

Bible Study Guide: Week of 8-9-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

John 6:51-58

[Jesus said] ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” ⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³So 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. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

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This passage is a continuation of the conversation that Jesus and “the Jews” (as John calls the crowds here) began in v. 25. More than that, this conversation is an extended discussion based on Jesus’ sign of the feeding of the 5,000 earlier in this chapter. We pick up this week on the last verse of last week’s gospel lesson. This repeated verse helps link the two portions of the conversation and sets up a new dispute between Jesus and the crowds. Last week they wondered about Jesus’ origin and parentage: When Jesus mentioned his “Father” (referring to God), they “grumbled” (as their ancestors had done in the wilderness so long ago) “Is not this Joseph’s son whose mother and father we know?” In this week’s lesson, however, the crowds turn their attention not to Jesus’ origin, but rather to the content of his message.

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We can hardly blame the crowds for wondering about Jesus’ mysterious words here. Who among us would listen to someone who asked us to eat his flesh? In truth, it is only because we are so used to this passage and other ones like it, as well as familiar with the imagery of consuming the body of Christ in the Eucharistic meal that we do not take offense at Jesus’ words here. The Jews’ dispute here is perfectly logical and reasonable—they have, after all, just eaten loaves and fish. Now Jesus claims he will feed them with his own flesh. They may be beginning to wonder what sort of bizarre or grotesque banquet Jesus has in store for them next.

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Rather than reducing the confusion experienced by the Jews or alleviating their offense, Jesus doubles down in v. 53, adding that they must also drink his blood. Further, he claims the authority to raise them up on the last day—a bold claim that would have caused a lot of confusion and offense among those gathered. He doubles down yet again in v. 54, changing from the verb *esthio*—to eat—to the verb *trogo*—to gobble, gnaw, scarf, munch, eat noisily, or eat like an animal. As Rev. Dr. Brian Peterson once wrote, “It is eating as though life depends on it, because it does.”

In v. 35 earlier in this passage, Jesus said that those who believe in him will never hunger or thirst. We use language like this in our day and age. Think, for instance, of the idiom “to eat, sleep, and breathe” something. We use this to mean someone does one activity with great passion and to the exclusion of all else. It is in this same sense that Jesus’ metaphor functions. Just as one cannot stay

physically alive without food or drink, so one cannot truly live as God intends without faith in Jesus. So this eating and drinking is obviously functioning as a metaphor for faith in Jesus—at least on one level. John’s gospel rarely functions on just one level, however.

This eating and drinking certainly has Eucharistic overtones, as well—we are reminded of language that in the other gospels comes in the Last Supper. John has no Last Supper proper in his gospel, focusing instead on the foot-washing and the farewell discourse. Part of that farewell discourse focuses on the theme of abiding—a theme which is ever-present in John’s gospel and which comes up yet again here in v. 56. These themes of life and of abiding with and in Jesus are central to the gospel of John in general and this passage in particular. Jesus is *living* bread, he invites others to eat and drink him as if their *life* depends on it. Those who do so will *live* and *abide* in him. And this *life* will have no end: he will raise them up (to new *life*) on the last day. Jesus’ Father is the *living* Father. Jesus *lives* because of the Father and those who eat Jesus will *live* forever, as well.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. What does it mean to you that Jesus gives his flesh for the life of the world?**
- 2. Why do you think Jesus “doubles” (or even “triples”) down on his grotesque and confusing statement that others must eat his flesh? Could he not have attracted more followers by using different language?**
- 3. Do you think about this passage primarily in terms of the Communion meal, or primarily in terms of Jesus’ speaking metaphorically about faith? Why do you think this is?**