

## The Extraordinary Offense of the Cross

John 6:51-58

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 6. We're reading Verses 51-58 of John 6. This morning we come to one of the most misunderstood passages in the New Testament. More violence has been done to this passage than just about any other text in God's Word. It's because we come to one of the truly difficult sayings of Jesus. In fact, that's exactly what many of His disciples said about this passage. They said, "***This is a difficult statement. Who can listen to it?***" (John 6:60) The word difficult in Greek is the word 'sculeris'. It means hard. "This is a hard word. Who can bear it?" So when they heard what Jesus said they struggled with it, they stumbled over it. It was scandalous to them. One of the things that we need to understand when we look at this passage is why Jesus chose to say this just in the way He did. I want us to look for answers to that question as we look at this passage. It would have been easier had He not chosen the exact wording that He did, but the Lord never makes mistakes. He's not like us. He never thinks, "I over-said that, I overstated that." He always says precisely what He intended to say and precisely in the perfect way. So, though we may find it difficult, or hard, or troubling, it doesn't change the fact that it's exactly what He wanted to say.

We'll see in this passage that essentially, the offensive part of it is when He says, "To have life you must eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood." He doesn't say that once, he says it three times. We've noted as we study the Scripture that when something is repeated, it is important. God is calling our attention to it. When it's repeated a third time, it's to the superlative. He's really emphasizing it. Three times he says, "You must eat and drink the flesh and blood of the Son of man to have life." And actually a fourth time He says, "***For My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.***" (John 6:55) Let's read God's Word together.

***John 6:51-58:***

***51 I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.*** 52 ***Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"*** 53 ***So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.*** 54 ***He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up***

*on the last day. 55 For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever.”*

I'm going to go ahead and read the next two verses just to put in context what I quoted a moment ago.

*John 6:59-60 ~ These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. 60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?”*

Who can hear it? Let's pray together.

*Father, we bow before a passage of scripture, as we always bow before Your Word in complete dependence upon Your Spirit. Lord, if You don't grant us illumination we will not see. We confess the blindness of our hearts even in the regenerate state we still have a mind that struggles with the darkening effects of sin, and we need You to open our eyes that we might see. Open our hearts that we might believe, that we might love our Savior more. We pray this in His marvelous Name, Amen.*

Why did Jesus speak in this way? Why in such an offensive way? This text, if you let its force hit you, you can't help but feel some sense of discomfort, revulsion. It is offensive wording. One of the things this passage brings to us is that God often speaks in offensive ways, ways that offend our sensibilities. When He does so, He does so intentionally. He does so purposely, and He does so perfectly. He knows exactly what we need and I think what He's doing here, in one sense, is He's popping the dullards, the spiritual slumbering people of Israel, who are right in the presence. They have been partaking of His Word, hearing Him speak, and seeing His miracles, and yet they don't believe. He's popping them upside the head. Kind of like you slap someone when they need to be woken up. They're walking off a cliff, like somebody is sleepwalking off a cliff and you have to shake them to get them to wake up. That's what's happening in this passage. That's the force of the passage. He does so that He can wake us up to the reality of what true salvation, true saving faith really is, and that's really what He's teaching us here.

To understand this passage I want us to consider two basic points. The first is, what this text does not teach. The second is what this text does teach. Those are our two major outline points. As we look at what the text does teach we're going to try to answer the question a little more carefully and thoughtfully, "Why does the Lord use such inflammatory language?"

### 1) What Does the Text Not Teach?

There are two things this text does not teach. We could add to that but certainly these two it does not teach:

#### A) It Does Not Teach the Roman Catholic Doctrine of Transubstantiation.

Unequivocally, emphatically, it does not teach that at all. That doctrine is a perversion of the passage. That doctrine is a heretical perversion of the Gospel of Christ. It obscures God's glory rather than enhances it. This passage teaches something glorious about the nature of saving faith and the glory of what Jesus Christ has done on the cross. It teaches that the way that you live is by believing. That as Augustine said, "If you believe, you have eaten," we're going to see that as we look at the passage. It does not teach the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, which is the doctrine that says that when you take the Lord's Supper, they believe that the body and blood of Christ, through the prayer of the priest, that the elements are transformed into the literal physical body and blood of Christ. So that in reality, every time the priest prays the prayer, Jesus Christ is re-sacrificed on the altar. It contradicts the whole tenor of scripture. Verse after verse after verse, which teaches once and for all an offering has been made. Christ is not brought down from Heaven. That's why they worship the hosts. They really believe in the wafer and they worship the wafer.

