

Bread of Life Discourse: Part 2

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[0:00] Amen. Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go?! You have the words of eternal life.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So this morning, we're wrapping up the section in John's Gospel called the Bread of Life Discourse.

And we're also wrapping up our sermon series in John's Gospel for now, with the plan to pick up again next summer. Also happens to be Christ the King Sunday.

Today, given what this passage, it just so happens that this passage talks a lot about discipleship, about the lordship of Jesus, about his claims.

So, without me realizing that this would be the case, it is perfectly appropriate for Christ the King Sunday. So last week, we looked at the first part of the Bread of Life Discourse.

[1:19] We saw that Jesus is the Bread of Life, that those who come to Jesus in faith will never hunger again. And that everyone who looks on Jesus and believes in him will have eternal life.

And those themes continue this week, with Jesus really driving the point home in increasingly uncompromising terms. We see the negative reaction, and what could honestly be described as the repulsion of the crowd, and in their example we see the cost of following Jesus.

We come to Jesus on his terms, not ours, and his terms are absolute. This particular section of John's Gospel has long stood at the center of much theological controversy.

Some scholars have argued that this section, with its focus on eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus, is primarily sacramental. That is, it's mainly talking about the Eucharist.

Others have argued that if anything, John's Gospel and this text are anti-sacramental. It has nothing to do with the Eucharist whatsoever, goes that argument. As Anglicans, we are nothing if not moderate in theological debate.

[2:40] So our reading of the text, I think, would avoid either of those two extremes. More on that as we go along with that little disclaimer in mind. So let's look at our text, John chapter 6, starting with verse 41.

Our text here this morning begins with grumbling. I think it's unsurprising for anyone who has ever been a human being, or has dealt with human beings, that we are a grumbling bunch, aren't we? This crowd has been hearing the words of eternal life spoken by the one who is life. And what's their response? Hey, let's grumble. Jesus tells them that he is the bread of life that comes down from heaven.

What's their response? They say, is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I've come down from heaven? They're like, wait a minute, we know his parents.

What's he talking about? And in so saying, they reveal something. They reveal that they, in fact, do not know who Jesus is.

[3:53] And even more than that, they reveal that they do not know his father in heaven. Jesus doesn't let up. Here's how he responds.

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 of 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. Let's break that down. Jesus is letting them know in no uncertain terms that their grumbling is not going to help them to come to the truth.

The only way that a person can come to the truth is by being drawn by the father to his son Jesus. Jesus draws on Isaiah chapter 54, and he quotes it.

[5:07] The point being that the only way to come to true spiritual knowledge is for the father to teach us by his spirit. Human wisdom is not going to get us there.

It's not even going to get us started on the road. It's also clear if we've been taught by the father or if we have not.

We have been taught by the father we will come to Jesus. We can come to the father and see the father only through Christ. So whoever believes in Christ has eternal life.

Jesus reiterates what he said earlier. 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.

Jesus is the bread of life. Again, he contrasts himself with that other bread from heaven, the manna, that the children of Israel had eaten in the wilderness, and that this crowd seemed to be so enamored with.

[6:24] The manna, of course, was a gift from God. They ate of it. Children of Israel in the wilderness. It was a good thing. It sustained their lives when they were out in the middle of nowhere.

But still, they all died eventually. Jesus is saying, if we eat of him, we will never die. He drives the point home.

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.

Well, here's how the crowd responds to that one. They say, disputing among themselves, how can this man give us his flesh to eat?

The crowd here appears to have been troubled on a couple of fronts, or at least the crowd's leadership.

[7:29] We're not really sure who is doing this disputing. But the most obvious reason that they're troubled is that cannibalism, last time they checked, was bad news.

So if their response is, man, that is disgusting, that explains part of their hesitation. That they don't get the deeper truth that is being presented to them.

But this Messiah, this chosen one of God, this king anointed by God to save his people, the crowd would probably have thought of his task being fulfilled by military victory, by restoring the glory of the people of Israel, instead, he's talking about giving his flesh for the life of the world.

In their mind, that is not what a Messiah is supposed to be doing. That means then that obviously he's going to die, he would be offered as a sacrifice, and they found that idea repugnant.

Parallel might be able to help us understand why. My understanding is that in Islam, Jesus is actually acknowledged as a prophet, but Muslims do not believe that Jesus actually died on the cross because it would seem repugnant for a prophet of God to die in such a dishonorable way.

[9:01] As Christians, we believe that not only a prophet really died on the cross, but the very Son of God died on the cross and was glorified and brought salvation and redemption by doing so.

So the unbelieving crowd, obviously, doesn't get it. That's understandable why.

Why would God's chosen king give his flesh for the life of the world? What is that? As Christians, however, we realize that our sins are so heinous that it takes nothing less than the death of the Son of God, dying the death that we deserve in order for the penalty for our sins to be paid and for us to be set free.

The crowd doesn't get it. They appear to have turned adversarial, and still Jesus does not back down. He goes on. 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. Well then, that escalated.

[10:29] Here, of course, is where the debate about this passage arises that I mentioned in our introduction. What does Jesus mean by eating his flesh and drinking his blood in this passage?

