

Spiritual Nourishment

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] Don't even need your Bibles for this, but it's good that you've got them with you, just to be absolutely sure that this is what the Word of God says. So 1 Corinthians 11, verses 23 to 25, three verses, sorry.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also he took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Now if you'd like to go back to John chapter 6. Just while you're making your way there, John 6 begins with the feeding of the 5,000.

And sort of the working assumption that, you know, that if you use it, you use it up. In other words, if you use it, you use it up so it's all gone. And Jesus has to correct that, that that's not how it works with God.

[1 : 17] You know, when he says, well, how much will it take to feed these people? And the disciples say it's going to take about eight months' wages. Well, yeah, any atheist could come up with that type of answer. But God doesn't work like that.

If you use it, you don't use it up because that's not the way it works for God. That's the way it works in a finite world where, you know, there are finite resources.

But not so with God. He has a way, because he is God, of bringing more out the finite, even if that makes sense. Strange though it is, but that's what happens. So he then goes into the conversation of, I am the bread of life that's come down from heaven, that gives life to the world.

That's found in verse 33. And, you know, this is talking about the manna in the wilderness. And now Jesus is here. He's the true bread from heaven that gives life to the world.

And then we're going to pick it up in verse 47, where he says, so verse 47, Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

[2 : 29] 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.

Just let that sink in, because that is a punchy statement. Verse 52, Then the Jews then disputed amongst 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.

[3 : 41] 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 like the bread 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.

Now, if you read on, which we won't do, but if you read on, you begin to realize that, you know, people are falling out. This is a hard saying. And a whole group of them stopped following Jesus. Well, how many? Well, he had a crowd of 5,000. Jesus says these few words, and he takes the group of 5,000 down to a group of 12.

Invite Jesus as your next church speaker. You know, what is he likely to do? Well, it's a striking statement. Now, what I want us to begin with this evening is just for these words to just to soak down into your skin.

[4 : 51] Well, even deeper than that, into your heart and into your mind. And these are the words, Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him.

And here's the thing. Jesus offers no clarification. He doesn't say, Oh, and what I mean by that is this. Or what I meant by that was this. No, he doesn't clarify it at all.

He just lets the statement stand. So I'm going to read it again. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. What is Jesus saying?

Is he inviting us to a Christian life that is cannibalistic? No, that can't be it. He can't be calling Christians to be cannibals. Because there'd be no one to witness to.

If you think about it. So what is Jesus actually saying? Well, he's saying something particular about his flesh and his blood and something that we are to do with it.

[5 : 55] One of the other things that we begin to notice when we read the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John in this account, is that people can become easily offended when they come face to face with their needs.

So Jesus comes and he says, you know, I am the bread of life. You need me for eternal life. I am the one who can give you life. So that when you eat of me, you will not die.

You will live forever. You will have eternal life. And people become offended at that. Not just that. They become offended at the other stuff. And instead of people accepting their need gratefully, saying, you know, thank you very much.

It seems as though that when some people come face to face with their needs, they become incredibly defensive. And that's a problem.

I think that's a big problem when we become defensive to our needs. I'll give you an example. Probably something that you've all experienced. You notice a friend or a family member.

[7 : 03] And you walk over to them and you say, would you like me to help you? Now, you know that they need help. They know that they probably need help.

But they say to you, no, I don't want you to do anything. Thank you very much. Thank you for offering, but no. And they continue, but nothing improves. Nothing gets better. And so you go back to them and say, you know, you sure you don't want me to help?

And then they become defensive. Why? Well, the natural instinct is, is that we become defensive when we become face to face with their needs.

Instead of accepting help graciously, saying, yeah, I can recognize that I can't do this, we become defensive and then we turn the person away.

Why? Are we turning them away because they didn't ask in the right way or they wasn't gentle? No, it's none of that. It's actually more to do with the fact that we don't like coming face to face with our needs.

[8 : 05] In fact, most of us spend a whole lot of time trying to avoid our needs the best that we can. And when you come face to face with Jesus and then you come face to face with your need and you become defensive over your need, not only do you push the solution away, but you push the solution away because you're pushing Jesus away.

And that's the problem. That's the real issue here. And so when Jesus starts to talk about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, it looks like on the surface that that's where the issue is.

That's not where the issue is. The issue is, is that they don't think their needs run that deep. That's the problem. Yeah, we've all got needs, but my needs aren't quite that bad.

