

John 6:51-58

⁵¹“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

⁵²At that, the Jews argued among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

⁵³So Jesus said to them, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. ⁵⁴The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like your fathers ate and died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.”

I Am THE BREAD of Life

I.

“The staff of life.” That is what bread has been called. Fossilized cakes of bread have been discovered by archeologists in a number of their digs. As far back as you can trace human existence you can find bread. God spoke to Adam and Eve about the consequences of their sin: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19, NIV84). The word for food is *lechem*—literally “bread.” In fact, the Bible uses the word “bread” to refer to the necessities of life many times.

Bread is the most basic form of food in nearly every human society, even today. Whether it’s flatbread or bread with yeast, cakes or loaves, made from barley or wheat or corn or some other kind of grains, you will always find some sort of bread.

In the First Lesson today Solomon personified wisdom as a person, inviting others to a banquet. That banquet gives understanding and spiritual life. Jesus talks about essentially the same thing in the Gospel today. For several weeks he has identified himself as the bread that came down from heaven and the bread of life. People who are without Jesus, even though they might appear to be vibrant and healthy, are malnourished. They are really nothing but the walking dead.

“The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51, EHV). This is a hard thing for many people to understand. Is Jesus advocating cannibalism? Are people to literally eat his flesh?

Many people—even respected theologians—think Jesus was alluding to the Lord’s Supper. He was not. Jesus hadn’t instituted the Lord’s Supper yet. When he did, he wouldn’t tell them, “Take and eat, this is my *flesh*,” but “take and eat, this is my *body*.” Whenever Jesus *did* do something that was to be understood differently after he rose from the dead, he would tell them they would understand better in the future. There is nothing resembling that in this instance. Jesus says: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves” (John 6:53, EHV). The thief on the cross never had the opportunity to receive the Lord’s Supper. Neither did countless children throughout the centuries who died before taking their confirmation vows and receiving the

Sacrament. Jesus says that “you *do not have* life” if you don’t eat his flesh and drink his blood.

No, Jesus is not speaking about, or even alluding to, the Lord’s Supper. It is all about having faith in the Savior who came to buy back souls with his flesh and blood offered on the altar of the cross.

II.

“The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.’⁵² At that, the Jews argued among themselves, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’” (John 6:51-52, EHV). There it is on display—unbelievers rejecting the Savior. A refusal to believe in the One whom God sent from heaven as the living bread who would give up his life for the world. They wanted nothing to do with him. They did not want to make any effort to understand him.

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves” (John 6:53, EHV). Many years ago an atheist friend of mine could recite all kinds of facts about Jesus from the Bible, but he didn’t believe that Jesus was his Savior. Countless people have a head knowledge of Jesus, but lack faith. They look at the Bible as only a book of rules and regulations—ordinances to follow and rituals to perform. They only want intervention and comfort from the church at the big events of life—baptism, getting married, and being buried. In all other circumstances, butt out and leave them alone.

Is there faith there, or is it the same kind of push-back the unbelieving Jews demonstrated? Eating Jesus’ flesh was illogical to them. So was believing in him for salvation. Those who only want the church to participate in their formal occasions are missing out on the banquet of life Jesus brings. Continuing to do so to the bitter end means “not having life” in themselves.

When I was in high school I went to visit a friend on his family’s ranch for a few days. When it was time to feed the cattle, the ranchers would run a shovel handle across the corrugated metal sides of the barn. At the sound, cattle would come running from every direction, recognizing the signal for feeding time. I’ll bet your pets do the same. They hear the click of the plastic latch and rustle of the scoop in the food bin and come running. And when the food is dumped in the bowl, they eat voraciously.

“The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.”⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me” (John 6:56-57, EHV). Do you hear the alarm on Sunday morning and react like the cattle to the shovel across the barn walls? Do you spring out of bed with great excitement because you recognize the Sunday morning alarm as a call to worship—a call to have another opportunity to feed on God’s Word and be spiritually nourished to face another week in the world?

III.

The last verse from the Gospel for last week is the first verse of the Gospel for *this* week. It’s a crucial verse. “The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51, EHV).

Jesus knew that he would die for the scepticism of unbelievers and the incredulity of those who scoffed: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (John 6:52, EHV). He knew that he would die for the sins of hitting the snooze button as you decide the week was just too busy for you to spend an hour feeding on his Word. He knew that he would give his life for all who turn his life and death into a mere example—just another bunch of regulations to follow as human beings try to earn heaven on their own. He knew he would die for all

those who only turn to him for the crises of life, or when there is some major celebration or life event.

IV.

Don't wait for a crisis. When Jesus announced that he is THE BREAD of life, he said: "If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51, EHV). Notice the future implications. Heaven is coming. Believe in Jesus and you *will* have eternal life.

But notice what Jesus says a few verses later. "The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the Last Day" (John 6:54, EHV). Jesus *will* raise believers up on the Last Day and bring us to our heavenly home. But notice the present tense at the beginning of his statement: the one who eats Jesus' flesh and drinks his blood—in other words, the one who believes in Jesus right now—*has* eternal life. It is already yours—right now.

There is something very important about eating. Something that relates to what Jesus repeatedly tells us when he calls himself the bread of life. Food isn't something to be eaten once and never again. Proper nutrition means that you have to eat regularly.

There is a plant in Australia called Nardoo. Some explorers once found themselves running out of food. The aborigines gave them some nardoo to eat, and they found it quite satisfying. They began to harvest and use it themselves as a staple in their diet. Unfortunately, they didn't realize that the aborigines roasted the nardoo before grinding it into powder. Without that important step the nardoo contained an enzyme that breaks down thiamine and robs the body of vitamin B1. Eventually the men starved to death, even though their appetites were continually satiated.

Proper nutrition means not eating something that robs your body of nutrition, even though it might taste satisfying. Proper nutrition means not gorging on junk food, or food that saps your strength rather than enhancing your strength.

Proper spiritual nutrition means not chasing after moralizers—those who turn the gospel of Jesus into a set of rules and regulations to follow, rather than recognizing him as the Bread of Life who has provided salvation full and free. Proper nutrition means to regularly take in the gospel message in Word and Sacrament and be spiritually nourished to go back to your daily life.

"This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like your fathers ate and died. The one who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:58, EHV). Keep strengthening your faith. The Lord Jesus is *the bread* of life. Feed on the Lord Jesus and his Word of life for your spiritual nutrition and live forever. Amen.