

This Bread Is My Flesh

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 November 2020

Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0 : 00] And this morning we come to one of the most difficult teachings or sayings of Jesus in the Bible. Jesus said a number of things that were difficult. Some are difficult because they're hard to put into practice.

Some are difficult because they offend our sensibilities. And some are difficult because they're just hard to understand what Jesus means. This particular saying of Jesus is difficult for all three of those reasons.

So let's read what Jesus said in John chapter 6 starting in verse 48. Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves.

How can this man give us his flesh to eat? 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.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. And I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food.

[1 : 48] And my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me. And I in them. 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. This is the bread that came down from heaven.

Your ancestors ate manna and died. But whoever feeds on this bread will live forever. He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Wow. Let's start with what is clear here. Jesus said this while teaching in the synagogue. We're not sure just when this conversation transitioned into the synagogue.

Or maybe it started in the synagogue. And that's where he met up with some of the people who had been at the feeding of the 5,000 just the other day. But here Jesus is in the synagogue.

[2 : 55] He's in the place where devout Jewish people go to worship God. And he's been teaching the crowd who's gathered there. And we've already looked in a fair bit of detail at most of what Jesus has said in this conversation.

It's been a bit tense. Jesus has told them that they have some majorly misplaced priorities. He's told them that God, his Father, wants them to believe in him.

They demand a sign. Give us some proof and then we'll believe. Maybe do something like the miracle of the manna in the wilderness. Jesus tells them basically God is right now giving them bread from heaven.

He says, I am the bread of life that has come down from heaven to give life to the world. And of course we've talked about this. Jesus is talking about eternal life and spiritual life as we've seen. But then the crowd started to grumble because Jesus said that he was from heaven. In their thoughts, he was just a man. He was just the son of Joseph and Mary.

[4 : 08] And so again, as we just read, he tells them, I am the bread of life. He says, your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died.

In other words, listen, you need more than just the manna like they had back then. Having some manna appear on the ground tomorrow isn't going to help you with the problem of death.

They ate the manna provided from heaven, yet they died. You can almost imagine it. Jesus essentially saying, if I was to make some manna appear for you right now, it wouldn't solve that problem.

You could eat it, and yet you would still die. No, you need something more. You need something better than that manna or bread of long ago.

He says, but here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.

[5 : 23] I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

So the manna like they had in the wilderness long ago, it's not enough to meet your true need, your deep need, your deeper need.

There is a provision of God, however, that can meet that need. That provision is me, says Jesus. I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

Literally, in the original, there's quite a lot of emphasis in those words. He says, I am the bread, the living bread, which from heaven came down.

So far, we're tracking with Jesus. We've got some metaphor here. I mean, we know, we all know that Jesus is not a loaf of bread.

[6 : 33] He's a person. He's a person claiming to be from heaven, just like the manna was from heaven. He's a person claiming to give life, just like the manna did.

Only Jesus has made it clear. The kind of life he's talking about is not just physical, bodily life. It's spiritual. It's relationship with God. It's eternal life kind of life.

And especially the kind of life that happens at the last day when he raises us up. So, if we're listening carefully, I mean, it seems pretty clear that Jesus is using a metaphor.

He's using a figure of speech. He's making a parallel between that provision of God long ago and the provision of God right now, that he is standing in front of them.

There's a big difference between the bread of long ago and the bread of today. The word living draws our attention to that in verse 51.

[7 : 43] I am the living bread. That bread of long ago, it came from heaven, yes, but it was still just bread. But I am the living bread.

God's provision for your life today has come down from heaven in the form of a living person. And Jesus continues on with this metaphor.

He says, whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. And it's at this point that a sharp argument arises among the people who are listening that day.

Verse 52, Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves. How can this man give us his flesh to eat? So obviously the crowd has missed the metaphor.

They've not fully picked up on the fact that Jesus is not talking about physical eating. He's talking about himself as a living, breathing provision of God from heaven.

[9 : 00] He's talking about how someday he will give his flesh for the life of the world. How he will surrender his fleshly body to death.

So that anyone who believes in the whole world may have this eternal life that he's been talking about. But the Jews there that day, they missed the metaphor. They're still thinking about some kind of physical something that they can put into their mouth and chew.

How can this man give us his flesh to eat? That sounds disgusting. That sounds like cannibalism. And even if he really intends to do that, it would be wrong for anyone to actually eat his flesh.

We don't do that. We eat the meat of animals, not people. That's what I imagine they're thinking. As the Old Testament scriptures teach, man is a special and distinct creation of God.

Unlike the animals. He says, I give you the animals for food. But if anyone sheds the blood of man, there's consequences. Everywhere throughout the Old Testament that it's talked about eating the flesh of a human being, it's something horrific and horrible that people do out of desperation because of their own wickedness.