I don't need that much help. I can, I'm okay, I can do it on my own. And Jesus is basically removing all of that and saying, no, that's clearly not the case.

Your need is far, far deeper than you can begin to imagine. And so I think one of the real reasons for them, you know, saying this is a hard saying was not because the saying was hard in and of itself.

[9 : 24] That it probably is. It's actually more to do with the fact that it was hard because they come face to face with their needs. And the reason I say that is because of what one of the disciples says, Simon Peter.

Jesus says to him, verse 67, where are you going to go as well? And Simon Peter says, verse 68, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

Okay. Peter understands his need. And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. Peter doesn't say that, you know, when Jesus says to him, are you going to go as well?

Peter doesn't go, well, I don't understand what you mean about eating your flesh and blood. No, Peter understood. Peter understood what was at stake here. You have the words of eternal life. Where else can we go? Okay. So what can be said about all of this? Well, I think a couple of things. First, that Jesus is clearly making reference to his death when he's talking about, you know, that his verse 51, I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

[10:31] If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give him, that I will give for the life of this world is my flesh. I think he's talking about the cross.

He said, look, that's where this bread of life is going to be offered up, on the cross. That's where you're going to receive it. The second thing, he has to be referring to communion.

And that's why we read from 1 Corinthians 11, because in no other context does eating the flesh of Christ and drinking his blood make sense, unless it makes sense within a communion context.

Now, don't be put off by the fact that it doesn't say anything about communion here in John, especially in John chapter 6. John has a habit of writing in a way that's not chronological.

In other words, he doesn't start with A, then go to B, and then go to C. He doesn't do that. He doesn't behave in that way. When John writes his gospel, he orders things completely differently in order to make different points with the same information.

[11:38] And so if you read John chapter 2, what you'll read is about Jesus entering into the temple, turning over the tables, throwing out the people inside, because they have made the place a den of robbers when it ought to be a place of prayer.

Well, okay. But that never happened at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. That happened at the end. That happened when he went into Jerusalem. That happened much closer to the cross than it did the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

But John, no, John breaks all the rules, and he says, no, I'm going to tell this story at the beginning. Why? Well, because he wants to make a point that his own people didn't receive him.

Do you remember how John opens up? He come onto his own, and his own didn't receive him.

Well, how does John emphasize that point in a greater way? Well, he tells you the story about the temple.

Okay, he puts something that happened near the end of the life of Jesus, at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. It's totally confusing, I understand, but he does so to make a point.

[12:42] And what about my favorite one, Mary anointing the feet of Jesus? You get to John chapter 11, you're just going to be found out that Lazarus is ill.

Then he dies, and he's resurrected. But at the beginning of John chapter 11, you read this, that Mary is the one who anointed the feet of Jesus with oil. But you don't actually find that out until you read John chapter 12.

Why would John do that? Why would John tell us something that we can't possibly know until reading a whole chapter later? Well, because any time you anoint a body in that kind of way, you're preparing it for death.

And so John is sort of saying, look, the story that you're going to read about Lazarus dying and being raised from the dead by Jesus is not really about Lazarus. It's about Jesus' death and resurrection.

I'm going to tell you about how the death and resurrection of Jesus will happen by showing you it in the life of Lazarus. And the way that I'm going to do that is by telling you that Mary is the one who anointed the feet of Jesus.

[13:49] So John has this way of sort of breaking all the rules when it comes to writing things in order. He doesn't do that because John knows that order doesn't really matter all that much.

What matters is the truth and the point that is made through the truth. So why does John make this reference to eating the flesh of Christ and drinking the blood of Christ here in John 6, now that we know he has this habit of ordering things in a particular way to make a particular point?

Well, firstly, Christ truly is the bread of heaven, the bread that comes down and gives eternal life.

There is no one else who can give it.

He is the only one who can bring the essential blessing that you need. And the blessing is to be found nowhere else other than in the flesh and in the blood of Christ.

Now, we saw this last week, the channel of grace, the means of grace. How does God bless his people? Does he bless them in their work? Yeah, probably, for sure.

[14:57] But where does he say that he will bless them? Well, it's in prayer. It's in the sacraments, baptism, the Lord's Supper. It's through the word of God.

