

We Must Eat of the Life-Giving Bread

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 9:1-28 (p. 1794); John 6:47-51 (p. 1,522)

Text: John 6:47-51 (p. 1,522)

Today, we continue our consideration of the discussion between Jesus and the Galilean people at the synagogue in Capernaum, who, as we learned last week, were murmuring or complaining about what Jesus was claiming concerning who He was, and is; that is, that He is the Bread of life that comes down from heaven.

Jesus responds to their unbelief in John Chapter 6, verses 43 to 58.

He first responded by expanding upon verse 37 in this Chapter, where He said that all whom the Father has given to Jesus will come to Jesus, which speaks not only of God's unconditional election, but also of God's irresistible grace. It is God's irresistible grace of which He expands upon in verses 43 to 46, whereby He tells His listeners, and us also, that only those whom the Father draws to Jesus come to Jesus; that is, those taught by the Father and who learn from Him will be drawn to Jesus Christ. **We learned that those taught by the Father have the word of truth put in them by the Holy Spirit, and are enabled by the Holy Spirit to understand what is revealed by Jesus to His listeners at that time, and what is revealed to us in His written word today.** It is those who have been drawn to Jesus by the Father that Jesus will raise up at the last day, which we learned was a reference to the resurrection of the body, and the promise that not

only the soul but the body also will enjoy the blessing of life everlasting, never to be separated from each other in the new heaven and the new earth, where sin's curse will cease and death's sting will never be felt.

Having expanded upon the irresistible grace of the Father in verses 43 through 46, Jesus now turns His attention back to the original discussion concerning who He is. It is from this point in verse 47 to verse 58 where Jesus expands upon the metaphor, which He uses to describe who He is and what He does for all who believe in Him; **or rather**, eats His flesh and drinks His blood, as He tells us in verse 53, which we will learn what He means by that next week, Lord willing.

However, in our text for today, verses 47 to 51, Jesus introduces that thought by first expanding upon what He said earlier in verses 26 and 27, and then in 32 and 33. **In verse 47**, Jesus used a phrase that expressed absolute certainty as to the truth of what He is going to say next.

Literally, the first two words of verse 47 in the original language is "**Amen, amen**," and are translated in the King James, "**Verily, verily**." Other versions translate it, "**Truly, truly**"; or "**Most assuredly**." Though these are good translations, we need to understand that Jesus begins stating emphatically that what He says next is not some made up fanciful nonsense; it is a trustworthy statement of facts or truth that is a matter of life and death, though it may not seem that way on the surface. **In other words**, "**Amen, amen**" convey the sense of the certainty of truths and instills the confidence and assurance of the promises that Jesus

communicates in the words that follow. It is with this unwavering confidence and assurance that Jesus tells His listeners and us also, [that] **“he who believeth in Me hath everlasting life.”** **Then,** He tells them again what it is that they are to believe in concerning Him in verse 48 of our text; **that is,** simply, **“I am the bread of life.”**

Jesus told the people earlier in this Chapter, in verse 35 that He was the **“Bread of Life.”** **However,** in order to get them back on track again to the previous discussion Jesus repeats that description of Himself in verse 48. We might understand verses 47 and 48 in this way, **“Let me remind you of our previous discussion, before we got sidetrack with all of your murmuring. It is most certainly true or as the Heidelberg Catechism defines ‘amen’, “so shall it truly and surely be” that when I tell you that anyone who believes in Me has everlasting life, it is because I am the Bread of Life. But let me explain further what I mean when I say this.”** Up to this point Jesus has simply stated that He is the Bread of Life without explaining exactly what He meant when He described Himself in that way. Now Jesus does exactly that in His statement that follows, from verse 49 and following.

He begins His explanation by once again contrasting the manna that was eaten by the Israelites in the wilderness and the life-giving bread of God that comes down from heaven, which the Father gives for the life of the world, as we read in verse 32. **Yet,** this time Jesus makes the contrast between the two, not from where they came, but the benefit that is gained

from them and explains in metaphorical terms what it means to believe on Him. **In verses 49 and 50,** we read, **"Your fathers did eat the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die."**

In stark contrast to the manna that was eaten in the wilderness and the Bread of Life that is eaten is the difference between death and life. The manna filled the bellies of the Israelites and gave them the nourishment needed to survive their wandering in the wilderness for forty years; but it did not give them life. **On the contrary, a whole generation of Israelites died in the wilderness.** In Numbers 26:65 we read, **"For the LORD had said of them, "They shall surely die in the wilderness." And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun."** There were over 600,000 men over the age of 20, not counting the women that died in the wilderness, who came out of Egypt, only Caleb and Joshua survived together with a new generation that went into the land of Canaan. They all ate of the manna that the Lord provided for them in the wilderness; their bellies were filled but their bodies laid scattered all over the wilderness.

