

JESUS GIVES HIS BODY AND BLOOD FOR US
(SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2013)

Scripture reading – 10 Words; John 6:41-59

INTRODUCTION

I have chosen to preach from the Gospel of John in preparation for our celebration of the Lord's Supper. I want especially to speak today to the children who may already be participating in the Lord's Supper or will one day.

As a congregation we have for some years emphasized the important role of fathers in teaching and preparing your children to come to the Lord's Table. Our position on this is in some respects not the common position.

There is a role for the elders in the church on this matter also. We would encourage communication between fathers and elders on what you see is the spiritual state of your children and their readiness to come to the Lord's Table.

Hebrews 13:17 teaches that elders will give account to God for their watch and care over the souls that have been entrusted to them. This is an awesome responsibility. We don't dare do this lightly.

John 6 is a beautiful passage where our Lord so powerfully speaks of the salvation that is found in Him and in His work alone. It is essential that everyone who comes to the Lord's Table know very well the truth that is found in this passage.

The words are both familiar and I would also say shocking. We know this passage, but we don't often speak with the same powerful words that Jesus uses.

I would say that this is a very encouraging passage and one that gives a needed rebuke. It is encouraging because it exalts the salvation that our Sovereign God brings to those He has chosen. This is actually of great encouragement to those who believe. The passage also delivers a rebuke, because generally speak we don't feast on our Lord and Savior as this passage describes. Our fellowship with our God can often be very weak.

So what is the call of this passage?

You are called to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is the only way of salvation, and that your joy and satisfaction in life are found in Him.

Your participation in the Lord's Supper is a confession of these things as well as one of the ways that God gives to you to strengthen your faith and also realize that joy and satisfaction can only be found in God.

1. WHAT JESUS SAID CAN NEVER BE IGNORED, VV. 41-42

Consider the context of our passage.

The first part of John 6 records the incredible miracle of Jesus feeding 5,000 men plus women and children by multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish. This is a miracle found in all four Gospels. What a powerful miracle which shows Jesus to be God the Son.

According to John 6:4, Jesus performed this incredible miracle not long before Passover, and likely a year before the final Passover He celebrated.¹ This detail is important for understanding the language Jesus uses at end of the chapter. In part, the context is that of a coming Passover, something all Jews would have been thinking about and preparing to celebrate.

In this great miracle of Jesus Christ, we see that He is the **climax or goal** of Israel's history, and in His life and ministry He also **repeats** some of Israel's history. The account here should be compared to Exodus 16 where God miraculously provided bread and also meat.

The next day after this great miracle, many of those fed by Jesus continued to seek after Him. They went to great lengths to travel to Him and find Him. What did Jesus say to them? Look at His response in verses 26-27,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷ Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

And then several times in the following discussion, Jesus made the incredible claim to the **true bread from heaven, the bread of life**, the one who gives true and eternal satisfaction.

As we see in verse 41, the unbelieving Jews complained or grumbled about Jesus' bold declaration. What is the OT connection here? This same word **grumbled** is used a number of times in the books of Exodus and Numbers. The children of Israel grumbled about a lack of water to drink and a lack of bread to eat. They grumbled about the difficulties in occupying the Promised Land and complained even about the manna which God had so graciously given to them. Isn't that significant for this chapter?

¹ Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 61.

The unbelieving Jews were even more guilty in rejecting the voice of the LORD now in the words of Jesus.² Like those of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, these unbelieving Jews only would recognize Jesus as the son of Joseph. After all, they knew both Mary and Joseph.

Their complaining or grumbling also shows that they realized the significance of what Jesus was saying. They recognized He was claiming that He was God. No man could ever say what Jesus said.

To all those who believe in Jesus Christ there will come times of testing, when your faith is tried. You will be encouraged maybe even by friends or family to doubt. The world tells you that either that all religions are really just different paths to the same end or that all religions are just merely the ideas of men. And for all false faiths this is true.

When your faith is tested, I encourage you to remember the powerful claims of Jesus Christ. What Jesus said affects every aspect of life. You cannot ignore what Jesus said.

If Jesus is the bread which came down from heaven, then every part of your life comes back to Him and to His authority. You cannot escape having to deal with Jesus Christ.

2) JESUS SPEAKS OF THE FATHER'S WORK AND HIS AMAZING CLAIM TO GIVE ETERNAL LIFE, VV. 43-48

We see from verse 59 that Jesus in this part of John 6 was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, the city he chose as his home city. The audience here was not the massive crowd that Jesus fed earlier in the chapter. This was a smaller setting inside a synagogue.

