

Feeding on Christ in the Supper

We have Lord's Supper, so the order is slightly different. I'm going to the sermon now. We will have two verses, two sets of verses, Hosea 6.3 and then John 6.63. So we are going through Hosea in the afternoon.

Okay, Hosea 6.3 in the context of repentance come and let us return to the Lord, right? Verse one. Verse three, let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. In John 6.63 and 64, let us listen attentively here as well.

It is the spirit, Jesus says, who gives life, that the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirits and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.

For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that did not believe and who would betray him. Let us pray. In these words, God, we read a feeding upon Christ.

And may we see the connection between feeding upon Christ and the knowledge of Christ that the two are intimately involved, that we cannot have a growth in the Christian walk through ignorance, but through the knowledge of our Savior, Jesus Christ, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, opening our hearts and our minds, God, to your truth and thus enlivening our hearts that we would exercise the mouth of faith and feeding upon Christ. And such a thing, Lord, may we be encouraged and strengthened as we have the Lord's Supper this morning and indeed throughout the entirety of our life that is not just in the Lord's Supper, but whenever we meditate upon Jesus with a heart of faith, we are thereby feeding upon his work and applying it to our lives. By your Spirit, we pray these things.

Amen. And so, here as we have the Lord's Supper, occasionally I will go over again the significance of the Lord's Supper and what it means. And here, one part of the Lord's Supper, what it means to feed upon Christ.

What does it do for us, this communion or the Eucharist or the celebration? How does Christ's death relate to his sacrament? When Christ mentioned eating his body and drinking his blood in this chapter, chapter six, is he talking about the Supper as such? And what does it mean with respect to eating and drinking? And you already had an answer of that in my prayer. And as a last question here in particular I want to focus on, what does it mean to eat the body and to drink the blood of Jesus? It's a point of contention between ourselves, of course, the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans. But more importantly, we'll see it's a graphical way of describing how the Christians grow in Christ.

What is Feeding upon Christ?

What is feeding upon Christ? So, the first point here, we have to unpack the Last Supper as the Lord's Supper, to give a reminder for most of us here, I'm sure, but perhaps some of us don't have it clear in our mind what the connection here is. Matthew 26, 17 we read, and as they were eating, that is Jesus and the disciples, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, take, eat, this is my body. Then he took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to them and said, drink from it, all of you.

Verse 28, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. And again, in 1 Corinthians 10, 26 we read, for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes. Paul quotes Jesus here, but continues to talk about eating and drinking, reminding us of the connection of the event of Christ, continued on in our lives, what we call the sacrament, that which is ordained or instituted by God.

He took an ordinary thing, a simple meal of sorts, we wouldn't call it a meal today, we would say it's like a snack, right? The idea is eating, and gave it spiritual signification in a way that we cannot do. If we did that, that's called superstition. The Roman Catholic Church, unfortunately, is full of superstition, to give an example.

You have to do this and do that as a divine way of growing in Christ. Now, the way we grow is the way he has given us, and here, the ordinary thing he has given us of the sacrament, in particular, and of course, baptism being another such thing of water. So, this eating and this drinking is used by the spirit for our growth, and the best way of explaining this growth is John chapter 6. John chapter 6, what I had read earlier.

So, you have the Passover meal, which turned into a Lord's Supper, not the meal itself, but has been transformed to simple elements. There is no lamb, none of that anymore, just the bread and the wine that Jesus said, I'm going to use for special purposes. You must continue this.

I showed in 1 Corinthians, where Paul says, it's also continued. We exercise this as well. We do the sacrament, we do the Lord's Supper, but what is the significance of eating and drinking? Why does Jesus use that language? John 6 is the key passage here.

John chapter 6, the great discourse, the bread of life discourse is called. It's a long chapter. It's got 71 verses, and he goes into the details here.

It is the spirit, we read in verse 63, who gives life. The flesh profits nothing. He told them, you must eat my body to live, and they were dumbfounded.

That's the context. Christ is popular. Hundreds are following Him.

