

Come to a Never Ending Feast

John 6:48–59

- Being a Christian is not for the faint-hearted. It is not simply walking an aisle or praying a prayer. Being a Christian is the most radical thing one can do upon this earth. Forget bungee jumping, forget skydiving, forget any sort of extreme games, they are nothing compared to being a true follower of the Lord Jesus. Being a Christian tells you that you are no longer boss of your life and everything is in submission to the will of Christ. That is a Christian and it is hard. It will challenge all that you are and everything that you do.
- Peter writes in **1 Peter 4:18** **“AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?”**
- This expression relates to the arduous experiences of the righteous in this life. It doesn’t mean that there is doubt about our salvation, but emphasizes that the pathway is marked with difficulties as we are being saved.
- Likewise Paul instructed his converts that “we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God”. It is clear that the apostles of Christ had “none of the starry-eyed optimism of some modern Christians.”
- And where did the apostles come to understand that being a follower of Christ is difficult? From the words of our Lord Himself and I think some of the toughest words are here in John 6. It is a call to for His listeners to come to Jesus but you must come to Him believing and trusting, with a

willingness to partake deeply of Christ such that He affects your whole life.

- Jesus' call here to these people, though shrouded in metaphor is very simple and very difficult and so I simply want to divide these verses up into two imperatives. This is the call of Christ and the call of Christ to all people everywhere. The call is...
- **Come Feed on Christ for Salvation (48—53)**
- This is what Jesus had just explained to the crowd and now He is going to tell them again in another way. Only now when He tells them what He just told them, He is going to do it in a unique way and press the use of the bread metaphor. He tells them again that He is the bread of life.
- These next verses that follow our Lord's statement form what is called an ***inclusio*** in that an idea is introduced at the beginning and then mentioned again at the end. If you look at verse 49 Jesus speaks of their fathers eating the manna and then again He brings it up in verse 58.
- Throughout these verses the Lord is contrasting their father's eating of the manna in the wilderness and the result of that with the opportunity before this crowd of partaking of Christ and the promised result. Jesus does a comparison between Himself and the bread that their fathers ate. They brought up their fathers back in verse 31 and so Jesus is saying let's talk about them and what they ate. They ate and died, but in contrast to them you people have the opportunity to eat and live.
- Notice in verse 49 what Jesus says to the crowd, "Your fathers..." Well, why were they "your"

fathers and not “our” fathers? Because those who ate of the manna in the wilderness were very much like the crowd in that they were grumblers and unbelievers just like these people were. They ate this amazing bread in the wilderness and what happened to them? They complained and they died and the Lord was not pleased with them. It did not get them into the Promised Land.

- In fact, though they ate the bread in the OT for forty years, they still quarreled with the Lord. Here is the Lord Jesus who had just given this crowd miraculous bread and they are now quarreling with Him. They are just like their fathers, seeking what is only temporal instead of what is eternal.
- Their need is for salvation and not just for miracle bread from heaven and so in verse 50, in contrast to that bread... “This is the bread which comes down out of heaven.” Notice the pronoun, ‘this.’ Was the Lord gesturing to Himself? I’m not sure, but we do know that He is speaking of Himself.
- He is telling them that there is another bread available and it has come down out of heaven as well, but it is far superior because when you eat of it you will *not die*. In the previous verse Jesus is speaking of physical death and here in verse 50 He switches to speak of spiritual death. Anyone who ‘eats’ of Christ has the life that is eternal.
- This is the first time in this discourse that Jesus uses the term ‘eat’ and what is key is that this word is a substitution for the words used previously, ‘believing’ and ‘coming.’ As we’ll come to see the word ‘eat’ is a wonderful metaphor to describe what coming to Christ and believing in

Christ is all about. Here is where He begins to really press them as to what He is talking about.

