

# **Eating Jesus' Flesh and Drinking His Blood**

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**John 6:52-59**

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So, Jesus said a lot of things that make us scratch our head and say "What?" Like Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." Huh? What? Or Matthew 5:30. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. Oh, what? Seriously? Matthew 5:39, "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Oh, really? I could do this more, but you get the point, right? Jesus said some baffling things, things that are confusing for us because we don't have an infinite mind and because we don't have infinite knowledge. We're sucking our thumbs while he's doing advanced calculus. That's Jesus.

But it may be that the most confusing thing that Jesus ever said is our text today. Did you hear what I said? Flesh eating, blood drinking. What in the world is he talking about? I know you Sunday school superstars, you got the answer. You're good. But listen, the people there that day, they didn't have the first clue what he was talking about. But here's the thing, don't miss the words, truly, truly, and unless, and have no life in you, and eternal life and raise them up on the last day. Don't miss all of that because with all of that, Jesus is not only proclaiming, but He is pressing down on our souls the absolute necessity of eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

You have to do it. You have to. You have to eat. You have to drink. It is essential. If you don't eat his flesh, if you don't drink his blood, you have no life in you. Death will be yours forever. Now, two things before we get into this text. First, I want to set the scene. Verse 59 says all of this took place in a place that we will be standing in. Some of us in May. Take a look at this picture. This is the synagogue in the city where Jesus said these things. In that spot. And some of you will be standing there, and so this is a historical moment that this text is describing with an actual place. Now, this is the 4th century synagogue that is built on top of the 1st century synagogue that Jesus actually said these words in. Pretty cool, huh?

Second, before we get into what this text is about, I need to nerd out with you for a second and tell you what this text is not talking about. Jesus is not talking in this text about communion. For almost two millennia, some Christians have taught that this specific part of John 6 is about communion, Eucharist, Lord's supper, but it's not. Why? Well first, communion is for Christians or non-Christians? It's for Christians, right? It's where we remember the death of Jesus for our sins. But to say that this text is about communion is to rip it out of context because who is Jesus talking to? He's talking to non-Christians. He's talking to non-Christians, encouraging them to be saved, to believe in Him. Second, if this is about communion, verse 54 teaches salvation by communion. You see that, verse 54? Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.

If that's communion, then you got to eat his flesh and drink his blood. You got to take communion to have eternal life. But if that's the case that contradicts what? Dozens of texts throughout the Bible, that salvation, being saved from God's punishment for your sins happens as a result of faith, trusting in Jesus to save you instead of trusting in your good works to save you, or some ritual to save you, or some system or pope or prophet or your own personal feelings. No, it's putting all that aside and trusting in Christ.

If this text is teaching salvation by communion, that would mean anyone who didn't receive communion couldn't be saved, like infants or those who come to Christ right before they die, or that thief on the cross that Jesus said is going to go to heaven, but nobody ran over and stuck a cracker in his mouth. Salvation by communion would also mean that regardless of whether a person believes in Jesus or not, they could just participate in the ritual. Eat the cracker, drink the juice just one time. Heaven is assured. I mean, how easy would missions be then? Just buy up a bunch of bread and buy up a bunch of juice, pass it out to every person on the planet, say some prayer and everybody goes to heaven. But no, no. Verse 54 where Jesus talks about feeding on his flesh and drinking his blood for eternal life is almost identical to verse 40, but I want you to listen for the difference.

Verse 40, "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 them up on the last day." You hear the similarity? Verse 54, it's eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood that leads to eternal life. But in verse 40, it's what? It's belief. It's belief. Why? Because eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood was never meant to be taken seriously. We don't eat his actual flesh or drink his actual blood. Those things don't magically become his flesh.

It's an illustration for trusting in Christ. That's it. In fact, to take Jesus literally here is to make the same mistake, the same mistake as the Jewish leaders did in this text. And another thing too, Jesus didn't start this communion ceremony until a year later, a year after this text. So, it makes zero sense for him to be talking about communion. No one listening to Him would have any clue what he's talking about.

One preacher put it this way, I thought it was so helpful. He said, "We can take communion and yet not eat and drink Christ's body and blood, and we can eat and drink Christ's body and blood and yet not take communion." Why? Because this text is not about communion, even though the death of Jesus is the theme of this text, and the death of Jesus is the theme of communion. It's about as close as this text gets to communion. Same theme.

