
LIFE IN HIS NAME

THE BEST HARD MESSAGE EVER

John 6:41-59

The title of the message from John 6:41-59 is The Best Hard Message Ever. I just want to give you a praise report before we read God's word. This past week I went to an event at Calvary Chapel where our ministry partner, First Priority, celebrated the year end. If you don't know what First Priority does, they have clubs that meet in public middle schools and high schools all throughout South Florida. We now have clubs in 194 schools. Isn't that amazing? And this last school year we saw 3,637 students make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. That's amazing, isn't it? That's awesome. We work in two schools: Silver Lakes Middle School and Coconut Creek High School. We are overseeing those two clubs. One of our guys working in those schools just moved to Missouri, so we need help. It takes about an hour and a half a week. If are an able adult, see Stefan. I just wanted to tell you that this was a marvelous celebration as we heard testimony after testimony about what God is doing and how lives are being changed. Thank you for your support of this great ministry. Amen?

John 6:41-59:

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."

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 in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

We are making our way through John Chapter 6, the longest chapter in the New Testament, 71 verses. It begins with the miracle of the feeding of the 5000, which is really the feeding of the 20,000 – 5000 men plus women and children – this wonderful miracle where Jesus takes the lunch of a small boy, this small meal, and blesses it and breaks it and feeds this massive crowd. The lesson taught through that miracle is now expounded upon in this long teaching.

A comparison is being made between what God did through Moses in giving the manna, and Jesus, not just in giving his own bread, his bread of life, but in that Jesus himself is the true manna, the true bread of life. That was the lesson from the first part of this teaching. Jesus is the bread of life, one of the seven great “I am” statements. “I am the bread of life.” **Jesus promises satisfaction, fulfillment, a life of meaning and purpose not just now and in this life, but for all of eternity – abundant, eternal life.**

We looked at Jesus’ teaching that it is unwise for us to labor in this world, to work so hard for things that won’t last. He tells us to work for the food that lasts for all of eternity. Then he makes it explicitly clear that that labor is not really labor. It’s receiving eternal life by faith in Christ, as he told us in verse 29, which we studied earlier. “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” **Don’t work for the food that perishes. Work for the food that will last forever. Here is that work: Believe in Jesus.**

So that brings us to today’s teaching. It’s a teaching, but there is a little bit of dialogue that’s taking place. And we ask ourselves, “Okay, if the first part of the broader teaching is “Jesus is the bread of life, Jesus gives eternal life, believe in Jesus,” what is taught in this section? The answer to that is that now Jesus teaches exactly how it is that God gives life. It’s summarized well for us at the end of verse 51. There is one sentence where Jesus states, “And the bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh.” My flesh? Yes. His body will be broken. His blood will be spilled. He is speaking of the cross. **He is speaking of the offering of himself as a sacrifice for our sin so that all who believe in him will be pardoned, forgiven, acquitted, cleansed of sin because of his sacrifice in our place.**

That message, we discover, as Jesus not only presents it, but enlarges it before this crowd in Capernaum – that message is difficult to receive. They have a very difficult time hearing this message. And yet, it is the message that leads to eternal life. I would say it this way: **The hardest message you will ever hear is the message that will change your life forever.** The hardest message you will ever hear is the one and only message that will

change your life forever. I want to unfold it today in three parts. This message is offensive, it is hard to believe, it is wonderfully received. Those are our three points, if you are taking notes. **This hard message is offensive, hard to believe, wonderfully received.** Let's get started.

I. This message is offensive.

Let's just begin by talking about the elephant in the room. When you read this passage, if you are really paying attention and observing it, the metaphor that Jesus uses of eating his flesh and drinking his blood is unpleasant. It's offensive. Scripture will frequently use metaphors and images to teach us about God and who God is and what God does. You know, when Jesus earlier in John said, "I am the living water," there is something pleasant and refreshing about that image. But in the way this image is presented, it's difficult. Jesus says, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." Obviously, that's a metaphor. It's not something that is intended to be taken literally, yet even as a metaphor it is challenging. That's just on the surface. If you look at the flow of the passage, you discover Jesus is *intentionally* offending. Intentionally? Yes.

Think of it in this way. We began in verse 41, where they are doing what? What are they doing in verse 41? They are grumbling. That's foreign to us, right? We never grumble. The basic teaching where Jesus says, "Listen, I came down from heaven. The Father has sent me. I am the bread of life" -- they are like, "Who does he think he is? Isn't this Joseph's son?" They are offended by the claims that Jesus is making. That's really the first movement, in response to the very simple teaching where Jesus has taught that he is the bread of life.

