

John 6:41-71 Jesus the True Bread of Life (continued) February 22, 2010

Last time Jesus introduced himself as the true bread of God. He fed 5000 men plus women and children with the five loaves and two fishes one child had brought along. The people were so enthused by this display that they sought to make him king. However, this week he will begin to explain his true nature, the bread from God that has come down from heaven. The people become confused, and in their confusion begin to ‘grumble’, just as they did in Moses’ day.

The more they hear, the greater their distress, until many turn from him and return to their well-set ways. They were hoping for relief of their physical needs, and found the promise of eternal life too ephemeral. However, Peter and the other eleven disciples remain true. Peter confesses: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

John 6:41-51 *So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.*

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Below are reviews of the ‘grumbling’ of the Israelites in the wilderness.

Ex. 16:1-8 *They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt.*

And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.”

So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?”

And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.”

Ex. 17:1-7*All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.*

Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?”

But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” And the LORD said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Num. 11:1-9*And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, and when the LORD heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp.*

Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down. So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the LORD burned among them.

Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”

Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium. The people went about and gathered it and ground it in handmills or beat it in mortars and boiled it in pots and made cakes of it. And the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil. When the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell with it.

Num. 14:1-3*Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?”*

Jesus response to the grumbling is to tell them the good news of the gospel, that God is drawing them to himself through the presence of Jesus in their midst. This was promised by the prophet Jeremiah: *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they*

shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jer 31:31-34)

Bultmann says of this: “The ‘drawing’ by God takes place when man abandons his own judgment and ‘hears’ and ‘learns’ from the Father, and so allows God to speak to him. The ‘drawing’ by the Father occurs not, as it were, behind man’s decision of faith, but in it.”

God is reaching out to the grumblers here just as he did in the wilderness, this time with the appeal to believe and thereby gain eternal life.

This is re-emphasized in v. 65: “*This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.*”

Note the eschatological language:

v. 39 *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but **raise it up on the last day.***

v. 40 *For this is the will of the Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and **I will raise him up on the last day.***

v. 44 *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And **I will raise him up on the last day.***

v. 54 *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and **I will raise him up on the last day.***

Hilary of Poitiers: There is no approach to the Father except through Christ. But there is also no approach to Christ, unless the Father draws us.

Augustine: *No one can come to me unless the Father who has sent me draws him.* This is the doctrine of grace: none comes unless they are drawn. But whom the Father draws, and whom not, and why he draws one and not another, do not presume to decide if you want to avoid falling into error. Take the doctrine as it is given to you: and, if you are not drawn, pray that you may be.

John 6:52-59 *The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus 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 you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks 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. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.*

This section presages communion in the church today. However, the disciples and Jesus’ other hearers could not realize this. This is not a call to cannibalism. And to drink blood was strongly forbidden in the Old Testament.

Lev. 7:26-27 *Moreover, you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwelling places. Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people.”*

Lev. 17:10-12 *If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.*

We find a parallel to this in verse 35: *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*

We see that ‘comes to me’ parallels ‘feeds on my flesh’, and ‘believes’ parallels ‘drink my blood’.

Most of the people that day were not able to make the connection between the two.

Today the church is divided over this language. The Roman Catholics believe in transubstantiation while most protestants consider the elements of communion to be just physical bread and wine/grape juice.

In Peter Kreeft’s book, **Jesus-Shock**, he makes a strong case for transubstantiation. He says: that Protestants accuse Catholics of the most egregious idolatry in history, bowing down to bread and worshipping wine; of turning Christianity into paganism, as if by magic matter suddenly became God. Whoever is wrong about this is very, very importantly wrong indeed. This book is about that question: not the theology of the Eucharist, but the experience of Christ’s Real Presence, which is the cause and explanation of “Jesus-shock”.

I cannot accept the Catholic position of transubstantiation that Peter Kreeft strongly and wisely advocates, but I do feel that we, as Protestants, take communion, and the elements far too lightly. The elements are transformative in our lives and are not just symbols.

Jesus says: *This is my body which is for you.* (1 Cor 11:24) He does not say this represents my body, or this is symbolic of my body.

John 6:60-65 *When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”*

It appears that grumbling is a common trait of mankind. The Israelites did it in the wilderness. Now even the disciples, who had just heard this sermon, begin to grumble. The teachings of Jesus are simple on one hand, but are never simplistic. There is depth that none of us can ever plumb, even on Monday mornings.

John 6:66-71 *After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered him, “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.” Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.*

This chapter began with an overwhelming crowd about to make Jesus king of Israel. In a very short period of time many turn back and no longer follow him. He will not see such a following again, except possibly briefly during his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Jesus teaches in **Luke 13:22-30** that the door to the kingdom is narrow. Many will seek to enter and will not be able. **Matthew 7:13-14** describes a wide gate that leads to destruction, and a narrow gate and hard way that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Luke 13:22-30 *He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”*

Matt. 7:13-14 *“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

Note the pathos in Jesus question: “Do you want to go away as well?” Things seem to be falling apart. The crowd of thousands has thinned out into 12 remaining disciples. But Peter rises to the situation with his response: “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.” He is beginning to understand Jesus teaching, and, empowered by God himself, he can ascribe the powerful title to Jesus, *the Holy One of God.*” He is the holy Redeemer of mankind. This life is not all there is. Eternal life looms in the eschatological future. We do not come to understand this through our own intellectual and emotional efforts. This comes to us from the Father who draws us to his Son.