

John 6:41-71

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 January 2024

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] A number of weeks ago I was asked, do you have drama in your services at IPC?

! Do Presbyterians do drama in their services?! What's the answer to that? The answer is yes.

We do drama the first Sunday evening and the third Sunday morning.

Some Presbyterian churches in our denomination, they do drama every week. The Lord's Supper is drama. You will see bread broken.

You should see wine poured. We don't do that, we probably should do that, shouldn't we? My job tonight, I think if we preach John 6 right, I think it has to end in the drama of the Lord's Supper.

[1 : 07] That's my job for you tonight. Which is why unusually we're having the Lord's Supper both morning and evening services. At John 6 it started, Jesus fed 5,000 families with five loads, two fish.

And the next day he preaches a very long sermon. And it's got one basic theme, verse 35. And as we come to this last big chunk in this chapter, there's a tension going on.

I hope you can see it. There are no words in John 6 that children cannot understand. Jesus was a brilliant yet very simple preacher.

But as Jesus gets clearer, there is a reaction of hostility and antagonism. And not just from the wider crowd, but from many of the disciples. Look at verses 66.

We read that many of his disciples, many of his followers, they no longer walked with him. There's a mass defection. There's a point that comes to any of us in our relationship with Christ.

[2 : 11] Where it becomes clear to you that Jesus is laying claim in the most radical and far reaching way possible. That the way that I live and the decisions that I make and the way that I think and the attitudes that I have, they are poisoning me.

And poisoning the ones that I love. And I have to choose between the people I've invested myself in, and I think are going to make me happy, and Jesus, who says, I am the true bread of life.

There comes a point, doesn't there, where we realise, actually, I'm just playing about with the edge. About the edge with Jesus. But to be a true disciple, it means that I'm going to have to let go of my iron grip on all the things that I think make me happy.

And allow Jesus Christ and his grip of grace to grab hold of me. I realise that I'm so frantically busy going off in different directions, and that to truly follow Jesus means I'm going to have to simplify my life.

I'm going to have to make Jesus Christ first. And that means I'm going to have to demote some of those things. And I'm going to have to, in the language of John 6, feed on him first. And last.

[3 : 37] And I wonder if you've ever felt that tension. I hope some of you might be feeling that tonight. Because if you are, Jesus is revealing himself to you, and your choice is to listen to him, and come with humility to him, or to walk away like those disciples.

And many choose to be offended and scandalised. And they say in verse 60, this is all too hard for me. I don't have to listen to this. So the question is, will you feed on Jesus, or will you defect?

Two big points. The first is feeding on Jesus' flesh. And then we'll look at some responses. Verses 47 to 59, feeding on Jesus' flesh.

So verse 48, can you see Jesus says, I'm the bread of life. He's echoing what he's been teaching already that day. And in verse 49, he speaks about the ultimate futility and inadequacy of anything else to ultimately satisfy.

Even the very best gifts that God gives to you in this life. The things that you think will feed you most in this life will lead to dust and to death, apart from Christ.

[4 : 51] There is nothing, apart from the Lord Jesus, that can truly satisfy and fulfil and feed our needs. Because I'm so culturally aware, I am aware of FOMO.

Do you know what FOMO is, isn't it? FOMO is the fear of missing out. Fear of missing out. Other people have experiences that we would love to have and we want.

People talk about things that they are frightened of not getting. It's FOMO. And every single one of us here has experiences that we think, if we have that, it will make me happy.

Or we compare ourselves with those who do the coolest things and we feel inadequate. And you fear that you're going to miss out. FOMO.

But if you could accumulate, if you could put together all the coolest experiences in the world, they are not true food. And they are not true bread, the life of God.

[5 : 57] They cannot connect you or they cannot bring you close to the God who made you. They cannot give you the life of heaven. Because Jesus in John 6 is saying to us that he alone is the true food and the true bread.

And what Jesus does in this last section of John 6, is there are two shifts and two new directions. And the first shift is the picture from bread to the picture of flesh and blood.

So the one thing that you must do to inherit eternal life is to, listen, eat his flesh, drink his blood.

Jesus is speaking about his death. The way in which Jesus can give you tonight the true food from heaven is through his atoning death on the cross.

At the cross, his flesh and his blood are torn apart. In the Bible, blood does not mean life.

It's not the blood that's pumping around our bodies normally. But in the Bible, when it speaks about there being power in the blood, nothing but the blood of Jesus like we sang this morning, it's talking about blood poured out, blood lost, blood shed.

