

## Spiritual Cannibalism

### John ch. 6:47-59.

“Spiritual Cannibalism.” A very unlikely title for a Christian sermon. It’s one of those words that disgusts most people.

Cannibalism is the ingesting of human flesh and the thought of it is most repulsive to most people. But there are several reasons why cannibalism occurs.

1. Because of the depravity of man. Sometimes it occurs in the deviant behavior of those who are mentally deranged. There is that depth of depravity in men.
2. Cannibalism may occur as a means of survival – and we’ve heard or read stories of people resorting to that as a means of survival.
3. Missionaries in New Guinea would tell stories that among the headhunters of New Guinea they sometimes practiced cannibalism. But among them it is ritualistic cannibalism. It’s not eating human flesh because they are so mentally deranged or because they need it to survive. But they eat their enemy in order to receive the power of their enemy, the strength of their enemy, the life-force of their enemy. They eat their enemy in order to become like their enemy.

And as strange as that sounds, it’s that aspect of cannibalism that comes closest to depicting what we are reading here in our text today.

Ch. 6, remember that it’s been all about bread. In the 1<sup>st</sup> 14 verses we have the account of Jesus feeding the 5000 by multiplying the 5 loaves of bread. And then in v. 27 it continues with His offer to those who first went across the Sea of Galilee to the other side to be fed and then when they found out the next morning that Jesus has gone miraculously back to the other side, they head back over and find Him there on the west side at Capernaum. In v. 27 He offers to give them another kind of bread – a bread that endures unto everlasting life – a bread that never gets old or runs out – a bread that continues to give life.

Then in vs. 30, 31 they demand that He give them a sign and the sign they want is bread from heaven – manna like Moses gave the Israelites in the wilderness. Jesus tells them in v. 32, 33 that’s already happened – Bread HAS come down from heaven – True Bread – the Real Bread – and He’s it! He says that He is the Bread that has come down from heaven to give life to the world.

In v. 34 they ask to eat of this bread – but Jesus then tells plainly, “I am the Bread of Life,” and they must come to Him and believe on Him and this they have not done – He says in v. 36.

And then in vs. 37-46, Jesus makes clear that nothing less than a supernatural “drawing” by the Holy Spirit of God will ever bring someone to come to Him in the real sense and to believe on Him in the truest sense. It will be nothing short of a miraculous work of God that brings that to pass.

We who hold to *the doctrines of grace* speak much about John 6:44. “No man can come to Me, except the Father who sent Me draw Him.” We preach about how God must supernaturally move in the heart to produce faith. That saving faith is not something we have naturally that we can just turn on through our decision – it’s a gift of God. It’s something miraculous that God must work in us.

But brethren, that must be balanced with the truth of why such a miraculous work of God is necessary. Why is it that people won’t come to Christ? Why won’t they believe on Him in the truest sense of the word?

Well what Jesus is teaching in this passage today answers that question. It’s because it involves cannibalism. And I can tell you - that as men are naturally repulsed by that idea, they are spiritually as well.

First, notice the subtle change as we look back at the verses which led up to our text. Look at the last half of v. 27. Jesus is saying there that Christ, the Son of man, will “give” this bread unto them. So, in v. 27, He gives the bread. But notice in v. 33, a subtle change has taken place. There Jesus says, “the bread of God is He which comes down from heaven.”

In other words, in v. 27 He’s giving the bread and in v. 33 He IS the Bread. Therein lies the problem. Because for bread to do you any good, you can’t just have it, put in the cupboard and open it every day and check – “yes, it’s still there.” You can’t just put it on the table and smell it. No, for bread to do you any good, you have to eat it!

For you to receive from the bread the nourishment, the life that your physical body needs – you must ingest the bread. You must take it, put in your mouth, chew it up and swallow it. That’s what you must do in order to receive the nourishment that is bound up in the bread.

In v. 51 of our text, Jesus states that the bread that He's talking about is no less than His own flesh ("the bread that I will give is My flesh"). They must eat His flesh. And then we can almost sense their disgust in v. 52. They say, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"

It seems like this thought repulses them. In their minds this is not only a repulsive idea, but it is also an impossible idea. It should remind us of the response our Lord received from Nicodemus in ch. 3. Jesus said he must be born again and Nicodemus said the same thing, "What are you talking about? That's impossible! How can I be born again when I'm old? Can I enter a 2<sup>nd</sup> time into my mother's womb?"

