

John 6.41-71 / COB / 05.18.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Synagogue]** Please join me in prayer...
- † Close your eyes for a moment. Take a deep breath. Imagine that you are a Jewish religious leader in Capernaum. You and your friends are very religious and believe you are the most righteous people around. You have a good existence and you feel good about your life.
- But then tension comes, because for the last couple of years, you have had to contend with John the Baptist and Jesus, who have been highly critical of you and your ways. John the Baptist died at the hands of Herod Antipas, the ruler of your region of Galilee, but Jesus continues to teach all over the country and God has blessed him with miracles and popularity among the people.
 - Lately Jesus has been provoking you further, by saying things that sound religiously offensive to you and violating some of your religious customs.
 - Now Jesus has returned to your hometown and is standing in the synagogue talking to you and your friends, and he is saying that you should eat his flesh and drink his blood, clearly ideas that are intolerable to any good religious person! What are you to make of this?
- † Before we see what happens, let's first remember where we are in our narrative. You can turn in your Bible to John 6.41.
- While you are turning, I will remind you that over the last two weeks, we have seen that Jesus miraculously fed thousands of people, which caused many to believe he was the great prophet whom Moses had said would come. The people then wanted an even greater sign from Jesus, to validate that he was even more powerful than Moses.
 - But Jesus admonished them, because their excitement was due to being well fed – to enjoying temporal, physical blessings – not because they understood the significance of the miracle.
 - Jesus said they should seek not perishable food, but eternal food that could sustain eternal life. And then Jesus told them that he was the bread of life, sent by God, to give life to the world.
 - We finished last week with Jesus teaching that God would send people to Jesus, and those people would come to faith in Jesus and have their salvation guaranteed forever.
- † The dialogue we studied last week might have taken place anywhere in Capernaum. But the second half of this so called “bread of life discourse” certainly took place in the synagogue of Capernaum, as we will see in v.59 momentarily. But let's begin in v.41...

[Slide 2: 6.41-42] John 6.41-42 NET: Then the Jews who were hostile to Jesus began complaining about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven,” ⁴²and they said, “Isn't this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’”

- † Most translations say in v.41 that it was “the Jews” who were murmuring among themselves. But we have seen several times already that the author John sometimes uses the term “the Jews” to

refer to the Jewish religious leaders. Inside the synagogue, the religious leaders would have gathered to discuss what Jesus was saying to the crowds.

- They were troubled by his teaching that he had come from Heaven. They knew his family! He was from Nazareth, a little town a few miles away! So what was with this talk about coming down from Heaven?

[Slide 3: 6.43-46] John 6.43-46: Jesus replied, “Do not complain about me to one another. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to me.” ⁴⁶(Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God– he has seen the Father.)

- † Last week, we heard Jesus say that everyone whom God the Father chose would come to faith in Jesus. We see this repeated in v.45, where Jesus says that everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to Jesus. But now Jesus also says in v.44 that no one can come to faith in Jesus unless God the Father draws them in. Together these ideas are called “election.”
 - As we have learned earlier in our study of this gospel, we are all born with a corruption in our human nature. This corruption occurred when Adam and Eve first rebelled in sin against God’s will. At that time, their nature was corrupted and that corruption was passed down through the generations, and we inherited it from our parents.
 - Because of this corruption, we cannot discern spiritual things accurately. People often boast, at least to themselves, about how wise, discerning, or street smart they are, but when it comes to understanding the depth of our own sinfulness, the absolute purity of God that demands he see things in black and white instead of shades of gray, the way to salvation, and the need to choose to believe in Jesus as our savior – when it comes to all that type of thing – our corrupted nature prevents us from understanding or discerning clearly... unless God helps us.
 - John has shared with us various teachings by Jesus that make it clear that God the Father chooses someone by grace, and that chosen person is enlightened by God such that s/he eventually comes to realize a personal need for a savior and comes to faith in Jesus as the savior, and in this process the Holy Spirit regenerates that person spiritually, and identifies him/her forever with Christ.
 - Now Jesus rounds out this teaching by saying that nobody can come to faith in Jesus if they are not chosen by God to go through this process of divine enlightenment and regeneration.
- † Not all Christians believe in election. It is clearly stated here in John and in other places in the Bible, but many believers find it unpalatable, for they cannot accept that God would determine that some people would not go to Heaven. There are two mistakes in this reasoning.
 - First, saying God specifies that a certain person cannot go to Heaven misses the point: The point is, that because of the rebellion of mankind, because we all are tainted with a corrupted human nature, and because we all have rebelled against God by sinning repeatedly, every day, none of us deserve to go to Heaven. So the miracle is that God chooses to save any of us.
 - Second, even if you believed that everyone should [or does] get the same opportunity to choose Jesus in faith, it still would be true that God knew who would come to faith and who would not when, at creation, he chose this specific path out of the infinite possible paths for the universe, so God still would be the root cause of some believing and others not.

