

October 12, 2014
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 6:51-59

1. How do we know that Jesus did not expect the people to engage in cannibalism?
2. Explain the Roman Catholic doctrine that teaches that the recipient of the Eucharist actually eats Jesus' flesh and drinks His blood.
3. How do Jesus' words about His flesh and blood in this discourse compare with His words to the woman at the well about living water?
4. What did Jesus really mean by telling us that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to have eternal life?

**IT'S A MATTER OF RELATIONSHIP,
NOT A RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE
John 6:51-59**

The story of normal human existence is not a very pretty picture. We are born with incredible potential to achieve, but we are also born with a sin nature. As long as that sin nature rules in our lives, we will be on an endless quest to find satisfaction without God. It is a futile search.

No one illustrated that futility better than Solomon, the wisest of men. He recorded his empty journey to find satisfaction apart from God in Ecclesiastes. The book is a study of the experiments of life,

looking for a lasting sense of accomplishment, only to discover that without God life is an empty collection of vanity. The word *vanity* shows up in one form or another in the book over thirty-six times. Solomon confessed that he searched for meaning in knowledge, self-indulgence, human wisdom, work, and in creativity, only to come to the same end in every endeavor – vanity. He rightly concluded that only in a relationship with God, which God our creator intended for us to have, do we find satisfaction. *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13).*

To the endless list of pursuits humanity has added spiritual things like yoga, eastern mysticism, meditation, and other such experiences that try to get in touch with a different world. The most common error for finding peace with God in eternal life is religion. Religion is man's method for finding God apart from submitting to and obeying God. Common sense dictates that all efforts to find God apart from His one defined means is destined for futility. As long as mankind has existed, he has tried to achieve a relationship with God through human means.

Jesus taught some of the most religious people in the world that even if they could recreate their forefather's very religious experience of eating bread from heaven, that would not suffice for gaining eternal life. Indeed, He had reminded them that their fathers who had eaten the "angel bread" had all died in the wilderness. Jesus explained in detail that the people could not grasp that the only way to eternal life is through an intimate relationship with Himself. The people who heard were as unreceptive to the message as your peers and mine are. Nevertheless, the rule of God stands. Only through complete and full dependance on Christ can we find eternal life.

Feeding on Jesus Results in Eternal Life (vv.51-55).

As it does in our day, such was the case when Jesus taught the self-righteous Jews. The idea that people need to feed on Jesus causes disputes (v.51-52). It wasn't like Jesus was teaching in cryptic code or something. The Jews heard Jesus promise eternal life to all who ate of His flesh. Yes, that is what He said. *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 (v.51).

The clear teaching in this statement is a reiteration of what Jesus already taught. He is the living bread. But, sinners must eat of Him. He left no doubt about His position as the heavenly bread because He identified Himself as the living bread in four previous verses (vv.33,35,48,50). He stated in that context that the only way a needy person will come to Him, the living bread, is when God the Father draws Him (vv.37,39,44,65). However, at the very same time, Jesus taught that when the Father does draw a person, it is his or her responsibility to eat.

It is very important for us to grasp the application of these truths. It is as though God in His sovereign design of salvation has set before the fallen race a scrumptious plate of food. But the food is of no value if the person does not feel like eating. In reality, the scrumptious plate of food is the Word of Christ. The Word itself reveals that it is eternally nourishing. The prophet Jeremiah discovered, *Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts (Jeremiah 15:16)*. David understood, *How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalms 119:103)*. You can't come to conclusions like this unless you eat.

So what will you do with the Word of Christ? The sad truth is that there will be no eating if there is no hunger. This is a point of concern in real life. If a person is sick or despondent, he or she will not feel like eating. There might be a case where a person just does not understand that the only way to gain the nutrition of the food is to eat it – though that is hard to imagine. Maybe the person doesn't understand that he has a need for nutrition. But if a person is truly hungry, regardless of what he knows or doesn't know, he eats.

Jesus promised that those who spiritually hunger and thirst after righteousness will be fed, will be satisfied (Matthew 5:6). But the context of that promise indicates that people who hunger and thirst for righteousness are not normal. It is normal to reject God's Word and favor human wisdom. It is normal to try to satisfy spiritual hungering for God through human efforts (religion). It is normal not to eat from the only source of spiritual satisfaction God has provided.

