

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Encounter Jesus – The Son of the Living God

What Are You Eating?

Most of us realize the importance of a healthy diet upon our physical health. And yet, most of us still gorge on junk food which frequently results in serious, but avoidable health problems. It's the same with spiritual food. If we gorge on movies, books, sports, etc., and seldom feed on God's Word and prayer, we should not be surprised when our spiritual health declines. Bible.org gives this example, "If your spiritual intake consists of a sugary devotional that you grab on the run, like a donut, and an occasional sermon when you aren't doing something else on Sunday, don't be surprised if you're feeling kind of spiritually sluggish. You are what you eat."

Today we pick up in the middle of the conversation Jesus was having with the Jews at the point where He was explaining how to come to the Father.

Read John 6:46 (ESV) ⁴⁶ *not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.*

Why do we need to come to Jesus? We come to Him because no one else can reveal the Father to us. Only the One who is from God has seen the Father. The Old Testament teaches that no human being has seen God. John began his book by stressing this truth in the beginning of his gospel. **John 1:18 (ESV)** ¹⁸ *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

You might be thinking "what about Moses in the Old Testament?" You may even quote **Exodus 33:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ *Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.* However, this passage is simply saying that God and Moses had a close spiritual relationship – but it does not say they talked physically face to face. If you read a bit further you will find where the LORD said in **Exodus 33:20 (ESV)** ²⁰ *"you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."* Even the seraphim in heaven cover their eyes as they worship God (**Isaiah 6:1-4**).

We know that God can do anything and He could appear in human form if He desired to do so. However, the Father chose to send His Son to become flesh. Many people in the Bible witnessed theophanies, or manifestations of the Presence of God. Jesus, the Son of God, was born into the flesh and yet from the beginning Jesus Christ has seen God the Father in all of His glory. Hence, our need to come to God the Son in order to see the Father.

If my count is correct, Jesus made 25 *truly, truly* (or *verily, verily*) statements in **John**. This passage brings us to statement #10.

Read John 6:47-50 (ESV) ⁴⁷ *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.* ⁴⁸ *I am the bread of life.* ⁴⁹ *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.* ⁵⁰ *This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.*

Jesus is pointing out the certainty that those who believe in Him have eternal life. Jesus has been explaining how *bread that comes down from heaven* is not literal bread. The Bread is a person! **John 6:33 (ESV)** ³³ *For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.* The miraculous manna which Israel received in the wilderness (**Exodus 16**) and the bread which Jesus created on the prior day (**John 6:11–15**) were only meant to be *signs*, or symbols, pointing towards the greater, eternal truth – that is, Jesus is the Bread of Life!

BibleReference.org explains, “The manna which Israel ate in the wilderness was symbolic of Jesus. Manna was small, white, round, and arrived at night. These are symbols of humility, purity, eternity, and times of spiritual darkness, respectively. Manna could not be made or transferred; it had to be individually accepted. Manna was also found on the ground, leaving only two options: receive it as a gift or walk right over it (**John 3:16–18**).” Jesus' statement that *this is the bread that comes down from heaven* has two purposes. First, it emphasizes that Jesus is explaining the true meaning and the true purpose behind the symbol of bread. Second, we will see that Jesus is clearly referring to Himself.

Read John 6:51 (ESV) ⁵¹ *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*”

In the wilderness, God sent a source of physical life from heaven in the form of bread. Now, in the land of Israel God has sent bread from heaven to be the source of eternal life found in the flesh of His Son, Jesus. His mention of the bread of His flesh pictures His upcoming death on the cross.

This picture will be immediately misconstrued causing the crowd to dispute even more. In the middle of their disputing, Jesus interrupts with another of his *truly, truly* statements. This time He made things even more repulsive to them when He added drinking His blood to the mix!

Read John 6:52-55 (ESV) ⁵² *The Jews then disputed among themselves, 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 you.* ⁵⁴ *Whoever feeds on 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.*

This is another example in John's Gospel of the people misunderstanding a spiritual truth by treating it literally. Recall Jesus remarks about destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days (**John 2:19-21**). And, then there was Nicodemus and the woman at the well who both took Jesus' comments literally (**John 3:4 and 4:11**) Being orthodox Jews, they got ‘hung up’ in the prohibition against eating human flesh or any kind of blood. **Leviticus 19:26 (ESV)** ²⁶ *“You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it....*

Wiersbe explains, “All Jesus said was, ‘Just as you take food and drink within your body and it becomes a part of you, so you must receive Me within your innermost being so that I can give you life.’”

