

the gospel of

JOHN

witness to the light

JOHN: THE ONE WHO GIVES LIVE

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Scripture Reference: John 6:35-71

Hi, my name is Hannah. For today's scripture reading we will be in John 6:51-52, and verses 66-69. Please stand for the reading of God's Word.

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.' The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'"

Verse 66. "After This many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.'" This is the Word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Good morning, church. If you're new here, my name is Donald and I'm one of the pastors here on staff at Doxa. Been here at Doxa since 2015. My family moved up here from Nevada just a few months after it started. And being here has been a gift and quite a ride for the last six years. We are back in the book of John this morning, but because we're picking up the series after a break from the first five chapters that we covered in 2020, I want to remind us about a few things from the book of John. Now, the purpose of this gospel is unique. Mark writes his gospel to a non-Jewish audience to show Christ primarily as servant. Matthew writes his to a Jewish audience to show Christ as King and Luke writes his to show Christ as fully human. But John repeatedly shows how Christ is God and how Christ is better. In fact, within the book of

John, we will find the seven epic "I am" statements that definitively prove John's point that Christ is God, unmatched in every way.

These seven "I am" statements are a big deal because Jesus is going to smash the notion that he is a nice guy with some wisdom that you should consider sprinkling over your life. That he's not looking to give advice or share the steering wheel with you. In fact, he's God, and we don't get to reduce him, minimize him, contain him, or be him. Now, Jesus today wants to remind us, or perhaps show us for the first time, that nothing else fits or satisfies the deepest desires inside us. That our appetites and wanting is this relentless reminder that we want more because we were made for more and Jesus is the only more that works. Pray with me.

God, we are thankful for our church and thankful for your word. And I pray this morning that you would speak through my life and my words to bless this church, to encourage, to exhort, to correct, to help bring your peace to your people. And we believe that you desire to shape us so that we can enjoy you more. And so help us to that end this morning. We pray these things for your glory and our good. Amen.

In the summertime, my family and I spend a lot of time down at our neighborhood lake. For the hundred or so homes in my neighborhood, we have access to a small beach front at the lake. And some of you in the North region know this because I invited all of you over a few years back. In the park, there's a cabana and some grass, but the main feature is the dock. And that's where everybody hangs out. Just soaking up all of the vitamin D that we possibly can. At the end of that dock is a diving board. And my daughter is now eight, but at the time of this story, she was just turned seven. And she, if you've met my daughter, you know, she is a brave little warrior. She is just an absolute beast and has more courage at eight than I probably had at 18. She's a bruiser on the soccer field. She generally just charges into life with a lot of guts and bravery. But two summers ago, this diving board at the end of our dock in our neighborhood became a problem. It became a rite of passage, and it was the first time that we ever really saw Harper get rattled. It became almost like a dragon to be slayed. And we made a lot of trips down to the dock that summer in an effort to convince Harper that she actually had what it took to send herself off the end. Now, church, I tried everything. I tried counting. I tried swimming in the water with my arms out. I tried gentle invitations. I tried negotiation. I tried bribery. I tried reverse psychology. I tried tears and cursing. I tried gathering all of the neighborhood kids around just to call her names and peer pressure her off the end of that board. Nothing worked. And what drove me mad in those moments was that I knew that my bold little adventurer, that she was going to absolutely love the experience of jumping off that diving board. That once she tasted it, I wouldn't be able to keep her off of it. But her head and her fears were preventing her from knowing and experiencing what that was like. So finally one day, we walked down to the lake and she's already got her life vest strapped on as tight as it'll go, her goggles on, her pool noodle over her shoulder. And she figured if dad's going to make me do this, then I'm going to bring my backup plan. And through her own volition, she stepped off the end of that diving board. Now she was wearing so much foam that when her little 50 pound body hit the water, she just kind of bounced off the surface. I mean, her hair didn't even get wet. And you see, I wanted her to trust me as her dad. Trust my words. Trust my voice. And

she wanted to trust a life jacket. She wanted to leave that diving board on her own terms with a backup plan and all of the security and comfort that she could hold in her hands.

