

Main Idea: In the middle of Jesus’ Bread of Life sermon, in John 6:41-51, two interesting things happened that teach us so much about Jesus and about ourselves.

- I. The people grumbled (41-42).
 - A. They’re just like their forefathers.
 1. Grumbling is what happens when God’s ways differ from ours.
 2. Grumbling indicates that we lack faith.
 - B. They think they know Jesus, but don’t.
 1. They’re confused about His identity.
 2. They’re confused about His origin.
- II. Jesus confronted the grumbling with more truth (43-51).
 - A. He expounded on His relationship with the Father (44-46).
 1. The Father sent Me (44a).
 2. The Father draws people to Me (44b).
 3. The Father teaches people so they come to Me (45).
 4. The Father has been seen only by Me (46).
 - B. He expounded on His reason for coming (47-51).
 1. He came to give eternal life (47-50).
 - a. Eternal life begins the moment you believe (47).
 - b. Eternal life is better than anything in this world (48-50).
 - c. Eternal life will climax on resurrection day.
 2. He came to give His flesh (51).
 - a. Jesus’ death is a gift.
 - b. Jesus’ death is like food.
 - c. Jesus’ death is for the life of the world.

Take Inventory: Are there any grumblers in the house?

1. Are you thinking rightly about Jesus?
2. Are you responding rightly to Jesus?

A lot of interesting things happen at the family dinner time. Teachable moments galore, for sure—which is a great reason to eat together as a family, if at all possible. Like when there’s one piece of pizza left and two people eyeing it. Or whose turn it is to clear the table, and so on.

Have you ever experienced this scenario? It’s dinner time and the family gathers around the kitchen table. Mom, you’ve done your best to prepare a meal to nourish those kids and husband you so love, but when they gather in their chairs you begin to hear it. It’s sort of a low pitched droning sound, no actual words, but you know instantly the meaning.

“What?” you ask, already knowing what’s coming.

“Ah, mom, not again!” says your beloved firstborn.

“You know I don’t like this stuff!” adds your beloved second-born.

And so it happens. Another teachable moment has arrived.

Grumbling and food. You wouldn’t think the two words would go together. After all, God gives us richly all things to enjoy, says the Scriptures. But in the real world where sinners live, they do at times. Grumbling and food.

That’s precisely what we find when we open our Bibles to John 6. The story begins with a meal unlike any you’ve ever enjoyed. Jesus took five loaves of barley bread and two small fish and multiplied them into a feast that fed five thousand men, plus women and children. The crowd was so impressed that they intended to make Jesus king by force, but Jesus would have nothing to do with their short-sighted plans. He’d come to die for sinners, not satisfy their whims.

So He left them. First, He went up on a mountain to spend time with His Father. Then He walked across the Sea of Galilee, joined His stunned disciples in their boat, and arrived in

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Capernaum. The next day the crowd did a manhunt for Jesus and found Him in the synagogue, where they began to question Him.

“Rabbi, when did you get here?” they asked in verse 25.

To which Jesus answered in verse 26, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.” He knew why they wanted Him. They want a king that will meet their needs in *this life*. So He told them in verse 27, “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

Then they fired another question at Him. Verse 28—“So what must we do to do God’s works?” They missed the point, didn’t they? They think they can merit God’s favor.

To which Jesus offered these clarifying words, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

But they don’t get it. They still have bread on their minds. That’s what they want, the stuff of life, and they expect Jesus to provide it. So they start talking about the manna that Moses gave their ancestors. “How about doing something like that, Jesus? Not just one meal, but a lifetime supply of meals. Do that and then we’ll believe in you.”

To which Jesus offered some more clarifying words. “It wasn’t Moses who gave the manna, but that’s another story. I want you to know that my Father is right now giving you bread from heaven.”

“Okay, give it to us!” they insisted.

“I am the bread of life,” responded Jesus. “He who comes to me will never go hungry. I have come down from heaven to do my Father’s will, and my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life.”

And that’s when it happened. You guessed it. They started grumbling. Verse 41—“At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’”

It’s amazing when you stop and think about it. God sent a gift to the earth, the most amazing gift imaginable—a feast for sin-sick and famished souls. And the response? The people with the famished souls grumbled.

Why? In a sense they grumbled for the same reason the kids at the table grumble. They don’t like what’s in front of them. They had their heart set on something else.