As I face this question, I regret not asking Deacon Mark to preach this morning. Long story short, I would say that what Jesus says here is certainly pertinent to the Eucharist, but that it's not the primary thing in view in this passage.

Would you have preached the same thing, Deacon Mike? Okay, good. I didn't ask him beforehand. So, more immediately, looking at the Bread of Life discourse, Jesus says that those who come to him will never hunger, and those who believe in him will never thirst.

So, eating his flesh and drinking his blood, specifically within the context of this passage, seems to most immediately apply to coming to Jesus and believing in him.

Now, of course, when we come to the table to receive Holy Communion in faith, we do truly feed on Christ. As Anglicans, we believe that the sacraments, like the Word, are means of grace by which our faith in Christ is strengthened.

[11:59] So, it's not as if coming to Christ and believing in him are somehow at odds with what happens when we approach the table. As believers, in fact, these are things that go hand in hand.

So, attempting to set them in opposition, as some of the debate about this passage does, would strike me as rather strange. So, in the context of this particular passage, I think the primary meaning that eating his flesh and drinking his blood refers most directly to coming to Jesus and to believing in him.

Jesus says that if we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we abide in him and he in us.

It means that the life of a Christian is one of union with Christ. We abide in him. We belong to him.

And he not only gives us his presence, he dwells in us through the Holy Spirit.

We belong to him and we depend on him completely. Jesus closes, really, with summarizing what it means when he says that he is the bread of life.

[13:20] He says, as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he will also live because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

So, what do we make of all that? So, I was studying this text and thinking over it and praying over it. It occurred to me that this morning's application is really pretty evident from the reaction that the disciples had to what Jesus taught here.

Some of those disciples had this reaction. This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? Their take is, man, that was harsh. I'm not sure about this following Jesus thing anymore.

[14:28] Because what Jesus has said is that he's the only way to eternal life and that we can only come to him and follow him on his terms. Being a disciple of Jesus has been shown both in word and in the reaction of the crowd to be a costly thing.

Following Jesus means that we put all of our trust in him and that in the eyes of the world we're going to live and believe in a way that appears foolish.

And it means that Jesus is in charge of our lives and we are not. That's hard to take. We are either all in as disciples or we're not really in at all as disciples.

It's tough. The Anglican preacher John Stott once talked about discipleship in this way. Forgive me if this is a long quote but I think it's worth it even if it's challenging.

He says Jesus never concealed the fact that his religion included a demand as well as an offer. Indeed the demand was as total as the offer was free.

[15:55] If he offered men his salvation he also demanded their submission. He gave no encouragement whatever to thoughtless applicants for discipleship. He brought no pressure to bear on any inquirer.

He sent irresponsible enthusiasts empty away. The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict half-built towers.

The ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people still ignore Christ's word and undertake to follow him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so.

the result is the great scandal of Christendom today's so-called nominal Christianity. In countries to which Christian civilization has spread large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent but thin veneer of Christianity.

Christianity They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great soft cushion.

[17:10] It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism.

Jesus never lowered his standards or modified his conditions to make his call more readily acceptable. He asked his first disciples and he has asked every disciple since to give him their thoughtful and total commitment.

Nothing less than this will do. Well that's convicting. I think the question for each of us this morning then is this.

Have I given Jesus my thoughtful and total commitment? Have I given everything about my life over to him? Does his lordship over my life matter more than my comfort?

And if not, we need to understand nominal, comfortable, respectable, half-hearted Christianity simply will not do. If you find upon searching your heart that you're following of Jesus as his disciple, following of him as your king and your lord, has been too comfortable and too half-hearted, as mine often has, if I'm being honest.

[18:55] Do not neglect to confess what you have failed to do. Confess it to God this morning. We have the opportunity built into our liturgy to confess it together.

fear. And let's ask the Holy Spirit to transform us into disciples of Jesus who follow him more seriously and more fully.

Moving on. We see that some of these so-called disciples who heard the words of Jesus did not believe.

They followed Jesus for a time. Judas was one of the twelve.

He's referenced here. And they didn't believe. They eventually turned away. They turned away. Think about these so-called disciples.

[20:06] They saw Jesus in the flesh. They heard Jesus. They traveled with Jesus. They were called disciples. And they didn't really believe and they eventually departed from him.

That should serve as a warning to us. We can hear about Jesus. We can call ourselves Christians. We can even be involved in church stuff. We can even wear a clerical collar. But if we don't really believe in Jesus, if we don't come to him and put our trust in him, we do not have eternal life. the scriptures have presented us with tough things to grapple with this morning.

We have hard words in front of us. Words that are both difficult to understand and words that might seem harsh. What are we supposed to do with that?

[21:30] Well, here are some of our options. Should we look for a more comfortable way? Should we look for something less exclusive?

Should we look for something less demanding? should we look for something that will ask less of us? What do you think?

We hear the voice of Jesus this morning saying, do you want to go away as well? there's only one answer to that question that makes any sense and it's this.

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. This morning, let's trust in Jesus, the bread of life, completely as our only Savior from sin and death.

And let's commit, or recommit as the case may be, to following Jesus as our King and as the Lord of our lives. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[22:59] Amen.