

Eat my flesh!

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Date: 14 January 2024

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[0 : 00] Christian, thank you. Here's our question for this morning. You do not want to leave too, do you?

! The question Jesus asks of the twelve in verse 67 is so personal, so direct, I guess, as he looks them in the eye. And it is the question that he would ask us this morning. You do not want to leave too, do you?

The reason Jesus asks is because there are many who do leave. There are many who begin as disciples of Jesus. They come to him, listen to him, start to follow him, join a church family even. Yet the moment comes when these many disciples turn away, turn back, decide they will no longer walk with the one who offers eternal life. This is the, well shocking in a way, story of John chapter 6. Now rewind to this moment 2,000 years ago. We're in the middle of Jesus's public ministry, and with five loaves and two small fish, Jesus has fed a crowd of 15 or 20,000 people. He's walked three or four miles across a lake of water to his disciples' boat, visibly. This man, Jesus, controls the whole created world. He bends it to his wishes.

He is the divine Son of God in the flesh. There is no doubt about it. In John 6, having shown his life-giving power, Jesus then speaks, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

He's come from heaven to offer and give us eternal life, satisfying life, secure life in restored relationship with God.

[1 : 57] He will raise us up at the last day, and we will live forever with our God, we who will come to him and believe him. And yet, though his identity is so clear, and his gift of life so wonderful, what happens as he teaches?

If you heard, as Christian read, in verse 41, the Jews began to grumble about him. In verse 52, they argue sharply among themselves.

In verse 60, many disciples say, this is a hard teaching. They grumble, they are offended, and in verse 66, many turned back and no longer followed him.

You think, what on earth is going on? What's going on? Of course, the story of John 6 could be, is the story of today, from one angle.

We drive up to Norfolk from time to time to see Meg's parents, and as we drive up there, we pass, in almost every village, old chapels, little church buildings, built 200 years ago, many of them, to accommodate Christians.

[3 : 10] You imagine 200 years ago, up in Norfolk, 30 or 40 villagers gathering on a Sunday in each village you go through to follow and worship Jesus Christ. Today, those old chapels are empty shells.

They're boarded up. They've been converted into family homes. Bed and breakfast accommodation. Why? Because in England, over the past 200 years, we have turned back, no longer following him as we did.

In our national life, our public life, the claims and teaching of Jesus have become not just hard to take, but offensive. And so much of what Jesus says has been scrubbed out of acceptable conversation.

What's true of us as a nation, you also see in personal lives, don't you? Children brought up in the church, yet aged 25, they've moved on.

Students, excited to discover what Jesus offers, yet listening to his teaching, end up grumbling, offended, and walking away. Maybe friends we know, people we love, and we were so thrilled that they were meeting Christians, reading a gospel, until eventually a very clear, this is not for me, he is not for me.

[4 : 35] Here's the question for us. As we hear Jesus' teaching, when many are turning back, you don't want to leave too, do you?

You won't turn from the one who has the words of eternal life, will you? Well, with that in mind, that is what's going on in John 6.

Let's dive in together, with our Bibles open, to Jesus' teaching, his teaching in these verses, which divides disciples. In verses 35 to 40, this was last Sunday here at St. John's, Jesus declares to those around him, I am the bread of life, and he is so inviting.

Come to me, I'll never drive you away, you shall have eternal life, I will raise you up at the last day. In verse 41, at this, the Jews there began to grumble about him, because he said, I am the bread that came down from heaven.

So do you see here, what they say they can't cope with and grumble about, is hearing Jesus claim he came down from heaven. That Jesus is God the Son, come into our world, born as a man.

[5 : 57] And in part, for them then, you can understand the shock of this. Because, verse 42, they said, is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?

They're saying, we know the family. Mary and Joseph and the kids, we've known them for 30 years. We've seen Jesus growing up.

Our kids went to nursery with him. He was just a young lad, a regular Jewish boy growing up in Nazareth. How can he now say, I came down from heaven?

