

Eating is Believing

John 6:48-58

BI: The only way to obtain eternal life is to receive into the depths of our souls Jesus' personal, bodily, atoning sacrifice on our behalf.

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Introduction:

If I were to ask you to give me a metaphor for saving faith, what would you say? What is true belief like? Some might say it's like Studying. In order to be saved one needs to take the claims of Christ and think deeply about what they mean. You dig into the original language and you immerse yourself in the theology of salvation. Others might say true belief is like Purchasing. When you realize that salvation is something you desperately need you go to the local spiritual retail shop and negotiate how much money, how much penance, and how many good works you need to perform to get yourself in right standing with God. Still others may say true belief is like Falling in Love. In fact, there is a popular Christian song that says exactly that: "It's more like falling in love than something to believe in. It's more like losing my heart than giving my elegance... It feels like I'm falling in love." Of course the problem with *that* metaphor is that you can just as easily fall Out of love as fall in. So what is real saving faith like?

There are a number of metaphors the Bible uses for true faith, but the one Jesus uses in John chapter 6 is this; that real saving faith is like eating. Or, we might say that the theme of this chapter is "Eating is Believing."

Over the past month or so a number of people have told me that they are looking forward to hearing what I'm going to say about Jesus' statement, "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no part in me." And honestly, I have been curious to hear what I'm going to say about that text as well because before the last week or so I wasn't sure what Jesus was meaning.

There are probably a couple of reasons why people are interested in understanding this particular statement of Jesus. For one, it just comes across as a shocking statement. In fact, it sounds like Jesus is espousing some kind of cannibalism. But that is clearly *NOT* what he is saying. Even unbelievers realize Jesus teaching by use of metaphor. The question is, what does the metaphor point to. And that brings us to another reason why people are interested in this text; namely, because Catholic and Orthodox traditions point to this text to substantiate their view of the Lord's Supper. Now, it's not my purpose this morning to get into all of that but suffice it to say that Catholic tradition teaches that when the Mass (or Lord's Supper) is served, the priest actually has the ability to call down Christ from heaven and turn the wafer and the wine turn into the real flesh and

blood of Jesus so that the communicant is actually obeying this text literally by eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus as a means to salvation.

Protestants have rejected that view from the very beginning and many trees have lost their lives (not to mention men) over what Jesus meant when He commanded His followers to eat His flesh and drink His blood. So what does it mean and why does it matter?

To answer that question I want to take you through the text and point out the key elements that lead us to what I believe is the correct interpretation of this text.

I. The Point of Jesus' Teaching Concerns Eternal Life:

1. Between verses 27 and 68 Jesus speaks of life or eternal life 12 times.

- A. (27) "eternal life"
- B. (33) "life to the world"
- C. (40) "eternal life"
- D. (47) "eternal life"
- E. (51) "life of the world"
- F. (54) "eternal life"
- G. (55) "the Holy Spirit gives life"
- H. (68) "eternal life."

2. So its clear that Jesus is explaining and offering eternal life.

The question then is, how does one obtain the eternal life he is offering? And His answer thus far is that one must receive it in a manner that is like eating. So the point of Jesus' teaching concerns Eternal Life.

II. The Metaphor of Jesus' Teaching is Eating:

1. Remember, his teaching here falls right on the heels of His great miracle of feeding the five thousand. And what did he feed them? He fed them bread and fish. So in His teaching about how to receive eternal life He uses the illustration of eating bread. But really it was the people who brought up the idea of bread in the first place when they demanded a sign (30) to prove that He is able to give the eternal life that God offers. They want Him to perform a sign that proves He is greater than Moses so they say, "Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness (31); as it is written, he [Moses] gave them bread out of heaven to eat."

2. So Jesus picks up on the idea of bread that comes down from heaven (like manna) and uses it as a metaphor for the source of eternal life.

