



Food For Hungry Souls
John 6:52-59

52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?"

53 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.

54 "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

55 "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.

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 feeds on Me will live because of Me.

58 "This is the bread which came down from heaven -- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

59 These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

The Western nations are passing through a time of terrible famine. I know that some of you are thinking, "what are you talking about?" Obesity is our national blight. Didn't you see the film "**Super-Size Me?**" We have so much food, this is the one portion of the world where we are all preoccupied with losing weight, as opposed to gaining it. But the famine, I'm talking about is not a lack of food for our bodies. We still have plenty of that. But kids are you *just a body*? No you are a body and a soul, aren't you? Now for the first time since I went off Atkins, I had a Pizza, it was delicious. It fed my body. But did it feed my soul? No. Physical food, even the foods we nickname "soul food" can't feed our souls. It's the souls and not the bodies of Americans and Europeans that aren't getting fed.

What is food for your soul? Well in these verses, Jesus tells us that HE ALONE is life-giving food for our Souls. And that unless we eat and drink him we aren't feeding our souls. But if we are going to correctly understand how to feed our souls the first thing we must do, is figure out what Jesus *doesn't mean, because it is very easy to make a serious error here.*

You can see that from the fact that the people Jesus originally spoke these words to in the synagogue in Capernaum couldn't figure out what Jesus was talking about, and began quarreling and arguing about it. They couldn't understand because Jesus is using a parable here. Parables are "*earthly stories with heavenly meanings*" In parables Jesus taught spiritual truths using everyday things, for instance in teaching about preaching the gospel and how men receive it, Jesus used the image of sowing seeds in different kinds of soil. Here Jesus uses bodily actions, eating and drinking, in order to teach a spiritual truth about believing.

Now the thing about parables is that while they make spiritual truths more understandable to spiritual men, men who have been born again and have had the eyes of their hearts opened, they make things even harder to understand for unregenerate men:

Matthew 13:10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

11 He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

12 "For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

13 "Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

14 "And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive;

15 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'

16 "But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;

Like Nicodemus was in John 3 they are hung up on literal interpretation of the parable. Nicodemus could understand the image of born again - how could a man be born a second time? He couldn't get beyond physical to spiritual birth. These peoples in Capernaum do the same thing: "*How can he give us his flesh to eat?*" The reason of course is that they fail to see the spiritual truth, behind the physical reference. So they are offended at the idea of cannibalism, even if it wasn't a repulsive idea, it was against the dietary restrictions in the Torah. Some of the people here may not have been able to list every single animal they weren't allowed to eat, but I'm sure they all knew that people weren't on the menu. The ante is upped even higher when Jesus speaks of drinking His blood, which was expressly forbidden (Lev. 17:10-14). Now they are really offended.

The sad thing is that many have repeated the essential error of these Jews and assumed that Jesus really is talking about literally eating him. That for instance is the view of the Roman Catholic church which says in the Lord's Supper the bread, literally turns into the flesh of Christ and the Wine literally becomes his blood, and that therefore everyone who takes part in what they call the sacrifice of the Mass is eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood. "***Fallen man, in interpreting the Bible has an unhappy aptitude for turning food into poison.***" – JC Ryle

Jesus is not talking about literal eating and drinking here, and he is not talking about the Lord's Supper. There are many reasons why we can see this is the case, I'm going to give you just three for the sake of time.

1) This was before the Lord's Supper was instituted. Do we think Christ would teach on something he hadn't instituted or that it was impossible to be saved prior to the institution of the Lord's Supper?

2) To take the literal view is to put a bodily act between the soul of man and salvation. To say that in order to be saved, my body must eat something is to mix up the physical and the spiritual. The only things without which we cannot be saved are repentance and faith, not the Lord's Supper.

The thief on the cross, for instance, never partook of either sacrament, and yet Jesus responded to that man's declaration of faith with the words: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)

3) The eating and drinking Jesus speaks of are absolutely unqualified, he says do it and you have eternal life. If Christ is speaking of literally eating Lord's supper, it would admit to heaven thousands who have gone to the Lord's Supper without a shred of faith. Judas, for instance, took part in the first Lord's Supper, but it is clear that he never had the gift of eternal life. Let us remember as Ryle put it, "We may eat the Lord's Supper, and yet not eat and drink Christ's body and blood. We may eat and drink Christ's body and blood, and yet not eat the Lord's Supper."