Because we long for the wrong kind of food, we grow up to be the wrong kind of people. The great and obvious problem is that we are what we eat. This is a good rule to follow with physical food. You can look at many dishes of food, but none of the food will effect you at all until you eat it. Once you eat the food, you become healthy or obese depending on what you are eating. In the spiritual realm, we are all spiritually famished and undernourished by nature. But the more we eat the Word of God, the more we become like its Author. That is God's plan for the church according to Paul who wrote, *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, (Ephesians 5:25b-26)*.

Another important truth is that no one can eat that scrumptious food for you. This means that though your parents might be the most faithful followers of Christ in all the world, you cannot claim their nourishment for yourself. If you don't eat of Christ, you don't have eternal life. Period! Jesus promised that the result of eating the bread that came down from heaven is eternal life. Everything Jesus was saying might have been understandable (at least to some extent) up to this point.

Then Jesus said that this amazing bread is His own flesh that He gave *for the life of the world*. This is probably the point where all understanding came to a screeching halt. Notice that He offered His flesh, not His body. This is interesting because at the Last Supper Jesus said, *"This is My body."* Here the word flesh contains the whole of the incarnation. John had introduced the incarnate God by writing: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)*.

God the Son gave the whole of His incarnate form because God gave His incarnate being *for* (i.e. *in behalf of*) the world. The wonderful truth is that God offers salvation to the whole world. The offer is necessary because all have sinned. The offer is universal. The acceptance of the offer is not. Jesus taught that only those who believe will be given *life*. The extent of efficiency of Christ's provision is defined in the words *if anyone eats*, which is literally, *"if some might eat."* Not everyone eats of the heavenly bread. Most people look at the scrumptious plate of food and walk away unchanged, unaffected.

In response to this wonderful news, *The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"* (v.52). A genuine debate erupted among them. It was not that the people immediately rejected Jesus out of hand. No, they needed to confer among themselves; they needed to share the various conclusions of human wisdom. Sort of. How they shared their thoughts was quite interesting. Actually, the word *disputed* refers to a fight, a serious argument, or a conflict that we might see in a sporting event (like boxing or wrestling).

The issue they argued about was how a "man" can give His flesh to be eaten. Surely even the dullest among them had to have realized that Jesus did not mean that they should take what He said literally. If not, then what did He mean? That was the point of contention. I think it noteworthy that the people did not debate the meaning of life. The most important issue in temporal life is settling the matter of eternal life. And all the religions argue sharply with each other about semantics. What does it mean?

Quickly, Jesus explained everything to the debaters. His response to their arguments actually covers the next six verses (vv.53-58). He warned them that if they rejected Him, they would forfeit eternal life (vv.53-55). Not to feed on Jesus is to have no life. *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"* (v.53).

Jesus' explanation actually would have caused greater confusion. On one hand, they had to know that Jesus was not encouraging cannibalism. But, on the other hand, drinking blood was strictly prohibited by God's law. God instructed through Moses, *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. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life* (Leviticus 17:10-11).

Therefore, because cannibalism and actually drinking blood was out of the question, the lesson has to be this: "Unless you are involved in some kind of spiritual, figurative union or relationship with the flesh and blood of the man Jesus, you have no lasting life in

you." This kind of talk would have been scandalous to the extreme in the ears of devout Jews. It still is to all religions!

Jesus compounded the people's consternation. He taught that only the true food and drink give eternal life. *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.* That might not be too hard to swallow until Jesus revealed that the true food is His flesh and the true drink is His blood.

Anyone familiar with the Lord's words at the Last Supper would have had to make a connection here. What does the instruction in that setting mean in light of this teaching? Matthew told the story. *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"* (Matthew 26:26-28). Clearly Jesus did not tell the disciples that evening that they had to eat His body and drink His blood like cannibals. His body was that in which the incarnate God lived; the body in which He fulfilled His own law perfectly. His living body was the sign of life.

