

# THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

John 6:41-71

## GOD INITIATES

*41 So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” 42 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?’”*

Jews are grumbling because Jesus told them that He was the Bread of Life come from heaven.

## REMEMBER THE CONTEXT

Yesterday, Jesus fed thousands of people — estimates of up to 20,000 people — with a five loaves and two fish — until everyone was full — with leftovers. Then the next day, many came seeking Jesus for another round of the all-you-can-eat buffet. Instead of asking about the significance and the meaning of the sign — they wanted Jesus to fill their belly and put on another show.

Jesus does offer them provision — but instead of a physical meal to satisfy their physical hunger — Jesus tells them about bread that will satisfy their soul. Jesus tells them that He is the bread of life. The sustenance that he provides is eternal, not perishable. He also tells them that they can't work to earn this bread because it's given not earned. And finally — he tells them that the bread of life is a person to love and follow — not a program to perform.

Just like their forefathers complained and grumbled in the wilderness when they didn't understand what God was doing — here they grumble because they can't understand how Jesus has come from Heaven when they know who his father and mother are. They say — Isn't this Joseph's boy? Isn't Mary his mother? They're Galileans like we are. How can he claim to have a divine heritage?

Now — their question isn't totally unwarranted — but their cynicism and unyielding skepticism is. They've seen him perform a miraculous sign before their very eyes. That alone should produce a faith that seeks understanding — instead of a doubt seeking validation.

*43 Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. 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. 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. — 46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.*

In verse 44 Jesus says the reason it doesn't make sense to you is because you're relying on human reasoning. God doesn't operate according to human logic — God works according to his divine wisdom. Then Jesus explains — No one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him, which is very similar to John 6:37... *All that the Father gives me will come to me...*

So if we combine these two truths we see — All that the Father gives to the Son will come to him — and no one can come to him unless the Father draws him. And there's a promise of good news — everyone who is drawn by the Father and given to the Son — will be raised on the last day. That's the Bible's way of saying — death will not have the last say. Everyone who is given to the Son will overcome death and experience the ever-increasing joy of eternal life.

Then Jesus says — that the drawing from the Father is a fulfillment of Isaiah 54:13.

*All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children.*

So how does the Father draw people to Jesus? Is it by force, coercion or manipulation? No.

The picture here is of a loving Father teaching his children where to find life and fulfillment. The Father initiates and invites his children to know God the Son. The Father teaches — and true sons and daughters — hear and learn from the Father. And the evidence that they've received and obeyed the Father is that they come to the Son.

Notice the verbs and how's doing what — The Father draws and teaches. Those who come to the Son hear and learn. The father initiates and his children receive his teaching. And Jesus says — I know this is true because I have come from the Father. I've seen the Father. I know the Father and this is how he works.

One of the distinct honors and privileges of my life is to be the father to Bryton, Haddon, Everett, Evie, and Emerson. And as their father — one of the ways I show them my love is to teach them so that they grow in knowledge and understanding — wisdom and maturity. And as their father, I've been teaching them from day one. How to talk, how to eat, how to live, how to learn, how to function and thrive in the world. I didn't wait until they came to me — as their father — my love compelled me to begin their education even before they knew they needed or wanted it.

Teaching them takes intentionality. It takes presence. It takes time. It takes patience. In short — It takes initiative.

Jesus is saying — God the Father doesn't wait until we recognize our need to start drawing us through his tender and loving teaching. Because of sin — our default posture is self autonomy. Not only do we want to do things our way — we think our way is best. And in our pride we don't look for God. And in our ingratitude we simply forget God is even there.

So God in his mercy and love — doesn't wait for his children to come to him. As a loving Father — he takes the initiative and starts to speak to us from the inside. And as his children — we hear his voice and we learn from Him.

We learn the good news of the Gospel of Grace — That God the Father has sent God the Son to raise up his children on the last day so that none would perish — but have eternal life. In the Gospel of Grace — God Initiates. But not only does he initiate — God Provides. Look at verse 47.

## **GOD PROVIDES**

*47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.*

Jesus continues to explain the gospel of grace to them — whoever believes has eternal life. We've seen this come up over and over in John. It's John's central thesis — his whole point of writing (John 20:31; John 6:29)

To receive Jesus...to come to Jesus...is to believe in Jesus — and everyone — no matter race or pedigree — no matter status or situation — no matter gender or age — everyone who believes in Jesus has the gift of eternal life.

That is good news because it's a question relevant to everyone — everyone has to figure out how they will deal with death. Every religion and non-religion has to deal with that question. For the atheist and irreligious — death is simply a natural part of life. The answer to death is simply to deal with it. It's a fixed fact. There's nothing you can do to prevent it — so you might as well accept it as a natural structure of human life.