How do you help people like that? What’s needed to change their appetite so that, instead of grumbling, they actually want that which they so desperately need?

We’ll find out from Jesus. Right in the middle of His Bread of Life sermon, in John 6:41-51, two interesting things happened that teach us so much about the Lord and about ourselves. First, as just mentioned...

I. Scene one: The people grumbled (41-42).

At this the Jews began to grumble about him. The word “grumble” comes from the Greek word, *gogguzo*, which is an onomatopoeic term, meaning it sounds like what it represents. The people were muttering under their breath at Jesus. And the verb is actually in the imperfect tense which means “they kept grumbling.”

Why? Well, for starters, it’s because...

A. They’re just like their forefathers. They tell Jesus they want manna. That’s interesting. Think back. What happened the day that the Lord started giving His people manna? Check out Exodus 16:2, 7, & 8. They *grumbled*. In the LXX it’s the same root as our word.

Why do people grumble? What causes it?

1. *Grumbling is what happens when God’s ways differ from ours.* That’s why the Jews grumbled in Exodus 16. God wasn’t giving them what they expected out of life. They’d just escaped bondage in Egypt and were tasting freedom for the first time in four hundred years, but

now they're having second thoughts about this trip through the Sinai desert. And before long their grumbling will turn to outright whining, "We want the leeks and garlic and pots of meat like we used to enjoy back in Egypt!"

That's what happens when God's ways differ from ours. Grumbling. And of course, it's not just the Jews in the wilderness, nor the Jews in Jesus' day who grumbled. We're all prone to grumble. Which is why Paul told the church members in Corinth, "Do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel [a reference to the Jews in the wilderness]. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come (1 Cor. 10:10-11)."

Friends, we're all prone to second-guess God's ways. We want to contend for supremacy with God. If we're His people we would never flat out tell Him He's wrong, but isn't that what we're saying when we grumble?

"This job stinks." "These kids are getting under my skin." "My neighbors are a pain." "If I just had better teachers at school." Grrrrr!

But who gave you that job, and those kids, neighbors, and teachers? The One who said, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thes. 5:18)."

At its root...

2. *Grumbling indicates that we lack faith.* We're not trusting in God's purposes for us. We're not accepting what He has sent our way for our good and His honor. We have another agenda in mind, and without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

That's what's going on in John 6. They're grumbling at what Jesus said because they don't believe who He is. There's no faith. That's what He told them in verse 36, "You have seen me and still you do not believe." And why is there no faith? In short, it's because...

B. They think they know Jesus, but don't. You can't believe in someone you don't know. In this case, the problem is confounded because they actually think they do know Him, as evidenced by their mumbling in verse 42, "They said, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

They're mixed up regarding two issues.

1. *They're confused about His identity.* Isn't this the son of Joseph? Legally, yes, his adopted son, but that's certainly not the whole story.

It's not hard to explain their confusion. More than likely, if we had been in that assembly, we'd have responded the same way. These Galileans saw Jesus grow up. They worshipped with Him in the synagogue. Some perhaps went to school with Him. Others sold him lumber or food supplies at their stores. This went on for the first thirty years of His life. And then He started doing miracles, and preaching all over the country, and gathering crowds wherever He went. No wonder they're perplexed about His identity.

In a BBC radio talk and later in his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis offered what is known as the "trilemma," which narrows the possibilities of Jesus' identity to three options:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me

obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.¹

But it's not just His identity that perplexed the crowd. What's more...

2. *They're confused about His origin.*² How can He say, "I came down from heaven"? That's interesting. Their question isn't so much about the bread part of His claim, as the *come down from heaven* part. That's their question, "How can He say, 'I came down from heaven?'"

The fact is, five times in this sermon Jesus tells them He came down from heaven (verses 33, 38, 50, 51, 58). *Came down from heaven...came down from heaven...came down from heaven.* Heaven, of course, is where God is. To say you've come from heaven is to say you've come from God.

They know what He's claiming, and they don't buy it, and not only that, it's beginning to irritate them. From God? No way. You're from Nazareth, Jesus. You're speaking nonsense.

And so they grumbled, all because they think they know Him, who He is and from whence He came. But of course, they don't know Him. That's the problem. And to complicate things, they're resisting the truth He's just given them.