[10 : 23] It's talked about as a curse. And so I imagine these are the kinds of things that the people in the synagogue are thinking as Jesus says this. They totally misunderstand, it seems, what Jesus meant to say when he said, whoever eats this bread will live forever.

This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. But then, in response to all this, Jesus says something that stirs them up even more.

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.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink.

You can just imagine the eyes of the crowd in that moment go wide. Like, whoa. You can just imagine the eyes of the disciples of Jesus going wide.

[11 : 40] Can you imagine what Peter's thinking at this moment? Like, oh, no, Jesus, don't say that. You're embarrassing us. You can't seriously mean that, can you?

Like, if this is all just a metaphor or an analogy, just tell us with plain words. Don't say it like that. I wonder if that's how some of us followers of Jesus today feel about these words that Jesus said. Do these words embarrass you? Do you wish that Jesus hadn't said them? Maybe do you think you know better than Jesus how to get the truth across to a hardened and unbelieving crowd like this one?

There are some words that I keep hearing playing over in my mind as I think of this passage. Something Jesus said to Peter on another occasion and to the whole crowd. He said, if anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this sinful and adulterous generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels. It's something to think about. We should not be ashamed of what Jesus said here. As shocking as it sounds, I think Jesus meant to say it that way.

[13 : 12] I think he meant to shock the people that day and to get them to really think. I mean, let's stop and think about this for a moment. If Jesus was just trying to get a following for his own ego, like all of these people on YouTube these days, why would he look at his followers and say this to them?

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood? My answer is that Jesus intended to shock them. He intended to say it this way, to get them really thinking about what he's saying.

I can't help but think of the paddles. You know, the ones that the doctor uses when a patient is flatlining in a hospital bed, the shocker paddles, defibrillators, or whatever they're called. Have you ever wondered what it would feel like to get shocked with those while you're wide awake and healthy? Apparently it's been described as getting kicked in the chest by a mule or as a small bomb going off inside of your ribcage.

Extremely painful. And yet it's a shock that we can be deeply thankful for because there are times when it can save our life, when our hearts go out of rhythm.

[14 : 36] And that's what I think is going on here. Jesus has already said back in verse 36, you have seen me and still you do not believe.

Their hearts are out of rhythm. They're spiritually flatlining. The provision of God is right there in front of them in the person of Jesus and some of them have seen him do miracles already. They ate the bread that he made out of just five loaves. And yet they won't come to him. They won't believe in him.

And so perhaps Jesus says it like this in such a shocking way to pierce through the hardness of some to get them really listening and thinking about the words that he's saying. Words which for some may be the words which give life. So the big question is what does Jesus mean when he says this?

[15 : 40] Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. We all know the answer intuitively.

We just do. It's just, it's one of those things. You could ask anyone. You could ask any person in this room. Even the children know the answer. I'm sure. Does Jesus really want us to take a bite of his flesh and swallow down his blood?

No. We just know it. We know the answer from the rest of the Bible. Eating the flesh of people and drinking their blood is horrible.

And it's wrong as the scriptures portray. We know the answer from how the rest of Jesus' story unfolds. If we watch how the story goes, there never comes a moment where Jesus turns and instructs his disciples to take a bite or starts letting his blood out for them to drink.

And we can know this answer even just from the conversation because we have to keep these words in the context of this conversation. All along until this point, if we're listening closely to the words Jesus chooses, we can see that he has been speaking in metaphor.

[16 : 58] He's using bread from heaven as an analogy, as a parallel, a figure of speech. And so when he tells them to eat his flesh and drink his blood, we need to continue to interpret it that way.

We might paraphrase his words like this. Very truly, I tell you, you need to take the provision of God from heaven into yourself or unto yourself.

If you do not take this provision of God, which I am unto yourselves, you will perish. You will die. I think that's the plain meaning of Jesus' words.

But what keeps us from hearing it that way? Why do we trip over his words so easily? I want to suggest two things. First, I think we have to be careful about how we understand the words truly, truly or very truly.

The crowd says, how can this man give us his flesh to eat? And Jesus says, truly, truly, unless you eat the flesh and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

[18:13] What does truly, truly mean? Is Jesus agreeing with them and saying, yes, indeed, you do need to eat my flesh and drink my blood in the same sense that you're thinking?

I don't think so. That might be what some of them thought Jesus meant. But we might take truly, truly a different way.

He's not necessarily agreeing with their understanding of how they need to eat his flesh. We might take it more as something like, in all seriousness, or I tell you the truth.

unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, in the sense that I mean, you have no life in you.

The second thing I think we need to be careful about is verse 55. This verse is part of why we stumble over Jesus' words, because we think, well, you can't really be meaning.

[19:13] Eat your flesh and drink your blood. And then he says in verse 55, for my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. The natural sense of that seems to be that, yes, my flesh is actually food that you need to eat and my blood, real drink that you need to drink.

