

John 6:41-71 “Bread of Life Sermon, Part 2”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Boy, I don't know about you, but I feel like a lot has happened since we were last here together. Or perhaps a lot has changed, but very little has happened for many of you.

Maybe you've enjoyed that. Maybe that's been really difficult. But it's quite possible, it doesn't feel like just last week that we were looking at the first half of Jesus' Bread of Life sermon in John 6. But that was the first part of Jesus' sermon after feeding the 5,000. He announced himself as the Bread of Life, the gracious invitation to us to come find lasting satisfaction in Jesus.

He gave us glorious promises of life, of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that we might embrace the Savior who has already come to us to give us life eternal.

[1 : 15] Jesus is going to keep reiterating many of those themes in the second half of this sermon, which we're about to read together. But notice as I read for us, that he speaks now surrounded by increased grumbling from his followers, from people gathered in the synagogue to hear him.

Interestingly, grumbling was what was going on back among God's people in the Old Testament when the manna came down from heaven.

And now the bread of life himself coming from heaven to grumbling. As I told you last week, at the end of the sermon, we'll see that people are sharply divided over what he preaches and who Jesus is.

A division of skepticism versus belief that John puts before us and we're going to talk about a little bit today. Notice that as we read this long section, beginning at verse 41 of chapter 6.

So the Jews grumbled about him because he said, I am the bread that came down from heaven.

[2 : 35] They said, is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I have come down from heaven? And 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 him who is from God. He has seen the father.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 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.

[3 : 38] 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.

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.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, this is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, do you take offense at this?

[4 : 59] Then what if you were to see the son of man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit who gives life. The flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life, but there are some of you who do not believe.

For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe and who it was who would betray him. And he said, this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the father.

After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the 12, do you want to go away as well?

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

Jesus answered them, did I not choose you, the 12, and yet one of you is a devil? He spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the 12, was going to betray him.

[6 : 09] Let's pray. Father, would you draw our hearts right now, this morning, again and afresh to Jesus.

Show us our Savior. Draw us to him in worship, in need, in desperation for life.

By your spirit we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen. If you live in Huntsville, Alabama and someone tells you there's going to be three to five inches of snow tomorrow, you should be skeptical.

If you get an email saying you've won a \$1,000 Walmart gift card, just put your social security number in right here and then you... You should be skeptical.

If the politician promises that if you vote for him, your income will go up and your taxes will go down, you should be skeptical.

[7 : 15] It is increasingly popular and praiseworthy, in fact, in our culture to be skeptical, even cynical. So much so that I read this week that some university professors are now challenging their students to have skepticism about their skepticism.

Think on that one for a minute. Skepticism and cynicism is so much the air we breathe these days that I regularly challenge just not to be cynical, not to be so quick to feel negative or reject the truth. This morning, though, I'd like to begin by telling you that even when it comes to spiritual things, in some ways especially when it comes to spiritual things, you really should at least be skeptical. To be honest, it's warranted. It's appropriate in several ways. So especially if you think of yourself as cynical, here's your chance.

Like, this is your day here, okay? If you're a cynic, here are groups of people you should be skeptical about.

[8 : 35] Church leaders and preachers. I'm thankful for many examples of pastors who seem to have largely lived as faithfully as they preached.

But it is often true of preachers that we talk better than we walk, sometimes scandalously so. Sometimes we're quick to repent, other times we're not.

I am really glad most of you could not see or hear the pride, the impatience in my heart this week as plans got disrupted over and over, and I often don't respond well to that.

You should be skeptical about church institutions. Many of you have experienced churches where the functional mission of that church seems more protective, like a club for them, than altruistic, like a mission for others.

That has hurt some of you, especially those of you prone to skepticism and questions, which churches have often seemed to silence or ignore.

[10 : 00] Let's just go ahead and admit you should be skeptical about church people in general.

We're a sketchy bunch. You should be skeptical about the motivations you hear or perceive behind why we vote the way we do.

Why we spend our money the way we do. Why we treat people we disagree with the way we do. Sometimes it's not consistent with what we say we believe.

While we're at it, you should be skeptical about Bible characters. I hope you know that David didn't just defeat Goliath, although that was a great moment, but he also committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah murdered.

Father Abraham lied. The apostle Peter was really bold with his words, except for all the times he was really fearful and angry and self-protective.

The list is getting a bit long, I think, but I want to include one more person this morning to be skeptical about.