One of the reasons I think the Lord speaks in these kind of difficult ways is that hard words have a way of hardening and softening at the same time. It hardens the unbelieving. It hardens those who want God to be manageable so they can have a system. "I can just eat this and drink this. I don't have to give my heart to Christ." "Give me some works that I can do." But hard words also soften the hearts of the elect, those who the Lord is working in. They soften their hearts. It does not teach the Roman Catholic doctrine. I'm going to show why in just a moment. It doesn't teach that.

#### B) It Does Not Teach That We Must Physically Eat Jesus' Flesh and Drink Jesus' Blood.

Secondly, really related to that, it does not teach that we must physically eat Jesus' flesh and physically drink Jesus' blood.

That's what it doesn't teach, now the reasons. Let me explain why the text clearly does not teach that. The first reason is the way that we use language. This is just basic, common sense communication that the average three or four-year-old figures out as they learn to communicate. One of the rules of communication is that when someone says something that the literal sense that is impossible, then we automatically, intuitively, interpret it figuratively. That's something we've learned to do. If I were to say to someone, "You're driving me up the wall." Now, you don't see me driving a car up the wall. You know intuitively that I'm not saying something like that. Or if I were to say, "I was talking to my boss and he really chewed me out. He chewed me up one side and down the other." You wouldn't start looking for teeth marks. You know, intuitively, that is a figure of speech. Jesus often speaks in figures of speech. I mean, He says, "I am the door of the sheepfold." "I am the true vine." He's not literally a vine. Everyone knows that. When He says, "You must eat My flesh and drink My blood," He is using powerful, metaphorical language. It was impossible for the people there to have really considered, "Is He going to start feeding us His flesh right now?" Of course they knew that wasn't true, but they were stumbling over it, just like those who propose transubstantiation still stumble over it. We know the rules of language insist on a figurative interpretation.

One of the reasons too, if you just stop and step back from this, even the Pagan who hears this for the first time, "You must eat My flesh and drink my blood," knows intuitively that that is an impossible thing for God to literally, physically mean. Why? Because cannibalism is offensive to the most ungodly. Intuitively we know it's wrong. And then when you add to the fact that Jesus is speaking predominantly to a Jewish audience, John, in writing this, is recounting it for a Jewish audience. It is triply impossible because they were forbidden to even drink blood period, or to eat meat that had blood in it. So if they're interpreting correctly, they should feel the weight of it, the force of it, and then put it in context of what they know about the Lord and how He speaks.

So the way we use language makes it clear that they should see it metaphorically, but now let me just show you the plain and clear teaching of the passage which nails it down beyond a shadow of a doubt. Scripture interprets scripture, and one of the ways we do that is to just look at context. What does Jesus mean when He says that?

***John 6:60 ~ “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?” 61 But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, “Does this cause you to stumble?”***

Literally, “Does this cause you to be scandalized?”

***John 6:62 ~ What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?***

Look what He says about what I’ve just said:

***John 6:63 ~ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.***

Do you see that in context? He’s saying right there, “It’s the spiritual meaning of what I’m talking about. Don’t stumble at this.”

Now let’s consider the broad context of the Gospel of John. The words that came out of his mouth were, in Verse 53, ***...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.*** So eating flesh and drinking blood equals eternal life.

Now what does Jesus say throughout the Book of John? What does the Gospel of John teach as the way to have eternal life? It says throughout, from John 1- John 21, “Believe, and you shall have eternal life.” John 20:31, the purpose statement of the book, ***...these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*** In John 1:7, John the Baptist has come ***...as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him.*** He’s come as a witness to that. He says in Verse 12:

***John 1:12 ~ But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,***

In John 3:15, how do you come to have eternal life? What did Jesus say?

