

Words to Live By

1. Jesus' words by which we live!
2. Peter's words to live by

⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

⁵²Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

⁵³Jesus 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. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

⁶⁰On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

⁶¹Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"

⁶²Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!

⁶³The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. ⁶⁴Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."

⁶⁶From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

⁶⁷"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

Today we're on week three of Jesus' bread of life discourse and so we need to start with a bit of a recap so that we're all up to speed and ready for the story's ending. It starts back when Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish. Boy, did that amaze the people, so much so that they figured, "We'll just stick with this guy, and he'll feed us forever." So, even after Jesus snuck off in the middle of the night, they tracked him down the next day and found him at the synagogue in Capernaum when he begins to preach his famous bread of life sermon.

He points out to them that their motives are bad, that they're just looking for him as a means to have their stomachs filled. He points them to a different kind of bread, a bread that doesn't spoil, the bread of life. They say, [Oh Yeah], "**Always give us this bread.**" (John 6:34 NIV). Okay, coming right up, Jesus says, "**I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry**" (36) and they're flabbergasted. Who does this guy think he is? We know his parents, Mary and Joseph. They're nothing special and neither is he! Of course, they didn't know what we know, that he was "*conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,*" but they also managed to forget that he had just fed 5,000 people.

So Jesus doubles down to explain the bread of life and that's where our text today picks up, "**I am living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.**" (51) And he's making it clear that he's not talking about eating his actual flesh, like a cannibal thing, but that eating the bread of life means believing. "**The one who believes in**

me has eternal life.” (47). And some of the Jews are still back at the beginning, arguing, **“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (52)** They’re hung up on physical eating, but it wasn’t because Jesus wasn’t being clear, it was because their heads and their hearts and their stomach were somewhere else. They were “listening but not understanding, ever seeing but never perceiving”.

So when Jesus launches into third section of the discourse, he isn’t looking to make the explanation simpler, now its like he’s trying to make it more drastic and reveal the true difficulty of it. **“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise them up at the last day.” (53,54).** The drinking his blood part might’ve thrown off even more red flags for the Jews, remembering that the Levitical Law forbid them from eating or drinking even the blood of an animal, much less a human. But this is a figurative section, not literal blood they’re supposed to drink like vampires or something. So what does this all translate to? Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life. To feed on him is to believe in him, that is the only way to be saved. Yes, it was a miraculous thing that God gave the Israelites physical manna through Moses, but their bodies still died because it was just bread. Jesus is the living bread which the Father sent into the world for people to eat and live forever.

Now here’s the reactions. We don’t really hear any more about the Jews from before who had been grumbling and arguing and had kind of written Jesus off. Now we hear about the reaction of Jesus’ wider group of disciples, ones had been following him, people who either were or appeared to be believers. Jesus knew which where which. Now they start to grumble about this sermon. **“This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” (60).** It wasn’t that they didn’t understand it, it was that they did understand and didn’t like it! It was hard because they didn’t agree with it or they had things in their hearts that were competing against Jesus. This is a sensation we all get at times, when we realize that God’s word is saying a hard thing to us, and we can’t avoid it.

Jesus, knowing their reaction, confronts them, **“Does this offend you?”** The answer is yes! It offended them and their keeping of Moses’ law in the same way it offends my pride and my ego when Jesus tells me that I cannot contribute a single solitary ounce of work or effort to the cause of being saved and everything I do in order to try to save myself actually piles on more sin to the landfill in my heart that I can’t get rid of in the first place. And yes! Jesus saying he is the only way to heaven offends everything else that offers itself as a possibility to give salvation—human effort and law-keeping, being a good person, being genuinely devoted to any religion that’s not Jesus.

People are almost right when say something like, “I think all religions lead to the same place.” That’s true as long as you’re leaving out Jesus. All other religions besides the true Christian faith do lead to the same place, the place called hell. As true as that is, it’s not something people like to hear because it sounds mean. But it’s not, because the True God knows there’s only one way to be saved and he cannot stand idly by while people put their faith in the likes of wood or stone or their own goodness or other figments of our imagination that he knows have no power to save.

