him of my Father.” We have here a necessary condition for coming to Christ. No man can come unto Him, except it were given to him of the Father. Every single individual who comes to Christ must have been previously given to Christ by the Father. There is no failure in coming, if one is *given*. It is necessary to be given, before one can come. To put it as clearly as possible, all who come have been given. Incidentally, what does it mean to be “*given*”? It is clear from the usage of the term in the gospel and elsewhere (although it is particularly a Johannine expression) that the giving by the Father antedates the coming to Christ. The tenses, a perfect passive periphrastic in v. 65 and the perfect in v. 39, make that plain. Further, it is clear that the giving includes the prevenient drawing by the Father, a work indicating convincingly

that all the initiative in coming lies with God. Thus, we have in the “giving” a pre-salvation giving of the Father to the Son of all who come, or believe. In addition, they come for salvation and resurrection (cf. vv. 39, 44). And what they are given, life and resurrection, is only for the ones given to the Son. What is it to be given but to be elected to eternal life. To be given to the Son for the divine work of the communication of life and resurrection is simply to be chosen by God for eternal life. Thus, we have an airtight case for divine, unconditional (the ground of the giving is said several times to be simply the will of the Father; cf. vv. 38, 39, 40) election. All the given ones come. All who come have been given. There are no exceptions. The necessary and sufficient conditions for the event, or state, of divine election exist in fact and in history. Divine, sovereign, unconditional election is the teaching of our Lord.

**CONCLUSION:** “*The bread of life* also points to the satisfying nature of Jesus. This is drawn out in the corollary, *never go hungry* and *never be thirsty*. All other breads, like the manna in the wilderness, leave a sense of dissatisfaction. The inner ache is not permanently assuaged; we hunger again. By contrast Jesus, once tasted, obviates the need for further satisfaction. As Jesus had said to the woman in 4:14, *whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst*, so now he says to the Galileans, *he who believes in me will never be thirsty*. Jesus alone can satisfy the heart. In a society which has experimented to the point of satiation with every form of material, physical and spiritual palliative to fill the inner emptiness of its heart, Jesus’ invitation comes with wonderful relevance – *He who comes to me will never go hungry . . . will never be thirsty.*”<sup>8</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to my former professor of Theology, at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, S. Lewis Johnson, for his penetrating analysis of this section of John’s Gospel. Cf. his “Human Inability and Divine Ability, or Thinking Christians and Unconditional Election,” *Believer’s Bible Bulletin* (June, 1982). These have been made available at <http://sljinstitute.net/gospel-of-john/the-bread-of-life/>

<sup>2</sup> A. B. Bruce, *The Training of The Twelve* (rpt. Kregel, 1971), p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Crisis of The Christ* (rpt. Revell, 1966), p. 281.

<sup>4</sup> J. H. Bernard, *The Gospel According to St. John I* (T & T Clark, 1928), p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> P. W. Comfort and W. C. Hawley, *Opening The Gospel of John* (Tyndale, 1994), p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel of John* (Eerdmans, 1981), p. 371.

<sup>7</sup> *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* (P & R, 1973), p. 726.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Milne, *The Message of John* (IVP, 1993), p. 111.