That's where God pours out his blessing. That's the channel to receiving the blessing of God. And none more so than the flesh and the blood of Christ.

This is where true blessing is going to be found. So here's a question, quite an important one, that you have to be brought round to, just like one more later on.

And that is, does prayer alone produce blessing in your life? I can remember reading a book title once in a Christian bookshop. It says, prayer is powerful.

And I thought, yeah, I know what you mean, but it's not entirely true. What about this one? Does taking the bread and the wine lead to blessing?

[15:58] You're going to say, well, hang on, Pastor. Last week you said it did. Yes, but this is the importance of coming back every week because I'm going to tell you something different. Not contradictory, but I'm going to add something.

And the answer is, yes it does and no it doesn't. Why? Well, there's nothing magical in the bread and the wine. Nevertheless, there's nothing magical in prayer.

Nevertheless, when you participate in prayer and faith, then the blessing happens. When you participate in the bread and the wine by faith, then the blessing occurs.

So prayer is powerful. Well, yes and no. But praying to God in faith, that's where the power is. What does James say?

You know, he who prays must do so in faith or else he won't receive. The essential element is faith, which God gives Ephesians 2. God gives you the faith to be able to pray to him.

[16:59] So that's where the blessing is. That's how the blessing flows. Not only do you have to be in the means of grace, at the word, in the sacraments, in prayer, but you also have to do it in faith.

And that's what the people here were lacking in John 6. They had no faith in Christ. They understood what he said. They understood about the flesh.

They understood about the blood, at least as far as they could. But they didn't see their need of him. They had no faith in Christ being the sustainer of the world, the provider of all, the one who truly can give eternal life.

And so we go back to that question. Have you ever tried to help someone? Yeah. And they turned down the help? Yeah. Why? Because they're becoming face-to-face with what they need.

They can't do it, but they're offended now at what they need. Now, some of us might think that Jesus should have been clearer, that the reason why these people disappeared was actually to do the...

[18:01] You know, Jesus is unclear. He didn't clarify what he meant about eating his flesh. He didn't clarify what he meant about drinking his blood. And so these people have been put off. You know, Jesus' sermon was not clear enough.

Jesus doesn't play along with that. He simply states it as it is. And I think the reason why Jesus does that is clear. Here's why.

I think when a person understands their need, they're not too bothered about the difficult bits. I think when a person truly understands their need for Jesus, they're quite content to leave the difficult bits to a later date, to a later time.

Imagine it like this. A soldier who's wounded in war, and he's brought back to the medical tent, and he's in the process of dying. How likely do you think he is to argue with the doctor over medical difficulties?

Or do you think he's more concerned with, can you save my life? I think it's the second, isn't it? That actually, when we come face to face with our needs, and we truly understand our needs, we are content to put up with the difficulties.

[19:17] Because what we're really concerned with is whether or not our needs can be met.

Whether or not God can really meet our needs. Just like the soldier who's been shot. He's not too interested in what type of bullet it is.

He's not too interested in what type of medicine he's going to be given. Or the difficulties involved.

Or the medical difficulties of doing it different ways. Now the only thing he's concerned about is can you save my life?

Why? Because that's his greatest need. And I think these people here, the reason they're offended, is not because of the complexities, or the difficulties, or the fact that Jesus isn't clear.

I think the reason they're offended and they walk away is because they just didn't see their need for Jesus. They hadn't had, they didn't have faith in Jesus being the answer to what their needs were. And they didn't see that because they didn't see their own needs. Now why is this so important? Well, it's important for a number of reasons. Because Jesus is going to expect you to eat his flesh in faith.

[20 : 28] And Jesus is going to actually expect you to drink his blood in faith. And where do we do that? Well, it's at the Lord's table.

So what Jesus is saying is this. Let it sink in. That as you partake in the bread, it's not that the bread becomes the flesh of Christ. But as you partake in the bread, you are spiritually eating his flesh. And as you partake in the wine, you are spiritually drinking his blood. Not that the wine becomes his blood, or the bread becomes his flesh. Nevertheless, there is a real spiritual connection to feeding on Christ, to feeding on the bread of life, to truly being nourished spiritually by his flesh and blood that was given for the life of the world.

Because, right, what is he saying? Whoever eats this has eternal life. He's not saying, go take communion and then you're saved. What he's saying is, is that as you take the bread and the wine, you are nourished to everlasting life.