- So we do believe in election: that nobody deserves salvation, but out of all people God chooses to save some, and these people come to faith in Jesus, while nobody else does.

[Slide 4: 6.47-51] John 6.47-51: [Jesus continues] **“I tell you the solemn truth** [this is ἀμὴν ἀμὴν, truly truly, the way Jesus starts many of his most profound teachings], **the one who believes has eternal life.** ⁴⁸**I am the bread of life.** ⁴⁹**Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.** ⁵⁰**This is the bread that has come down from heaven, so that a person may eat from it and not die.** ⁵¹**I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats from this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”**

- † Most of this is the same as we heard last week. If you want to know more about the ideas Jesus shared in these verses, check out the devotion from last week, copies of which are on the resource table out front. Or you can listen to last week’s sermon on the church’s website.
 - Last week, Jesus was speaking to a crowd somewhere in Capernaum, possibly out by the shore, but now the religious leaders are complaining about his teaching, so he reiterates these ideas here in the synagogue.
- † Jesus is the living bread, or it could be translated “life-giving bread.” Jesus is the eternal bread, which can sustain eternal life. Even Moses could not offer eternal bread. The people wanted a sign to prove Jesus was greater than Moses, but instead of another miracle, Jesus offers them this truth.
 - If someone comes to Jesus and believes in Jesus, then s/he will have eternal life. The one new teaching here is Jesus specifically saying that the eternal life-giving bread is his flesh.
 - Before we go on, let’s note that Jesus is the divine Son of God come to earth as a real man. He is the divine Son of God – part of the one God who has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – who came and took on human flesh. This is called the incarnation: God taking on flesh. It’s what we celebrate at Christmas.

[Slide 5: 6.52-55] John 6.52-55: [The religious leaders were not celebrating...] **Then the Jews who were hostile to Jesus began to argue with one another, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”** ⁵³**Jesus said to them, “I tell you the solemn truth** [ἀμὴν ἀμὴν], **unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves.** ⁵⁴**The one who eats 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.”**

- † Jesus had said before that he was the bread of life, and that hadn’t really bothered the religious leaders; they were more concerned that he said he came from Heaven. But now Jesus gets more graphic, and he says, not only is he the bread of life, but the bread specifically is his flesh! This upsets the religious leaders. They probably know he is not promoting cannibalism, but they severely dislike his metaphor and don’t understand it.
- † If we are to understand what Jesus is saying here, we need to remember what we learned last week and earlier in this gospel.
 - First, one reason the Son of God came in the flesh was to offer himself as a sacrifice for us. When Jesus allowed himself to be crucified on the cross, he took on the penalty for all the sin of the world for all time. He gave his flesh and spilled his blood to save us.

- **[Slide 6: 6.40, 54]** Second, in v.40, Jesus said, “For this is the will of my Father— for everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him to have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” Now, in v.54, he says, “The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” So to eat his flesh and drink his blood is to believe in him, to accept his identity as the Son of God in the flesh and to accept his sacrifice as one that saves you, that makes peace with God for you.
- **[Slide 7: 6.35, 51]** Third, we can get more enlightenment by another comparison. In v.35, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.” Now, in v.51, he says, if anyone should eat from this bread, his flesh, he will live into eternity. If to eat Jesus’ flesh is to come and believe in him; then to not hunger, to not thirst, is to live with God into eternity. They are parallel ideas.
- The passage we are studying is not about our sacrament of communion, but communion is a remembrance of the sacrifice that Jesus is discussing here. He died to make salvation possible. All God requires of us is that we believe in who Jesus is and in what he accomplished for us.

