

Eat and Drink to Live

HN/SS 23/01/05 am

Reading: Exodus 12:1-27, John 6:35-59

Study: John 6:52-59

Psalms:

YP – Passover

Take a lamb without blemish and kill it at twilight. Take the blood and paint it on the doorposts and on the lintel. Take the flesh, roast it and eat it with bitter herbs and unleavened bread – eat the flesh that same night.

Every year at Passover, Jews celebrated their deliverance out of slavery in Egypt. Their forefathers sacrificed a lamb as the Lord told them through Moses. The blood preserved their life from the angel of death, and the flesh gave them strength to flee to the Promised Land.

The Passover was near as Jesus spoke to the Jews in the synagogue at Capernaum (6:4). The discourse up to this point had been about bread, about the manna their fathers ate in the desert. This picture continues in the background, even as this discourse concludes in the passage before us (6:58). But the element of blood is introduced by Jesus in 6:53 – *unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.* What is the background to this image?

The Jews quarrelled or got into sharp disputes among themselves when Jesus said the bread that I shall give in my flesh. What did he mean by this? How can a man give us his flesh to eat? Does he want us to be cannibals? How outrageous! He makes amazing claims about being the true bread from heaven and now he says the bread is his flesh and we must eat his flesh!

Well what did Jesus mean? How are we to understand what he was saying? Many Christians jump to the conclusion that he was talking about the Eucharist – the sacrament of the Lords Supper. When Jesus instituted this sacrament he took bread, broke it and said this is my body (here the word is flesh not body). But that is quite different to saying unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you.

The teaching of transubstantiation devised by the Church of Rome seeks to link these two passages directly. They say that the bread and wine actually become the flesh and blood of Jesus. But to the Jews the thought of physically eating the flesh or drinking the blood of Jesus was abhorrent- as it is to any person who really thinks about it. Indeed in the law it was forbidden to drink the blood of the sacrificed animals – for the life was in the blood (Leviticus 7:27).

If Jesus was thinking of the sacrament what are we to make of his words that *unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you.* Are we to

think that by eating a wafer and drinking some wine we receive new life, eternal life! God forbid! What a corruption this would be of the whole of Scripture. It is by grace you are saved through faith. In this very chapter Jesus has been saying again and again – believe, believe in me and you will have eternal life. He does not call upon them to perform some ritual or any outward action – just to believe.

If we look ahead to 6:63 we see that Jesus himself said he was speaking about spiritual realities not about physical things. *The words I speak to you are spirit and they are life.* The eating and drinking Jesus was speaking about is spiritual, he was speaking metaphorically – a vivid and powerful metaphor for sure.

Sacrifice

The Jews were familiar with animal sacrifices. In the temple animals were being sacrificed all the time. Passover was the most important sacrifice. The blood was poured out and the flesh roasted and eaten as we saw. Flesh and blood for the Jew pointed to sacrifice.

Jesus was indeed pointing them to a sacrifice, the sacrifice of Calvary where he would make true atonement for sin. His own blood would be poured out and his own flesh torn as he hung upon the cross.

They must believe, you must believe, your children must believe, your parents must believe, your friends must believe, must believe that in that sacrifice on Calvary your sin was dealt with, all your sin was atoned for. That sin brings death if not atoned for.

By believing in Jesus as *the bread of life sent down from heaven*, by believing that he gave his life in atonement for sin, you will receive the gift of God, eternal life – and Jesus will raise you up at the last day.

So in answer to the confused and bitter quarrelling of the Jews, Jesus made the point, first negatively and then positively, that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood if they were to have life and be raised up at the last day. He was speaking metaphorically, with reference to his death. What they must do is believe in him. Here in 6:53 he refers to himself as the *Son of man* rather than the bread from heaven, probably to emphasise that he indeed is flesh and blood, fully man even though he came down from heaven.

Everyone who sees the Son and believes in him has everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last day. That is what Jesus said in 6:40. Here in 6:54 the outcome is the same, eternal life and being raised up. But instead of believing he speaks of eating my flesh and drinking my blood. He was conveying the same truth in a vivid metaphorical way, seeking to persuade or provoke the Jews to believe in him.

Ryle paraphrases this verse (6:53) to mean ‘Except you believe in me as the one sacrifice for sin, and by faith receive into your hearts the redemption purchased by my blood, ye have no spiritual life and will not be saved’. Eating and drinking mean participation in the

benefit of his sacrifice which faith conveys to the soul. 'Whenever a man, feeling his own guilt and sinfulness, lays hold on Christ and trusts in the atonement made for him by Christ's death, at once *he eats the flesh of the Son of Man and drinks his blood*'.

Believe

Believing does not mean simply saying the right words, or doing the right thing, or performing some ritual. Such things may impress men and get you into the visible church. Believing does not mean just mental assent to the truth of Jesus words – which is hardly possible when we come to a passage such as this.

The Jews wanted to believe Jesus was their messiah, that he was their political deliverer promised by God. But the more they saw him work, and the more they listened to him, the more disillusioned they became. Some people find it easier to be a Christian by staying away from church and not reading the Bible. Such activities will challenge their own shallow and false belief.

These words of Jesus challenge any shallow or half-hearted belief. You either eat or you don't. Do not think that you have life if you have never eaten the flesh or drunk the blood of Jesus Christ. These words of Jesus caused many to turn back and walk with him no more. We might even question the preaching of the gospel if people do not turn away because they find the challenge too great.

Real food and real drink

You have eaten today or will eat I presume. If you do not eat for some days you will become weak and sick and eventually die – a horrible death from starvation. The body needs food to keep it alive. We all know that. We eat instinctively.

But what about your soul? Does it not also need food? Spiritual food yes but food nevertheless. That is exactly what Jesus is talking about. My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink he said. Because of sin you were born spiritually dead. No matter how well you mother nursed you, no matter how much food your father later gave you, your soul remains dead.

Jesus is the only one who can give you life-giving food for your soul. You must believe in Him, you must feed upon him in your heart by faith if you want to live, live as a new creation in Christ Jesus, live eternally. *He who feeds on me will live* he said. He will live because of me; he will live because I died in his place: my life given as a substitute for his. You were redeemed with *the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot* (I Peter 1:19).

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides/remains in me and I in him. Do you know what it is to abide in Jesus? Do you know what it is like to have Jesus abiding in you? *Abide in me and I in you* he later told his disciples (15:4).

The apostle Paul knew what Jesus meant. See what he writes in Galatians 2:20 – I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Can you say the same thing- from your heart?

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