And whenever Jesus is challenged on His teaching like that – whether it's there in ch. 3 with Nicodemus, or here with these Jews in ch. 6 who have heard Him speak of eating His flesh – you'll see that our Savior never, ever backs down. When Jesus makes these "hard sayings" He never backs down. He never apologizes or softens His words. He'll never back off and say, "Well, I'm sorry, maybe I overstated the case a little."

Instead, He'll do in those places like He does right here – He comes back with a statement like we see here in **v. 53** - that solemn formula, "Verily, verily, truly, truly." He did it with Nicodemus and here He does it again here. As you remember, in the Greek it's "Amen, Amen." It's like an oath, "I swear it! Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, (repeating what He said in the last part of v. 51, and now adding to it another dimension) and except you drink His blood, you have no life in you."

In other words, Jesus is telling them, "You heard Me exactly right! Your revulsion that this is absolutely absurd and impossible – what you thought you heard Me say is exactly what I'm saying."

Think of it – of all the things He could have told them that would have completely offended and horrified a Jewish audience! In Jewish culture, one of the things you would never do was drink blood! In Acts 15 there is recorded this counsel in Jerusalem – this big debate over whether the Jewish Christians should require circumcision of the Gentile believers. Do you remember their conclusion?

They decided that they shouldn't require the Gentiles to keep the Old Covenant Laws of Moses, but they wrote them letters and did ask them to abstain from 4 things: meats offered to idols, fornication, things strangled and eating blood.

In other words, for the sake of the Jews who would be sitting down at the dinner table with them, “Please don’t drink blood!”

Because the Gentiles of that day, instead of cutting the throat of their animals to kill them and bleeding them out like we do (discarding the blood), they would strangle them and cook the animal with the blood in the meat or drink the blood. Of course, this was offensive and repulsive to a Jew. And it’s not because that was now morally wrong under the New Covenant of Christ – but out of deference to the Jews who would be eating with them, the word was, “Please don’t do that!”

So, we can understand how this would offend a Jew, and yet these are the very words that our Lord chooses here to express to these Jews what is necessary for them to have the life that He brings. “You must eat My flesh and you must drink My blood.” v. 54

And then in He goes on to say in v. 55, “My flesh is meat (it’s food) indeed and my blood is drink indeed.” The modern translations say, “My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.” Remember earlier Jesus called Himself the “true Bread.” Back in ch. 1 John calls Him the “true Light.” Here Jesus says, “My flesh is the true food and my blood is the true drink.”

Think about what He’s saying. Why do we eat and drink? To nourish and sustain our bodies and enjoyment. What would be the ultimate food and drink? That which after one portion would sustain and satisfy us forever. This is what Jesus is describing here – true food, true drink – we might call this the true “whole food.”

Remember early on in ch. 6, v. 4 we’re told the time of year when this transpires – it’s at the time of the Passover that’s taking place down in Jerusalem. Jesus isn’t in Jerusalem – He’s up north in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. And Jesus isn’t going to Passover this year. This is the Passover before His last Passover when He’s crucified. So it’s about a year before His crucifixion. And we’ve already mentioned that ch. 6 pictures sort of an alternative Passover, if you will.

This great multitude has followed Jesus out into a wilderness place and there He has miraculously fed them with bread – this parallels that situation with the Israelites coming out of Egypt, being led by Moses and being fed with the manna. Ch. 6 is sort of a recapitulation of those great redemptive events.

And I believe our Lord is teaching us about the true nature of the Passover. Think about what happened at Passover. You have to bring a lamb to the priest, he would slit the throat of the lamb and pour its blood out at the altar, and then give you back

the carcass of the lamb. You would take that home, cook it up and that evening you and your family would have a Passover meal. You were to eat the flesh of that Passover lamb; you were to eat it all and eat it with the bitter herbs and the unleavened bread.