Jesus' claim to be God the Son in the flesh. So many people do find that hard, actually.

Muslims, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, 20th century Bible experts, just regular people round here with no time for organised religion.

[7 : 00] I mean, most people actually think, don't they? Come on, I can't swallow that. I just won't swallow that, that God has actually come down. But notice, though, as Jesus answers these grumbling Jews, he doesn't seek to show or explain his divine identity more.

He doesn't try to really convince them to believe in him. But instead, he arrows in on them. And something very hard to hear about human nature in relation to God.

Two things I want to say this morning, they'll come up on the screen, from this whole passage that I hope capture for us Jesus' hard-to-hear teaching. Here's the first thing, from verses 41 to 48.

To have eternal life, to come to Jesus and believe in him and receive eternal life, the Father must draw us to Jesus.

The Father must draw us to Jesus. And that is because by ourselves, as human beings, we neither can come to Jesus, nor want to come to Jesus.

[8 : 28] And look at this with me. This is what Jesus says, it's what he teaches in verse 44. Look with me. To those questioning whether Jesus really is God, stop grumbling among yourselves, verse 43, Jesus answered, no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.

Is that hard to hear? I think it is. Look, no one can come to me unless the Father, says Jesus.

That is, none of us has the ability in ourselves to come to Jesus Christ and believe in him. I wonder, did you know that?

In John's Gospel, Jesus speaks truthfully and plainly about what we are like as human beings in a fallen world. Having turned away from God in rebellion against him, we are by nature, as Jesus describes us, well, we're blind, we're spiritually dead, and we are slaves to sin.

Every single member of humanity has an inbuilt resistance to having Jesus as Lord and Saviour of our lives.

[9 : 56] We're blind. We can't, we won't see who he truly is. We're dead, unable to rouse ourselves to spiritual life.

We are slaves. Our minds and our wills so trapped into living for me that by ourselves we neither can nor want to free ourselves and come to Jesus.

No one can come to me, Jesus teaches. Listen to this. The condition of man, of humanity, after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and works to faith and calling upon God.

He cannot. We cannot. Do you know who says this? This is the Church of England. In our 39 articles of religion, what we say we believe, this is absolutely true.

Or in other words, says Jesus, no one can come to me unless. Jesus' teaching about what we are like as human beings, it is hard to hear, I think.

[11:17] Because we like to think that we are able and free. We like to think that we are rational and clear thinkers. Show me the evidence for the Christian faith and I will think it through and I will weigh it up and if Jesus does happen to convince me then I will take him up on his offer and I will come to him.

Jesus says, don't fool yourself into thinking you think clearly and will decide for yourself. No one can come to me. I would love to hear after us what you think about this, Jesus' teaching here. What he says here, I think it explains our world and it explains our experience. Someone said to me a while back, about six months ago, if only God would give me a sign and show me something miraculous today, then I would believe in him.

But actually that's not what happens in John chapter 6. Jesus feeds 15,000 people miraculously and then the crowd says, what sign will you give us that we might see and believe in you?

And the Jews grumble about Jesus. You think, are they blind to what Jesus is doing? And the answer is they are. This inbuilt resistance to Jesus, it explains today, I think.

[12:51] When you pray for someone you love and do all you can to explain as clearly as possible who Jesus is and what he offers and yet you get nothing back, just not interested.

Not for me, thanks. I'm not even sure he existed. You think, what's going on? No one can come to me unless...

What do you think of yourself? If you think of yourself like this and maybe you're natural bent away from Jesus. Why do I still feel like that sometimes?

Cold and resistant to him. This is why. Jesus here, from his lips, he wants to shake up and humble these grumbling hearers who are standing over him in judgment.

You. You, with your I will weigh up Jesus and I will decide attitude, you can't come to me, he says to these grumbling Jewish people. No one can come to me unless...

[14:01] Well, look at this. Unless the Father who sent me draws them and I will raise them up at the last day.