[11:13] Yourself. Spiritually, I mean. Especially if you're a Presbyterian. Jesus is warning us here in this passage about trusting our own ability to have everything figured out.

All of our theology just perfect. To make sense of Jesus. To explain it all simply like it's no big deal. Often Presbyterians get excited about theological precision.

Can I get an amen? Yes, theological precision is a good thing. As long as we remain skeptical about our own ability to get it all right.

Look at Jesus pointing this out to the grumblers. They can't get their heads wrapped around Joseph and Mary's son, the one they've watched grow up, say that he came from heaven.

Come on, Jesus. We've been here watching you since you were knee high to a grasshopper. What are you talking about? Verse 43. Do not grumble among yourselves.

[12:32] No one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him. It's right here at this most important point about the identity of Jesus that we most need to recognize our limitations.

It's not something you just puzzle out in your head and it all makes easy sense. Jesus says it's not how it works. You won't come to me by grumbling it out until you understand the father has to draw you.

Embracing me as the bread of life is a supernatural matter. Now, we sometimes struggle to understand how this works, don't we?

But what is clear throughout this passage is that when we come to Jesus, when we believe in him, we are both completely dependent on God for that and completely free in doing so.

Look at how the Bible holds together truths that we sometimes think compete with one another. Verse 37.

[13:47] All that the father gives me will come to me. And whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. Both of those in the same verse.

Verse 40. 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.

And, verse 44, no one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up on the last day. Both of those at the same time.

It's a hopeful verse, right? About Jesus raising people up, not about keeping them away. But we are utterly hopeless apart from God's grace coming and giving life to a dead and undeserving heart.

God must draw. And then we must come and must believe in Jesus. So if you've come to Jesus, if that's your story, then this should prompt deep humility, right?

[15:00] And at the same time, deep gratitude to God for what he has done. We are completely dependent upon him. So we have to be skeptical about ourselves.

Trusting our own reasoning that we can figure things out. That assumes already that we are the final authority over God.

That we're the ones with the control here. Here's part of what Jesus wants us to hear here in his sermon. Maybe you're skeptical that we got it right about the age of the earth.

Some of you are. Maybe you're skeptical that your church or that any church has this tough relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility sorted out just right.

Maybe you're skeptical about the problem of evil and the best way to solve it. Fine. Even good.

[16:13] That skepticism may be prompted by an appropriate humility and self-awareness that you have. But don't let that skepticism keep you from Jesus.

Don't let that skepticism keep you from Jesus. That's why Jesus keeps saying, come to me. Believe in me. Why is that so important?

Why is it so vital that even if we miss everything else and even if we get our theology wrong somewhere, that we don't miss Jesus? Well, there are a lot of answers to that question.

But Jesus gives us at least three reasons to have hope. That there is a person worthy of our trust.

About whom this person. This person. We need never be skeptical or cynical. Uniquely, unlike with all these other religious people I mentioned. Myself included.

[17:18] We can always trust him. Why? How? First reason is that Jesus offers himself as the source of the life that we can't achieve ourselves.

We're stuck without him. It sounds like what he said last week. Listen to verse 47. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life, 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.

What is? I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. What an offer, right?

Just for trusting him. Just for believing in him. We get life that we can get no other way.

[18 : 24] That's the point of what Jesus is saying in verses 45 and 46. He quotes from the prophet Isaiah in chapter 54.

It's the section of Isaiah. It's connected to the part we read last week at the beginning of Isaiah 55.

Where there's this gracious, free offer to come and drink without price.

It's all free. God tells his exiled people to be taught by him of really important, glorious things. Of his great compassion.

Of his everlasting love for them. Of his eternal covenant of peace as a free gift.

I'd encourage you to read. It's a glorious section. Read all of Isaiah 54 and 55 later. But for now, I want to tell you how God describes the people to whom he offers this amazing free gift.

[19 : 35] See if any of these sound like you. Afflicted. Storm-tossed. Grieved. Not comforted.

Widowed. Deserted. Ashamed. Barren. Desolate. Thirsty. Having no money. To those people he says, come drink without price.

No charge. It's on me. And Jesus here in this passage clarifies that God's true people, all the ones that God teaches about this free gift, ultimately come to Jesus.

Everyone God teaches comes to me. Jesus says. Listen to that. Listen. They may baptize with different amounts of water.

