

Did Jesus Really Say That?

“Eat My Flesh, Drink My Blood”

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This text is from a transcription of a recent sermon by Rev. Kevin Labby. It has been transcribed verbatim and edited by Copilot AI, along with additional review and editing by the theological staff at Third Millennium Ministries.

Please turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of John, chapter six. Today we'll be looking at verses 51 through 59. We are nearing the end of our fall sermon series, Did Jesus Really Say That? Throughout this series we've wrestled with some of the more difficult sayings of Jesus—words that initially confound us, but which, when understood in their context, reveal life-giving power. This morning, we come to one of the most challenging passages: John 6:51-59.

“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.”

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 like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

Jesus said these things while teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for these words. They strike our ears strangely, even if we've begun to grasp their meaning. By your Spirit, help us to understand them more fully, to eat and drink more deeply, and to know the life that is found only in Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

This is a clear instance where Jesus' words don't make immediate sense—especially to his first-century hearers. Early Christians in the Roman Empire were even accused of cannibalism, because outsiders overheard their worship and the language of the Lord's Supper: "Take and eat, this is my body... Take and drink, this is my blood." Misunderstanding has followed these words through the centuries, not only outside the church but within it. So today we pause to consider why Jesus chose such startling language, and how it points us to the life he offers.

If these verses make you blink, you are not alone. Eating flesh and drinking blood sounds strange to modern ears. But it was no less scandalous in the synagogue at Capernaum. John tells us later in this chapter that many disciples abandoned Jesus after hearing these words. They could not accept them.

To see what Jesus meant, we need to read carefully, verse by verse. Let's begin with verse 51: "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."

This is one of the seven "I am" statements in John's Gospel. Each echoes God's self-revelation in the Old Testament — "I am who I am." When Jesus says, "I am the bread of life... I am the good shepherd... I am the resurrection and the life," he is not merely offering guidance or moral teaching. He is claiming to be the very source of life itself. Bread sustains the body; Jesus sustains the soul. He is God incarnate, who gives his flesh as a sacrifice for the life of the world.

We are constantly tempted to treat faith as something we do rather than someone we trust. But Jesus points us to himself—his obedience, his life, his cross. "My flesh... which I will give for the life of the world." He is the Savior for all nations, offering his life as the sacrifice for sin.

Where do we turn when our souls are hungry? We often feast on lesser things: the approval of others, financial security, reputation, admiration. Yet none of these satisfy. Jesus alone invites us to come, eat, and live.

Notice in verse 52 the crowd's confusion: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" They are stuck in a literal reading, missing the metaphor entirely. This shouldn't surprise us. Earlier in John's Gospel, Nicodemus struggled in the same way when Jesus spoke of being "born again." Again and again, Jesus presses us beyond the surface to see the deeper reality.

In John chapter three, Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cover of night, asking what it means to be justified before God—how a person can be set right with Him. Jesus answered plainly: "You must be born again." Nicodemus, confused, replied, "How can I be born again? I cannot return to my mother's womb a

second time.” Jesus responded, “No, you cannot. What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

Here Jesus points to a spiritual reality through a physical metaphor. Nicodemus’s confusion reveals resistance—an unwillingness to open the mind beyond human effort. The lesson is clear: salvation is not something we accomplish. It is the sovereign work of God’s Spirit, who, like the wind, blows wherever He wills. The mercy and grace of God are our only hope.

We see this same resistance in Peter at the Last Supper. When Jesus stooped to wash his feet, Peter refused, insisting there must be another way. What seemed like humility—“I am not worthy”—was in fact pride. Peter was saying, in effect, “Salvation must happen according to my understanding, not Yours.” Jesus rebuked him.

And Jesus does not soften His teaching. In John 6:53 He intensifies it: “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.” Instead of easing the tension, He raises the stakes. The double “truly” signals utmost importance. This is the truest of truths: without Christ, there is no life.

Here is the diagnosis of the human condition. Apart from God’s grace, we do not merely need help or insight—we need an entirely new life. We need a new birth, a new heart, a new creation. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”

The imagery of eating and drinking carries profound biblical weight. Blood forgives; bread sustains. Jesus embodies both in His life and death. He not only removes sin but reconciles us to God, giving us new life. Notice the radical exclusivity: “Unless this happens, you have no life in you.” There is no alternative path, no secondary option. Life in Christ—or death.

So let me ask: Do you know Jesus as your Savior? Do you know that He has covered your guilt—every sin committed, every good left undone? In His death He perfectly bore it all. To know God’s forgiveness is to know Christ alone, the source of life.