The second movement begins in verse 41. The first movement is what we previously studied. Verse 41 is their reaction to it. What does Jesus do in this first paragraph? If you are looking at the text, we are really studying two paragraphs today -- 41 through 51, then 52 through 59. In the first paragraph, Jesus' response to their grumbling is what? He just takes it up a notch. Verses 43-46:

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 just keeps elaborating on the teaching until at the very end in verse 51, our main idea, he ends with this: "And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Here is what he does. They object to the whole idea that he is the bread of life, he has come from heaven. They grumble. He *repeats* the teaching. He repeats it with more emphasis, and then he alludes to this application: You have to eat my flesh. He doesn't say it like that. He says it in

a more general way: "...the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Right? Are you with me? They don't yet know what he means, but they suspect. So what do they do?

Third movement: They ask. Verse 53: "They disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us flesh to eat?'" Now Jesus is really offensive: "So then 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.'" Then he just repeats it. Do you see the progression? They are offended just at the idea that life is found in him. He repeats it, strengthens it, then takes it to a whole new level, saying, "You have to eat my flesh and drink my blood."

Do you know what they do after this? He has fed 20,000 people, he has walked on water, he preaches this message in the synagogue, and do you know what they do? They leave. Yeah, that's next week's sermon. Jesus is standing there with just the apostles. They are like, "Wow, this started so good! 20,000 people! We could have really done something with this! Jesus, you have offended everyone! And as they started to get offended, you just made it worse!" I'm suggesting to you that it is to a degree deliberate. What is the message? "The bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh." **The message is the cross, and the cross is an offensive message.**

It might help you to turn to Matthew Chapter 16, and we will see a parallel construction. It's an interesting thing that when you look at this passage and the use of this metaphor, some people will say, "Well, the reason it's offensive is that Jesus is teaching us about The Lord's Supper. So when Jesus teaches about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he is referencing what will take place in The Lord's Supper. I think that's an inaccurate interpretation of this passage. Certainly, now, the institution of The Lord's Supper having been given, we understand it. We can look back and we can make those connections. But I think Colin Brown, D.A. Carson and others have said it well. This passage is not about The Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is about this passage.

The Lord's Supper symbolizes the truths that are taught here, but you can't reverse it and say this is just teaching about The Lord's Supper. There is a lesson here about the nature of faith in total dependence upon him. Total faith. Total trust in Christ. That is the message, which includes this abiding, this union, which is consummated in our resurrection. Did you follow all of that?

Alright, if we receive eternal life by faith, it would be easy for us to misunderstand what that means, to think of a superficial application of that. We just agree with what Jesus says about himself. Jesus is teaching here, "No, no, no." This faith speaks of a dependence on Christ that's much deeper and it involves a communion with him.

I want to illustrate this from Matthew 16, verse 13-17:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! (That’s son of Jonah.) For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

Here is what’s happened. They are with Jesus. Jesus is ministering. They are starting to see that maybe this is the Messiah, maybe this is the Christ, maybe this is the One. Jesus brings them to a point of confession. **This is the most important question you will ever answer in this life: Who is Jesus?** You must answer that question in one form or another, and Peter answers, “You are the Christ! You are the Messiah. You are the Son of the living God.” Do you remember what Jesus said to him? “Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah. Flesh and blood didn’t reveal this to you. You didn’t figure this out on your own. My Father revealed this to you. This was revealed by the Spirit of God to you.” Alright?

That really is last week’s sermon from John 6. Jesus is the bread of life. Jesus is the Messiah. The Father, through the Son, speaks a blessing on Peter, recorded in verses 18 through 20, then we come to verse 21: “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” That verse, verse 21, is John 6:51. “The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Are you following? Do you see the parallel? Who is Jesus? “You are the Christ. You are the Messiah.” John 6: “I am the bread of life.” **Trust in Jesus and live.**

Now, today’s message: How will you accomplish that? How will you do it? “I will give my life on the cross. I will give my flesh. My flesh will be broken. My body will be broken. My blood will be spilled.” Peter has gotten the first question. Now Jesus has given him the answer to the second question. “From that time forward Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

Here is Peter’s response: “And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” “Don’t worry, Jesus, I’ll protect you from the cross.” The cross is offensive. The idea of a crucified savior is offensive. The idea that my sin is so deep and profound that the penalty of it is death, that I can only be saved by completely depending on Jesus Christ and trusting in him, offends my sensibilities. It offends my pride. 1 Corinthians 1:23: “...but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles...”

This is a hard message. This is a hard message, but the only message that will change your life forever. It's offensive. I'm suggesting to you that there is a certain deliberate quality in how Jesus presents it to bring us to see our complete need of Jesus Christ. That's point #1. Don't worry, that was the shortest point.

II. Hard to believe.

How do we eat the flesh of Jesus, following through on the metaphor? Well, the passage makes it clear. We believe. The answer is faith. Let me give you a sampling from the passage from our last study and from today.