After the flood mankind began to eat flesh in order to survive. But, the flesh of animals was not enough to cause the humans to survive the curse of sin. The shedding of blood and animal sacrifices were made in the temple to atone for the sins of the people. **Hebrews 9:22 (ESV)** ²² *Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*

Knowing it would take more than animal flesh and blood to save souls. Jesus came to earth in flesh and blood to make the one-time perfect sacrifice to release us from the penalty of eternal death. This is why He said: *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*

Read John 6:56-59 (ESV) ⁵⁶ *Whoever feeds on 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 whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.* ⁵⁸ *This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.* ⁵⁹ *Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.*

Some interpreters tell us that Jesus was speaking about the Lord’s Supper when He said: *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.* These interpreters believe that the elements of the Lord’s Supper literally become His flesh and blood when taken at the communion table.

Keep in mind that the gospel of **John** is filled with symbolism and imagery. To take literally that the wine or juice and bits of bread we take at the Lord’s Supper actually become the body and blood of Christ is to make the same mistake the people made who first heard Jesus’ words.. In the regular observance of the Lord’s Supper, our thoughts are called back again to Calvary and remind us of the price of redemption. We should recognize the relationship between the communion and this precious truth. But do not confound the symbol with the reality. Ironside explains, “As we feed in faith upon the body and blood of Jesus Christ, we lose our appetite for everything unholy.”

Read John 6:60-62 (ESV) ⁶⁰ *When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”* ⁶¹ *But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this?”* ⁶² *Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?*

Most references to ‘disciples’ in **John** relate to the Twelve; however, the Greek word for disciple means a student. There are a number of places where ‘disciples’ refers to the larger group of people who followed Jesus. It was this larger group who found Jesus’ teaching about eating his flesh and drinking his blood to be a *hard saying*. To them Jesus’ teaching was offensive, intolerable much like we would be if we heard of someone drinking blood today. However, Jesus was not talking about cannibalism or vampirism. Jesus was speaking symbolically.

Our Lord's teaching was not hard to understand but hard to accept once you understood it. The Jews' problem with Jesus was larger than the "Dracula theme". The idea of their Messiah being anything other than a conquering, military, political king was unacceptable! Even the most fervent Jewish follower of Jesus would have been bothered by the idea that the Promised One was not destined to be another leader like David or Joshua as they were expecting. That was what **they wanted**.

Jesus makes a reference in verse 62 to His coming ascension back into heaven (**Luke 24:50–53**). There are two main ways of interpreting these words. (1) Jesus is asking whether or not these people will also be offended when they see Christ taken back into glory. In other words, Jesus is asking 'if this teaching offends you, are you still going to be offended when you see me return to heaven?' OR (2) Jesus is suggesting if this offends them, the ascension will offend them even more. With this interpretation, Jesus seems to be saying, 'if you don't like this, just wait until you see what's coming next.'

Read John 6:63-65 (ESV) ⁶³ *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.* ⁶⁴ *But there are some of you who do not believe.* " (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ *And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."*

In verse 63, we will see for sure that Jesus had not been speaking literally but spiritually concerning His flesh and blood. Jesus comments that *the flesh is no help at all*. This is meant to directly indicate that His teaching on 'eating' His flesh and blood were symbolic, not literal. At the same time, that remark also pictures the difference between legitimate belief and mere 'interest'.

True belief in Christ requires that the truth of who Christ is must be taken and digested deep within our souls. Going back to the concept of physical food: food must be taken inside a person in order to have any effect. Simply seeing or touching food is not enough. It must be consumed. And if we consume junk food, it has no real value.

In verse 64 we read, *Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe*. Tyndale Commentary suggests, "Perhaps this explains why he did not attempt to cajole people into belief nor worry when they rejected him. He knew 'from the beginning' those who would not believe. He even knew which of his inner circle of disciples would betray him. Jesus knew that Judas Iscariot would betray Him to death on the cross and yet Jesus loved him.

Back to the title of this lesson, What Are You Eating? There is a hunger this world will never satisfy. That is why we need to 'Feast on Jesus'. **Psalm 107:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.*