

## (2) The bread of life

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[ 0 : 00 ] This morning's reading is John chapter 6, verses 41 to 59, and this can be found on page 1075 of the Bibles.

John chapter 6, beginning at verse 41. So the Jews grumbled about Jesus, because he said, I am the bread that came down from heaven.

They said, is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I have come down from heaven? Jesus answered them, do not grumble among yourselves.

No one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, and they will all be taught by God.

Everyone who has heard and learned from the father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the father, except he who is from God, he has seen the father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

[ 1 : 05 ] I am the bread of life. Your fathers 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. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, how can this man give us his flesh to eat? So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, 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 feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

Whoever feeds on 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 whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.

[ 2 : 11 ] This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever. Jesus said these things in the synagogue as he taught at Capernaum.

Thanks, Richard, for reading. Please do keep the Bibles open at John chapter 6 on page 1075. Why don't we pray together?

Heavenly Father, thank you for that wonderful truth that we just sung about, that the Lord Jesus is our good shepherd. And we pray now that he would shepherd us as we come before your word.

Please would you teach us and instruct us. We pray, Heavenly Father, that none of us would leave here unchanged by what we've heard. And we ask it for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen. Well, if you're anything like me, you still have one or two relics around the place at home from your childhood, that perhaps you haven't quite been able to bring yourself to dispose of, at least not for at least another 20 years at any rate.

[ 3 : 22 ] One such relic, which we have at home, is an airfix model of a VC-10 passenger aircraft, which I made, I should think, when I was about 10. Now, of course, having children is the perfect reason, perfectly excuse anyway, for hanging on to it.

I'm only hanging on to it for their benefit, obviously. And they play with it occasionally. However, last summer we went to the Imperial War Museum at Duxford, and we looked around a real VC-10, decked out in the same decor, which it would have sported when it was flying around the world in the 1960s.

And whereas our children can go for many months without really showing a flicker of interest in the model, they were absolutely fascinated by the real thing. Because, of course, the real thing is always much more interesting than the model.

Well, in John chapter 6, if you were here last week, you'll know that Jesus has been teaching us that he came on a rescue mission. And he's been explaining it in terms of the Old Testament model. You'll remember that we said that 1,400 years earlier, God had rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, and he had taken them on a 40-year journey through the deserts to the lands which he had promised them.

[ 4 : 36 ] One of the most significant events of that first rescue was when God miraculously fed his people. They had no food. There were hundreds of thousands of them.

And for 40 years, God provided food for them, bread and quail, as he sustained them miraculously on that journey. But that was just a model of the rescue that Jesus has now come to bring. Have a look in our passage today at verse 48. As Jesus says, During the Exodus, they ate the bread in the desert.

It gave them life physically, but nonetheless they died, just like the rest of us. But that is just a model. Jesus is the reality.

As he says here, he is the bread that comes down from heaven. He is the one who gives spiritual life, eternal life. As he says, verse 51, he will live forever.

[ 5 : 59 ] That's the promise, isn't it? We saw last week, if you look back at verse 40, as Jesus said, 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'll raise him up at the last day.

However, we also began to see last week that the extraordinary thing is in John chapter 6, is that as Jesus explains about this rescue that he's come to bring, so the more opposition he faces. He's going to flick over the page to see what people are saying by verse 60. This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? And verse 66, After this, many of his disciples turn back and no longer walk with him.

And so today, as we look at verses 41 to 59, we're going to see Jesus explaining the heart of the rescue he's come to bring. But as he does so, we're also going to see why it is that people reject that rescue at the same time.

Well, you'll see there's an outline on the back of the service sheet. First of all, the scandal of Jesus' life. Now, I guess it's fair to say, isn't it, that in the popular imagination, Jesus Christ is perhaps the least offensive person you could ever come across.

[ 7 : 23 ] Gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Miles. However, of course, as soon as we begin to read these eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life, as we have them in the New Testament, we discover some of the extraordinary things he did and some of the most extraordinary things that he says.

Such as, here for example, the extraordinary claim of verse 38, which we looked at last week. His claim to have come from heaven. I have come down from heaven, he says.

And it's a claim which causes much outrage then, when he said it then, as it does today. Just look on to see what happens next. Verse 41.

So the Jews grumbled about him because he said, I am the bread that came down from heaven. They said, is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?

How does he now say, I have come down from heaven? Well, I wonder if you can see what they're saying. Jesus is just the local boy from next door.

[ 8 : 29 ] He looks so ordinary. Perhaps if he had had angels' wings and the rifle and a chariot, well, things might be different. But he's the boy we grew up with, we went to school with him. How come he's now claiming to have come from heaven?

However, Jesus goes on in that paragraph to show that his divine origin, the fact that he has come down from heaven, is inextricably linked with the work that he came to do.