And this is the question I want to be honest about this morning. I want us to ask ourselves, honestly, am I following Jesus or using Him? Am I following Jesus or using Him? So we'll look at John chapter 6 in verse 35. He starts off, he says,

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'"

Now, pastor Justin spoke last week that the kind of hunger Jesus is addressing here is a spiritual one. That he wasn't referring to your body's need for water and food, but instead, using your need for water and food to point to a greater need, that we all have. To know God and to be reconciled to him. Now jump down to verse 47. He says,

"Truly, truly I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.' The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" Two observations for you this morning from this passage. And I want you to watch for this, not only in this passage, but really the rest of the book of John. Number one, Jesus is often misunderstood. And number two, Jesus is offensive. So first let's talk about him being misunderstood. If you've been reading John, you've probably lost track of the number of times that Jesus says something and then whoever he's talking to thinks he's saying something else, and Jesus has to say it again or repeat himself or explain it. Right? What do you mean bring you jars of water? The wine is all gone. What do you mean go after the snacks? What do you mean you're at the well? You don't even have a bucket with you. What do you mean it's okay to heal someone on the Sabbath? What do you mean do I want to be healed? I need a ride down to the baths. What do you mean a person has to be born again? What do you mean you won't come home with me to heal my son who's dying? He's misunderstood over and over and here in John 6, once again, his audience takes him literally. Once again, they misunderstand. What do you mean you're living bread? In verse 53, he says,

"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. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 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. 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.' And Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum."

Jump down to verse 66. Pastor Jeff is going to preach these other verses next week. Down in verse 66, "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him."

Jesus is offensive. And in this passage we see Jesus saying two highly offensive things, right on top of each other. One is obvious. And one is a little easier for us to miss. First, the obvious one. He said this incredibly disturbing phrase over and over each time drawing out these details that answered the question, "What in the world could he mean eat my flesh, drink my blood?" It just sounds so horrible. At first glance, it almost seems dare we say it, that Jesus is trying to use cannibalism as illustration of some kind. And as bizarre and off-putting as that may feel to you, imagine yourself as a first century Jew doesn't even eat pork, much less other people. I mean, this is crazy. Where is Jesus's PR guy? This feels like the part that should have been edited out of the speech. Why does this story get recorded over and over and over again? This is highly offensive.

Secondly, it would be easy for American Christians in 2021 to miss the bite of these words, but Jesus is saying those ancestors you revered, those men and women you call your heroes, yeah, they died. And Jesus here is dismantling and maybe even slightly belittling a very sacred story for the Jews. One that they point to and find value and identity in. Their lineage, their heritage. This recalling of Exodus 16, when God provided for them. It's a part of their regular liturgy. It's a part of their poetry and their songs. To them it was a shining example of why they were God's favorites. And then Jesus steps in and says, "Yeah, your favorite bedroom story? It ends with your great, great, great granddad dead in the ground." Now none of this may seem terribly offensive to you, but I promise you that Jesus's message has pushed buttons in every era and every culture in the last 2000 years. And we are no different. There are thoughts you have and I have. Preferences we have. Convictions we have. And Jesus disagrees with them. And Jesus's love is at times offensive. His love is attractive, yes. And patient and kind. But it is also often offensive. And I would submit that if you have not encountered Jesus as offensive or difficult at times, then it's possible that you have only ever known a shadow or a portion of who He really is.

