

## STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS

### THE BREAD OF LIFE II

Read John 6:41-71

We continue from where we stopped last week. Jesus had just confirmed to His hearers that He is the Manna from heaven, and He is the Bread of Life. These revelations will cause His hearers to be offended:

*“The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” And they said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” (vv41-42)*

Predictably, Jesus' enemies bristle because of his amazing claims. We know his parentage, they say. His claims to be the bread come down from heaven are preposterous! Yet, six times in this immediate context Jesus says that he ‘came down from heaven’ (6:33, 38, 41, 50, 51, 58). His claim to heavenly origin is unmistakable. This claim sounds ridiculous to His hearers.

If you were part of this crowd, how would you have received these words?

Was it an issue with familiarity or the weight of the words spoken by Jesus?

*“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’” (v44-45a)*

The Jews thought that they were all chosen by God by virtue of their physical, natural birth. Jesus made it clear that God must draw them before they can come to God. Everyone who responds to the Father will respond to the Son. Certainly, his enemies are blind to who he is, even though they pour over the Scriptures (5:39). In the Gospels following the Parable of the Sower, Jesus quotes Isaiah to indicate that the spiritual blindness of some is to be expected.

*“And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand and seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So, that I should heal them.’” (Matthew 13:14-15)*

However, Jesus, says (quoting Isaiah 54:13), "They will all be taught of God" (6:45) Those who truly seek the Father will recognize Jesus as speaking God's truth -- and in believing Jesus they will find everlasting life.

#### **God's Wooing or Personal Responsibility**

We need to look carefully at three verses in Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life that indicate God's sovereignty in the salvation process.

*"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me." (6:37a)*

*"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." (6:44a)*

*"Therefore, I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." (6:65b)*

In certain corners of the evangelical movement there is a long-standing belief that anyone can come to Christ, based on the idea, "whosoever will may come." People must make a decision! They're responsible to respond with faith. It is up to them. That's one side of the coin.

But the other side of the coin is that God is behind the scenes making it possible for us to come. The belief is that we are not free moral agents in a neutral world. There is an enemy who captures and ensnares many, who blinds the eyes of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4). And there is the Holy Spirit who convicts and draws us (John 16:8). There is an ongoing spiritual battle for the souls of men and women.

Which side of the coin are you? How do we resolve this?

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

**It's a mystery we can't know fully this side of heaven. Our assurance comes from believing the strong promises of God's drawing and keeping. But our preaching comes from obedience to the command to preach the gospel to every creature, expecting their positive response (Mark 16:15-16).**

### **Jesus the Bread of Life**

*“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” (vv48-51)*

Jesus repeated and continued the use of this metaphor. As bread is necessary for physical life, so Jesus is necessary for spiritual and eternal life.

“Bread of Life” and “Living Bread” mean bread that brings life, just as “Living Water,” in the spiritual sense, means water that brings life. It is not physical life that physical bread and water sustain that he is talking of here, but eternal life. Jesus contrasts himself to the manna that came down from heaven in the wilderness (Exodus 16:13-36). People ate the manna, but eventually died. But those who eat of the Living Bread will have eternal life.

Jesus plainly explained what He meant by bread in this context. That bread was His flesh, given for the life of the world. It was His soon-coming work on the cross when He gave His life as a sacrifice pleasing to God the Father and as a substitute for guilty sinners. Jesus explained that receiving Him as bread was not receiving Him as a great moral teacher, example, or prophet. It was not receiving Him as a good or great man or noble martyr. It was receiving Him in light of what He did on the cross, His ultimate act of love for lost humanity as Messiah.

### **Eating Jesus' Flesh & Drinking Jesus' Blood**

*“The Jews therefore quarrelled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, 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 eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats 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 he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”” (vv52-58)*

Bread of life is a metaphor. Bread from heaven is a metaphor. Living bread is a metaphor. Bread of God is a metaphor. The big question is this: Is Jesus speaking about the Lord's Supper in this passage? His audience, remember, is primarily those he is trying to bring to faith in Christ, but John knew that Christians would read these words too – and that they couldn't help but think of the Lord's Supper. What is Jesus saying here? Jesus has been going back and forth between three metaphors:

- Manna, "bread from heaven" (6:31-34, 38, 41-42, 49-50, 58)
- Bread of Life, that is, bread that brings about eternal life (6:35-42, 51, 58)
- Flesh and blood as "food" (6:51b-56)

These metaphors are related in that they all refer to eating and nourishing. These are the elements Jesus uses to weave a beautiful and powerful teaching on faith and eternal life. It is quite clear that "believing in Jesus" corresponds to "eating the Bread of Life," since these are used as parallel statements in the same context and with the same result -- everlasting life. This theme weaves itself through this discourse and is said first one way and then another throughout the passage.