In other words, if he's going to offer this eternal life which he speaks about, he must have come down from heaven. In fact, Jesus outlines in that paragraph, verses 41 to 51, he outlines a three-step process that's necessary if anyone is to have eternal life.

Life with God in this world and the next. I put those three steps on the outline and the three steps will show us why it is that Jesus must have come down from heaven, why he had to come from heaven. First of all, the first step is that God needs to draw people to Jesus if they're to have eternal life.

Now, that's something which Jesus will pick up on next week, but for the time being, he simply states the facts in verse 44. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him and I'll raise him up on the last day.

[ 9 : 54 ] Now, of course, that begs the question, doesn't it? Well, how? How is it that God is going to draw people to himself? What needs to happen if that's going to happen? Well, secondly, Jesus goes on to say, verse 45, that we need to be taught by God.

It is written in the prophets and they will all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Now, that little phrase, they will all be taught by God, is a quote from Isaiah, chapter 54, in the Old Testament, which pictures God's people standing around in God's presence, listening to him and being taught by him.

And the point is, very simply, that those who belong to God listen to God's words, which is why Jesus quotes from Isaiah 54 and John 6, because if we're ever to belong to God, if we're ever to have the eternal life that Jesus speaks about, why do we need to be taught by God?

However, that begs another question. How can we be taught by God? That brings us to the third step. Jesus is the one who reveals God.

Verse 46, Not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God. He has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

[ 11 : 23 ] I am the bread of life. No one has ever seen God. And therefore, how can we be taught by God? Well, it's only possible, isn't it, if Jesus, it's only possible rather because of Jesus' divine origin.

It's only possible if Jesus comes down to earth so that we can be taught by God. Now, I guess there may be one or two here this morning who, like me, can remember all the hype that surrounded the release of Steven Spielberg's film E.T.

in 1982. It is a great blockbuster as it described the encounter between the young Henry Thomas and E.T., the extraterrestrial.

Now, I guess there are many reasons why that film was such a success and why it's still shown on Christmas every year. So if you haven't got a clue what I'm talking about, then just tune in on Christmas Day or Christmas Eve, whenever it is, and you can watch it again.

But no doubt there are many reasons why that film was such a success. But I suspect that part of it is because that many of the early dreams for space exploration in the 1950s and 1960s have come to an end.

[ 12 : 30 ] People have dreamt, haven't they, of finding life on other planets. If only we go to the moon or to Mars or whatever it is, surely we'll find life there. Well, by the 1980s, that quest for life elsewhere seemed to be over.

Unless, of course, that life came to us. Hence the appeal of UFOs, I guess, not to mention E.T. If life in other form as it exists came to us, why then we'd know all about it.

Well, I wonder if we can see that Jesus is saying a very similar thing with God. No one's ever seen God, that's obvious. Yet we need to be taught by God if we're to have eternal life.

But amazingly, God has come to earth in Jesus Christ. He reveals God perfectly. His life demonstrates what God is like. His teaching is the teaching of God himself.

Jesus is the perfect revelation of God. Yes, of course, if he was simply a human being, even if he were a very good human being, why, we'd rightly ask, wouldn't we, what do you know about God?

[ 13 : 40 ] You're only human. We'd rightly question any authority which Jesus claims to have over anyone else or any other religion. But we can see here, can't we, that Jesus is claiming a total uniqueness.

Indeed, his divine origin means that true knowledge of God is impossible without him. Look again at Jesus' words. Verse 44. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

Verse 46. Not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God. he has seen the Father. In other words, it is precisely because of Jesus' divine origin that eternal life is found in him because he is the one who reveals the truth about God.

Well, it's not surprising, is it, that people found that teaching hard to accept? It's not surprising that by the end of the chapter we see people turning away from Jesus? And it's just this same teaching which people find hard to accept today.

I was talking to someone recently who goes to church occasionally who believes that Jesus was a great man but not that he is God. So I challenged him to investigate the evidence and he has yet to take up the challenge.

[ 15 : 07 ] Well, I've been scratching my head as to why that might be and I suspect it's because it's more comfortable to believe even a Jesus who was a great man, a great teacher but actually who

fell far short of being the one who has come from heaven as Jesus puts it.

Because a Jesus who is simply a great man while we may respect his teaching nonetheless he makes no demands on us. Whereas of course a Jesus who has come from heaven who reveals God why his teaching must be true.

And it may be that that's a very uncomfortable thing. So we must expect people to reject Jesus precisely on this point of the fact that he has come from heaven.

But as a Christian I have to say this teaching has filled me with a new gratitude this week. Gratitude that Jesus took human flesh and came to earth.

That God has revealed himself that it is possible to be taught by him. You sometimes don't you come across Christians who all these people who call themselves Christians who seem to delight in sort of uncertainty about God.