[Slide 8: 6.56-59] John 6.56-59: [Jesus continued] **“The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood resides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who consumes me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the bread your ancestors ate, but then later died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹Jesus said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.**

- † **[Slide 9: 6.54, 56]** In v.54, we heard Jesus say, “The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” Now, in v.56, Jesus says, “The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood resides in me, and I in him.” Again we see parallel thoughts: residing in Christ and having him reside in you must be related to having eternal life.
 - This is about our relationship with Jesus. You remain or reside in Jesus by continuously coming to him and believing in him, by willingly remaining identified with him, and thus experiencing saving faith and personal transformation to be more like him.
 - Jesus remains or resided in you, by sacrificially identifying with you, to help and bless you, to give you true and eternal life.
 - We saw before that Jesus has life in him, because that is God the Father’s will, so Jesus can impart life to others, physical life and spiritual life. Thus if we remain in him and he in us, we can have life, and have it eternally. He is the eternal bread that can sustain eternal life.

[Slide 10: 6.60-62] John 6.60-62: **Then many of his disciples, when they heard these things, said, “This is a difficult saying! Who can understand it?” ⁶¹When Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining about this, he said to them, “Does this cause you to be offended? ⁶²Then what if you see the Son of Man ascending where he was before?”**

- † When the disciples complained, “This is a *difficult* saying!” they were not stressing its deepness or complexity, but rather how unpleasant or harsh it was. The Greek word σκληρός indicates that.
 - Part of the problem was that Jesus was teaching in metaphors about his sacrifice, and people did not understand that he had to die to pay the penalty for their sins, so they were confused.
 - Another part of the problem was his choice of metaphor, eating flesh and drinking blood. Consuming human flesh and blood was an offensive idea then, just as it is now.

- And it was against the Law of Moses even to drink the blood of animals or to eat meat with the blood not drained from it. So the Jews would find this metaphor extra offensive.

† So why did Jesus use such a metaphor?

- First, blood already was associated with sacrificial death, for blood had to be shed for the animal sacrifices that temporarily atoned – or temporarily appeased God’s wrath – so this symbolism could have helped people understand that Jesus was the sacrifice for them, if they could get past their objections to the metaphor.
- Second, remember this whole discussion started when Jesus miraculously fed the people bread, which reminded them of Moses and the manna, and so they started wanting more physical blessings from Jesus’ miracles, to prove he was greater than Moses. That’s when Jesus started telling them to seek eternal bread, which only he could give them.

† **[Slide 11: offense]** So, does Jesus try to comfort his disciples? He asks if his teaching causes them to be offended and, knowing it does, he asks what will happen if they see him ascend to Heaven.

- In v.61, Jesus uses the verb σκανδαλίζω, which can mean “I cause you to sin,” but here is more likely to mean “I offend” or “I shock.” The disciples are shocked and offended at his teaching.
- But if the teaching so far is a problem, what about when it all comes true? The only way for Jesus to end his mission on Earth and ascend back to Heaven was to die on the cross. If they were offended by his teaching about this, how would they react to him going through with it?
- Would they not be even more scandalized? They don’t understand that he has to die for them to live; they would not understand how he could be the Messiah-Savior from God who was supposed to deliver Israel, and still allow himself to die the lowest form of death in their culture. If he is God, would he be sacrificed? It would seem a crazy idea.
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “but we preach about a crucified Christ, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” [1 Corinthians 1.23 NET]. Stumbling block there is the term σκάνδαλον, so we say, “the scandal of the cross.”

[Slide 12: 6.63-66] John 6.63-66: [Jesus continued] **“The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help! The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”** ⁶⁴**But there are some of you who do not believe.”** (For Jesus had already known from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵**So Jesus added, “Because of this I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has allowed him to come.”** ⁶⁶**After this many of his disciples quit following him and did not accompany him any longer.**

† Jesus did not comfort his disciples. Instead of softening his message, he raised the bar on following him. And thus many left.

- These disciples were people who were following Jesus around and accepting his teaching, but they were not true believers in Jesus’ identity or his offer of salvation. Here we see them reject his teaching, and thus stop following. For them, the offense of his words outweighed the excitement of his miracles. That is how obstinate unfaith can be.