They love the miracles. They love the free food, you can imagine, and Jesus answers and says to them, most assuredly, I say to you, you seek me. I'm popular, you want me, you keep following me.

I have throngs and multitudes. You seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. He feeds them here in John chapter 6, and he reprimands them.

They come together, and he speaks to them, and he doesn't hold back. He says, I know why you're here. You're not here because of me.

You want the goodies. Unfortunately, that's the same problem we have today. He continues on.

Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, he says. What shall we do that we may work the works of God? They cry out in response, and Jesus answered and said to them, this is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he sent. Lord, give us this bread always, because he talked about eating this bread and having everlasting life, and he says, I am the bread of life.

He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst, but I said to you that you have seen me, and do not believe. What's one of the things that you see here, this pattern in this discussion, this back and forth. He feeds them and explains to them why you love my food and really not interested in me.

You don't believe in me. We want to do the works of God. What's the works of God? That you believe in me.

We want to have this bread of life. He says, but you don't believe in me. You can see he talks about this picture of bread, out of eternal life, and he ties it to the idea, the important idea, not just an idea of abstraction, but the fact that you must believe.

You must trust in Jesus to have that eternal life, to have that eternal bread. He repeatedly says to them, believe in me, believe you don't believe. He says it negatively, he says it positively, and then in verse 41, the Jews then complained about him because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven, and Jesus digs deeper.

He eats my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in me, and I in him, and he eats my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in me, and I in him, and this offended the Jews, as you can imagine. They're listening to this, and they're confused. Even the disciples are confused.

You're reading these verses. He gave them this saying, and their heart and hearts could not understand a metaphor. They said, we have to eat your flesh? We have to grab your body like a cannibal? They were offended, and this is the same language here in Matthew 22, 26 that I read earlier.

Take, eat, this is my body. Same idea. The confusion is deepened there in John 6. How can this man give his flesh for us to eat, right? How can this be possible? This is crazy stuff.

We're supposed to go to Jesus and bite him? That's what they're thinking because when they hear him speak, they hear him with carnal ears and not with the ear of faith. As we use that way of speaking, which is not common, it's just a metaphor. It's just highlighting the spiritual reality.

Do you believe what you're hearing, understand what you hear, and receive it? But Christ doesn't leave them in the dark. He continues on here to explain what he means by eating, and eating his flesh, and drinking his flesh. Verse 63, it is the spirit who gives life.

The flesh profits nothing. You're stuck in thinking about a physical body. It profits nothing.

It is a spirit that gives you the work of God, and what do you call the work of God? Believing in him. Earlier in chapter 6, the words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. It is not about the bodily material flesh per se, the body that they saw of Jesus walking in the flesh, for that profits nothing when eaten.

The spirit gives life, not the flesh as such, and the spirit of life is found of course in what? The words of life. He says my words, the words that I speak are spirit. They are the source of life, but there are some of you who do not believe.

There it is again. He's not concerned about their physical mouth biting into his flesh. He's concerned about their soul believing in him.

You don't believe. It's a picture of a spiritual reality, and of course he did it on purpose using this language, because he knew they were hardened in their hearts. So that but there, there are some of you who do not believe.

Even after I explained to you my words are spirit, and they are life. This is how you get to heaven. So it's the same subject.

So not eating is not believing, ergo eating is believing. That's the logic of John chapter 6. He mentions three times in the bread of life discourse, believe in me to have that bread that lasts forever. Eating the flesh of Christ is metaphorical for believing the words of Christ.

My words are life. But the Bible has the words of Christ. Therefore to feed upon Christ we must what? Believe the Bible.

And that's how it's tied to Hosea 6.3. The repentance involved there is a knowledge of the Lord. That knowledge is the word of God, and that's how they continue in their life, a life of sanctification and holiness in Hosea. Christ is a source of heavenly life, not our self-efforts, not even faith itself, which is a gift of God.

And we obtain it by feeding upon Christ by reading and believing the words found in the Bible. Thus faith cannot exist without truth. And people running around and talking, I ran across recently a gentleman, well he's been around since the 70s, N.T. Wright.