What does it mean then? Well, that isn't a great mystery. Throughout this section Jesus has been talking about the absolute importance of BELIEVING IN HIM for ETERNAL LIFE and has been using eating and drinking as a METAPHOR for belief:

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

John 6:35 "And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

John 6:47 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life."

The eating and drinking here is in the Aorist tense, denoting a once for all action. It is not repeated eating and drinking that is necessary, as is the case with the Lord's Supper.

Flesh and Blood refers not to the sacrament but to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and the eating and drinking without which we do not have life means the reception of Christ's sacrifice which takes place when a man believes on Christ crucified for salvation. As soon as we see our own guilt and sinfulness, and the atonement of Christ on the Cross for our sins, and trust in Christ, the Son of God, and his saving work our souls feed by faith on Christ's sacrifice, in the same way that our bodies feed on bread. As the church father Augustine rightly put it: "**Believe, and you have eaten**"

I'm going to give you five. There are some wonderful similarities between physical eating and drinking and believing in Jesus. Let me show you what I mean:

1) Before you eat and drink you need to... **Hunger and Thirst**. Men do not eat even when food is available, because they don't feel hungry. So let me ask, do you hunger and thirst for Christ and the Righteousness that He alone can give you?

2) We may be hungry but imaginary food is of no use to us... and so too believing in a mythical savior cannot give us life. If Jesus is only an idea, a myth, to you and not a real material flesh and blood person, not the Son of God who was crucified for sin then he cannot be of any use to you. If someone says to you they believe in the spirit of Jesus but not the reality, open up to them:

1 John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,

3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Friends do not be deceived, an imaginary savior, a mythical sacrifice and a spiritual resurrection, cannot save you and give you life any more than the idea of food can keep your body alive.

3) Merely having real food and drink, or looking at food and drink, even smelling food, won't do us any physical good. In order for food and drink to be of any use to you, what do you have to do?... ***Eat and drink it yourself***. Digest it, make it part of you. Having food and knowing it will do me good, does nothing for me unless I actually eat it. So too unless you personally put your faith and trust in Christ, and receive and rest upon him alone, Christ can do you no good. Knowing that he is the savior will do you no good.

4) Eating is a sure sign of life... Do corpses eat? No, if you didn't eat, it would be a sure sign you weren't alive. If you don't spiritually eat by believing in Jesus Christ it is a sign that we have no life in us and are still dead in your sins and trespasses.

Jesus couldn't possibly make that point more strongly than in verse 53 when he says: "***Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.***" You may kid yourself you can find spiritual life somewhere else, but you can't. I recently saw a movie called "*Into the Wild*" ... [explain how man tries to find spiritual life from physical things and changes] Friends, changing your circumstances and surroundings and stuff external to you is useless. Alaska is stunningly beautiful, but when it comes to giving your soul life, it might as well be a Pizza. What you need is what Paul called "***Christ in you, the hope of glory.***"

5) Once you have eaten food, and digested it, it becomes part of you, it can't be taken away. So too, once you have believed in Jesus, He becomes part of you and you become part of Him. Theologians call this mutual indwelling, co-inherence. The important thing to remember is that once you have truly believed, your fellowship with the Lord is permanent. He remains in you and you continue on in saving faith, He continues to transform you, help you and give you the life that comes only through him: You will pass through the gateway of death, but that gateway is but the passage into ETERNAL LIFE

Applications: 1) Believing in Jesus Christ and thus feeding on Him is something we must do for ourselves, no body can eat a meal for us, nobody can believe for us. But eating is so simple.

"Eating is an act of reception in every case. So it is with faith: you have not to do, to be or to feel, but only to receive; the saving point is not something which comes forth of you, but the reception of something imparted to you." – Spurgeon

NKJ Isaiah 55:1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.

2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.

3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you -- The sure mercies of David.

2) Many Christians are weak because they have put the physical in the place of the spiritual. Instead of continuing to feed on Christ and strengthen your faith via the means of grace, the reading and preaching of the word, prayer, the sacraments, you have fallen into the belief that somehow the material change can become your food.

NKJ Psalm 63:1 A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah. O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water.

2 So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory.

3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.

4 Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.

5 My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.