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John 6:51-58
THE BREAD OF LIFE IS FLESH AND BLOOD

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Every year millions of people go to places like Greenfield Village, Mackinac Island, Williamsburg and Jamestown, Virginia and many other places where they can relive history. The problem is that you really can't relive history. History is often romanticized. We may think that it was a certain way, but it may not really have been that way at all. I don't know what Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and others were really like. I wasn't there. All I know is what other people said about them which may or may not have been correct. I've seen movies, but movies take a lot of license. We often wish that we could go back in time to what we think was a much simpler time with fewer problems. In reality, every time has been tainted with sin. There were a lot of problems then and a lot of problems today.

When we think of the Old Testament, certain things may come to mind. I must admit that many of the pictures I have in my mind of Old Testament events come from Sunday School lessons and Bible history books and paintings. Eight years ago, I was privileged to go to the Holy Land. It really makes a difference as you see certain things firsthand: places like the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, and the various mountains. It may be many years later, but there are still a lot of things that are the same in places like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Jericho. In many cases I have different pictures in my mind today.

The people of Jesus' day had certain pictures in their minds as well. Like us, they had a tendency to romanticize history. The Old Testament was not simply a history of an ancient people with a complex ethical and liturgical code. Rather, it was a script waiting for a speaker. When Jesus came, he would speak about himself in terms of persons, places, and things from Israel's past. He spoke about the Old testament as if it were written about him. Here was the greater Jonah, the greater Solomon, and the greater Temple. The real Moses, the real Aaron, and the real King David had finally come in him. We think of all the sacrificial animals: the sheep, the goats, the cattle, the turtledoves that were now pushed to the side so that he could stand in the place of every man, woman, and child who ever lived. It wasn't that part of the Old Testament referred to Jesus while that vast majority didn't. All of it did. Jesus spoke of the Scriptures. He said, "They testify of me." All too often, we want to pick and choose passages and say, "This is Messianic and this isn't." There is much that we miss. When our Lord Jesus walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." I wish that I had been there that afternoon. I'm sure that I would have learned a lot that I've missed. Jesus appeared to the Twelve on Easter evening and said," This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms."

Yes, the entire Old Testament would testify about the Savior that God would send to bring us the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. They would point to Christ. The Temple was not merely a remembrance of the past, but also a visual promise of the future. It was a picture of what God was going to do on a far greater scale. Jesus was Israel. Jesus was Jerusalem. He was temple, sacrifice, priest, and priesthood. He was Joshua leading the people across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. He was their bread of life on their journey through this life and the food that

would sustain them in the next. He stood before them and told them in no uncertain terms that he was the one thing that they needed for all eternity. THE BREAD OF LIFE IS FLESH AND BLOOD!

"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." Throughout this chapter, Jesus refers to himself as the Bread of Life, as living bread. Once again, let's go back historically. In our culture we eat bread on a sandwich or toast or along with our meal. Some people rarely eat bread at all. In that culture, bread was the meal. You didn't use forks or spoons to eat. The other food would be scooped up with one's bread. Bread was eaten at every meal, not as an option, but as the main course.

As our Savior spoke those words, the entire Old Testament was opened up. We swing from the Garden of Eden to the wandering in the wilderness to the Passover celebration in the Temple. One picture blends with another. Every prophet, priest, and king comes together. Abraham, Moses, Aaron, the priesthood, the temple, the manna, and the sacrifices were all bound together in Jesus to find their fulfillment. In Christ you have one final sacrifice, one life-giving sacrament and one eternal Gospel.

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God and were driven out of paradise, humanity could find its only hope for survival in the bread that came from the tilled ground that had given birth to Adam and to which all his sons and daughters were doomed to return. But Jesus was the living bread that came from heaven, a divine food that promised not disintegration into dust but elevation into heaven. He was the bread that the elders of Israel ate with Moses on Mt. Sinai in the presence of God. He was the bread of the Passover, a bread of sincerity and truth, bread without the yeast of sin. He was the priestly bread of the tabernacle and the temple which only the priest dare eat. He was the manna that fed a rebellious people and gave them life instead of death.

