

The Gospel of John: *Know Jesus and Live*

Part 20

John 6:48-71

How do we interpret this difficult language?

- Before we begin unpacking this passage verse by verse we must establish something up front. This section of John six is filled with Jesus saying things like eat my flesh and drink my blood. What in the world does he mean by this? The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Jesus means that we are to literally devour his physical flesh and literally drink his blood. Is this true though? Is Jesus truly a proponent of cannibalism and vampirism? Most protestants, including us, believe that Jesus was not teaching that we are to literally eat his flesh and literally drink his blood. So the question is how do we know who is right? Is it their word against ours or are there clues in the text that reveal the truth to us? I believe there are. There are some pretty interesting parallels in John 6 that should settle the issue for us.

Verses 35 & 53

- ❖ John 6:35--*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.*
 - According to this verse, that which satisfies our hunger and our thirst is coming to Jesus and believing in Jesus.
- ❖ John 6:53--*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 you*
 - Notice the parallel. These verses are dealing with the same content. In verse 35, Jesus speaks of hunger and thirst. In verse 53, Jesus speaks of eating and drinking. Fortunately, verse 35 has already stated what it is that satisfies our hunger and thirst. ...coming to Jesus and believing in Jesus. Thus, when Jesus says that there is no life in us unless we 'eat his flesh' and 'drink his blood' we know what he is saying. He is saying that there is no life in us unless we come to him and believe in him. The ancient church father St. Augustine described this reality by saying, "For to believe in Him is to eat the living bread. He that believes eats."¹

Verses 40 & 54

- ❖ John 6:40--*For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*
 - According to this verse, eternal life and the promise of glorification are granted to those who "look on the Son and believe in him."
- ❖ John 6:54--*Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*
 - Notice the parallel again. These verses are also dealing with the same content. Jesus is teaching that only certain people will receive eternal life and the promise of glorification. Only those who 'feed on his flesh and drink his blood.' Did Jesus change his mind about the requirements? Did he forget what he said only a few moments earlier? No, Jesus is simply stating metaphorically what he has already stated directly. In saying eat me, drink me, he is inviting people to come and believe.

¹ St Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*

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- What this shows us is that in this section of John 6, Jesus is going to be saying many things that he has already said earlier in John 6, but furthering the bread, eating, drinking metaphor. Coming to Jesus and believing in Jesus will now be described as feeding on Jesus's flesh and drinking Jesus's blood.



Jesus's offensive language

- ❖ John 6:48-51--*I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 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.*

Repeated themes

1. Jesus is the bread of life. Jesus has come down from heaven to give eternal life to people all over the world. He has already taught this in verses...27, 32-33, 35, 38, 40, 47
2. The manna was but a shadow of the true bread. The manna nourished the physical body for 40 years. The true bread nourishes the soul for all eternity. All who ate the manna died. All who eat the true bread will be raised on the last day! He has already taught this in verses 32-33, 39, 40, 44.

New theme: Sacrifice

- ❖ John 6:51--*And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*
 - It is likely that those who heard him say this had no clue what he meant. In fact, verse 52 confirms this for us. It was one of those times when Jesus speaks somewhat vaguely and mysteriously as if to say, "you will soon find out what I mean." The cross made the meaning of this statement perfectly clear. Jesus was saying, "I came to die so that you might live."
 - So, the question now is, how did the people respond to this statement?
- ❖ John 6:52--*The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"*
 - two things to see here...
-  **There was debate.** It is easy to look at this verse and assume that everyone was upset about the same thing. Without reading carefully we can jump to the conclusion that everyone is grossed out by Jesus's cannibalistic sounding statement. However, it was not that way. A careful reading of this verse reveals that there were many different theories as to what Jesus meant. Undoubtedly some believed that Jesus was being literal and inviting people to eat his physical body. Others would have been utterly clueless as to what in the world he was saying. Some perhaps were being aided by the Holy Spirit to understand what he was truly saying. Thus, the room was filled arguing and bickering on this point.
-  **The debating was heated.** The ESV doesn't quite capture the strength of this dispute. The greek word, *emachonto*, "is very strong"². It can mean "armed combat" or "war of words." Thus, we can know that people had VERY strong opinions on the matter and were voicing them forcefully.
 - So, what will Jesus do? Will he settle the debate for them? Nope, he is going to press right on through...

