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**I AM
the Bread
of Life**

996-B

Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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That was some boat ride. It was bad enough leaving the shore without the Master, not even sure why He had not come. But add to that the bruising winds that suddenly appeared as we sailed and began beating on the boat, why, it seemed the harder we rowed, the harder the wind blew. At first, those who were not doing the rowing laughed at us as though we were not giving it all we had. So we gave them the oars and said, "You row!" (Then the laughing stopped.)

It was a wicked wind. "Oh, if only the Master were here," I heard someone behind me say. "All He would have to do is say *hush* and the winds would cease." It's true! Even the wind and the rain obey His voice! But where could He be? He told us He'd come. Maybe we were a bit hasty in heading for Capernaum. At any rate, He's not here and we are; all we can do now is just row harder! The sweat is pouring from my brow. My hands are raw from rowing, and it's too late to turn back. We're too far across to do that. What do we do? What does one do when he is already afloat in the sea and the winds are blowing, and there seems to be no turning back? What does one do?

Good grief! What is that form in the distance? It's...it's... coming toward us. It's too small to be a ship. From here, it almost looks like a...person. But, no, it can't be a person. Not on top of the water. A person would drown! It's getting closer now, and all the other guys are as scared as I am! Peter is the first to say anything. (He always is!) "It's a ghost! It's a ghost!" he begins to shout! Soon the others all chime in. "It's a ghost, a ghost!" Everyone begins to yell in unison. Boy, what a bunch of cowards we turn out to be.

No, it wasn't a ghost. You've probably heard the story. It was Jesus. He was coming toward us, walking on top of the water! We just weren't prepared for that. I thought, for a moment, it was going to be every man overboard, and that we were going to take off swimming in a thousand different directions. But just about that time, He spoke, "It is I AM, do not fear." It was as if the weight of a thousand pounds had been lifted from our shoulders. "It's Jesus! It's Jesus!" we all began to scream. His very presence

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should have been enough to satisfy us. But, no, not Peter. He had to try to become the world's first amphibious disciple. "Lord, if it's you, let me try it, too," he bellowed, as he climbed over the side of the boat. Jesus did. You know the rest of the story. As long as he looked at Jesus, Peter could walk on the water, too. But the minute he turned and focused his eyes on the storm, he sank like a ten-ton rock.

At any rate, Jesus then climbed into the boat with us, and immediately the storm ceased; and we all proceeded to our destination, somewhat embarrassed, but somewhat relieved.

The next morning, we later learned, there was sheer pandemonium on the other side of the lake. Rumor had it that the KGB was watching us. Of course, the KGB hadn't been invented 2,000 years ago, so it must have been our imagination! For at sun-up, lo and behold, huge crowds began to form by the shoreline across the lake. They had seen us take the one boat, but they hadn't seen Jesus leave at all. Immediately, they began to play "Clue". Clue#1: There were no other boats missing. Question: Was Jesus still somewhere in the vicinity? If not, how had He got away? They hadn't had any M-A-S-H reruns back then, so nobody knew what a helicopter was. Therefore, they surmised that either Jesus was somewhere on that hillside, or that we had returned late at night to get Him. The crowds guessed the latter and began to board the little ships that had been left behind, heading for Capernaum, to see if, in fact, Jesus had somehow miraculously joined us. It didn't take them long to find us. Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. They rushed in and interrupted:

Rabbi, Rabbi, when did you get here? (John 6:25b NIV)

The curious throngs began to shout, as they mobbed the Master. His patience with their constant probing was beyond our understanding. What business was it of theirs how or when He got there? I mean, if He wanted to take a rocket ship to the moon and come back by way of Capernaum, what was that to them? (I'm just kidding, of course, rocket ships were not available yet for general travel.) But you understand, the crowds just wouldn't leave him alone. I'll never forget Jesus' answer. He didn't ignore them, but neither did He refuse to deal with the shallowness of their faith. He looked them straight in the eye and said this:

"I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and

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had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”
(John 6:26,27 NIV)

A somewhat dignified man, who appeared to be some kind of expert on religious matters responded quickly and asked:

“What must we do to do the works God requires?”
(John 6:28 NIV)

There was dead silence. It was as though this man was being half cynical, half serious. It was as if, on the one hand, he was asking if anything man could do could satisfy God, and yet, on the other hand, beneath his cynicism, there was a kind of frantic searching for Truth. Jesus responded, quickly:

