1-26-20

John 6:26-63

As we continue looking at the Lord’s Supper, we can consider this account of Jesus dealing with a large crowd about a year before the Last Supper took place. The back-ground to this account is the feeding of the five thousand. The day before, Jesus had taken five loaves and two fish, and multiplied them to feed five thousand men and all the women and children who were present; perhaps 20,000 people. The next day, the people found that Jesus was gone. So, they crossed the lake of Galilee and found Him in Capernaum.

When these people came to Jesus, He knew that they didn’t truly believe in Him, but were interested in being fed physical food. They were concerned about their stomachs and not their souls. In spite of this, Jesus patiently taught them. He did this for three reasons: One is for our benefit. We now have His teaching recorded in Scripture for us to study and better understand our Lord. Secondly, there were some true believers there. They may not have understood all that Jesus was saying at that time, but they would understand later when they received the Holy Spirit.

The third reason, unfortunately, applied to the majority of the people there; even many who had followed Jesus for some time. Jesus’ teaching purged the group of those who were not true believers. His teaching was hard. Jesus placed Himself above Moses; He put Himself on par with God; and He told them that He had come down from heaven. On top of all this, He told them to eat His flesh and drink His blood.

The Jews held Moses to be the greatest man who ever lived. They knew that he had prophesied another like him would come, but Jesus didn’t fit their idea of who was coming. They were looking for a Messiah who would lead them in overthrowing the Romans and restore Israel as an independent nation again. The Jews were completely focused on the world; on what they could have in this life. That is why they were after Jesus to provide them with bread to eat.

Now, it is very easy for us to be condescending toward these people for their focus on this life. But let’s consider this day and age. We don’t have to look far into the nonbelieving people to see that their primary focus is on self and this life. This will never change for them unless they become followers of Jesus Christ. Even more importantly, we must look at ourselves. Christian’s lives should be focused on eternity. Can we say that about ourselves? Think about any decision you make: Have you made your decision in terms of what will happen in the immediate, or even in the distant, future? Or have you considered what it will mean in your life after death? We Christians ought to consider the ramifications of anything we do in eternity, as being more important that what they are now.

All of us need a vehicle, and there is nothing wrong with having a nice one. But do we have to buy the very best we can possibly afford? Or could we do with a little less and use the rest of that money in some way to advance the Kingdom of God? All of us need some entertainment, a time to relax and do something enjoyable. But is that how we ought to spend every spare moment? Or could we put some of our time to working the works that God has for us to do? We Christians must remember that we are citizens of heaven and only passing through this earth. There are certainly important things for us to do here in this life; but if we consider eternity, it can change what we view as important.

The Jews here had another problem: they thought they knew where Jesus was from. He had grown up right next door in Nazareth. It was obvious to them that He was the son of Joseph and Mary. How then, could He claim God as His Father and to have come down from heaven? Again, they looked with earthly eyes and didn’t understand the Scriptures. Isaiah had prophesied a virgin birth; but they could see no reason that this should happen to Mary. Jesus had just fed thousands of people with a small amount of bread and a couple of fish; but they couldn’t get past knowing Him as a “Son of a Carpenter”. What they thought they knew got in the way of reality; they were blinded and hard of heart.

Again, even as Christians, we must be careful that what we “know” doesn’t get in the way of reality. The spiritual world is very real, but it can be difficult for us act as if it is. The physical world is where we live and we tend to focus on it; which is natural. But Christians are called to understand how very important the spiritual world is. This life will end; the Bible teaches us that our spiritual life will go on for eternity. What we decide in this short life determines whether we will spend eternity in blessed happiness or abject misery. Still, how often do we make decisions without ever considering the eternal consequences?

Jesus spends a lot of time in this discourse talking about His flesh and blood and bread. Sometimes Jesus is speaking metaphorically and sometimes He is not. Certainly, when He refers to eating His flesh and drinking His blood, it is metaphorical. In the Bible, eating human flesh is shown to be a result of rebelling against God and receiving His judgement. Human-beings are the only creation made in the image of God, and so, are above all the rest of God’s creation. Additionally, consuming any kind of blood is strictly forbidden.

Deuteronomy 12:23

Only be sure not to eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh.

We know that Jesus kept the law perfectly. Therefore, it isn’t possible that He taught His followers to do these two things that are so completely against the law and will of God.