Now we have to ask why. Why, why is Jesus like this? Is Jesus just trying to shock the crowds? Is he just trying to stir the pot for his own entertainment? And I have to say, no, that's just not his motive. His motive is love, but it's not soft, squishy love. It's not weak, temperamental love. It's not fickle love that changes its mind when circumstances change. It's fierce, blazing love. A love that would do anything for his bride. I love that would do anything for you. Because in his unrelenting love of you and me, he knows that we have to see that having the provider is far better than having just the provision. Jesus is not a vending machine and he's not in our life to do magic tricks or act as a genie for us, bowing down to our desires and whims. He is our servant, yes, but he is a servant on his own terms. Namely, our sanctification. And enjoyment of God is the center and treasure of our lives. And there's something in this that would just prefer He give us the stuff that we ask for and then leave us alone. Parents, we feel this all the time. You make a meal for your kids and they scarf it down or maybe pick at it for 45 minutes. And then they run back to doing whatever they were doing before you called dinner. Singles, you

maybe have experienced this as well. Maybe you've dated somebody that made you feel like they wanted things from you, but they didn't actually want or love you. We know what it is to be a provider for someone who at times only wants your stuff and not relationship with you.

Now, food is a good thing. Bread is delicious, but bread that gives eternal life is better. And Jesus is saying that provision is good, but the power of God is better. That the miracle is good, but the Messiah is better. That the gift is good, but to have God is infinitely better. And just so you know that I'm not making this up and it's not just misunderstanding later here in this same passage, in verse 53, they even point out in that passage and down in verse 60, it says, "This is a hard saying." They know what he's saying, but it was offensive, and they didn't like it. And this is because Jesus at times is offensive. It's not a soft, squishy, easy believism that he's calling us to. See, many of us have confused Jesus, the peacemaker with being a peacekeeper and it's not the same thing. Jesus will make peace, but he has no problem crushing anything that stands in the way of you getting him. And that includes your hopes, your expectations, your sin, your idols, and all the things that you hold dear. We have forgotten or avoided the controversial things Jesus has said. And we've convinced ourselves that Jesus can have most of us. Because as long as Jesus is a nice guy, he can't make sweeping demands of our lives. Nice guy Jesus isn't ever expecting you to sacrifice anything. Nice guy Jesus is perfectly fine with all of the things that you run to when you're anxious and stressed and sad and angry and lonely. Nice guy Jesus doesn't point at the toxic things in your hands and say, "You know you have to put that down, right?" And that's not who he is. That kind of Jesus isn't worthy of worship. And I'm thankful, even as painful as it is at times, that he's far better than that. I'll tell you what, you can always count on him to lock in, to hone in on the things you'd prefer to be lord over. The areas of your life that honestly, you'd probably prefer God stay away from. He can smell that stuff on us like a bloodhound. And he's not mean. He's not vindictive. But he is relentless in his love and his pursuit of crucifying, everything in us that brings death and confusion. And you can always count on Jesus to meet you in the middle of that brokenness and to show grace and to offer mercy and to be present with you in your sadness, in your suffering, to care deeply for you. And I'll take that. I'll take that over impotent, coward Jesus, because that's not him. That's not who he is. And you shouldn't settle for that.

Down in verse 67, he continues. "So Jesus said to the Twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?'" Isn't it funny when Jesus asks a question he knows the answer to. It's obviously not to gain information, right? We know he's up to something else. And this question, do you want to go away as well? It's just, it's so piercing and so intense. He's saying, "Are you also here to use me?" Right? "You ate the bread. You saw the miracles. Have you got what you've come for? Or do you actually want to follow me?"

Church, hear me say this. If you try to use Jesus, you will be disappointed. You can't read the book of John without seeing chronic confusion and disappointment and surprise in the people around Jesus. They think they know what he's going to do. They think they can use him, coerce him, manipulate him, trick him, leverage him, confuse him. And they always feel disappointed when it doesn't work. And this is because Jesus knew the difference between the massive crowds following him around for the meals or the entertainment or those that were simply

excited because Jesus was trending on the religious circuit. And those that would do anything to have God. Anything to be truly loved. Anything to have a new start and forgiveness. I mean, count how many times Jesus says "I could do this. I could do blank. And you still wouldn't believe." And this is Jesus calling out those that are using him for something else. They want Jesus's lunches, but not his lifestyle. They want his miracles, but not his methods. And if you use Jesus, you will be chronically and repeatedly disappointed.

