

WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY

The Glory of the Bread of Life – Part 4

Introduction

After Jesus says what we are going to consider today, in this passage, we read that *“when many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?””* (John 6:60, ESV). The Bible admittedly has many “hard sayings”. Why wouldn’t God just make things easy. Why does the Bible contain hard to understand passages? To be even more relevant, “Why are not all sermons, slow lobs across the plate? Easy for anyone to hit?” There could be many reasons but let me suggest a few. Examine what I say and see if this resonates as true:

- #1. Parts of the Bible are hard to understand because understanding the Bible is a supernatural event. Apart from the New Birth, the indwelling Spirit of God and the transition from being a natural person to a spiritual person, you cannot understand.
- #2. We are to think. Paul told Timothy to *“Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”* (2 Timothy 2:7, ESV). We are to love God with our minds. God created us to think. We are also to study. God never intended some truths to be handed to us – some truths take digging – take work (*“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”* (2 Timothy 2:15, ESV)
- #3. Thirdly we have difficult passages so that we are forced to “not lean on our own understanding”. We are obligated to fall in humility before God and pray with the psalmist *“Incline my heart to your testimonies . . .* (Psalm 119:36a, ESV)

So, we know at the outset we are heading into what the disciples refer to as a “hard saying”. I’m going to read the passage and make a couple interpretive comments. Then I’m going to ask 3 questions and then apply this. But first we pray!

Text: John 6:52-59 (ESV)

Outline

So, here are the 3 questions that I think emerge from the text that are important to you and I this morning:

Question #1. Why does Jesus use such crude language?

Question #2. Then what does it mean to “eat His flesh and drink His blood”?

Question #3. What does it mean to have “eternal life”?

Question #1. Why Does Jesus Use Such Crude Language?

It is said of Jewish people that they often answer a question with a question. I'm not Jewish but at times I think this is a wise approach. My answer to why Jesus uses such language is answered by the question, "Why did God create humans to be dependent on food and water?"

Look at verse 55: *"For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink."* That word "true" is a word we already noted in verse 32. There I explained that the word "true" as used by Jesus speaks of what is ultimate; what is fulfilled; what is the real reality. Therefore, in Chapter 15 He can say that He is the "true" vine. Here He says that He is the true food and true drink. Therefore verse 55 reminds us that all food and drink is created with this in mind: it is pointing to the Ultimate Food and the Ultimate Drink. When you understand this in the context that Jesus is speaking, He is saying, ***"Your hunger and thirst is an indicator, a pointer, a trigger to remind you that the ultimate need of every person is provided and satisfied in Me (Jesus)."***

Look at the way Jesus structures his comments. Jesus says in verse 51, that the bread that He gives is life. Then in verse 53, he says, you must eat me. I think that's a very significant way of Jesus saying, "I have come to give you eternal life and that eternal life is found in Me – as a Person." When you become a Christian you get forgiveness, you get peace, you get many things, but the most important thing you get is Jesus – and Jesus is the ultimate need of every single person.

Stated otherwise, if you don't eat and drink earthly food you will die and if you don't consume Jesus you will spiritually perish. Every time we eat and drink, we should think: "My true hunger and thirst is for Jesus." David cried, *"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water."* (Psalm 63:1, ESV)

Question #2. What Does It Mean To "Eat His Flesh and Drink His Blood"?

The answer to this is less difficult than we make it. Remember the interpretative key to the whole Bible: The Bible is the interpreter of the Bible. John has previously clued us in as he reported this interaction between Jesus and the Jews. Note verse 40:

"For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Now compare this with verse 54:

"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

How does one receive eternal life and be confident that Christ will raise them up on the last day? Answer: "look to the Son and believe in him" or stated otherwise: "feed on his flesh and drink his blood." ***You come to Jesus in spiritual desperation knowing your need of Him and believing on Him, you will have eternal life and you will be resurrected to live with Him forever.***

These verses have nothing to do with the Eucharist, the Lord's Table or Communion. You must "read in" that interpretation to believe such things.

- The immediate context looks back to Moses, not forward to the institution of the Table.
- The Lord's Table had not even been instituted yet. These Jews would be lost in such an interpretation.
- More importantly, to infer Communion from this text would presume that to take Communion is to receive eternal life (which is heresy).

The answer is in the text. To feed on Christ is to come to Him in faith and believe in Him. Lastly,

Question #3. What Does It Mean To Have "Eternal Life"?

That is not an irrelevant question. If I were to take you to the 17th chapter of John we read these words: *"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."*¹ Eternal life is summed up to "knowing" Christ in God. The word "knowing" is not intellectual knowledge. It is an intimate relationship. Notice how Jesus states that in verse 56, *"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."* Note how in John 6:54 eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood produces eternal life and the promise of resurrection at the last day. Here the same process of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood leads to a relationship of mutual indwelling (resides in me, and I in him). This suggests strongly that for the author (and for Jesus) the concepts of 'possessing eternal life' and of 'residing in Jesus' are virtually interchangeable.

Eternal life is just another way of speaking of a reality whereby the believer is brought into union with Christ.

This is huge in Paul's theology. The Christian is "in Christ". The Christian is "Christ in you".

- It is this relationship with Christ that determines how we view sin (Romans 6:1–4 (ESV) ¹ *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*”).
- It is this relationship with Christ that determines how we live the Christian life (Galatians 2:20 (ESV) ²⁰ *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*”).

¹ John 17:3, ESV

- It is this relationship with Christ that speaks to our assurance (Romans 8:38–39 (ESV) ³⁸ *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ *nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”).*

I mean this is of major importance. Being consumed with and by Christ that is seen in this passage brings us to a level of experience that is beyond description. “Christ in me; me in Christ”.

Application

Sometimes we can think and talk about Jesus as “someone out there” – Someone external to us. That is so far from the truth. Imagine yourself at the airport, about to board a plane. The plane is on its way to sunny Florida, and Florida is where you want to be. What relationship do you need to have with the plane at this point?

- Would it help to be *under* the plane, to *submit* yourself to the plane’s distinguished authority in the whole flying-to-Florida thing?
- Or would it help to be *inspired* by the plane? To watch it fly off and whisper “One day, I hope to do that too”.
- What about *following* the plane? You know the plane is going to Florida, and so it stands to reason that if you take note of the direction it goes and pursue it then you too will end up there.

Of course, the key relationship you need with the plane is not to be under it, behind it, or inspired by it. You need to be *in* it. Why? Because, by being in the plane, what happens to the plane will also happen to you.

To be in Christ – to be in union with Jesus is more than dutiful obedience to Him; it’s more than being inspired by His profound wisdom; it’s more than following his ethics and moral code; it’s being with Him, in Him. And this undefinable, yet real relationship with Jesus is yours by a hungering and thirsting faith in Him.