***John 3:14 ~ As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.***

And then that most famous verse in all of the Bible:

***John 3:16 ~ “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.***

The verb ‘believe’, ‘pisteuo’ in Greek, occurs 240 times in the New Testament. 94 of them are in the Book of John. Over 40% of the occurrences of the word believe, in the verb form, are in this Gospel. This is a summons to life by believing. You have it three times in John 1, four times in John 2, six times in John 3, seven in John 4, seven in John 5, and nine times in John 6, our present chapter. Believe. That’s the broad context. So he’s saying, “Believe and be saved.” This is the message. “Believe and be saved.” “Believe and live.” Now, in one passage he says, “Eat, and drink, and live.”

Now let’s look at the passage a little more closely. Look with me at John 6 at the immediate context in Verse 27. Now remember the crowds had eaten the bread the day before when Jesus fed the 5,000. They find Jesus and He says in John 6:26, ... ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.*** “You haven’t come to Me rightly because you saw the signs of Who I am and want My salvation. No, you just want a physical satisfaction. You want more bread.”

Look what He says in Verse 27: ***Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life,...*** There is a kind of food which endures to eternal life, ...***which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.***” They’re catching on a little bit, not much, but a little bit. They say, “Hey, what do we do so that we may work the works of God? We want that food you’re talking about. How do we partake of this food which will result in eternal life?” Look what Jesus says in Verse 29:

***John 6:29 ~ Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”***

***John 6:35 ~ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.***

Do you see this? This is way before He actually says, “My flesh and my blood. Eat and drink.” He’s saying here in Verse 35, “If you come to Me it means you won’t be hungry. Believing in Me means you won’t thirst.” So coming and believing means that if you’re hungry and thirsty what should you do? Come and believe! In fact, He makes it even more clear. Look at Verse 54, which is in the middle of Jesus repeating and emphasizing, “Eat My flesh, drink My blood.” What is He getting at here?

***John 6:54 ~ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.***

That comes 14 verses after another. Look at Verse 40. This is a parallel statement.

***John 6:40 ~ For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”***

If you put those side by side, He says, “Eat My flesh, drink My blood, you will have eternal life, and I will raise you up on the last day. Believe on Me and you will have eternal life and I will raise you up on the last day.” The first statement is the figurative, true meaning, and it sets the tone for all that comes after it. We interpret it in context. He’s not talking about some mystical power to the Lord’s Supper. He’s not talking about some supernatural, life-giving power to physical bread. In fact, that was exactly the problem with the Jews that He’s talking to, and their forefathers. Really what John is doing is showing how the Jews in Jesus’ day are committing the same atrocity that the Jews in Moses’ day did. The Jews in Moses’ day received manna from Heaven. God fed them bread out of Heaven for 40 years. Every day they got up and there was bread out of Heaven. What was the purpose of that? The purpose of that wasn’t so they would get used to eating the physical bread. The purpose of that, Deuteronomy 8:3 says, “The reason the Lord tested you and fed you with bread from Heaven was so that you might learn and know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that precedes from the mouth of God.” The physical bread was to teach them a spiritual reality. The reason they died without receiving salvation was because they were preoccupied with the physical reality and missed the spiritual reality behind it. The Jews in Jesus’ day are doing the same thing. They were preoccupied with the bread and now they’re even tasting of the Living Bread through hearing Him teach, seeing His miracles. They are in the presence of plenty dying. How many still die because they think that there is something magical about the physical element and have been missing the spiritual reality. The text does not teach transubstantiation. The text does not teach that we must literally, physically eat Jesus’ flesh and blood.

## 2) What Does the Text Teach?

### A) The Nature of Saving Faith.

That’s what’s being taught here is the nature of saving faith in the most powerful, image-laden way. Jesus is communicating to people who are not believing what true, saving faith looks like. He does it through this image of eating and drinking.

What's the nature of saving faith? In Verse 40, "If you believe in Him you will have eternal life and I will raise you up on the last day." In Verse 53, "If you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will have eternal life and I will raise you up on the last day." He's explaining, expounding what means to believe. What it means to believe is like eating and drinking, and the picture is really one of the digestion process. I mean, think about it, you have undoubtedly had this experience, and when you have little kids they're more apt to do this. You eat something, you put something in your mouth, and then you just spit it out. As we get to be adults we don't do that as much.