How do you help people like that, people who in their close-mindedness would rather grumble than change? Do you have anybody like that in your life? Maybe you see yourself in this crowd. Then take a close look at what Jesus did next.

II. Scene two: Jesus confronted the grumbling with more truth (43-51).

Verse 43, "'Stop grumbling among yourselves,' Jesus answered."

How's that for addressing the elephant in the room? Jesus doesn't answer their question, not at first, but begins by telling them to *stop grumbling*. You don't learn when you are grumbling with disdain for a speaker. And when you are grumbling you're in no frame of mind for an explanation.

Jesus, the Master Teacher, certainly knew that. No sense talking over a muttering crowd. First, get them to stop their whispering to each other, and then give them the truth they need. In this case, the crowd is mistaken about two critical subjects, which Jesus begins to address.

A. He expounded on His relationship with the Father (44-46). Verse 44—"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Interesting. *We know His father. This is Joseph's son.* That's what they just said.

Let me tell you about my Father, says Jesus. And it's not Joseph. Here are four things you need to know about My Father.

1. *The Father sent Me (44a).* He says, "No one can come to me unless the Father *who sent me* draws him." There's that word again. *Sent.* We've been seeing it in John's Gospel over and over, in 5:23, in 5:24, in 5:30, and in 5:36. We hear it from Jesus' lips earlier in this sermon in 6:29, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has **sent**." And then in 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who **sent** me."

"You wonder why I am doing what I am doing right now? I'm on a mission. My Father sent me into the world and I won't leave until I have finished the work He gave me to do." And course, that work was to go to the cross (4:34; 17:4; 19:30).

2. *The Father draws people to Me (44b).* Verse 44 again, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me *draws* him." The verb is significant. The Greek term is *helkuein* which means "to pull in, to haul in, to drag, to lead by force," and it almost always involves resistance.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 54-56 (Book II, ch 3).

² They're also confused about His work which Jesus will address in the next part of His discourse (beginning in verse 52).

For instance we find the word twice in John 21, which is the account of the miraculous catch of fish. Verse 6 says, “They were unable to *haul in* the net because of the large number of fish.” And verse 11 states that Peter “*dragged* the net ashore.” We see it in Acts 16:19 where the angry slave-owners “seized Paul and Silas and *dragged* them” before the authorities. In Acts 21:30 another angry crowd seized Paul and “*dragged* him from the temple.”

Friends, that’s what the Father must do. Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father *draws* him.” Sinners don’t come to Jesus on their own. They must be drawn, hauled in, as it were. And this drawing is a triune work shared by God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Later Jesus Himself said in John 12:32, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will *draw* all men to myself.” To see the Spirit’s role in this drawing, just read the book of Acts.

Now a question. Why does Jesus say this in response to the grumbling? Remember, they’re grumbling because He said He came down from heaven, and He says, “No one can come to me unless the Father draws him.” What’s the connection? He’s showing them something, namely that a person cannot grasp the truth about Him on their own. It’s impossible. No one can believe Him and come to Him *unless*...the Father draws him, or to use the word Jesus adds in verse 65, unless the Father “enables” him.

Okay, so the Father is drawing people to His Son. Are His efforts always successful? Some say, no. For instance, William Barclay concludes, “God can draw men, but man’s resistance can defeat God’s pull.”³ Is that true? It’s worth noting that Barclay points to not one biblical text to support his conclusion. Sure, the word indicates resistance, but in none of the passages cited by Barclay is the resistance successful. The one doing the drawing always succeeds.

Do men resist the Lord when He draws them? All the time. I did. Didn’t you? But the resistance didn’t prevent Him from fulfilling His intent. When the Father says, you’re coming home to My Son, then you’re coming home. In the end His drawing power is always effectual and victorious. Calvin described it as “an effectual movement of the Holy Spirit, turning men from being unwilling and reluctant into willing.”⁴

At this point, some will say, “But wait. Jesus makes it sound like a sinner *can’t* respond rightly to the gospel offer on his own.” Indeed, that’s what He said—“No one can come unless the Father draws him.”

“Doesn’t that rob the sinner of his free will?” you ask. It depends what you mean by free will. When the sinner hears the gospel offer and rejects Christ, he’s doing exactly what he wants to do. He freely rejects Christ.

