

**Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live**  
**(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)**  
**John 6:52-59**  
***Eating His Flesh and Drinking His Blood***

<sup>52</sup> *The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”* <sup>53</sup> *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.* <sup>54</sup> *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.* <sup>55</sup> *For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.* <sup>56</sup> *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.* <sup>57</sup> *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.* <sup>58</sup> *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.*

All of us have had to *share hard truths* that were difficult to swallow. And all of us have had to *receive hard truths* that were difficult to swallow. Some humorous examples of this are: 1) Continental breakfast is not real breakfast! 2) The sign on a dental office which reads, “no matter how you brush, you are doing it wrong. 3) Choose two of the following - good grades, a social life, a good night’s rest. 4) We must accept the reality that there is a profound difference between the shirt that you bought, what you think you look like in the shirt that you bought, and what you actually look like in the shirt that you bought.

Jesus has just shaken up the crowd. He has shared with them some hard truths. In fact he has bothered the crowd so much that they begin to argue sharply among themselves saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Interestingly, quite different from what many of us would do, Jesus does not back down. Instead he presents the truth in even more graphic terms “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...”

What in the world is he saying? What in the world is he asking? What we’ll discover is that Jesus is not speaking literally and in physical terms, but metaphorically and in spiritual terms. Further, it is important that Jesus’ *primary focus* is not on the Lord’s Table (the Eucharist, or Communion). John 6 is not directly or specifically speaking about the Lord’s Supper. But, as we will see, there is a parallel theme because the receiving of eternal life through being united with Christ is represented in the Lord’s Supper. There are at least four reasons for believing that John is not directly referring to Communion: 1) The Greek term here for flesh is never used in the New Testament to refer to the Lord’s Supper. 2) At the time in which Jesus is speaking, it is about a year before the Lord’s Supper is instituted. 3) The eating and drinking that is part of the Lord’s Supper is for those who are already believers whereas Jesus’ focus here is clearly on unbelievers. 4) Further, the eating and drinking here most assuredly results in the receiving of eternal life (or salvation). And it is somewhat obvious that at least some of those who partake of the Lord’s Table do not possess eternal life. They may believe that by simply partaking of the Eucharist, even if they have not surrendered their life to Christ, they earn saving grace. Maybe they do it once or twice a year to fulfill their “obligation” to attend church. Bottom line, they do not understand what they are doing partly because they have never entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ. They have not believed on him and committed their life to him. And sadly some churches have not explained clearly what the Lord’s Supper is all about. What then are we to make of all of this? What we’ll discover is that the truth of this passage is unlocked in the answering of two questions:

**I. What does it mean to “eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood”?**

**1. Just as looking and believing in Christ equals eternal life (6:40), eating and drinking Christ equals eternal life (6: 54).**

If the results are the same, then these two phrases must be equivalent in their meaning. Jesus is equating genuine faith and commitment to Christ to eating (the flesh) and drinking (the blood of) Christ. *Therefore*

*trusting and believing in him, especially in his death for the sins of mankind, is partaking of and receiving life from “the Bread of Life.”* He is saying that if we *believe* in Christ, *receive* him as our Savior, put our *trust* in him, *welcome* him into our lives - we have eternal life.

## **2. This eating and drinking is for real!**

Jesus’ flesh and blood are real spiritual food and drink. The true commitment of faith is as real and productive as any literal eating or drinking. True spiritual food and drink bring true nourishment for the soul. This begs the question: Is Christ as real to you spiritually as something you can taste or handle? Is he as much a part of you as what you eat? Don’t think me trite or blasphemous when I say: Is your feeding on him as real as your feeding on a steak and potato?

Let me further illustrate by using the analogy of a bride and groom. Let me suggest that real faith, that real belief, is similar to that which a bride does in promising herself to her husband. Before the ceremony the bride can do anything she likes. In fact, if she wants to, she can even cancel the whole wedding. She can decide five minutes before the ceremony that she has made a mistake and cannot go through with it. However, when the ceremony begins she comes to the place where she speaks her vows and on the basis of those vows and those of her husband is pronounced a wife, his wife. She is now no longer her own. At the same time, her groom pronounces his vows to her. He becomes hers no less than she becomes his.

Now apply this to Jesus who is the faithful lover and bridegroom of the church, and to you and me who are his bride. It is he who has courted us and wooed us. We did not choose him. It is he who has pronounced the vows first of all. His vows were pronounced in eternity long before the foundation of the world. He said, “I, Jesus, take you, John Miller (Betsy White, or whatever your name may be), to be my wedded wife. And I do promise and covenant, before God and these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful husband, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, for time and for eternity.”