Well, if that's not what it's about, let's look at what it is about. Verse 52, "Jews then disputed among themselves saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" This group of religious leaders do not like what Jesus is saying here. Verse 51, He says that the bread that he gives that you must eat is his flesh. So now they're arguing about it. Hey, what's that all about? Don't like that, which is proof that they don't believe, it's proof they actually have disdain for Jesus. The question shows they think he's insane, and the question there says how can this man ... It's like, who's this guy think he is?" This guy, this man. It's derogatory.

So, they're offended by him. Their unbelief, their contempt to shut them off from the truth, and I want you to notice how Jesus recognizes that he's offended them, so he backs down. 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. He didn't back down, did he? Just the opposite. He's like, oh, did that offend you? Well, I know I just talked about eating my flesh and that freaked you out, and so let me add this part for you, too. And drink my blood."

Does that help? Does that help? You guys got it now? So from a general statement verse 51, if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever, Jesus moves to the negative, to the absolute necessity of eating him and the tragic, painful results of someone who refuses. Verse 53, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." He's saying it's utterly essential. You have to eat my flesh, you have to drink my blood, and if you don't, if you refuse, you will not ever have any life in you. You may be alive biologically, but that is it. You will never be alive spiritually. In case you missed it, Jesus front loads this whole flesh eating, blood drinking stuff emphasizing his authority when he says ... notice ... "Truly, truly, I say to you." I know you're offended, and I don't care because this is the truth. I'm not folding, I'm not fleeing. This is fact.

Before we get into the details of the text, I want us to consider for a minute what Jesus just did here with a group of hostile unbelievers, and point #1) ***Refuse to Compromise Truth to Make it Easier for People to Believe. Refuse to Compromise Truth to Make it Easier for People to Believe.*** Today people are going to be just as offended by the truth as these people were offended by what they were hearing Jesus say. So, what should we do? Refuse to shave the hard edges off the truth to make it easier for people who are hostile to Jesus to believe in him. That's not what Jesus did here, right? He didn't back down. He what? He doubled down, and listen, I know this is a temptation. I know it's a temptation to compromise truth, to make it easier, more likely for people to believe in Jesus, but do not do it. You see compromise from Christians all the time now, even Christian leaders compromising on false doctrine. It's okay if they believe in a false Jesus. It's fine if they believe in salvation by works. They're still Christians. They're fine.

Compromising on LGBT issues, that activity, that's not sin. Those desires, that's not sin. Just love who you want to love. Love is love. Compromising on Marxist social justice out of fear, compromising to avoid disdain and offense and hatred, compromising the truth, hiding the truth to make it easier for people to believe.

I don't know about you. When I read the Bible to my kids, I don't look at Judas and say, hey kiddos, make sure that you live your life like Judas, the compromiser. Make sure you follow King Saul. He's the one. Follow that example. Not at all. No, we honor Joseph, who didn't compromise his integrity. We honor Daniel who didn't compromise but held fast to the truth even when he knew it would cost him his life if it weren't for a miracle. We honor his three friends who did the same exact thing. We honor Esther, who didn't compromise but was willing to risk her life to save the Jewish people from genocide. We don't look down on these people.

We think highly of them, even the ones who give their lives, who didn't have a miracle happen. We call them heroes. Why? Specifically, because they did not compromise.

But if we're honest, we don't compromise the truth to make it easier for people to believe, do we? We compromise the truth to make it easier for us to be around them, to be around people who are hostile to the truth that we love so much. And I know it's become so much harder today. We live in a world dominated by the message. Whatever the approved ideas are, the approved message from our cultural overlords, that is what is to be believed. And if you don't believe it, it's off with your head. It's canceled, mockery, marginalized, manipulated, unless or until what? Until you bow down. You repent. You submit to the message.

Listen, the church of Jesus Christ, the true church on earth made up of all born again believers in Christ, the church of Jesus Christ has never played that game. One of the reasons this world is not our home is because we don't fit in here, and the reason we don't fit here is because we are truth-oriented people, right? True is true. False is false, right is right, wrong is wrong. Up is not down. Down is not sideways. Reality is fixed, and it is fixed because God is fixed, and God is the one who created this universe.

So when the message attacks reality, we stick with reality come what may. When the message is making evil good and good evil, we don't budge. We hold up what is right because it's right. When the message demands that we repent and believe its lies, lies that everybody knows is lies but are supposed to submit to the lies because we're so afraid, we don't submit to the lies. We stand on the truth. We do not compromise. Why? Why must we speak the truth? Why must we live the truth is true. Because when we do, we actually are loving the people who need the truth that we have, just like Jesus does in this text. Just like giving the truth to the patient who is dying, telling them the truth regardless of how difficult it's going to be so that they will receive and ingest the medicine that they need. So two, we don't compromise the truth. We speak the truth in love because it may just be that God will use the truth coming from us to save their souls.