But, again, we need to read these words carefully. Let's remember how Jesus has talked about food in this conversation already. Back in verse 27, he said, do not work for food that spoils. but for food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you. We saw back there how Jesus was using the word food somewhat metaphorically already.

Almost as a proverb or a principle. Don't work for provisions that don't last, but for provisions that last into eternal life. And I think we should carry that same sense forward to these words as well. for my flesh is real provision from God and my blood too sent down from heaven to meet your real need.

[20:29] Both the body and the blood of Jesus are critical to this salvation plan working. this is what God has been pointing to for centuries through the Old Testament scriptures through the sacrificial system and the sacrifices that had to be brought to the tabernacle and the temple and be offered for atonement of sins.

Blood had to be shed. An animal had to be slain bodily. If Jesus has no body and just comes down as a spirit, he cannot fully atone for our sins.

We are bodily creatures and so for justice to be done, an acceptable substitute must take our place, must take our punishment upon himself and to be an acceptable substitute for complete and final forgiveness, Jesus had to be human.

He had to be one of us. He had to have a body like we do and blood coursing through his veins like we do. He had to face the punishment we deserved which was no less than bodily death.

His flesh, this comes through really clearly in the words of the author of Hebrews. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

[22:16] There you see, flesh and blood are required to make atonement. His flesh, his blood is real, true, genuine provision from God that meets our need so that we can be spared what we deserve for our sins and have that eternal life that he's been talking about.

Notice the word real. The word real can also be translated as true. Real isn't the same as the word literal.

He's not saying my flesh is literal food. He's saying it's real, it's true, it's genuine food or provision that you must take unto yourself and participate in or you will die.

So we have to read this carefully or else we'll find ourselves in the same spot as the crowd and kind of asking that same question. Will he really give us his flesh to eat?

the context by the way points to this as well. We see this in verse 51. He says, this bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world.

[23:42] And if we read that with the full story of Jesus in mind we can see the way that his flesh gives life is through his death. it's through his giving over of his flesh to death which will happen at the cross as the story goes.

Not only that but we have already heard Jesus drop the metaphor for a moment. If you think back to verse 35 he said it what they need to do very plainly there.

He said, whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

So the way that you get your need to eat of Jesus satisfied forever is simply to come to him. The way that you get your need to drink of Jesus satisfied your thirst quenched is simply to believe in him.

That's what it means to eat and drink of Jesus. And yet in all this I think Jesus is quite deliberate in calling them to eat and drink of him.

[25 : 00] Why? Well we already talked about the gracious shock paddles for an unresponsive heart but beyond that there's something very rich and intimate about the language of eating and drinking.

Eating and drinking when it's used in metaphor communicates a depth of participation. When you eat or drink something it goes from being outside of you to inside of you.

It goes from you know food drink it goes from doing nothing for you to now when it's inside of you giving life to the body as it's used by the body.

in the same way I think Jesus is making a point here unless you participate unless you partake of my death my flesh and my blood which I will give for your life unless you take what I'm going to do for you on that cross into yourself unto yourself to the very depths you will die but if you do you will live forever so what's the significance of all this well I guess we could say that in a veiled sort of way Jesus without them fully realizing it is telling them about how he is going to suffer and die for the life of the world as a gracious provision of God from heaven which unlike the manna will give them life beyond the grave if only they will eat and drink what

God has provided if only they will come to him and believe in him and this is exactly what Jesus prepared his disciples to understand on the night of his betrayal he sat down with them to eat the Passover meal and they sat around the table at that meal and Jesus again used metaphor while they were eating Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying take and eat this is my body then he took a cup and when he had given thanks he gave it to them saying drink from it all of you this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins it wasn't his own flesh that he broke and gave out and that they ate neither was it his own blood that he poured into the cup and then passed out his own flesh was broken the next day when he died on the cross his own blood was poured out the next day and he gave it for the life of the world in the same way it's it's not eating or drinking from this table that gives us life what his disciples did that night didn't give them life it was what

[28 : 22] Jesus did the next day as his flesh and blood was given for the world a special gift of God from heaven that's what the table the meal points to it's symbolic and even today as we come to this table it points back to that same reality drinking from this cup and eating this bread it doesn't give you salvation we don't believe as some do that this bread and cup actually become the blood and body of Jesus in some mysterious way it's just ordinary bread and grape juice but partaking of this table is one of the most important things that we do as Christians as a church it's something we were instructed to do by Jesus himself it's our way of saying with our actions yes Jesus I have come to you yes

Jesus I do believe in you and I take I receive and I take into myself what your death accomplished on the cross what your body and blood accomplished for me eternal life and forgiveness of sins and so let's take a moment as we prepare to eat and drink from the table to pray quietly to our Lord we're going to have some music play and I want to encourage you to take a few minutes in the quietness of your own heart to confess to thank God to reflect on what Jesus suffered for you on the