“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”
(John 6:29 NIV)

Once again, it was as though a holy hush spread throughout the congregation. You could have heard a pin drop! (On second thought, I don't think we had invented pins yet.) But at any rate, it was quiet. I recognized the hulk of a man who moved his way to the front of the crowd. He had been following Jesus wherever He went. Often he listened; often he questioned. Now his deep demanding voice rose above the crowd:

“What miraculous sign then, will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”
(John 6:30,31 NIV)

Again, silence prevailed. It was as though this man spoke for them all. We disciples didn't totally understand all that Jesus was saying ourselves. This guy's question seemed logical to me, and yet Jesus had just fed five thousand men with five loaves and two fish. What more of a sign did they want? Or did they really want a sign? Weren't they just trying to goad him into performing more miracles? I don't think anyone goaded the Master into doing anything. And I don't think these people really knew who it was they were dealing with, either. In fact, neither did I at the time. Well, at least they knew their Old Testament Scriptures. But then the Master spoke again, and He shattered with one sentence their whole logic and lifted the entire conversation from the realm of earth to the realm of heaven. You ask, what did He say? He said this:

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“I tell you the truth, 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. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

(John 6:32,33 NIV)

Suddenly a quiet sense of understanding began to flood my soul. It was as though a veil had been lifted, and the words Jesus had spoken began to fill my heart with light, just as the stars filled the eastern sky at night. It was as though the Lamp of God began to burn in my spirit for the first time. Jesus was talking about Himself! Now the pieces of the puzzle began to fall quickly into place. In one gracious movement, the hand of God reached down and laid each part where it belonged, until like a blazing fire, the Truth exploded in my mind. It all began to make sense. It all began to crystallize into the foundation upon which Jesus’ ministry would be built. At last, I understood! Do you?

God in human form was standing before fallen man and painting on the canvas of man’s heart, using the paintbrush of Jewish history, a living image of who He is, and who He ever shall be. No, these men were not worried about who He was. They were worried about how He got to the other side of the lake. And no, they were not impressed with His nature, nor even with those expressions of His nature that were manifested in the miracles they so enjoyed. They were only impressed with how those miracles affected them. The reason was, they were living in a different realm. They were living in the realm of the flesh; He was living in the realm of the Spirit. So even those physical miracles and those practical stories about physical realities were for only one purpose...to teach spiritual truth. And they missed it all.

They loved the miracles and they enjoyed the stories...but they missed the message. The message: He is I AM! This man who stood before them so humbly, so patiently responding to their endless taunts, was God Himself. They were not interested in who He was. They were interested in food, and He gave them lots of it. They were interested in witnessing the phenomenal, and He allowed them to do that regularly. Now, instantly, Jesus pointed His finger once again at their shallowness and said, “Do not labor for food that spoils; but for food that endures to eternal life.”

Do not labor for food that spoils? What does He mean? Of course! He means, do not live your life for that which is in the very process of decaying the moment you touch it. He means give

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your life for something eternal. But, you say, we're Jehovah's leaders! We're followers of God! But that's not what He meant. He said give your life for that which endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you. He is saying there is something we cannot earn, something so divinely supernatural, that God Himself must give it to us; and once we have it, we have a reason for living.

No, the multitudes didn't get it. They wanted to know what kind of works they had to do to earn whatever it was that God was giving out. So they baited Jesus by asking just what it would take to get God's favor. What kind of works did they need to do? They missed it. He's the work of God. "The work of God is this... to believe in the one He has sent." The work of God is an act of faith...nothing more. Oh, my soul, do the others see it? I wanted to go and shake Peter and James and shout it to the rooftops, "Do you see? Jesus is it! Jesus is I AM!" But their faces still looked so blank. Surely, I can't fault them. I too, had been walking in His steps day after day, listening to His every word, and keeping, as I could, His every commandment. But, oh, dear God, I missed it! It isn't what I do! Or even what I will do that pleases the Father... it's believing who He is that pleases the Father, and if I am to do the works of God, I must simply acknowledge that Jesus is I AM.

They wanted a sign, and yet the very sign they used to ask for was a living proclamation of "Who He Is!" They said, "Our forefathers ate manna in the desert." Jesus didn't deny that. He simply told them why our forefathers ate manna in the desert. God, the Father, was etching into history a symbol, a type of the Truth that one day would come into the world in the form of reality. The miracle of manna was nothing! It was who manna is that matters. Jesus answered and said to us... "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. The Bread of God is He...

