

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Partaking of the Bread of Life

by Dan Trygg

“I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh.’ ⁵² The Jews therefore began to argue with one another, saying, ‘How can this man give us His flesh to eat?’ ⁵³ Jesus therefore 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 yourselves. ⁵⁴ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.’” John 6:48-56

We saw last time that a number of those whom Jesus had fed with the multiplied loaves and fishes had come across the Sea of Galilee looking for Him. They wanted the Lord to continue to supply their need for food. He was not willing to be used by them in this way. Instead, **Jesus challenged them not to labor for the food that perishes, but to seek for eating that which would give eternal life.** They wanted Him to feed them, like Moses gave the Israelites manna in the wilderness. **He began to turn this episode into a spiritual lesson. He pointed out how those who ate the manna all died. Instead, He could give them something that would give them eternal life,** life of the Kingdom to come. **Hearing this, they said, “Lord, evermore give us this bread”** (vs. 34).

Jesus responded by saying that He was the Bread of Life. The one coming to Him will not hunger, and the one believing in Him will never thirst (vs. 35). He then says, “I have come down out of heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ... The will of My Father is that everyone who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life” (vss. 38,40). This was troubling to the crowd, and many grumbled, because they knew His parents, and said, “How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven’?”

Jesus repeated His claim, “**I am the living bread that came down out of heaven.** If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever.” Then, He adds a new twist, “**The bread which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh**” (6:50,51).

Of course, this caused a stir, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” Jesus responded by saying that unless they ate of His flesh and drank of His blood, they have no life in themselves. The original language presents this as if they had to at least eat of Him at a point in time, or drink from His blood at a point in time. **If they don’t eat or drink at least once, they are without life** (vss. 50-53). **Then, however, Jesus switches it up. He changes verbs and verb tenses.** “The one continually-gnawing-on or nibbling-on My flesh and continually-drinking 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. **The one continually-gnawing on My flesh and continually-drinking My blood ABIDES in Me, and I in Him** (vss. 54-56).”

In the next verse, Jesus makes an important comparison. He said, “Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on Me will live *because of Me.*” In other words, “**as the Father is My source of life, I will be the source of life to you**”. This is an important insight into the dynamic that Jesus operated by, i.e., He lived by virtue of the Father’s leading, empowering, and sustaining. He promises a similar life dynamic for those who consistently partake of Him. Then He made one last comparison between Himself and the manna God had provided through Moses, “This One is the Bread that came down out from heaven. It is *not* like the manna your fathers ate – and they died. **The one continually-gnawing-on this Bread will live forever.**” The enormity of His statements tends to escape us because we are familiar with the idea of Him being God in the flesh. **For these listeners, the words he uttered must have seemed incredible!** Imagine if anyone you knew were to make statements like these. **How would you even begin to process them?** John then points out that He said these things in the synagogue at Capernaum, ...located right next door to Peter’s house, where Jesus was probably staying while in town.

It is not surprising, then, to read in the next few verses that the reaction of even Jesus’ followers was, “This is a harsh saying! Who is able to hear it?” The word for “harsh” also means “rough, difficult, hard, unpleasant, hard-to-take”, even “intolerable”. **To the Jews, it was downright offensive!** They had been taught over and over throughout their lives that they were *never* to eat meat that had blood in it. They were *never* to eat any blood (Lev. 7:26). **They went to extreme lengths to drain out all the blood from any animal they slaughtered.** They would wash it, soak it and rinse it several times, so there would be no blood remaining in the flesh when it was being cooked. **It was one of the distinctives that separated them as “holy”. The gentiles took no such precautions, and thus their food, dishes and utensils were defiled with animal blood.** Of course, cannibalism is horrific and abominable in nearly every culture. **Yet, here, this notable Teacher, One who was doing incredible signs and wonders, ...who**

had just the evening before had fed them with miraculously multiplied loaves and fishes..., **is now telling them that they needed to eat His flesh and drink His blood.** He used words that were *descriptive* and *repugnant*, ... GNAWING on His flesh, DRINKING His blood! **Ughhh! It was too much!**

Jesus recognized their reaction. You might expect Him to somehow soften His words, ...smooth things over a bit. Does He? NO! He gets in their face! He says, “Does *this* offend you?” The word for “offend” is *skandalizō*, meaning “to catch in a trap, to cause someone to stumble, to offend, to cause to shock or anger someone.” **Basically, He is saying, “Does *this* statement upset your apple cart? Does *this* rattle your cage? Does *this* rock your world? Does *this* shake-up your theology? What if you were to see the Son of Man going up where He was before?”** Wow! He is pushing them to the limits of their understanding and their sense of propriety, and *then* shoving them right over the edge!

