

The One Who Eats This Bread September 1, 2024

John 6:52-59

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; 55 for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." 59 He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum (NRSV).

Imagine you are watching a horror movie about a person that was kidnapped and dragged into the woods where people were talk about eating flesh and drinking blood. That is a very scary scene. Now imagine you are in the synagogue two thousand years ago and a man preaches about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. That is a concept that is very hard to grasp. It is not hard for us to understand this because we know the rest of the story and how this is tied into the new covenant, the sacrament, and the cross. We know the rest of the story and we know its significance.

The Scripture takes place while Jesus is in Capernaum, a friendly area of Jewish territory and the audience is a bit troubled by his teaching. I hope we are able to understand the impact such teaching would have on the audience. The thought of drinking blood is repulsive. Jesus is teaching a concept that is very strange to the audience. It is also a much more detailed and complex lesson than what is on the surface. Everything Jesus says is a very important lesson and each of these individual lessons is a part of a much bigger lesson. The overall strategy of God is to wrap us all in a blanket of love. It is not about the law, rules, and regulations; it's about being in communion with the Lord. We are to have a like mind, like heart, and like soul that matches that of the Lord in order to be in union with the Lord. We are not in union with the Lord until we are in union with each other. God's design and strategy is to sew love into the hearts of humanity. The lessons and sacrifice from Jesus is the needle and thread of God's design sewing it all together. The sacrifice of Jesus and his offering is a matter of God taking the initiative and offering love, justice, and unity to all of humanity.

The lesson from Jesus is about God reaching out to humanity and getting in communion with the people. Jesus teaches a lesson that is so profound, they don't learn it when it was presented, or when it happens at the Last Supper. They don't learn it until after the resurrection of Jesus. The lesson is beyond human comprehension until it is analyzed after future events. Jesus promises the grand prize that everyone wants. He will raise you up on the last day. There it is the fountain of youth a promise to live forever. There it is the genie granting one wish, you will get to live forever. What Jesus promises is true but even more so. During your lifetime you will have peace in your heart forever. This comes to you through the Holy Spirit as it replaces anxiety with peace. Jesus does not promise freedom from hardship, death, trauma, or conflict. In fact he takes it upon himself, not to free us from it, but to share in our pain is the ultimate love.

When it comes to prayers, we tend to focus on our own issues. I think the best example is always Jesus. When he was facing the cross and being tortured to death he stated not my will but your will be done. We tend to pray, Lord help me, please, please, please, like a little child begging from mama. The inner being that Jesus teaches us to be does not have selfish desire, whether it is materialism, or relationship problems. I read a story about a man that prayed to God to bring his wife back into his life. The then asked the preacher to go visit his wife with him. He thought God would bring her back into his life is he prayed for it. The preacher told him if you love her, you will be praying for her happiness, success, and well being; not for God to force her to take you back.

The overall biblical lesson is based on the character of God. Once again the Bible clearly distinguishes between the physical being and the spiritual being. The Lord is not at all interested in the outward appearances of piety. The Lord values an inner character that is kind, generous, and loving. With the love of God living inside of you, your whole life is one of peace, unity, and love forever. That is what God gives to us. That is what Jesus delivers to us. God had to deliver God's love to the world. Jesus is the only one that can get the job done due to his divine status. Jesus introduces to the world a theological concept. The world prioritizes the physical over the spiritual. The Lord prioritizes the spiritual over the physical. The Lord took the physical, his flesh and blood, to lead people to the spiritual experience of the Lord's love. The Lord prioritizes the spiritual over the physical. When Jesus talked to the audience about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, the audience hears Jesus talk about his physical being. However, Jesus is talking about the spiritual being. We are to take a physical action of consumption to consume the spirit of Jesus, the very essence of his loving character. To be in communion with Jesus is to be one with Jesus in his loving spirit. The problem with humanity is that we look at and judge others based on the physical being. We are all guilty of judging others. We judge based on what we see on the outside of the person but God judges based on what is inside the person. Jesus needed a way to get past physical resistance and into the heart and soul of humanity of humanity. We consume the sacraments to be one with the Lord. Jesus announces the real deal his flesh is the true food and his blood is the true drink. We do this to abide in each other for unity and to seal our relationship with the Lord. This is the ongoing sign of the New Covenant, the needle and the thread sewing up and securing God's love for us.

I preach a lesson that Jesus preached on the disparity between public piety and inner character. We not only have the individual biblical lessons but the whole of Jesus life is a lesson on love. The love of God is tremendous. The love that Jesus gave to us is tremendous. Love has a much higher value than rules. It is all about the character of the person; the heart and soul, the inner being. Wednesday's devotional was a perfect example of someone that found it difficult to pray for someone that betrayed her. At first her prayer was complaining, selfishly hoping God's will for her would go against God's divine nature. The anger began to dissipate as God's love for her grew her heart, God's love for the other person grew within her also. God's love is greater and stronger than our pain.

The whole biblical lesson surrounding the life of Jesus is a divine process of cleansing. The focus on outward appearance is condemned. The judging of others by their actions and appearance is condemned. The focus is on the inner self being pure and righteous with love in your heart, mind, soul, and spirit. When one is full of the Holy Spirit, then temptation, desire, greed, ambition, selfishness, and all other vices are diluted

significantly because the Holy Spirit purifies the inner being. We do not need to focus on the condemnation of sins when the motivation to sin has been removed by the love of Christ. The whole of the life of Jesus is not about addressing behaviors but a lesson on the individual getting right internally. It is about the character of the individual being ruled by love and caring for others. The New Covenant does not come easy – it comes to us from the death of Jesus. The New Covenant comes from a very serious sacrifice. The lesson Jesus teaches us is a very serious lesson of the New Covenant. The old covenant with rules, regulations, judging, and condemnation, is replaced with a New Covenant. This New Covenant does not conscript obedience because it does not have to, that is because obedience is automatically guided by love. Transgression is no longer handled with judging and punishing but is now handled with love and grace. When we consume the sacrament, we absorb the teaching of Jesus, the character, love, and virtue of Jesus. We are united together with God, Jesus, and one another in love, peace, and grace.