The bread of God is He? That's it! Bread is a person. That physical manna was a divine portrait painted thousands of years in advance, of the person God was going to send to feed the souls of men. Our ancestors ate that food, and the next day, they were hungry again. But He is I AM. When He feeds our spirits, they are eternally satisfied. I keep wanting to run around in a circle and shout it so everyone can hear it, "He is I AM. He is I AM," but they'd just send me away to the North Jerusalem Asylum for religious fanatics. They wouldn't understand. So all I can do is praise Him in my heart, until the daystar dawns in their hearts,

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as well. Shh! Our strong-voiced spokesman is about to respond, and there is a chorus of his friends shouting amen. Listen!

“Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”

(John 6:34 NIV)

Oh, dear God, they want what you have; but, oh, dear God, they do not want who you are. How many, I wonder, down through the ages to come, will echo that same empty cry? “Sir... from now on...give us this bread...”

They didn’t want to have to bake and cook again. They didn’t want to have to raise their crops again. They wanted God to give them all of the neat things in this life they believed God owed them. How comfortable. How pleasant. How simple. How easy. “Sir, give us this bread...Sir, give us free lunches...and we’ll praise you...”

Jesus wasted no time. He answered them and said:

“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. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.”

(John 6:35,36 NIV)

“I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If a man eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

(John 6:47-51 NIV)

Immediately bedlam broke out. Everyone started talking at once. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” they began to murmur. “He is mad! Does He look like a loaf of bread? What nonsense!” they laughed. Jesus was trying to communicate the nature of God, and they were hung up on what a loaf of bread looks like. Jesus was talking about heaven, and they couldn’t see heaven for the likes of food.

But what does He mean: “This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world”? That puzzles me. It puzzled the rest of them as well. So Jesus didn’t stop. He went on.

Jesus said to them, “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

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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. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”
(John 6:53-58 NIV)

I wish I could describe what happened next. It was almost as though a great statesman, who had gained the following of the whole world, suddenly said something that alienated 90% of his following. A stunned, silent crowd recoiled in horror. “Eat my flesh? Drink my blood?” A cloud settled over that once-exuberant crowd, and it was, as though this man, Jesus had uttered something either too unacceptable or too incomprehensible, to be believed. Like a crowd at the end of a sporting event moving toward the exits, suddenly there began a mass exodus away from where the Master was standing. The rest of the disciples watched in horror. They were torn. Men and women they had encouraged to come to hear their King were shrinking back in horror, and cold, distant glances were being exchanged among them.

I heard one of our closest followers standing to my left, utter those immortal words:

“This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”
(John 6:60 NIV)

Not hard. Impossible. Suddenly, it began to dawn upon me what the Master had just said. Once again, that light that had begun to glow in my spirit, welled up within me one more time, and I began to sense a holy awe at what King Jesus had just uttered. Jesus wasn't talking about eating His flesh. He was talking about appropriating His nature, and that included identifying with Him in whatever the Father had in mind for Him. For a time, I thought He was about to be crowned King of Israel. Now I knew better. Just as quickly as the crowds had formed at His feet, they had dispersed at the sound of one harsh phrase. One thing stuck in my mind; He seemed to be likening our relationship to Him to His relationship to God, the Father. That is an awesome thought. My mind cannot grasp it. Yet that is what He said!

Meanwhile, as these thoughts raced through my troubled mind, all about me the masses were dispersing. “Surely He will say something to soften the blow,” I thought. “Surely He will ask them to come back to hear a more gentle explanation.” Listen, He's about to speak. He seems to be ignoring the throngs that are

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leaving; He seems to be about to speak to us instead. Quiet. Let's hear what He has to say:

“Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.”

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. (John 6:61b-64,67 NIV)

I could not help but wonder if generations yet to come would not, somehow, see this split second in time as the dividing line between the acceptance and rejection of Jesus Christ as King of Israel. Suddenly the pushing, shoving, screaming crowds who had been reaching out with all the strength they possessed just to touch this man's garment, were no more. As suddenly as they gathered, they were gone. The silence was deafening. “Do you want to leave, too?” That's what Jesus had just asked us. Once again, Peter spoke for the whole of the clan. Voice trembling, obviously shaken, Peter answered:

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:68,69 NASV)

“Lord, to whom shall we go?” Perhaps no greater words would ever be spoken by man to God.

