

JOHN 6:51-59 – UNLESS YOU EAT MY FLESH AND DRINK MY BLOOD

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever. Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

So let's start again this morning by reviewing and setting up the context for this passage.

And I want to remind you and encourage you to always strive to read Scripture in its proper context, because that allows us to more accurately understand what the Biblical author is saying.

So remember that at the beginning of John 6 Jesus feeds the multitude. And as we said 2 weeks ago, this would have reminded the Jews of the miraculous feeding of manna in the wilderness in Exodus 16.

And that's exactly what they were looking for in a messiah. A great man, like Moses, who would come and take care of their physical/temporal needs, and usher back in a period of prosperity.

And Jesus fits the bill! He's miraculously feeding them just like Moses did. But Jesus rebukes them and tells them to work for true bread, not bread that perishes.

And he then goes on to identify himself as the true bread, the living bread, the bread of life! And the bread that he offers is his flesh.

So we've heard now, and we know that Jesus is the bread of life. This is the first of 7 “I am” statements in the gospel of John.

Jesus is the bread of life, eternally satisfying, and if we eat this bread we will be raised on the last day and have everlasting life.

But here's the question...what does it mean to eat the bread of life? We know we need it, but how do we eat it? That's what I want to look at today.

v. 51-52

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world is my flesh. The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Jesus says, the bread of life is my flesh. In essence he’s saying the bread that I offer is myself. You need to eat me.

And the Jews, like they’ve been doing a lot, start to grumble again. And they’re grumbling because they don’t understand what Jesus is saying to them.

Just like Nicodemus in John 3. Jesus says, ‘Nicodemus, you have to be born again.’ Nicodemus says, what?! I’m a grown man! How can I reenter my mother’s womb and be born again? He didn’t get it.

The Jews say, what?! How can you possibly be telling us to eat your flesh? They are getting more and more uncomfortable and upset with the things Jesus is saying. You already told us you came down from heaven...but now this?

So Jesus elaborates for them.

v. 53-55

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

I love how Jesus is never afraid of offending the religious establishment. By the way, if you’re interested in church growth strategies, I would avoid following Jesus’ example.

In today’s mega-church age a lot of churches are deeply afraid of saying things that would offend someone. We see a crowd and think, what can I say that won’t offend anyone and that will get even more people to show up.

Jesus saw a crowd and thought, I need to say something offensive, because a lot of these people are here for the wrong reasons.

He didn’t say things that offended people for shock value, like some preachers like to do. But he wanted people to know that being his disciple was an all or nothing thing. You’re either all in, or you’re not.

And if we’re honest, sometimes the gospel is offensive. The gospel tells us that we’re totally depraved and dead in our sin and deserving of God’s wrath, and that there’s nothing we can do to save ourselves.

But just because the truth can sometimes offend us does not mean that we don’t need to hear it!

Jesus knows this. And he tells them, if you want eternal life you need to eat my flesh and drink my blood!

Now if what he's said prior to this is offensive, this really crosses the line! It's kind of like what happened with Kathy Griffin a couple weeks back. She's said offensive things before, but this time she really crossed the line.

Jesus has said some offensive things to this point, but now he has really crossed the line.

We need to drink your blood?! How could he say that?

Leviticus 17:10

If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.

The punishment for drinking blood, as outlined in Leviticus, was to be cut off from the people...to be excluded from the covenant.

And Jesus is telling them to eat his flesh and drink his blood. So what is he saying?

Well, let's start out with what he's not saying.

He's not speaking literally as we will soon see. Jesus is not promoting cannibalism. Just as he was not saying that we needed to literally reenter our mother's wombs to be born again.

Second, he's not instituting the catholic doctrine of substantiation. Catholicism teaches and believes that in communion when people eat the bread and drink the wine, that the bread and wine literally turn into the body and blood of Jesus, and thereby impart grace to the one who partakes.

This is not taught anywhere in Scripture, and this is not what Jesus is saying here.

And third, Jesus is not instituting the practice of communion here, although there are many parallels.

So, what is he saying? What does it mean to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus?

The first thing we need to recognize is that Jesus is speaking about spiritual things. In v. 63 he says, **"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."**

He's speaking of a spiritual reality and he's using things familiar to the culture (bread, manna) to convey spiritual truths.

