

WHOEVER EATS THIS BREAD WILL LIVE FOREVER

John 6:41-71

Key Verse: 6:51

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

In today’s passage, Jesus continues to teach us that he is the bread of life. Jesus is the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is Jesus’ body. Some people would say that this is a hard teaching to accept. May God help us to soften our hearts to accept these important words of Jesus!

I. “I AM THE LIVING BREAD FROM HEAVEN” (41-59)

Jesus had invited a crowd of people to come to him and eat the living bread. He said, *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty”* (35). How did they respond to Jesus’ invitation? They clung to physical bread only. They didn’t want the bread from heaven; they only wanted the bread from oven. Jesus, however, didn’t give them the bread from oven this time. So they began to complain, saying that Moses gave their forefathers manna from heaven in the wilderness. Jesus taught them that he was the true bread from heaven (32). He told them that he had come down from heaven to give them eternal life, that is, to do the will of God to save the sinful humanity. Whoever believes in Jesus shall have eternal life because Jesus will raise them up at the last day (40).

Look at verse 41. *At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”* Jesus still loved them and tried to help them to have eternal life. But they said, *“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’”* (42) When their eyes were focused on bread, they could not see the Son of God who was standing right before their eyes. Worse yet, they hardened their hearts and refused to hear the life-giving words of Christ. They began to talk about Jesus’ human father and mother. Joseph and Mary were an ordinary couple. As soon as they remembered how ordinary his parents were, they forgot what he had done—feeding of 5,000 with only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. What did Jesus say to them?

First, “Unless the Father draws him ...” (43-47). Look at verses 43-44. *“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”* Jesus rebuked them, saying, *“Stop grumbling among yourselves.”* A grumbling heart is not a receptive heart. This kind of heart is not ready to hear and accept the living word of God. A grumbling heart is not a thankful heart. During the wanderings through the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites often grumbled against God and against their leaders. Exodus 16:3-4 read: *In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in*

Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” God was still gracious to them and gave them unlimited supply of bread called manna. But they were not thankful. Soon they began to crave for other food. They complained, “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!” (Nu 14:4-6) They continued to grumble. What was the result of their grumbling? Their grumbles provoked the Lord’s anger again and again. Above all, their grumbling drowned out the voice of God. Psalm 106:25 says, “They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the LORD” (or “did not obey the voice of the LORD” (ESV)). Likewise, it is easy for us to complain and grumble, sometimes habitually. But this can have a serious consequence for our spiritual life as it did to the Israelites. St. Paul says in Philippians 2:14, “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ...”

The people in this passage were stubborn, insisting on only physical bread and grumbling against Jesus. But Jesus did not give up on them. He told them: “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.*” What does this mean? It seemed that the whole crowd of people rejected Jesus’s invitation to come to him and have eternal life by believing in him. But that was not the case. There were some people who heard the word of God. There are always some people who come to God. God himself moves their hearts and draws them to himself when they are willing to open their hearts. In this way, the work of God continues. Even if the whole world seems to be rejecting God’s invitation, God continues to invite them. This is the nature of God’s work, as Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 54:13, “They will all be taught by God.” God, not man, plays the most active role in salvation. When someone chooses to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, he or she does so only in response to the urging of the Holy Spirit. God does the urging; then we decide whether or not to believe. Thus, no one can believe in Jesus without God’s help. What does this mean to us who are serving campus mission in our generation? It means we should pray for young students even as we faithfully share the word of God with them. It is not us who can change them. It is God. We should humbly pray that the Holy Spirit may work powerfully in the lives of young people to open their hearts and accept Jesus into their lives.

Second, “I am the living bread from heaven” (48-59). Look at verse 48. Jesus again declares, “*I am the bread of life.*” Jesus then explains why he is the bread of life. He says in verses 49-50. “*Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.*” The ancestors of Israel ate manna in the desert for 40 years, yet they died, most of them before entering the Promised Land. But Jesus is the bread of life from heaven. Those who eat the bread of life from heaven will never die. There is fundamental difference between the physical bread and the bread from heaven, just as the water from Jacob’s well was different from the living water that Jesus offered to the Samaritan woman. The physical bread we eat sustains our physical body until we die. It cannot give us eternal life. No matter how fantastic things you do in this world will not get you to heaven. Only Jesus, the bread of life, can take us to heaven. Let us read together verse 51. “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will*

live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” In the last part of the verse Jesus says, *“This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”* Again in verse 53 Jesus says, *“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”* This verse is a summary of the gospel. Jesus was telling the Israelites that he would die on the cross, shedding his precious blood for the sins of the sinful humanity. He would be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Then he would rise from the dead to bring us back to his glorious kingdom of heaven to reign with him forever and ever. Those who believe in him will be raised up at the last day. The phrase, “at the last day,” is repeated 4 times in this passage (39,40,44,54). It teaches us that the world as we know it will not last forever, as many people suppose. The last day will come. We don’t know when the last day will come, but it will surely come. And Jesus will take care of us at the last day.