I had one time where I wanted to do that pretty badly, about 5 or 6 years ago. I was at a party and the light was a little dim. It was somebody's birthday party and they had a little pie-like thing there. I cut myself a tiny piece of it. I should have known that something was wrong because it was this little, tiny piece of pie. I picked it up and I put it on my plate and I was convinced it was like an apple, possibly apricot kind of pie. There was a little piece of fruit on top of it. I put that bite in my mouth, a healthy bite of this little, small piece of pie, and it was brie. I don't like brie on a good day. But when I'm expecting apple pie, and it was brie, oh man. I swallowed it, thanks be to God, but that was a terrible experience.

The point I was getting was at is that you can put something in your mouth and not receive the benefit of it by spitting it out. How do you get the life-giving power of food? What happens? You take it into your mouth and you chew it, and you begin breaking it down. Your saliva is secreted and it breaks it down more. It goes into the stomach where stomach acid is. God has wired the body so that stomach acid fills the stomach and breaks the food down more. It goes into the large intestine, the small intestine, continually being broken down until finally, deep in the bowels of the person, the nutrients are released into the blood system so it can be carried to the cell and give the body life. It's this process of taking it all the way into yourself, breaking it down, so that the life-giving power becomes yours. That's a picture of saving faith. You don't just taste Jesus, you take Him into yourself. True saving faith is not an intellectual ascent, it is a submission of the heart. It is a coming and personal union with Christ. That's what He's getting at in Verses 56. He says:

***John 6:56 ~ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.***



“When you have saving faith and you take Me in, I abide in you, and you abide in Me.” There is a co-inherence. This is why the scripture speaks so often of the Christian as the person who is in Christ. We’ve been translated from the kingdom of darkness, delivered to a totally new kingdom, and it’s in relationship to His Son.

It’s a living, vital relationship. So that’s the picture that He’s getting at. This helps explain verses like Hebrews 6:4-5, where it talks about those who tasted of the heavenly gift and of the Spirit of God, who have tasted of the Word of God, but have fallen away. What happened? They just tasted. They didn’t become true partakers of Christ. It’s a dangerous thing to taste the Holy things of God and spit it out, because the author of Hebrews says that you can harden yourself to the point where there’s no return. So the message is to take Christ in, and Jesus is beckoning these people in the most attention-getting way He can, saying, “You must stop trifling with Me. You must stop coming to see the show. You must bow your face before Me and receive Me as the Bread which alone can save your soul.” That’s what He’s saying, and He says it in a way that is surely opening the hearts of some, even as He says it, even as they wrestle with it. How many went away troubled by those words, and yet the Spirit of God opened their eyes to see?

In the first point, the nature of saving faith, I said it’s personal. The second point is fundamental. I didn’t give you either one of those points. Basically, you have to receive Him yourself. You can’t eat for somebody else. If you’re starving to death and your loved one is starving to death, if you get food, you can’t eat for them. They must eat for themselves. So it’s personal. The nature of saving faith is personal. It’s interchanged with Christ. It’s fundamental. It goes to the very depth of your being. That’s where that digestion is—taking Him into the depth of your soul. That’s the nature of saving faith.

## B) The Extraordinary Offense of the Cross.

The second thing it teaches is the extraordinary offense of the cross. Before we get into unpacking that, I want to come back to the question: Why the inflammatory and controversial imagery? Why such an incredibly hard word? “Eat My flesh and drink My blood.” I mean that was stunning, jarring language, but God has a way of doing that from time to time. Think about Luke 13, where the crowd comes to Jesus. He’s been teaching. They say, “Have You heard what happened, about the atrocity that happened?” Pontius Pilate had sent his Roman soldiers into the temple complex. They desecrated the sanctuary of the Holy God, and they went after Jewish zealots who had taken refuge in the temple thinking they would be safe there, and Pilate’s soldiers went in and cut them down at the altar so that their

blood, the blood of human beings, mingled with the blood of the sacrifices. This is an appalling thing. This is the kind of thing a Jew tears his clothes over. They tell Jesus and they're expecting some kind of indignation over it. And truthfully, that was an indignant thing and God is indignant over it. What He does at that moment is something that is equally jarring and jaw-dropping. Do you know what He says?