- Verse 29: This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.
- Verse 35: Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.
- Verse 40: For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.
- Verse 47, from today's text: Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

Friend, if you are here today, believe in Jesus Christ. Trust in him and you will receive eternal life. That is the clear message of how we apply this metaphor to our lives. And yet, also made clear in the text, it is difficult to believe. It is hard to believe. In fact, Jesus puts it this way in verse 44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." This message is so difficult for us to understand and believe because of the conditions of our hearts. It's not like it's difficult to comprehend, but it is *folly*, as 1 Corinthians 1:23 tells us. It is foolishness. It's a stumbling block.

When someone comes and says, "Listen, God made you. You have been given this precious life and there is something wonderful about your life. You will live forever. You will never die. You are an eternal being. From the moment you were conceived, you will exist forever, made in the image of God. Yet, you are responsible for what you will do with the treasure of your life, and you have sinned against God. You have offended God. God is just and he will judge your sin. The only way for you to be right with God and to spend that eternity in the joy of his presence and in paradise with him is to trust in Jesus Christ, to receive as a gift the gift of salvation. God offers it freely to you today." That message humbles us and brings us to a place of complete dependence upon him.

Just to be clear: Eating the flesh of the Son of Man equals believing in Jesus and his life and his death on the cross in my place. This belief is not superficial agreement, but it's a complete trust, dependence, likened to eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

Let me just, if I may, speak to Christians for a moment. When we come to Christ and we believe in the sacrifice of Christ, we are born again. The Spirit of God enters our hearts, and Jesus is referencing that here in this passage. He is saying that you can't come to God unless God draws you. He is showing us that our dependence goes much deeper than we are aware of. He teaches them in this section. He says, "Listen, you have never seen God, but the One who has come down from heaven has seen God." Jesus is basically saying this to them: "You don't really know God. You haven't seen God, but I am here to show you God." Right? But then he takes it further and he says, "Not only that. The Spirit of God will live *in* you, revealing God to you."

The way he does this is rather fascinating. If you will, just open the text and look at Chapter 6, verse 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." Verse 45: "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..." Now, that little phrase "and they will all be taught by God" – Jesus is quoting there Isaiah 54:13. He is quoting an Old Testament promise that the day will come when God will live *in* you and he will teach you. You will believe in God and obey God from the inside out. Jesus is applying that now as he teaches, "You must eat my flesh and drink my blood. You must trust in me and my death for you, and the Spirit of God will enter you and teach you about me from the inside out."

Because this is so amazing and wonderful and delightful, I want you to go to Isaiah 54, if you would. I cannot go to this passage without being moved deeply because of how God used it in my life. Now Christians, I am aware that this is meaty. You've got to think. This is not a sermonette for the Christianette. You've got to apply yourself. I want you just to go with me to this passage. You are going to be wonderfully encouraged, I believe, if you will allow God to show you the connections here. Verse 13: "All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children." That's the idea, that's the verse that Jesus is quoting back in John 6 – this prophecy given to Isaiah of a day when God will do something so miraculous.

Now, if you go to verse 1, where the prophecy begins, this is what it says:

*"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;
break forth into singing and cry aloud,
you who have not been in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be more*

*than the children of her who is married,” says the LORD.
“Enlarge the place of your tent,
and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
do not hold back; lengthen your cords
and strengthen your stakes.
For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,
and your offspring will possess the nations
and will people the desolate cities.*

God used this passage in my life in a season when my wife and I wanted to have children and we weren't having children. God had delayed, for us, having children. If you heard my testimony, you know God brought us through a very difficult time in our marriage. At the end of that season of our struggle, confronting our own pride and selfishness (at least I would speak for myself saying that – my wife is an angel, always has been, of course) – our frustration in a marriage that almost didn't make it was now weighted down with the disappointment of not being able to have children.

I was in a prayer meeting and God spoke this passage to my heart. I can't explain exactly how. There was no audible voice, but I read this passage and from this passage God spoke to my heart dramatically. We were deliberating, “Will we go to Africa on a mission trip?” The doctor said, “Listen, if you go, you have to have these vaccines. I don't want you to be pregnant. I don't want you to get pregnant for six months.” We were testing for pregnancy, making this decision, dealing with the disappointment. Here I am in this prayer meeting, and God speaks this.

I want to tell you, I know I'm not a woman. I get the fact that I don't bear children, but the idea of barrenness just characterized my life. My marriage was barren. We were not able to have children. I felt barren in ministry. I felt the powerlessness of my life, the fruitlessness of my life. And God tells me, “Sing and rejoice! Go home, enlarge your tent, raise the posts, stretch out the stakes, get ready, because more are the children of the desolate than the married one.” God spoke: “You are going to have children. You are going to be blessed with a lot of children, and you are going to be fruitful in ministry, and your fruitfulness in family will correspond and illustrate fruitfulness in ministry. There will be times of delay, but those times of delay will only remind you that it's by my promise and by my power.” Alright? God spoke that.

