

Jesus Teaches Difficult Truths

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Jesus' teachings about eating His flesh and drinking His blood were difficult to understand, but eternal life is found in them.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: John 6

Often people who are quite unfamiliar with Christianity still admire Jesus and even wish more Christians were like Jesus, at least as they understand Him. But when they encounter what Jesus actually said, they find He is not who they thought He was. The Jesus they thought they admired said some very hard things. He wasn't all "peace, love, and good vibes." He didn't go around just teaching everybody to be nice to each other. (For one thing, He never would have been crucified if *that* were His major message.) No, the real Jesus was, and is, polarizing.

Jesus' words and actions offended people, not because He lived to give offense but because He lived to center everything and everyone on Himself. The claims Jesus made of *His* self-centrality are an assault upon the self-centeredness of sinners like you and me.



What are some misconceptions people might have about Jesus?

Group Time

Point 1: Jesus shares words of life (John 6:52-59).

⁵² At that, the Jews argued among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day, ⁵⁵ because my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ Just 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. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the manna your ancestors ate—and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.”

⁵⁹ He said these things while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

“Eat My **flesh** and drink My **blood**”—what a strange thing to say! And though the Jews misunderstood His meaning, Jesus didn’t let up on the metaphorical language. He insisted that people must find their spiritual sustenance in Him as the fulfillment of all God’s promises. Manna fed the body for the Jews in the wilderness, but Jesus—the Bread of life—feeds body and soul for eternity. Blood represented the life of an animal or a person, so it was prohibited for eating and drinking, but Jesus—the Lamb of God—poured out His blood for our forgiveness and our eternal life.

“You have what it takes” is the message of the world. It is the message of self-help spirituality and self-centered self-esteem. But the truth claims of Scripture—indeed, the very essence of Christianity—hinges on our *not* having what it takes (Rom. 3:23). We have nothing but need; Jesus has and is everything we need, so we must feast on Him.



Why do people find it so offensive to hear that we don’t have what it takes?

Voices from the Church

“The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a rock we stand on to climb a mountain; it is the Rock, the Mountain. It is His faithfulness that holds me, not mine that holds Him. The footholds only hold because they are part of the Rock of Ages.”¹

—Amanda Bible Williams

Point 2: Jesus shares words of the Spirit (John 6:60-65).

⁶⁰ Therefore, when many of his disciples heard this, they said, “This teaching is hard. Who can accept it?”

⁶¹ Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, asked them, “Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you were to observe the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ The Spirit is the one who gives life. The flesh doesn’t help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. ⁶⁴ But there are some among you who don’t believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning those who did not believe and the one who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ He said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted to him by the Father.”

Many people who were following Jesus had a hard time with His teaching that centered the hope of salvation on Himself. They struggled to believe Him, and Jesus explained why: No one comes to Jesus in faith unless the Father grants the ability to do so through the Holy Spirit. Without new birth in the Spirit (John 3:5-8), there is no salvation because the Holy Spirit is the One who convicts us of sin, leads us to Jesus in faith, and regenerates our hearts. If you want eternal life, you must believe in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is integral for that step of faith.



Why is it important for us to remember the role of the Holy Spirit in our salvation and our sanctification?

Sometimes people may think they were saved because they knew more than others or were morally superior. But the reality is that not one bit of our supposed “righteousness” is any advantage at all. For any of us to experience the new birth, whether we were raised in church or raised to stay away from it, whether we have been a moralistic older brother or a wild prodigal, we need the radical intervention of heaven. We need to be given the gift of faith unto eternal life, and this gift is pure grace from God, not based on our works.



What means did the Holy Spirit use to draw you to faith in Christ?

Point 3: Jesus receives words of worship (John 6:66-69).

⁶⁶ From that moment many of his disciples turned back and no longer accompanied him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the Twelve, “You don’t want to go away too, do you?”

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

The twelve disciples had been around Jesus for a while. They had heard His teachings and seen His miracles, but so had a lot of other people. Now, after some hard teaching from Jesus, they watched as some who claimed to follow Christ vanished into the distance. But the Twelve remained. And to Jesus’ question, Peter, for all his impetuosity, replied with the right answer, the response of faith and worship. Truly seeing and believing Jesus means every other option has become no option at all, and that leads to worship of “the Holy One of God.”



What are some declarations of truth that glorify Jesus?

Salvation comes through faith alone in Christ alone. *He* is the way, *He* is the truth, and *He* is the life (John 14:6). He is the only way to the Father, the only way to new and eternal life. The world’s wisdom runs counter to the truth of Christ, which is why so many left Him when He challenged their worldly beliefs. Therefore, to follow and worship Jesus means rejecting the ways of the world in favor of God’s truth. We must love Him above all, not ourselves, or we will miss out on His love for us. We must live His way, not our own, or we will not live at all.

God Is Truthful: The Scriptures are clear that in God there is no falsehood. God represents things as they really are. Everything He says can be _____ because God guarantees the truth of everything He tells us. Telling the truth is one way we bear the _____ of God, whose _____ is “the way, the truth, and the life.”

Daily Study

Day 1: Read John 6:22-40

“Only one life and soon will be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”³

You’ve probably heard that saying before. I know some people who grew up with it cross-stitched in a frame on their kitchen wall or printed on a favorite coffee mug. It’s become a bit of a cliché in Christian culture, but its truth is ever relevant to every generation of believers.

