# Feeding on Jesus

The early part of Jesus’ ministry was a period of increasing popularity. A year before His crucifixion, Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 men by multiplying a little boy’s lunch. This was the high point of His ministry in Galilee. People were so excited that they wanted to proclaim Him king right there on the spot. John 6:4 tells us that the Passover was near. A year later, during Passover, the Jews crucified Jesus.

Last week in Sunday school you studied the feeding of the 5,000. This morning I am preaching on the sermon Jesus gave a day later. We call it the *Bread of Life* discourse, and it marked the turning point in popular opinion about Jesus. At the close of this message, many of His disciples deserted Him.

The people wanted Jesus to keep on feeding them, just as God fed their fathers manna for forty years in the wilderness. The manna was a *type* of Jesus, who is the true bread out of heaven. (You remember, I hope, that a *type* is a person, object, institution or event in the Old Testament that God designed to point forward to Christ.) Just as the manna was the bread that sustained the life of the Jews, so Jesus is the bread that gives us life.

The people said to Jesus,

*"Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst”* (John 6:31-35).

In the following paragraphs, Jesus elaborates on this truth: Our Lord feeds us with Himself. This morning I am dealing with doctrine of this passage under four headings—

1. You must eat His flesh and drink His blood.

2. What does this vivid language mean?

3. Why does Jesus use this metaphor?

4. How can you eat His flesh and drink His blood?

# 1. You must eat His flesh and drink His blood.

*"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." 52 Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" 53 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 yourselves. 54 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever"* (**John 6:51-58**).

This is very shocking language. If you are a normal person, you probably find this passage as disgusting as the typical food of the Maasai tribe in southern Kenya. Their diet consists almost exclusively of raw milk, raw blood, and raw meat. Milk the cow. Poke a hole in a major artery. Swirl the blood around in the cup with the milk. There you have breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The language of Jesus was just as shocking to His Jewish audience. Many of them couldn’t stand it, and they left. Be careful so that none of you follow their example.

Jesus said that you must eat His flesh and drink His blood –

**A. To have His *eternal life***

*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 yourselves.He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*

There it is. That’s pretty clear. If you don’t eat and drink Jesus, you will die and go to hell. If you do eat His flesh and drink His blood, you will have eternal life right now, and in the future, Jesus will raise you from the dust when He comes again, and you will spend eternity with God.

In John 6, the verbs *eat* and *drink* come in two forms. Some are in the aorist tense, and some are in the present tense. What these verbs suggest is that you can view eating and drinking as completed action or as a process.[[1]](#footnote-1) A Christian does not eat Christ’s flesh and drink His blood once. He does it repeatedly or continuously. When you first eat and drink, you have eternal life. Then you continue eating and drinking—

**B. To nourish your *spiritual life***

You would not be content to eat a nice dinner this afternoon and then never to eat again. Your physical life is nourished and sustained by continual eating and drinking. God has designed our physical lives to be mirrors in some ways of our life with Him. If you stop eating physical food, you die. If a child of God neglects feeding on Jesus he doesn’t die, but he withers spiritually. He loses his joy in the Lord. He forgets what it is like to have fellowship with God. He becomes worldly so that he is useless for any spiritual good to others.

Do you have eternal life through eating Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood? Have you continued eating and drinking? Has Jesus been feeding you with Himself, or are you spiritually starving and wasting away?

**2.** What does this vivid language mean?

It should be obvious that Jesus did not mean for us to take His words literally. Unfortunately, the Roman church has done just that. They say that the bread and wine of Communion become the physical body and blood of Christ. The taste and texture remain the same, but the substance is changed. The Scripture passage we read earlier from 1 Corinthians 10 clearly indicates that we do not physically eat the body of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. I’ve given you some questions on the back of the sermon outline to help you think through that passage.

Here in John 6 the Lord’s Supper is not even in view. The Gospel of John does not report the Lord’s Supper. Since this gospel was written to help unbelievers come to faith, the first non-Christian readers of the gospel would not have made the connection between John 6 and a non-existent description of the Lord’s Supper. Eating Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood is a metaphor for two closely connected spiritual truths. It is a metaphor for –

**A. Jesus offering Himself as a *sacrifice for sin***

The combination of **flesh**, and **blood**, and **life** comes from Old Testament sacrificial language.

*For the* ***life*** *of the* ***flesh*** *is in the* ***blood****, and* ***I have given*** *it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement* (**Leviticus 17:11**).

The sacrifice of animals was not an idea that the people of Israel came up with. It was not their own plan to appease an angry God. Even though they **gave** the animals to God, it was really God Himself who **gave** them the blood to make atonement for their sins. So, in John 6, we read that the Father **gave** them Jesus and Jesus **gave** His flesh for their life.

*Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who* ***gives*** *you the true bread out of heaven”* (**John 6:32**).

*"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will* ***give*** *for the life of the world is My flesh"* (**John 6:51**).

God gave us the flesh of Jesus on the cross. His life’s blood was poured out as a sacrifice to give life to the world. Jesus gave His flesh to be offered as a sacrifice to give life to those who believe in Him.

Eating Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood is a metaphor for two closely connected spiritual truths. It is a metaphor for sacrifice, and it is a metaphor for –

**B. Our receiving Jesus by *personal faith***

*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst”* (**John 6:35**).

*"For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day"* (**John 6:4**0).

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life”* (**John 6:47**).

We have already seen that you must eat Christ’s flesh and drink His blood in order to have eternal life. Now in this same discourse, Jesus tells us that the way to have eternal live is to believe in Him. Therefore, eating and drinking are metaphors for believing in Jesus. What is faith in Christ? It is not simply receiving the **gifts** of forgiveness and eternal life. Faith is receiving **Christ Himself**. Faith is being joined to Christ as a wife is joined to her husband. Faith is inviting Jesus into your life as you invite someone to come into your house and live with you. Heather and I have invited various people to live with us for short periods of time, but when Jesus comes into your life, He does not come as a temporary guest. He comes is as the owner of your house, and you become His dependent.

Eating and drinking are wonderful metaphors for faith. We take food in and it becomes a permanent part of us. We take Jesus in by faith, and He becomes permanently joined to us.

**3.** Why does Jesus use this metaphor?

Some people do not like metaphorical language. They wish Jesus had just said straight out what He wanted us to believe and do. Of course, sometimes He did, but the Bible is full of metaphors, symbols, and types. In this case, Jesus used this vivid language of eating His flesh and drinking His blood to do a couple of things. First –

**A. To drive away *superficial followers***

*As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore* (**John 6:66**).

Many Christians assume that God is desperate to get converts, and we should be just like God. We need to get people in here by hook or by crook. It doesn’t matter how we get them. We put nice bait on the hook, and when they bite, we reel them in. The important thing is how many fish we catch.

The angels will sort out the good fish from the bad fish at the end of the age, but Jesus did some of that sorting in advance. He preached in such a way that the false followers became disgusted and turned away. In this chapter, Jesus preached several doctrines that people don’t like. He told them about His heavenly origin. He taught the doctrines of election and effectual calling. He insisted that eternal life only comes through Him. (Each of those doctrines would be a message in itself.) And then He used this gross, disgusting imagery to describe faith.

Many people are willing to follow Jesus as long as He agrees with their notions and meets their felt needs. If they read something in the Bible they don’t like, they say, “I don’t believe that.” A true disciple of Jesus Christ accepts whatever He says and whatever He does. If I find something in the Bible that makes me uncomfortable I figure there is something wrong with me. I haven’t understood something correctly, or my notions are all wrong. I’m the one that needs to be straightened out.

We should not hide uncomfortable truths from sinners just to get them to sign on the dotted line. Jesus didn’t do that, and in some cases, He expressed truth in the harshest possible way to sort out His true followers from the false ones.

This shocking metaphor also has a very positive message for us. Jesus used this metaphor of eating His body and drinking His blood –

**B. To teach us that salvation is *Christ in us***

*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him* (**John 6:56**).

The apostle Paul often expressed this same truth with the prepositional phrase *in Christ,* which occurs many times in his letters*.* He expressed it even more vividly in Galatians 2:20.

*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me* (**Galatians 2:20**).

I have a little book by Henry Scougal called *The Life of God in the Soul of Man.* The title expresses what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is not a person who has said a certain prayer and who thinks that prayer will save him. A Christian is not a person who goes to church, has been baptized, and who takes the Lord’s Supper. A Christian is not a person who reads his Bible and prays. Those are things that Christians **do.** But what **is** a Christian. A Christian is a person who has the life of God in his soul. A Christian is a person who has Jesus living within him. A Christian is a person who can truly say, *Christ lives in me.*

That is the lesson Jesus was teaching with this vivid imagery: *He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him* (**John 6:56**). That is what salvation is all about.

Is Jesus Christ living in you this morning? That is the crucial question. If He is not, you are not a Christian. If He is, you need nothing more to make you a Christian.