[7 : 14] Blood separated from the living thing. Blood is always a symbol of death in the Bible. So that the bread of life that Jesus offers us, it becomes available when the flesh and blood of Jesus are separated on the cross.

It's a very dramatic, gaudy picture, isn't it? Of a violent and bloody death. Look down at the second half of verse 51. 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. It's a very important detail like, and he says, the bread that I will give.

The wonder of what Jesus offers you tonight is that it is completely free, completely gracious. None of us deserve this.

Jesus is not compelled to do it. He is not coerced to give his life. And he's talking here about the horror of crucifixion. And he is going to do that freely for the life of the world.

[8 : 19] The word for means in the place of, on behalf of, as a substitute for. So as he gives his life over to death, it is for the sake that we will have life.

He says, it is my flesh. And of course, he's speaking symbolically here. He's not speaking specifically about the sacrament. Although, as we come to the Lord's table, at the end, you'll see the relevance of this.

So verse 53, 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.

When Jesus left the glory of heaven and became incarnate, took on flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and he was made. He was made man.

The whole fullness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily. But Jesus' flesh and blood were not magic. There was no more magic in Jesus' flesh and blood than there is in yours.

[9 : 26] The Lord Jesus had human DNA. And so if we could go back 2,000 years, and we could bleed a litre of blood from Jesus' body, sounds grotesque, doesn't it?

And you were somehow able to bring that litre of blood forward in a time machine to this evening, and you could drink it, it wouldn't do you any good at all. What he's talking about is that on the cross, his flesh and his blood are torn apart.

That on the cross, he becomes the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And his human flesh and blood, his body as it were, becomes the channel, it becomes the conduit through which eternal life which dwelled in him comes to us.

He gave his flesh over to death. He takes our place so that his body becomes the source and fountain of eternal life for you and for me.

The other shift that he makes when he starts talking about his flesh and blood, he changes the word eating that we would use in a normal meal to the word munching, chomping, gobbling, feasting.

[10 : 44] If I was to speak to teenagers, I might use the illustration of zombies here. But the Bible translated as feeding to show there's a difference.

Just look at verse 54. It doesn't talk about eating there. He says, whoever feeds, the word is feast, whoever feasts on my flesh, drinks my blood, has eternal life.

And I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever feasts, feeds, gobbles on my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him.

As the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds, feasts on me, he will also live because of me. This is how we receive the gift of eternal life through Christ.

Can you see, it's not through believing in Jesus generally. It's not just through believing in his death. It is feasting on him as our substitute and saviour in his death.

[11 : 55] Don't you think it's astonishingly humble for Jesus to use this picture? We might say, Jesus, why didn't he use something like chocolate and caviar as a picture of precious, eternal life giving flesh?

No, he says, whoever, whoever feeds and drinks, it's domestic, it's ordinary. It is something we all do, isn't it? It is something we all understand. If you'd ask me, what's my favourite restaurant in Ealing, I would say to you that it is Espresso Kebabs.

I don't know if you've been to Espresso Kebabs in Hanwell. It's a little hole in the wall. It is a remarkable place. And it's difficult for me to express to you what it tastes like.

What is the only way that you could understand what it tastes like? It is for you to experience it. To taste it.

To feast on it. The same is true with the Lord Jesus. You can be a fan of the Lord Jesus, you can be a follower, and you can have never really tasted the true bread of life.

[13 : 08] Tragically, we know, isn't it, you can even stand up and say, I believe Jesus died on the cross without experiencing who he is and the reality of his death for you. It's possible to grow up in a church like this, to know the story, but never to be known by him.

Because apart from actually sampling and savouring Jesus himself and his death, there can be no changes, no real heart changes. I think that's why Jesus uses this illustration of the manna, the bread in the Old Testament.

The manna was a really good gift from God that was meant to point people to the Lord Jesus. And I think it's a picture of every good experience that you have in life. And thank God there are many. Your best experiences come from God, but as good as every experience is, it cannot feed you with eternal life.

It is meant to turn us, so that we feast on him each day, each hour. And so our God is not anti-pleasure. Our God is not anti-good experience.

But at their best, those experiences are meant to turn us to Jesus Christ. And if they don't turn us to Christ, what they do is they turn us away from Christ, to themselves, and all your hunger, and all your tastes, constantly need recalibrating like mine do.

[14 : 38] And the only way to recalibrate your heart, to set it right, is to feast on Christ. This passage warns you that your good pleasures will lead to dust.

If there's something in your life that you really need to be happy apart from Jesus, if there's something that you choose above him, before him, Jesus promises it will turn to dust.