Jesus offers us heavenly bread for eternal life, but we must eat it. Faith in Jesus is not compared with tasting or admiring, but with eating. Jesus says that we must have Him within us, and we must partake of Him.

- Seeing a loaf of bread on a plate will not satisfy our hunger.
- Knowing the ingredients in the bread will not satisfy our hunger.
- Taking pictures of the bread will not satisfy our hunger.
- Telling other people about the bread will not satisfy our hunger.
- Selling the bread will not satisfy our hunger.
- Playing catch with the bread will not satisfy our hunger.

Nothing will satisfy our hunger and bring us life except actually eating the bread. *"He who eats this bread will live forever."*

### **What Does Jesus Mean by Eating His Flesh and Drinking His Blood?**

If this is figurative language, as I believe it is, then what is Jesus saying? Observe in 6:53-59 the consequences of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood. Let's look at these verse by verse, examining the consequence as well as similar sayings elsewhere:

- Verse 53 -- **"Having life in oneself."** The consequence of believing is to have life in his name, according to 20:31. In 1 John 5:10-12, having life is associated with believing in the Son of God.
- Verse 54a -- **"Has eternal life."** Eternal life is the consequence of believing in 6:40a, as well as in 3:15-16; 3:36; 5:24; 1 Timothy 1:16; 1 John 5:13; etc.
- Verse 54b -- **"Resurrection on the last day."** Resurrection on the last day is the consequence of believing according to John 6:40b. Jesus also connects believing in him with resurrection and eternal life in the raising of Lazarus (11:25-26).
- Verse 56 -- **"Remains or abides in Jesus."** This is also a consequence of believing Jesus' words according to 15:7. His word remaining or abiding in us is connected with eternal life (1 John 2:23-25), being true disciples (8:31-32), and bearing fruit (15:5).
- Verse 57 -- **"Live because of me."** Eternal life is the consequence of believing in the "I am the resurrection and the life" passage (11:25-26).
- Verse 58 -- **"Live forever."** This is the consequence of eating of the "living bread" in 6:51b above. It is another way of saying one "has eternal life" (see 6:54a above). In 11:26 Jesus connects believing in him with never dying.

It is clear that the consequences of putting one's faith in Jesus -- believing in Jesus -- are the same as the consequences of "eating his flesh and drinking his blood." This is a strong, even extreme, metaphor for faith.

### **The Vivid Metaphor Causes an Uproar (6:59-66)**

The metaphor was so vivid, so extreme, in fact, that it caused an uproar. Many "disciples" left and no longer followed Jesus. As I reflect on the reaction to Jesus' vivid metaphor, Jesus' response seems very unlike what a modern politically correct people would do.

But Jesus' reaction in verses 61-62 to the complaining "disciples" (distinguished from the Twelve in 6:67) is to say, *"Does this offend you?"* Jesus understood the offence many of His listeners took at His teaching, yet He didn't change the teaching or feel it was His fault. Jesus didn't preach just to please His audience. If that was His concern, He would have instantly taken back what was just said, seeing His audience was offended. Jesus didn't take it back. He challenged and confronted them even more.

He said: *"What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?"* Better to be offended now and to get over it, than to be offended on that day.

Jesus says something curious:

*"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." (6:63)*

In other words, Jesus seems to be saying, to take these words literally, as if I was talking about literal bread and flesh, is pointless. I am speaking of spiritual things. The Spirit inspires Jesus' words, and these words, taken in their true sense, bring eternal life to those who believe.

### **Will You Also Go Away? (6:67-69)**

*"Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also, we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.""* (vv67-69)

There are some "hard sayings" in life that cause the faint of heart to let go. There are those who assent to Jesus' words, but when there is a crisis of faith, those who continue to feed on Jesus, who continue to believe, who abide in him, they are his true disciples; the others walk away. This entire passage is about Jesus having "the words of eternal life," that is, the words, which, when believed, result in eternal life.

### **Lessons for Disciples**

This has been a long and complex lesson. But several lessons stand out for us disciples to ponder and obey.

1. Sometimes people follow Jesus for merely selfish reasons (because Jesus gave them physical bread, for example), but true disciples must look beyond the physical blessings to hunger for spiritual life, eternal life (6:26-27).
2. Eternal life is gained by faith, not by certain works of righteousness (6:28-29).
3. Jesus is the Bread of Life who nourishes people spiritually and gives them eternal life (6:35).
4. Eating the Bread of Life and eating Jesus' flesh/drinking his blood, are vivid metaphors for putting our whole faith in him (6:53-59).
5. Not all who have the name of disciple will continue with Jesus. Those who have only a selfish or surface belief will fall away when Jesus tells them hard sayings or asks difficult things of them (6:61-66).