

Bread Is My Flesh

HN/SS 16/01/05 am

Reading: Exodus 16:1-21, John 6:40-59

Study: John 6:47-51

Psalms: 63:1-5, 34:1-7, 34:8-15, 107:5-9

YP – manna in desert

The smell of baking bread is very captivating. Walking down the street it is hard to escape the smell emanating from a hot bread shop. I was shocked when I learnt a few years ago that they actually pipe that rich yeasty smell from the back of the shop into the street. The smell draws people into the shop to get fresh bread and enjoy the taste.

That smell- it is so captivating! They could almost charge people to come into their shop just for the smell. Come in, sit down and enjoy the smell. Do you think people would pay for that? The smell makes me hungry and I want to eat the bread – out of the packet before I get home! I would not feel too satisfied if all I could do was smell the bread.

The Psalmist invites you to taste and see that God is good. Jesus invites you to eat of this bread. Whoever eats of this bread, he will live forever – and the bread that I shall give is my flesh.

Jesus continues in his discourse with the Jews following his feeding of the 5000. They were upset with him for claiming to have come down from heaven. I am the bread of life he said (6:35) after saying the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven (6:33). Upset or not Jesus continued to make the claim. I am the bread of life he says again in v.48. And again he says he who believes in me has everlasting life v.47.

Vital to eat

Jesus reasserts these truths with his solemn declaration – most assuredly I say to you or amen, amen.

After the feeding miracle, the people themselves had introduced the subject of their fathers eating manna in the desert. Great teacher that he was Jesus willingly took up the matter of the manna, here pointing out an obvious but important fact from the point of view of his teaching. What was that fact? All those who ate the manna in the desert are dead.

They had asked Jesus to perform a sign before they would believe – and challenged him to better the sign that Moses gave their fathers in the desert. The bread that Moses gave your fathers – it was a wonder no doubt, but they still died said Jesus. I am showing you an even greater wonder.

I stand before you as the true bread sent from heaven. I stand before you and declare that one may eat of this bread and not die (6:50). Many think that Jesus was actually pointing to himself as he said to them – this is the bread which come comes down from heaven, that ne may eat of it and not die.

They had previously asked him – Lord give us this bread always. But they did not know what they were asking. Jesus is explaining to them what it means to eat the bread of life. And eat the bread of life they must if they are to have eternal life.

Slowly but surely Jesus leads them deeper and deeper into the great truth that he is the bread of life come down from heaven. They murmured among themselves and later quarrelled among themselves but Jesus pressed on with this vital teaching – teaching that meant life or death to them, life or death to us, and life or death to all people.

He goes on to say that the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world. Bread is to be eaten. Their fathers ate manna in the desert. Jesus is the bread which came down from heaven. That bread is my flesh he said. What a shudder went through the synagogue when they heard that word flesh- eat my flesh.

The Jews were shocked and began to quarrel – how can he give us his flesh to eat? A lot of commentators think and teach that Jesus is suddenly introducing the idea of the Eucharist. But the focus is still upon comparing and contrasting the manna which their father ate in the desert.

Their fathers ate and died. Jesus is promising that if they eat him, eat his flesh they will not die. He is not referring to some mysteriously changed piece of bread. Would that have offended ritualistic Jews? He is exhorting them to believe in him. To believe that he came from the Father; to believe that he is the giver of life.

Jesus had explained to them divine election- that unless the Father draws them they cannot come. But that does not absolve them from their personal responsibility to believe in Jesus. They must believe what Jesus is saying and must believe he is who he claims to be. Believing is like eating. It is taking hold of Jesus, embracing him fully and taking him into your heart.

Faith in Christ makes us a new person – we walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17).

People are greatly concerned about the food they eat. Some even say that we are what we eat. The Jews themselves had very strict food laws – as do Hindus and Muslims. They were concerned about what went into their body. So today for religious reasons or other reasons people are greatly concerned about what they eat. But few are concerned about feeding their soul. Do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures unto everlasting life said Jesus (6:27).

Remember bread does not satisfy your hunger, it does not sustain you physically unless you eat it. That rich yeasty smell, the fancy breads in the shop window do not satisfy unless you eat them. To smell, to look or to touch do not satisfy.

Yet that is all some people get from coming to church. That is what the Christian life is to them- if you can call it life. They love to see the ritual and the stained glass windows, they love to hear the bells ring, and they love the smell of incense. It is all very titillating, stimulating to the emotions but when Christ is not preached the soul remains starved. This was the great problem in the church at the Reformation.

What about today? How many come to church for the emotional stimulation, the stirring music, the sights and the sounds but remain starved of the truth, the true bread that came down from heaven. Eat this bread said Jesus and you will have life, you will have eternal life. Don't just smell it, don't just look at it but eat it and it will change your life.

Voluntary Sacrifice

Jesus was sent by the Father from heaven. He is the 'logos', the word became flesh. The Jews saw Jesus as just a man. They would not believe that he was with the Father and had seen the Father. They would not believe that he was divine, and that it was by the power of God that he performed miraculous signs.

There were and still are those who hold to a very different doctrine of the incarnation. They hold that Jesus was not fully human. John deals with such false teaching in his letters (I John 4:2-3). Jesus took on flesh and blood, he shared in humanity that through his death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil (Hebrews 2:14).

Jesus speaks of giving his flesh in the future tense, the bread I shall give. Surely he was contemplating the Cross. The future tense clearly indicates that Jesus is thinking of one definite act, viz his atoning sacrifice on the cross. In that he will give himself, he will sacrifice himself. A once for all voluntary sacrifice for sin.

Vicarious sacrifice

The sacrifice that Jesus contemplated, his voluntary sacrifice would be for the life of the world. It would be a vicarious sacrifice. His death would not be for his own sin for he was without sin. His death, his giving of his flesh would be for sins of the whole world. He himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (I John 2:2). It would be sufficient for all but not efficient for all. His death is vicarious only for those who believe.

Jesus came down from heaven into a fallen world. Every human being born in this world is a descendant of Adam and inherits the sin of Adam. All have sinned – and the wages of sin is death. Jesus said he will give his flesh; he will sacrifice himself for the life of the

world. The only way any human being will live, will escape the penalty of death, is by believing in Jesus Christ. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever.

The bread of life sent down from heaven. The life that Jesus offered would necessitate him giving his own life, his own flesh, that many, that all who believe may have life. His sacrifice was a vicarious sacrifice. Did Jesus die for you? Have you accepted him, have you 'eaten' him? Are you living the new life, everlasting life that Jesus gives to those who believe?

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