Jesus cautioned His hearers not merely to work for food that will pass away but to pursue the bread of eternal life—Himself. But the cares of the world swallow us whole each day. The pressures and priorities of our ordinary lives crowd out our attention to God and His Word. We spend most of our lives focused on things that ultimately won’t matter. They may be important. They may be necessary. But if they are the heart of our pursuit of meaning—if they are the whole of our affections—then we miss out on investing in things that last. Nobody on their deathbed wishes they’d spent more time chasing more money, bigger stuff, and other temporary cares.

The truth is eternity impacts every day. Each moment is weighted with the tremendous reality of God and His glory. Do our thoughts, interests, and pursuits reflect that?



Voices from Church History

“That the true coming is from a sense of an absolute need of Jesus Christ to save, etc., is evident by the outcry that is made by them to come, even as they are coming to him, ‘Lord save me,’ or I perish; ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ and the like ... This language doth sufficiently discover that the truly-coming souls are souls sensible of their need of salvation by Jesus Christ; and, moreover, that there is nothing else that can help them but Christ.”⁴

—John Bunyan (1628-1688)



What can you do this week, even today, to invest in eternity?

Day 2: Read John 6:41-51

What would change your life entirely if it came to you?

If you asked this question to any random person on the street, you might find a variety of answers that all amount to roughly the same thing: an improved set of circumstances. However, Jesus was always pointing us to a deeper and more eternal perspective.

Jesus did not come to make our lives “better” but to give us real life! He came that we might live forever, free from death and enjoying His presence in the unending paradise of the new heavens and new earth. If you’re a Christian, this gift is already yours. The most important things about you have now been settled: Your sins are forever forgiven; you have been imputed with Christ’s righteousness; your life belongs to Jesus; and you will be raised in a resurrection body to enjoy eternal life.



What impact should knowing you have eternal life have on your worries or complaints today?

Day 3: Read John 6:52-59

We vastly underrate how essential Jesus is for life. Everywhere He went, Jesus was centering everything on Himself. On the road to Emmaus, after His resurrection, for instance, He told two disciples that the whole Old Testament is about Him (Luke 24:27). He told His audience that He’s the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). In this passage, He said that unless someone feasts upon Him, he or she would die (6:53,58).

Jesus makes the necessity of Himself akin to the necessity of food. If you and I don’t eat, we will die. We will get malnourished and emaciated, and eventually our bodies will shut down. Jesus made the parallel point about belief in Himself. He’s not an option. He’s not an add-on. Just like not eating food means we will die, not trusting in Him means we will die the second death (Rev. 21:8).



What changes will you make because Jesus is essential for your life?

Day 4: Read John 6:60-65

One oddly encouraging thing about the Gospels is seeing just how confused Jesus' disciples were. When Jesus was being literal, they took Him metaphorically. When He was being metaphorical, they took Him literally. They always seemed to be a few steps behind. Even after the miracle in John 6 when He fed the five thousand, there was a subsequent event when a smaller crowd of four thousand had gathered, and the disciples wondered how they would be fed (Matt. 15:32-38)!

This is encouraging nonetheless because it means our ignorance is no hindrance to God. Our spiritual callousness seems to be a prerequisite for His awakening grace. In this passage, Jesus taught that it was the Spirit who enlightened sinners to know and believe in the gospel. Our blindness is no difficulty for God. We must really be loved by God! If He gave us this gift apart from our efforts and despite our blindness, He really must care for us and want us to be His people, His children.



The greatest proof of God's love is the giving of His own Son to die for us on the cross, but what are some other evidences in your life that God loves you?

Day 5: Read John 6:66-71

Jesus knew full well Peter would deny Him. He even told Peter this was going to happen, which Peter denied (Matt. 26:30-35). Jesus said elsewhere that anyone who denied Him before men He would also deny before the Father. So denying Him is no little sin. In this passage, however, Jesus appears to have commended Peter's words and hinted at condemnation for Judas. Later He would forgive Peter and restore him, whereas Judas carried out his betrayal and ended up taking his own life.

So what makes the difference between Peter and Judas? The difference between the two appears to be repentance. Peter repented of his sin. Judas seemed merely to regret it. Peter faced Jesus with godly sorrow and humility. Judas turned his back, his sorrow being worldly. Repentance isn't feeling sorry you got caught or simply wanting to be free of guilt. Repentance is a despair of your own sin and a desire to be in fellowship with Jesus.



Since the life of following Jesus means repenting daily, what areas of your life—behaviors, thoughts, and words—do you need to repent of and turn to Jesus for forgiveness right now?

UNIT 25

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3. Quoted in "Only one life, 'twil soon be past..." by Thomas and Elizabeth West, *The West London Life*, December 31, 2018, www.thewestlondonlife.com/single-post/2018/12/31/Only-one-life-twil-soon-be-past.
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2. Athanasius, "Homily on the Resurrection of Lazarus," quoted in *John 11-21*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, vol. IVb in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 13.
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SESSION 2

1. Andrew Wilson, *Unbreakable: What the Son of God Said About the Word of God* (IOPublishing, 2014) [eBook].
2. Kim Huat Tan, *Mark*, in *New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015) [Wordsearch].
3. Augustine, *Tractate on John* 40.9.13, quoted in *Mark*, eds. Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, vol. II in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].

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1. See "Diamonds Unearthed," by Cate Lineberry, *Smithsonian Magazine* (December 2006), www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/diamonds-unearted-141629226.
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