Some suggest that the Scripture reading for that service included Exodus 16 and Isaiah 54, the two passages that Jesus uses in His comments.

There is other evidence we have that synagogue services included the type of teaching and questioning that we see in this chapter. This is an amazing scene that John has recorded in this chapter.³

How did Jesus respond to the grumbling He heard? Jesus responded to those who complained telling them not to murmur among themselves.⁴ The verb murmur is the same the same word used in verse 41 (complained) and later in verse 61 (complained).

Then Jesus in verse 44 explained how only those whom the Father draws can come to Jesus.

² Beasley-Murray, 93. See Ex. 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Num. 11:1, 4-6; 14:1-3.

³ Carson, 283-284.

⁴ γογγύζετε – pres, act, imperative, 2P.

The verb **draw** is a strong verb. No one comes to Jesus unless God the Father works in a powerful way in your heart.

Often we think that it is in Paul's writings that we learn about predestination, election, and God's sovereignty. And indeed in Romans, Ephesians, and other books we see Paul giving teaching on these important doctrines. But it is Jesus who first gave clear instruction on God's sovereignty in salvation as we see in verse 44. Only those whom the **Father draws** can and will come unto Jesus.

This language should also be of encouragement to you. If you are trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, this is God's work in your life. The famous atheist Richard Dawkins says people just follow the religion of their parents. This may be true of other religions. And unfortunately many people think of themselves as Christians simply because their parents are Christians or their parents at least attend worship services on Sunday. But the only ones who truly enjoy salvation are those that have been drawn by the Father. They are the ones who will be raised on the last day.

Continuing in verse 45, Jesus spoke of the Father's work so that men and women will believe. Jesus quoted from Isaiah 54:13, "And they shall all be taught by God."

Again, if you truly believe, then this is evidence of God the Father's work in your life.

Jesus in verse 46 stated that no one has seen the Father except He who is from God. Why did Jesus say this?

It is true, of course. It also reminds us that we have no ability to try to figure out things based on our own wisdom or thinking. It is Jesus alone who can make us understand who God is. Anyone who claims to know God and says that Jesus is not important for this knowledge is deceived and is deceiving others.

Look now at the amazing promise that Jesus makes in verse 47. Is there a more amazing promise that has ever been given? Most assuredly, Jesus says, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. Note it is not *will have* but *has*. It is a present possession. We tend to think eternal life means that you die one day and you will go to heaven. Jesus speaks of the present enjoyment of eternal life. Eternal life begins in this life.

It is a most amazing thing to consider, because we know that we all will still die. It might be next week, next year, or 50, 80 years from now. You will die. Your body will be buried. But if believe in Jesus Christ, that He is the Son of God, the only Savior, then you now have eternal life. You have life that Jesus gives to you now and will continue to give to you.

3) JESUS CONTRASTS MANNA WITH THE BREAD AND DRINK FOUND IN HIS BODY AND BLOOD, VV. 49-59.

If you look at your Bibles, you will see that Jesus in verse 49 spoke of manna and death. This is repeated again in verse 58, showing that this is one main section of His instruction.

As I mentioned before, it is possible that the subject of manna comes from the OT reading from Exodus 16 that might have been part of the Scripture reading that day in the Capernaum Synagogue.

The coming of the Passover celebration also would have caused the Jewish people to think about God's miraculous provision for Israel in their wilderness wandering. God sustained His people for 40 years through manna. What an amazing blessing. But this manna could not give eternal life. This manna did not even sustain the physical lives of those who ate it. They are all dead. This might seem to be an obvious point, but Jesus emphasized this to call attention to the eternal life that is found in Him.

Notice the repeated references in these verses to the resurrection - **39, 40, 54**. Eternal life does not mean you will escape physical death. You will die physically one day, but this death is nothing in comparison to spiritual death, which is why Jesus also speaks of eating and not dying - **verse 50, 51, 58**.

Jesus gives a twofold hope - the hope of resurrection and the assurance that physical death is not the end. Life will continue even after physical death.

Verse 51 shows us how Jesus gives life. He gives life by giving up His own physical life. He gave His flesh, which He gave for the life of the world.

The language here is unmistakably the language of sacrifice.

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

Verse 52 like verse 41 shows that the unbelieving Jews realized the significance of what Jesus was saying and they did not like it.

