

Providing and Dividing

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[0 : 00] Well can I just say again it's great to be with you again here at Brunnsfield. It's always a joy to be here to meet up with Graham, to meet up with Archie and to meet up with others.

I bring greetings of the church family at Charlotte Chapel and to say you are our brothers and sisters and it's lovely to have fellowship in this particular way.

I mentioned my grandfather earlier, my grandfather from born in Falkirk but my grandfather was an interesting character. He was a very strong personality and he encouraged my grandmother in certain eating habits and they went through various fads and fancies.

There was the egg diet in which they ate at least half a dozen eggs a day. There was the apple diet in which they consumed vast quantities of apples.

There was the grapefruit diet in which they had half a grapefruit before every meal. There was the fad of having a glass of hot water every morning and every night.

[1 : 16] I especially remember a vile concoction that they drank called Biostrath. Maybe it's only the older ones here who could ever recall that. I've tried to block it out from my memory. It was appalling but they drank this because apparently it did them good and of course there were the numerous pills and the numerous tablets that they took every day.

And I remember thinking to myself, I'm not going to do that when I get older. But now here I am. And every morning there are lined up for me by my wife, six tablets that I am to take. She says they'll do me good. I'm not quite sure what each one does.

But if she was to put a cyanide tablet there, I would take it without thinking, not knowing any better. And I've got the sneaking suspicion I may not be alone in doing this.

And by the way, at the end of the service when we're shaking hands, don't feel obliged to give me a list of all the things that you take and define them. That's fine. The Lord bless you. Now, why do we do it? Why do we do this sort of stuff?

Why do we pay such attention to our diets? Well, there's a saying that goes, you are what you eat. It's the reasoning that suggests that what you take into your body will inevitably shape and affect how you are physically.

[2 : 48] Now, if you've grasped that, and probably we all think it's quite reasonable, then you're in a position to understand the illustration that Jesus used when preaching to the Jews there in that synagogue in Capernaum.

He said, I'm the bread of life. He said, you need to eat me to live. And for those there who didn't understand the illustration, but who took him literally, this was a problem.

In verse 52, we read this, then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves. How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

You see, they failed to understand the metaphor. They failed to understand the illustration. They failed to understand that not only are you what you eat physically, but you are also what you eat spiritually.

And it is actually the latter that is more important than the former. It is far more important that you are well spiritually than you are fit and healthy physically.

[4 : 03] So I trust you can see why Jesus used this illustration as he did. He was contrasting physical food with the spiritual sustenance that he could give.

But more than that, he was also contrasting, deliberately contrasting, the feeding of the Exodus people, 1,200 years before, with the food that he provides.

You see, he was not only the provider, he was also the provision. And he wanted his listeners to grasp this vital lesson about himself that had been pictured so clearly with the giving of manna, 1,200 years before, in the desert.

So the first point I want to bring to you, I just have two points. Don't get overly excited by only two points. It doesn't mean too much. But it's this. Number one, the saviour who provides. The saviour who provides. You see, Jesus is the bread that, first of all, satisfies completely. Jesus is the bread that satisfies completely.

[5 : 07] Jesus declared there in verse 35, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. And whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

You see, whereas we constantly need to be taking into our bodies food and drink to survive, probably most of us here have had breakfast. If we haven't had breakfast, probably we've had a cup of coffee or something like that.

We do that to survive. We're thinking about our Sunday lunch. We do that because we realise it is important for our wellbeing. You see, the gift of Jesus is completely satisfying.

We need to keep doing these things. But Jesus satisfies, he meets our deepest spiritual needs. He satisfies the deepest cravings of our soul.

All that we were ever looking for is found in him. You may have had some good experiences in life, whether that's in what you achieve or who you're with.

[6 : 13] But like a meal, it's never enough. It satisfies for the moment, but can soon leave you empty.

Whereas Jesus, lastingly and completely, fills that hole in our soul. Peace with God, purpose in living, joy in serving, confidence in dying.

Jesus is the bread that satisfies completely. Jesus is the bread that saves eternally. There in verse 47 through to verse 50, Jesus said, Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.

I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.

You see, food, like the manna the Israelites ate when they were traveling to Palestine, that can't stop you from dying. It keeps you going for a while.