Those who eat His flesh and drink His blood participate in His life and death, and live in Him for eternity. Verse 54 promises: “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

This is the promise: when you turn to Christ in faith, trusting Him for salvation, the Father declares you righteous—not by your effort, but by His grace. You move from feasting on the world to trusting in Christ as your source. Eternal life begins now, with the hope of bodily resurrection to come.

The Old Testament manna foreshadowed this. Israel received daily bread from heaven, enough for each day, but it could not grant eternal life. They ate and died. Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life." He is the true bread from heaven, the perfect fulfillment of that promise, giving life not only now but forever.

This is why, at memorial services for believers, we mourn with hope. Though the body lies in the grave, the soul lives in God's presence. And when Christ returns, He will raise the dead, reunite soul and body, glorify them, and remove every stain of sin. In Him, death loses its power.

Jesus calls His flesh "true food" and His blood "true drink" (John 6:55). The word true means genuine, lasting, eternal—not temporary. In Christ we find life, and life everlasting.

It means authentic as opposed to counterfeit. Jesus is the real source and sustenance of life that we have been looking for all along.

I think it was C S Lewis who said that human history is the long, terrible story of human beings looking for something other than God to make them happy.

We don't need to live our lives in a restless search for meaning, for significance, for justification, for proof that we matter, for proof that we are meaningful, purposeful, we have it in Jesus. Everything else we feed on eventually will disappoint, decay or depart.

Success satisfies for a moment, but the moment we attain it. It demands more of us. Pleasure distracts us briefly, then leaves us feeling empty. Relationships, even good ones can't bear the weight of our expectations. Our ultimate hope, even the people we love the most, who have the most character, the most integrity in our lives, eventually they'll all let us down because they're sinners, just like us.

Jesus is saying beyond all of those things, "I'm the real thing. I'm the one thing that can fill you to overflowing for all time."

So I think it's important to ask ourselves, what are we trying to eat? So to speak, to keep ourselves alive, control, image, comfort, entertainment.

These are just snacks. They won't satisfy. Jesus is the feast. Verse 56 says that Jesus intended this as a metaphor of abiding union. "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me and I in him."

This is what he means, abiding in him, staying connected to him, living in an ongoing, daily dependent relationship with Him. This actually is going to echo something in John chapter 15. It says, Abide in Me and I in you, as the branch

cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine. Neither can you unless you abide in me.

Eating and drinking aren't one time events. They're daily habits, and the Christian life looks like daily feeding on Christ through His Word, verse 57 Jesus roots this in the life of God the Trinity. He says, "As the living Father sent me and I live because of the father, so whoever feeds on me, he will also live because of me."

It's not just that we experience God's forgiveness through Jesus, because He lives and we in Him, we are now moving from merely forgiven as great and as glorious the truth as that is, to enjoying fellowship and communion with God and one another, satisfied at the table of God as His people. Verse 58 says, "this is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

Jesus has brought all of this full circle, pointing us that the Old Testament manna was a hint of the ultimate bread that would come and never spoil.

He's the provision that leads not just to our physical survival, but to eternal life. The Old Testament points to Christ, every sacrifice, every prophet, every type, every shadow, everything that the Old Testament concludes finds its fulfillment in Jesus.

Jesus says all of this adds up to a crisis. We have to choose the way that we will live our life and the source of life that we will seek. Verse 59: "Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum."

Jesus didn't whisper these words to a select few. He said them publicly to all people, because this is a public truth that affects every one of us. There is no safe middle ground. You either come to him for life or you walk away hungry in death.

He speaks publicly so you can respond personally.

What will you do with his words? That's the question with which we need to contend today.

May I extend to you an invitation this morning, an invitation to Christ and his table.

Some of you have walked in here today tired, maybe feeling guilty, spiritually underfed. You've been running on fumes for weeks, maybe months. You're exhausted from trying to hold everything together, trying to find meaning and purpose in life.

You don't know how much longer you can keep going.

Some of you have been feasting on all the wrong things, success, distraction, comfort, and you're still hungry.

You know that these things only satisfy for a moment, but ultimately leave you empty.

Some of you are here out of habit, maybe obligation, not really expecting much. As you come into worship, you're spiritually tired, maybe numb, going through the motions. Jesus gives this hard saying because he wants to give you life, real life, resurrection life. He offers himself his broken body has shed blood for you.

And he says, "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."

"If anyone." The invitation is open.

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