

S T U D Y G U I D E



Knowing Christ

THE "I AM" SAYINGS OF JESUS

by R.C. Sproul



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421 Ligonier Court, Sanford, FL 32771

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The Bread of Life

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Throughout the public ministry of Jesus, many opinions arose about who exactly this Man from Nazareth was. We see this most clearly in the conversation between Jesus and His disciples in Mark 8:27–30, when the apostle Peter confesses Him as the Christ. The “I AM” sayings of Jesus recorded in the gospel of John, however, do not focus on what others thought of Him; rather, our Savior’s pronouncements disclose His own understanding of Himself as deity, including His saving relationship toward the world. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul discusses the first of Jesus’ self-revealing statements in the book of John: “I am the bread of life.”

SCRIPTURE READING

John 6:22–59; Luke 22:14–20; Exodus 3:1–22, 16:1–36

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to explain how the structure of Jesus’ “I AM” statements allude to the great I AM of the Exodus.
2. To be able to summarize the content of the passage (what Jesus is saying about Himself).

QUOTATIONS

And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. . . . I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

—John 6:35, 51

... Gods Tender Bowells run
 Out streams of Grace: And he to end all strife
 The Purest Wheate in Heaven, his deare-dear Son
 Grinds, and kneads up into this Bread of Life.
 Which Bread of Life from Heaven down came and stands
 Disht on thy Table up by Angells Hands.

—Edward Taylor, “Meditation 8: I Am the Living Bread”

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. “I am the bread of life”: the structure

- A. In John 6:35, the Greek word rendered “I am” is most commonly seen as *eimi*, and when the emphatic first-person singular is intended, *ego*.
- B. But Jesus is recorded as speaking neither. He uses *ego eimi* (“I am, I am . . .” or, “I, even I, am . . .”), which is more rare outside of John’s gospel.
- C. *Ego eimi* also can be found in the Septuagint’s version of Exodus 3:14, “And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’”
- D. This serves, then, as a thinly veiled reference to Yahweh, the redeemer and covenant Lord of Israel.

II. “I am the bread of life”: the content

- A. In John 6:32, Jesus points out that the manna that sustained the lives of the wilderness-wandering Israelites did not come from Moses but from heaven.
- B. In like manner, according to Jesus in verse 33, He Himself has come down from heaven, giving life to the world.
- C. There is a connection between the purposes of God in Christ and the descending/ascending of Jesus. Just as He ascended with a purpose (to sit in triumph as Mediator at the Father’s right hand), so He descended with a purpose (redemption).
- D. For this reason, Jesus declares in John 3:13 that “No one has ascended to heaven.” He is not suggesting that no human has gone to glory; rather, He is stating that to ascend means more than “to go up,” for no one has ascended with Christ’s purposes except “He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man.”
- E. What, then, is His purpose? In the verses following Jesus’ designation of Himself as life-giving bread, He affirms three main things:
 - i. That His mission is one of doing the will of His Father (v. 38).
 - ii. That God has sent Him as the bread of life to give life to those to whom the Father has given the Son, not one of whom shall be lost (v. 39).
 - iii. That the purpose of God is that everyone who believes in the Son may have eternal life (v. 40).
- F. Amid the growing conflict among the Jews in this passage, Jesus reaffirms His previous statements even more clearly by declaring in verse 44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (note the necessary condition: “unless”).

- G. The words *to draw* have caused much debate in church history.
- H. One thing is clear: this “drawing” is effective. The one who has been given to the Son by the Father will indeed come to the Son. His or her inner disposition is changed, and the bread of life is now made sweet to an otherwise hateful palate.
- I. Although not the primary focus of the text, note the parallels to the Last Supper in the Upper Room where Jesus institutes the Eucharist, breaking the bread and saying, “This is my body . . .” (e.g. Luke 22:19).
- J. Thus, in John 6, Jesus binds the idea of life tightly to Himself. He is both the sustainer of life, nourishing us, as well as the very fountainhead from which it springs.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The structure of Jesus’ statements in John 6:35 serves to accentuate _____.
 - a. The Lord’s Supper
 - b. Jesus’ inextricable tie to Yahweh
 - c. The rarity of the use of *ego emei* (“I am, I am . . .”)
 - d. The apostle John’s superb writing ability
2. The First Advent, or descending of Christ to earth, is symbolically related to what other event?
 - a. The Exodus
 - b. The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70
 - c. Pentecost
 - d. The Ascension
3. Out of those who have been given to the Son by the Father, which ones shall be lost?
 - a. Legalists
 - b. Liberal politicians
 - c. No one
 - d. Bartenders
4. What is the primary purpose of God in Christ as revealed in John 6:35–40?
 - a. To give eternal life to everyone who believes in the Son
 - b. To grant His people material success in this life
 - c. To make all of life joyful and happy
 - d. To save people by means of the Eucharist
5. What doctrine can be clearly drawn from John 6:44?
 - a. Reprobation
 - b. The last days
 - c. Holy Communion
 - d. Effectual calling

6. The “drawing” of John 6:44 can otherwise mean which of the following?
 - a. Forceful dragging
 - b. Wooing by persuasion
 - c. Compelling by changing the inner disposition
 - d. Simply giving a choice

