**The Living Bread from Heaven**

December 17, 2017

John 6:48-58

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.”

Jesus is the living bread from heaven. Jesus came down from heaven not to give us bread but to be bread. In other words, Jesus is not Santa Claus. During Christmas you hear the song, “Santa Claus is Coming to Town.” “Santa Claus will give you everything you want.” Many people regard Jesus as Santa Claus. How many times have you heard that Jesus would meet all your desires? Many Christians regard Jesus as someone useful in meeting their desires. Even some pastors say that Jesus will meet all your desires. No, Jesus is not someone useful in meeting your desires. He is the Son of God and Christ the Lord. Jesus Christ did not come into the world to assist you in meeting desires you already had before you were born again. He came into the world to change your desires so that he may be the central desire. 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. In the song, “Draw Me Close to You,” there is a refrain, “You are my desire, No one else will do…You’re all I want, You’re all I’ve ever needed.” Can you sing it from your heart?

Now Jesus does care about bread, I mean physical bread. He cares about your body. He promised in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (food and clothes) will be given to you as well.” But he didn’t come down from heaven mainly to provide our physical needs. He just doesn’t care mainly about your body and your physical bread. He didn’t come mainly to cause all of our physical desires to be satisfied, but to change those desires at their core so that he becomes our treasure over everything. We are what we love. When Jesus is what we love, we become the new creation in Jesus Christ. Then when Jesus comes again, he will restore all things. He will give us glorious resurrection bodies: No more mourning. No more crying. No more tears. No more depression. No more sin. Only joy on the new earth, under the new heavens forever. Jesus cares about the body. He is going to raise the body from the dead so that you can enjoy him in the fullness of your humanity. That is coming. But meeting all our physical desires is not the main point of this world.

As I said, Jesus is not someone useful in meeting your desires. Jesus is not someone we can use to fulfill our desires. Jesus is the Lord of creation. He is the Son of God who was with God in heaven in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:2-3) He was there with God when they created the universe. He was there in eternity before the creation of the world. He was there when our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Instead of confessing their sins, they tried to blame each other. Adam even tried to blame God for giving him the woman. Since then, all people try to blame others for their problems, and never take responsibility. Refusing to apologize reflects efforts to protect a fragile sense of self. Politicians and religious leaders are known for their non-apology apologies, such as “If I hurt anyone, I am truly sorry.” Notice the “If” – the person doesn’t know whether he or she has hurt anyone, but wants to cover his bets and express an all-purpose apology. This vague apology acknowledges no wrong action, no regret (for what?) and no intention to change his/her behavior in any way in the future. Some non-apologies are even worse! There is the “I’m sorry you feel that way” which is a passive-aggressive way of saying, “it’s your fault for feeling that way.”

It has been our sinful nature to do everything by ourselves and for ourselves, without God. We love to be right, we love to be strong; we hate to be weak, we hate to be wrong. We love the strength that comes from money, beauty, intelligence, prestigious work, fame, even raising 12 disciples. We work hard to maintain that feeling of righteousness. Sometimes we put others down in order to preserve our own reputations. We make excuses to justify our actions. Some of the excuses are “I am just weak.” (It is not my fault.) “That is who I am.” (I am a sinner, you will just have to live with that fact.) “We have a communication problem.” (You are half the problem.) What form of self-justification comes out of you first? Gossip, complaining, criticism, boasting, blame-shifting, self-defense, lying? We love being right and looking good—pretending that we are better than we really are. We also love pretending that the people around us are far more messed up than we are—this way we have given ourselves permission to yell at them, shame them, criticize them or crush them. Yet, in spite of all our sins, God promised to send the Savior. An offspring of the woman would come to crush the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15). When he does so, he will make it right. No need to justify ourselves. No more pretending to be righteous. No more shame. Since that first promise, the Word of promise has been like refreshing water for all believing souls.

In God’s right time, the Son of God entered into human history. God sent his Son to redeem and adopt us as his children. Jesus came down from heaven. The prophet Micah tells us that the Messiah will be born in the town of Bethlehem and rule over God’s kingdom forever. Mary, Jesus’ mother, was at Nazareth, 120 km away from Bethlehem (4 or 5 days journey), and she was in full term. Jesus could have been born in Nazareth. But Caesar decreed that a census should be taken and everyone had to go back to their ancestral home. In this case, Joseph had to go to Bethlehem because he was a descendant of David. We know that Bethlehem is called the town of David. What you may not know is that the name Bethlehem means “house of bread.” And that is most fitting! For the One who called Himself the bread of life was born in a town that means “house of bread.” Is it purely coincidental that Jesus, the Bread of Life, would be born in a town that means “house of bread”?