However, isn't it true that whoever has believed in Jesus since He dwelt amongst us has died and most are buried six feet under the ground somewhere? **So, what is the contrast of which He was speaking in our text?** Though the manna in the wilderness was a miracle food without which they would have starved; it was good only for the body and that for

one day at a time. They ate of the manna and are dead; not because of the manna, but because of their unbelief. **They not only died not entering into the land of promise, their bodies scattered all over the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula, but they also died spiritually in their unbelief.** In fact, as mentioned in a previous message, they sought only the things of this life to fill their bellies; but they did not trust the Lord, they didn't believe His promises; only Caleb and Joshua believed in the Lord and though they are dead physically, they live spiritually; they looked beyond the things of this world and saw the promises of God and the life that is in Him alone through Jesus Christ. The other Israelites thought of the Lord as one god among many, who was limited in ability, not able to protect and care for them; though He proved otherwise on many occasions. The Israelites got their miracle bread, the bread of angels, but they remained dead spiritually even to today; their soul is suffering the torment of Hell because of their unbelief with no hope of being redeemed, no hope of everlasting life.

Zechariah asked the rebellious descendants of the Israelites several hundred years later, **"Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, 'Thus saith the LORD of hosts: 'Turn ye now from your evil ways, and *from* your evil doings': but they did not hear, nor hearken unto Me," saith the LORD. Your fathers, where *are* they? And the prophets, do they live forever?"** (1:4-5). In other words, **"Your Fathers are dead. Do you want to also die like them, because of your unbelief? Or, Do you want to live**

forever like my faithful prophets.” The Israelites didn’t see the spiritual significance of the manna, which was spiritual food to them, as Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 10 and verse 3. The Israelites sought only the things of this world thinking nothing of the world to come, or very little of it. **So also,** the people in Capernaum who were listening to Jesus’ message; they cared only about the feeding of their belly; and sought the things of this world that would bring them comfort and safety in this life. They looked for nothing higher to which the bread that Jesus gave to them pointed, as it is indicated in verses 26 and 27. The people did not think about the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 men, plus women and children beyond their bellies being filled. **Their soul was in jeopardy of everlasting death and torment in Hell; would they die also, just as their forefathers?**

This leads us to verse 50 of John Chapter 6. Jesus tells us in that verse that if anyone eats of the Bread of Life, which is Jesus Christ Himself, that person will not die. Whereas the manna did not give life to those who ate of it, all who eat of the Bread of Life will have life bestowed upon them, and that life that is bestowed upon all who believe in Christ will never be extinguished.

The bread of Life gives spiritual life now and sustains that life until the resurrection, when the body of the believer will also reap the benefit of the Bread of Life that was eaten, and be raised up to immortality and incorruption. **Thus death will be banished, and in a sense death is even now a banished enemy for the life that is in all who are in**

Jesus Christ have passed from death to life. In fact, Jesus tells us in John 11:25-26 that all who believe in Him, “**though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.**” It is in this sense that all who eat the Bread of Life will not die.

Further, it is in this sense that Jesus raises the Bread of Life above the manna that the Israelites ate in the wilderness. **It is this life-giving Bread,** which is how Jesus refers to Himself in verse 51 of our text in John Chapter 6.

In verse 51, Jesus tells the Galileans and us also three pieces of information concerning the living Bread, which we understand also from verses 35 and 48, is a metaphor for Himself. The first piece of information is a repeat of what He had said before in verses 32, 33, and 38 of this Chapter; that is that the living Bread, the life-giving Bread came down from heaven. **It is because Jesus is the living bread, He is, in essence, telling them that He is the Son of God, the Word that left the glory of heaven; and while remaining very God, took on Him the very nature of man, both of body and soul.** By reminding them of this truth, Jesus is focusing the attention of His hearers upon Him as the Son of God, and the Son of man, the promised Messiah in preparation for the third piece of information.

