

“Soul Food”

The Scripture reading today was from John 6:48-63. If you were really paying attention to the reading, you may have caught that it sounds kind of gross! Jesus is talking about eating His flesh, drinking His blood! This smacks of cannibalism, vampire behavior! Yuck! The Greek word translated eat really means “chew”. Double yuck!

If we have a problem with Jesus’ words, we’re not the first! John 6:52 says: “Then the Jews disputed among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’” Jesus’ disciples also had a problem with what Jesus said. “Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, ‘This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?’” (verse 60). The disciples are saying, “Lord, we just can’t buy what you’re saying!”

As you probably can sense, there is a lot of *symbolism* in this passage. Jesus is not saying we have to literally chew on His arm or drink His blood (we can’t anyway, since the physical Jesus is no longer with us). So let’s go deeper into this Scripture.

Jesus says, “I am the bread of life” (verse 48). Are you a bread eater? I like bread with my meal. But a lot of people just don’t serve bread regularly with their meal. Some who are weight conscious don’t eat bread. So, the force of Jesus’ words is somewhat lost for us today. But in the time of Jesus, bread was much more of a staple in everyone’s diet. Bread was the most important part of the meal. Everyone (even the poor) had access to bread. Bread was a means of fellowship – to “break bread” with someone meant you are friends. We would catch more of the intent of Jesus’ words if it were translated, “I am the *food* of life.” We may go without bread, but we can’t go long without food!

Jesus is not talking about physical food here. Meat and potatoes and vegetables and salads sustain *physical* life, but more is needed! The Bible says, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

We need more than physical food. We are more than just animals. We are created in the image of God. There is a *spirit dimension* that sets us apart from other creatures. That spirit part of us needs nourishment also. Jesus said, “I’m the food that you need for your soul.”

Earlier, Jesus had spoken these words: “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). *There are things that will satisfy us.....to an extent.....for a while.* Money...possessions...the hobbies we love...a fun vacation...a good meal. These all have their rightful place. But even the things of this world that are good and bring us pleasure and satisfaction can only take us so far.

Haven’t we all had the experience of finding satisfaction in something, then only to have the luster wear off or the joy that it brought fade? It’s like children, getting new toys for Christmas. But after a few days, they often don’t even bother to get these new toys out of their toy box. We don’t entirely outgrow this! It’s just that when we’re adults, our toys are more expensive! Ravi Zacharius has said, “With all our ingesting and consumption, our hungers are still many and our fulfillments are few.”

The Bible says, “One does not live by bread alone.” We need something – or someone - who can satisfy the deepest longings of the human spirit for something that will *endure*, something that will not fade nor perish. C. S. Lewis once made this astute observation: “If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.” *Jesus offers us food that will last. In Him we find eternal life.*

In the Scripture we are looking at from John 6, Jesus says this to the crowd gathered around Him: “Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died” (John 6:49). Remember when the Jews were in the wilderness, God fed them with manna. As miraculous a gift as that was, after all was said and done, they died.

But, Jesus contrasts what *He himself* gives: “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever” (John 6:48-51a). All of us eat to stay alive. But what about after that? Have we been eating anything that will keep us alive forever? Jesus says, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:51).

How do we eat this bread? How do we experience the eternal life Jesus offers? Here we revisit this difficult section: “So 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. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them’” (John 6:53-56). We “eat his flesh” and “drink his blood”. As I said, this sounds gross and repugnant to us.

Jesus’ insistence that one had to drink His blood must have shocked the Jews. Old Testament law prohibited eating anything with blood in it. Why? Because the Hebrews regarded blood as the *life of the animal*. Jesus is saying something profound: By eating my flesh and drinking my blood *you are absorbing and assimilating my very life into yours!*

We abide in Him, and He abides in us! “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them” (verse 56). We don’t have our soul satisfied, we don’t have eternal life, just by having a mild brush with Jesus, or having a belief in Him that never gets further than our head. No, it’s when we have an *ongoing, intimate relationship* with Him that we have eternal life.

Do you abide in Christ? Does Christ abide in you? We can abide in Christ and have Christ abiding in us when we put our faith in Him and surrender our life and will to Him. Ephesians 3:17 says, “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts *through faith.*”

We feed on Him! Someone put it this way, “Really, to receive from Christ what he has to give

us...to experience of his saving power, we must feed on him – there is no other word that expresses it...(we) must absorb his teaching, his character, his mind, his ways; (we) must appropriate the virtue there is in him, till his mind becomes our mind and his ways our ways.”

“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” (John 6:53). Here’s another interesting truth behind those words: According to Leviticus 17:11, it is the blood of animals, poured out on the altar, that *makes atonement* for one’s sins. “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life” (Leviticus 17:11). We drink His blood. And in that connection to Jesus’ blood, poured out on the cross, we find atonement and forgiveness for our sins!

One more point from these words in John 6. *This passage suggests communion, or the Lord’s Supper.* Most Bible scholars feel that the gospel writer John has in mind the Lord’s Supper when he writes these words. Remember that night in the upper room, as Jesus ate His last meal with His disciples? He takes the bread and says, “This is my body. Take and eat this.” He holds the cup of wine and says, “Drink this. This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Each time we take communion it’s an opportunity to feed on Christ and let Him nourish our souls, and to remember with gratitude how His blood enables us to be forgiven

“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). You eat a good meal. How long does it last? Isn’t it good to know that there is food that can satisfy us *forever*.

During World War II, the Germans forced many 12 and 13 year olds into the Junior Gestapo. These boys were treated very harshly and given inhumane jobs to perform. When the war ended, most had lost track of their families and wandered about without food or shelter.

As part of an aid program to post-war Germany, many of these youths were placed in tent cities. Here doctors and psychologists worked with the boys in an attempt to restore their mental and physical health. They found that many of the boys were waking up in the night screaming in terror. One doctor had an idea. After feeding the boys a large meal, he put them to bed with a piece of bread in their hands, which they were told to save until morning. The boys slept soundly because they finally had the assurance of food for the next day.

Jesus is the bread of life. Hold onto Him, and we will never have to worry about the deepest needs of our spirit being fed....forever. “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

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