Jesus is teaching that just as bread is the basic necessity for physical life (the Jews depended on bread to survive), eating the bread of life is the basic necessity of the Christian life.

Just as a human being can't live without eating and drinking, in the same way a Christian can not live without eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus. It's absolutely necessary for life!

And as we've looked at previously in John 6, eating the bread of life means believing in the one the Father has sent (**v.29**).

So to eat the flesh, and drink the blood of Jesus is to believe in, or have faith in the person and atoning work of Jesus!

And without this faith, this eating and drinking, we die.

So faith, or believing, is key! But how do we come by this faith? How do we get it?

v. 56-57

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.

We see here that if, through faith, we abide in Christ, then Christ will abide in us and we will live because he lives!

But here's the problem. We are incapable of abiding in Jesus; we are incapable of living in Jesus; we are incapable of being united with Jesus, through our own power and effort.

Remember we talked about that 2 weeks ago. **John 6:44 – No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.**

We can only come to Jesus if the Father draws us, and he does that through the power of the Holy Spirit!

We can only abide in Jesus, and share the life of Jesus, through the power and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Remember in **v.63** Jesus says, **It is the Spirit who gives life.**

Genuine spiritual life can only be produced through the power of the Spirit. That's what Jesus is saying.

And to understand this we need to understand why the Father sent the Holy Spirit in the first place.

Have you ever thought about that? Why did God send us the Holy Spirit? What's the ultimate purpose? What does it mean to have the Holy Spirit and to be filled with the Spirit?

When we talk about the power of the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Spirit, there's all kinds of places our minds go to.

For some of us being filled with the Spirit means having a happy, peaceful feeling in our hearts, or an emotional buzz if you will.

Some of us think it means spending all of your time speaking in tongues and receiving visions from heaven.

Some of us picture the guys on You-tube slaying people in the Spirit by the dozens.

For some of us it means a deeper, more passionate prayer life, and a stronger faith.

Some of us don't want to talk about the Holy Spirit at all. He's like the weird uncle at the family reunion, and you know he's there, but you don't want to make eye contact.

We believe all kinds of things about the Holy Spirit, but let's let Jesus teach us about the Holy Spirit.

John 14:26 – But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

John 15:26 – But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

John 16:14 – He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

So what the Holy Spirit does, is take the truth about the person and work of Jesus, and he makes it a reality in our hearts. The Holy Spirit takes the gospel, the good news of Jesus, and makes it real, and beautiful, and wonderful and precious to us.

He opens our eyes to see the truth and the glory of it.

The Holy Spirit produces faith in us, whereby we believe in Jesus, and whereby we are united to Jesus.

It is the Spirit who gives life! Through the Spirit we abide in Jesus and share in his life.

1 John 3:24b

And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

We are all familiar with John 15. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

If Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches, then the Holy Spirit is the sap that takes the life of the vine and imparts it to the branch!

The Holy Spirit takes the word of Christ and makes it “dwell in you richly”. Col 3:16

Through the Spirit, the gospel goes from being something you hear to something that takes root in your heart and transforms you into a new creature!

So to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus is to be filled with the Holy Spirit who enables us to believe in the person and work of Jesus...and to be filled with faith, which unites our lives to Jesus and allows us to abide in him and share in his life!

And if you are united to Christ through faith, through the Spirit, if you feed on this bread (v.58), then you will live forever!

Church, your food and drink is to get up each day and ask the Father to fill you with his Spirit so that you can believe in Jesus and trust the gospel!

Now there are many gifts of the Spirit, and there is the fruit of the Spirit; and these are the outworking's of a Spirit-filled life. But the primary purpose of the Spirit is to enable you to believe in, love, treasure, honor and exalt Jesus Christ.

The person that says, I'm a Christian but I'm not really interested in the Holy Spirit or being filled with the Spirit...that's like someone saying they don't need to eat or drink.

That's why Paul exhorts the Ephesian church to be filled with the Spirit!

So who's hungry?

Jesus finishes his discourse by reminding the people one last time that he is the only one who can satisfy and give life everlasting.

v.58

This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

So I'll ask you again...whose hungry?

Listen, I know some of you out there this morning are starving to death! But Jesus has a place for you at the table, so come and feast!