However, before He tells them the third piece information, He again expands upon the truth revealed in verse 50 of our text stating it positively; that is, that anyone who eats this living bread will live forever. The question that arises in our minds might be; how is it that eating the

living Bread can give us life? Can what we consume with our mouths give us that which is spiritual? **The answer is, no it cannot.** So, Jesus in anticipation of this question, explains how it is that eating the living bread that came down from heaven can give anyone life.

Jesus now reveals a piece of information that will ultimately cause many who had followed Him up to this point to depart from Him and never follow Him again. Jesus said in the last part of verse 51 of our text, **“ . . . and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”** These are difficult words to understand and if we are not careful we may fall into unbiblical traps, which are not being revealed to us by our Savior here. **So what does Jesus mean in this statement?**

The best way to answer this question is with Scripture. **Did Jesus say something similar that is found elsewhere in the Bible?** Jesus, in teaching His disciples that in order to be good leaders they must become servants, presenting Himself as an example to them. He tells them in Matthew 20:28, and us also, **“Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.”** **By giving up His life on the cross shedding His precious blood as a ransom,** Jesus gave His flesh to pay the penalty of death for our sins and redeem sinners from the curse of sin, having made man a servant of his sin nature. So it is that we are able to understand from His statement in Matthew that what Jesus is referring to in his statement in John was His death. By Jesus' one atoning sacrifice of His body shedding

His precious blood on the cross, He obtained the forgiveness of our sins by the giving of His flesh, securing for us life everlasting, and redeeming us from our bondage to sin and rescuing us from the kingdom of darkness and death. **The apostle Paul expressed it this way in His letter to Titus, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, . . . our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works”** (Titus 2:11&13b-14). **Then,** in Colossians the apostle tells us that Jesus “. . . hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son: ¹⁴ In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins . . .” (1:13-14). Jesus gave Himself for us; **that is,** He gave His flesh by dying on the cross so that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and the power of darkness, so that we might have life everlasting. We see in these passages the truth that is revealed in our text in the Gospel of John that the bread that we are to eat to live forever is His flesh, which was given for an atoning sacrifice on the cross for the life of the world. We also understand from these passages the necessity of Christ giving His flesh, for without His death He would not be the Bread of Life that we must eat for everlasting life.

Calvin puts it together this way, when he writes concerning what Jesus says in verse 51 of our text in John, **“it denotes that singular giving which was done on the cross, when he offered himself as a**

sacrifice to his Father; for then he delivered himself up to death for the life of men, and now he invites us to enjoy the fruit of his death. For it would be of no avail to us that that sacrifice was once offered, if we did not now feast on that sacred banquet.” So it is that when Jesus told the Galileans that all who eat of the living bread will live forever, He is referring to embracing with a believing heart His death on the cross, His one sacrifice of His flesh, through which eternal life is obtained, not only for the Judaic people, but for all who believe in His name alone and in what He accomplished on their behalf.

Let us, therefore, feast on that sacred banquet by faith, embracing with believing hearts His one sacrifice on the cross so that we might have life in Him, in His flesh given for the life of those given to Him by the Father scattered throughout the world; **from every kindred, tongue, people and nation** (Revelation 5:9).

Zechariah, asked the descendents of the Israelites, who died in the wilderness because of their unbelief, **“will you die, also, like them?”** Let us each ask ourselves the same question, “will I die because of unbelief?” **“Will I die remaining under the death sentence of sin as it says in John 3:18,** because I refuse to eat of the living Bread; refusing to rely solely on the Bread of Life that was given for me that I might have life everlasting?”

Next week, we will go into more depth as what it means to eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood, as we learn what Jesus meant in verses 52-58, praying that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes that we might also understand in what way we can eat His flesh and drink His blood so we might have the life He gives.

In the meantime, let's prayerfully ask the Lord to grant each one of us grace to come to Jesus and keep on coming to Him, looking to Him alone with souls that hunger and thirst for the nourishment that is given by Him alone; the nourishment of the bread of life, as we embrace by faith that life which He gives through the one atoning sacrifice of His flesh on the cross on our behalf so that our walk of faith each day would be a humble testimony to the goodness and grace of God through Christ Jesus, our only Savior, our only Lord, our only King, to the glory of the Triune God – **For to Him alone belong all glory, honor wisdom and power, forever!**

AMEN!