- What is so great about this passage is that Jesus teaches comprehensively about the Christian life in these verses. He speaks of when someone comes to faith initially, but then He speaks of their continuing relationship with Him and He pictures both with the concept of eating.
- In verse 50, Jesus speaks of “that one may eat of it” and then in 51 He speaks of “if anyone eats of this bread.” Again in verse 53 the same word is used “unless you eat the flesh...” In all of these uses the same tense and mood, the aorist subjunctive, are used and it means a once-for-all action of receiving Christ. It is the act of appropriating Christ. This is the time of salvation. Anyone who takes this decisive action will in verse 50, ‘not die,’ and in verse 51 ‘live forever.’
- These people are worried about hunger pangs and Jesus is drawing their attention to their eternal death, because that is their need. Their need is not physical bread, but to partake of the heavenly bread that gives eternal life. Those who have once eaten Christ shall “not die” means, as Calvin states, that **“the life which He bestows on us is never extinguished.”**
- In verse 51, He further explains that He is not some stagnant bread, but that He Himself is “the living bread” and that “He came down” meaning that His origin is heaven and referring to the incarnation.
- Why does Jesus continually state that He came down from heaven? He states it in 32, 33, 38, 50, 51, 58. There are certainly a number of reasons

but one reason is that spiritual and incorruptible life will not be found originating in this world. Only God provides life and if Jesus is from the earth then He is not qualified to give life. Life only comes from above, and spiritual life only God Himself can provide.

- And what is this heavenly bread? What is this substance that provides life? He tells us there in verse 51...it is His flesh. The 'bread' is now identified as His flesh. Jesus says that He is going to give His flesh for the life of the world.
- Notice Jesus says in verse 51, "I will give." He hasn't given it yet and He is not currently giving it. He uses the future tense looking forward to the cross. The bread which gives life is the sacrificial death of our Lord. It is His crucifixion. In His death on the cross is life for the world.
- Notice that His sacrifice is voluntary, in that 'He Himself will give of Himself', and vicarious, in that His sacrifice is in place of the world. Jesus will give Himself on account of, in place of, for the sake of, to procure the world's life. His death is the ransom by which eternal life shall be purchased for a world of sinners.
- I take 'world' here the same way I took it back in 1:29 and 3:16 in that it means "world." It means all of mankind. I cannot make kosmos in John's gospel mean anything other than world. I can't make it mean elect. Christ died for all of mankind, not for the elect only though certainly not all the world is saved. Jesus is saying that His death is sufficient for all of mankind, but it is only efficient

for those whom the Father draws or for those whom believe in Him; they are one and the same.

- He has brought life to us; He came here so that we might have life but you must appropriate the heavenly life to yourself by feasting upon Christ. You must eat. You must eat of this bread, which Jesus says is His flesh. And by ‘eating’ Jesus means ‘believe,’ He means have faith in Him.
- The Jews are shocked in verse 52 because they took our Lord woodenly literal and so they began strongly arguing with one another. “This man is advocating cannibalism! How do you eat His flesh?” They totally missed it as the crowds all through the gospel of John have missed it.
- So, He presses it even more in verse 53. Notice how strong He is by beginning with “truly, truly,” and now He adds ‘drink His blood!’ He is pressing them with strong language and a strong metaphor to get their attention and shake them out of their unbelief. They didn’t understand when He told them plainly in the previous verses and so now He is pressing them against the wall with the metaphor.
- If you refuse to eat and drink the Son of Man then you continue to have no life in you. Jesus is not an appetizer. He is not a salad. He is the whole thing and must be completely taken in for life to be had, but these are walking dead people. They have no life because they have not partaken of Christ. They need salvation; they need to come to Christ. They need to eat and drink of Him. And some of you this morning need to do the same. You continue to put off Jesus and refuse to come to Him and eat.