[16:25] You know they say things like well we can't really know what God is like we can't really know what God is saying to us. I wonder if you've come across people like that. And of course left to our own devices they're right aren't they?

But wonderfully we haven't been left to our own devices. And so what is the logic of Jesus' argument? Well it's there in verse 47. Truly truly I say to you whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Jesus is very emphatic isn't he? I am the bread of life. Yes as we listen to Jesus we are being taught by God.

God. It's easy to forget that isn't it? Easy to take it for granted. But it is a wonderful thing. He is the one who has come from heaven. He is the one who reveals God perfectly.

If we want to have eternal life we must listen to Jesus. And I guess for those of us as most of us will have done as those of us if we put our trust in Jesus already if we have that life already then the challenge must be to go on listening to him the one who speaks from God and living in the light of his teaching.

[17:42] And we might like to ask each other over coffee whether we're doing this or whether we got out of the habit of listening to him reading the Bible for ourselves and how we can do that better.

So then the scandal of Jesus' life. But secondly the scandal of Jesus' death. Because yes people stumbled and couldn't accept the fact that he was the one who had come from heaven.

But secondly Jesus' teaching about his death also caused people to reject him. We can see that in verse 51. I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. And how do people react, verse 52, the Jews then disputed amongst themselves saying, how can this man give us his flesh to eat?

Well what we are going to see in this paragraph is that people were offended because Jesus says that a relationship with God starting now in this life and lasting through to eternity is only possible by depending absolutely and entirely on his death.

[18:57] There is no other way. So remember first of all that this is the Passover. Back to verse 4 of chapter 6. John went out of his way, didn't he, to tell us the Jewish Passover feast was near.

And the Passover was a celebration of that Exodus rescue 1400 years earlier. And Jesus uses the language of that first Exodus to explain the rescue that he has come to bring.

Now we've already said that the important part of that first rescue was that God miraculously fed his people in the desert. But that was just the model. Jesus is the reality.

He, verse 51, is the true bread, the real bread that comes down from heaven. And Jesus is saying in that verse that he will lay down his life for the world, that those who don't have eternal life, may have eternal life.

Because many of us will know that at the heart of that first Exodus, that first rescue, the heart of the Passover was the death of a lamb. You might like to look it up in Exodus chapter 12 later on, but God's people remembered how God had judged their enemies and saved his people through the death of a lamb.

[20:16] In each family where a lamb was killed, in each family where the blood was painted around the front door frame, why when God came in judgment, those who were in those houses were sheltered from judgment.

All those in Egypt, all the firstborn of the Egyptians were killed, those with blood around their door frames were saved. So now look, see what Jesus goes on to say in verse 54.

Paul, as he says, whoever feeds not on the flesh of a lamb, but whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I'll raise him up at the last day.

That Exodus rescue brought physical life and freedom from slavery in Egypt through the death of the lamb. Jesus brings eternal life, a relationship with God beginning now, lasting through to eternity, through his own death.

And notice that what Jesus stresses is that he is dying on behalf of his people. Have a look again at verse 51. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

[ 21 : 38 ] That little word for is very significant in John's gospel. It means on behalf of and throughout John's gospel it's the way in which Jesus describes his death.

We get the same thing in John chapter 10 for example where he says I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays his life down for the sheep on behalf of the sheep.

Now there's a good illustration of this in Captain Corelli's mandolin if you've read Louis de Bernier's novel where at the end of his book he deliberately evokes this language of someone dying on behalf of another.

It's towards the end of the book where Captain Corelli, Carlo and their fellow Italian soldiers are to be executed by the Nazis Italy having joined the Allies against Germany in the Second World War. And this is how he describes the scene. Carlo stood to attention next to Corelli, glad to die at last, and resolved with all his heart to die a soldier's death.

[ 22 : 44 ] The shooting began, they fell to their knees, their hands flailing, their nostrils haunted by the stench of cordite, searing cloth and oil, their mouths filling with the dry and dusty tang of blood.

What no one had seen was that at the order to fire, Carlo had stepped smartly sideways, like a soldier forming ranks. Antonio Corelli, in a haze of nostalgia and forgetfulness, had found in front of him the titanic bulk of Carlo, had found his wrists gripped painfully in those mighty fists, had found himself unable to move.

Carlo stood unbroken as one bullet after another burrowed like white, hot, parasitic knives into his chest. Eventually, Carlo flung himself over backwards.

Corelli lay beneath him, paralysed by his weight, drenched utterly in his blood. stupefied by an act of love so incomprehensible and ineffable, so filled with divine madness.

Well, there is a picture of just one man dying on behalf of another. And Louis de Benio deliberately echoes the death of Jesus in using that language of divine madness.