This was a yearly reminder of that first Passover in Egypt (Ex. 12) when the lambs were slain and the blood wiped up over the doorposts. This was the sacrificial lamb that shielded the firstborn from the wrath of God. That's one aspect of it. But also, they must then eat "the flesh" of that lamb. I hope you're seeing how all this is coming together here in ch. 6.

Jesus is saying here what Paul will state very clearly in 1 Cor. 5:7, that "Christ is our Passover who is sacrificed for us." We too have a Passover Lamb, whose blood shelters us from the wrath of God – whose blood is payment to the satisfaction of divine justice – that propitiates (turns away) God's wrath from us.

But for us to participate, for us to receive it – we must ingest that Lamb. But do you wonder why Jesus adds this additional feature? It's shocking enough when He tells them that they must eat His flesh, but now He says in addition to that, "you must drink My blood."

Look in **Lev. 17:10-14**. The Law states that the Jews were absolutely forbidden to drink blood. In fact, it says there in v. 11 that "the life of the flesh is in the blood." In other words, the blood represents the life of the animal and that blood was to be poured out on the altar. It was not to be ingested. You could eat the rest of the animal, but you could never drink the blood.

I hope you're beginning to see that there's more here than a simple dietary law. When they were forbidden to drink the blood of the sacrificial animal – it's not just because that's a disgusting practice. But it's because that blood represented the life of that animal – and being forbidden to drink the blood of those O.T. sacrifices says what the writer of Hebrews would eventually say – that those sacrifices could never truly take away sin and give you life!

Those animal sacrifices would never be able to give them life. Why not? In the first place they couldn't drink their blood. And the blood represents the life of the animal and they could never ingest that according to the Law.

Under the Law a person is shut out from the life of the sacrifice. Do you see? Under the Law there is no way to receive life!

And now here in John 6 we see that Jesus is removing this prohibition that pertained to those animal sacrifices under the Law. There they could eat the flesh but not drink the blood – but under the Gospel, concerning Christ’s sacrifice, we are to do both! We eat His flesh and we drink His blood.

What does this all mean for us? This sheds light on a couple of areas we should be concerned with.

1<sup>st</sup> it gives us some insight into what we call, “saving faith.” From the very beginning John tells us that there is a faith that falls short of saving faith. There at the end of ch. 2, there were many when they saw the miracles that Jesus did – they believed on Him, but Jesus wouldn’t commit Himself to them because He knew what was in them. There is a faith that falls short of saving faith.

Let me try to explain. On the lowest level there is a faith by which people “seek” Jesus, people “come” to Jesus, and yes, people “believe in Jesus – but it’s in order to get physical “bread.” We’ve just seen it here in John 6. These people have compassed land and sea seeking for and coming to Jesus – they had an “all you can eat” buffet out there in the wilderness and then 12 baskets of leftovers. The next day when they couldn’t find Jesus, they go all the way back across the Sea of Galilee and find Him on the west side of the Lake – and now they’ve come back for day 2 – they’ve come back to Him for more of that physical bread.

I know they didn’t say that, but Jesus, who knows the hearts of men said that’s why they came back. **V. 25, 26** In other words, “the only reason you’re here is for more of that physical bread.” We see it here in our text and it’s rampant in the visible church today. (better life, better marriage, health and wealth) Jesus gave them that kind of bread out there in the wilderness, but John called it “a sign.” It was a sign that Messiah is here; it’s a sign that the True Bread had come. A sign that said, “I am the Bread of Life.”

Jesus shows them in that sign that there’s plenty of bread – there’s bread enough and to spare. But they were only taken with the “sign.” They just wanted more signs, more of that physical bread.

Does the Lord give us our daily bread? Yes, He does. Does He provide for our physical needs, sometimes even miraculously? (financial provisions, divine healing) Yes, we’re not denying those things.

But since we know that “every good and perfect gift comes down from above” (James writes) – we must remember that the goodness of God toward us is designed to do what? Lead us to repentance, which leads us to Christ. **Rom. 2:4** All those good things are just signs to point us to Christ! All those things are just like the physical bread that perishes. V. 27 It’s food that perishes - It won’t last. It’s bread for a day and the life it gives is temporary life. The Lord Jesus is offering something far, far better – something that never runs out, never gets old, something that keeps giving life.