But he had a video interview because people still like him, I guess because he has a British accent. He must be really smart or something. And he's talking about this saying, I think he's a believer.

Why? He's just kind of muddled in these matters. He denies the bodily resurrection of Jesus. He has his other problems.

But I really believe in my heart he means well or something crazy like that. He's a knowledge. His knowledge is ignorance.

Muddled is a nice way of saying he has heresies. But he means well. So there you have this approach, which unfortunately is in even conservative churches.

He means well. He put his words and his actions. They don't line up with the word of God.

There's a problem here. He doesn't believe. A belief must have knowledge.

More than knowledge, of course. You have to trust in Jesus, the person, not just what he says as abstract words. But when we say I believe your words, we often mean I believe you as well behind the words clearly.

And that's what we have to do. That's what we're called to do as believers. And not just our first step of conversion, but all our life we're called to feed upon Christ.

This bread of life discourse, brothers and sisters, is not a communion discourse. It is explaining to us the reality of life about Jesus. He had not in mind here the Lord's Supper.

Although the language is the same, there is no Lord's Supper here. He talks about himself before them. He didn't say, come, wait, come with me to the last, you know, the last Passover.

I'm going to turn it to the Lord's Supper and then you can eat my flesh and drink my blood. He's like, right here and now you can have eternal life if you believe in me. The John 6 bread of life discourse is about all of life.

Not just on Sunday when I have the Lord's Supper. The truth is found in the Bible. And Hosea 6 says, let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.

What? What kind of knowledge? Saving knowledge. The knowledge that feeds upon him. And growth as a Christian, therefore, with the supper and without the supper throughout the week requires that truth.

That reading of it, that receiving of it, that relying upon not the words only, but the one who gave those words, Jesus Christ. John 6 predates Christ's official creation of the supper on the night of his death. So this is earlier on in his ministry.

And he would not speak to his followers about the activity they knew nothing about. This doesn't make sense otherwise. It hadn't happened yet.

So feeding upon Christ is whenever you believe in the personal work of Jesus. First Peter 2, 1 through 3, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. He says, feed upon the word of God.

He uses the metaphor of a baby drinking milk, the pure milk of the word. He's not talking about the Lord's Supper. There's no milk in the Lord's Supper.

There's wine. He's saying every day, all days throughout your life, not just that one time on Sunday. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.

Psalm 119, 103. Again, it's the word where we find Jesus. Not out in nature.

We talked about the God of sanctification in Sunday school class. Common sense and natural law is a real thing. But you don't learn about Jesus there.

You learn him in the supernatural, in the Bible. That's where you feed upon him. As we believe, we feed upon Christ and have eternal life.

That's what he's talking about. There are times we're not thinking about Jesus, but we still have life, right? So he's talking about clearly a conscious thinking of. He's immediately on our thoughts at that time.

It's not like you stop thinking about Jesus like some kind of Berkeley in philosophy and you stop existing in salvation or something. That's not the case at all. There are times we especially focus upon Christ.

Sundays, prayer times throughout the week, the Lord's Supper. So what I mean is we have preaching in the Lord's Supper here and that's how we feed upon Christ in the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament.

So another way of coming to this explanation of the Lord's Supper, it's a sacrament which is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. It is a visible sign to reinforce the written and spoken word of truth. It is appended to the preaching.

It does not replace the preaching. It makes no sense without the preaching. It is for the strengthening of your faith, our weak faith.

But how does it strengthen your faith? Have you ever asked yourself that question? What does it mean that the sacraments here at the Lord's Supper in particular strengthens our weak faith, builds it up? Some think it strengthens your faith by simply doing it. It's mechanical. Roman Catholic Church has that approach.

Others think it strengthens your faith because God commands it as such. So others think it strengthens your faith because the physical body and blood of Christ are there in the bread and the wine or somehow there. The Lutherans have a variation of that.

But your faith is strengthened because you are feeding on Christ. That is, you're meditating upon Him and His work. Faith is thinking and dwelling and believing and growing thereby.