One exclusive way to eternal life through Christ is a simple but hard teaching! Now that they’ve heard it, these disciples were suddenly not so ready to follow along with the guy who claimed to be God’s gift to the earth, the bread that would satisfy everyone, and the only way to heaven. And Jesus knew tossing another miracle at them wasn’t going to help. Afterall, he had just fed five thousand people with next to nothing. So he tells them another sign wont work. **“What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!” (62)** What if you see me go back to heaven where I came from? Even that won’t help, that won’t make you believe because **“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.” (63)**

There, when Jesus says flesh, he isn’t talking about his flesh anymore. He had just gotten done telling them that his flesh was good for eternal life. The flesh he’s talking about is their flesh, their unbelieving hearts which have the default setting of unbelief and can’t suddenly make the jump to believe. It’s the same as we heard last

week, **“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them,”** (44). Now Jesus repeats the same thought again, **“This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”** (65) If they weren’t offended at first, this certainly would offend them now, and it offends a lot of people today, whole church bodies who teach decision theology.

“Jesus, you’re saying I can’t choose to come to you. I can’t look at the pro’s and con’s and make my own decision of whether I want to believe in you.” Jesus is re-emphasizing here, “Yes that’s correct. The Father must draw you. The Father enables you to believe. The Spirit gives you life. Your flesh does nothing.” It’s what Luther wrote in the meaning of Third Article, which is really one of the most profound explanations of what it means to be Lutheran, *“I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the one true faith.”* (Luther’s Small Catechism)

Our faith looks at Jesus and says, “Everything comes from you, nothing is from me!” Jesus has spoken to us words that are full of Spirit and Life. They are words accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit to make alive those whom God the Father has called from eternity. Those Spirit-filled words make us willing to believe what we would have never believed on our own. ***They are words to live by***, but not in the normal way we use that phrase, like some catchy motto or creed about the way we live. No, **1) Jesus’ words give life**; they’re full of the Spirit; they’re the words of eternal life, ***the words by which we live forever***. **“These words are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ and by believing you may have life in his name.”** (John 20:31) Those words of eternal life are the very heart of the end of this story.

On this day, Jesus encounters basically every preacher’s worst nightmare. He preached a sermon where pretty much all the people were offended and left and never came ever back. **“From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”** (66). It wasn’t because Jesus was a little short on time that week and preached a dud, nor did he preach something wrong. No, it was because he preached what was right, the truth that offers the free gift of the bread of life to all to eat and live, and the truth that excludes every other way.

The problem was that the majority of the people wanted something else, and now Jesus, who had come down from heaven for sinners, had to stand and watch as a multitude of his followers got up and left. They quit. They went back to what they were doing before. You can feel the heartbreak as Jesus turns to the Twelve after he’s watched a mass exodus of rejection and now asks them, **“You do not want to leave too, do you?”** (67)

In Greek, there’s two ways to phrase a question, based on whether you expect the answer to be “yes” or “no”. Jesus phrases the question in the way that expects a good response, for them to say, “No, we want to stay.” Yet the question still serves as a test for them to think about. “Should we quit too?” This time Peter, who doesn’t always get it, and still to come, will fall flat on his face a few more times, this time he nails it! Peter responds in faith and speaks **2) words to live by** for the ages. **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”** (68,69).

Dear believer, you could not by your own thinking or choosing, make your way into the faith. But now by the Father’s enabling and the Spirit’s call, you are in the faith, and now his power does live and work in you, empowering you to say “yes” to his word and will for your life. Now dear believer, you, like Peter, do have God’s power to keep on choosing to stay with Jesus. Every day you will face a thousand decisions of who to serve and who to follow, whether to turn away and serve other gods or serve yourself or to be led away by things deemed more important—or to stay by Jesus’ side, feeding on the words that make you live forever.

Those choices often won’t look all that epic. Sometimes they’ll just look like whether to get up and go to church on the first week of college or to sleep in. Whether to wake up, get on your phone and scroll into oblivion or to have breakfast with the Bread of life. Whether to let a busy schedule crowd out the one thing we

truly need. Everything else will beckon for you to follow, but in those moments see your Savior Jesus standing before you. See him look softly into your eyes and say, “You don’t want to leave too, do you?” And he’s hoping, expecting you to stay. Let your answer forever be Peter’s words to live by, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”** Amen.