They may vote differently from you. They may talk differently from you. But they all come to me.

They may not come to me. They may not come to me. They may not come to me. They may not come to me. Keep coming to me. Because you can't earn this life.

[20 : 44] It's amazing grace. Right? Right? That's why we sing it. It is by grace through faith in me.

It's the only way you get this life. But you know, preachers are notorious for talking a big game, aren't they?

That doesn't mean you can trust them. Big promises if we follow you, Jesus. That sounds cool. But will you deliver? Can we trust you for that?

Here's how you know you can trust him. Jesus backs up his words by selflessly giving his life to give us life.

Jesus is not the preacher who says, come to me. Give me one million dollars and your life will be successful in return. That's not what he says.

He says, come to me. I'll do all the work. And you will get life eternal for free as a gift forever.

[21 : 54] End of verse 51. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. He's going to give his own body as a sacrifice.

In fact, in the next few verses, you'll see he expands to his flesh and his blood. Down to verse 57.

He says, as the living father sent me and I live because of the father.

Right. My life from him. So whoever feeds on me, he also will live. How? Where? Because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven.

Not the kind, not as the fathers ate and died. Not like that. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever. However, I need you to think about eating for just a minute because it's a little bit different for us.

Here is what the people who were listening to Jesus talk would have known really well about eating. Eating meant for you to live. If something else had to die. Right.

[23 : 02] When they chewed on bread or vegetables, they first had harvested the wheat or the crops. They had cut it off. Right. From its life source so that it would die.

When they ate lamb, the life was in the blood that was shed right there. And they saw it probably from a young age, right before the meat was prepared for them to eat.

And that is true for you and me too. But most of us have never met the chicken alive that we eat for dinner. Right. Or even the lettuce on the plant before it was in our salad.

That's not something we're intimately familiar with. And some of you don't like thinking about it. I know that. But here's what Jesus is saying that we don't need to miss. This talk of eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

It's making people a little uncomfortable. Don't miss this. What Jesus is saying is that either he dies or we do.

[24 : 06] Right. Something. Someone has to die for us to live. Jesus is saying the bread he gives for the life of the world is his flesh.

That is, I will give my life to give you life because that's how it works. That's how you find life when you eat. I don't think Jesus is talking primarily about the Lord's Supper here.

He hasn't instituted it yet at this point. He's talking about our believing in his death in our place. But of course, that is beautifully pictured for us in the Lord's Supper.

When he does give that to his church to remember and to rest in his body and his blood shed for us. What a joy to celebrate that and remember what he has done.

Jesus' death on the cross. One of the most widely attested events in all of ancient history.

Christians, Jews, the Romans alike.

[25 : 13] His death on the cross shows us that we can trust him. Jesus is worthy of our trust because he's not amassing things for himself.

It's not what he's like. No, he is living and dying selflessly so that we get the gift of true life in relationship with him. In spite of that offer, though, many of those listening found Jesus' words to be hard.

This is more of the Bible's honesty that I so appreciate. It rings so true, doesn't it? Did you not think anything in there that I read just a few minutes ago was hard?

It did. It struck them off balance. And after Jesus responds to their grumbling again and he reiterates their dependence on divine grace.

No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father. After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

[26 : 25] That group that had followed him, not the 12, but the rest of them. Many of them left. So that maybe he was down to 12. We don't know for sure, but it sounds like it. What was hard for them, do you think?

Well, we know that the divine nature of Jesus coming down from heaven was hard for them. We see that here. They were, we saw earlier, quite okay with Jesus being one of them.

Who loved them and had lots of great benefits. Free meals. They were cool with that. But when he becomes someone altogether different. Who stands beyond and over us.

They're getting uncomfortable. Perhaps it's the grace alone part. That's what's right before this. Right before they leave.

Our complete dependence on God that Jesus keeps hammering here at Greats against our pride. And our independence. We love our independence, don't we?

[27 : 30] And this is uncomfortable for that. Perhaps it's just that many aren't looking for something that is so different. So starkly different.

It's a hard saying because they're realizing that they have to be all in with this Jesus. He's talking about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. There's a full life, wholehearted participation in him that Jesus is talking about.

And if we're really going to draw life from him. I don't know, man. Life's not all that terrible. I mean, I just wanted a miracle or two here and there.

A little bit of extra freedom from Rome. And that's enough. Maybe you feel that with Jesus today yourself.