So what does this look like? With your kids who've walked away from the faith, do not pretend you're not a Christian with them. Don't compromise the truth. With your kids that have rejected reality or some family member that have embraced some alternative lifestyle, do not pretend that you accept it. Do not compromise. With that family member, that coworker that hates Christianity, yes, be gentle and loving and kind and gracious. A thousand times, yes, but while doing that, do not compromise the truth.

Listen, I know this is hard. I know it. We just want to be left alone, but we don't live in a world anymore where we can be left alone, and so we're either going to fight or we're going to fold. And what you see in our texts is a Savior who refused to fold, and that Savior lives in you. So never value relationships or your own comfort more than the truth that we have. That can save people from hell. Speak the truth in love regardless of the cost because it loves people, and it honors our Christ.

Well, Jesus keeps doubling down. Take a look at verse 54. 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. So what is Jesus referring to when he talks about his flesh and his blood? To understand what he means, we have to go back to the context. We can't forget verse 51 where he says, "I am the bread of life 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."

I want you to notice that, that he goes from I am the bread of the world, and he sharpens the focus, and he says, "Well actually, the bread is my flesh, and it is my flesh that I'm going to give for the life of the world." So question, what is he talking about then with his flesh being given for the life of the world? It's a prophecy of the cross, right? He's talking about his death on the cross where he gives himself as a sacrifice, as a substitute, as a stand-in who receives the punishment that sinners deserve for their sins so that the sinners don't receive that punishment when they believe.

When he talks about his flesh and his blood in verses 53-56, he's referring to as death. Eating his flesh and drinking his blood therefore is a metaphor. It's a metaphor for what? For believe, for trusting, for committing oneself to Jesus, namely entrusting your soul to his death on the cross. His death in the place for sinners, receiving the just and good and right punishment that sinners deserve for our sins. It is trusting that his death will save you. And let's not forget verse 52, whose flesh and blood this belongs to. Yes, it's Jesus. That's always the answer, but how does he refer to himself in verse 53? He calls himself what? The Son of Man. The Son of Man is God's approved king of the world, the one who can be in God's presence, Daniel 7:13, because he is God. But also, the one who can be with us because he is human.

It is his unique flesh, it is one of a kind, very precious blood, the blood of the Son of Man, the king of the universe that we are called to feed on by trusting in his death for our sins, which means you lay your good works aside. You lay the best parts of your resume aside, all the religious rituals like baptism, communion, anything else, lay it aside. The religious organizations, the prophets, the popes, lay it aside and you put all your trust, all your confidence when you stand before God, your only hope in that moment is Christ and Christ alone.

This is what he's saying, I'm just reiterating. Verse 55 is the truth. He says, "My flesh is true food. I can say these things because my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." What he's saying here is all the food and all the drink that we have, all of them are signs. They're pictures. They're pictures that point to the reality, and the reality is that justice, food and drink give life, so Jesus gives eternal life, and he does it when people believe in his death, his broken body, his shed blood for the forgiveness of sins. Then Jesus says, "This life I want to talk about, what is this life like?"

Verse 57, "It's 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." I want you to notice the life. It starts with the father; it's given to the son and then the son gives that same life to those who believe. So, this divine and

supernatural life that Jesus has, that he received from the Father is the same exact life given to any and all, again, who feed on him, who trust in him to rescue them from their sins.

I want you to notice something starting in verse 54. He starts four sentences the same way. The beginning of verse 54 starts whoever feeds. The beginning of verse 56 starts the same way, whoever feeds, verse 57 at the end, whoever feeds. Verse 58 at the end, whoever feeds. Jesus repeats himself four times at the front of those statements, but not at the end. At the end, he changes it every time. It's like he's saying, "Whoever feeds, hey, this is what you're going to get. Whoever feeds, this is what you're going to get. This and then there's that, that there's this results, these promised blessings that you're going to receive if you believe."

That's the case, let's focus in on here on point #2) ***Recognize the Promised Results for All Who Truly Believe. Recognize the Promised Results for All Who Truly Believe.*** What are the results that are promised to those who eat and drink? Those who believe in him? First one, verse 54, is eternal life. We just saw it in verse 57. Eternal life is God's actual life in you. Life that can live in the age to come. Life that cannot ever pass away. Life that lasts forever. It's the life ... verse 58 at the end, whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

The second blessing, the second promise at the end of verse 54, "I will raise them up on the last day." All people will be resurrected. Every single one of us, every person that's ever lived will be resurrected either unto life or unto judgment. This resurrected life that he's talking about will be one of purpose and joy and satisfaction with meaningful, happiness inducing activity that goes on forever. You're not going to be some ghost floating around. That's nonsense. No, you will be in a body that cannot die, a body that is powerful and spiritual and glorious and you will never leave that body. You will be in a 2.0 version of your same body right now. A body that will never decay and never die, perfectly suited for the location, the environment that you will spend eternity in.

