

John 6:22-59

Food That Endures

For those of us raised in a culture where a normal Sunday is coming to church, we face a danger of letting the claims of Christianity lose their radical flare. We can become so accustomed to the norms of our faith that we lose sight of what it is, and who it is we are portraying when we gather. So far in this series on the church we have tried to look at many angles of the diamond that God is making out of the earth called the Church. We have looked at our gathering together and why we gather, and for the next few times we are going to look at the elements of our worship. But just put your shoes in the feet of one who is raised outside of church, raised outside of the norm that so many here are accustomed to. What do those who observe what we do think? Why is everyone singing? Why does everyone dress a little nicer than normal (or not any different)? Why is there a pulpit? Why is the preacher saying phrases like “take your Bible and turn with me”? Why do people get into robes and go down into water? Why do they take crushed fruit of the vine and bread and share it together?

With all these questions the field for explanation is tilled and ready for seed. The more illiterate our culture becomes in regards to Christianity, the greater our opportunity to not only explain ourselves to the world but to ensure that we have a firm grasp on our own practices. Misconceptions have existed about Christianity ever since the beginning. One of the biggest misunderstandings came upon the consideration of something that the Christians have been doing on a weekly basis since the beginning - the Eucharist, Holy Communion, The Lord's Supper. I want to read for you an early Roman description of what he thought the Christians were doing in the Supper:

What I am going to read for you is from an early church document (late 2nd century) called the Octavius of Marcus Minicius Felix. This document may be the earliest Christian apology (defense of the faith) and is written in the form of dialogue. In it a debate is described between a Christian and a pagan at the Roman port of Ostia. Minicius Felix was walking about the Roman port with two friends, Octavius, the Christian and Caecilus, the pagan. As they are walking, Caecilus stops to worship a pagan idol and Octavius, the Christian, objects and so a debate between the two ensues. Listen to the first lines of the debate:

CAECILIUS THE PAGAN: You Christians are the worst breed ever to affect the world. You deserve every punishment you can get! Nobody likes you. It would be better if you and your Jesus had never been born. We hear that you are all cannibals--you eat the flesh of your children in your sacred meetings.

OCTAVIUS the Christian: That story is probably based on reports that we share together a meal of the body and blood of Christ. That we do. But it is not human flesh we eat. It is bread and wine we consecrate to commemorate our Lord's death.

Christians were put to death because of their faith. We have a letter by Pliny the Younger, a

Roman Governor who is writing to the Emperor Trajan around 112. In it he is asking for counsel on how to deal with the Christians. One of the reports was concerning the practices of the Christians when they came together and celebrated the Lord's Supper. Pliny was very suspicious of the practices of the Christians and would give them three times to affirm their innocence, and if they did not then they were executed for being a Christ follower.

There have always been misconceptions about what we do as Christians, maybe some misconceptions that are not due to ignorance but due to bad theology as it relates to how we carry out our faith. If the world is to think us strange then better to be strange for the right reasons and not false reasons. So today I want us to consider the Lord's Supper and to do so we turn to one of the capstone passages, John 6.

READ TEXT

Now some of you are already scratching your heads about the Lord's Supper and this passage.

Hopefully by the end of our time together, when we participate in and partake of the Lord's Supper together this passage will well up inside of you as we consider our life in Christ expressed through our coming in worship to take the elements to remember our Lord, by faith participate in the life of our Lord, experience his presence with us through the Holy Spirit, as well as long for the day of his coming to partake of the cup with us when his kingdom is established.

2 things from this passage this AM:

1. The World is Hungry

This is one of the most significant passages in all of Holy Scripture. In this passage we get a picture of who Christ is and what he is doing. We see the need of the world and the help for the world's need in Jesus Christ. When we see Jesus as the answer to the world's need we see him as one who completely satisfies.

Notice the context. The people are hungry and in pursuit. Jesus has just fed the 5,000 with five barley loaves and two fish and the people have followed him from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other. When they find him, after he had crossed by walking on water, they intend to have their appetites filled with more of that bread and fish that Jesus offered. The last time they were together Jesus left (v.15) because they wanted to make him king, but look how quickly their thoughts turn away from Jesus and back towards their selves.

Have you ever known someone who would fit into a crowd like this? Someone who can't make up their mind? I have met many that struggle to know what they want to do for the rest of their lives, they truly don't know what they want. Have you ever seen or heard someone and said of them, 'he doesn't know what he wants'? Here this crowd is faced, much like the woman at the well in Samaria, with bread that endures and they can't seem to see past themselves and their moments to see real satisfaction.

