

Flesh and Blood

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[0 : 0 0] Turn with me to John chapter 6, the chapter that we read earlier, and look with me at verse 52 and verse 53 and verse 54. Page 1075, John 6 verse 52, 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.

Amen. If this is the first time that you have ever read the Bible, could be, who knows, there may be someone in here this evening who's never read the Bible before, let me say welcome. But if this is the first chapter that you have ever read in the Bible, and if this is the first text or verse that you have ever heard a sermon being preached upon, then I guess your first reaction to reading these words that I've just read is one of horror and revulsion. That's what they are at first sight, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

They are perplexing words, words where we naturally, they contradict our natural instincts. There is no one who naturally wants to think about eating the flesh of any other person or drinking his, it's abnormal it's unnatural, it's obscene, it smacks of what we know as cannibalism. That's these words only when we read them at face value. The kind of words that make you want to close the Bible and just dismiss it altogether. And of course, you have to, there's one other reason why you have to not do so. You have, the Bible requires studying, reading it over and over again, and it's only as you read these words in the context of the rest of the chapter, and as you think about them in the context of what Jesus says throughout the chapter, that you begin to understand what they mean, horrific as they may appear. You can only understand them in the context of what you find in the chapter. And so that's why I would urge you that if you're not familiar with reading the Bible, don't just read it now and again, and don't just read one verse here and there. The Bible demands and it requires if you're really going to understand the gospel, you have to sit down and you have to give quality time to the Bible and ask God to show himself to you, even in those perplexing verses such as the one that is in front of you tonight. But if you and I find this verse horrific, you can be sure that the Jews who were listening to Jesus, they found it equally horrific, if not more so, because the eating of blood and flesh that was uncooked was in itself, it was unthinkable to the Jewish people at that time. The eating of human flesh was, they wouldn't even give a second thought to it. It was repulsive. It was awful. And so that's why there were several of the people to whom Jesus was speaking on this occasion who found at last that they simply could not cope with the kind of language that Jesus was using. But if you read the chapter, if you were following closely with me as I was trying to read the chapter, you will discover that this was a conversation that was destined to come to a head. And the reason was because what Jesus was saying seemed to contradict the majority of those who had come to Him asking for a sign in the first place.

I'll go over this in a few moments' time. So, as you read the chapter, you kind of feel that you're eavesdropping on a conversation which is getting more and more and more contentious.

I'm sure you've had that experience yourself, maybe in a restaurant and you're sitting at a table and you're at the next table, you're, well, you're not listening to the conversation, but it becomes a time when you have to because you're hearing everything that's being said because the words are becoming louder and louder and you know by the very tone of the conversation that there is contention and disagreement and you know that this is coming to a head and you're just waiting for a split, a division for one person at the table to get up and walk out the restaurant or maybe in a shop or whatever. And this is the kind of situation you have here where these people, quite a number of them, it would appear, they follow Jesus to where He was and they want to see more and they want to know more and they give every appearance of being interested and concerned about who Jesus is and knowing more about Him. And from a very promising beginning, as the conversation goes on, it continues, it gets more and more apparent that what Jesus is saying to these people is not going down well. They disagree with

[6 : 36] Him. They find it perplexing and disagreeable and distasteful. They can't understand what Jesus is saying, but you get the impression at the same time they're not really trying to understand what Jesus is saying. They're only seeing it from one perspective and that is the perspective of themselves. They've come to Jesus asking the wrong questions with the wrong motives and the wrong expectations. And so everything He tells them is a contradiction, is the very opposite to what they want Him to say. He's not ticking the boxes for them and you know that they're getting more and more uncomfortable with what Jesus is saying.

Meanwhile, on the other hand, in the same crowd of people, there's what appears to be a minority, the twelve disciples, who are listening all the time silently to this conversation and the very thing which is so repulsive to those who eventually left is like gold to them. It's more precious than gold because it's amazing, isn't it, how the same thing said by the same person is understood in two completely different ways. But the gospel has always been like that.