The crowds have tried to use Jesus in a variety of ways. And we see them try to use the church to be a place for consuming and selling goods, right? And he turns the tables over. The crowds try to use him for a free meal and he calls them out and says, "Hey, something to think about while you're chewing that bread. You know that you're going to die just like your ancestors did, right?" They try to use him to show how their rule keeping made them special and supposedly closer to God. And instead turns around and says, "You know, for people who are supposed to be the closest to God, it's strange that you don't recognize him when he's standing in front of you." When we use Jesus, we find disappointment.

Now, if you're not a Christian with us this morning, I'm super glad that you're here. I want to say right up front, that whoever you came with or whoever brought you cares about you. And they're glad that you're here. I'm glad that you're here. I want to share just three really quick comments for you. If you're somebody who is investigating Christ or would not call yourself a Christian. First of all, I want you to know that when we Christians quit using Jesus and start actually listening to him and living for him, all that hypocrisy that you hate about church people, that starts to go away. And I think we can agree that that's a win, right? When Christians start to actually live like Jesus. Christianity will still, and Christians will still be confusing, I think, to you at times. I mean, thousands of people walked away from Jesus and clearly we're going to have some of that, too. And frankly, I've been around church for a couple of decades and there's still stuff that's real confusing to me, too. So that's just a thing. Secondly, I want to say that most of us in here and you are actually not that different. We're not better than you. We both celebrate stuff. We both struggle with stuff. We both want our lives to matter. In fact, the main difference is that the God that made the universe is actually inside of us as we celebrate and struggle with these things. That God sees you right now, that he loves you. He is for you, and he is around you, but he does not live inside you until you invite him in. You see, your body can be fooled for short runs, right? You can throw junk food into your body. And at least for a short while it no longer feels hungry. but then it feels awful after a while, right? And your soul is no different. And all the little snacks and accomplishments and temporary things in this world, they're never going to fill you up. In fact, some of you in this room right now, Christians and non-Christians alike, are actually experiencing this. You're actually experiencing what it feels like to have your soul feel a little sick from lack of nourishment.

The third thing I would say to you is that we need Christ. We all need Christ. And we all need forgiveness and all of us have done things we regret. We all know that our decisions and actions have at times added to the pain in this world. And we know deep down that there's a cost to that. But hear me say this. God loves you. He is for you. He has paid that cost. Jesus was executed for crimes He did not commit. He was killed for mistakes that He never made. And all

of that was so that his people could have God. He knew that we needed him more than even food and water. And we receive his love because of his sacrifice every single day. So if you feel something inside of you, as I say that, I want to say this, I want to say, that's the Father drawing you to himself? And I know we just met, but you've got to trust me when I say the smartest thing you could do if you feel that in your chest right now, is to tell Jesus that you need him. That you want him to rule over your life. That you've made mistakes you can't pay for, but that you will receive his free gift of grace. And if you do that today, please tell the person who brought you. Or if you came solo, find a person around here with a lanyard, one of our staff or leaders and tell them. And if you've got questions about Christianity and church life and all of that stuff, that is totally okay. We all have those questions. We will gladly walk with you in that. Let's look down at verse 68. "Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.'"

Isn't it interesting that Peter says these two phrases side-by-side: we have believed and we have come to know. Now the Greek here is helpful. The first phrase is more of a resolved, definitive, decisive belief. I know that this is true. But the second phrase speaks more to having experienced that something is true. And we get this. Knowing that a seatbelt will help you in a crash and feeling it work in an accident are very different. Are they not? Knowing that a restaurant has the best steak around and tasting it is very different. Knowing that you can swim and jumping into the lake and feeling yourself swim back to shore is different. And I'm convinced that in a church like Doxa, there's a large number of people here who have believed, but have not yet come to know the abundance of Jesus. There is no substitute for the Savior. And some of you have believed in Jesus a long time ago, but you've really struggled to know him, to experience his power. Some of you have been floating around the lake for a really long time, and you've got every reason in the world for holding onto your life jacket and your hair is not even wet. You have a saving faith. Your name is written in the Book of Life. And I want to say, what you already know is true, that there is more.