This word draw, it means attract or drag or haul in. So imagine being out on a boat fishing and you throw a large net out and you down into the water and then after a few hours, you draw the net in and you bring your catch of fish with you.

In his divine kindness, God the Father reaches out to you in your complete inability and draws you in.

He penetrates your heart and your mind by his spirit. He opens your blind eyes. He gives you spiritual life.

He turns you towards Jesus. Jesus says here, verse 45, it's written in the prophets, they will all be taught by God.

[15:06] Everyone who's heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God. Only he has seen the Father. With God the Father at work in someone like you, you learn from the Father as you listen to Jesus.

His teaching makes sense and speaks to you and is wonderful and the Father attracts you and ushers you towards his son Jesus and you believe in him.

And says Jesus, very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.

This is the experience of becoming a Christian.

And the point is, as Jesus teaches here, it is all God's work in you. I cannot come to him unless he draws me.

I say this from time to time. When I was 18 years old, I prayed in my bed one night the most basic prayer I think you could pray.

[16:15] Jesus, you are right and I am not. Amen. Which was me saying, Jesus, now you are Lord of my life. As I prayed that prayer to my Father, what was going on?

I hadn't suddenly become cleverer to understand Jesus' words. I'm pretty sure I hadn't suddenly become more naive and needy. Now, I wouldn't have put it like this.

I didn't know it. But the God of the universe, God the Father, was drawing me, sinful, blind, dead, enslaved, Chris, to his son.

Jesus' teaching, point one, the Father must draw us to Jesus. I wonder what you make of that. Is it hard to hear? Is it brilliant to hear?

Is it both? The teaching of Jesus in John 6, to have eternal life.

[17:19] First, the Father must draw us to Jesus. Second now, from verse 49 onwards, we must eat Jesus' flesh.

Look at this with me. Having declared himself as the bread of life and said, come to me and believe in me, in verse 49 onwards, do you agree? Jesus' teaching becomes, I don't know what you say, becomes sharper, more offensive maybe.

Look, verse 49, speaking to Jews in the synagogue, your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. It seems very clear, and nothing new in John 6.

I am the living bread. Eat this bread, you will live forever. A wonderful, open invitation, until Jesus says, end of verse 51, this bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

[18:37] And then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, how can this man give us his flesh to eat? And Jesus replied, verse 53, 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. Do you see? To have eternal life, we must eat Jesus' flesh.

Now, at a surface level, maybe any level, of course, it sounds foul, that sounds disgusting, to eat the flesh and drink the blood of another human being in a Jewish worldview, in any worldview.

What does Jesus mean? Well, first, I hope, obviously, he obviously does not want people there and then to go and grab him and bite on his arm.

It's not what he's talking about. It's not what they do. Secondly, here, Jesus is not saying, here in John 6, take the Lord's Supper, as if eating a bit of this bread will give you eternal life.

[19:54] It won't. At the end of verse 51, Jesus says of his flesh, I will give it for the life of the world.

When he says that, he is speaking the language of sacrifice, of Jesus giving his flesh in death on the cross so that the world might live.

John 6 is written in the context of the Jewish Passover. The Jewish people had once in Egypt sacrificed a Passover lamb. I don't know if you know the story.

They had sacrificed a Passover lamb. The lamb was killed and its blood displayed on the door and the flesh of the lamb was eaten.

And when God came to Egypt in destroying judgment, he saw the sacrifice of the lamb and he spared his people and they lived. And with that story in mind, what took place for the people of Israel, Jesus comes down from heaven as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[21:14] You and I, having turned away from God in rebellion, we deserve only his destroying death and judgment. But Jesus gives his flesh for the life of the world.

He goes to the cross and he gives and sacrifices his own flesh as he dies. On the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ endures the destroying judgment and death that all deserve.

and he does this for the life of the world so that you and I might be spared by God and may live.

He gives his flesh for the life of the world on the cross as he dies for sins so that you may have life.