A. Read 32-33

Now what is this bread that comes down out of heaven. It is none other than Jesus Himself:

- B. (35) “I am the bread of life”
- C. (41) “I am the bread which comes out of heaven”
- D. (48) “I am the bread of life”
- E. (51) “I am the living bread”

3. Jesus is saying, just as physical bread offers physical life, so spiritual bread offers spiritual life. The next logical question then is, How does one get spiritual life out of this spiritual bread. Answer: You must eat it.

- A. (50) “This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, *so that one may eat of it and not die.*”
- B. Are you following with me so far? The way people get spiritual life out of spiritual bread is by eating it. That’s a simple concept but what does it mean?

4. The next question we need to answer is precisely that. Since Jesus is speaking in metaphor, what does “eating” mean?

- A. (35) “he who *comes to me* will not hunger, and he who *believes in me* will never thirst.” So “coming” to Jesus to have your spiritual hunger satisfied is synonymous with believing in Him. In other words, “Eating is Believing.”
- B. (36) “You do not believe.”
- C. (40) “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who *beholds the Son* and *believes in Him* will have *eternal life.*” In other words, beholding is the same as believing.
- D. (47) “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes” has eternal life.
- E. (50) “This is the bread that came out of heaven so that one may eat and not die.”

5. So Jesus’ metaphor for obtaining eternal life is eating and eating *means* believing. Jesus is simply saying what He has always said; namely, that eternal life comes to those who believe in Him. But this believing isn’t like studying, or purchasing, or falling in love, its like eating. It’s like taking Him into your soul like you take bread into your body. You eat it. That is, you let it get inside of you and become part of you in order to give you life. Eating is believing.

6. So when we get to verse 51 we shouldn’t lose our minds when Jesus says, “and the life of the world is my flesh.” We already know that He is using metaphor to tell us how to obtain eternal life. Now He is simply sharpening that metaphor to show us where that life comes from.

7. How is Jesus able to give eternal life? The point of Jesus’ teaching is eternal life. The metaphor of his teaching is eating; namely, that eating is believing.

III. The Focus of our Believing is Jesus’ Death in our Place:

1. Read 51-55

2. Someone will say, “Well that passage certainly sounds like what the Catholic teaching on the Mass, that the bread and the wine must turn into the real body and blood of Jesus.” But you have to remember that the context has not changed. Jesus is still speaking about how to obtain eternal life. He is still using the metaphor of eating. And it is still true that eating means believing. The only difference now is that we are not eating bread (which represented Jesus) but flesh and blood (which also speaks of Jesus).

3. The question is, what does heaven in mind when He uses the metaphor of “flesh and blood”? Let me suggest to you that when Jesus speaks of His flesh and blood here He is referring to His own human and mortal nature. That is, He is speaking of Himself *NOT* in terms of His deity but in terms of His humanity. “Flesh and blood” was a common human idiom for human being:

- a) Eph. 6:12 “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness.”
- b) Gal. 1:15–16 “But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood...”
- c) Matt. 16:17 “And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

4. So flesh and blood points to Jesus humanity, but it also points to humanities inherent mortality; that is, human beings die.

1 Cor. 15:50 “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the *perishable* inherit the imperishable.”

5. To take this one step further we need to understand that in order for Jesus to satisfy God’s wrath against sinners He not only had to become a man, but He had to die in our place.

Heb. 2:14 “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood [humanity], He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil...”

6. Now it is not trouble at all to understand what Jesus is teaching.

Read 55-57

7. And just in case someone might miss His point, Jesus summarizes the whole thing in the final verse.

Read v. 58

8. You see, beloved, Eating is Believing. And believing in Jesus – that is, receiving the truth that Jesus died in your place – is the means of eternal life. As the apostle Paul said

it, “It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

9. There is more in this text that we could spend time gleaning and glorying over, but the reason John chapter 6 is in the Bible is to show us that God sent Jesus Christ into the world as a man so that as a man he might satisfy God’s demands for our salvation and so that believing you might have life in His name.

- Catholic church Mass based on the OT sacrifices every day.
- Heb. 10:1-12

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