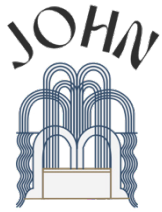


An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN



“Do I Have to Be a Cannibal to Be a Christian?”

John 6:41-59

Theme: Those who accept God’s provision for their spiritual hunger will live forever.

Introduction: Imagine hearing Jesus preach for the very first time in a synagogue. You’ve come expecting an increasingly famous rabbi to explain Moses or clarify some point of the Law. Instead, you hear a Him say: *“I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.”*

The natural reaction? Horror. In fact, many of His listeners were offended. *“Who can listen to this?”* they said. To their ears, it sounded like cannibalism. But Jesus was not calling His hearers to sink their teeth into His body — He was confronting them with the scandal of faith: Will you receive Me as the true bread of life from God, or will you reject Me?

This is still the great dividing line today. Every person is born spiritually hungry, gnawing with a need that cannot be satisfied by religion, money, pleasure, or self-effort. But God has graciously provided the only food that satisfies our pangs forever: His Son. Those who accept His provision by faith will live forever. Those who grumble, argue, and turn away remain hungry and ultimately “starve” to death.

That is the issue before us in John 6:41–59. **[Read Text]** - As we walk through this passage, we’ll see three vital truths:

1. **Our Sinful Nature is Antagonistic toward Christ (6:41–42).**
2. **Our Spiritual Need is Acknowledged by Christ (6:43–52).**
3. **Our Spiritual Nutrition is Available in Christ (6:53–59).**

The question is not whether we must be cannibals to be Christians. The real question is: *Will you take Christ in by faith as God’s provision for your soul, or will you starve in unbelief?* Our text teaches us that *“those who accept God’s provision for their spiritual hunger will live forever.”*

I. Our Sinful Nature Is Antagonistic toward Christ – 6:41-42

A. The Affront of the Call to Eat the Bread of Life – v. 41

1. In response to the people’s challenge that Christ come up with something more spectacular than Moses’ feeding the children of Israel for 40 years, Christ identifies Himself as the fulfillment of what the Manna was designed to portray.
2. In essence, Jesus stated that the manna met their physical need for a single day, and they had to receive additional manna.
3. However, the Bread of God, which comes out of Heaven, actually “gives life to the world” – cp. v. 33.
 - a) *Not only does it alleviate the hunger pangs of the soul, but it also provides*

life.

b) In addition, it doesn't only benefit the Jews, but it will benefit "the world."

4. Now, *"the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread that came down out of heaven.'"*
5. Their *"grumbling"* was essentially complaining about His claim and the ramifications of that claim.
6. Essentially, Christ's claim to be the *"bread that came down out of heaven"* was to equate Himself with God due to the claim of pre-existence.
7. By murmuring, they emulate their Fathers who murmured against God who provided them manna in the wilderness, demonstrating that the sinful disdain for God's provision is universal among those who have no hunger for it – cp. *Numbers 11:5-6; 21:5.*
8. To reject the provision of God is to still the wrath of God and judgment against not just the sin of rejection, but for all our sins – *Numbers 21:6.*

B. The Attempt to Compromise the Bread of Life – v. 42

1. They attempted to dismiss His claim of having *"come down out of heaven"* by pointing to their previous knowledge of Him.
2. Often, men will do the same thing – we will hear the message that confronts our sin and our flagrant deviations and will retreat to some portion of knowledge about God, asserting that we understand it, which we think will discredit the confrontation.
3. Here they appeal to His birth – *"They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?'"*
4. The Jews contest Jesus' claim of deity by asserting that Jesus is far from divine – actually the by-product of a fornicating woman who was with Joseph before they were married – cp. *John 8:41.*
5. When we have no hunger for the things of God, we will do the same thing, asserting our own ideas and assertions. (eg. claiming that God is love and that He will forgive everything regardless of faith or repentance)
6. They contest the truth of Jesus' origin – *"How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven?'"*
7. Notice the repetitive emphasis on Jesus having *"come down out of heaven"* – cp. vv. 33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, & 58.
8. Christ calls for sinners to accept Him, but those who are committed to their sin but claim to have a hunger for God's provision are actually rejecting Him.