The same faith that sends you off the end of the diving board is the same faith that activates all of the best parts of following Christ. If you want to be a witness that God works through to show himself to others? You're going to have to take that life jacket off. You want to see God answer prayers and pour his power out on all the chaos in your life right now? That jacket has got to come off. You want to see reconciliation happen in your relationships? Listen, I know how hard it is to say sorry first. I know how hard it is to admit to somebody that they have wounded you and that it still stings. But the spirit of God does work in us, and through us, when the jacket comes off. Church, are we using Jesus or are we following him into deep water? In my years as a pastor, I have seen plenty of people walk away from this whole thing. They realized at some point that Jesus wasn't ever going to be okay with a counterfeit. He wasn't going to share the throne with them. I've also seen people that couldn't have looked further from God, come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. And I've seen leaders in the church fall and swear to never return to the community of faith. I've seen people walk away and then be drawn back to the family of faith by God's restoring kindness.

We simply do not know how other stories will end because God is writing it, not us. And I don't want to minimize the deep struggle or the pain that they have endured and the stories that they would tell of why ultimately they decided to set their faith down and walk away. We don't know how those stories will end, but no one has ever given everything they had to Jesus and had him not keep his word, keep his promises, keep his end of the bargain. You know, all of us have in some way or another, put our expectations on Jesus, and we've liked the idea of being our own God and maybe asked him to co-sign that plan. Some of us were even taught by others who called themselves Christians, that God has made promises to us, that he has not made in his Word. And when those promises fail, it makes us sad or mad or disappointed in what God didn't do. But at no point has Christ not held up his end of the bargain. At no point, has he not followed through or kept his promises to us. You might say, pastor, I've got suffering. And I would say, yes, he said that would happen. And that in that suffering, you get Him. You say, pastor I've had losses. And I'd say, yes, everything in this life can be lost except for him because he's the one that's holding on to you. And in a way that feels counterintuitive to us, he's faithful to let our expectations that we project on him fail, because ultimately those are a distraction from who he really is. He has no interest in us worshiping or loving or relating to some version of Him that's a shadow or imitation. He will not be mocked. And it wouldn't be loving to approve of a counterfeit savior anyways.

Now, with all this talk of Jesus being the better bread and better wine, you may have noticed, I haven't really spent much time this morning trying to convince you that you're hungry. And the reason for that is because I know that you are. I've had enough counseling appointments and conversations with you to know that that is true. I know it because I feel it in my own chest. Every time we send out a survey to the church, it becomes really obvious, really fast, that many of you are dissatisfied with where your spiritual life is currently, that you are wanting more, that you're trying your best, but that you're still hungry. And our basic human needs are like a big neon sign pointing back to the one who made us. Your dissatisfaction and Discontentment just might be a breadcrumb trail back to God. But first, we have to be honest that we're needy. You know, needy is a tough word. We never hear this word typically in our culture in a positive light, right? Needy is a friend that has no boundaries. Needy is a person at work that won't stop talking. Needy is the way you describe somebody overseas that has nothing. Needy is a crying baby waking up at all hours of the night. But Jesus, loving and gracious, misunderstood, and offensive and merciful Jesus says that you and I are just as needy as them. Now, some of us really struggled because we learned early on that having needs was a way to be hurt. And people didn't run towards us in our mess. That they yelled at us. They shamed us. They resented the fact that we have needs. We recognize that we had needs and it left us abandoned. And others have honestly just grown self-reliant. We've forgotten the fact that we have greater needs than just the physical things of this world. I mean, we can pay our mortgage. We can order things on Amazon that show up at our house in 24 hours. It's a very, very powerful time that we live in. But that's not the longing of our soul. And Jesus told us that the doctor is here for the sick. That he opposes the proud and draws near to the humble. This is the heart of the teaching of why it's harder for the rich man to enter the kingdom of God, because we're just not aware of our needs. We've settled for lesser hungers, lesser appetites.