That's why the apostle Paul, he calls it a savor of life or a savor of death. That means that there are people who listen to the gospel this evening and who are hanging on every word. They can't get enough of it. They love it because they know what it means. They don't understand all of it, but they know that this is the word and the message by which they know God and which they're made right with God. And yet tonight there are other people that very same message who hate it. And the more you say, the more you speak about it, the more turned off they are, the more driven away they are. That's why the apostle Paul, he calls it a savor of life or a savor of death, an odor of life or an odor of death. And that's what it's going to be this evening. That's what it is. Every time we open the Bible, that for some of us, the message of the gospel will be the most precious word we've ever heard. And for others, you can't wait to close the

Bible. Well, our prayer this evening is that as we look together at these words, that God will change that hardness of heart and that we will open the hearts of everyone in here this evening who is closed to the message of the gospel. So that we, so that by reading with me through this passage and by trying to unravel the perplexities of this verse, that we will not only come to understand just even a little bit more, but that we will come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ. And so that we will be able to say with the apostle Peter, Lord, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life. That's the person who truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. You have the words of eternal life. There are four occasions in this passage when it becomes clear that the majority of the crowd who were listening to Jesus on this occasion, they are not on the same page as Jesus. Four occasions. First of all, their interest was limited by what they expected from Jesus. Here is this crowd of people and they're following him. They've found out where he was. They've made a great effort to find out where he was in order to come to him with all the questions that they came to him. And yet their interest, promising as it appears, we discover is limited. It comes to a point where it stops.

It only goes so far. And it's limited, first of all, by what they expected from Jesus. That's the first thing. Their interest is secondly limited by what they understood about Jesus' person, who he was.

[11 : 37] Their interest is limited, thirdly, in what they understood about why Jesus came into the world and how much they needed him, not only in his life, but particularly in his death on the cross.

And then lastly, their interest was limited in how far they were prepared to go along with Jesus on the road, how they were to follow him. I want to ask you tonight, is your interest limited at all?

Can you identify with this crowd of people who came to the point where they eventually split from Jesus? They turned their back on him and they said, this is a hard saying. Who can listen? And many of this, the disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. And I want this chapter perhaps to be a test, a test by which we're able to ask important questions of ourselves as to where we stand in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ and as to whether we are true believers like the twelve, or rather eleven, who stayed behind and who said, Lord, to whom else shall we go? Or whether we would be with a crowd who turned their back on Jesus eventually, having heard enough and couldn't take any more, or rather wouldn't take any more. Their interest, first of all, was limited in what they expected. Let me explain what I mean by that. They had witnessed the most spectacular miracle. What must it have been like to have been part of that crowd of five thousand people sitting on the shore of the Lake of Galilee that day, hungry, and watching Jesus taking five loaves and two fishes and in multiplying them to a quantity that would feed five thousand people? That was truly spectacular.

And the fact that after all that, they still came to Jesus in verse 25 looking for more signs and more evidence is astonishing. It wasn't enough for them. But Jesus saw through why they had followed Him.

They had followed Him with wrong motives and wrong expectations. Let me tell you what that expectation was. They say something very interesting here. In verse 30, they said to Him, What sign will you do that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Now, why did they ask that question? Why did they specifically make reference to the manna which their forefathers had eaten all those hundreds of years ago as Moses had led them through the wilderness? You know the story, of course, of how the children of Israel had been making their way through the wilderness, and how in their hunger they had cried to God or through Moses and Moses and God had sent them, bread from heaven, manna. Now, here's what the Jews believed in Jesus' time. Hundreds of years later, they believed for some reason, because some of the rabbis had written this, that when Messiah would come, a sign that He was the true Messiah was that once again God would send manna from heaven.

[15 : 23] That's what their expectations were. So, when they saw how spectacularly Jesus multiplied the five loaves and two fishes to make them feed 5,000 people, they weren't just interested in all of this.

They saw that this is halfway. This could be the Messiah, because there's only one step between this kind of miracle and calling down manna from heaven. That's what their expectation was. So, that's why they followed Him. Besides, they were concerned that the Messiah, the person whom they hoped that God would send one day, would be someone who they would serve in an earthly kingdom. He was to be an earthly king. And when they saw the kind of ability, the power of Jesus, the miraculous power of Jesus, they said, well, this is our king. They were happy to make Him their king, to crown Him, to honor Him, and to pay homage to Him, and to set up a throne and a palace.