I go out of the prayer meeting and call my wife. I'm just so *full* of God! Have you ever been like that? I was just erupting! But I don't think it encouraged her a whole lot in that moment. Here is the beauty of it. She wasn't

pregnant that we knew of. We tested. She got the vaccines. We went to Africa. Came back. First night, I'm lying in bed. I don't know how, God prompts my heart: "Your wife is pregnant." I learned from calling after the prayer meeting not to just spurt that out. I also knew the danger of that being said and then not being right. So I got up the next day, we navigated through it, and discovered she was pregnant. We then started having children and kept having children. The flow was kind of unbroken.

Now here's what's amazing about it. Had she been pregnant, we would have never gone to Africa. And had we never gone to Africa, we would have never had it put in our hearts to adopt from Africa. Our oldest child was born healthy. The vaccines weren't a problem. God gave us two children from Africa. We experienced out of our barrenness the fruitfulness of God. The message of Isaiah 54 is: **Jesus is your husband. And when Jesus is your husband, you will be fruitful. You will be provided for. You will be protected. You will be blessed.**

Listen to the rest of the passage, as it flows now, with that idea. Isaiah 54:4-10:

*"Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;
be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced;
for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.
For your Maker is your husband,
the LORD of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.
For the LORD has called you
like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit,
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,
says your God.
For a brief moment I deserted you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.
In overflowing anger for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,"
says the LORD, your Redeemer.*

*“This is like the days of Noah to me:
as I swore that the waters of Noah
should no more go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you,
and will not rebuke you.
For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,”
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*

It goes on. It's beautiful. Skip to verse 13: “All your children shall be taught by the Lord.”

In John 6 Jesus is interpreting that as a New Covenant promise of the Spirit of God being placed in your heart. The context when it was given was *barrenness*. **You cannot be saved unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man. It is not your power. It is not your works. It is not your fruitfulness. It is not what you are able to do. It is God who gives you a promise and does it in you and does it for you.**

Is this not the best message you've ever heard?! When you go home today and you say, “I just can't get it right,” God says, “Yes! You are the desolate, cast-off wife and now I have good news: **The Maker of the world is your husband! You will be fruitful in a way you cannot imagine, not even humanly possible.**” It's a hard message to believe.

I don't know if I'll get to the third point, but that's okay. I want to make this application. Some of you are saying, “Brian, you love to tell this story. You've told this story before. You've told it a lot.” You're right. You know why? Revelation 12:11: “They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” **We overcome by the word of our testimony.** I want to challenge you and invite you to tell your testimony of God's grace over and over and over again, because the enemy is defeated in your life as you confess your barrenness and God's fruitfulness.

One application before we leave this point. Just as we are told in Isaiah 54 to rejoice and sing in the midst of our barrenness because it's an occasion, it's a highway for God to bring fruit in our lives, we are told in James Chapter 1

to rejoice when we enter various trials. Don't turn there, just listen: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Here is what James tells you. James tells you that when you get tested and you go through trials, get happy. There is a purpose. We can connect to that much of what Jesus is saying here. But what we can't connect to, at least for me when I read it – "Okay, let me look at how that's going to happen." You know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. It makes you persevere, right? And then it says, "And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Okay, let me get this right. Trials come, I rejoice, right? Because it's going to make me persevere, and once I persevere I will be mature.

I'm sorry, but it seems like some steps are missing. Like how? How is just going through junk going to make me complete? We are trying to apply this idea. It's hard for me to really conceive of my need for Christ, my absolute dependence – that Jesus would phrase it in such an offensive way: I have to eat his flesh and drink his blood. To say that my faith means trusting and communing completely and absolutely with and on Jesus – that truth is not just difficult to receive the first time, but it has to be worked deep into our hearts. **The gospel, the good news of Jesus has to be massaged and worked over and over and over again into your heart.**

James is telling you that the way that happens is: You go into a trial, you come to your own barrenness, to your own lack, to your insufficiency, and God delivers you. Great! I'm learning to depend on Christ. I'm learning that my power won't do it. That's followed by another trial. That's followed by a different trial. That's followed by two trials together. That's followed by the first trial, now with a new trial. Right?

You are saying, "This is my whole life!" And God says, "Yes! **Rejoice in it because you are now growing to maturity where you are learning, 'I am not confident in myself. I am not relying on myself. I am not relying on the circumstances of my life. I see that Christ is everything! You know what? He's the bread of life.'**" The difficulty of the message points not just to the fact that it's offensive, that it's humbling, but also that it's really hard for me to get ahold of the depth of my need and the complete sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

Alright, I'm going to stop. You'll have to come back next week for point #3.

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