These are things that we are familiar with if you're familiar with the Bible at all, but it's this third one we're going to camp on. Verse 56. "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him." This is the first time in John that abiding in Christ is found, a theme that is going to continue throughout all of his writings. What does this mean though? Abide in me and I in him. Well, the first part, abiding in Jesus, that's staying committed to him. It's remaining a Christian for the whole of your life. It's continuing to trust him throughout all of your life. That's what it means to abide in him. But what about this other part, I in him. That's different. What Jesus is talking about here is talked about some 250 times in the New Testament. This truth that he's describing with those three little words are called the key to the New Testament. They're also called the central truth of the whole topic of salvation. They're also called, those three little words, the central truth of all theology and all religion. So maybe we know those first two, resurrection, eternal life, but maybe not this one so much.

This idea, I in him, is absolutely essential to everything the New Testament teaches about God and Christ and your salvation, your identity, your purpose, the reason you're here and where you're headed in the future. And yet all of us, myself included, we know incredibly little about

this truth. What I'm talking about is what the New Testament describes over and over again as being in Christ. In Christ, or what theological smart guys call the believers union with Christ. I had a professor in college, dear old man, who taught theology for years and he would say to us, "Brothers and sisters ..." even though we were in our 20s and he's in his 60s, he would say, "Brothers and sisters, if you understand what it means that you are in Christ, it will lead to a revival like you've never seen."

Why? Because this speaks of the closest possible relationship, a mutual indwelling. Yes, him in us but us in him like he's the house and we're inside safely. This is how he describes it, John 14:23, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." This is a closeness and an intimacy and a togetherness that we do not think about. We often consider, and rightly so, God is high and exalted. He's at the right hand of the Father reigning, but he is also united closer to you than your next thought. Paul will put it this way, Galatians 2:20, "I no longer live but Christ lives in me." One pastor, I heard him say once that, "I don't know where Christ starts, and I end and where I start, and He ends. There's just this union."

Why is this important? Because every blessing that God gives his children, he gives to his son first. Every blessing is found in Christ. So that eternal life and redemption from sin and being declared right with God, being sinless, glorified, reconciled with God, forgiven, adopted into God's family, salvation from God's wrath for our sin, all of that is described as being in Christ. So, if all of that is in Christ and you're in Christ, guess what? All of its yours. All of its yours. And it can't ever be taken away. And why can't it ever be taken away? Because it can't ever be taken away from Christ, and you're in him. So instead of asking how holy, how good am I before God? Have I done enough? Have I prayed enough? Am I good enough? We need only to ask how holy is Christ? How good is Christ? How accepted is Christ? And then you know what you do? You smile. You smile. Why? Because everything that belongs to him is yours when you are him.

On your good days and your bad days, he's the same yesterday, today and forever. And like I said, this union with Christ cannot ever change because Jesus never changes. It is fixed and solid and secure and unwavering and unchanging. How solid? As solid and secure as Jesus' omnipotent hands surrounding you and the Father's omnipotent hands surrounding both. That's how much.

I know resurrection is talking about the future, but eternal life and union with Christ, his abiding with you starts when you believe. It starts when you believe. So Christian, let's not forget these blessings that are yours forever when times are hard. When hard times are big and God's blessing seems small, the secret to joy in the middle of a trial, the secret to strength in the middle of pain is for God's promise to you to be bigger in your heart, to be more dominating in your thoughts than your trial. And that regardless of what happens in this life, if you have these blessings, eternal life, resurrection, Christ abiding in you, if these promises are the result of believing in Christ as well as others also, if you have those promises, you have everything.

You have everything you need. Yes, there are other things that are great like health and no problems and comfort and money and friends, and loving fulfilled family and all of that stuff, and all of that is great. But when those things capture your heart more than the promises then those things will rob you of the comfort and joy that these promises are meant to give you and are meant to sustain you throughout this life, no matter what comes your way.

