

Eat Jesus' Flesh

John 6:41-71

Key Verse: 54

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

Our passage this morning is a continuation of what we studied last week. Through the message, M. David helped us to think about Jesus who is the Bread of Life, the only bread that sustains our spiritual life. Do you still have verse 35 memorized? You can recite it, or read it on the screen with me. ***“Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”***

Today we have the opportunity to dig deeper into this truth. In this part of the chapter, Jesus adds, and repeats often, that we are to eat his flesh and drink his blood. No one has ever interpreted Jesus' words here literally. So through today's passage we'll think about what Jesus means when he says that. To do so, we'll break up the passage into 3 parts. First we'll think about God who draws us to himself. Then we'll spend most of our time thinking about what it means to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood. Finally we'll conclude with the example set for us by the Twelve.

I. The Father draws them (41-45)

While the first part of chapter 6 is a dialogue between Jesus and the crowd, from verse 41 Jesus is speaking with the “Jews,” likely the religious leaders. In verses 41 and 42 the Jews are grumbling about Jesus because he had said, ***“I am the bread that came down from heaven.”*** After seeing all that Jesus had done up to this point, rather than open their hearts to him, they decide to grumble among themselves. They thought they were justified in dismissing what Jesus was saying because they knew where Jesus was from, they knew who his parents were. At the surface it's actually a valid point. How can Jesus come from heaven when he has earthly parents? But Jesus doesn't even argue with them about that. He gets straight to the heart of the matter. He saw that they could not accept who he was because they weren't listening to God their Father. Let's read verses 43-45 together.

“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me.

Jesus is saying they can't understand is because they don't want to learn from God. Let's pause here for a brief moment to sit on verse 44 because it's significant. Jesus says, ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them...”*** This is interesting because this chapter is full of promises to “whoever” will come to Jesus. Verse 50 even says, “anyone may eat.” It all sounds like an open invitation to anyone and everyone. So is Jesus contradicting himself here when he says no one can come to Jesus unless God draws them?

What we actually find is a paradoxical truth. While each person is free and makes the choice to come to Jesus out of their own free will, we also see that no one comes to Jesus, unless the Father draws them. So the paradox here just requires us to throw out good mathematics. Because coming to faith

in Jesus is 100% your choice but at the same time 100% God's work in your life. It is also 100% God's gracious love that gives us the opportunity and moves us to accept Jesus. I'm a math teacher so this one really twists my brain into a knot! Cause $100\% + 100\% + 100\% = 100\%$? Another way to think about it is in terms of colored light. Do you know what happens when you mix 100% red, 100% green, and 100% blue light? It's different than paint, you actually get a bright white light. Similarly, these paradoxical truths, when accepted together, actually create something even more beautiful and brilliant.

When God draws us to Jesus, he does not manipulate or twist our arm to come. We are not forced or dragged. It is a gentle nudge, yet a powerful attraction toward Christ. Jesus said, ***It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me.*** This tells us that God's drawing is not random. And this is not done impersonally. We are taught by God, and everyone who hears the Father and learns from him comes to Jesus. We all can hear God's voice through the Scripture as we study His words, meditate on them. We hear God's voice as we quiet our souls and pray to Him. He does all this divine gathering of His children personally and intimately. This truth lays at foundation everything else Jesus' teaches in this chapter. God is sovereign, and all things that happen are under his sovereign rule and authority.

II. Eating is believing and leads to eternal life (46-59)

After getting to the heart of the matter with the grumbling Jews, and teaching them about God who draws them, Jesus goes on to reinforce the truth that he is the bread from heaven. In these verse we find two reason why Jesus is the bread of life.

1. Jesus is from God (46)

The first reason comes from verse 46. ***"No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father."*** The claim to be the bread of life is validated by the truth that Jesus is from God. The Jews would be right to be upset if Jesus were just a man, no different than themselves or anyone else. But when we know and believe that Jesus is the one that God sent into this world, we can know and be sure that Jesus is the true bread from heaven.

Jesus tried to help the Jews understand this by connecting this truth to a very familiar event in their history: manna in the desert. These events are carefully chronicled in the book of Exodus. While they remember the 40 years of God's provision very fondly, Jesus reminds them that their ancestors all ate that bread and still died. What Jesus was offering them now was a bread from heaven which anyone can eat and will not die. This bread is unlike any bread anyone has ever offered. No it doesn't make us immortal, but what it does is it gives us eternal life. And the reason this bread is different is because this bread is a person, who is from God and has seen God.

2. Jesus will give his flesh for the life of the world

The second reason Jesus is the bread of life is because he will give his flesh for the life of the world. Let's read verse 51 together. ***"This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."*** It's in this verse that Jesus begins to make the connection between bread and his own flesh. God sent Jesus into this world to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. It is through Jesus' death on the cross that we all receive forgiveness for our sins. This is referring to the new covenant through the gospel of Jesus Christ. His flesh was killed and his blood was shed so that we might be forgiven.