In other words, there's a real spiritual, tangible difference here. In other words, it makes a difference to your Christian life as to whether or not you take communion in this way.

[21 : 51] Jesus is not inviting us to cannibalism, as though we're actually eating his flesh and blood. What he's inviting us to is to really spiritually participate in his flesh and in his blood.

And that way, that's why Jesus doesn't clarify it. And that's why so many people are offended at it and then they walk away. You know, can that happen in a congregation?

Yeah, sure it can. It happens in all congregations when people don't see that their greatest need is Jesus. So what about nourishment? Well, God is saying, or Jesus is saying, that you really are fed on my flesh.

You really are fed by Christ. In other words, you are stronger to live in this world for Christ as you eat the bread and the wine. Not because there's anything magical about eating the bread and the wine, but because that is where God has decided to pour out his blessing.

That's where God has decided to spiritually nourish you. So here's the question. Are we doing ourselves an injustice by not taking the bread and wine every week?

[23 : 07] I think the answer is yes. I think the answer has to be yes for a couple of reasons. Why? Because Jesus says here that as you eat of my flesh and drink of my blood, you are nourished to everlasting salvation.

And that means we're only nourished to everlasting salvation as we participate in these things. So what happens when we don't participate in these things when we meet together? Well, the blessing's not there.

It's a real challenge because we don't participate it necessarily in the way that Jesus expects us to. We think it's memorial. Do this in remembrance of me.

Or we think it's proclamational. Do this for as long as you drink it in remembrance of me, proclaiming his death until he comes. So we look at communion purely as a remembrance, a memorial, or an act of proclamation until he comes.

But Jesus is saying here that there's a whole other side to it. And that is you're going to be spiritually fed as you eat the bread and drink the wine.

[24 : 20] Another thing to notice is this, is that God does deal with us at communion. I mentioned probably a couple of weeks ago the pastor who said that beware, whenever a church goes to weekly communion, it is like a spiritual clearinghouse.

God really does deal with it. Why? Because every time you come to communion, you're having to examine yourself before God. And whether you take it seriously or not does matter.

But God always takes that seriously. And so God deals with his people as they examine themselves before him. Why?

Because it's a matter of faith. It's a matter of practice. It's a matter of coming to God for everything that we need. So Jesus said, look, don't overlook the importance that I'm placing here on the bread and the wine.

Jesus said, don't overlook the importance that I'm placing on the flesh and blood of Christ. It's not cannibalism, but nevertheless, it is real spiritual participation in the body and blood of the Lord.
[25 : 33] Is there confusion here? Yeah, I think there is confusion. Can we understand everything that Jesus is saying? Well, I think we can understand enough. You know, could Jesus have been clearer?

Well, the answer is, well, maybe. But he hasn't been. But is there clarity here? I think there is. And here it is. Jesus knows that believing and practice go together.
Believing and practice go together. Faith and prayer goes together. Faith and taking the Lord's Supper go together. Faith and the Word go together.

In other words, believing and practicing go together. together. Are we going to be spiritually stronger if we participate in the bread and the wine in faith?

The answer has got to be yes. Are we going to be spiritually stronger if we participate in the Word by faith? Of course. What about prayer?

[26 : 31] Also. So this really is a matter of faith in Christ. But here's the big question. Here's the question that doesn't matter whatever angle you come at it from you can't help but end up at this question.

And here's the question. Are you offended at the fact that you might just need to be at the Lord's table weekly? I don't need it weekly.

Listen to the question. Are you offended at the fact that you might just have to be at the Lord's table weekly? And here's why it's such an important question. If you come to the Lord's table and you don't participate in the Lord's table by faith then you'll be the member of the church that won't see any need for it to be done weekly.

Because when you participate in the Lord's table when it's not done in faith it doesn't profit you anyway. And so why increase anything that's not a profit? There'll be no need to do it weekly because it's not profiting you in the week that you're taking it.

If however you're one of those people that really do participate in the Lord's table in faith where you know that you're spiritually being nourished by the body and blood of the Lord then you're going to want it weekly.

[27 : 54] Why? Because you know that that's where spiritual blessings sound. Not because the elements are magical but because through faith you understand that God is doing something.

So where's the tension? Well the tension's always going to be between those who see their need in faith and those who don't see their need in non-faith.