I just wanted some friends and a church to claim when I'm asked about it at work. So I can feel like a legit Christian in Alabama. I just wanted a place for my kids to be safe and polite.

[28 : 36] And honestly, there was a free nursery. Life's not all that terrible. I don't need this disruption. This all in sort of thing.

Like life is only found here. Jesus would say to you, don't walk away from me and miss true, abundant, everlasting life.

Not life that is always easy. No, no. That's not what he's offering. He's promising life that always has joy. That always has purpose.

That always, no matter what happens, has hope. So he turns to his 12 disciples and says, do you want to leave too?

Go with everybody else. Peter gives the alternative answer to leaving, to rejecting Jesus, to remaining only cynical about everything and everyone.

[29 : 37] Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

You see, Peter didn't say, do we want to leave? Of course not. This is easy and simple for us. We understand it all. Is that what Peter said? That's not what I read.

Let me translate if I could. It's as though Peter's more saying, you know, this is hard. I'm not sure I understand, Jesus.

But only you could make the hard parts worth it. Only you, Jesus, can help me make sense of what I don't understand.

I can't imagine life without you, Jesus. Where else would I find it? One of the realities that makes Christianity unique among systems of belief and even unbelief is that all of Christianity hangs on the reality of Jesus, one person.

[30 : 49] Jesus invites us into life in relationship with him, not merely a list of things to do or what to believe. Without him, it's all a waste.

Islam is fine without Muhammad. It stands. Hinduism doesn't look to a person, but more a combination of principles of life or existence.

The Buddha ended his life by saying, work hard to gain your own salvation. You can do that without him. In fact, you have to.

Because he's gone. But Jesus, Jesus says, life, salvation, is found in him.

To whom shall we go? Ourselves? Your religion? It's just me? My own understanding? My own efforts?

[31 : 52] My own experiences? I don't trust me, y'all. I don't want to be stuck there. All of those other religions leave us with guidance to do on our own.

Jesus invites us to come to him, the only pure, trustworthy, selfless one, to believe that we will live because he lives.

To bring our hurts, our questions, even our skepticism to him and say, Jesus, to whom shall we go? You know our limitations.

You understood that I wouldn't understand it all. And you gave your life to give me life. Right there, in my hurt, in my doubt, in my skepticism, you came to me.

Do you remember the division of labor that Jesus lays out for our eternal relationship of life with him?

[33 : 00] It is unlike what anyone else will offer you. Jesus says, here's the deal in our relationship. I'll give up all the glories of heaven. I'll be born and live a perfect life.

I will die an agonizing death. I will rise from the dead. You believe in me.

That night that he was with his disciples, he said that this way. He took bread and he broke it and he gave it to his disciples as I, ministering in his name, give this bread to you.

He said, take, eat, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And in the same way, after supper, he took the cup and said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Drink from it, all of you, for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Jesus said, I am the bread of life.

[34 : 12] If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This is a table for skeptics who come to Jesus.

We all have questions. We all have struggles with our own understanding, with our own performance. We doubt that we are enough.

But if you bring your skepticism to Jesus and you trust him for life, if you find him to be your only hope, then come and eat.

You will live forever when you eat this bread, when you trust this Savior. You don't have to believe Presbyterian things to come to this table.

You have to believe in Jesus. And that is, if I might say, very Presbyterian. Come to Jesus and come and eat with us this morning.

[35 : 10] If you are a skeptic who has not come to Jesus, then I would say to you this morning, don't come to these elements this morning because they are given by Jesus to signify a wholehearted, desperate feeding on him, finding life in him.

And that's not what you believe. And that's not where you found life. Don't come here. But if you're searching for life, if you're honest enough to say, I'm not sure I've found that thing that fulfills me, that you're in a great place because we're seeking for that too and we don't have it.

It's not us. It's Jesus. And he invites you to come to him. He gives you, in fact, not a plan to earn life like that, but a person to give it to you as a gift.

You come and receive it from him. As part of our prayer before we come to this table, I want us to sing a song that is a prayer.

It's called, Help My Unbelief. All of us who come to Jesus join the man who said, I believe, Lord, help my unbelief.

[36 : 31] Jesus is the right place to go with our skepticism, with our unbelief. Let's ask for his help even now as we come to eat with him at the table he has set for us.

You can stay in your seats, but join Ron and Lindsay as we sing. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. like, we're not calling for something that could not be