When Joseph and Mary got to Bethlehem, the city was very crowded. They could not get a room in the inn. You can see the hardened hearts of people who would not give up their room for a pregnant woman crying in birthpains. It is representative of people’s sin of selfishness. It is like many students who see others as competitors and do not share their information with classmates for fear that others would do better. Even worse, they give the wrong information. So Joseph and Mary went into a stable of animals and gave birth to a son, and they laid him in a manger. Is it purely coincidental that Jesus, the living bread, who says to you, “Take and eat,” would be placed in a manger, animals’ feeding box? Jesus, the eternal God entered our human reality in human flesh, a naked and helpless infant. His mother needed to feed Him. His parents needed to change his diapers. His parents needed to wrap him in homemade blankets to protect Him from the cold. He would have to go to the distant land of Egypt when King Herod tried to kill Him. In the end, he was crucified on the cross for our sin. He offered himself as a sacrifice that would save the lives of his condemned brothers and sisters. After offering himself as the sacrifice, God raised him from the dead. God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Now Jesus sits at God’s right hand. He did not get to this throne of power through political intrigue. He did not rise to this rule merely by outlasting his opponents, or out-campaigning his competitors. He sits at God’s right hand as the man from God who paid the price for our salvation. He is the One whom the Father raised from the dead to rule over everything for the Church.

By his amazing grace, this Jesus is inviting us to come to him and believe in him so that we may have eternal life. 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 this not 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 expectation of free food, and they were upset and not at all interested in repentance, not at all interested in obedience to God’s will. They understood enough to believe in Jesus but they rejected the truth. The more they rejected Jesus’ words, the more difficult his teaching became.

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 live, it is only a matter of believing in the person and work of Jesus Christ. But they had 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. 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 them 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 them 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 passage 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 live in you and my life becomes your life — forever. 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 to emphasize its importance.

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 reinforces it. 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 to make it more shocking because their problem is not simply misunderstanding. Their problem is a deep set of unbelief and rejection. They heard his definition of eating as coming, beholding, believing. Believing in Jesus is not just agreeing with certain statements about Jesus. It is about a relationship with him. Just as bread sustains our life, we need Jesus for our life and energy. Just as we need bread every day for life, we need Jesus every day to have life.

As we know, we are what we eat. All food that we eat and drink becomes a part of our body. Likewise, if we really accept Jesus and his words, they become my thought and will and direction and treasure in my heart. It means if we don’t think nor desire as Jesus thinks and desires, we have not accepted him fully yet, even though we may say, “I believe in him,” habitually. So by actually living according to Jesus’ word, we are demonstrating that we really believe in him. St. Paul’s desire was to become a top Pharisee. In order to make a name for himself, he persecuted the church of God. But after meeting Jesus, he ate the living bread from heaven, and God changed his desire, until knowing Christ was his only desire. He said in Philippians 3:8, “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.” Inspired by this verse, Graham Kendrick wrote the song, “Knowing you.” “Knowing you; there is no greater thing. You’re my all, you’re the best, you’re my joy, my righteousness and I love you Lord.” By eating the living bread, we let Jesus live within us, and become part of us and transform us. Galatians 2:20a says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”

Just in conclusion, a few things to think about. Eating is necessary. If you don’t eat physically, you will die. Likewise, if you want eternal life, eating the living bread Jesus is necessary. You can’t just come and look. You can’t just admire. People do this all the time, saying, “I have a lot of respect for Jesus.” You can’t just come and admire. You have to eat, which is to believe fully. But eating is in response to hunger. So, the people who eat are the people who are hungry. Wah Paw prepares lunch for her son who is in kindergarten. But he brings back lunch uneaten because he is not hungry. What is hunger? It is the aching of the heart of one who knows he is empty. That is the work of the Holy Spirit to make the heart hungry. That is where our heavenly Father starts to draw us to himself. The hungry heart sees the bread. And, by the way, eating is personal. It is not a group event. You can all go out to dinner, but the food has to go in your mouth. Lots of people can do lots of things for you. They can come over and change the curtains, fix the room, and fix the bathroom sink. People can do a lot of things to help you. But you have to eat for yourself. Eating is necessary. Eating is in response to hunger. Eating is personal and eating is transformational. If you eat, food you take in transforms you to be like Jesus and Christ will live in you.

 I pray for those who are here, who are looking, but haven’t believed, received, eaten that they may eat the living bread that nourishes the soul. May nothing about the gospel be a stumbling block, but may the gospel be a welcome message fully embraced. May it be today that there are some people who have heard this who will eat, who will receive Christ as the living bread from heaven, and receive from him eternal life.