[ 24 : 07 ] death. But notice here that Jesus' death was even greater and goes even further that he died in the place of many to bring eternal life.

And Jesus goes on in the next few verses to show us two implications of his death. One negative and one positive. First of all, the negative in verse 53, if you have a look at it. So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

In other words, without trusting in Jesus and without believing in him, we remain unforgiven. Let me say that again. Without trusting in Jesus and believing in him, we remain unforgiven.

It's a truth expressed in Article 18 of the 39 Articles, part of the core doctrine of the Church of England. We had an article last week, I know, we have another one this week, we won't keep on having one every week, but it's useful just to have these summaries, isn't it?

I put Article 18 there on the outline. They also are to be accursed that presume to say that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professes.

[ 25 : 23 ] The Holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved. Outside of Christ, we remain unforgiven.

And clearly this is the very thing, isn't it, which people could not accept Jesus' teaching, when we see later on in John chapter 6, that people turn away from him and say this is too hard to accept. And therefore I take it that while one of the reasons we must expect people to reject Jesus is because of the claim that he came down from heaven, while the other claim, the other reason why we must expect people to reject Jesus is because of this claim that outside of him there is no forgiveness and no eternal life.

Which means, of course, that it's a truth we must insist on, because Jesus himself insists on it, and we must make sure that we can explain it as Jesus himself explains it. But we mustn't be discouraged when people then reject that truth as they rejected that truth when Jesus spoke it.

So that's the negative implication. But then wonderfully notice the positive implication of verse 54. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I'll raise him up on the last day.

[ 26 : 47 ] Remember that first part over, it was those who ate the flesh of the lambs who were rescued. And Jesus throughout this, you probably noticed, uses that same language of eating, and makes it clear that his offer of eternal life is for anyone who will eat.

So verse 51, if anyone eats, and verse 54, whoever eats, and you get the language of eating and feeding throughout this section, by which Jesus simply means believing.

He uses the language of eating and feeding and believing, sort of interchangeably in this whole chapter. so he's not suggesting a literal eating of his flesh, but rather believing in him.

We had that back in verse 35, where Jesus says that he who comes to me will never go hungry. He who believes in me will never go thirsty. So this language of feeding on Jesus is simply a picture of believing in Jesus.

But it's a good picture, isn't it? Feeding on Jesus is a good picture. Chewing over the death of Jesus, dwelling upon it, thinking it through, depending on the death of Jesus.

[ 28 : 06 ] It's not simply a sort of academic thing, is it? But rather feeding spiritually on his death. I guess the language of feeding speaks of personal dependence on the death of Jesus, not just a kind of a one-off thing but an ongoing thing.

And it is for all who will believe. And in verses 53 to 58, this dependence on the death of Jesus, you'll see Jesus goes on to show the wonderful promises which come for those who depend on him.

So verse 54, the promise of being raised up to resurrection life on the final day. The promise of standing before God blameless, forgiven, is a promise for those who feed on the death of Jesus, who are trusting his death and depending upon his death for their standing before God.

Or verse 55, over the page, here is the promise of Jesus abiding, dwelling in us and remaining in us and us remaining in him for those who feed on him.

They're wonderful promises, aren't they? they're all true for those of us who are trusting in the death of Jesus Christ and depending on his death alone for our standing before God.

[ 29 : 30 ] Now that will describe most of us here this morning. It's a wonderful reminder, isn't it, of the real life we are living if we are trusting in Jesus' death today. And therefore, it's a great day to be celebrating the Lord's Supper together.

it's entirely appropriate that we do so. It's a great thing for those of us who are personally trusting in the death of Jesus to share the bread and the wine, to feed, to eat, as symbolic of our trusting in Jesus' death for forgiveness.

So therefore, we welcome all those who know and love the Lord Jesus to take the bread and the wine in just a moment as it's passed around along the pews. Clearly, if we are not trusting in Jesus' death for ourselves, then just pass the bread and wine along to the next person.

But for now, I'm going to pray, and then we will stand to sing this next hymn, A Debtor to Mercy Alone. And you'll notice as we sing verse three, that verse three picks up on the absolute assurance which those who are trusting in Jesus can have.

We saw, didn't we, last week, Jesus' promise never to cast out or drive away those who come to him. And we see that in verse three, eternity will not erase my name from the palm of his hands.

[ 31 : 02 ] Why don't I pray, and then we'll stand to sing. I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. Heavenly Father, we praise you for these two wonderful truths.

Thank you that Jesus is the one who has come from heaven. It's possible, therefore, as we listen to him to be taught by you. And we thank you too that he has come to give life, spiritual life, in this world and the next.

And he's done that by dying in the place of his people. And again, we thank you for that. And we pray that we would be those who would be depending upon his death for our standing before you and for our forgiveness.

And we ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.