For the reincarnation-enlightenment religions like Buddhism and Hinduism — we don't just live one life. We live many lives — and upon death our soul reincarnates into another life. The next life will either get better or worse based on your performance in the previous life until you reach the ultimate enlightenment and our souls are released from the cycle of life and death. And in the end — you either cease to exist or are absorbed into creation itself or into the divine.

In other works based religions like Islam and Mormonism — there’s a heaven and hell — but you get one shot and it’s entirely based on your performance in this life. Follow the rules. Get them right. Do good and you have a chance at earning your spot in Heaven.

Christianity is distinctly different than every other religion. First — it doesn’t deny the basic impulse that everyone knows to be true — that death isn’t natural. It’s an enemy. Death steals, kills, and destroys — and its an intruder into God’s good world.

Second — Christianity teaches that everyone lives once and everyone has to figure out how to overcome death. And unlike the works based religions that put pressure and burden on you to perform and earn — Christianity teaches that God the Father provides eternal life as a gift — not to be earned — but a gift to receive — to all who believe in His Son — who is himself the provision.

Now — you might be asking — how does that work? How does Jesus provide salvation from death? I’m glad you asked. Let’s look at verse 48.

***48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 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.”52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”***

Now — the idea of eating Jesus’ flesh sends the Jewish authorities into disputes among themselves wondering how it is that Jesus would give them his flesh to eat. Is Jesus advocating cannibalism as the way to eternal life?

Often in the gospels — the crowd refuses to really listen to what Jesus is saying — and they take Jesus’ words in an overly literalistic sense — when it’s clear that Jesus is speaking metaphorically and spiritually. They simply don’t want to receive what Jesus has to say.

But for the sake of his disciples and any in the synagogue who would hear — Jesus keeps going.

***53 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. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.***

Well — if they found the idea of eating the flesh of Jesus hard to hear — the idea of drinking his blood is intolerable and outright offensive. Jewish law forbade the the drinking of blood — even eating meat with the blood still in it.

And by adding the conditional word — unless — he makes it a prerequisite to having eternal life. Or to state it positively — if you want eternal life then you must eat the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.

Then like a good teacher he gives them an illustration to make his point. He says your forefathers — the exodus generation — they ate manna in the wilderness -- but it only provided temporary sustenance. They ate it — but eventually died.

Jesus says — I am bread of life — the living bread that has come from heaven to give you eternal sustenance. The provision of manna was temporary. The provision of my flesh and blood is eternal. My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink and whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.

So — What is Jesus actually saying here? So let’s unpack the metaphor together.

First let's take a step back and remember that all of this is in the context of a request that Jesus give them food to eat because they're hungry. Jesus uses their physical hunger to point them to their greater spiritual hunger. Everyone is hungry for meaning and purpose and everyone needs to have their spiritual hunger satisfied. Jesus says that the manna of this world will never truly satisfy. It's temporary and it was never designed to satisfy your soul. So God, being rich in mercy and love, sent the bread of life as a lasting provision to satisfy our spiritual hunger.

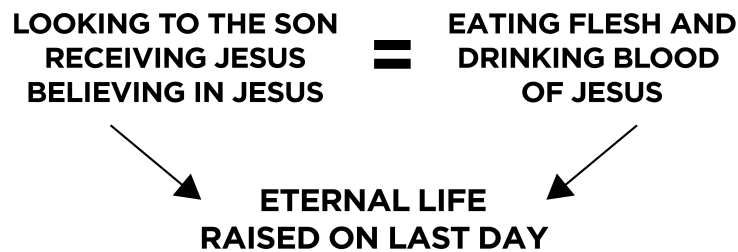
Earlier in John 6:40 Jesus said,

***For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."***

And in verse 54 Jesus said...

***54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.***

So when you line those up, you get this...



Looking to the Son for provision is to receive and believe in Jesus and that is compared to eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus. When you look to food and drink for nourishment, first you have to believe that it is good for you and that it will provide nourishment for you. If you believed the food to be spoiled or poisoned or distasteful — you would reject it. Then once you believe that the food and drink is desirable and good for eating and drinking — then you receive the food into your drink and trust that it will provide sustenance to your body.

In the same way we look to Christ as our heavenly food and drink for spiritual nourishment. We believe that He is what we need to be truly satisfied. Then we receive him by faith and trust that he will provide eternal sustenance for our very life.

St. Augustine said it simply...

***Believe — and you have eaten.***

To eat and drink of Christ is to believe in him. Now look at verse 56...

***56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 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. 58 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 says — when you feed on me — I will abide in you and you will abide in me. Abiding means remaining — which speaks to this life-giving on-going relationship. Just like we eat physical food regularly for our sustenance — so we should continue to feast on Christ.

And in this mysterious mutual abiding — in this union and connection to Christ — we have access to His life. The Father and the Son share in this life-giving reality and those who are connected to Jesus share in that life.

Now, how is that provision made possible for us to consume? Though we aren't at chronologically at the cross in John's Gospel — the allusions to the cross continue to get more and more clear.