But when we learn to feed on him, if we are able to feed on him, it becomes the key.

It becomes the key to be able to serve others. If I am feeding on him, it means I can love others even if they don't love me.

and if I am feeding on him, and say, if I am feeding on him, I think that is the only way to starve my pride and my bitterness and my anxiety and my regret.

[15 : 55] None of us have power over those things apart from Christ. What does he mean to feed? He is speaking about taking Jesus into our heart, the ongoing, soul-filling fellowship with him as we partake in his death.

Right. There you go. That's good. He is speaking about the soul-filling fellowship with him as we partake in his death. It is digesting him.

It is actively taking him in through faith. The way that we grow, the way that we transform and change is taking into our heart the crucifixion and Jesus crucified to ourselves.

That is feeding on Jesus. So what is the reaction? This is our second point. The second point is there is more at the end of this chapter on people's response than Jesus' word.

There are three different responses. Let's look at them. The first two are both offence and rejection. The last one is tentative faith. The great surprise is the first response comes from the crowd but the second one comes from the disciples.

[17:04] People have begun to follow Jesus. Now you might begin to think that when Jesus speaks in this way people would just rush to him, wouldn't they? They'd feed on him what he is offering.

These promises are too good to be true almost but there's realism in this chapter. And so for a time the crowds did flock to him.

But as Jesus becomes clearer people take offence and then they complain and they reject and I think that's the basic human disposition towards God outside the Garden of Eden.

The basic disposition is suspicious. I think the children are saying get me away from this boring man tonight. Alright? Aren't they? They're saying we've had enough of him.

Alright? I understand children I feel the same. Alright? And so they are offended the crowds and then they complain and they reject him.

[18:05] And that is the basic human disposition outside the Garden of Eden. That's the normal reaction. People are offended. And so if you are partially offended by what I've said tonight this is for you.

And if you have friends that are offended by Jesus this is very helpful. Let's see the three responses. Okay? First the reaction is the crowd verses 41 to 45. The crowd begin to grumble and complain.

Jesus has just said I've come down from heaven four times and that's what's made them complain. I've come down from heaven. I've come down from heaven. And I think we need to feel something the offence of this.

The incarnation of Jesus is offensive because of what it says about us. You see on our own our best spiritual insights and intuitions and thoughts are completely in the dark.

You can take the most brilliant accomplished compassionate person and apart from Christ coming from heaven and feeding on him their best opinion about God is a stab in the dark.

[19:20] One of the most powerful assumptions in our culture is this idea that we can look at all the spiritual experiences and spiritualities and we can construct a view of God and we get to decide what God is like.

So it's a massive affront when Jesus comes and he says no one has ever seen God. Verse 46 except the one who has come from God.

You can only truly know God if you know me. You can only truly please God or experience God if you please me. You can only worship God by coming to me and believing in me and feeding on my flesh and drinking my blood.

It's so offensive. It cuts across right across that we can somehow find God by accumulating spiritual experiences.

You can see the scandal in verse 42 just after Jesus says he's come down from heaven they say verse 42 is not Jesus the son of Joseph and Mary the carpenter he fixed my coffee table last year.

[20:25] How does he now say I have come down from heaven? It's contempt isn't it dogmatic. It's an adamant refusal to accept that God could come to us through this one man. And this dogmatism can be so disheartening can't it particularly when you're trying to share your faith with a friend or someone that you love.

The most wonderful and delightful people automatically dismiss Jesus without even a thought. And what does Jesus say to people in those circumstances?

What does he say to the person with a dismissive attitude? The one who just rejects him? His answer is quite amazing. He doesn't become insecure and threatened. He doesn't even defend himself.

He doesn't justify himself. Look at verse 43. He says stop grumbling. And then he says this. Only God can really convince you in your heart of my authenticity.

Since I am heaven sent, I come from God with eternal life. The only one who can back up my claim is God himself.

[21:36] And you have to hear from him directly or you're just going to keep on grumbling. Verse 44, no one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him.

The word draw is very, very important. It is always against resistance. It's not a violent or abusive drawing in any way, but it's always against inertia and resistance and disinterest.

Because you see, only God's grace is powerful enough to overcome our grumbling. We cannot approach God with our own competency.

The movement begins with God himself. And it's very encouraging in one way, in that it means that every single one of us tonight who have come to the Lord Jesus, we have done so because God the Father has drawn us.

That's the reason why you are feasting on Christ tonight, if you are. It is because God has drawn you. And I think because it is God who draws them, I think it means that we shouldn't harass or nag our friends.

