

“Partaking of Christ”
John 6:47-60
(Preached at Trinity, May 22, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapter 6** is a wonderful testimony to God's sovereign grace in the redemption of His people.
 - A. They are chosen of God, given to Christ before the world began
John 6:37 NAU - "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."
 - B. Jesus was sent of the Father to redeem those chosen of the Father.
John 6:39 NAU - "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."
 - C. These chosen people are taught of God, their hearts being opened to receive their Savior. **Verse 45** is testimony to the New Covenant revealed in Jeremiah 31
John 6:45 NAU - "It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me."
Jeremiah 31:34 NAU - "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."
2. **Chapter 6** opened with the feeding of the 5000. That evening Jesus sent them away and departed to pray. With this miraculous feeding upon their minds, the next day the multitude came seeking Christ. Like the woman at the well who wanted the living water so she would no longer have to make daily trips to the well, these people had their sights fixed upon a daily provision of bread.
3. They called attention to the daily provision of Manna provided to Israel in the wilderness.
John 6:31 NAS - "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'"
 - A. Again, their minds were fixed upon the miracle of Jesus feeding them the day before. Wouldn't it be wonderful if they could receive such provision every day? Could Jesus do that for them?
 - B. Manna was supernatural, and it was sent from heaven, but it had to be repeated the next day. It did not provide lasting nourishment.
4. Jesus turned their eyes upon the true Bread from Heaven. The food they ate in the wilderness was not the food of eternal life. They ate the manna provided, but they eventually died.
John 6:32-33 NAU - "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. ³³ "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."

5. Of course, they were unable to receive these words. Jesus kept taking them deeper and deeper. Not only did Jesus *give* the bread of life. He *is* the bread of life.
John 6:34-35 NAU - "Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."
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."
6. The Jews could not receive this word. Jesus is referring to Himself, but it was beyond their comprehension. How could he offer them His own flesh and how could they partake of it?
John 6:51-53 NAU - "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."
John 6:60 NAS - "Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard *this* said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"

- I. What did Jesus mean by eating His flesh and drinking His blood?
- A. Many hold that Jesus is speaking of the Lord's Supper.
1. This is consistent with Jesus' words in the synoptics
Matthew 26:26-28 NAU - "While they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." ²⁷ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."
 - a. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John does not mention the institution of the Lord's Supper. Some conclude that this must be John's substitute.
 - b. This account takes place in a Jewish synagogue long before the Last Supper which wouldn't occur for another year.
 2. The long-held position of the Roman Catholic Church is that this passage is referring to the Sacrament of Communion. They take it literally. They hold that in Transubstantiation the bread and the wine literally become the body and blood of Christ, thus the communicant is literally partaking of the body and blood of Christ.
 We reject this teaching.
 Our Confession speaks clearly on this: LBC Chapter 30, Paragraph 6 –
 "That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ's body and blood, commonly called transubstantiation, by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason, overthroweth the nature of the ordinance, and hath been, and is, the cause of manifold superstitions, yea, of gross idolatries."

- 3 Leon Morris says there are strong reasons against this referring to the Lord's Supper.¹
- a. First of all, there is the setting. Jesus is speaking in the synagogue at Capernaum to a crowd that includes opponents and lukewarm disciples. It is difficult to hold that John wants us to think that to such an audience Jesus gave teaching about a sacrament whose institution lay well into the future.
 - b. Second, there is the strength of language. Jesus says eating his flesh and drinking His blood are the means of eternal life. The statement is unqualified. There is no reference to faith or repentance or conversion. Surely, Jesus would not have attached the act of partaking of the Lord's Supper to eternal life.
- John 6:53 NAU** - "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves."

4 The Lord's Supper is important. Paul gave dreadful consequences for partaking of it unworthily. But we should not attach to it a meritorious meaning whereby it becomes a means of eternal life.

- B. Jesus is referring to the giving of Himself for the salvation of His people
1. Eating His flesh and drinking His blood are essential for salvation. Although Jesus is not describing the Lord's Supper, we must not miss the figurative elements Jesus is setting before us. One cannot help but visualize the sacrificial image of His death and spilled blood. Jesus has shed His blood as our substitute apart from which we cannot have life. By faith we must be joined with Him in His death so that we might have life.
 2. To partake of the flesh of Christ is to receive Him and partake of Him to the fullest as food for our soul, the spiritual nourishment needed to bring life to those dead in trespasses and sins. It isn't enough just to taste of Him. We have to receive Him to the fullest.
 3. To partake of the blood of Christ is to accept the blood of Christ alone as a sacrifice of atonement providing full pardon of sin – but not in a general sense. We must receive Christ personally. The blood of Christ has accomplished full pardon for MY sin. We must fully, personally embrace or partake of the blood of Christ.
 4. We must partake of Christ fully. In this sense, we must consume Him. We must become united with Him. We must become one with Him. This is made possible by faith, by resting upon the perfections of His work as our Redeemer.
 5. Matthew Henry said the spiritual eating and drinking of Christ points to four truths.
First, It implies an *appetite* for Christ. This spiritual eating and drinking begins with *hungering* and *thirsting*, earnest and importunate desires after Christ, not willing to take up with anything short of an interest in him.