Much has happened since that fateful day in Capernaum, when the God of Eternity, clothed in human flesh, stopped giving man what He wanted and told man what He needed instead. Not only did His popularity wane, His every waking moment turned into what appeared to be a race against time, as the very people He came to save became obsessed with His destruction.

I watched in horror as they plotted to kill the Son of Glory. I listened in disbelief as we reclined at the table that night, and the Master said that one of us would betray Him. I followed after Him, tears streaming down my face, as He bore the weight of that awful Cross. I looked on, as though I had been transported into a world of horror as they spit on Him, railed at Him, cursed Him, and gambled for His clothes. My heart raced within me as He cried, “It is finished!” The sky above was clothed in a cloak of mourning. We fled like rats, hearts broken, hope gone.

I wandered that lonely road to Emmaus with the others as

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that stranger walked alongside us. My heart burned within me as He traced the history of I AM from the Scriptures, and suddenly vanished...into nothing. I stood amazed in that upper room as He walked through bolted doors, and then we knew...oh, dear God, we knew...it was He. I AM. The Bread of Life had risen from the dead.

I was there, and I have a word for those of you, in generations to come, who are sitting in your comfortable churches, looking for “meaningful worship experiences, and stirring messages” to make your Christian life more exciting. I have a word for those of you who may be shopping around for miracles or putting your God on a performance-based behaviour trip, determining from day to day if He is who He says He is.

Yes, I was there. And I am writing to tell you who He is. He is I AM. When the earth was formed out of nothing, He was there. When the earth was destroyed by the flood, He was there. And, Beloved, when the weight of the sins of the whole world came crashing down on the shoulders of love so you and I could have eternal life, He was there, as well. I AM was there.

No, He did not come into this world to demonstrate how to feed the masses with a minimum of food, nor did He come to demonstrate to doctors how to heal with a minimum of medicine. He did not come to demonstrate to the curious onlookers of the world how to walk on water, and He did not come, either, to entertain or even to educate the religiously acceptable of our society. He did not. He came to die, so you and I might live. He is nothing less than the Bread of Life. If a man takes of Him, he will never hunger again; he will never thirst again. He came to call men and women to eat of His flesh and drink of His blood, and to taste of the cup of His sorrow, that as His character is formed in us, His very nature will be made manifest to a dying world. They will be looking for living bread, and they will find it in us. It may mean suffering. It may mean grief. It may mean... God, it may mean dying... it did for Him.

Does that offend you, my comfortable Christian friend? You, too, can walk away. You, too, can reject this kind of relationship with the Living God as too hard, too difficult, too demeaning. You can walk away. He'll let you. And all you'll miss is the splendor of seeing the miraculous life of the Living God continue in you as you taste, as He did, the cup the Father had for Him to drink.

I learned something that day in Capernaum. By God's grace, I

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hope you have learned it, too. I learned that He is I AM. Therefore, whatever He calls me to do, and whatever He calls me to pass through in order to do it...I consider to be the greatest privilege known to men. Should my lot include the valley...even the valley of death, what greater honor could a man have than that? That's not what that mob in Capernaum was looking for. So when He told them who He really was, and why He had really come, they turned, and they walked away.

God, forgive them; they missed it all.
And, God, help us...to learn from them!

For Application

1- Rewrite John 6:25-69 in your own words. If possible, personalize it, placing it in today's setting, and placing yourself in the midst of the multitude that day.

2- Why were the people that followed Jesus so intense on seeing that He not get away from them? Can you suggest more than one reason? Can you give a modern parallel?

3- Read Exodus 16 and Numbers 11 to get a better reminder of the reason for and the symbolism of the manna God gave to the children of Israel.

4- Using Jesus as a type of manna, make a list of the principles that God was unfolding for the church. Make one using Israel as His picture book.

5- Make a list of seven key Scriptural absolutes found in the sixth chapter of John.

6- How would Jesus' sermon, preached in this chapter have affected most of the congregations in America in our day? What element seems to be lacking in our theology that does not prepare us for who Jesus really is, and what He is really calling us to do?

7- Memorize verses 68 and 69. During what kinds of tests would it be most appropriate to quote these passages as a shield against the enemy?

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