They would have done anything to do that, as long as it was in this world, and as long as a benefit of being in His kingdom, they would be continuously fed with fast food.

And that's why Jesus replied to the question by saying, you are seeking Me, not because you saw the Lord, but because you ate your fill. Your interest, your expectations are limited to this world.

But I've come with a greater purpose than that. The tragedy is that you're not listening. And you're not interested. Let me tell you, He says, and if you read verse 26 onwards, He says, let me tell you, there was a big problem when Moses, through Moses' manna, came down from heaven and fed the children of Israel. Wonderful as that was in those days, our forefathers died. It only had a limited purpose.

[17 : 49] But He said, the real manna, what manna all those hundreds of years ago really represented was, what it focused the minds of the Israelites upon was not an earthly kingdom one day in which manna would fall from heaven again, only for the subjects to die. But what it focused upon was the real manna that would come from heaven, which is the Son of man, me. The tragedy was, they weren't interested.

They were only interested in their own expectations. I want to ask tonight, is your interest in the gospel limited to what you want and to what you expect and to this world and perhaps life being better for you in this world? Or have you come to see that God has done something far greater in sending His own Son into the world for us to worship Him and honor Him and obey Him and glorify Him and for us to become one with Him? That's why Jesus came into the world. They were also, their interest was also limited in what they understood about Jesus. The Jews grumbled about in verse 41, because He said, I am the bread that came down from heaven. 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?

Again, you can't help feeling that there's something deliberate about their hesitancy, about their unwillingness to listen to Jesus. They were only prepared to accept what they themselves could understand, and that is always a fatal mistake when it comes to the gospel, because there is no one that can fully understand what God has done. But faith and understanding, although the Bible does give us understanding in a measure, faith goes beyond our understanding. Let me illustrate that to you.

I don't understand how my car works. It works in a certain way. I used to think when I was in school, we were taught about the four-stroke engine and how a petrol engine works and combustion and all the rest of exhaust and camshafts and all. I used to be interested in all of that kind of stuff, but cars have advanced so much, all of them, in the past 30 years. I wouldn't have a clue. I never even lift the on it. I'm too scared to, because I haven't a clue how computer-controlled ignition works and all of that kind of stuff. If I touched it, it would just disintegrate, I'm sure. But I don't need to.

That doesn't stop me opening the door and sitting in the car and turning the key. I know it's going to go, and it takes me from A to B. That's faith. I don't need to know how it works. That's for other people to worry about. I don't need to know. And it's the same with the gospel. I don't need to know how God can become a baby. It's an absolute marvel to me. I can't begin to understand the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, because everything I see in this world has had a beginning. You've had a beginning. I've had a beginning. Everything I touch and see, it's all have that. It's there because it's come to be. But God has not come to be. He was always there, and He was always in three persons.

[21 : 48] I can't get my head around that. I can't get my head around the message of the gospel. Why God should love a person like me and send the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ, to become one of us and to live our lives in Bethlehem and Judea and in Jerusalem and to teach and to preach and to do miracles and to lay down His life. How can God lay down His life? How can God give Himself into the hands of evil and wicked men, and how could they put Him through agony for me?

I don't understand that. And yet, the message of the gospel is, for me, it is the most precious message, most precious word I have ever come across because it brings me into a relationship with God, and it promises me that my sin is forgiven. And that's why Jesus says that it is the person who the Father has drawn, and that's the person who is taught by God. That's what Jesus says. It is a relationship with God. So, they were limited in their understanding of Jesus.

Their understanding was restricted to what they knew about Him. It's not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know. How can He now say, I have come down from heaven? Well, it doesn't take much understanding. It doesn't take much logic for them just to think back to the day before when this very person who they thought they knew was able to multiply five loaves and two fishes and to make them feed 5,000 people. Now, there's got to be something different about a person like that.

Even Nicodemus says, we know that you're a teacher come from God because no one could do the works that you are doing unless God was with him. He had the sense to know that. Why did they not have the sense to know it? And yet, unbelief is so brutally limited, isn't it?