Likewise, Jesus' blood was the symbol of life. It always had been, as God had pointed out to Noah. At the outset of repopulating the world, God said, *But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood* (Genesis 9:4). Add to that evidence the clear statement in the law that we already saw: *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life* (Leviticus 17:11). These statements lay the foundation that the shedding of blood always pictured a violent death in Scripture. Shedding blood was taking life. That is what all the Old Testament sacrifices were about. Therefore, Jesus taught: He was going to die a violent death by which He would provide the means for "some" sinners [anyone, v.51] to have eternal life. This was His purpose for coming into the world.

But sinners have to participate in that death in order to have life. How? Jesus explained the connection we must have with His death on the cross.

Feeding on Jesus Results in Living With Jesus (vv.56-59).

The Lord explained to the crowd that day that to abide in Christ is to live (vv.56-57). Feeding on Christ results in mutual abiding. He said, *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (v.56)*. We know from the rest of Scripture that eating or feeding on Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood has to refer to faith in the work He accomplished through His violent death. Paul taught this truth in the letter to the Roman Christians. *But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame" (Romans 10:8-11)*. The same answer was given to the inquiring Philippian jailer, *Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:30-31)*. And again the letter to the Galatian churches says, *But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe (Galatians 3:22)*. Therefore, we who have trusted Jesus have great confidence. *For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:14)*.

Those who believe abide in Christ and He in them. "Abiding in" is the most intimate relationship possible to imagine. It means that Jesus Christ is virtually remaining within us in the person of the Holy Spirit. When that is the case, we sense evidence of that indwelling. For example, *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16)*. There is also external evidence. *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16)*.

Abiding in Christ means that the person and character of Christ establishes the parameters of our lives. Very simply put, it is the love and obey principle. Jesus taught, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15)*. Therefore, proof that we abide in Christ is respect of our relationship with Him. *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love (John 15:10)*. Is how

you live your life important? Keeping Christ's commands, walking in the Spirit, or **abiding in Christ** cannot win your eternal life because you cannot do it until you have eternal life. But an **abiding in Christ** lifestyle is proof that you have eternal life.

It is very important because a mutual abiding guarantees eternal life. Jesus taught, *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 (v.57)*. No one should argue that God the Father is not alive and well. We have external evidence all around that proves it. We have the testimony of His law written on our consciences. That Jesus Christ was alive, active, and powerful should have been enough proof that He and His message are true to both the ancient Jews and to us.

Therefore, the challenge is for everyone who desires to have eternal life. Eternal life is a Christ, God the Son, God the Father kind of life. It is characterized by their eternity. It is characterized by God's holy character. It is gained only by believing what God's Word says about Jesus.

Therefore also, living in Christ is not a religious thing (vv.58-59). Jesus explained to the religious people that the true bread of heaven is not like religious experience. He said regarding Himself, *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 (v.58)*. The bread the forefathers ate certainly had some God-like traits about it. God promised to give it. God instructed how they should gather and eat it. God set warnings and parameters like how to prepare the bread for the Sabbath. God miraculously sent it as long as it was needed.

This was a wonderful symbol of God's protection and provision for His chosen people. We can honestly conclude that the whole experience should have made a deep impression on the people regarding their relationship to God. The Psalmist called it "angel bread" (Psalm 78:25). Almost 1500 years later, the religious posterity was still calling it a miraculous sign of God from heaven (so the argument in this context).

Their experience and past evidence was not unlike the kind of experiences religious people have today. Many people credit various visions and apparitions to God even though He probably has nothing to do with any of them. But "God thoughts" make for good religion.

Indeed. Nearly all false religions talk about a god and invent ideas about the true God, but it is all in error. Millions of sincere people participate in religious observations that focus even on the eating of Christ's flesh and drinking His blood. It is a very religious experience. But the people miss the true message that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ's violent death, burial, and resurrection alone. Such religious teachings and traditions might leave a warm feeling, but they cannot give eternal life.

All of this teaching is what Jesus wants religious people to know. John pointed out that *Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum (v.59)*. He taught the truth to religious people who gathered in a place known for religious instruction and experience. But religion could not open the eyes of the understanding for these people. They ultimately rejected Jesus because He didn't say the kinds of things that fit with their preconceived religious ideas.

The masses of the world still reject Jesus, the bread of life, because He doesn't fit the mold of their religion. They still think that there is something they must do, some kind of works that will impress God to give them eternal life. Abiding in Christ through full belief in His person and work is still the only means to eternal life.