

## Stage IV. The Great Galilean Ministry

### I. Jesus' Third Tour of Galilee and its Aftermath

#### The DAILY JESUS NEWS #117

#### 10. Believers Are United With Jesus Through Faith in Him JN 6.52-59

52 <sup>J</sup>Then the Jews were quarreling among themselves, saying: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

53 Jesus said to them, *"Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever continually eats my flesh and keeps on drinking my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink."*

56 *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood continues to make their home in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I am living through the Father, so the one who is feeding on me will live through me."*

58 *"This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever is feeding on this bread will live forever."*

59 He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = <sup>MT</sup>, Mark = <sup>M</sup>, Luke = <sup>L</sup>, John = <sup>J</sup>, Acts = <sup>A</sup>. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	The Synagogue in Capernaum
Timeline	Early April (Month 26)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage IV: The Great Galilean Ministry
	I. Jesus' Third Tour of Galilee and its Aftermath
Title	10. Believers Are United With Jesus Through Faith in Him

#### COMMENT:

This reading contains the conclusion of Jesus' teaching on "the Bread of life." It is probably the most radical and easily misunderstood thing that Jesus ever said in his public ministry. However, when we properly interpret the symbolism and imagery that Jesus used here, his closing promise is one of the richest and most encouraging things he ever said.

Jesus had been thinking of "bread" as the role of food in sustaining physical life, even as he is the creator and sustainer of eternal life. After speaking of "bread" as "food," in these verses, Jesus added the rather shocking phrases, *"eating my flesh"* and *"drinking my blood."* We need to clarify two things here:

(1) What did Jesus mean by "eating" and "drinking?"

(2) What did Jesus mean by "food," his "flesh," and his "blood?"

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Jesus used "eating" (one of the main verbs he repeated throughout this discourse) and "drinking" (occurs in 6.53-56 only) as synonyms for "believing" in him. This is not surprising when we remember that the gospel of John uses the verbs "believe" and "receive" as synonyms for each other. For example, in the beginning of his gospel John wrote: "Yet to all who did receive him—to those who believed in his name—he gave the right to become children of God." (JN 1.12) Jesus spoke of "eating" and "drinking" in this message to remind the people of how he had provided the food that sustained their lives in a miraculous way the day before.

"Eating and drinking" describe how we "receive" food physically; "believing" describes how we receive Jesus spiritually. When we eat or drink, we choose to receive a source of energy into our body. In the same way, when we decide to believe in Jesus, we receive him into our inner being in the form of the Holy Spirit. Instead of using our mouths, we use our faith to take Jesus in. Then, like food and drink become energy within our bodies, Jesus himself becomes the energy of eternal life for us. Thus, the gospel of John uses the verbs "believe" and "receive" as synonyms for each other, and here Jesus spoke of "eating and drinking" as a synonyms for "believing" as well.

Jesus himself defined what he meant by "flesh" in yesterday's reading: **"I AM the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread they will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."** (6.51) Jesus was speaking here of giving his body (flesh) on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. While he did not define "blood," in the passage, the "blood of Jesus" consistently refers in the New Testament to the blood that Jesus shed on the cross. Thus, **"eating his flesh"** and **"drinking his blood"** means believing in Jesus as the risen "Lamb of God," who gave his body and blood as a sacrifice in our behalf.

Eating the "bread" that symbolized Jesus' body (flesh), and drinking his "blood" sounds a lot like the observance of Communion, or the Lord's Supper. While the language does closely parallel the later words of Jesus and Paul about Communion, Jesus' own explanation of what he is talking about here indicates that Communion is not what he had in mind.

Jesus was speaking of receiving him by faith, and the eternal union that comes from doing so. Just as Jesus promised that one drink of his "living water" would become a well, then a fountain abundant enough to become the source of rivers of water, one "bite" of Jesus' "flesh" becomes an eternal union with the Trinity. Communion points to the reality of Jesus' sacrifice that created that eternal union with him when we believe, but it is not the reality itself. Jesus was speaking of the reality itself here. How do we know this?