***Luke 13:2 ~ And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? 3 I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.***

He totally takes it into a different direction, and then He doesn't stop there. He turns the screws tighter. He says:

***Luke 13:4 ~ Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."***

He knows what happened is appalling. He doesn't even bother saying that though. But we know when we interpret it in the context of who God is that this is what would be true. He's saying, "It was appalling, but compared to the most appalling thing going on right now, it's nothing. Do you know what the most appalling thing going on right now? It's that you people are still alive. That's the most appalling thing. You are wicked sinners, and you are still alive. Marvel at that." You and I deserve hell now, and the most appalling thing is that we are still alive. So He takes these opportunities to shake us. We forget. We have a low view of sin and a high view of self. We think He judges by our intentions, not by our actions. The folly of it is that we imagine like Psalm 50:21 says: "You imagined that I was altogether like you, but I'm not." It is a miracle of grace and compassion that He doesn't destroy sinners every moment. That's how bad sin is.

So He takes that opportunity to slap the crowd in the most loving and compassionate way He could, because that's what they needed to hear more than anything else in the world. That was the most loving and compassionate thing that he could do. If someone's sleepwalking off a cliff, the most compassionate thing you can do is slap them and tackle them, and knock them to the ground. But what if we say, "No, I don't want to offend you. You're sleep walking. I don't want to overstep my bounds. Now you're dead, but at least I didn't offend you." God is much more loving and kind than that. But the problem is we don't see reality.

Everything is upside down. He does it to show us and to wake us from our slumber.

He says inflammatory things like that also to teach us. When you come to hard words of the Lord, there are two things that people do. The normal thing that people do is they run from them and judge God for them. And many people look at this passage 'Eat my flesh and drink my blood' and say, "I don't want to deal with any more of that." The Lord says in Luke 13, "Marvel that you're still alive." They turn and walk away from that, and they walk away from life, and they confirm themselves in death. He not only gets our attention, but He also teaches us.

One of the most amazing hard words of God was what He said to Abraham in Genesis 22:2. Abraham waited 25 years for a son. The Lord told him, "I'm going to make you a great nation." Abraham is 75 years old and his wife is 65. She's barren and she can't have children. They've been living childless all this time, and the Lord tells them at 75 and doesn't give them a son until he's 100. I think I'd say, "Lord, why didn't You wait until I was 99?" Well, the Lord's not interested in what you and I want. He's interested in manifesting His glory and giving us more than what we want, but instead giving us what's best. Abraham in heaven is not going to be saying, "I wish You'd told me at 99." He'd say, "I learned a whole lot through Him telling me at 75. I saw His glory in a way I wouldn't have seen it before. God always does what is best." He's 100 years old when his son's born. Isaac's name means laughter. One of the reasons is that he brought laughter to the whole family. Look at the laughter of holy joy. Can you believe what God has done for us?

Isaac is 10 or 11 years old, maybe 12, and then the hard word comes to Abraham.

***Genesis 22:2 ~ He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."***

That's all the Lord said to him. That is a hard word. And if we're honest, there's a sense in which we look at things like that and we feel a little bit indignant, because we just can't believe God would treat us that way. And when you do feel that way, that's a time to get on your knees and say, "Lord, teach me." Abraham didn't have all the revelation that we have. He didn't have a Bible. He didn't have the written Word. He didn't have all the commandments laid out. He just had a few direct revelations of God where he knew something about God. But he interpreted that hard word in light of the context of what God had already told him, and this is the

key. When you come to a hard word, interpret it in light of what else God has said. Scripture interprets Scripture. The hard words are interpreted by the other words around them. What did Abraham know? The Bible tells us in Genesis 22 that the next morning he got up early and he took off. He goes three day's journey. He takes Isaac up there, and he goes through all the agony of that. He gets ready to bring the knife down probably with tears streaming down his face, wondering what God is doing. He's ready to kill him, and the Lord says, "No Abraham. I didn't intend for you to kill him. Don't touch the boy." Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham interpreted that command in light of God's fuller revelation. He knew that God had promised him irrevocably that *through Isaac, your descendants will be named. Isaac is going to be the one through whom the nation is going to come, through whom the seed, the Messiah is going to come. So if You tell me to kill him, I know Your Word is faithful and that You're going to raise him from the dead.* That's the only way he could lift up that knife. He knew. He interpreted it within the context. The Lord never intended to have him do that. And later He shows us in His word that you're never to think about offering your child or killing someone, but the Lord gave him a hard word at that time in redemptive history, because He wanted to teach him something, and what He wanted to teach him was this: It's the nature of saving faith again. If you want to have Christ, you must lose everything else. Nothing can compete with true salvation. "Isaac cannot stand between me and you, Abraham. You must be willing to let him go so that you might have Me."