In verse 31, the Jews bring up the manna that fed the Israelites for forty years as they wondered in the desert. This was something miraculous that took place; God provided for the physical needs of His people with this gift from heaven. Jesus lets them know that He comes from heaven. Thus, we know that Jesus has always existed; He has existed from eternity past as part of the Trinity. He left His glory in heaven and came down to the earth as a man. Just as the manna came down from heaven to sustain physical life, Jesus came down from heaven in order to sustain spiritual life. This is why He uses the metaphor of bread to describe Himself.

There is an important difference: While the manna kept them alive for a time, they still died. Jesus offers life for eternity. In this discourse, Jesus tells us four different times, that He will raise up believers on the last day. From this, we understand that our physical bodies will die, but will not stay that way. Jesus promises to bring our bodies back to life to be with Him eternally. Our spirits will be with Him immediately when we pass from this earth.

In the first part of this discourse, Jesus talked about *believing* in Him; starting about verse 50, He changes to speaking of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. These are really the same thing; He changes to the metaphor in order to show how deep and profound this belief must be. We can think of it as consuming Christ.

When we consume food, it is to nourish our bodies and sustain life. When we consume Christ, it is to nourish our spirits and sustain eternal life. How do we consume Christ? First and foremost is to act on the faith provided by the Holy Spirit and accept Him as our Saviour; admitting that we cannot attain heaven without Him and depending entirely upon Him. Remember that Jesus is the manifest Word of God; and, the Bible is the word of God. Read and study your Bible, let the words sink into your heart, place them in your mind and live by them. In this way, we are consuming Christ. Prayer is spending time in communion with Jesus. In this way, we become more like Him. Participating in the Lord’s Supper is physically symbolic of taking Christ; but is a spiritual reality of spiritual nourishment.

When Jesus had spoken about these things, many of them said, “This is a difficult statement”, and really, it is. There isn’t any way that someone with a worldly mind and carnal heart could go along with all that Jesus had said. Later on, we read that many of those who had been following Jesus left; they had been following Him for earthly reasons. Jesus didn’t run after them either; He seeks those who follow Him in truth and in belief that He is the Son of God. This is the effect of the Gospel: it will either draw people to Jesus, or it will cause them to turn away from Him; there is no middle ground.

When many left Jesus, He asked the twelve if they were going to leave too. Peter responded, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” You can bet that at that time, none of the apostles fully understood all that Jesus had said; but they believed that He was the Christ and that what He said meant true life. They wouldn’t have a good understanding until after they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This is important for us; there are lots of things in the Bible that we may not understand, but we trust Jesus, and follow Him anyway. That is why our salvation is based on faith and not on understanding. Understanding is important, but it comes over time as a result of faith.

Verse 63 is the key to understanding everything that Jesus had been talking about. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” From the Old Testament, we know that the Holy Spirit is the One who gives life. We eat in order to keep our bodies alive, but sooner or later, our bodies die. Our bodies, our flesh, cannot give us eternal life. But listening to what Jesus says and believing on Him will give us eternal life.

When Jesus became a man, He didn’t lose His Godhood, but He laid it aside. He did nothing but what the Father wanted Him to; He spoke nothing but what the Holy Spirit told Him to. So, the words He spoke came from the Holy Spirit and they spoke of spiritual things. We must understand them spiritually. When we take these words and believe them and understand them spiritually, we will have eternal life.

As I mentioned earlier, this took place before the Last Supper. What Jesus said here was not in reference to that supper, but was spiritual teaching. But when Jesus did institute the Lord’s Supper, you can bet that the apostles thought back to this event. When Jesus told them that the bread and the wine were His body and blood, they would have known He was speaking spiritually. Perhaps they didn’t fully understand, but they would have been able to tie these two things together.

This account in John and the Lord’s Supper are both about how our lives and Jesus become intertwined. He takes up residence within us and becomes part of us as we live in Him. We have true and eternal life only in union with Jesus.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask for the help of the Holy Spirit. It is only by Him that we can see and understand spiritually. The spiritual world is hard for us to comprehend since we live in the physical. But Your word tells us that it is real and important for our eternity. Impress upon our hearts the importance of caring for our spirits.

Give us guidance that when we make decisions, we consider eternity. Help us to place greater importance on the eternal and less on the temporal. Thank You for understanding how difficult this is for us; thank You for Your great patience. But we desire to grow in this area so that we don’t continue to try Your patience.

Thank You, Jesus, for literally giving up Your flesh and life on the cross. Because of what You have done, we can experience spiritual rebirth; then, we can be spiritually nourished by Your word. In all these things we praise You, for You are worthy.

Lord Jesus we pray all these things in Your holy name

Amen