[7 : 20] But it can't answer the problem of aging and decay and death. Whereas Jesus said that he had come to give us eternal life.

In fact, this particular truth is repeatedly emphasized in this passage. Did you note that as the passage was read to us? Verse 40, everyone who looks to the sun and believes in him shall have eternal life.

Verse 47, I tell you the truth. The one who believes has eternal life. Verse 51, whoever eats this bread will live forever.

Verse 54, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. Verse 58, whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

You see, that's the problem of our sin. It destroys the body and it condemns the soul to an eternity separated from God's grace and subject to God's just and holy anger.

[8 : 20] But Christ deals with that. He saves eternally. But then Jesus is the bread who secures certainly.

Who secures certainly because he goes on to say in verse 56, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them.

See, when we eat food, it becomes a part of us. For example, the calcium from our milk that we drink is used to strengthen and to build bones.

It becomes an integral part of who you are. In the same way, Jesus is saying when we receive him as our Lord and Savior, we are connecting to him in such a deep, in such an inseparable way.

Let me tell you something quite stunning. Actually, the Christian is just as strongly connected to Jesus as the Holy Spirit is.

[9 : 27] When you go back to John's Gospel, chapter 1, verse 32, we read this. Then John gave this testimony. I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him, remain on Jesus.

And in fact, it's that word remain, which is the same that we have in chapter 6, verse 56. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me. And just as strongly connected as God the Father is to God the Son.

In chapter 14, verse 11, John records these words. Believe me, Jesus says, when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. The Father remains in me.

In fact, it's the same words that we're just looking at in verse 56. So when someone becomes a Christian, they are inseparably connected to him.

They can never be parted. They are eternally secure. You could be no more separated from Christ than I could separate metal alloys. I don't know if this is an alloy or plastic or what?

[10:38] Metal, I think, made of some sorts. And if it's a combination of metals melted together and then forged in this way, I'm not a metallurgist, as you can tell. But I could no more separate the alloys than you could be separated from being in Jesus.

When you are a follower of Jesus, when you are a believer in his name, you are inseparably, inseparably connected to him, just as much as the Holy Spirit is connected to Jesus, just as much as Jesus is connected to the Father.

So the obvious question we must ask is this. What is required for us to feed upon and enjoy all the blessings that Jesus, the bread of life, brings?

Well, have a look at the conditions outlined in five of those verses that we've already considered.

Those verses that I briefly read talking about eternal life. Verse 40, it says, everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life.

Verse 47, I tell you the truth, he who believes has eternal life. Verse 51, if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

[11:57] Verse 54, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. Verse 58, he who feeds on this bread will live forever.

So what becomes clear is that when Jesus talks about feeding on him, it means the same as believing on him. It's just a very strong way of describing the trust and faith and belief that we must have in Jesus Christ.

You see, just as a starving person would hungrily devour food when given to him, so the lost and helpless sinner will hungrily, passionately, absolutely throw themselves upon the only Savior.

But there's actually even more implied in this passage. What is it that the seeker will be especially resting in? What will be the hope? What will be the center of their trust?

We've just said, yeah, it's believing in Jesus, but there's more here. The clue is in verse 54.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. Now, what is this flesh?

[13:03] Verse 51, this bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Jesus is pointing to the cross. What is this blood that's spoken of?

It's pointing to the sacrificial death, that he will die on behalf of sinners like us. So the call is for us to place our trust in the work of Jesus on the cross.

To hungrily feed on that. That is who a believer is. That is who a Christian is. A Christian is someone who recognizes their sin, recognizes their need, recognizes their standing before God, and puts their trust in the work of Jesus there on Calvary's cross, when Jesus took our sin upon his own body, when he, the substitute sacrifice, died in our place.

Yet the tragedy of this chapter is that it began with a crowd of about 20,000 people, and it ends with just a dozen.

About just a dozen. You see, thousands of people had witnessed a stunning miracle. Thousands of people had heard Jesus speak, and thousands had rejected him and walked away.

[14:27] So my second, my final point is this. The saviour who divides. The saviour who divides.

For it's possible for us to identify three separate categories of people mentioned by John in this last section of the chapter.

And each one of us here, sitting here, will fit into one category or another. Where do you come? The first category is that of followers. Followers.