Then there came a day when we looked up into his loving face and eyes, believed his promise, and repeated his vow. In the case of the church something great happened between the speaking of this promise

by Christ and our repetition of it. Between his vow and the saying of our vow, Jesus went to the cross where he paid an infinite price for our sin, purchasing us so that we could be free of sin, guilt, and shame as we come to him. He sacrificed his whole person. He allowed his flesh to be torn and gave every drop of his blood. We see his sacrifice. With that in mind we repeat, “I sinner, take you Jesus, to be my wedded husband. And I do promise and covenant, before God and these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful wife, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, for this life and for eternity.” **That is what faith is. That is what it means to eat Christ’s flesh and drink his blood.** It is to commit yourself to him who gave of himself totally for you - of his flesh and of his blood. It is to accept his promise and pledge on your behalf and repeat his promise, vowing to be his for eternity.

It is this genuine faith in Christ that makes the celebration of Communion or the Eucharist real and satisfying. When we come to Communion Jesus is actually present in a special way spiritually. We meet him at his table, to which he comes to give himself to us. As we receive the elements of bread and wine in the presence of Christ, so we partake of him and all his benefits. We feed upon him in our hearts with thanksgiving. He comes to us with sanctifying grace (the grace and power for holy living) and empowering grace for ministry according to the gifts we have received from him. We feed on him spiritually and receive vitality and power from our union with him. (We do not literally eat his flesh and drink his blood, but we do receive spiritually wonderful blessings for the living out of our faith in our Christian lives.)

## **II. What are the benefits of eating his flesh and drinking his blood?**

### **1. Resurrection**

As we discussed in our previous study, the life that we received at the moment of our spiritual birth, the moment we gave our hearts and lives to Jesus as our Savior and new master, continues on into eternity (6:54, 58). Our soul and spirit are eternal not only in duration but in the quality of a never ending life with God. Even if, or when, our body dies physically, Jesus has promised that he will raise our bodies from the dead and that they will be transformed into a glorious resurrection body that will be perfect in every way.

## **2. Union and Communion**

Here in John 6, for the first time, we have the idea of a life transforming union with Christ coming as a result of believing on him (6:56). Jesus will develop this idea further in John 15. The very same intimacy and union that Jesus has with God the Father is the very same intimacy and union that we experience with our Lord.

Again, this can be illustrated by going back to the wedding analogy. Before the wedding the bride has one status; afterwards she has another. For one thing, there is a change in her name. From that time onward she will bear the name of her husband. There is also a change in her legal status. Before, she could buy or sell property as she chose. Now, there often must be joint signatures. There is a psychological change. She suddenly realizes, "I'm married!" She senses a profound difference between being single and being married. There is a social change that will involve the matter of who her friends will be, whom she will entertain in her home, how she will spend her time, and many other matters. When do these changes take place? They take place instantly and simultaneously in the moment when she is joined to her husband. So it is spiritually with us. At the moment we were joined to Christ through faith, and by the new birth, we received a new name. We are now Mrs. Christian instead of Miss Sinner. And a whole new life of new relationships and obligations is opened before us. Further, the fact that we are joined to Christ means that we receive his life and are going to go on receiving it in an increasing abundance throughout eternity. We are to be filled, as Paul says, with "all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19). Imagine that! Right now we are much like a gallon jug filled with seawater drawn from the beach. It is real seawater, but not much is in the bottle. But suppose we could gradually enlarge the bottle, the more seawater it would hold, until eventually it would be filled with the entire Atlantic Ocean. In the same sense, God promises to enlarge our spiritual capacities until in the coming age the infinite Christ is reproduced in us. No, we will never be infinite in our capacity, but we will be ever growing in our intimacy and knowledge of God throughout all eternity.

## **Conclusion**

As we near the end of the passage, we are struck by the words, “When many of his disciples heard it, they said, this is a hard saying; who can listen to it? After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.” Jesus was not what they had expected. He did not conform to their political ideology. The Greek term here for “hard” does not mean “hard to understand,” but “offensive.” What he said was offensive to them. Today, it is also not uncommon for people to be offended and to become highly critical of a true servant of God. Especially when he or she lovingly but straightforwardly proclaims the “hard truths” of Scriptures. How dare they talk about people going to hell! How dare they mention the flagrant sin in our culture! How dare he push his position on us! “It does not fit our value system. It conflicts with our views and traditions. This man is asking too much of us”, they cry! But it is the “hard truths” of Scripture that are the “life-giving truths” of Scripture. To run from them is to run from eternal life in the direction of eternal death; to run from a glorious future to the inevitable horror of an eternity without God and all that he is - an eternity of never again experiencing love, peace, hope, and joy. Whatever might seem difficult about the truth of God’s Word, it is nowhere near as difficult as the consequences of turning your back on God’s Word. It is a hard choice to follow after Jesus, but it is a choice well-made and a road well taken.