² D.A. Carson, *John: Pillar New Testament Commentary Series*



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- ❖ John 6:53-59--*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. 54 Whoever feeds on 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 Whoever feeds on 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 whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 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."* 59 *Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.*
 - We began this sermon by identifying that when Jesus says things like eat my flesh and drink my blood, he is actually teaching us to come to him and believe in him. This understanding reveals to us that in these verses Jesus is really just continuing to repeat in metaphor what he has already stated plainly earlier in John six. He is saying...
 - 🎧 **Believe in me and receive eternal life**
 - 🎧 **Believe in me and be raised at the last day**
 - 🎧 **I have been sent from heaven**
 - 🎧 **I am the true the true bread, greater than the manna during Moses's time**

The results of Jesus's offensive language

- ❖ John 6:60--*When many of his disciples heard it, they said, " This is a hard saying; who can listen to it*
 - two quick things to see here...
 - 🎧 **The mention of disciples doesn't mean the twelve.** They will be mentioned later. Here, 'his disciples' is more generically referring to people who were supportive of Jesus.
 - 🎧 **They didn't know and they didn't want to know.** These fair-weather followers were interested in a Messiah who would feed their bellies, deliver them from Roman authority, and wow them with frequent miracles.³ When they saw Jesus healing the sick and feeding 5,000+ with pitifully meager rations they thought they had found him. Yet, this discourse has revealed to them that he has not come to be that kind of messiah. They likely weren't exactly sure just what he had come to be, but since it wasn't what they had in mind, they didn't care. Their hopes were dashed. This is what was so hard about Jesus's teaching. It proved that he absolutely wasn't what they were looking for and so they just couldn't listen anymore.
- ❖ John 6:61-62--*61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?*
 - Jesus doesn't soothe his followers, he presses them. Knowing that they don't like what they have heard he questions them with, "Would you feel better if you saw me ascending into heaven? Do you think you would like me then?" He then goes on to answer his own question...
- ❖ John 6:63-64--*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe."* (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) 65 *And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.*


³ Ibid



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-  **Thus, the answer is no.** Miraculous signs and spectacular visions are not what changes a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. Human will cannot do this either. Only the Holy Spirit can cause these people to believe and only the Father can grant the Holy Spirit to a person so that they come to believe. Here, Jesus is teaching what the Apostle Paul will later teach the Corinthian Church...
- ❖ 1 Corinthians 2:14--*The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*
 - Thus, Jesus is basically saying “many of you don’t believe in me and I know why. It is because my Father has not granted you the Holy Spirit to cause you to believe.” What affect does this have on the crowd?
 - ❖ John 6:66--*After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.*
 - Jesus started the day with thousands following him. Now, many of them are gone. Jesus revealing who he really is has not caused them to run to him in faith. It has caused them to walk away in disgust and disappointment.
 - ❖ John 6:67-69--*So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?”*
 - Though some choose to do so, we must not interpret Jesus’s question as pouting. Jesus isn’t channeling the spirit of Eeyore and saying “You guys probably want leave too huh? Well then go ahead. Thanks for noticing me.” He is challenging the disciples. This question is not much different from when he asked them...
 - ❖ Matthew 16:15--“ But who do you say that I am?”
 - The crowd had made their opinion known and now Jesus was calling out his disciples. He was challenging them to answer the question of “Am I worth following?”
 - ❖ John 6:68-69--*Simon Peter answered him, “ Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.*
 - Peter’s answer reveals what the Holy Spirit has done in his life. He is, at least in this moment, a glorious portrait of what it looks like to be drawn by the Father. Jesus said that his words were “spirit and life (63) and Peter has come to believe these words. The Father granted him the Holy Spirit so that he came to know the glorious truth of who Jesus really is! The Spirit’s work was so powerful and so thorough that it not only caused him to believe in Jesus, it left him totally unable to believe in anything else ever again. He was totally, eternally captivated by Jesus!
 - The only thing that Peter did wrong in this moment is that he chose to speak for the whole group as we shall soon read...
 - ❖ John 6:70-71--*Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” 71 He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.*
 - Peter’s beautiful speech made the false assumption that all of the twelve had experienced the same work of the Spirit that he had. However, our omniscient and utterly sovereign Lord had plans that Peter knew nothing of. Jesus is demonstrating that he is not only sovereign over his own, he is even sovereign over those who are “of their father the devil.”



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- Here at the end of chapter six, Jesus has lost thousands of followers and is swiftly on his way to the cross. It looks like bad news. Yet Jesus is not shaken. He is not dismayed. He is sovereign over those who come to faith in him and he is sovereign over those who don't. Even in the midst of such apparent failure it is still absolutely true that...
 - ❖ *Isaiah 55:11-13--so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. 12 "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. 13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

The point of application

- The application is probably obvious but it is no less profound despite the lack of subtlety. The application is this. There is no greater comfort in all the universe than knowing that God is ABSOLUTELY SOVEREIGN! No matter how difficult the situation looks. No matter how hopeless things appear to be. God WILL work all things according to his purposes. God will use both the righteous and the wicked to display his absolute sovereignty and majestic glory. We never need worry that things won't turn out the way they are supposed to. God is simply too powerful and sovereign to ever be defeated!