¹ Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 311–312.

Second, An *application* of Christ to ourselves. Meat *looked upon* will not nourish us, but meat *fed upon*, and so made *our own*, and as it were *one with us*. We must so accept of Christ as to appropriate him to ourselves; not theoretically, but really and personally.

Third, It points to a *delight* in Christ and his salvation. The doctrine of Christ crucified must be *meat and drink* to us, most pleasant and delightful. We must feast upon the dainties of the *New Testament in the blood of Christ*,

Fourth, A *derivation of nourishment* from him and a dependence upon him for the support and comfort of our spiritual life, and the strength, growth, and vigour of the new man. To *feed upon Christ* is to do all *in his name*, in union with him, and by virtue drawn from him; it is to live upon him as we do upon our meat.²

II. This is a hard saying for many

A. The Jews were perplexed over the words of Christ

John 6:52 - "Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"

John 6:60 - "Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"

1. Years ago, F.F. Bruce wrote a book titled, "The Hard Sayings of Christ." He wrote, "It is all too easy to believe in a Jesus who is largely a construction of our own imagination—an inoffensive person no one would really trouble to crucify. But the Jesus whom we meet in the Gospels, far from being an inoffensive person, gave offense right and left. Even His loyal followers found him, at times, thoroughly disconcerting. He upset all established notions of religious propriety."³
 - a. Of the 70 chapters dealing with the hard sayings of Jesus, chapter 1 deals with eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus.
 - b. We might call this the chief because this is the way it is described to us: "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"
 - c. It seems so incredible that Jesus would teach on eating His flesh.
2. The early Christians had several accusations levied against them.
 - a. First, they were called atheists because they refused to bow before the multiple gods of the Romans, and chiefly they refused to bow before the emperor.
 - b. Second, they were accused of immorality, because it was assumed there was something illicit taking place behind closed doors during their love feasts.
 - c. Third, they were accused of cannibalism because it was assumed they ate human flesh and drank human blood. This was the result of the literal interpretation of our Lord's words.

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1955.

³ Bruce, F.F., *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1983), Page 15.

3. The Jews were unable to make the connection between the physical symbols and the spiritual realities. Whether Jesus was speaking of a new birth, or living water, or the Bread of Life, it was beyond their capacity to understand. They couldn't understand the significance of circumcision, of the feasts, or of the sacrificial system.
 4. Jesus told them of the spiritual reality of the true Bread of Life and they complained:
John 6:52 NAU - "Then the Jews *began* to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us *His* flesh to eat?"
 5. Jesus was and is a stumbling block for many
John 6:61 NAU - "But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble?"
- B. There are many things in the Word of God that we may consider hard sayings, difficult for us to comprehend and understand.
1. The difference between the faith of the believer and the unbelief of this world is infinite.
 2. There are some things that are truly difficult to understand; things which cause us to study hard and carefully compare Scripture with Scripture. In the end, however, the hard things are to be received by faith.
 3. The problem with most people isn't so much that there are difficult things but that there are plain things. Even when the difficult things become plain they still will not receive them.
As F.F. Bruce says, "The better we understand them, the harder they are to take."⁴

Conclusion:

1. Have you partaken of Christ? Have you received Him to the fullest? Have you rested upon Him alone for salvation? Too many people are enamored by the good life of Christ or of the religion that takes His name, but have you actually received Him?
A.W. Pink wrote:
"I may look at bread and admire it; I may philosophize about bread and analyze it; I may talk about bread and eulogize its quality; I may handle bread and be assured of its excellency—but unless I eat it, I shall not be nourished by it. All of this is equally true with the spiritual bread, Christ. Knowing the truth, speculating about it, talking about it, contending for it, will do me no good. I must receive it into my heart."⁵
2. Do you have a hunger and thirst for Christ? The Gospel is preached to multitudes. The table is spread with the richness of Christ. But you have to have an appetite to partake of Him or you will perish in your sin.
The problem with the Jews is they had a desire for physical food. They understood physical hunger and desired to have their appetite satisfied. But they could not comprehend their true spiritual need. They heard the preaching of Jesus. They saw His miracles. He fed over 5000 of them, but they did not see their true need for Him.
3. Jesus alone will satisfy. Jesus alone will provide the true nourishment that leads to salvation. He must be received by faith alone. Jesus declares that He alone can provide salvation.
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."

⁴ Bruce, F.F., *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1983), Page 17.

⁵ Arthur Walkington Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1923–1945), 343.