My final crucial question this morning is –

**4.** How can you eat His flesh and drink His blood?

**A. By trusting in His sacrifice for *justification***

This is how you become a Christian. To eat Jesus’ flesh and blood means to believe that He died to save sinners like you. It means that you have stopped trusting in your own efforts to make you acceptable to God. You recognize that you are a sinner in need of a sacrifice, and you accept Jesus’ sacrifice on your behalf. You have confidence before God because of what Jesus has done.

After you become a Christian, you continue to eat His flesh and drink His blood throughout your whole life. One way is –

**B. By trusting in His sacrifice for *prayer***

Many people mistakenly believe that God’s job is to hear and answer prayer. They assume that everybody in every religion is praying to the same God on the same basis. This is completely false. The different religions have markedly different beliefs about God or the gods. They are not all alike. Moreover, if Jesus is God, and if the Bible’s rejection of other gods is reliable, then there is only one way to approach God in prayer, and that is through Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus opened up the way to approach God for all who accept Him as their sacrifice. When you bow your head in prayer, you should always be deeply conscious that God only listens to you because of what Jesus has done for you on the cross.

Another way you continue to eat the flesh of Jesus and to drink His blood is –

**C. By trusting in His Spirit’s presence for *life***

If the lesson of eating and drinking is that you have taken Christ into your life, then the Spirit of Christ is your life. He is not far away up in heaven. He is not hiding out somewhere in a corner. You have taken Jesus into yourself. You have eaten and drunk of Jesus. His Spirit is in you. Therefore, a Christian should never say, “I can’t obey God. I just can’t. I’m too weak.” It is true that you are weak. So am I. So is every Christian. It is true that you and I will sin. We do sin. However, it is also true that in any and every situation you and I can do the will of God because the Spirit of Jesus Christ is in us. Jesus is your life. Jesus is my life. That is the basic fact of our existence. It determines everything else. Trust in the presence of the Spirit of Christ in you. You **can** do what God wants you to do, as the apostle Paul said, *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:13).

Another way you continue to eat the flesh of Jesus and to drink His blood is –

**D. By feeding on Him in the *Lord’s Supper***

Earlier in the message I said that John 6 is not a sermon about the Lord’s Supper. However, the Lord’s Supper teaches the same lesson as our Lord’s sermon in John 6. The Lord’s Supper is a visible sermon about feeding on Jesus, and the words, *As often as you do this*... highlight the fact that we must eat and drink often.

How can you feed on Jesus during the Lord’s Supper? As you hold the bread, you might pray, “Lord Jesus, as I take this bread, I acknowledge that I am spiritually weak and needy, and I am running on empty. Please feed me with yourself. Please feed my hungry spirit.” As you hold the cup, you might pray, “Lord Jesus, your blood was shed to wash away my sins. As I drink this cup, I acknowledge that I have sinned in many ways. I have sinned in thought and word and deed. I have sinned by things done and by things undone. Please cleanse my soul afresh.”

Jesus is your sacrifice; Jesus is your satisfaction; Jesus is the source of your life. Jesus is the strength of your life. Trust Him. That is what eating Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood means to you.

# For Additional Study or Family Discussion

Did the Lord speak to you today about Himself and His ways? Did He show you a duty you need to perform or a promise you need to claim? What was either encouraging or challenging in the sermon?

**1 Corinthians 10:16-22** – The basis for the questions 1-3

1. What is happening when a **believer in Christ** partakes of the communion cup (v. 16)?

What is happening when a **believer in Christ** partakes of the communion bread (v. 16)?

2. When an Israelite in the Old Testament ate his share of a peace offering, he became a sharer in the altar (v. 18). This means that by eating he shared in the spiritual benefit of the offering, and he enjoyed fellowship with God as he ate.

When a pagan ate part of a sacrifice offered to a demon, how did he become a sharer in the demon (vv. 19-20)?

3. How do these two examples (vv. 18-20) help us understand what it means to share in the body and blood of Christ during the Lord’s Supper?

Note: Since Christ is not physically present in the bread and the cup, an **unbeliever** does not share in His body and blood if he takes communion. Christ is spiritually present in the bread and cup **for the** **believer.**

4. **1 Corinthians 11:23-32**. What should a believer do before taking communion? Why is this important?

# **"I believe that Christ is eaten with the heart.  The eating with our mouth cannot give life, for then should a sinner have life"**

# Thomas Cranmer (Protestant reformer under Henry VIII and Edward VI, martyred by Bloody Mary; Cranmer was the author of the statement of faith for the Church of England)

1. These verbs should probably be regarded as gnomic presents and gnomic aorists. A gnomic aspect expresses a general truth or principle. The variation between present participles and aorist subjunctives may have no special significance, but it suggests a change in viewpoint: When you first eat and drink, you have eternal life; as you continue eating and drinking, you abide in Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)