II. Our Spiritual Need Is Acknowledged by Christ – 6:43-52

A. Our Dependency on God's Provision – vv. 43-47

1. Jesus immediately confronts this antagonistic spirit by saying, *“Do not grumble among yourselves ...”*
2. In saying this, Jesus emphasizes their personal human responsibility.
3. On the one hand, He commands them to take responsibility and curb their sinful antagonism to His teaching, and to stop grumbling ...
4. But, in the very next breath, Jesus emphasizes the horrible hopelessness of our depraved existence: *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”*
5. This is true for several reasons: The Gospel is too ...
 - a) ... spiritual for the carnal mind to see;
 - b) ... humbling for our entrenched pride to choose;
 - c) ... exacting for our rebellious wills to yield;
 - d) ... lofty for our darkened understanding to grasp;
 - e) ... holy for our profane desires to crave.
6. Man's hope lies completely outside of himself – it rests in divine grace and mercy – as the Spirit of God *“draws”* sinners to Christ Jesus.
7. What does this “drawing” consist of?
 - a) *It is clear that the initiative for this comes from God Himself – “It is written in the prophets, ‘and they shall all be taught of God.’” – Isaiah 54:13.*
 - b) *He then describes the consequence of this initiating work of God – “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.”*
 - c) *This “hearing and learning” “from the Father” is accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit, whose primary work is to use God's Word to convince lost men of “sin, righteousness, and judgment.” – cp. John 16:8-11.*
 - (1) **“Sin”** – convincing them of their guilt before God – a guilt that persists because “they do not believe” in Christ.
 - (2) **“Righteousness”** – the unique qualification that is possessed by Christ alone – the standard by which we all will be assessed in judgment.
 - (3) **“Judgment”** – the inevitable consequence of all those who persist in following after “the ruler of this world [who] has been judged.”
 - d) *Yet everyone who has “... learned from the Father – comes to Me.”*
 - e) *He then teaches the indispensable role that He Himself fulfills in this*

process: *“Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.”*

- f) He then assures us all that *“he who believes has eternal life”* – that is, God has done the work in Him to “draw” him to Himself.

Part 2

One of the basic rules of interpretation is to interpret what is unclear or confusing, considering what is perfectly clear. Throughout the entirety of the New Testament, sinners are called to believe not in what they have done to save them, but in what Jesus has done. We are told clearly that to be saved, we must *“believe on the Lord Jesus Christ”* – [Acts 16:30-31](#). Paul declared in [Romans 10:13](#) that *“Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* The dynamics of this salvation begin with the grace of God and are delivered through His gift of faith – [Ephesians 2:8-9](#). The thought that what Jesus did was somehow partial and that there are things we must do to make our salvation effective is to blasphemously diminish the competence and sufficiency of Christ’s work of redeeming us. Hence, aside from faith – which is not a work – but a God-given response to His saving grace, there is nothing in us, about us, through us, or by us in our salvation. Paul made this clear in [Titus 3:5](#).

This is important as we approach the text that we started examining last week. Many people approach this text assuming it refers to Communion – eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ. However, if such were literally necessary – that is, if a person is not able to be saved apart from communion, it becomes a way by which we earn salvation, something completely denounced by every theological teaching in the Bible. As we discussed last week, “eating” and “drinking” are euphemisms for faith – the willingness to receive the truth by faith. Let’s continue to look at our text. [Read Text].

Last week we looked at: **I. Our Sinful Nature Is Antagonistic towards Christ (6:41-42)**. Then we saw that **II. Our Spiritual Need is Acknowledged by Christ (6:43–52)**. Jesus taught that we are utterly dependent on God’s provision for our spiritual need for salvation. No one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him, and we saw how God does this through the ministry of God’s Holy Spirit, who convicts us of sin (ours), righteousness (Christ’s), and judgment (because of the disparity between them). We were looking at the Dependability of God’s Provision in vv. 48-52 last week when we ran out of time. Let’s pick up and finish this text.

B. The Dependability of God’s Provision - vv. 48-52

1. If you are looking for the provision of God (*the one that is needed by all men who would come to God but cannot without the help of God*), Jesus proclaims, I am the very provision God has given, *“I am the bread of life.”*
2. They had touted “manna” as the consummate expression of the worthiness of one like Moses, who they believed provided for God’s people.
3. Jesus states: *“Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.”* –

An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN

that is, the provision of the manna was for a temporal need.

4. However, God's provision in the "bread of life" is superior: *"This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die."*
5. He then provides the basis for the superiority of God's provision in Christ: *"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven."*
 - a) The idea of *"living bread"* carries the impact of carrying within Himself the source of life.
 - b) Thus, to eat this *"living bread"* is to appropriate by faith that singular provision of God whereby eternal life is gained.
6. Because of the nature of the bread provided by God in Christ Jesus, *"if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."*
 - a) To *"eat of this bread"* means simply to accept it, appropriate it, or to receive it to oneself; eating and drinking are established as being metaphorical references to faith – cp. v. 35.
 - b) Saying that something is difficult to "swallow" because it is so unbelievable or because one has difficulty accepting it is to make the same analogy today – cp. Jeremiah 15:16; Psalm 119:103.
 - c) This analogy of "eating" is appropriate for several reasons:
 - (1) Eating is an extremely personal activity – you cannot eat a meal for anyone but yourself. In the same way, trying to claim another's faith cannot help you.
 - (2) Eating is what allows food to be beneficial; no food left uneaten can nourish us. Similarly, truth that is not embraced cannot satisfy the soul.
 - (3) Eating is caused by hunger. Similarly, faith addresses the pangs of the soul that is unfulfilled.
7. The Father gives the Son as the provision for the world, and the Son gives Himself: *"... the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."*
 - a) This clearly indicates that Jesus was going to sacrifice Himself in order to satisfy God's wrath for the sins of the world.
 - b) This clearly refers to the one act of crucifixion by which Christ would give Himself "once for all" for the sins of the world – cp. 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18.
8. However, the unbelieving, rebellious Jews *"began to argue with one another, saying 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?'"*
9. Those who believe that the symbols of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper turn into the body and blood of Jesus (a teaching known as "transubstantiation") are just as mistaken in their understanding as the Jews in this text – erroneously equating this with the Lord's Supper in a logical fallacy called **"False Equivalence."**