The reality is that when you release, and you open your hands, and you give God everything, this is what it takes to come to Christ. This is what Jesus was saying when He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who found the pearl of great price and he goes and sells all that he has so that he might have that pearl." It's all or nothing. You've got to have Christ. Nothing else matters. It's unconditional. It's taught there in Genesis 22. That hard word opens up our eyes to see that this is how salvation happens, and it's urgent that we see that.

Well, what's happening here in John 6? Jesus is using offensive language. We noted that He said three times, "***You must eat My flesh and drink My blood.***" A fourth time, He said, "***My flesh is true food and My blood is true drink.***" If you want to live, you must partake. Flesh and blood in Hebrew, just like English, are a figure of speech for saying real humanity, and the separation of those is the image of his death. What He's saying is, "For you to live, you must receive the benefits of My death." He was saying something that was so utterly appalling. It was more appalling to them than it is to us, which is hard to imagine, but it was. He was saying something that was utterly appalling and offensive. Why? Because it was the closest thing that He could say to reveal how utterly and completely appalling

and offensive would be His death at the cross. Nothing in all history approaches how awful an event that was, how utterly and completely appalling that is. It's jarring, striking imagery. I think the idea is you eat and you chew. He was saying, "Listen, for you to be saved, for you to have life, My flesh is going to have to be chewed up. My blood is going to have to be spilled." It is the most offensive thing.

Think about what happens at the cross. We read from Psalm 22 earlier. "The bulls of Bashan have surrounded me. Their horns are coming at me. The dogs have encircled me." The picture is someone who is surrounded by wild animals, lions, wanting to devour his flesh. Think about how terrifying it would be to be surrounded by animals that want to tear you apart. How appalling that scene is. How offensive. I remember seeing a few years back, a pack of hyenas surrounding a rhinoceros and her baby, and they ended up getting the baby rhinoceros, and I was appalled. If you have some grace in you, you're pulling for the right side here. Those nasty hyenas. It was appalling. How much more when a human being has something like that happen? How much more when the most noble, the most lovely, the most righteous, the most Holy human being that ever walked the face of this earth is so unfairly treated the way He was? He was chewed up by our sins. He must be devoured by the wrath of God for you and me to be saved. The most appalling thing beyond our wildest imagination must happen. The Lord of Life who created and sustains and upholds all things by the Word of His power, the Lord of Life must enter death.

The authors of Scripture strain under the weight of this incredible paradox. The apostle Paul, thinking about the cross, knowing the cross, said, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." For a Jew to be any Jew, to be hanged on a tree is to be accursed and abandoned by God. You read through the narratives of the Old Testament, and David commends them for taking Saul's body down. He was hanged. He did a good thing to take his body down. Saul was a sinner. It's not fitting for a human being to be hanged from a tree. It's not fitting for a human being to be crucified on a cross. Romans would not suffer the indignity of that. If you were a Roman citizen, you could not be crucified. That's why Paul was beheaded. He was a Roman citizen. You can be beheaded, but no, not the indignity of being nailed to a cross. No, that's too horrid for any Roman citizen. To the Jew, hanged on a tree? It's unthinkable. Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree, and yet the One who was the most noble, the most blessed of God, the One who pleased the Father so much, He sits there hanging on a cross for our sins.

D. A. Carson says, *“If the disciples find Jesus’ claims and even His language offensive, what will they think when they see Jesus on the cross? That is the supreme scandal. However offensive the linguistic expression of eating flesh and drinking blood may be, how much more offensive is the crucifixion of a Messiah? The very idea is outrageous, bordering on blasphemous obscenity, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, yet this stands at the very heart of God’s self-disclosure. The moment of Jesus’ greatest degradation and shame is the moment of His glorification, the path of His return to the glory He had with the Father before the world began. The hour when the Servant of the Lord is despised and rejected by men, that hour when He is pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities, is the very portal to the moment when He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Such is the mysterious, glorious plan of God.*

