

JESUS HAS THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE

John 6:41-71

Key Verses: 6:68-69

“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.’”

The key word of chapter 6 is “bread,” and Jesus uses it progressively. Jesus started with physical bread. Then he introduced himself as the bread of life, and later the living bread. He related this bread to the real food and drink of his flesh and blood, which signified his death on the cross. Jesus began by feeding five thousand people with physical bread, out of his great compassion. Jesus wanted them to grow spiritually in understanding of who he was, but they only thought about physical bread. They did not listen to his teaching and degenerated. Despite their rejection, Jesus continued to teach them spiritual truth because they were human beings created in the image of God. Jesus told them that he is the bread of life, who came down from heaven to give life to the world.

After hearing his teaching, there were two responses to Jesus: one group saw him with a merely human perspective; the other saw him with a spiritual perspective. At that moment, this difference may not have seemed so significant. But as time passed, the consequences were indeed serious. Which perspective we have of Jesus is not a small matter. It determines whether we grow spiritually or degenerate. Ultimately, it is a matter of eternal life or eternal condemnation. Let’s have a spiritual perspective in seeing Jesus and his word.

First, real food and real drink (41-59). In verses 41-59, Jesus’ audience shifts from the crowd to the Jews (41,52). In verse 59 we find that Jesus gave these teachings while in the synagogue at Capernaum. It may be that Jesus moved from the open fields to the synagogue at this point. When Jesus declared that he is the bread that came down from heaven, the Jews began to grumble about him. They said, **“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”** They rejected Jesus’ teaching because they saw him from a human perspective. They knew his parents, and had watched him grow up. They

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thought of him as an ordinary neighborhood boy. We have the same tendency to see people from a human perspective. When I was an intern shepherd, in order to help me learn serving, Dr. Lee asked me to serve Joshua J's family, while they stayed as guests. Joshua Jr., a small boy at the time, had a habit of wetting his bed and sometimes my job was to go and clean it. So I had a certain concept of him. But he grew spiritually to know Jesus and has spent the last three years in message training. As I watched him I learned that the Holy Spirit is working mightily in him and has raised him as a great servant of God's word and a shepherd for young people. Now he is planting a new UBF church in Austin, Texas, together with his coworkers. To be honest, many people can tell funny stories about me, too. If Missionary Rebecca Choi started telling what she knows about me, I would be pretty embarrassed.

What did Jesus say to the Jews? **“Stop grumbling among yourselves”** (43). They grumbled because they did not get what they wanted. This kind of grumbling is also known as complaining. In America, complaining works. Those who complain loudly can get what they want. But God is not moved by human complaints. Rather, God may very well punish those who complain. This is why Paul warns us, **“Do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel”** (1 Cor 10:10). Though people grumbled, Jesus was not discouraged, because he trusted the Father who was at work among them according to his own sovereign will. In verses 44-45, Jesus explained that no one can come to him unless the Father draws them. Those who are drawn to Jesus are those who hear from the Father and learn from him. They are humble people. The Father draws them to Jesus through his words. He gives them spiritual desire in their hearts and works through the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus to them. When they come to Jesus, Jesus becomes their shepherd and leads them to eternal life. Jesus raises them up at the last day. This Jesus has seen the Father and came from the Father (46). No one else has. So Jesus is uniquely qualified to teach about the Father and his work.

Despite their grumbling, Jesus did not give up on the Jews. He kept on saying, **“Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life”** (47-48). In verses 49-51a Jesus compared himself with the manna that their forefathers ate. Those who ate the manna were satisfied for a few hours, but eventually they died. Anyone who eats Jesus, the living bread, will not die, but live forever. In verse 51b, Jesus revealed, **“This bread is my**

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flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, **“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”** (52) They degenerated from grumbling to arguing. They thought Jesus wanted to make them cannibals. It was a great misunderstanding. This happened when they saw Jesus from a merely human perspective. Jesus did not argue with them or compromise with them. He taught the necessity of eating his flesh. Let’s read verses 53-55, **“Very truly I tell you, 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 them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”** Here Jesus talks about his death on the cross. In the synoptic gospels he explains this through the Last Supper: Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, **“Take and eat; this is my body.”** Then he took the cup, gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, **“Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”** (Mt 26:26-28). In John’s gospel, however, Jesus explains the meaning of his death in the context of the bread of life.

In verse 55 Jesus refers to his flesh as real food and his blood as real drink. In order to grow healthy and strong in body, we need good food and drink. One young man ate the typical food of a bachelor, including lots of junk food. Then he married a young woman who eats only healthy, organic food, including many vegetables and no junk food. Usually, men gain weight after marriage. But this young man lost 30 pounds and looks healthier and more fit than ever. This happens to those who eat good food. Clean drinking water is also very important. Many people in African countries are forced to drink dirty water and contract all kinds of diseases. The kind of food and drink we digest is closely related to how healthy we are. In the same way, our spiritual diet greatly affects our spiritual well-being. Some people fill their minds and hearts with spiritual junk food through careless media consumption and the influence of ungodly people. They become very sick spiritually and dirty. Once this happens, there is no earthly remedy. Only the food that Jesus gives can restore our spiritual health.