† Jesus knows they are offended, scandalized, by his teaching. But he indicates what we already have learned: they cannot come to faith on their own. It is the Holy Spirit that gives life, through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- This is the pivotal point in each person's destiny: whether they react to Jesus and his gospel offer of salvation by believing or by drawing back and turning away.
- † Jesus knew people would reject him, and that it always would be so. He shares these truths about how people are saved, so that those who do believe can better understand and withstand the attacks of those who do not.
 - In that sense, this is designed to build up believers today also: to encourage us by understanding we were chosen, and to embolden us to defend our faith against those who are unenlightened.
- † Notice here that Jesus, as the divine Son of God, already knows who will believe and who will not, and he knows, not only that his sacrifice is coming, but who will hand him over to the authorities that send him to the cross.

[Slide 13: 6.67-71] John 6.67-71: So Jesus said to the twelve, "You don't want to go away too, do you?" ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God!" ⁷⁰Jesus replied, "Didn't I choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is the devil?" ⁷¹(Now he said this about Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for Judas, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.)

- † In the Greek text, the way Jesus formed his question indicates he clearly was expecting them to say no, they did not want to go.
 - This was a time of sorting out the true believers from those who were just hanging on for fun. The twelve probably also did not like Jesus' teaching, and no doubt were upset that he was driving away most of his followers. In their minds, this was no way to run a ministry or start a revolution!
 - But Jesus chose them specifically, and they believe by now that he is all that John has revealed to us so far, summarized as the Holy One of God, and that he has the words of eternal life, the true gospel.
- † Well, eleven of them believe this. The other one, Judas Iscariot, would later hand Jesus over to the authorities and start the legal process that would result in Jesus' death on the cross.
 - Jesus refers to Judas here as "the Devil." Some English translations say "a devil," but there is only one devil. Jesus called Peter, "Satan," when Peter was trying to dissuade Jesus from going to his death, and here he thinks of Judas as "the devil" for setting his death in motion. Both men were in those moments doing Satan's, the devil's, work.
 - Satan means adversary, and when Peter was acting adverse to God's purposes, Jesus called him Satan. The word we translate as "devil" is δῖάβολος, which means slanderer. Judas would slander Jesus to the authorities as he did the devil's work, so Jesus refers to him as the devil.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 14: chosen]** If God chooses you to be one of his people, you will come to faith in Jesus as your savior.

- That means you will continuously depend on Jesus for salvation through his death and resurrection, and believe in Jesus as the divine Son of God who came to be the human Messiah-Savior we call Christ.
 - If you put your faith in Jesus in this way, then you will remain in a close relationship with him. He will be the bread that will sustain you for eternal life, and so you can be assured, as we saw last week, that your salvation is guaranteed, that you will go to Heaven when you die and be resurrected to new physical life when Christ returns.
- † But this relationship with Jesus is not just about having your future guaranteed, it is about being intimate with him, forever, but starting now.
- It is about depending on Jesus every moment, not just to make your relationship with God peaceful, not just for forgiveness, but for empowerment, empowerment so that you can be courageous to openly face your fears and doubts;
 - empowerment so that you can be bold in sharing God's truth in love; empowerment so that you can be gentle and kind even when people mock you;
 - empowerment so that you can learn to live in freedom from your lusts, addictions, and bad habits, empowerment so that you can overcome your flaws, and so you can learn to develop your gifts and strengths and use them for good.
- † This relationship also is about being devoted to Jesus every moment, not just acknowledging him as savior and king in your head, but actually doing the things he commands his followers to do, like serving in the ministry and building spiritual relationships with non-believers.
- It is about actually learning to live more selflessly, giving up more of your money, more of your time, more of your will and desire, so that you can serve Christ by helping others.
 - And – perhaps most importantly – it is about learning to walk with him, not just in obedience, but in protective love, to commune with him, and talk with him, and be taught by him.
- † In the Christian Service Brigade two weeks ago, I reiterated to the young men that our goal was to help them develop into good Christian men who are spiritual leaders. That is also the goal of the church, to help you develop into good Christian men and women who are spiritual leaders.
- We want you to become healthy and strong and growing spiritually, so you can enjoy true life with Christ, so you can experience the exhilaration of having Christ work through you to bless others, and so you can influence people for Christ in your family, neighborhood, workplace or school, and in the greater community.
 - The next few weeks, we will be talking about what God's plan is for believers and how we experience "spiritual growth," or "progressive sanctification." For today, let's close in prayer...