What has to happen in these moments is we have to see the appalling nature of the cross, the appalling nature of the image, and realize that what we should be appalled at is our own sin. It’s like David when Nathan came to him and told him the story. Imagine a man who has one lamb and his neighbor has hundreds. The wealthy neighbor has a guest come to his house and rather than kill one of his own lambs, he goes and he gets the lamb from his neighbor who has only one, who sits at his table in his children’s arms. They feed him from the table. He’s like a family member. He takes that lamb, he kills it, and he gives it to his guest. David says, “That man shall surely die for what he has done.” And Nathan says, “You are the man.” What this text says to us is that something so appalling must happen that it’s beyond eating flesh and drinking blood. It’s the perfect Son of God giving Himself, and the Scripture says to you and me: *You are the man*. For one sinner to be saved required this incredible almost blasphemous event, but it’s the most glorious event in the whole universe, the most glorious moment.

When the Son of God comes into the world, He knows the only way that we can be saved is for Him to bear God’s wrath, and He’s turned over by the Father at the cross. One who should have been worshipped every moment of His life, revered, praised, celebrated, throughout His whole life was rejected and sneered at. Even His own brothers mocked Him. His half brothers. His people who should have received Him, scorned Him. They hated and despised Him. Psalm 22:6 says ***...I am a worm and not a man...*** That ultimately was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He was completely rejected by God there on the cross, crying out, ***“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*** There, under the wrath of God, bearing the weight of our sins, hanging on a tree, the most violent mistreatment by a human being, the most brutal and vicious assault, the most relentless attack ever endured, was by the man

Jesus Christ, and it went on and on throughout His life, climaxing in the cross, all because that was the only way you and I could be saved.

So in this moment when Jesus opens up this metaphor, He is unveiling His glory. “This is what it takes to save you. This is what it takes. There’s no other way. My blood and My flesh. You must partake of that in the deepest way possible. You must turn from every other trust, every other confidence, and you must embrace completely the reality that this is what is true of Me. I needed that.”

I remember hearing about the first screening of the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, which certainly had some deficiencies, I think, in it, but Mel Gibson attempted to portray the physical agony of Christ. He doesn’t portray the Spiritual agony, which was even greater, but the physical agony. In Hollywood, all these major movie stars had gathered together to watch the movie, and in the middle of the movie when Jesus is being beaten and mistreated by the Jews, and then by the Romans, and whipped mercilessly, and bearing His cross, this woman gets up and yells, “Why? Why are they doing this to Him?” Just seeing the physical reality of it overwhelms her. You are the man. You’re the reason. You and I are the reason. Our sin is so offensive to a Holy God. It was so far beyond what we could imagine, and if you doubt that, just look at the cross. That’s what it took. Not too much. Not too little. Exactly what was required. And praise God for such a glorious Savior who would leave glory, the place where He’s worshiped by angels, and would come and live a life as a man for 33 years, being mistreated, disrespected, dishonored, hated, and scorned, culminating in a moment of abandonment on the cross, so that He might save you and me. And because of that, God has raised Him from the dead and given Him a Name that’s above every other Name, that at the Name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth, and those under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

That is why we sing about the blood of Jesus. *There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.* There is no other way to be made right with God, but praise God there is a way that you can come today into the very throne room of the Living God, but you cannot come clinging to your own righteousness. You cannot come clinging to your own dignity. You must come humbly upon the blood stained path of Jesus Christ. There is no other way. But He, in this passage, is inviting all to come. ***I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me will not hunger. He who believes in Me will not thirst.*** What would keep you from coming to Him today?

Let's pray together...

*Our Father, we thank You for giving Your own dear Son, doing what You would not let Abraham do, and giving so much more precious a reality, the eternal Son of God. Father, help those in this room who have not yet believed, who have not yet partaken of Christ, to stop resisting and to bow the knee to Him as their Lord and Savior. Grant them repentance. Grant them faith. Help them not just merely taste of these things, but to receive Him as their Lord and Master right now. Father, help all of us to stand in awe of You, to treasure the glorious gift of Christ, to marvel, to never stop marveling, that so high a price was paid for such an unworthy, sinful person as we, Lord. Father, help us. Help us to be constrained by Your love and Your grace. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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