Now Jesus goes on to say that this bread that gives life is flesh and blood. He does not merely say that he is bread, but that his flesh was bread. His flesh was a saving flesh, a flesh offered up in atonement on the cross of Calvary for the life of the world, a flesh that promised a resurrection to those who ate it even as he rose from the dead. We think of the meal that Christ has given to us. On the night of his betrayal, he took the bread and said that it was his flesh. Here he points to his flesh and says that it is bread. Jesus is God's intended Sacrament for the life of the world. "This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Usually when we hear the word "flesh" in Biblical terms, it is not a good one. Our flesh is that part of us that is constantly saying "no!" to God. Flesh is selfishness and self-gratification. Flesh is our heart's inclination to sin. "A voice says, 'Cry out!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?'
All flesh is like grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall." Jesus would say later in this chapter, "the Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing." We speak of our soul's greatest enemies as Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh.

But Jesus' flesh was different. We speak of Jesus being true man. When we use that expression, we often take it to mean that Jesus was a human being with a physical body. He ate and drank and slept. He showed human emotions. He laughed and cried. He would suffer and die. He was man as man was before the fall into sin. He was holy, perfect, sinless. He lived in perfect harmony with his Father's will, always showing perfect love and obedience. He is what we once were and what we will be again. God became man. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." We need Jesus to live, for eternal life. We are not speaking of some kind of cannibalism as some early opponents of Christianity

claimed. We eat the flesh of him who is the Bread of Life and drink the blood of him who is the true Vine by faith. We take Jesus for who he is, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the only hope for the human race.

Jesus also said, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." Once again, we see the exclusive claim that Jesus makes. This is what causes the great scandal. Jesus never says that he is one of many ways to the Father or one of many ways to heaven or one of many ways to eternal life. He is the only way. We live in a world of religious pluralism. "All religions are basically the same. All roads lead to heaven. It really doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere in believing it." You've all heard those words many times. In a world of political correctness, these words of our Lord Jesus are an offense to many.

When Jesus talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he is using a word that describes intensity. Imagine that you were without food for almost four days. You are absolutely famished. The first thing that you see is a rack of ribs just off the barbecue pit. You can imagine yourself attacking those ribs, chewing on the bones, with the sauce running down the corner of your mouth. Jesus is not talking about some half-hearted commitment here. He is talking about receiving him wholeheartedly in faith. Is that how we view coming to the Lord's house and hearing his precious words of life? Is that how we view our opportunity to come to the Lord's Supper? Is that how we see our need for Christ? It should be!

The world wouldn't really mind if Christianity would merely say that Jesus is a way, a truth, a life, a resurrection, a Good Shepherd, a vine, a gate, a Savior. You go your way and I'll go mine and we'll all see one another in heaven. It is when we put the word "the" in front of those words that the world starts screaming. "How dare you say that some people are wrong in what they believe? That's not nice!" But Christ is the only way to heaven. You can't get there by your own good works. You can't get there because you are better than mass murderers, rapists, and child molesters. You can't get there because you tried really hard. You can only get here through the merits of Christ, by his life lived for you, by his death died for you, by eating and drinking him through faith.

The same flesh and blood that Jesus would offer on the cross for our life is offered sacramentally in the Lord's Supper. This is real food and drink for our soul. We receive what we eat. We eat and drink the very body and blood of God. That is what Christ tells us. It gives us the ability to say "no" to sin, strengthens our faith, and comforts us in all our sorrows. There is a reason that the church fathers referred to the Sacrament as the "medicine of immortality."

The true Bread of Life is flesh and blood. Jesus Christ came down from heaven to feed us now and forever. Put your full trust in him! AMEN.