Well, this brings us to the end of Jesus' message on being the bread of life, the morning after he fed thousands with five loaves and two fish. And he ends this message brilliantly. Verse 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." Why is this brilliant? Because what he does, which I try to do every week and it's impossible, he takes verses 26 to verses 57 and he summarizes them in one sentence, and then takes it and challenges the people listening to him. And I love how he starts with that word, this. You see that there. This. The last time we saw this word was in verse 52, when they used that word as a derogatory term to refer to Jesus as this guy. Who does he think he is?

He goes, oh, this guy. This guy that you're rejecting. Whether you like it or not, this guy is the bread that came down from Heaven. The God, you think you worship sent me here. I was in the beginning with the Father, John 1:2 but John 1:14 says, "He became flesh, he added humanity to his deity and made his home with us. "Like the bread that came from heaven," in Exodus 16, "so did Jesus." But unlike that bread, this bread, the bread of life gives life that lasts forever. Manna, no doubt, gift of God's grace to save people from physical death, lack of food. But like Jesus said, all the people that ate the manna eventually died anyway. But God gave his son to save people from eternal death. All you have to do, verse 58, is what? Feed on Christ. Trust in him. Give your life to him.

So, let's conclude our time together where Jesus concluded his time with the people in Capernaum that day. So let's be clear, you and I, we must, point #3) ***Respond To the Truth or It'll Be Death Forever. Respond To the Truth or It'll Be Death Forever.*** And proclaim that far and wide. Why? Because this is for whoever. Verses 54 to 58, I'll repeat the word four times whoever. Just in case we missed it after the third, he adds a fourth. "Whoever you are then, come and eat." It doesn't matter where you're from, it doesn't matter how old you are, it doesn't matter what you've done. Whoever you are, come and eat. It's for you. The invitation goes out to all, to anyone and everyone. There's no one that this invitation is not addressed to because it is addressed to whoever. Now, whoever could come off as a little too general so take a look at the end of verse 54 where Jesus says I will raise what? "I will raise him up on the last day." Look at the end of verse 56, "I in him."

Look at the end of verse 57, "He also will live because of me." Talk about compromising truth, some Bible translations maybe that you have out there right now are taking all him's and he's out of the New Testament, out of the Bible because it's too masculine ... it's not gender-neutral ... and replacing he's and hims with them and they and theirs. But do you see why that's a problem?

The problem is the word them is plural, robbing Jesus' words of the individual personal specific nature of what he says of this invitation.

Yes, it goes out as a general call to every individual person, so it's not just whoever, it's you and it's you and it's you. It's you. So, respond to the invitation in the only acceptable way there is to respond, which is come and eat, come and drink. Come to Christ and believe in his death for your sins. Believe that you are a sinner and believe that he is not just the Savior, but he will be your Savior who will save you personally from the punishment you personally deserve for all of your personal sins when you personally believe in his death to forgive all of your sins.

One author brilliantly describes this, and I know it's easy to check out when preachers read quotes, but I beg you not to check out in this moment because this is so helpful. The author says, "In eating and drinking, a man is not a producer but a consumer. He is not a doer or a giver. He simply takes in. If a queen should eat, she would become as completely a receiver as the beggar in the rescue mission. Eating is an act of reception in every case, and so it is with faith. You have nothing to do, to be or to feel, but only to receive. The saving point is not a something that comes forth from you, but the reception of a something given to you. Faith is an act which the poorest sinner, the vilest sinner, the weakest sinner, the most condemned sinner may perform because it is not an act requiring power on his part or goodness on his part, nor the going forth of anything from him, but simply the receiving to himself of Christ."

So like food and drink being offered to you, Christ is being offered to you today. No one can eat for you, no one can believe for you, either. You've got to come and eat. Just as food is useless for you unless you eat it, so Jesus is useless to you unless you come to him and believe. Like food and drink that will nourish and sustain your physical life, Jesus will nourish and sustain your spiritual life, and he will do so forever world without end. So come and eat. Like food and drink that becomes a part of you when you eat it, so like we saw, Jesus will be united with you and you united to him never to leave you, never to forsake you, to be with you always.

And just as food and drink are both necessary for your physical life, so trusting in Christ, his death for your sins, is absolutely necessary for eternal life. Without him, what does verse 53 say? Without him, you have no life in you. You are spiritually dead and will remain that way forever. It's life forever, or it's death forever. Which one will it be? The choice is yours. Come believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for sustaining my voice. I just pray that it was not a distraction so that people lost the gravity of this text because of my silly voice. Would you please take these truths and use them. Use them in each of our lives to draw us closer to you, either for the first time in salvation, or to draw us closer and closer to you because of the truth that we've heard. That would be evidence of your grace, and we so need more grace. Thank you for being a God of grace and mercy. Please bless our time, I pray. Amen.