So here comes the good news. Number one, Jesus is willing. Jesus may be offensive at times, but he is always willing to move towards us, to help us, to bless us, and to carry us. You know, they expect him to shut the party down, but he's willing to make more wine. They expect him to bring a bucket, to draw water from the well, but instead he's willing to draw out the heart of a woman who needs grace. You'd expect Him to offer a ride down to the waterfront where the rumors are, if you touch this magic water, you could find some relief. And instead he's willing to heal the man right on the spot. And the good news is that when we see our own neediness and take it to him, that Jesus comes right in. That he's not reluctant. That he runs towards us in the need. One of the most powerful books that I have read in the last year is written by Dane Ortlund, it's called "Gentle and lowly." I would commend it to you. I highly recommend this. If your spiritual life or devotional life feels dry, and it just feels like you need some encouragement to remember who Christ is. I would highly recommend picking this up. It's a wonderful and powerful reminder that Christ runs towards us in our need.

And in the story that we have read today, we see that once again, Jesus is taking basic human needs and moments of wanting and inserting himself. That our needs are often the door that God walks through. And I've said this to you before church, that our wounds are often his way into our lives. Our needs are a consistent way that we slow down long enough to know what is always true. That we need God and not just a little bit. And that from time to time, he shows up so powerfully in the midst of those needs and that he's willing, that he's happy to do so. So be honest with God about your neediness. Your need is a gift, not a liability.

Good news. Number two, Jesus is a feast. Jesus is not in the business of barely. He is not the Jesus of just made it. He is not the God of emptiness, but the God of abundance, not just scraping by. Listen, the wine Jesus makes tastes amazing. Think about what that means. It's not just about getting by. He is the God of plenty. Jesus is a well you can't find the bottom of. He's the vacation you've always tried to plan, but never experienced. He's the meal that satisfies and doesn't fade in a manner of hours. He's the friend that always has time for you and pursues you. He's the spouse that never harms you and always cherishes you. He's the King that rules fairly and brings real lasting peace to the land. Jesus is better than you think. And he's the only more that works. And Jesus is saying to you today, trust my words, trust my voice. Not that life jacket that you have been holding onto.

If nothing else happens this morning, I want you to see with clear eyes that Christ is better. And I want that because if you see that, if you can hold that for a minute, then you've got real hope for change. If you can see him clearly, then maybe you won't just know that he's better, but actually experience it. Because guilt and obligation, those are horrible roads to a better spiritual life. And you aren't going to have better quiet times or a stronger prayer life, or talk to your coworker about your faith, if you just feel bad about those things and how they've been lacking, or that God is disappointed in you. That's not who God is. He sides with the weak. He sides with the humble. He sides with the struggling. Listen, everybody loves the idea of being in the front row when Jesus does a miracle, but I'm convinced that the disciples were fed the most in their walks between appointments. Their lives and the time they spent together, not just the crazy miracles or the big speeches. It's in Jesus's transforming presence. And when you get time with

Jesus, you can feast on him. Not scraps or crumbs, but a seven course meal. Not one moment has passed without you in his mind and attention. Not because you're the point, but because of his capacity to love, to be present. He has never left you. Not for a minute. Let's pray.

Christ, you are better. Forgive us for the many ways we have turned to smaller things in this world. That we have jammed all sorts of junk food into our souls. We need you to show us and to lead us and to help us recognize the ways in which we still try to be our own God in our lives. We need to turn away from the ways that we try to use you for our own will, our own desires, our own plans. And instead, I pray that we would clearly invite you and see you to be the King and Lord over our life, because you are, God. You are not simply a mere teacher. You are not simply a spiritual friend, but you are God over all things and you are worthy. Help us, Lord. We pray these things for your glory. Amen.