So on the very lowest level, there are people who will come to Jesus – they will go to great lengths to follow Him – as long as they have hope to get that physical bread. That is a kind of faith in Christ, but it’s not saving faith.

But then there’s another kind of faith on another level, that comes to Christ, that seeks Christ in order to learn how to bake the bread. They look at salvation as a “do it yourself” project – “some assembly required.” They come to Christ because they want to know the recipe for salvation.

Ex. In Matt. 19 The rich young ruler comes to Jesus with these words, “Tell me Master, what good thing shall **I do that I** may have eternal life.” “What’s the missing ingredient?” Jesus began to list all the ingredients in the Law and the young man said, “I’ve already got all those ingredients in my pan – can you just tell me the missing ingredient so I can add that in and bake the bread myself?”

That’s what is being expressed in John 6:28. Jesus has just told them that He has come to give them bread that endures to eternal life – and they say, “What must we do to work the works of God?” In other words, “We’re not interested in You giving us bread, we want to know how to make our own bread!”

And Jesus’ reply today is the same reply that Jesus gave them then in v. 29, “This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent.” Beloved, our responsibility is not to produce the bread, our responsibility is to eat the Bread! That Bread that God gave us in the person and work of His Son!

God in grace and mercy is offering us the Bread of life and as John has already said in ch. 1, “this life is in His Son.” John will restate that in [1Jn 5:11-12](#) And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (12) He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

There is no real life, no abundant life, and no everlasting life apart from Him. And to have Him you must receive Him and to receive Him you must come to Him and believe upon Him. You must consume His flesh (His perfect life – His righteousness, not yours) and consume His blood (His death – not yours as a perfect sacrifice for your sin).

I'm sure I'm not getting across the warning I'm trying to express here. But I've seen people come to church, they'll sing about the Bread, they'll praise the Bread, they'll read about the Bread, men in the pulpits preaching about the Bread and people in the pews listening about the Bread. They paint pictures of the Bread and make movies about the Bread – they'll do everything about the Bread except for the one thing that Jesus said was absolutely essential – **THEY WON'T EAT IT!**

They won't ingest it. They won't swallow it. But beloved, that's what saving faith does! Saving faith is a carnivorous faith; it's a cannibalistic faith; it's a parasitic faith.

Ex. Think of a tick on your dog or your cat. Pull it off and squash it and what comes out? Blood – because that tick lives by drawing life from the host, and it can't live on its own. And that is exactly what our Lord is describing to us in this passage. We are in no sense producers of life; we have no true life in us and we can't produce it. Christ came to give life and this life is in Him – and we have life when we have Him. And if we don't have Him, we don't have life.

When we, by faith, eat His flesh and drink His blood – when we live by Him, then and only then do we really have life eternal. Notice how Jesus states this in these closing verses. **V. 56**

This Bread of Life is altogether different from that physical bread that your fathers ate. That bread is “dead bread.” In other words, it gives us physical life, it sustains our physical life for a season. But the Bread that Jesus is speaking about is not dead bread – it's “living Bread.” It's Bread that's alive!

And unlike physical bread that just gives you energy to go and do what you want to do – this Bread is alive. And when it dwells in you – you do what He wants you to do. Through saving faith, this Life from heaven has invaded our hearts and it lives within us. **Gal. 2:20** “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Jesus goes on to say in v. 57. Here the Lord Jesus is giving us His secret to life. He says, “I live by the life that’s in My Father and I do those things that He wills Me to do and I speak those things that He tells Me to speak. I perform My miracles by the power He supplies.” That’s how Christ lived.

“I live by the living Father,” and He goes on to say, “So, he that eats Me, even he shall live by Me.” He’s telling them, “I want you to enter into the same kind of relationship that I have with My Father. A relationship of absolute dependence. And Jesus says here that He would have us live in that same kind of absolute dependence upon the life that is in Him. **V. 58**

For all who just live this life by that “bread” that perishes, for all who are counting on that kind of bread to carry them through – they will soon find out that the life that that kind of bread brought them will run out. Death will come and if they don’t have Christ (who is the living Bread) – if they haven’t been living a life of dependence on that Bread of Life, there will be nothing but death..... after death.