- Let me explain in more detail what the Lord means by eat. Pink was helpful in thinking through this metaphor that Jesus uses. And it is a perfect metaphor picturing what is required in salvation.
- First, eating is a necessary act if you are to receive any benefit from the bread being offered. You may look at the bread and admire it; you may analyze it; you may talk about the bread and eulogize it; you may handle the bread and be assured of its quality, but unless you eat it, you shall not be nourished by it.
- Too many in today's world are all about knowing truth, speculating about it, talking about it, commending it, recommending it to others, but they themselves have never eaten of Christ and if you don't then all your talk will do you no good and indeed Christ will do you no good.
- Secondly, eating is responding to a felt need. The need is hunger and when one is really hungry he asks no questions, he makes no objections, he raises no trivialities, but gladly and promptly partakes of that which is set before him. So it is spiritually. Once the sinner is awakened to his lost condition; once he is truly conscious of his deep, deep need, once he becomes aware of the fact that without Christ he will perish eternally; now he will need no urging, but promptly and gladly he will receive Christ as his own.
- Thirdly, eating implies the act of appropriation. There may be a great banquet set in front of you with everything that you love, but the food will do you no good until you commence eating, until you make the food your own. When you eat, the food

that was once outside of you comes inside and becomes a part of you and supplies health and strength.

- So it is spiritually. Christ may be presented to you in all of His attractiveness, you may respect His wonderful personality and admire His perfection and be touched by His sacrifice on the cross, but until you appropriate Him, until you receive Him as your own personal Savior, then you shall be saved. Now He is inside of you and is your bread of life and is ministering daily to you, now you have eaten Him.
- Fourthly, eating is an intensely personal act, no one else can do it for you. If you are to be nourished you must yourself eat. You can standby all you want at a restaurant and watch others eat but it will not supply your needs, so too with Christ. No one can believe in Christ for you. I cannot, your friends cannot, your parents or your children cannot. You can hear wonderful testimonies, but unless you eat personally of Christ it will do nothing for you. But if you come and “eat this bread” then you will live forever and continually feast on Him who gave Himself for us.
- So, you must come feed on Christ for salvation and that is eating Christ flesh and drinking His blood, but it isn’t a one time eating, it is instead continual, which leads into our next point...
- **Continue Feeding on Christ for Sanctification (54—59)**
- Friends, what I found fascinating in this passage is that Jesus is not just talking about salvation,

though that would be wonderful enough. He is speaking of the ongoing relationship that He has with those who come to Him to eat.

- There is an interesting change in verse 54, though in the English it does not look like a change. Jesus changes words for eating here in verse 54, from *evsqi,w* to *trw,gw*. Additionally, He changes verb tenses and goes from the aorist indicative to the present participle and uses it for the rest of the discourse.
- He is saying that yes you do come initially for salvation and are saved, but then, as a result of salvation, there continues to be a feasting upon Christ and a continued appropriation of Him into your life. So, it isn't just the one who comes one time, it is the one who then continues to eat "My flesh and drinks My blood" who possesses eternal life. These are the ones who are truly saved and who have truly eaten.
- But I must pause at this moment because I've got to address the issue of those who use these verses to support the partaking of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church. These verses are not in reference to the Lord's Supper.
- There are a number of arguments why this passage has nothing to do with it and I want to simply bring a few to your attention.
- First, is the point that I was just making and is a grammatical argument. Jesus is using the aorist tense, which points to the single act of appropriating Christ. It is a one time event and that is of partaking of Christ, eating of Christ.

These are one time acts and as soon as you do this then verse 50 states that you will not die. Verse 51 states that you will live forever. The Catholic Church teaches that you must continually partake of it in order to earn life, but that is not what these verses teach.