You see, in the first two years of Jesus' public ministry, he attracted a lot of attention. Well, little wonder that he did that. He was performing amazing miracles, such as healing the sick and feeding the hungry.

And he was teaching some amazing and glorious truths. And he was showing amazing compassion to individuals. And in the context of a country like this, with its rich history and yet occupied by the Roman army, he initially, Jesus initially appeared to many as the conquering deliverer, this Messiah that they had been expecting, who they thought was going to come and throw out the occupiers and give dominance back to Israel itself.

So around him flock large numbers. Freedom fighters, outcasts, the spiritually hungry, the dispossessed. And for two years, Jesus was followed by this large but motley crew.

[16:03] But it was these who began to leave him in large numbers at this point in the story. These are actually the ones that John refers to as disciples.

We just need to be canny enough to see this in verses 60 to 61 and verse 66. Let me give you three reasons why they left.

Number one, I'd say mental laziness. Mental laziness. Because there in verse 60, they say, this is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?

See, there were things that Jesus was saying that they weren't prepared to think through. They struggle over the picture language of eating flesh and drinking blood.

They fail to grasp the truth behind the metaphor, behind the picture. And today, there are some issues that cause people to stumble because they don't take the time to think through them sufficiently.

[17:07] For example, we as Orthodox Christians, gladly as biblical Christians, say we believe in the Trinity, the God who is three in one and one in three. And people go, oh, it's too tough.

I can't believe that. Or there's the issue of God's control over everything. You know, we declare God is sovereign and he is ruling. And people go, well, I look around and how can that be?

Or there's the issue of God's holy anger. That must deal with sin, the justice of God. And people say, oh, I don't get that. I want justice, but I don't want justice for me.

And there's the issue of Jesus dying in the place of sinful people. And it's not something that is taken in. It's not something that is thought about. So you see, we have mental laziness.

But then secondly, there's personal interest. Verse 61, we read this. See, what was offending them was Christ teaching that it wasn't enough just to follow the law of Moses to get into heaven.

[18:16] What offended was Jesus pointing to the fact that he was going to give his life and he was going to spill his blood. And only by total commitment to that work might people be saved. And what offends maybe some people here, I don't know, what they can't get their head around is the Bible's teaching that salvation is a grace gift from God.

It's not something that you could merit. It's not something that you could earn. It's entirely of God's grace from start to finish.

And it offends people to tell them that they are not good enough, even the religious, even the moral people who gather here at Brunfield. Your religion will not save you.

I have many good Muslim friends and have been thinking and praying for them during this time of Ramadan. But the whole time that I would engage in conversation and talk to them about the Christian faith, we were just missing each other by miles because they were saying, but I need to do this.

Maybe, maybe Allah will receive me if I do all these things, the five pillars of Islam. And if I keep the fast and if I go on the pilgrimage and give charitably and stuff like that.

[19:36] And I'm saying, but you can't keep that perfectly. The Christian faith proclaims it is not by our works. It is by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

It is his work completely. And that offends some people. Personal interest. But then thirdly, I notice with them spiritual blindness. Verses 63 to 64.

The spirit gives life. The flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you, they are full of the spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe. I wonder, have you ever tried explaining color to a blind man?

You know, he just won't be able to get it. It's outside the categories that he has. It's impossible to describe. The only way he will ever understand it is for his eyes to be opened.

And Jesus was saying that there were some there who just couldn't get what he was saying because it had to be spiritually discerned.

[20:36] And I realize that the only way that some people here will ever understand is for God to do a miracle and to open their spiritually blind eyes.

Maybe you've been coming to this church for, I don't know, weeks, months, years even. And you say, well, they're nice people. They're lovely people and love the music and just love being with them.

But I don't get this. I don't get this Jesus thing. I don't get this grace thing. I don't get this Jesus dying on the cross in my place. Look, if you're in that category, just pray and see God and say, open my eyes.

Because I'm not seeing it. I need my eyes to be opened by your grace and by your mercy. And as a church, pray and pray and pray again that friends and colleagues and family who do not follow Jesus would have their eyes opened that they might see.

So there were the followers. But then the second category of people here were the believers. Verses 67 to 69. You do not want to leave too, do you?

[21 : 40] Jesus asked the 12. Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.