But whoever “eats of this Bread,” Jesus says, “Shall live forever.” Their death will be but the gateway to more life, eternal life. [John 11:25-26](#) Jesus said, **I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me (eats My flesh and drinks My blood – lives by Me), though he were dead, yet shall he live: (26) And whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die?**

Next time we are going to consider some things that this whole idea of eating His flesh and drinking His blood sheds light on. 1<sup>st</sup> It’s so offensive to man. Why? Because at the very least it means giving up our independence. It’s a surrender.

Back to the tick – when that tick lives by the life that’s in that dog, where is the tick going to go? Wherever the dog goes. What’s the tick going to do? Whatever the dog does. When that parasite enters into that kind of relationship with the host, it has surrendered its independence. So must we to be saved.

Another thing this sheds light on is the nature of the N.T. church. It tells us what we are to be as a church. #1 We’re not a bakery – we can’t manufacture the Bread. We don’t have a recipe for producing “living Bread.” All we can do is come together and tell you about it and point you to it. We’re like the O.T. Table of Shewbread in the Temple – we’re here to put the Bread of Life on display and then seek to persuade you to receive it and ingest it.

We’re just here to promote and distribute that Living Bread.

Most people don't want that Bread. That's what's happening here in John 6. And we're going to see by the time we get to the end of this chapter that hardly anybody wanted THAT Bread. Oh, they wanted that other bread for their bellies and they'd follow Him anywhere if they could get that bread! But when Jesus fully explains what THIS Bread is – those thousands that were following Him turn away and they leave and they never come back.

That highlights the problem – natural man doesn't have an appetite for this Bread – they don't want it. And that's why Jesus spent the last 10 verses before our text today explaining why nothing short of a supernatural work of God is going to bring them to ingest this Bread.

People naturally don't want this kind of Bread. Well, what if we just “sugarcoat this Bread?” Then they would eat it.

I've never been a big bread eater. But when I was young, my mother would mix melted butter, sugar and cinnamon and put that on bread; put it in the oven under the broiler and make “cinnamon toast.” Or she would make me a “butter and sugar” sandwich. I still didn't really care for the bread, but I would sure eat it to get that sweet stuff.

So in the same way if the church could just come up with a bread that doesn't taste like bread – more people would eat it. That's the temptation – instead of setting out the Bread of Life (the Person and work of Jesus Christ in all its simplicity and in all its purity) the church serves donuts – sweet bread. And when that's what's set before natural men – you don't need a supernatural work of the Spirit to get them to ingest it.

But if, by the grace of God, you've ever “tasted and seen that the Lord is good,” if you've ever, by faith, eaten the flesh of the Son of man and drank His blood (taken His life and His death as a substitute for yours) then you know how sweet that Bread really is! Then the words of the hymnwriter are now your own words.

*Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him at His word;  
Just to rest upon His promise; Just to know, “Thus saith the Lord.”*

*O how sweet to trust in Jesus, just to trust His cleansing blood;  
Just in simple faith to plunge me 'neath the healing, cleansing flood!*

*Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus, just from sin and self to cease;  
Just from Jesus simply taking life and rest, and joy and peace.*

*I'm so glad I learned to trust thee, Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend;  
And I know that thou art with me, wilt be with me to the end.*

So, we proclaim Jesus Christ, the Son of God as the Bread of Life and we do it in the confidence that God will draw men and women, boys and girls to come to this Bread, believe in this Bread, eat of this Bread and then live by this Bread – both now and forever more.

This sermon has been about Spiritual Cannibalism – drawing life from the life of another. A life that was offered up in sacrifice for us. A life that gave Himself for us and now “ever lives by the power of an endless life” and we can live forever by partaking of Him.

If you're not saved, if you're not a true Christian - don't spend your life seeking for the bread that will perish. Don't try to bake your own bread. Come to Christ, receive Him by faith, believe on Him as if your life depended on it – because it does!

Nothing less than an absolute surrender to Him will do it. Nothing less than embracing Him as your own personal “true food and true drink” will save you. Here's a vaccine that will guard you against all deadly diseases (including Coronavirus) → living Bread → a Bread that will give you real life forever.

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” “This is that Bread which came down from heaven; and he that eats of this Bread shall live forever.”

**Amen.**