Here's the thing, and it can't be stated enough. We are all terrible sinners. Because of the things we say, think, and do, we deserve punishment from our perfect and Holy Father in heaven. Our actions demand blood. But Jesus' righteousness and His death function as payment. It's like Jesus wrote a check with his life so that we could be redeemed. His resurrection meant that check cleared. And now the sacrifice of Jesus' flesh gives life to the whole world. This is how Jesus' flesh became the bread of life.

To eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood is like eating a meal.

After explaining these things the grumbling of the Jews turns to sharp arguments. Look at verse 52. ***Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"*** They seem to be getting even more upset. And in their anger, they tried to twist Jesus' words to make Jesus sound like he was a crazy person. They tried to make it sound like Jesus said we should eat his flesh, when he actually hadn't said that yet. What Jesus does next is take their sarcasm and willful resistance and make his point even more boldly. Let's read verse 53 together. ***Jesus said to them, "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."*** Jesus adds that not only should you eat his flesh, but also drink his blood too! Jesus actually repeats this three times (53, 54, 56).

So what does Jesus mean when he says we have to eat his flesh and drink his blood? As I stated in the introduction. No one has ever interpreted this literally. Christians are not, and have never been cannibals. And while Jesus' words sound crazy. I actually really like thinking about accepting Jesus as eating and drinking. Cause like I shared, and I think others can relate, we all like to eat. Right? I don't know anyone who says they don't like a good meal. I'm sure we've all enjoyed a meal where someone spent an entire day to prepare our favorite foods, sets it out at a table surround by our family, friends, and loved ones. Once the table is set, I know everyone likes to take out their cell phones and gets on Snap or Insta or something to show off what they're about to enjoy. But after everyone gets their social media posts done, wouldn't it be crazy if the next thing we did was just look at the food, study it, and stare at it. And then we took out pen and paper or our phones to just start writing about the food that's sitting right in front of our faces. Maybe we'd touch the food or smell the food to study it better. But if that's all we did, all evening and then left all the food there and went home, that'd be INSANE right!?!? We all know what to do when that glorious spread is on the table! We stuff our faces. That's the quietest time of the night when everyone is busy putting food in their mouths. With every bite we allow our taste buds to enjoy every morsel. We swallow it and allow our bellies to fill until we can't possibly fit any more food. We have taken that food in, enjoyed it to its full. That's how you eat your meal and have it to the full!

That's the same with Jesus. We can study about Jesus, look at Jesus, stare at Jesus, and if we could smell Jesus or touch Jesus that'd be pretty cool. But if we don't take Jesus in, if we don't eat his flesh and drink his blood, we are not experiencing the fullness and richness of what Jesus has to offer us, which is himself.

Before thinking about how we eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood, let's think about its blessings.

Blessings of eating and drinking

We've thought about enjoying our favorite food through a special meal. But we all know life isn't only about these kind of big special meals all the time. Food actually has a much more fundamental

purpose. Unfortunately not everyone has the opportunity to eat well, let alone enjoy their favorite foods. But the human body needs to consume food every day. The food we eat has a purpose to nourish our bodies and sustain our physical life. Eating just to eat can be unhealthy, especially if we eat junk food. But healthy food provides the right kind of energy and enhances the operation of our body's complex systems. It does more than just satisfy our hunger. It gives us strength to do our work, to maintain our health, and increase our body's durability and longevity.

Jesus, the bread of life, is the same. Jesus' flesh is the healthy food for our soul. It has a greater purpose. He doesn't only satisfy the hunger and thirst of our soul in the moment. But Jesus becomes the source of energy enhancing our soul's durability and longevity. He becomes the provider and sustainer of our souls and eternal life.

Let's look at our passage for more on the greater purpose of eating the bread of life. After each command to eat his flesh and drink his blood there is a promise. In our verses today we can find three blessings.

1. Eternal Life (54, 57, 58).

Let's read our key verse, 54. ***"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."*** In fact, in this passage, there are 9 references to eternal life, living forever, or being raised up (44, 47, 50, 51, 54, 54, 57, 58, 68). The number one and biggest blessing of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood is receiving life, eternal life. Refusing this bread is to miss life and to die (50, 53). This blessing of eternal life actually begins the moment we accept Jesus. The verb is present tense. "Has eternal life." Not "will have eternal life." We don't have to wait until we die to enjoy "eternal life." M. David talked about this a lot last week. Having Jesus, the bread of life, fills our hearts and souls with so much joy, we experience a satisfaction, in this lifetime, that can't be achieved through anyone or anything else.

2. Assured hope (44, 54).

The second blessing is an assured hope that we will be raised up at the last day. This is a promise that on the last day, when the end has come, when Jesus comes again, we will be raised and given our resurrection bodies. When we have this hope we are given an eternal perspective of our lives. This gives us the strength, and the will, to endure the ups and down, the highs and lows, the failures and successes of life. When we know that after this life, we have the most glorious resurrection to look forward to, we can endure it all.

3. Union with Christ (56).

The third blessing is an intimate relationship with Christ. We can find this in verse 56. ***"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them."*** When we eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood we enter into an intimate relationship with him. A relationship that is like the vine and the branch relationship in John 15.

