

Sermon

Sunday, 12th July 2009

Last week Rosslyn spoke about Moses' experience of God,
And the way that God showed himself to Moses at the burning bush,
God said I am who I am,
Today and for the rest of these summer services we will continue to look at that theme of God revealing himself in Jesus as we study Jesus' "I am" sayings.
But it is important to realise from the very outset that what we are dealing with here are not merely adjectives and images that Jesus used to describe himself,
Not merely words to help people get a grip on what he was all about,
To help people to understand better his mission and purpose,
Instead we are looking at the very nature of God,
Who is God?

I am
And that is revealed in each of these saying of Jesus,
What begun with Moses reaches its culmination in Jesus
This is theology in its purest form
And faith at it very heartbeat,
What God is like and how God acts in our world.

As Rosslyn pointed out last week,
The very first thing we can say about God,
Is that he is not some distant force in the sky,
Not some unreachable power outside of the universe,
Instead he is the God who comes to us,
He is the God who speaks with us,
He is the God who expresses himself to us,
He is the God who says I am,
It is me,
I am here.

Today in our studies we look at Jesus' words,
I am the bread of life.

At first it might seem a strange way to describe yourself,
Where on earth did that image come from,
What does Jesus mean when he says I am the bread of life?

In order to answer that question
We need step back and see the whole of what Jesus is talking about
We have to realise that everything Jesus says is set not in a vacuum
but in a place and time,
Within the experience of a people.

Jesus says I am the bread of life,
And these words are uttered just after Jesus has carried out the miracle of the feeding of the crowds,
The 5000 men and the women and the children,
With the five loaves and two fishes on the mountainside,
Bread that never runs out,
Food for a hungry people.

Now you might think,
Oh that's why he describes himself as bread,
Because of the feeding of the 5000!

But there is so much more.

The Jews were a people with a history of God
An experience of God from the very inception of their nation that they held onto so dearly,
For them the greatest experiences of God,
Date back to their earliest history,
And the experience of Moses leading the people in the desert,
God providing for them,
Leading them,
And making them into a nation,
Ready to take hold of the promised land,
Delivering to them the law and the 10 commandments,
The principles that have shaped the Jewish life from the very first to this very day

Most Jews look to the Exodus as the greatest point in history,
And certainly in Jesus time,
As a nation occupied by an enemy force – the Romans,
And a people of little influence,
Their dream is that there will be a new exodus,
A time when God will bring forth a new leader,
The messiah,
And lead the people back to being a great nation.

Off course as he taught and carried out his miracles,
And touched people's lives,
Many began to wonder,
Is Jesus the messiah?
So they began to look at the promises of the messiah and see if they fit Jesus.

One of the signs of the messiah in the Jewish faith,
Is that like Moses he will feed the people with the manna from heaven,
He will give them the bread of heaven,
The bread of life.

After the feeding of the five thousand they have to ask,
Is this the one who will give us the bread from heaven,
Not that they thought the bread and the fishes were manna,
No,
But they have to ask for the sign they have to say give us the sign that you are the one,
Give us the bread of heaven.

The problem is that the Jews were looking through rose tinted glasses,
They were looking back,
As we too so often do,
And seeing how wonderful everything was in the past,
And longing for it to be the same again.

They had forgotten

That for all the manna the people gathered in the wandering in the desert,
It was just bread
It just kept the people from going hungry and nothing else,
It didn't give them special powers,
It didn't allow them to live forever!
And they have forgotten too,
That though this bread came from heaven,
It didn't make a big difference in the faith of the people
In a short time those righteous ancestors were grumbling because they didn't have enough
variety in their diet!

Maybe what they were looking for from Jesus,
Was what they got from Moses,
A set of rules to follow,
A way to live life that would guarantee success.
Maybe that's what they wanted from the one they called rabbi – teacher,
A set of rules to follow to guarantee heaven,
If I do this then no matter what I will be certain of a good life.

But when God reveals himself to us,
When we talk about the nature of God,
When God says to us I am,
He is not offering to us a set of rules to live by.

So Jesus has to remind them that it is not Moses who gives the people the manna,
The bread comes from God,
And that manna,
Was not the bread of life,
It was just food for their bodies,
It did not meet all their needs,

Jesus describes something more when he calls himself the bread of life,

The old manna could not satisfy,
Any more than the law of Moses could make them good,
His words declare that there is no secret code to follow to get to heaven,
There is no work that you can do to earn your way to eternity,
There is no project you can undertake that will force God to invite you to join him in the forever!

It is not a rule or a code of an action offers life,
It is a person.
Jesus is the bread of life,
And it is relationship with Jesus,
And relationship with him alone that leads to eternity.

For many of them that is more than they can take,
The scandal of the incarnation is too much to believe in,
That God should become one of us
They knew Jesus' mother,
They knew his father,
They had seen him grow up,
They had watched his family at work.

They see only the man,
Not the bread of life.

Jesus says I am the bread of life.

I love watching programmes on TV about people who go on adventures,
Folk like Ewan McGregor and Charlie Boorman,
Who travelled the world on motorbikes,
Or Michael Palin who has followed some of the journeys of the greatest of explorers.
One of the interesting things that to me seem to come out of these adventures,
Is that for all the different cultures,
And for all the different ways that people live their lives,
There are some things that we all have in common,
And wherever you look bread is one of those common things,
It may come in many different forms,
But it's still bread,
It is one of the basic rations of the life that we need to stay alive.

Yet whatever the bread,
It is still just food for our bodies,
It still just keeps us going,
It feeds our bellies,
But we get hungry again,
It does not solve our problems,
It does not take away our fear and our shame,
It does not deal with our hurt,
Nor answer our questions about the meaning of life.

What Jesus offers to us,
Is as basic a need in our lives as bread,
What he offers to us is relationship with himself,
What he offers to us is relationship with God,
What he offers to us is the chance to be close to God,
Not just for a moment for all of our lives,
But forever.
What he offers is unity with God,
For all eternity,
What he offers to us is the filling of all our needs,
An end to that hunger for meaning and purpose that yearns in our lives.
Why am I here?
You were made for relationship with God,
What will make me happy?
Knowing that you are loved and precious to God,
Knowing that you have nothing that gets between you and God.
What will happen to me?
You will know God's peace in your life,
When you know him as friend,
For all eternity.

Willie Barclay said it best

“The hunger of the human situation is ended when we know Christ,

**and through him, know God.
The restless soul is at rest,
the hungry heart is satisfied.”**

But so many can't see past the man,
So many can't see the hope beyond the ordinary,
So many try to live the rules,
To be a good person
And never get the relationship,
Never discover the joy,
Never experience the love.

Jesus said, I am the bread of life.

So come to him,
Come and be filled,
He is able to fill your hunger
He is able heal your wounds and mend your brokenness
He is able to love even the unlovely in you,
He is able to surround you with hope for eternity,

Come, come to bread of life, come and be filled
Amen.