

the deepest and most intimate way the cleansing grace and renewing life of Jesus into our own lives.

Augustine maintains that our Lord “would have this meat and drink to be understood as meaning the fellowship of His own body and members, which is the holy Church... This it is, therefore for a man to eat that meat and to drink that drink, to dwell in Christ, and to have Christ dwelling in him.”

### Applying it all to ourselves

We could, of course, think about this question of Jesus as the Bread of life as a controversy between Jesus and the Jews of his time – an interesting academic exercise.

But the question comes down to our relationship to Jesus. We reflect that the conversation and teaching took place before the cross and resurrection. We cannot think about it without reference to those great redemptive events. So we are historically “on the other side”. And, as believers, we are already committed to him as we reflect on these words.

- What does it mean to us to call Jesus “the Bread of Life”?
- What is the vital nourishment he came to give?
- What are the means by which we receive his life into our lives?

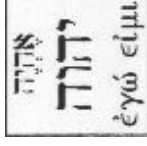
### For the people of our day...

Jesus came for ordinary people – and for all people! He didn’t only come for first-century Jews, but for twentieth-century Australians. As we read these “I am” sayings of Jesus, we recognise that all of them are saying quite definitely that Jesus relates very much to the needs of all human beings. We need to be thinking about our fellow-Australians and ask ourselves...

- How would Australians respond to the idea of Jesus as “the Bread of Life”?
- What associated ideas are there in the Australian culture that would help to communicate this teaching about Jesus?

**Study 2: “The Light of the World” Reading: John 8.12-19; 9.5.**

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How things have changed! There was a time when a friend dropping in for a friendly chat would call out at the open front door, “[Your name], it’s me!” The less familiar would knock loudly, perhaps adding, “Is anyone at home?” A voice would come from inside, “Who is it?”

But things have changed! The door now is most likely shut and locked. Or you push the button and wait. Sometimes you hear approaching footsteps and see a darkening at the security peep hole as someone checks you out. Or perhaps the door opens a little way – as far as the security chain will let it. Or perhaps you hear the person identifying you over the intercom at the door. I have even been identified by a closed-circuit TV camera.

In Revelation 3.20, John records Jesus saying, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (NIV).

Well may we ask, “Who is it?” These days we have good reason for caution. Not everyone who wants entrance should be let into our lives. And this one is not some passing trader who hopes to sell his wares. No! This one comes with the express intention and desire to share all of our lives with us.

“Who is it?” We know that his name is Jesus – but who is he really? what are his claims and credentials?

In these studies we will be looking at some of his claims – the ones recorded in John’s Gospel. They all begin with the words “I am”.

### The Situation in Jesus’ Time

At the beginning of the chapter, we read about the feeding of the five thousand.

Jesus had been wanting time away from the crowds, time with his disciples. They had crossed to the far shore of the sea of Galilee, but the crowds had followed. In the events that followed, a boy offered his lunch – five small barley loaves and two small fish.

“Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish” (v.11).

The people were impressed – “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world” (v.14) – a reference to the “prophet like Moses” foretold in Deuteronomy 18.15.

Jesus and his disciples set off again by boat during the night for Capernaum. The next morning, realising that he had gone, the crowd set off for Capernaum looking for him.

**Reading: John 6.25-58.**

Whenever John describes a miracle, he calls it a “sign”. We could almost call it a “sign-post”. Leon Morris comments, “It is characteristic of them not so much that they arouse wonder and are hard to explain, nor even that they are demonstrations of divine power, but rather that they point us to something beyond themselves. They show us God at work. They are meaningful.”

There are, of course, some sign-posts that are made for themselves. They are really a fancy kind of cairn marking a place of arrival. Tourists stand under them for a photograph to show the “arms” indicating the country or place of their origin. Most signs are designed to point you somewhere else. They are sign-posts, not cairns – and certainly not eating-houses!

The people who were looking for Jesus had witnessed a miracle but not read the sign-post! They wanted “more of the same” – an eating-house – but needed more than anything else to believe in Jesus (note vv.27,29). The true “bread from heaven” is “he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (vv.32-33).

• There is a spiritual quest on today. It affects people inside and outside the church. What are they looking for – sign-posts? or cairns? (or maybe, eating-houses?)

Jesus now makes it a direct and unmistakable claim – “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (v.35).

To quote Leon Morris again, “The bread of which He speaks is not something like the manna, which they can pick up and eat. It is nothing less than Himself. His ‘I am’ is a solemnly emphatic statement, and in this context has overtones of divinity. This is the first of seven such emphatic statements in this Gospel. Each one brings home an important aspect of the person and the ministry of Jesus. ‘The bread of life’ is another way of linking life in the closest fashion with Christ. He Himself is the food, the sustenance that nourishes spiritual life. It is only from this bread that men really obtain life.”

It has become fashionable today to speak about “spirituality”. Jesus was claiming that true spiritual life can only begin and continue as people put

their faith in the Son. “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (v.40).

• To what extent are we aware of a quest for “spirituality”? Where are people looking for spiritual strength?

• What do we think Jesus meant when he called himself “the Bread of Life”?

Jesus is the Bread of Life, the “living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever” (v.51). So far, so good. But Jesus goes further. The verse ends, “This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”!

Earlier, the Jews had said, “Sir, from now on give us this bread” (v.34). But now they are arguing about what he means. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v.52)

Possibly the average reader is thinking the same! We could quite happily drop out that sentence, skip the next few verses and pick up the conclusion at v.58. That would be just fine. We could gather some fine spiritual analogies and be spiritually uplifted.

Sorry, we can’t do that! Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me” (vv.53-58).

That sort of statement is enough to get us all arguing sharply among ourselves. What is it all about? I recall reading a long document many years ago in which the author, a Roman Catholic, was arguing strongly that this teaching was clearly supportive of the Catholic doctrine of the Mass – transubstantiation and all!

But the words of Jesus are much too literal for that. Leon Morris strongly doubts that the words held any primary application to the sacrament. Jesus may have been speaking things too deep for his hearers, but he was not speaking in riddles!

And, of course, he was not speaking of cannibalism! What we eat and drink becomes part of us. To eat his flesh and drink his blood is to receive in