You see, here's the difference between followers and true believers. Followers will leave when the going gets tough. Followers will leave when their own interests are challenged.

Followers will leave when stronger relationships replace their affection for Jesus. But believers won't.

Believers stay. Believers last the course. Believers are those truly born again by the Spirit of God. Let me give you three quick reasons why.

Number one, because they've heard the words of Jesus. You see, Peter said, you have the words of eternal life. In essence, what the 12 was saying was this. What you say to us, Jesus has met our deepest need and has delivered us from our sins.

[22 : 46] It's freed us from our fears. Your words, Lord, are the most remarkable words we've ever heard. They explain us. They explain life to us.

They satisfy us. Nobody speaks like you do. Nobody understands life like you do. That holds us. And it's the same for so many of us here. It is the words of Jesus.

It is the words of truth. That is why this is a Bible church. Because those who know and love Jesus as their Lord and Savior are those who love this word.

Because they've heard the words of Jesus. Secondly, because they've seen the work of Jesus. See, for two years, these men had been in the close company of Jesus. Not only had they witnessed his miracles.

Not only had they heard his words. But they'd witnessed his character. And what Jesus said tied in precisely with the life that he lived. And from our vantage point now, we've seen so much more.

[23 : 53] We've seen the cross. And we've seen the empty tomb. We remembered it last week. Love so amazing. So divine demands my soul.

My life. My all. We've seen the work of Jesus. We understand the work of Jesus in ways deeper. I think the third reason is this.

Because they've recognized the worth of Jesus. Because they've recognized the worth of Jesus. They say in verse 69, We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.

See, they'd recognize Jesus for who he really is. He is the promised Messiah. He is God's deliverer. God's son. He is God incarnate. He is the prince of glory.

He is the creator of all things. And the sustainer of all things. And when you've grasped that. And when you've grasped that. Little wonder they should ask, Lord, to whom shall we go?

[24 : 58] For nothing compares to Christ. He is the one who is supremely worthy. There is none like him. No one comes close to our Jesus.

They've recognized the worth of Jesus. And when your eyes have been opened. And you see Jesus. Oh, you stay with Jesus. You love Jesus.

So there are followers. There are believers. But the final category is there are deceivers. For Peter had spoken those wonderful words on behalf of the 12 chosen disciples who remained.

But Jesus knew in reality there was still one deceiver among them for whom those words were not true. So we read this in verses 70 to 71.

Then Jesus replied, have I not chosen you, the 12, yet one of you is a devil? He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who though one of the 12 was later to betray.

[26 : 06] And if I'm to be faithful to God's word before us, to this passage, I must alert you to the dangerous truth. That it's possible to think that you're part of God's people.

When all along, you're not. You're deceiving yourself. But you're not deceiving God.

And I fear there might be some here, I don't know, who think they are Christ's when all along they actually have never placed their trust in him.

They've never been born again. They've never come to that point of repenting of their sins and throwing themselves completely upon the finished work of Jesus.

You're just going through the motions. Sunday by Sunday. You're just playing the game. You're just acting the part. So my plea is this.

[27 : 10] Become a true believer in Christ even today. We know it didn't happen for Judas. And the role he had to play in the death and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. But my friend, you may be here.

You may think, but what will others think of me? My friends, you have an opportunity to come in faith to Christ. To repent of your sin.

To put your trust in him. To be born again by his spirit. To be ready for eternity. And my plea with you is that you become not a follower.

My plea is that you become a believer. In the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Father, we want to thank you for these words that we've read.

Father, we have to say when we heard them read to us, they seemed quite complex and intense. But Father, thank you that we can grasp that the Lord Jesus Christ himself is the bread.

[28 : 15] That he is the one that we need to feed upon. Not in a real physical way, but in a spiritual way. To trust him.

To rest in him. And to know all the benefits that come through knowing him as Lord and Savior.

Father, those of us here this morning who do know and love Jesus, we thank you again for saving us.

For bringing us into your family. For forgiving our sins. Thank you that we know we are joined to Christ and nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in him. Father, keep us faithful.

Keep us loving Jesus. Keep on giving us a bigger vision. Of who he is. That we might be delighted. That we might be enraptured by the wonder of the Savior who gave himself for sinners like us. Hear us.

[29 : 14] Help us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.