

LESSON #11 CHAPTER 6:22-71

Jesus is the Bread of Life

Divine Attribute: Predestination

Theological concept: Bread of Life

Geographical location: Capernaum

Chapter Structure

6: 22-34 Labour for the food of eternal life

6: 35-51 Jesus' Self Proclamation: I am the bread of life

6: 52-71 Eat My Flesh and Drink My Blood

Spiritual Principles:

P1 Those who do not love the Lord do not have true faith and true obedience.

Today's lesson...

After Jesus performed the miracle of five loaves and two fish, he sent his disciples to Capernaum to avoid the overzealous crowd. Nonetheless, the crowd did not give up following them. The next morning, when the crowd saw they were not there, they sailed to Capernaum and found Jesus.

In this lesson, we shall listen to Jesus' sermon on "the Bread of Life". The sermon is divided into three parts: (1) perishable food versus imperishable food vv. 25-34; (2) Jesus is the bread of life vv. 35-51; (3) Man must live by the new life in Christ vv.6:52-71.

A. 6: 22-34 Labour for the food of eternal life

26 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."

Jesus knew that the crowd wanted things of the world, be it free food or restoring the kingdom of Israel. He then reminded them that bread is the sustenance of life, not the purpose of life. Therefore, men must not pursue the body's satisfaction but the soul's needs. He urged them to work for the food that lasts for eternal life (6: 27), which has a lasting effect on eternity and gives everlasting life. Such food is the true bread from heaven (6:32).

What is the true bread from heaven, and where can you find it? These were the questions on the audience's mind and our minds also. The Lord answered the 2nd question first: He is the giver of the true bread, "*which the Son of Man will give to you*".

The Lord Jesus contrasted the perishable and eternal food, similar to the water from Jacob's well and the water that quenches thirst forever. Under Moses' leadership, the Israelites ate manna and got hungry again, just as the Samaritans drank from the well of Jacob and thirsted again. Despite coming from Moses and Jacob, manna and the well water could not impart life.

Religious rituals cannot give life, whether baptism or the Lord's Supper. True life comes from God alone. That was why Jesus called it the bread of God 6:33.

The crowd was keen to receive the bread of God, so they asked Jesus what kind of work they had to do for God to earn the bread for eternal life.

"believe in him whom he has sent."(6:29) was Jesus' answer: it is not by righteous and good acts but simply by believing in Jesus. To those who reject God, this is an absurd teaching, but for those who reckon their spiritual filthiness, this is good news of great joy!

Reflection: Lord, I confess that I have taken the Gospel for granted. Have mercy on me! Help me so that every time I hear the Gospel, I will rejoice and give God the glory like I did when I first believed it!

30 So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Even though they had just witnessed a great miracle the day before, they asked Jesus for another to confirm his claim. This was because a Rabbinic teaching at that time said, "As the first redeemer caused manna to descend,...so will the last redeemer cause food to descend."¹ Therefore, the Jews expected Jesus to rain food from heaven as Moses did.

32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Here, a fatal error in the Jew's understanding of God was revealed. They thought that it was Moses who provided them with manna from heaven! Dear brothers and sisters, how easy it is for sinners to idolise a great man. Idolatry is in our sinful nature. In the east, the Chinese deified the upright official Bao Zheng, Confucius...etc. In the ancient Near East, the kings of Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and even Rome deified themselves and demanded their people worship them. Even the Roman Catholic church today deified the apostles and worships Mary, the mother of Jesus.

A greater peril in our sinful nature is the enjoyment of being worshipped. Satan enjoys it most. *"I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly"* (Isa 14:13) This nature of Satan was exposed in its temptation for the Lord Jesus, *"All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."* (Mat 4:9)

The love of being worshipped turned Satan into an eternal adversary of God! It is also the mark of *"the man of lawlessness"* that will appear at the end time, *"who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God."* (2Ti 2:4)

Dear brothers and sisters, we should respect and love God's servants, but we must avoid idolising them to prevent causing ourselves and others to stumble. As for ourselves, while there is a need for the

¹ F.F.Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), p.146

approval of trusting people at times, let us not indulge in or depend on the applause of man as our motivation to serve God.