In John 1 — Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb of who takes away the sins of the world.

In John 3 — Jesus was lifted up on the staff so that all who look to him would be saved from the poison of sin.

Now in John 6 — the very flesh of Christ is given for us that we might live. The very blood of Christ is poured out that we might drink.

In fact — the language of sacrifice underlines this whole text. John 6:1 tells us that this whole scene happened just before the Passover — when the Jews would sacrifice a spotless passover lamb and consume it. The whole passover meal is this beautiful picture of God's physical and spiritual provision.

And just like the sacrificial lamb is slain in order to be consumed — Christ is our sacrificial lamb — slain in order to be consumed so that all who eat and receive him would have eternal life and a lasting relationship with Him.

In the Gospel of Grace — God provides the meal we need in order to be satisfied.

Seven Mile — my friends — have you eaten from this table of grace? Have you drank from this cup of life? Have you looked to Son — believed — and received Him?

Skipping a meal during the week isn't a matter of life and death — but Jesus says — skipping this meal is a matter of life and death.

## **GOD AWAKENS**

***60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" 61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?"***

Not only are some in the crowd having a hard time receiving Jesus' words — some of his very own disciples are considering if its too hard for them. And Jesus knows it. So he asks them if they're offended by his words.

And Jesus makes another allusion to the cross. Jesus came into this world by way of the incarnation — That's what John 1 is all about — the Word who took on flesh and dwelled among us. But his ascent back to the Father will come because he will be lifted up on a Roman cross as he suffers and dies on our behalf. What's his point? Jesus says if talking about my sacrifice is causing you to consider leaving — then seeing me die is really going give you trouble.

***63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) 65 And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."***

These are some of the clearest verses in the Bible that it is God — and God alone who awakens us to eternal life.

Greg Forster helpfully explains —

***Here we have the whole Trinity working together to transform the unbeliever into a believer — the Father “grants” that the Spirit will “give life” such that the person “comes to” the Son. The person obviously responds to this work by actively believing; otherwise he didn’t come to the Son at all. But what does he contribute to the spiritual transformation that brought about his belief? “The flesh is no help at all.”***

What we need is new life. We don’t need rehabilitation — we need transformation. We don’t need information — we need awakening. We need life from God because apart from him we are dead. And Jesus says — when people receive and believe my words — they produce a spiritual awakening in our soul causes us to truly come alive.

Notice — Jesus didn’t say receive my words and then you can have a second chance to live a better life.

Jesus didn’t say — get your act together — and then — you can come to me. No. The God the Father grants that the Spirit will give life so that the person responds by faith and comes to the Son. Our flesh does not awaken itself. Dead people cannot give themselves life. In the Gospel of Grace — God awakens us while we are dead in our transgressions.

***Ephesians 2:4–5***

***But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.***

In the Gospel of Grace — God awakens us because He is rich in mercy and because He loves us. That’s it. Our flesh is dead because of sin — and by God’s grace — he makes us alive.

The self-sufficient — the self-made person — will struggle with this. It seems like a handout and we want to believe that we bring ourselves to God and then when we show up God says welcome home — I’m glad you made it.

But the Bible doesn’t portray us as merely being spiritually lost — though we are. The Bible makes the emphatic point that we do not come to God because we dead. Jesus didn’t come from Heaven to earth to make redemption merely possible. He came to make it a certainty. That’s why from beginning to end salvation belongs to the Lord as the gift he gives to us.

We are merely recipients of God’s gracious initiative and powerful salvation.

***66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” 68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” 70 Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” 71 He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.***

At some point — everyone has to make a decision. Everyone has to decide if they’re going to receive or reject Jesus. Here we find that some who had begun to follow Jesus walk away.

F.F. Bruce writes...

***What they wanted, he would not give. What he offered, they would not receive.***

Friends — What could Jesus say that would offend you and cause you to walk away? Don't rush past that question. This one deserves some thoughtful time this week. Write it down and really consider the areas of your life where you haven't allowed Jesus to speak — where his words might offend and cause you to consider walking away.

So then — Jesus asks the 12 — Do you want to go away as well? His question is direct and aimed at the heart. Do you *want* to go as well.

Peter — as per usual — is the spokesman for the group. Peter says they aren't going anywhere because Jesus has the words of eternal life and they've come to believe that He is the Holy One of God.

Peter's statement is a true and genuine expression of his faith. At the same time — Jesus reminds him that He chose them and that he even chose for there to be a betrayer in the group — so that the sovereign plan of God could be fulfilled.

And in Peter and Judas we have two final pictures of what happens when God brings genuine awakening.

When God truly awakens your heart and you come alive by grace through faith — you embrace Jesus as Peter does. Though he stumbles and falls along the way — in the end — Peter clings to Christ.

But in the case of Judas — he's never truly awakened. He follows Christ for a season — but he never fully comes alive to God. In the end, he betrays Christ for financial gain.