- a) *This assumes Jesus is referring to the ordinance of Communion, which is unwarranted exegetically, as it erroneously equates this teaching with the Lord's Supper.*
- b) *This also assumes the perpetuity of Christ's sacrifice – erroneously believing that Jesus is continuously being sacrificed afresh for each sin – something taught in the Mass.*

III. Our Spiritual Nutrition Is Available in Christ – 6:53-59

A. The Promised Benefit of Spiritual Nutrition – vv. 53-55

1. The perplexity and incredulity demonstrated by the Jews' argument in v. 52 are answered by Christ immediately: *“So Jesus said to them ...”*
2. He first responds by giving them a negative affirmation – you indicate that it is impossible to eat my flesh – *“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.”*
 - a) *This is very similar to Jesus' statement to Nicodemus in John 3:3, 5.*
 - b) *Thus, if there is a refusal to accept the provision of God, there is simply “no life” present.*
 - c) *“It should be noted that the verbs translated eat and drink are aorists, not present tense verbs. That suggests a one-time appropriation of Christ at salvation, not the continual eating and drinking of His body and blood portrayed by those who believe in transubstantiation.”¹*
3. On the contrary, *“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*
4. The accusation is sometimes made that we are failing to interpret this passage literally unless we believe that we have to literally eat Jesus' body and drink His blood. However, consider this:
 - a) *Even touching a human corpse rendered a person unclean for seven days – Numbers 19:11.*
 - b) *There was a strict prohibition on eating human flesh and drinking blood of any kind – Leviticus 17:10-14.*
 - c) *Such practices are associated with paganism – cp. Deuteronomy 28:53-57.*
 - d) *Eating human flesh is a sign of God's wrath - Jeremiah 19:9; Ezekiel 5:10.*
 - e) *Hence, our conclusion is that Jesus cannot be advocating for literally eating of Him, but is teaching that we must receive Him by faith.*
5. The essential benefit then of eating the “bread of life” is the possession of *“eternal life”* (also described as the ability to *“live forever”* – v. 51b), which is equated to being raised up *“on the last day”* – cp. John 6:40 & 44.

¹ MacArthur, p. 262.

An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN

6. Thus, to believe, to be drawn by the Father, and to eat the flesh and blood of Christ all refer to ***the same thing***, not a recurring ritualistic act.
7. Notice also that if you believe in Christ, you already have eternal life – cp. the present tense ***“has”*** in v. 54.
8. This brings Jesus to state, ***“My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink”*** – that is, there is nothing meritorious in the act of eating; the power to impart eternal life is faith in what Jesus has to provide us.

B. The Proven Basis for Spiritual Nutrition – vv. 56-59

1. The basis then for the possession of eternal life is the personal relationship that exists with the Savior – ***“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”*** – ***Colossians 1:27***.
2. He appeals to the similarity of our relationship with Him to the relationship He enjoyed with the Father – ***“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.”***
3. Obviously, Jesus isn’t speaking of cannibalism here – a heinous violation of God’s immutable law against such a pagan practice.
4. Once again, the issue is that if you believe (eat) in Christ, you have a relationship with Him that guarantees eternal life – not because of your faith, but because of the relationship that exists with the Son of God
5. This bread is not superficial in its impact and benefit as was manna; if you eat this bread, it has eternal benefit: ***“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.”***
6. He closes with a comment on the location of this exchange – ***“These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum,”*** enabling us to know this was a formal teaching environment, treating the fulfillment of God’s covenant with His people instead of the establishment of a liturgical practice (or a reference to the Lord’s Supper).

So What?

1. How do I see the signs of spiritual hunger in my life, and where do I tend to run to satisfy it?
2. What does it practically look like for me to “feed” on Christ daily?
3. How does Jesus identifying Himself as the Bread of Life reshape my understanding of what truly sustains me?
4. How should feeding on Christ daily change the way I relate to others in my

family, job, or church this week?

Theme: Those who accept God's provision for their spiritual hunger will live forever.