Jesus made it plain in his conclusion:

**56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood continues to make their home in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I am living through the Father, so the one who is feeding on me will live through me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever is feeding on this bread will live forever."**

When Jesus spoke of believers who **"eat my flesh and drink my blood"** in vs. 6.56, he went on to describe that person as **"one who is feeding on me"** in 6.57, and in 58, **"feeding on this bread."** "Eat" is synonymous with "feeding" here. In other words, the process of feeding on Jesus' flesh and blood is an ongoing action, a constant feeding, or eating. Here is the key issue: How does this "eating/feeding" continue? Jesus qualified the believing/eating/feeding process in a totally unexpected way in 6.57. **"Just as the living Father sent me and I am living through the Father, so the one who is feeding on me will live through me."**

**"Just as I live through the Father"** is Jesus' explanation. **"Just as"** qualifies our relationship with Jesus in this passage by His relationship to his Father. The relationship of a believer to Jesus is the same as Jesus' relationship to the Father. We abide, or make our home in him, and he in us, in the same way that Jesus made his home in the Father, and the Father in him.

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How did Jesus experience his oneness with the Father? Was it the observance of communion as a memorial, or sacrament that sustained Jesus' oneness with His Father? That was impossible, for Jesus had never experienced the rite of communion when he spoke these words. Yet he had been living "*in the Father, and the Father in me*" for eternity already when he spoke these words!

Since Jesus was not talking about the rite of communion when he spoke of sustaining his oneness with the Father, then he could not have been speaking about communion as sustaining his oneness with his disciples, either. The "**just as**" qualifier only allows this interpretation.

Communion has a deep, powerful role in affirming and re-experiencing our mutually indwelling relationship with the Trinity. That is why it is called "communion!" However, communion does not create our oneness with the Trinity and is not the basis for sustaining it, any more than communion is the basis for oneness in the Trinity, and the means through which each Person of the Trinity sustains their mutual indwelling of each other. Communion has a vital role in our personal and corporate experience of oneness with God, but it does not create or sustain his indwelling.

Jesus' relationship with the Father was a permanent, mutually indwelling union through the Holy Spirit. Our union with Jesus is also a permanent, mutually indwelling union through the Holy Spirit, because it is "**just as**" his relationship with the Father. Believing/eating/drinking in Jesus leads to a constant process of union and fellowship with him in the Spirit, all modeled on his own ongoing union with his Father in the Spirit.

Believers "**abide in me, and I in them,**" according to Jesus (6.57). In his final hours before his arrest and death, Jesus will **command** his disciples to "**abide in me.**" This mutually indwelling union is one of the most profound ways to describe our relationship with God ever spoken. It is not an option, it is the explicit command of our Lord.

The union is the product of believing in Jesus. Like the "drink--well--fountain--rivers of living water" progression that Jesus used to describe his indwelling in John 4.14 and 7.38, the "bread of life" teaching expresses unbelievable abundance and vitality in our life in him.

Jesus is the bread that has come down from heaven in the incarnation, so that if when take just one "bite" of him by faith, he then indwells us and becomes the source of energy and life that lasts forever, bringing us into permanent union with the Triune God. Jesus is supernatural "food" of the highest quality. Receiving just one morsel of him by faith assures eternal, abundant life.

This eternal life is what Jesus was offering his audience in the synagogue in Capernaum through the symbolism of the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 when he spoke these words. Jesus was also making the same promise of eternal life available to everyone as well, by explicitly using universal language that applies to everyone in the world in the same way as his original audience.

#### APPLICATION:

Are you constantly drawing from Jesus every day, moment by moment, in reliance upon him to live in and through you by his boundless power and grace? That was the way Jesus lived in fellowship with his father. That is the way he longs to live in fellowship with each of us.

*How will you feed on Jesus today? How will you abide in him, so that he can live freely in you?*