How about when he says yes to Christ? Is he doing that freely? If by *freely* you mean, is he saying yes because he *wants* to, then yes, he wants to. He’s not a mindless robot. But if by *freely*, you mean he did it on his own, then no. *No one, on his own, comes to Me*, says Jesus, *unless the Father draws him*.

It’s at this point that some theologians get uncomfortable and introduce what they call *prevenient grace*. For instance, theologian Millard Erickson explains:

As generally understood, prevenient grace is grace that is given by God to all men indiscriminately. It is seen in God’s sending the sunshine and the rain upon all. It is also the basis of all the goodness found in men everywhere. Beyond that, it is universally given to counteract the effect of sin....Since God has given this grace to all, everyone is capable of accepting the offer of salvation; consequently, there is no need for any special application of God’s grace to particular individuals.⁵

Everyone is capable of accepting the offer of salvation? If that’s true, then why did Jesus just tell these unbelieving grumblers, *No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him*?

³ Barclay, p. 220.

⁴ Calvin, quote taken from Leon Morris, p. 371.

⁵ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3:920.

The truth is, the Bible presents a very different picture of mankind than that of neutral human beings who can either accept or reject the Savior. The Scriptures teach that all people enter the world with a sin nature they inherited from the first man, Adam (Rom. 5:12). They are dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). They are slaves to unrighteousness (John 8:34; Rom. 6:6, 17, 20). They are alienated from God (Col. 1:21). They're hostile to God (Rom. 5:10; 8:7). They're spiritually blind (2 Cor. 4:4). They're captives (2 Tim. 2:26). They under the dominion of the devil (Col. 1:13). They're powerless to change their sin-corrupted nature (Jer. 13:23; Rom. 5:6). They cannot please God (Rom. 8:8). They are incapable of understanding spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:14; John 14:17).⁶

That's what God says about the sinner's condition. He's dead, enslaved, alienated, hostile, blind, captive, powerless, darkened to truth. So how then will he ever be saved? Apart from divine initiative, he won't. He can't. But there is divine initiative. *All that the Father gives me will come*, says Jesus in verse 37, and no one can come, says verse 44, unless the Father *draws him*.

Some will say, "This is dangerous teaching. If you believe in election, it stifles evangelism." That's interesting. John's Gospel is perhaps the most evangelistic of the four Gospels (see 20:31). And yet throughout his Gospel the apostle John consistently puts the emphasis on God's sovereignty in man's salvation.

Leon Morris says it well, "Men like to feel independent. They think that they come or that they *can* come to Jesus entirely of their own volition. Jesus assures us that this is an utter impossibility. No man, no man at all can come unless the Father draw him."⁷

That raises another question. How does the Father do it? That brings us to the third thing you need to know about the Father. Jesus says...

3. *The Father teaches people so they come to Me (45)*. That's verse 45, "It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me."

Jesus is quoting from Isaiah 54:13, and He assumes His hearers will recognize the context of that verse. It's a messianic context. In the previous chapter, Isaiah 53, Isaiah predicted the terrible suffering of the coming Messiah. *We have all gone astray, yet the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*. How will people who've gone astray ever believe in this One who's coming to suffer in their place? *The LORD will call you back*, says Isaiah 54:6. "For a brief moment I abandoned you," says God in Isaiah 54:7, "but with deep compassion *I will bring you back*."

And how will He bring these wayward sinners back? "Your sons will be taught by the LORD," says Isaiah 54:13, the verse Jesus that Jesus cites.

You say, "How does the Father draw sinners to Christ?" Here's how. It's the teaching of the Word that the Father uses to draw lost people to His Son. *They will all be taught by God*. And what's the effect of this teaching? Jesus tells us at the end of verse 45, "Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me."

Again, I ask, why is Jesus telling this audience this truth? Why is He telling them that those who listen to His Father will come to Him? It's because that's what they need to do. They can't make sense of His words, so they're grumbling. But if they would just listen to the Father, He would teach them, and then they would come to Him.

There's one more thing you need to know about My Father, says Jesus.

4. *The Father has been seen only by Me (46)*. That's Jesus' point in verse 46, "No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father."

⁶ I appreciate John MacArthur's helpful description, with appropriate biblical texts, of man's condition; p. 253.

⁷ Leon Morris, p. 372.