Now what must you and I do? What must we do?

If we're to benefit from the life-giving death of Jesus, we must eat his flesh. I think you understand it like this.

[22:20] Understand it like this. When you're about to die of hunger and there is no life left in you and somebody offers you bread to eat, don't just look at the bread.

Don't say, I think I'll be fine by myself, thanks. Don't say, yes, I can see how that bread might be good for me. No, when you die of hunger and there's no life left in you, reach out in desperate need and grateful thanks and take the bread and sink your teeth into it and eat and live.

When, as a rebel against God, you will die in your sins and you know that there is no spiritual life in you, don't just look at Jesus and his death on the cross.

Don't say, I think I'll be fine by myself, thanks. Don't say, yes, I can see how Jesus will be good for me. No, eat his flesh.

Come to him, yes. Believe in him, yes. Reach out in desperate need and grateful thanks and take Jesus as your life-giving food.

[23:32] Eat his flesh. my Lord, there is no life in me. Without your death on the cross, I will die.

I depend entirely on you. Feed me and give me life. I eat you. And the one who promises to give us life as we come to him, believe in him, take him, eat him, depend on him, the one who promises to give us life, he will.

Listen, verse 54. 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.

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. Do you see repeated three times, eternal life, you will live, you will live forever.

[24 : 54] But hear this, you absolutely must eat his flesh. And that is because there is no other way for the spiritually dead to have eternal life.

Your religion, your ethnic background, your Jewish heritage if you have it, your goodness, your try to be better than others, your Christian track record, your being in church from time to time, who you are and what you've done, it profits nothing when you have no spiritual life in you.

This is hard to hear. You have no life in you unless you eat his flesh. The only reason that you and I can live with God and have eternal life is because of the Lord Jesus Christ from first to last.

To have eternal life, the Father must draw us to Jesus because by ourselves we're blind and dead and enslaved and we must eat Jesus' flesh for it's only through his sacrificial death that we can live. Nothing in me, nothing in my hand can I bring to you, Lord. It is only you, all your work. What do you make of John 6?

[26 : 33] If we've understood some of this properly. It's pretty deep, it's pretty stretching, it's pretty hard to hear in part.

God. In verse 60, on hearing it, many of his disciples said, this is hard teaching, who can accept it? And aware his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said, does this offend you, what I've said? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?

The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing. That's the message of this chapter, the flesh, who we are in our humanity, nothing we can do, our flesh counts for nothing with him.

The Spirit gives life. The words I've spoken to you, they are full of the Spirit and life, says Jesus, yet there are some of you who do not believe, because Jesus had known from the beginning which of them didn't believe and who would betray him.

[27 : 38] And he went on to say, this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father gives it. And so, verse 66, from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

We're offended by what you say. We don't like what you say, Jesus, and so we are off. Let me just ask the question simply.

You do not want to leave too, do you? Do we? Hearing what Jesus teaches, would we turn back and no longer follow him?

Do you not think Simon Peter's humble answer is so wonderful? Do you not think this is wonderful? Look at this. Simon Peter answered and said, Lord, to whom shall we go?

Where else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the holy one of God and so we will cling to you, whatever you teach and whatever you say, because you are the one who gives eternal life.

[29 : 02] let me lead us in a prayer. Let's pray together. 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.

Amen. Amen. Our Lord and God, to those like some in John 6 who think a lot of ourselves or more of ourselves than we should, the teaching of your Son is so very humbling that none of us can come to him unless you draw us, that by ourselves we have no life in us.

And yet at the same time what wonderful teaching that you our Father draw us to your Son, that your Son gave his life for us, that your Spirit works in us, giving us life.

We do nothing to gain salvation. You give and do everything in your wonderful grace. Please make us this morning those who see ourselves clearly and see you in all your wonderful life-giving power.

And may we be those who cling to your Son and know that he alone has the words of eternal life.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

[30 : 56] Amen.