Then, after *that* shock wave passed, in order to reel in any who still may be listening and to clarify what He was teaching, **He says, “The Spirit is the One making alive; the flesh does not benefit at all; the personal-directives that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life”** (vs. 63). **This statement is the key to understanding this entire passage!** Jesus was *not* talking about eating His literal flesh, or drinking His literal blood. He clearly states, “The flesh does not benefit at all.” It is not about *eating flesh* or *drinking blood*! These are just elements of the word-picture He was trying to paint to strongly communicate the main lesson: Life does *not* come from manna, or loaves and fishes. **True life, ...eternal life..., comes only from Jesus. We are lifeless without Him.** As Paul would later teach, “We were dead in our trespasses and sins...” (Eph. 2:1). God can make us alive in and with Jesus. “...and us *being dead* in our trespasses, He *made-us-alive-together-with* the Christ (by grace you are having-been-saved-ones)” (Eph. 2:5). **What does Jesus say here? What is He actually teaching? “It is the Spirit who makes-alive!” -- How do we get the life of the Spirit?** – “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” What does this mean? Does it mean that we are to study and/or memorize Jesus’ teachings to get life? **Does life come from Jesus’ words somehow? NO! THAT is NOT what He is saying.** That would be like casting spells, incantations, invocations... all superstitious practices of pagan religions. No. Jesus is *not* saying that life comes from His *words*. What is not clear to us in English is that **Jesus is using a different Greek word** than what is used in John 1. There, the vocabulary for “word” was “*logos*”, meaning “word, message, thought”. Here in John 6, Jesus uses a different vocabulary. **Here, the Greek word, “*rhēma*” is used. This refers to a “personal word or directive”. This is more than just information, or doctrine. It is direction toward a course of action, ...a decision or a pattern of living.** In this case, **the personal message is to “come to Jesus for life”.** He is to be the source of our lives. **We need more than a one-time influx of His life. We need to draw our vitality, strength and power from Him repeatedly, ...ongoingly.** We need to abide in Him. Jesus’ teaching here is remarkably similar to the teaching from John 15, about the Vine and the Branches. Life comes from Him. **This is life from the “Kingdom-age to come”, available to us now.** How do we receive this “Kingdom-life”? Jesus solemnly declared, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, the one believing (trusting) has eternal life”**(vs. 47).

It may not appear obvious to the casual reader, but there is a connection between Jesus’ claim to be “the bread of Life”, “the bread that came down out of heaven”, and the Christmas story (6:35,38,41,48,50,51,58). **There is a well-known prophecy in Micah 5 that speaks of the birth of the Messiah, “...as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.** His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. ³ Therefore, He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel. ⁴ And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And this One will be our peace” (vss. 2-5). **What is the connection? The Hebrew name of the village where Jesus was born was “Bethlehem” (Matt. 2:1), as in Micah’s prophecy.** What is not so apparent to us English speakers is the *meaning* of that name. **“Bethlehem” means “house of bread” in the original Hebrew.** “Ephrathah” was the name of the *region* in which the village was located. **“Ephrathah” means fruitfulness in Hebrew. So, the Bread out from heaven literally came down to earth in the “house of bread”, in the region of “fruitfulness”.** It was said that the “goings forth” of the Messiah were “from long ago, from the days of eternity”. Jesus claimed to formerly have been with God, and to have come from God (6:46,62). He claimed to be the Good Shepherd, the One who would lay down His life for His sheep (10:14,15). He came to reconcile us back to God, making peace through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:19,20). He makes available *to us* a peace that goes much deeper than any peace the world offers (Jn. 14:27), a peace that overcomes the deceptions and difficulties of this world (16:33). **If we trust in Him, take Him as our Ruler, and the source of our lives, we too can have life within ourselves. As we come to Him for life, moment by moment, we learn to abide in Him, and His life within us will motivate growth, change and make our lives fruitful for Him** (15:5).