What was their response to Jesus’ teaching? Look at verse 52. *Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”* They thought that Jesus wanted them to be cannibalistic. Of course, Jesus was not talking about literal flesh or blood. To eat the flesh of Jesus means to have Jesus in the center of our lives. Just as the food we eat becomes part of us when it enters our blood stream and organs, Jesus becomes part of us when we eat the living bread. This is what Jesus says, *“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me”* (56-57). To eat Jesus’ flesh and drink his blood means to have a union with Christ, as St. Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). To eat Jesus’ flesh and drink his blood means to have a personal relationship with him through his words and prayer. Look at verse 51 again. *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”* Those who eat of the living bread from heaven will live forever. Just as bread must be eaten to sustain life, we must invite Christ into our daily walk to sustain our spiritual life.

II. “LORD, TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?” (60-71)

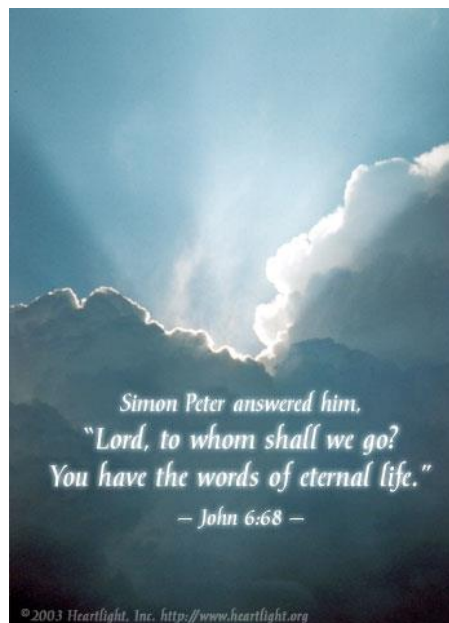
Jesus’ teaching was clear. They needed Jesus, the bread of life, even more than the physical bread. But they only wanted free bread from Jesus. Realizing that Jesus wasn’t going to hand out free bread that day, they rejected Jesus’ word of life and began to complain. They said: “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” (60). From a human point of view, Jesus’ teaching was shocking. How can we even imagine eating a person’s flesh and drinking his blood? (Though this seems less far-fetched, given some horrible events on the news in recent years) I believe that Jesus wanted to shock them. He wanted to help them to get out of the box that all they needed was the bread from oven, just as we often think that all we need is good job, money, family, fun time, and so on. Jesus wanted them to think about life beyond this world. He talked repeatedly about “bread from heaven,” “eternal life,” and “the last day.” The people should have understood his teachings in the context of him feeding the 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Sadly, they did not open their hearts to hear him. They failed to see him as the

Messiah who came from heaven to give them eternal life. They continued to grumble against him.

What did Jesus say to them? *Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life” (60-63).* Once again, Jesus tried to help them to focus more on the Messiah and his life-giving words than the physical bread. He really wanted them to open their hearts to hear his words spoken to them—the words that were full of the Spirit and life. Still, Jesus was aware that some of them would never accept his words or believe in him. Verses 64-65 read: *“Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”*

Some people come to church but would not open their hearts to hear what Jesus says to them. They ask questions such as, “What’s in it for me? What do I get out of it?” That’s what the people in this passage did. When no more free bread was offered, they grumbled and would not hear what Jesus was telling them. Jesus was sorry because of their unbelief. They were unbelieving people. They would not believe even if they saw Jesus’ ascension into heaven with their own eyes (62). So Jesus told them, *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The word I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (63).* I pray that each of us may believe that the word of Jesus is the word of life.

Look at verse 66. *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.* Jesus knew that his twelve disciples were shaken by these people’s decision to leave the ministry. So he asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Simon Peter answered him, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (68-69).* This answer alone explains why Peter was a top disciple of Jesus. Peter didn’t become a rock solid disciple until Jesus’ death and resurrection, even though Jesus changed his name from Simon (“sand”) to Peter (“rock”) early on. Peter was still a very much impulsive person. He spoke before he thought. He acted before he thought. He denied Jesus three times, right after he said he would die with Jesus rather than betraying him. But Peter also showed why he was a promising disciple of Jesus. When Jesus helped him to catch a large number of fish, he fell at his feet and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man” (Lk 5:8). Unlike the people in this passage, Peter recognized Jesus as the Lord. His focus was not the large catch of fish; it was on Jesus. Then he said, “I am a sinful man.” It was a great self-discovery. It was a great starting point. No one can truly believe in Jesus until he or she recognizes himself or herself as a sinner and accepts Jesus as the



Lord. Once Jesus asked his disciples the question, “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ” (Mk 8:21). Building on this confession of faith, Jesus began to teach them about his upcoming death and resurrection.

In today’s passage, Peter said to Jesus, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God*” We learn that Peter followed Jesus, not because his brother Andrew followed, but because he accepted the word of life. Peter’s faith was based on the word of eternal life. He followed Jesus because Jesus is the living bread from heaven. Peter was different from the people whose focus was on the bread rather than the Messiah. He listened to Jesus when he said “I am the living bread from heaven.” Peter was also different from people who followed Jesus with an ulterior motive. For example, Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, followed Jesus but he never accepted the living words of Jesus because of his desire for money. He would eventually betray Jesus (70-71). There are many wise men and women in this world who write excellent books, but Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. Peter knew that he could find eternal life from no one and nowhere else, but Jesus. This is the reason why we should study the Bible wholeheartedly. I earnestly pray that each of us may say to Jesus, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

May God help us to believe that Jesus is the living bread from heaven! If we eat this bread, we will live forever. May God help each of us to eat this bread by coming to the word of God faithfully and by obeying his word prayerfully!