

Eating the True Food

The redemption offered to us in Christ is a massive divine project to renew us and the entire cosmos. John's gospel is also extraordinarily ambitious in that John seeks to lead us to faith in Jesus Christ that we may have life. In our text today, John recounts a teaching from Jesus in exactly what we need to do to have this life.

John 6:41-59

41 So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. 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. 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." 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. 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.

I. We must have a true appetite (vv. 41-46).

In response to the grumbling of the Jews regarding Jesus' claims to being the very essence of life itself, Jesus responds that no one can come to Him unless the Father "draws" him. This is very important to us for several reasons. First of all, we need to know that we must apply to God even for the appetite to receive Jesus Christ. Secondly, we as believing witnesses need to remember that we can't convert anyone; only God can do that. There have been debates for centuries about what this "drawing" is. Augustine debated Pelagius, Calvin was debated by Arminius, and the most famous debate was between Martin Luther and Erasmus in which Luther said this: "The ungodly does not 'come,' even when he hears the word, unless the Father draws and teaches him inwardly, which he does by shedding abroad his spirit. When that happens, there follows a 'drawing' other than that which is outward; Christ is then displayed by the enlightening of the Spirit, and by it, man is rapt to Christ with the sweetest rapture, he being passive while God speaks, teaches, and draws, rather than seeking or running himself" (*The Bondage of the Will*, Martin Luther).

II. We must have the true bread (vv. 47-51).

Jesus contrasts Himself as the true bread with the manna that God gave in the wilderness. Jesus teaches His disciples that this manna only satisfied temporarily, but the true bread satisfies for eternity. Then in verse 51c, Jesus displays the very heart of this true life that is given through the true bread. He says, "...the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Jesus is here teaching that this true bread is actually, at its heart, a sacrificial atonement. Jesus gives up His flesh on our account. Furthermore, Jesus shows that this atonement is voluntary, substitutionary, and global in its reach.

III. We must truly eat the true bread (vv. 52-59).

Here Jesus is teaching us that this true bread must be truly eaten. Jesus uses the verbs “feed,” “drink,” and “eat” eight times in verses 52-58, suggesting that we must not only observe this meal, but we must participate in it. This lesson was given to the Jews in the synagogue (v. 59), reminding us that He comes first of all to the people of God in the very church itself to teach us to have life.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the practical implications for us in verse 44?
2. How does the Father “draw” us?
3. How does the “bread of life” differ from the manna God gave Israel in the wilderness? Why did Jesus make this comparison?
4. What do we learn about Jesus’ sacrificial atonement for us in verse 51c?
5. Jesus uses the verbs “eat,” “drink,” and “feed” eight times in verses 52-58. What does He mean and why does He emphasize this?

Going Deeper

1. What cheap counterfeit food do you most often substitute for the true bread that Jesus offers you? Why?
2. What do you need to do in order to feast regularly upon Jesus alone?