You don't do it otherwise. Feeding upon Christ in the Supper and drinking worthily here. 1 Corinthians 11.27 we read, For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

For this reason, many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. And so therefore, 1 Corinthians 11.27 tells us, taking the Lord's Supper is not mechanical. People took it and got sick.

You're not a passive agent, in other words, as you are in baptism. So baptism as a sign and seal of the covenant given by Christ, there to strengthen our weak faith, reflects the regeneration of the power of the Spirit upon us. He is the active agent.

We're passive. We are standing there while someone else pours the water on us. Why God, the symbolism is God, pouring the Holy Spirit upon His people.

So it's the initiation act of Christianity. The continuation, the perseverance therein, is an active faith. You are eating.

You're not sitting there like a baby and with your mouth open and the pastor gives it to you. Some churches kind of do that. The Roman Catholic Church does that.

But you're supposed to eat, actively participate and drink. And so your faith here in dwelling and meditating upon Jesus during this act of the Lord's Supper is where you are growing. Because the growth is through the knowledge.

Christ says, My words are spirit and they are life. And we hear His words. That's why I'm preaching about it.

And I read it again when I have the Lord's Supper. And you think and meditate upon what He has done. And that affects you and that helps you grow.

It's not automatic. It's not mechanical. It's an expression of an active, reflective faith.

Not perfection, of course, what He means here. He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself. But that those are living in usually gross public sins.

We see there in 1 Corinthians 11. And they had scandals there. And people were eating over here and partying over there.

And the poor folks had no food over here. But that's terrible. You're not going to grow as a Christian that way.

That's not you reflecting upon Christ in the Lord's Supper. That's the kind of stuff He's talking about. Not the fact that you're a sinner.

We're all sinners. And this is exactly why we have preaching. This is exactly why we have the Lord's Supper.

We're sinners saved by grace. And we need this because we are weak. We are repentant.

How Do We Feed upon Christ in the Supper?

We will grow by taking the Lord's Supper. And as with the Word of Promise, of course, Ephesians 1.13. This is something I think we forget sometimes. Ephesians 1.13. In Him, that is Jesus, you also trusted after you heard what? The Word of Truth.

So there it is again. Belief in the Word of Truth, knowledge, the Bible, the source of life because Christ is there. And whom also having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

So we call the Lord's Supper a sign and a seal. Sign as it represents a physical symbolism there. And it points to the work of Jesus in our lives.

The seal part, the sealing part is the Holy Spirit. And the sealing here is tied with what? After and whom you believed. Having believed while doing the believing, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit.

That is your conscience is strengthened. You are given more certification as it were upon your soul that God is with you and you believe in Jesus. You feed upon Him when you come to the table with the mouth of faith.

It is your faith in the person and work of Jesus our Lord and Savior, brothers and sisters. It is your reckoning yourself dead to sin but alive in Christ to God. It is your public confession as well that Christ died for you and you believe in such redemption for yourself.

The bread and the wine represent the body and the blood of Christ. But in conjunction with faith, you are growing spiritually. Christ's broken body and spilt blood 2,000 years ago have their effects upon you now.

Right here. Not by eating physical human flesh because Jesus says what? That profits nothing. John 6.63. But rather His words.

Do we trust in the Bible? Do we trust in the author of the Bible, Jesus Christ? And then we have fed upon Him and are growing thereby. You see, I know you see your sins but you must look to your Savior now, brothers and sisters. He has saved you from your sins and given you His body and blood as evidence and as an efficacious work 2,000 years ago for eternal life here and now.

Let us pray. Gracious God above, Father, Son, and Holy Spirits, we pray for more faith, more trust in you, more understanding of the Word of God that we may rejoice and have a heart of gratitude for what you continue to do for us, Lord, how much you love us in everlasting love by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And may this strengthen us, God, in our Christian walk to lift up our heads to walk forward, Lord, knowing that, yes, we are sinners, but we are sinners redeemed and saved by your grace and the precious blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen. Let's go ahead.