**WHOEVER EATS THIS BREAD WILL LIVE FOREVER**

December 4, 2016

John 6:41-71

Key Verse 6:51 “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Last week we learned that Jesus did not come to this world to give us bread, but to be bread. Jesus Christ did not come into the world to help you in meeting desires you already had before you were born again. He came into the world to change your desires so that Jesus may be the central desire. How many times have you heard that Jesus would meet your desires? No, Jesus came to change our desires profoundly. He didn’t come to cause all of our physical desires to be satisfied, but to change those desires at their core so that he becomes our treasure. It is called the new birth so that he is the central desire. He is the bread of life. Christianity is not about using Jesus to fulfill all my flesh desires. It is not about getting God to give me more stuff and make life more pleasant. That is a byproduct of our relationship with God. But the crowds did not want that. They did not want to be changed. They wanted Jesus to meet their desires. They wanted Jesus to fix their life and fix their marriage and take away their anxiety and solve their felt needs and make them more successful and elevate their comfort level and help them score a touchdown and things like that.

So they mocked Jesus. Look at verses 41-42. “At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ They said, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’” Jesus had shattered their hope for free food, and they were upset and not at all interested in repentance, not at all interested in obedience and submission. They understood enough to accept Jesus but they rejected the truth. The more they rejected Jesus’ words, the more difficult his teaching became. Instead of making the truth simpler, once their response was one of mockery, Jesus began to make it more difficult. He began to hide it from them. When the truth was rejected commonly through the ministry of Jesus, and it was mocked, Jesus invariably made the truth more difficult. He doesn’t argue. He doesn’t try to prove Himself. He simply returns to his confidence in God’s sovereignty in verse 44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them and I will raise them up at the last day.” Water can’t flow uphill, evil trees can’t bear good fruit, bitter fountains can’t yield sweet water, and no one gets saved without a sovereign, gracious calling from God. And again Jesus leans on sovereignty.

Look at verse 51. “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” If a person wants to be saved, it is only a matter of believing in the person and work of Jesus Christ. But they have no interest in divine reality. They mocked. Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” The Jews were shocked by cannibalistic talk or being a vampire. But in verse 40, Jesus already defined the idea of eating as coming, beholding, believing in him. “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the son and believes in him shall have eternal life.” There is then a willful ignorance that renders them blind.

Now notice Jesus’ response in verses 53-54, “Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” Those two verses say the same thing, exactly. One says it negatively. The other says it positively. Verse 53 is negative. “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” Verse 54 says it positively. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.” He says the same thing twice as if he is hammering it into their thick skulls.

What is so interesting is that he never stops to clear up their perplexity. He never stops and says, “Now wait a minute guys, you don’t understand. I am not talking about eating my physical flesh.” He never stops to say, “Now let me see if I can clarify that. I know it is an easy statement to misunderstand and you might be confused.” No, he just hammers it home all the harder. And he even makes it more explicit, and in some ways more shocking. You must eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and he adds, drink his blood. He adds that which even hits them harder because their problem is not simply misunderstanding. Their problem is deep set unbelief and rejection. They heard his definition of eating as coming, beholding, believing.

Why are they mocking him with this silly response as if they did not understand that he was talking about spiritual bread? Because of their willful unbelief. Rather than toning down his statements or modifying them, he strengthens them so that what seemed impossible and absurd at first is now made even more seemingly impossible and absurd. Not only do you have to eat my flesh, but drink my blood. What did he mean by that? He is saying, “You have to accept my incarnation. You have to accept my death, my death, my blood sacrifice for sins.” That is what you have to accept. And the Jews really couldn’t handle that. A blood spattered Messiah nailed to a Roman cross naked before the gazing world was not their idea of Messiah. They were looking for a military, political, economic leader who would come and conquer all their enemies and lift Israel to be the supreme nation of the world to which other nations would bow. They couldn’t see a dead Messiah. That is why Paul in Thessalonica, Acts 17, had to preach on why Christ had to suffer. That is why 1 Corinthians 1:23 says that the death of Christ on a cross was to the Jews “a stumbling block.”

Notice the very close parallel between verse 40 and verse 54. Verse 54: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” Verse 40: “Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” This parallel shows that, in Jesus’ mind, eating his flesh and drinking his blood are a figurative way of saying: Believe in me, trust me, receive me, get your nourishment from me. Get life from me. St. Augustine said, “Believe and you have eaten.” So the pervasive offer of this chapter from beginning to end is: Anyone may have eternal life if they will receive Jesus and trust in Jesus and treasure Jesus and be satisfied with all that God is for them in Jesus. Whoever feeds on my flesh — that is, whoever believes in me — has eternal life. I abide in you and my life becomes your life — forever.