Their response is another reminder of how the truth of what we share with others is not something people naturally think is wonderful. The message of the cross is foolishness. People are blinded by sin, by their own cultural upbringing, and their failure to understand that they truly need a Savior.

What did Jesus do in response to their confusion and unbelief? All the more He emphasized that which they found to be offensive. He did not soften the truth but exalted the truth even more. And it is here that the language Jesus used is almost shocking also to us. How often do we use the language that Jesus used in verses 53, 54, and 55?

What did Jesus mean when He spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood? Both Roman Catholics and Lutherans like to use this passage in thinking of the Lord's Supper. Roman Catholics believe that through the miracle of transubstantiation, the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Jesus while still looking like bread and wine.⁵ Lutherans believe that the bread and wine don't turn into anything else, but the real and physical flesh and blood of Christ surround the elements. Both of these interpretations must be rejected even though they are supposedly based on Scripture.

Jesus is the best interpreter of this passage. Eating His flesh and drinking His blood – very strong language – refers to two things. First, it means to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, which He accomplished in His sacrificial death - His flesh ripped, beaten, and pierced; His blood shed to pay for your sins, to take the wrath which you deserve from a holy and righteous God. The language Jesus used does speak of His violent death and suffering.

Second, the powerful words Jesus gave speak of our union and communion with Him. Look at verse 56. “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”

This is the language that describes the awesome privilege we have as the sons and daughters of God. We have union with Jesus Christ in His death and suffering. We now can enjoy true fellowship with the Triune God.

Parents, how do you model this for your children? How do we show others the reality of this? Many other things we like can be easily known - taste for food, the teams we like to support, the brands we most like.

Should not the truth of verse 56 be most known to others?

It is verse 56 which we see throughout the NT, the language of "in Christ."

Our abiding in Jesus Christ is not just an emotional show. But it should be a clear demonstration to others - joy, love, hope, peace, etc.

Application here also for children.

The Heidelberg Catechism asks in **Question 76**, “What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink His poured-out blood?”

⁵ There are two miracles here as R.C. Sproul correctly has pointed out.

Answer. It means to accept with a believing heart the entire suffering and death of Christ and by believing to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But it means more. Through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in Christ and in us, we are united more and more to Christ's blessed body. And so, although He is in heaven and we are on earth, we are flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone. And we forever live on and are governed by one Spirit, as members of our body are by one soul.

With this understanding in mind, there is still more to appreciate from Jesus' words. Why did Jesus use this very strong language in calling for these Jews to believe in Him? What else can we learn from His words? Here are five other points to consider.

First, as already noted, this passage has in mind the background of the Passover feast. Appropriately it prepared the way for His sacrifice at the Passover about 1 year later.

Second, we are very familiar with eating and drinking. We do this everyday. You need to eat and drink to live. Far, far more you need to eat the flesh of Jesus Christ and drink His blood to live. Every day we should seek to feed on Him.

Third, eating and drinking provide satisfaction. Eating and drinking Christ provides the greatest satisfaction.

Fourth, eating and drinking point to the closeness of fellowship you are to enjoy with Jesus Christ. Later Jesus in John 15:4 would also speak of the true fellowship we are to enjoy. **John 15:4** "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."

Fifth, eating and drinking very appropriately point to the suffering of Christ on the cross. He suffered in his body. His blood was shed for us. The words flesh and blood emphasize again the great truth that Jesus did take on a real human nature and physical body. Christ's divinity and humanity are both essential for our salvation. Both must be emphasized and appreciated.

Verse 57 expresses again the Triune nature of God. Jesus lives because of the Father. We live then because Jesus sustains us.

Isn't this again such a comforting thought?

And then finally, verse 58 parallels verse 49. Jesus speaks that He again is the bread which came down from heaven in contrast with the manna.

He who eats this bread will live.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus' words in John 6 as I mentioned have by some been wrongly interpreted to refer to somehow literally eating of Christ's body and drinking His blood in the Lord's Supper. Such is a mistake. As John Calvin and others have pointed out, it does not make sense for Jesus to speak about the Lord's Supper to unbelieving Jews before the meal had even been instituted by Jesus. John 6 does not directly point ahead to the Lord's Supper, but the Lord's Supper does point back to John 6.

We are not in any way eating of Christ's physical body and blood. But when we eat this meal in true faith and trust, we are strengthened through what Jesus did accomplish for us on the cross through His true body and blood.

Closing Hymn: 365

BENEDICTION – HEBREWS 12:1-3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.