Notice how Jesus switches the pronouns, from “I” and “me” in verses 41, 44, and 45, to “He” in verse 46, and then back to “I” in verses 48 and 51. He’s referring to Himself in the third person, apparently because He knows this truth is so staggering to the Jews.

You can’t see the Father, He tells them. No one can, for “God is spirit,” as He told the woman at the well in John 4:24. So if you want to know the Father, then you need to pay attention to the One who has seen Him, to the One who came from Him.

That brings us to the second subject about which this grumbling audience was mistaken, and concerning which they needed some more truth. First, they were confused about His Father. Then they were confused about His claim to have come from heaven. “How can He say that?” they asked. So He told them.

B. He expounded on His reason for coming (47-51). In short, He told them He came to accomplish two things, and they’re related.

1. *He came to give eternal life (47-50).* That’s the essence of verses 47-50, “I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.”

Why did the Son of God come to earth? Hear His answer. He came to give eternal life. Okay, so what’s eternal life? Listen to Jesus and you’ll learn three things about it.

a. Eternal life begins the moment you believe (47). He says in verse 47, “He who believes *has* eternal life.” It doesn’t begin when you die. It begins the moment you believe.

b. Eternal life is better than anything in this world (48-50). Remember, the Jews brought up the subject of manna back in verse 31. That’s what they wanted from Jesus, free food, the stuff of this life. *You’re thinking way too small*, says Jesus. I’ve come to give you something a whole lot better than manna. I’m telling you there is bread that’s come down from heaven, and if you eat it, you’ll never die. *I am that bread.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I think we at times forget what we have. If we have Jesus, we have something far better than anything you’ll ever find in this world. We have been given something we don’t deserve and could never merit. We have the guarantee from God Almighty that we will live forever and ever with Him.

I’d say that’s reason to celebrate! And to make sure we’re laying up treasures for that life that will never end.

But we’ve got a problem, and we need to address it. So often we’re not excited about eternal life, and here’s why. So many Christians equate eternal life with heaven, and they talk about the eternal state as though they’re going to be floating around as spirit beings on clouds strumming harps. Who wants to do that forever? But that’s wrong on two counts. One, God didn’t just save your spirit. That comes from Greek paganism, not the Bible. We’re going to have glorified *bodies*. And two, we’re not going to be in heaven forever. In fact...

c. Eternal life will climax on resurrection day. Let me show you something. Jesus refers to something He calls “the last day” four times in this message. That’s critical to see. He says in verse 39, “I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at **the last day.**” Then in verse 40, “Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at **the last day.**” Again in verse 44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at **the last day.**” And finally in verse 54, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at **the last day.**”

Sounds like *the last day* is pretty important in Jesus’ mind, doesn’t it? It is. The last day of what? Of time as we now know it. It’s on that last day that this sin-corrupted universe will be destroyed by the fire of God’s judgment, says 2 Peter 3:12-13. There Peter calls it “the day of God” and indicates that following that day all who know Christ will enter “a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness.”

My friend, if you die today and you know Christ as your Savior, then your spirit will go immediately to be with the Lord in heaven (so says 2 Cor. 5:8). But listen. That's not your eternal state. What did Jesus say in John 6? He said it four times. *I will raise him up at the last day*. Beloved, one day Christ is going to return and raise your body up out of the grave, and He's going to transform that body so that it resembles His glorious, resurrection body. And why will He do that? Because you're going to need it when you enter your eternal home in a brand new universe where you will serve the One who saved you forever and ever.

That's why He came. He says He came to give eternal life. But He mentions a second reason in verse 51, and it's the basis of the first. He says...

2. *He came to give His flesh (51)*. Listen carefully to verse 51, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

We just learned three things about eternal life. Now notice three things about Jesus' death.

a. Jesus' death is a gift. "Which I give," He says. Jesus didn't die as a martyr. He gave His life voluntarily.

b. Jesus' death is like food. "This bread is my flesh, which I give..." Ponder that. Jesus says the bread we must eat is His flesh. What's that mean? He's going to use the word "flesh" six more times before He concludes this discourse. If you'll notice verse 52, that word bugged these hearers immensely. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" The word is still creating quite a stir.

Some say that Jesus is talking about Holy Communion here and that salvation is linked to an ongoing participation in a sacrament. They say that to experience His life, you must *eat* of this bread (i.e. His flesh in the communion service).