Nobody does anything more than they need to when it's not a profit. If you're not being profited by communion now you're going to see no need to increase it.

If however you are be through faith then you're going to want it more. Why? Because you understand. That's where the blessing of God is found. And that's what I think the early church understood.

This is how it says on the first day of the week when we were gathered together to break bread. Acts 20 verse 7. First day of the week.

[28 : 57] Now there are other examples in the book of Acts as in Corinthians where it says that as the church meets together they're breaking bread, they're sharing communion, they're at the Lord's table.

It's a bit like saying begin, start, commence. All three words mean the same thing. Well break bread, communion, Lord's table, it's all pointing to the same thing.

And it's all done by the early church as often as they meet. as often as they meet, Jesus says in 1 Corinthians 11. Well how often did they meet? On the first day of the week.

So it seems to me very clear that the early church took a weekly communion. Why? Because Jesus says do it as often as you meet and how often did they meet?

On the first day of the week. That's not a stretch. That's not imagining something that is impossible. That's really quite clear I feel. So here's the exhortation.

[29 : 56] The exhortation is this, that one of the mistakes that the church at Galatia made, and it was quite a simple mistake, one that I feel I make, and no doubt you feel you make as well, was this, that now that you're saved, you get to that position where you say, I've got it from here.

Thanks God, but I can handle the rest. That was the problem at Galatia. Paul has to say, you know, you've been saved by the Spirit, why are you continuing in the flesh?

The problem that they had was not that they didn't believe that Jesus was needed for salvation, no, they understood that. Their problem was, was now that they are saved, they thought, I've got it from here.

Thank you very much, let me carry on with my Christian life as I see it. And that was their mistake. not that they had abandoned Christ, totally, but rather they had abandoned Christ in their daily Christian living, with the attitude of, I've got it from here.

And so how easy is it for you not to see your need? How easy is it for you to forget that you've got real deep needs? And I think the answer is, yeah, do you know what, it's really easy.

[31 : 13] It's really easy to miss just how much I need. It's really easy to forget just how much I need. And so what are the issues here?

I think one of them is needs. Are we offended when we come face to face with our needs? I think the second issue is faith. Whether or not we actually do put our hand on our heart and say, yes, when I partake in the word, when I partake in the table and when I participate in prayer, I do so in faith.

That's the challenge, isn't it? Yes, I can honestly say with my hand on my heart that every time I pray, I do it in faith. That every time I come to the Lord's table, I do it in faith. That every time I listen to the word of God, I do it in faith.

That's the challenge. The issue is need and the issue is faith. And they're really challenging. Why are they so challenging? Because it just opens us up.

To whether or not we're going to spiritually and humbly come before God to deal with our needs.

There is real spiritual blessing here. Jesus says that as you take of him, you'll be nourished to everlasting life.

[32 : 34] John 6 is not about a group of people who are misunderstanding Jesus, though I think you could argue there were some who did. I think the real issue in John 6 is that they didn't see their need and they didn't have faith in Christ.

And so they were not benefited spiritually. And it is no different for us as a church. Do you know, I so desperately want us to be blessed by God. I so desperately want to be blessed by God myself. And so I desperately want to get these things right, not only for me but for a church. That we might come to share in all the good things that God has for us.

But I know that it takes two things. First, we have to spot our need. And secondly, we have to have faith that the means that God has chosen to bless us are the things to participate in.

So do we need to feed on Christ? Like Jesus said we do, yeah, we need to do that. We need to feed on Christ. Can we understand how every bit of it works?

[33 : 44] Probably not. It is a mystery. It is an act of faith. Clearly, it is an act of faith. But do we need God to deal with us individually?

Yeah. Do we need God to deal with us as a church? Definitely. We need God to really do a deep spiritual working in our hearts and give us the spiritual nourishment that can be found nowhere else.

Are we going to be blessed if we participate in prayer more? Are we going to be blessed if we participate in the word more? Are we going to be blessed if we participate in the Lord's table more? If that's the channel of God's blessing, if that's the channel of God's goodness to us, his means of grace?

And I think the answer is yes to all of them. So consider the issues, and there are two as we finish. It's about where is our faith, and it's about what is our need.

[34 : 50] Where is our faith? What are we putting it in? And what are our needs? What are our needs? And how does God meet both of them?

Amen. concluIDS mo Template Thank you.