Through these three blessings we see that Jesus, the bread of life, provides so much more than just temporary and momentary satisfaction. Jesus is not meant to be enjoyed only in big meals on special occasions. Sometimes our walks with God can feel like we're just waiting for the next big spiritual meal through a conference or holiday or something. But the living bread, like healthy food, is meant to be consumed consistently and faithfully in our daily life.

God has a much greater purpose for this bread from heaven in our lives. Ultimately Jesus wanted to give us the Spirit and Life eternal. Jesus the bread from heaven gives our soul the durability it needs through a relationship with him, and it gives us longevity, ultimate longevity, through the resurrection and eternal life.

Eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood.

So how do we eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood? Most of the promises of eternal life come after the command to eat his flesh. But in one of the instances, in verse 47, Jesus says, ***"Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life."***

This verse is similar in form to our key verse. But in verse 47 Jesus replaces "eat my flesh and drink my blood" with "believes." What we can see here is that for Jesus, eating is believing. And drinking is believing. Why? Because believing requires us to take it in, to accept it, chew it, to "eat" and "drink" it. Believing is quite hard sometimes. Just as there is a difference in sitting in front of the meal and really consuming and enjoying it. There is a difference between hearing about Jesus and really believing in a way that satisfies our souls.

Believe what exactly? Specifically through this passage we are to believe that Jesus' death—the breaking of his flesh and spilling of his blood—pays in full the penalty for our sin. We are to believe that Jesus' perfect righteousness is freely given to us in exchange for our unrighteousness. We are to believe that Jesus is our Savior.

Jesus did not come to be our vending machine or a moral teacher or our friend next door. He did not come for anything other than to make the ultimate sacrifice of his own flesh and blood to be our savior. This is about accepting Jesus' forgiveness through his death on the cross.

There's some science behind the statement "you are what you eat." When we believe that Jesus is our savior, his flesh and blood become a part of us as well. This is an act of the Holy Spirit that flows in and through our soul. It's not simply adopting his philosophies, or following his teaching. It is an act of receiving by faith the way of Salvation given to us by God our father.

Believing this is how we "eat" Jesus' flesh and "drink" his blood. This is precisely why Jesus encouraged his followers to share the Lord's Supper. Through communion, through the act of consuming the bread and the drink, Jesus wants us to remember his body and blood shed on the cross for our sins.

If this still feels a little abstract, we have the disciples' example to follow. So let's go to our third part.

III. Peter's example (60-70).

This was a hard teaching to accept. So much so that many of Jesus' disciples took offense at his words and started grumbling. Jesus said to them, ***"Does this offend you? ...The words that I have spoken to you - they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe"*** (61-64). And from that time, many of Jesus' disciples turned back and no longer followed him (66). Maybe these disciples are like someone who didn't like the menu. They thought about eating it, but decided that they don't like that kind of food, and walked away hungry without eating.

But not the Twelve. When Jesus noticed that many were leaving, he turned to them and asked, ***“You do not want to leave too, do you?”*** (67) How did they respond? Let’s read verse 68 and 69 together. ***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.”*** (68-69).

Peter likely did not fully understand everything Jesus was teaching. Just like there are plenty of things we don’t fully understand. But Peter didn’t walk away. What Peter says in this short statement, is so beautiful. He’s saying, “I’ve considered everything, but I choose you. You are the only one worthy committing my life to.” This is a very real and honest testimony. He’s saying that after careful consideration and pondering, he has come to believe and to know that Jesus is the Holy One of God. He is speaking for all the disciples when he says “we.” At the same time, it is a personal testimony.

We often turn ourselves towards created things hoping that they will give us a full and better life. But from this passage we see that there is no one like Jesus. No one else has seen our heavenly Father (46). No one else came from God (46). No one else has offered their own flesh and blood for the life of the world (51). No one else promises eternal life now and forever (54). No one else satisfies the hunger and thirst of the soul (35). No one else is like Jesus!

I have a confession to make. The last couple months have been quite a journey and struggle for me. I had lost my appetite for the bread of life. The words of Jesus have not been like pure spiritual milk to me. This passage, and this message preparation, provided Anna and I an opportunity to come together in deep fellowship in God’s word. And we have come to a confession from our souls, “Lord, to whom shall we go!? You have the words of eternal life.” This was possible because God our father was drawing us to himself all along despite our resistance and rebellion (44).

Lord, you are like none other. You have the words of eternal life. You give spirit and life! The world gives us temporary anything and everything. But you give us eternal life, everlasting satisfaction and an enduring relationship with our Creator and Father in heaven. I pray that Jesus the bread of life becomes the source of power in everything I do.

Are we ready to do as Peter did? You are here today, listening to this word because God, your heavenly Father is drawing you to himself. Let’s be the kind of people who take Jesus and his words of eternal life into our bellies. Into our hearts, minds, and souls until we are satisfied to the full. Give your life, give your heart, give your all to Jesus. Eat his flesh, drink his blood, consume all of him and have eternal life.