We're not asking the right questions. We're stopping short of seeing the big marvelous picture of who Jesus was. And once again, I've said this so often in the past, but it is so relevant.

[24 : 06] Have you ever stopped to consider that who Jesus is and who He was? Have you read about Him? Have you asked the right questions? The right questions are, who was this man? Who was the identity of this man?

This is no ordinary human being. He has changed the course of human history. No one has done more in the history of humankind to change the world for the better. I don't accept these arguments that say, ah, it's Christianity that's been the source of all the problems in the world. That's simply not true.

I know that sometimes the Christian church has made huge mistakes, but if you look at the big picture, Jesus Christ has done more than anyone else to transform the course of history and people's lives, and He continues to do so even now. Ask the right questions.

And then thirdly, they were limited in what they understood about why He came into this world, and that's why when He used such ugly language, a language which is ugly even to ourselves and even more to them. I believe Jesus was being deliberately provocative to get them to think. He often did that. He did it with Nicodemus when Nicodemus came to Him, and He said, we know that you are a teacher come from God, and Jesus' response was, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Now, how deliberately provocative is that? Unless a man, Nicodemus was absolutely right in asking, how can a man be born again? How can he enter the second time into his mother's womb? And it's perfectly logical to ask that question, because Jesus' statement is, at first sight, absurd. Same as here.

[26 : 03] He does it elsewhere. He says, if your right hand offends you, cut it off, because it's better for you to enter into life with one hand than for you to enter into punishment, eternal punishment, with two hands. It's something which is horrific. It leaves you with an awful violent picture, but Jesus was using symbolic, and it's perfectly clear in this passage that Jesus is using this language symbolically. And yet, the people who turned their back on Jesus, they were not prepared to wait long enough and to ask the right questions and to come to a proper understanding of what Jesus meant when He said, whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. Now, what does it mean to eat the flesh and to drink the blood of Jesus? Number one, there is no sense in which this is in any way literal.

Jesus was using symbolic, spiritual language. He tells us that. He says, verse 63, if you carry on reading, don't stop reading. Carry on. He explains it to us. 63, it is the Spirit who gives life.

The flesh is of no avail. Right away, He's telling us that I'm speaking in a parable. The words that I've spoken to are the Spirit and life, but there are some of you who just don't believe, and because Jesus said something that shocked them and that repulsed them, that's it.

The book was closed and they were off. That's the first thing. The second thing for our benefit tonight is that eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus is not communion.

There are those who read this passage and they believe that this is what Jesus meant, that by taking communion, we are eating the flesh and drinking the blood, or we are doing what He says in this passage. Now, I'm not saying there's no connection with communion. There is a connection with it, but that's not what it means. What does it mean then? The flesh and the blood of Jesus referred to what was going to happen to Him, how He was going to give Himself into the hands of His enemies, the Romans, or rather the Jewish leaders. They were going to hand Him over to the Romans. The Romans were going to try Him, and they were going to crucify Him at Calvary. And there, as He hung and suffered on the cross at Calvary, He surrendered His life to God the Father as a sacrifice, as the sacrifice for our sin, thereby taking away the guilt of our sin, paying the price of our sin.

[29 : 13] And it's all encapsulated for us in these words, my flesh and my blood. He went on to say at the Last Supper, He says, take, eat, this is my body broken for you. What did He mean by that? The body that would be broken by the nails in the hands, the feet that would be broken by the nails, the side that would be broken by the spear, the head that would be broken by the crown of thorns, as He hung and as He suffered the awful agony of the cross as the sacrifice for our sin. So, when He tells His hearers in this passage and tells us, unless you eat, that's what He means. So, that was enough, of course, for those who had come to Jesus with their mind made up as soon as He made it clear that His intention was not to set up an earthly kingdom which would give fast food, provide fast food and an easy life for His followers. They weren't interested anymore. And so, the more He spoke, the more turned off they were. And yet, the very thing that was so offensive to those who refused to believe in Him was the very thing that the disciples, the true disciples, needed to hear. Isn't that amazing that you can read this in two totally different respects altogether, from two totally different perspectives? You can read it the way that these men and women, but I don't know whether there were men and women involved, I don't know, but those who turned away from Him, you could read it skeptically like them, offensively. You can say, this is a repulsive, this is a verse which is so distasteful,

I don't want to hear anymore. If that's what your gospel is all about, I don't want anything to do with it. It's easy to do. It's easy to do that. You can always find verses, loads of verses in the Bible, in which at first view, at first reading, that they appear to be senseless.