Life application

Dear brothers and sisters, what are you pursuing? Will you let physical and perishable food be the pursuit of your life or food that yields effect onto eternity?

Questions such as “What do you pursue in life?” and “What is the purpose of life?” are inspiring and relevant questions that can be used to introduce the Gospel. They will lead the hearers towards forgiveness of sin and the truth of life. Will you try it?

the crowds responded to the first part of the Lord’s sermon with some faith: *“Sir, give us this bread always.”* (6:34) Next, Jesus was going to give them the answer to the first question: what is the true bread that yields eternal life? It would be a hard teaching for most people: the doctrines of predestination and union with Christ. No one can accept these doctrines without God’s election and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Soon, the crowd’s response turned negative; they grumbled about him (6:41) and fought among themselves (6:52).

B. 6: 35–51 Jesus’ Self Proclamation: I am the bread of life

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

This is the first of Jesus’ seven self-proclamations in this Gospel book. Not only is Jesus the one who could give them the bread from heaven, he is the bread from heaven!

Indeed, Jesus is the Great High Priest who offered the atoning sacrifice and the sacrificial lamb! He came into the world to die so that all who come to him may live.

“37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

This passage is one of the essential references for the doctrine of predestination. *“I should lose nothing of all that he has given me”* All who will eventually enter eternal life are chosen by the Holy Father, *“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”* (Eph 1:4 NIV) They belong to Christ, and Christ will keep them to the end. He would not ignore them nor deny them. Those whom Christ denied on the last day are never His.

None of those whom the Holy Father elected would not resurrect on the last day. None of those who resurrect on the last day are not chosen by the Father. Here, we see clearly that the Father and the Son are completely of one mind and one heart in the work of salvation, and this is possible only because the Son *“not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”*

Life application

Those who belong to Christ are the church and are called by Christ to build up the church. For the church to have unity, everyone who serves must not *“do my own will but the will of Him who sent me”*, i.e. to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph 5:21)

By reiterating *“I will raise him up on the last day”* three times (6:39, 40, 44), the Lord Jesus emphasised that bodily resurrection is a fact and that we must look beyond death because He will raise us up from the dead personally. Dear brothers and sisters, the Lord does not want us to forget that bodily resurrection is our true hope. Do not let death threaten us nor cause us to waste our lives on things that do not yield in eternity.

“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’?” (6:42)

The criticism exposed the true blockage to their understanding. They were acquainted with Jesus’ family. They could not accept that Jesus, who was one of them, should surpass them in knowledge, power and respect.

Again, this is part of the sinful nature. We magnify the weaknesses and flaws of people who live among us. Let us be careful. Do we tend to see the elders and pastors of other churches better than ours, or are our elders and pastors not good enough for us? Jesus reminded us of this, *“A prophet is not without honour, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.”* (Mark 6:4; John 4:44)

The Lord urged them to stop the exchange of scandalised criticism, *“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.”*

The Lord emphasised that those predestined to be saved depend on God to lead them to Christ. Dear brothers and sisters, our efforts to invite someone to the church or share the Gospel are part of God’s plan to save him! This is our reward and our glory.

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.”

Manna was bread from heaven sent by God. It sustains the lives of those who eat it, but it does not impart life. Jesus is the living bread from heaven because the life He imparts is everlasting.

How do you eat the living bread? the Lord’s teaching on *“eat my flesh and drink my blood”* was even harder to accept. The Jews fought among themselves as they tried to comprehend this harder teaching.

C. 6: 52–71 Eat My Flesh and Drink My Blood

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 53 So Jesus said to them, 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 [a] the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

The Greek word used here for "disputed" is stronger and more offensive. It showed how contentious the teaching was.