- Also, those who argue this is about the Eucharist in verses 52—59 and that Jesus is commanding people to partake of the Eucharistic Communion, miss the fact that nowhere in these particular verses does Jesus tell anyone to believe. There is no faith at all listed in verses 52—59 when this concept was the dominant theme earlier in the same conversation. What happened to belief? Do we now eat instead of believe? Is belief required or can you simply just eat and that is it?
- Belief's very absence from verses 52—59 when it was so important in the previous verses should logically drive us to the fact that Jesus is using a metaphor in place of belief.
- Additionally, every other place in the NT when communion is mentioned the word 'body' or 'soma' is used, whereas here our Lord uses the word 'flesh' or 'sarx,' which again goes to support the position that this is a metaphor and not to be taken literally as the Catholics do.
- The parallel and key to interpreting this passage with its metaphor is in comparing two verses, 54 and 40. The only substantial difference is that one speaks of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood, while the other, in precisely the same conceptual location, speaks of looking to the Son and believing in Him. The conclusion is obvious:

verse 54 is the metaphorical way of referring to verse 40. Indeed, this link is supported by the entire structure of this discourse. It is a small wonder that Augustine of Hippo wrote, **“Believe, and you have eaten.”**

- You eat His flesh and drink His blood by beholding the Son and believing the Son. But what does “beholding” and “believing” mean? Well, the metaphor gives us insight as to what these two concepts mean. “Beholding” and “believing,” thinking of those concepts from the point of eating and drinking, means that you take Christ into your innermost being. You appropriate Christ into the very fabric of your life, not just one time, but a continual relationship with the Lord. This is a true Christian in that they have come to the Lord and tasted and they have continued to feast on Him throughout their life because they know that as He says in verse 55, His “flesh is true food, and [His] blood is true drink.”
- Verse 55 is an emphatic statement that true food and drink for our deepest needs are to be found in Christ, and by implication in Him alone. And one that has their deepest needs met by Christ continues to abide there as verse 56 states.
- Here is the description of a true Christian. They continue to abide in Christ. This is a blessed result of one coming to faith in Christ, of one feasting on Christ and that is that the Lord will abide with you. In fact, Jesus is emphatic by stating “he who eats My flesh and drinks My blood in ME abides and I in him.” He is saying once again whoever appropriates His sacrificial death to

their life by faith will continue to abide in Christ and Christ will abide in them and that is why His flesh and blood really are food and drink. They provide eternal life!

- So, what does it mean to abide in Jesus? This is a precursor to John 15, but it means that the believer continues to be identified with Jesus, continues as a Christian, continues in saving faith and consequent transformation of life. And the fact that Jesus remains in the believer means that Jesus identifies Himself with the believer, providing help, blessing, life, and personal presence by the Spirit.
- We can rest in this because of verse 57, we are assured of life in Jesus because the living Father sent Him and has life in Himself. This is speaking of the mediatorial work of the Son. Jesus is the perfect, submissive Son and perfectly obeys His Father, therefore the Father is pleased to provide Him with life so that He can provide life to those who believe in Him.
- Notice that He no longer speaks of “flesh and blood” but simply “he who eats Me.” Again, the tense is continuous. This way of putting it makes it clearer than ever that it is the taking of Christ within oneself that is meant by the metaphor of eating and drinking. Anyone who so receives Christ will have the life that comes only from Christ. And that person will live only for Christ; nothing else will matter.
- So, Jesus concludes where He began and that is the comparison between the manna and His flesh. He is saying, “there is no reason why you should prefer Moses to Me, because he fed your fathers in

the wilderness; since I supply you with far more excellent food, for I bring heavenly life with Me.”

- What a strong metaphor! What strong theology Jesus was conveying! And the people rejoiced and all joined Jesus! No...
- And because of this sermon, Jesus cleared out the synagogue. He preached a message which was hard to believe and people left.
- Friends, the first commandment states “You shall have no other gods before Me.” I would like to turn it around and state it positively for you, “You shall have Me.” The Lord is saying don’t search anywhere else, have Me. I’m giving Myself to you to be your God and that is what Jesus is saying here. Your search is over, come to Me and feast upon Me. Abide in Me and satisfaction will be found for your soul.