But this is how the disciples read the same thing that Jesus said. And this is how I hope that we will hear the words of Jesus. Listen to it again. He says this, 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 then Jesus said, 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. What does that mean? It means, if you take it from the other side, if you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you do have life in you. The kind of life that I want to give you. A life where your sins have been forgiven, and where you've been set free, and where you've been born again, and where you now live for God, and you live forever, and you've got the promise of everlasting life, life in heaven, and glory, and perfection. You see, there's two ways.

You can either be turned off by the imagery that he's using, or else you can see what the Apostle Peter said. The Apostle Peter didn't understand everything, and yet that's what he saw. He knew.

[32 : 55] He knew that the one thing he needed was to be right with God, to have his sins forgiven. He knew that the Jewish religion, the Jewish faith in which he had been brought up couldn't give him the answers to the greatest question of all. How can a man or a woman be made right with God? And so when Jesus moved on to say, whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. Peter, he was like, I don't know what this means in its entirety, but I know what Jesus is promising, and if this Jesus who I have seen raising the dead, walking on the water, feeding 5,000 people, if he can promise me eternal life, that's what I'm looking for. That's the one thing I'm looking for more than anything else. And if I don't understand what it means to feed on the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus, I'm going to find out what it means. I'm going to wait. I'm going to ask him. I'm going to try and understand what it means. And he did. And he waited. And he heard the explanation. And he came to understand that what those words meant were our relationship to Jesus Christ through his death on the cross. Because when a person comes to see by faith, to understand by faith what Jesus did at

Calvary, that person is faced with an enormous challenge, which is the challenge that I'm going to put to you one more time this evening. Do you accept Jesus' death as the payment for your sin?

Are you prepared to turn away from the life that you know with all its ugliness and the sin in that life? And I'm talking as one sinner, by the way. I'm not talking down to you. I'm talking as someone who has turned from my life of sin to the Lord. Are you prepared to turn from that and to accept, to take Jesus? You know, when you eat something, you're taking that food into yourself and that food becomes you. You're joining yourself. You're dependent for your very life, your future, your existence, your nourishment, your health upon the food that you eat. And that's what you're saying when you're eating that food. You're saying, I need you. I depend upon you. Without you, I can't live. Well, that's what it means to feed on the flesh and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're saying to the Lord, I need you. I need you. I can't live without you. And I want to accept your death, the flesh that you gave, the body that became broken, and the blood that became shed on the cross.

I want to accept by faith what you have done for me in your love and in your mercy on the cross. And I want you to be mine. And I want you to be mine. And I want you to be in me. And I want you to rule in me as my Savior and as my Lord. Without you, I can do nothing. That's what it means to take that step of faith and to accept what Jesus has done for you in dying on the cross and rising again.

So perplexing as this verse means, it's one thing that's for sure. You and I will remember this statement. It's the kind of statement that you don't forget, is it? It's so vivid that it stays with us. But tonight, more importantly, is this statement going to reach into our hearts and draws to a real living faith in the real living God, a faith that will change our lives forever. And if your life has already been changed by faith in the Son of God, then next week we are going to symbolically do what we have already done in coming to faith in Jesus and expressing our dependence upon Him and remembering what He has done in His death at Calvary. So I hope that if you have already turned to the Lord, you're already following Him by faith, there may be so many questions and so many reasons for us to hesitate. Yet the Lord says to us in His command, do this in memory of me, in remembrance of me. And as we do so in obedience, we are drawn to a greater understanding and to a greater understanding and to a greater obedience and a greater reflection of what the Lord has done for us. May he bless His word. Let's pray.