It is a sad state that sees men and women, boys and girls, chasing wind. How sad is the commentary of these here with Jesus, that they were in the presence of God like no one had ever been, and if they only knew to whom it was they were asking for bread, they would have asked him for bread that would satisfy and he would give it. We look to our world today and see the same striving for wind in dissatisfaction all proving the wise saying of the preacher of Ecclesiastes, *He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.* (Ecc. 3:11)

Notice the patience of our Lord with this crowd. They don't get it and instead of being overly frustrated and dismissive with them he gently leads them towards himself, although as we see in the end, Jesus is not really what the crowd wants. Man who was created for eternity doesn't want eternity and so he sacrifices eternity for the present pleasure of the filling of his appetites. This is where the church goer needs to be real careful. The crowd doesn't care how they get their fix as long as they get it. The issue that Jesus confronts the crowds with is that he is not interested in giving them "their" fix, he is interested in giving them himself. Does this make sense? The crowds were pursuing their selves when in reality they should have been pursuing Jesus. Don't make the mistake of the crowd, even the crowd that sticks close to Jesus. Make sure that you are pursuing Jesus and not yourself.

Because:

2. Jesus is the Bread That Satisfies

When Jesus says I am the bread of life, it is the first of the seven *I am* statements in John. Jesus sees through the crowd's intent and tells them to pursue things that endure. There is no one more enduring than one who was before the beginning - this is who Jesus is.

The crowd seems to be great religious people. Jesus confronts them with truth, they did call him Rabbi, and once confronted they were not dismissive. They wanted Jesus to give them a list of things they could do to accomplish the works of God (28). Jesus then goes onward to tell them the summation of the work of God -

believe in the sent and sealed one (27-28). The satisfaction for their hunger is faith. The crowd is living on a system that seeks a sign when Jesus confronts their seeking of a sign with his own self by saying and doing things that they don't get because they are not missing what is right in front of them.

My wife gets on to me all the time, says that I can't look for anything. She asks me to go get something out of her purse. She might as well be asking me to dig a hole to China. The reason she gets onto me is because usually whatever she needs was right in front of me the whole time, I just miss it. The same is true for this crowd and Jesus. The Creator of the universe is telling them how to have life and they miss it. He came to his own and his own received him not.

Jesus tells them this strange thing: Eat of my flesh and drink of my blood (53). This is a remarkable statement, remarkable because of how direct it is. Jesus plainly says, *Truly truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink of his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks of my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day* (53-54). Look at the promises, resurrection, and eternal life. Sounds great doesn't it? But it is the how we have to get there that most people say plainly, if this is what it means to have eternal life then forget it! But this is not just anyone, some hokey one saying this. Remember who is saying this, this is the Son, the Sent and Sealed one.

Look at how he was sent. He came so that men might believe and in believing have life. He was sent voluntarily and vicariously to save the world. Read verses 38-51.

In Jesus we have the culmination of all of God's saving acts. God has been working salvation since the beginning and is still working salvation. In Jesus all the saving acts of God come together to form a tapestry of grace. Do we see him that way? Our view of church, the assembly of confessing followers of this Jesus, those of us who have said, if it means drinking the blood of Jesus and eating his flesh is what it takes to have eternal life then yes give me Jesus. Listen, it isn't that we make room for God in our gathering together to express these great truths, but God has graciously given us space whereby to come and attend ourselves to the highest praise.

When we come together we are living the story of God's salvation. It is not just something that we remember, when we come to worship we confess that God has done, God is doing, and God will do. Past, Present, Future. No other element of worship contains all of these elements quite like the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Paul said that as often as you do this you proclaim (present) the Lord's death (past) until he comes (future). No other figure ties all time together like Jesus.

Now let's think about something. John is the only gospel that does not have the institution of the Lord's Supper. I believe this is the Lord Supper passage of John. John wants us to know something about the salvation that we proclaim when we through our visible signs attest to the invisible. Remember it was Jesus who said, take eat this is my body broken for you, take drink this is my blood of the new covenant (1 Cor 11:23-26).

If Jesus is the culmination of the ongoing work of God, then what are we doing when we take crushed fruit of the vine and broken bread? We are participating in the story of God. This is a story that he has been telling since he said let there be and will sum up the story by saying the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.

When we read John 6 we are meant read it not in isolation but in light of all of Scripture. John 6 is to remind us of the Exodus. There are events that are so closely weaved together. There were two great salvation events in the Exodus - crossing the Red Sea, Jesus just walked on water, and the manna in the wilderness, Jesus just fed 5K and then said that he was the true bread from heaven! In Exodus, the people of Israel were commanded to celebrate Passover as a perpetual reminder and assurance of God's deliverance. Only those who obeyed God by sacrificing and eating the perfect lamb and sprinkling blood on doorposts would live and only those who ate unleavened bread would remain part of the community. In the same way, only those who eat and drink of Christ will live forever.

Out of Egypt God called his Son. From the mountain God spared Isaac but did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all. Do you see all of the work of God culminating in Jesus?

When we come to the table we, through faith by the Spirit, encounter the risen Christ. This is why we come humbly, this is why we come obediently. Jesus has come and in that coming has given us a reason to live, a reason to come out from the world and gather together to celebrate not only what he has done, but what he is doing, and what he will do.

Now we know what a hard saying this is and we know that many will not accept this saying of Jesus, we know that to come to him takes belief. Even though the rest of the world goes away we are like Peter and the faithful - "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (68-69) Is this you this AM? Have you come to know or are you like the crowds?