But that's a misrepresentation of Jesus' words here, and specifically of the word *eats*. It's in the aorist tense which emphasizes a one time past event. *Eats* isn't referring to the ongoing activity of partaking of the communion elements. It's referring to the one time act of appropriating Christ, and He just said that's done through faith (verse 29).⁸

And then there's the word "flesh." What does He mean by "my flesh"? Once again, some see Communion in this. But Leon Morris offers this helpful corrective, "Many commentators speak as though the word 'flesh' self-evidently marked a reference to Holy Communion. It, of course, does nothing of the sort. It is not found in the narratives of the institution, nor in 1 Cor. 10, nor in 1 Cor. 11 in connexion with the sacrament. Nor is it common in the Fathers in this sense. The usual word in sacramental usage is 'body.'"⁹

Yet Jesus doesn't say "body" here. He uses the strong and almost crude term "flesh." John indicates the significance of this term back at the beginning of this Gospel account when he says in 1:14, "The Word became *flesh* and dwelt among us."

Some way that the Son of God didn't actually become a man, that God would never stoop to such base lowness. Throughout history so called Christian cults have so insisted. But He did.

Other modernist theologians have sort of dismissed the whole thing by spiritualizing the words and work of Christ. Did God actually become a man, do miracles, die on the cross, and come out of His tomb alive? It doesn't really matter, says the Liberal preacher. Believe whatever you want. What matters is the inspiration of the story. And so millions of professing Christians gather in Liberal churches every Good Friday and on Easter Sunday, not to reflect on a literal death and resurrection, but to celebrate an inspiring story. It doesn't matter if the story is real or not. What matters is that just like this person Jesus overcame a terrible lot in life, so you can triumph in this world, fellow struggler. Just look within yourself, or look to a Deity if you prefer, but just make sure you believe things will be better in life this year. Things always turn

⁸ To borrow a phrase from Leon Morris, p. 373.

⁹ Leon Morris, pp. 374-5.

out better for those who believe the best, and you too can come out of the pits of life, just like Jesus did.

My friends, you can't just spiritualize these words. Jesus won't let you. He said He came to give His flesh, and that's what He did. His body was nailed to a wooden cross, and there He died, and as He died He paid the penalty of sin for all who would believe on Him. Three days later, that very real body left that very real tomb very much alive.

What's more, He said you must eat this bread if you want to live forever. Think of what we do with bread. A piece of bread does your body no good until you what? Until you take it in. Holding it in your hand doesn't help you. You must eat it. Not just taste it, but eat it. Likewise, the truth of Christ does you no good until you internalize it. Just knowing about Christ in a merely intellectual way won't save your soul. A taste of Jesus won't do. To use the language of John 1:12, "to as many as *received Him*, to them He gave the power to become children of God." And verse 13 adds, "Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

What's more, no one can eat the bread for you. To benefit from its nourishment, *you* must take it in. You can't be saved by the actions of another. Your parents' trust in Christ can't save you, young people. The Lord says you must trust Him for salvation.

James Boice asks, "Is he as real to you spiritually as something you can taste or handle? Is he as much a part of you as that which you eat? Do not think me blasphemous when I say that he must be as real and as useful to you as a hamburger and french fries. I say this because, although he is obviously far more real and useful than these, the unfortunate thing is that for many people he is much less."¹⁰

c. Jesus' death is for the life of the world. That's the phrase He used at the end of verse 51, "Which I will give for the life of the world." The point is, His death is not only real, but substitutionary. It's for the benefit of others.

What others? You'll find several answers given in John's Gospel. His death isn't just for the Jewish people. It's for the world, says our text. It's for His sheep, says John 10:11, 15; for the nation, says John 11:50-52; and for His friends, says John 15:12. Paul made it quite personal in Galatians 2:20, and so should we if we know Christ. "I am crucified with Christ...who loved me and gave Himself for me."¹¹

Take Inventory: Are there any grumblers in the house?

Then consider two questions...

1. *Are you thinking rightly about Jesus?* Is your concept of Jesus consistent with what you've just heard from Jesus Himself?

2. *Are you responding rightly to Jesus?* Have you put your trust in Him?

¹⁰ James Boice, taken from Kent Hughes, *John*, p. 208.

¹¹ Observation by Wiersbe, p. 313.