"53 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." Jesus' explanation was even more offensive than the earlier statement! The law of Moses banned the drinking of any blood, *"For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off."* (Lev 17:14)

"Eat my flesh and drink my blood" must be understood on multiple levels. Firstly, for the Lord to offer his flesh and blood means he must die. If the Lord were not crucified, all of us would have perished. Jesus' death is the only way. There is no other way that we can be saved. Praise be to God that our Lord did not succumb to the temptation of Satan nor flinch from it. Dear brothers and sisters, how about you? Are you flinching from the calling that requires a greater sacrifice from you? Are you contemplating throwing in the towel because the ministry is facing a greater problem now?

Reflection: Lord, I am ashamed of myself. You have borne the greatest humiliation, the greatest injustice, and the greatest pain for me! Thank you for your timely reminder. I am willing endure whatever difficulties for you. Please add to me strength and do not take away the privilege to serve you from me!

Secondly, the Lord Jesus is the Word Incarnate. When he says, *"55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink,"* it is not referring to physical flesh and blood. It is the metaphor for taking in, chewing and digesting the truth of God.

Thirdly, *"56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him"* refers to our union with Christ. Indeed, we who are reborn are **in Christ**. The life we now live is Christ lives in me. This is the effect of the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. It is independent of our sanctification. Nonetheless, those who are in **Christ** will endeavour to live by the life of Christ.

"Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us." (1 John 3:24) Therefore, when we by faith through partaking of the Lord's Supper, reading God's words, listening to the preaching of the Gospel, worshipping, praying either personally or corporately, and obeying God's teaching, we are in the Lord and the Lord in us.

As such, faith and obedience are inseparable. Without obedience, there is no true faith. Without faith, there is no true obedience. If we do not love the Lord, neither the 'faith' or the 'obedience' we displayed are not true.

P1 Those who do not love the Lord do not have true faith and true obedience.

Do you see it now? *"eat my flesh and drink my blood"* refers to the true union of our life and Christ's life! Christ gave his life for us so that we may live out his life eternally! How beautiful is our salvation!

Note that the Lord is not instituting the Lord's Supper here. His sermon gives us a deeper exposition of the meaning of the Lord's Supper. When we eat the bread and drink the cup, remember that we live because he died, and be grateful for the flesh and the blood He gave us. Nonetheless, the most pleasing response to Him will be for us to give Him our full obedience in understanding His teaching and living by it!

D. Closing

This is indeed a difficult sermon. "*66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him*". But as Jesus told us, "*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—*" Some truths are a general revelation from God that people can understand and accept. However, only those taught by the Holy Spirit can understand God's salvation through special revelation. The Holy Spirit will enlighten and convict those God chooses, helping them understand and come to Jesus. Rejecting Jesus' words meant rejecting Him, the only path to eternal life.

The negative responses from the crowd did not stop our Lord from preaching. Dear brothers and sisters, should you be called to teach the Bible or preach a sermon for the Lord, remember the Lord's example in this passage. Do not stop teaching or preaching even when the congregation does not seem to accept the biblical doctrine. Work harder to make your exposition faithful to God and your explanation clear to men. Remember that the people of God need to grow in God's knowledge.

Let us not be surprised that even some of Jesus' disciples left him. Nowadays, some Christians selectively follow Bible teachings and ignore conflicting or challenging ones. Many are willing to be Christians but are not interested in learning more about God. If you are one of them, pray for God's mercy. Ask the Holy Spirit to rekindle you with the desire for the knowledge of God, lest you may also turn back and no longer walk with the Lord when you find it too difficult to walk with him.

The twelve disciples did not understand the hard teaching of "eat my flesh and drink my blood". But they did not turn back. Why? simply because, "*68 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.'*"

Indeed, to whom shall we go except the one who has the words of eternal life and who died so that we may eat of his flesh and drink of his blood? Let us diligently seek to know and do His words. Even when they are difficult to understand or obey, let us ask the Lord to give us strength and wisdom to keep our faith and follow Him to the end.

Let us join the prophet Jeremiah in prayer:

*"Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart,
for I am called by your name,
O Lord, God of hosts."* (Jer 15:16)



The reconstruction of a synagogue of the third century at Tell Hum (Capernaum) unearthed by the German archaeologists in the 20c. It is believed that this synagogue was built on the remains of the synagogue mentioned in Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John.



