

## The Hard Sayings of Jesus

John 6

BQ030613

The following is an excerpt from  
*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* on John 6.

**“I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” (6:51)**

For the fifth time in this discourse (cf. vv. 33, 35, 48, 50), Jesus claimed to be **the living bread that came down out of heaven**. He then added the promise that **if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever**. Here, as in verses 35 and 40, human responsibility to believe in Christ is in view (God’s sovereignty in salvation is taught in vv. 37, 39, 44, 65).

Ever the master teacher, Jesus used the simple, everyday routine of eating to communicate profound spiritual truth. The analogy of eating suggests five parallels to appropriating spiritual truth.

First, just as food is useless unless it is eaten, so also spiritual truth does no good if it is not internalized. Merely knowing the truth, without acting on it, both profits nothing (Heb. 4:2) and does not allow one to remain neutral (Luke 11:23). In fact, it will result in a more severe judgment (Luke 12:47–48; Heb. 10:29).

Second, eating is prompted by hunger; those who are full are not interested in food. In the same way, sinners who are satiated with their sin have no hunger for spiritual things (cf. Luke 5:31–32; 6:21). When God awakens them to their lost condition, however, the hunger for forgiveness, deliverance, peace, love, hope, and joy drives them to the Bread of Life.

Third, the food people eat becomes part of them through the operation of the body’s digestive system. So it is spiritually. People may admire Christ, be impressed with His teaching, and even bemoan His death on the cross as a great tragedy. But not until they appropriate Him by faith do they become one with Him (17:21; 1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Cor. 4:10; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17).

Fourth, eating involves trust. No one knowingly eats tainted or spoiled food; the very act of eating

implies faith that the food is edible (cf. Mark 7:15). Thus, the metaphor of eating the Bread of Life implies believing in Jesus.

Finally, eating is personal. No one can eat a meal for another; there is no such thing as eating by proxy. Nor is there salvation by proxy. In Psalm 49:7 the psalmist wrote, “No man can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him.” Sinners must appropriate the Bread of Life as individuals to receive salvation and **live forever** (vv. 50, 58; 3:16; 8:51; 11:26; Rom. 8:13).

The Lord further defined the **bread of life** as that **which He** would voluntarily (10:18) **give for the life of the world: His flesh** (cf. 1:14). The concept of Jesus giving Himself sacrificially for sinners is a repeated New Testament theme (e.g., Matt. 20:28; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14). The Lord referred prophetically here to His death on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24), one of many such predictions recorded in the gospels (John 2:19–22; 12:24; Matt. 12:40; 16:21; 17:22; 20:18; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; Luke 9:22, 44; 18:31–33; 24:6–7). It is Jesus’ offering of His **flesh** that is the price of redemption. Had He merely come and proclaimed God’s standards, it would have left the human race in a hopeless predicament. Since no one can keep those standards, there would have been no way for sinners to have a relationship with God. But to make reconciliation between sinful man and holy God possible, “Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18; cf. 2:24; Isa. 53:4–6; Rom. 3:21–26; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Since “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23) and “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22), Christ became the final sacrifice for sin, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). His death, for all who believed and would believe, God accepted as the full payment for sin (Rom. 3:25–26; 4:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10), so that complete pardon was provided for the sins of all the penitent faithful (Acts 10:43; 13:38–39; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 2:13–14; 1 John 1:9; 2:12).

The death of Christ was a real, genuine, actual satisfaction of divine justice. It was a true payment and atonement in full—actually, not potentially, paid to God by Christ on behalf of all who would ever believe, because they were chosen and redeemed by the power of God. The death of Christ was definite, particular, specific, and actual on behalf of God’s chosen people, limited in extent by His sovereign purposes, but unlimited in effect for all for whom it was rendered.

Redemption is the work of God. Christ died to accomplish it, not merely to make it possible and then finally accomplished when the sinner believes. The Bible does not teach that Jesus died for everyone potentially, but no one actually. On the contrary, Christ procured salvation for all whom God would call and justify; He actually paid the penalty in full for all who would ever believe. Sinners do not limit the atonement by their lack of faith; God does by His sovereign design.

Christ offered His **flesh** as a sacrifice not merely for Israel, but for the world (cf. 1:29; 4:42; 1 John 4:14). He died for people from all races, cultures, ethnic groups, and social strata (cf. Gal. 3:28; Col.

3:11). Thus God said in Isaiah 45:22, “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth,” and Jesus commissioned the church to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19). The Lord also declared, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life” (John 3:14–15), and “I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (12:32). He is the only Savior for the world of lost sinners.

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