Jesus’ body was broken on the cross and his blood was shed for our sins. Through his sacrifice God forgave all our sins and cleansed us. He also

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opened the way for us to have a love and life relationship with him. To eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood is to accept what he did for us on the cross. When we accept this, Jesus remains in us and we in him (56). We do not taste death, but live forever because Jesus lives in us (57-58). There is a saying, "You are what you eat." If we eat spiritual junk food we will be junk people. But when we feed on Jesus, we become godly people.

To eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood is to remember his grace of forgiveness. How can we do this? Jesus taught us one way at the Last Supper. After sharing bread and a cup with his disciples, Jesus said: **"Do this in remembrance of me"** (Lk 22:19b). We human beings have a tendency to forget what God has done for us; it is a kind of spiritual Alzheimer's disease. So Jesus commanded us to have communion in remembrance of Jesus' grace. The early Christians did so faithfully and it became a source of vitality to maintain their spiritual lives. They were persecuted by unbelievers, who thought they were cannibals. Still, they celebrated communion. It is vital for us to remember what Jesus has done by having communion. This unites us with Jesus more deeply. It also unites us with one another, and we can grow strong as the body of Christ. So we will share communion together today.

Second, the words of eternal life (60-71). Jesus taught the secret of the cross through the metaphor of bread so that people's spiritual eyes would open and they would accept him as their Savior. But on hearing his message, many of his disciples said, **"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"** (60) They stumbled over Jesus' words, for they saw him from a human perspective. They wanted to understand everything rationally. But the message of the cross can be received only by faith. Paul said, **"Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"** (1 Cor 1:22-24). Jesus did not explain further, but taught the necessity of accepting his word, saying, **"Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?"** If his death offended them, how would they respond to his resurrection and ascension? (62) If we do not accept Jesus' death on the cross, we cannot accept his resurrection and ascension.

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In order to help them, Jesus taught what perspective they should have toward his words: **“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life”** (63). This reminds us of Jesus’ words to Nicodemus: **“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit”** (3:6). Something that comes from the flesh is flesh in nature. It may be noble flesh, rational flesh, educated flesh, or even religious flesh. It may grow. But it always remains flesh. Flesh may be able to do many things, but it cannot give life. On the other hand, whatever comes from the Spirit is different. It is spiritual in nature; it is life-giving. The Holy Spirit works to give life in and through the words that Jesus speaks. So we cannot treat Jesus’ words like ordinary words. We should recognize the awesome, life-giving power of Jesus’ words. We should struggle to accept them humbly instead of arguing with Jesus. Then God works in us to transform us through his word. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 says, **“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.”** Though Jesus’ words were life-giving, he knew that some of them did not believe his words. He was sorry, but not surprised (64-65).

From that time on many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him (66). It was painful for Jesus to see people he had loved and served walking away from him. But he did not compromise with them. He did not try to please them. Rather, he challenged the Twelve, asking, **“You do not want to leave too, do you?”** (67) Jesus wanted them to commit more fully, and to purify their motives, taking deeper root in him. Jesus focused on raising a few committed disciples, not pleasing many of his disciples. Jesus was right. Though only a few disciples remained, they grew deep in commitment and became useful to God. As the book of Acts reveals, they became world changers who made a new history.

Upon hearing Jesus’ challenge, how did Simon Peter answer? Let’s read his words in verses 68-69. **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”** It was Peter’s confession of faith and his decision of faith. Peter knew that the words of Jesus are the words of eternal life. So he took root in the words of Jesus. He could not leave Jesus. It was not because

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of his position as a top disciple, or his human loyalty to Jesus. It was because he tasted Jesus' words of eternal life. He did not have any place to go because life without Jesus was meaningless. To him, Jesus was his life and joy and hope. Most importantly, Peter knew that Jesus is the Holy One of God.

How could Peter make such a confession? He said, **“We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”** Most people want to know first and then believe. But spiritual truth cannot be obtained through human reason. It is beyond human reason. It must come from God by revelation. God is pleased to grant this spiritual truth to those who trust him. We must believe first, and then we can know. When we believe, then our spiritual eyes open. Then we can see and understand. St. Augustine said, “We must believe in order to know. And we must know in order to believe more firmly.” In contrast to Peter, Judas Iscariot saw Jesus from a merely human perspective. Though one of the Twelve, he became the devil (70-71).

People work hard for bread, thinking that enough bread will satisfy them. However, such a life pursuit brings only emptiness and anxiety. Mankind needs more than physical bread. Jesus is the Holy One of God. Jesus' words are the words of eternal life. Jesus offers us his body broken for us and his blood shed for us on the cross: it is real food and drink which gives life to our souls. Let's feed on Jesus and enjoy true life.