[22 : 55] We should certainly pray for them. Your witness is important and your conversations and your invitations are very important.

But it is only God, isn't it, who can enter into someone's life and show them spiritually what is going on. And so I want to encourage those of us who are Christians tonight to pray for your friends, particularly those who are most antagonistic.

And how does God draw us? Verse 45, the next verse, 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.

It's a quote from the Old Testament, that when Messiah comes, that God himself will be our teacher, that God by his spirit, as we hear his word, as we hear the word of God outwardly, he will shine in our hearts illuminating the beauty of Jesus, that he's our Messiah.

So none of you have believed tonight because of your own strength, or insight, or intellect. None of you keep believing because of our own strength and insight.

[24 : 05] I don't have the strength to be faithful for 24 hours, or 12 hours. But if tonight you feel that God is drawing you now, don't resist him.

Come to Jesus. That is the reaction of the crowd, it's offence and rejection. That's the reaction of the crowd. There's a second, and we'll be briefer here, the even more troubling reaction is from the disciples, verses 60 to 66.

It's so searching, isn't it? It's not the crowd, you don't have any commitment to Jesus. No, these are those who become disciples, who begin to follow him. And there's a great number of them who turn away because they start to grumble as well, don't they, as Jesus becomes clearer.

They say, don't they, it's all too hard to swallow. You can't expect Jesus to take over a life like that. It's so impractical. We've seen that, haven't we?

People who come and they seem to be enthusiastic and they begin to follow Jesus Christ, but when it becomes clear that Jesus disagrees with us, or Jesus is calling us to have a deeper, clearer commitment, there's a cooling off at a distance, and the grumbling begins.

[25 : 23] And what does Jesus say to those who no longer want to continue with him? What does he offer those who say, I really can't be a disciple anymore? Well, in verse 62, he points us to the cross again.

And then in verse 63, he says, it is the spirit who gives life. The flesh, speaking about our human flesh, is no help at all. The words that I've spoken to you are spirit and life.

Our human flesh, on its own, apart from the spirit, cannot gain satisfaction. It comes to us through Jesus' word. And so tonight, if you are feeling particularly fatigued and worn out, and if you're feeling, I'm not sure whether I can even continue as a disciple, the way forward is not to try harder, it's not to work harder.

The way is simply to hear the words of Jesus because we cannot feed on Jesus apart from his words. And if you sense in your heart, you're pulling away from Jesus, and you're feeling overwhelmed with other hungers, you wonder if you can keep being a disciple, and perhaps even in your heart you've begun to grumble against him.

Or maybe you feel God has not come through for you, you and I need to attend to these really simple words of Jesus here. And the prayer I think for me and for you is, Lord, I do believe, help my unbelief.

[26 : 50] Isn't that the prayer of all of us? And he says, I will give my spirit without measure because my words are spirit and life. And finally and quickly there's the lovely and true response.

In verse 66, many disciples walk away. We've gone from a crowd of hundreds, maybe thousands, and they've gone, and we're left, aren't we, with twelve? In verse 67, Jesus said to the twelve, do

you want to go away as well?

And he says it for their benefit, and Simon answers, it's a wonderful answer, isn't it? To whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life, we have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

And that's the fundamental mark of what it is that God is drawing you, and that you are feeding on Christ. That you know tonight there's no real alternative.

You know the power, something of the power of Jesus' words, and when you read them for yourself, you hear them taught, it is like fire, you get a taste of the world to come as his word enters your heart.

[28 : 04] You know what it is to be acted on by a force outside of you, making you more like the Lord Jesus. Feed on his words, and as you feed on him, and above all you have come to know and believe in Jesus as the Holy One of God, not just to know about him, but to know him, that he is real to you.

And this is important, it is so important, let me tell you how important it is, that on the night before he was crucified, the Lord Jesus gave us a meal, and he gave us a meal to repeat.

the Lord's supper, and it enacts the gospel in exactly these terms that we're about to participate in.

It tells the story of the great heart of the gospel of Jesus' death for us, and at the end as we come to receive bread and wine, we are invited to feed on him, and drink.

in the Anglican prayer book, the 39 articles, one of the articles says this, that the Lord's supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death, and insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same bread which we break, is a partaking of the body of Christ.

And likewise, the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ. So come and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving, and come and drink his blood with thanksgiving.

[29 : 51] Because Jesus says whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink, and whoever feeds on my flesh, and drinks of my blood abides in me, and I in him.

Let's come to the table. Let's pray. Thank you.