7. What idea does Jesus closely associate Himself with in John 6:22–58?
 - a. Kingship
 - b. Death
 - c. Life
 - d. Contentment

BIBLE STUDY

1. Since St. John does not mention the institution of the Lord’s Supper during Jesus’ farewell discourse (John 13:18–30), some theologians contend that the apostle uses this occasion to impart his doctrine of the sacrament. Read John 6:53. How might this verse, if speaking about Communion, undermine the doctrine of salvation as portrayed elsewhere in the New Testament? In what ways might John 6:22ff be a secondary indirect reference to the sacrament?
2. Read John 6:49–51. Given Jesus’ repeated reference to manna, what might Jewish expectations be regarding the coming of the Messiah? (What event was under way when manna first fell?) Are they able to see the spiritual nature of the coming kingdom? What limitation does manna have according to Jesus? What, in contrast, supercedes Moses’ manna?
3. Focus on John 6:51. How would this offering of the bread of heaven “for the life of the world”—not just the nation of Israel—upset the Jewish expectations referred to in the previous question?

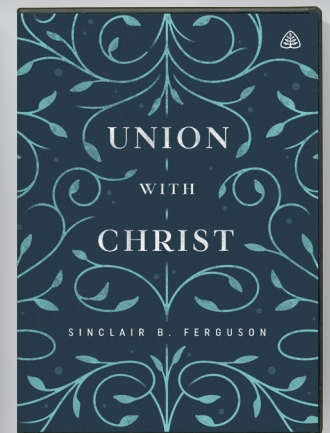
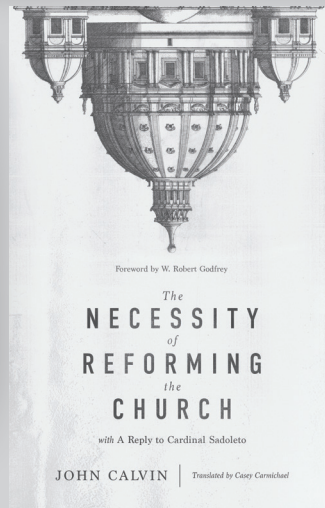
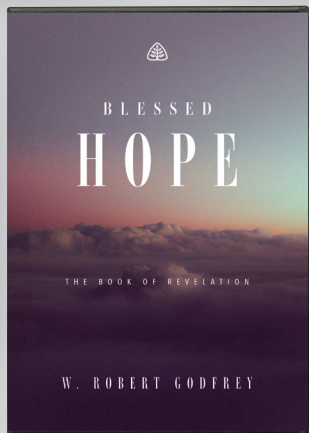
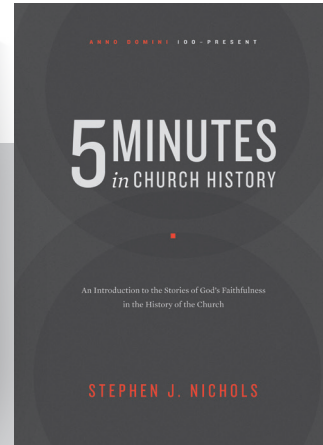
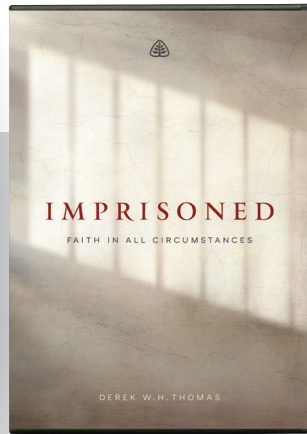
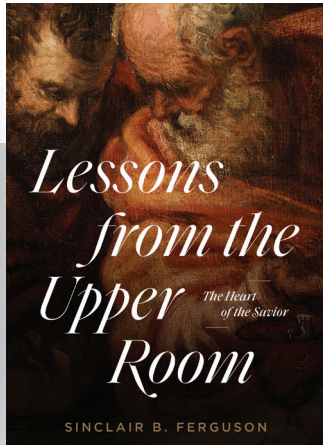
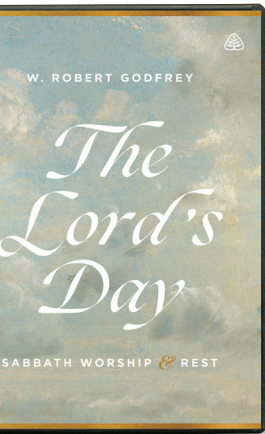
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you explain the words *unless* and *draws* in John 6:44?
2. In what ways might your daily walk with God change, knowing that His Son is not only the source of your life, but its very sustenance? How might this adjust your view of Holy Communion if it is indeed related to the text at hand?
3. It has been rightly said that either Jesus is the Son of God or a liar. How would you use this text (John 6:22ff) to defend against the idea that the Bible makes no claim that Jesus is both God and man?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Calvin, John. *John, The Crossway Classic Commentaries*, pp. 158–72 (This is Calvin’s abridged commentary on the gospel of John 6:34–58.)

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