Jesus’ teaching was clear. They needed Jesus, the bread of life, even more than the physical bread. But they only wanted free bread from Jesus. Realizing that Jesus was not going to hand out free bread that day, they rejected Jesus’ word of life and began to complain. They said: “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” (60). The Jews rejected Jesus’ words. The more they closed their hearts and minds to the truth, the more difficult his teaching became. Rejection of truth results in blindness. Because they would not see, they could not see the Messiah right in front of them.

What did Jesus say to them? Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life” (60-63). Once again, Jesus tried to help them to focus more on the Messiah and his life-giving words than the physical bread. He really wanted them to open their hearts to hear his words spoken to them— the words that were full of the Spirit and life. Some people come to church but would not open their hearts to hear what Jesus says to them. They ask questions such as, “What’s in it for me? What do I get out of it?” That’s what the people in this passage did. When no more free bread was offered, they grumbled and would not hear what Jesus was telling them. Jesus was sorry because of their unbelief. They were unbelieving people. They would not believe even if they saw Jesus’ ascension into heaven with their own eyes (62). So Jesus told them, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The word I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life” (63).

Look at verse 66. From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. Jesus knew that his twelve disciples were shaken by these people’s decision to leave the ministry. So he asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God” (68-69). Peter followed Jesus, not because his brother Andrew followed, but because he accepted the words of life. Peter’s faith was based on the words of eternal life. He followed Jesus because Jesus is the living bread from heaven. Peter was different from the people whose focus was on the bread rather than the Messiah. He listened to Jesus when he said “I am the living bread from heaven.” Peter was also different from people who followed Jesus with an ulterior motive. For example, Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, followed Jesus but he never accepted the living words of Jesus because of his desire for money. He would eventually betray Jesus (70-71). There are many wise men and women in this world who write excellent books, but Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. Peter knew that he could find eternal life from no one and nowhere else, but Jesus. This is the reason why we should study the Bible wholeheartedly. I earnestly pray that each of us may say to Jesus, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

The sixth chapter of John’s Gospel begins with 5,000 men following Jesus. And it ends with eleven. Someone said, “Chapter six ends on a note of failure.” From one standpoint that’s right. The resistance to Jesus in this chapter gets stronger and stronger, until almost everyone abandons him. So it looks like resistance is winning. It looks like failure. But Jesus firmly believed in God’s sovereignty. God is in charge. That is why he repeats again and again, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” Jesus was sorry that so many people refused to believe, but he says, “I am just going to have to rest on the sovereign purposes of the eternal God and know that all that the Father gives me will come.” Jesus was saddened and grieved over their unbelief, but he rested in the sovereign purposes of God. All that the Father draws will come. That is our confidence in preaching the gospel. In the face of so much rejection, Jesus reminded himself that this is all the Father’s plan anyway, and the Father has to draw before anyone will come. And when the Father draws, they will come and he will receive and the Father will do his will.

Whenever it appears that resistance to Jesus is winning in this world, the people of God need a very clear vision of God’s sovereignty over all things, including resistance to Jesus. We can apply that point to our lives: Whenever it appears in your life that Jesus is not winning, whenever it seems as though he is not triumphing over your enemy, just at that point and at that time, we need a very clear vision of God’s sovereignty over us and the horrors of our life. Feeding on Jesus means that we should trust in him no matter what happens. We should believe that God will make good on his promise, namely, everyone who looks to the Son will have eternal life and Jesus will raise him at the last day. In the face of seeming failures and everyone against us, we should hold on to this truth. Georg Cantor was a German mathematician who invented set theory. He gave a proof that there are many kinds of infinity. For example, real numbers are more numerous than natural numbers. It was such counter-intuitive and shocking that many people fiercely objected and refused to accept it. Even though he was right, Cantor could not handle such a criticism and died in a mental hospital.

But we are not going to bow to pressure. Even if it is counter-intuitive and everything is against us, we hold on God’s will and his promise: Everyone who eats Jesus will have eternal life and Jesus will raise him at the last day. When the going really get rough, Peter’s answer is a powerful truth to remember. When my faith has been most shaken, I hold to those words, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” We may not understand the circumstances we are experiencing. We may not understand why God is allowing us to go through what we are going through. We may be tempted to toss in the towel and give up. But the truth is there is no place else to go. Jesus alone has the words of eternal life.

When you are happy, go to Jesus and rejoice in his goodness to you. When you are sad and discouraged, go to Jesus because he alone has the words of eternal life. Whoever eats him will live forever.