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Jesus' Life Living Through Us

John 6:41-71

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY **201st General Assembly**

- **TUESDAY (SESSION) @ 8:00 AM**
IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.
- **WEDNESDAY (EVERY) @ 1:00 PM**
IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.

Capitol Commission Bible studies are held on Tuesday and Wednesday. The legislator Bible study meets from 8:00-8:45 AM in Room 203, Ryan Bldg. (during session weeks). An open-to-all Bible study meets from 1:00-1:30 PM in Room 203, Ryan Bldg. (during non-session weeks). The Bible studies are nonpartisan and non-denominational, and will focus on the Gospel of John for the 2017/2018 General Assembly.

– Jeff Whitebread, Pennsylvania State Minister, Capitol Commission

John 6:41-71: “Jesus’ Life Living Through Us”

Sometimes it is helpful to take a step back before we plunge into the deeper teachings of Jesus. John is writing that his readers might believe Jesus is the Messiah, God’s one and only Son, and that by trusting him they would have Jesus’ life dwelling in them and living through them (John 20:31).

As a 1st Century rabbi, Jesus is gathering around him students to be with him, so they would be like him, and would be able to do the things that he was doing and carry on his work. All those who would claim allegiance to Jesus are making a similar commitment to be his apprentices, his students in kingdom living.

As a disciple of Jesus, I will always be learning from him. And the place of my discipleship is wherever I am at now, and whatever I am currently doing. I am constantly learning from him and there is a long way to go before the lessons end. Sometimes we might wish these lessons would stop, but they don’t because life moves on, the challenges change, and so I must be reconciled to the fact that I am going to be a student of Jesus from here on out.

One thing that is critically important to understand is that Jesus, in fact, is the smartest person in my field – he is not just nice, but he is brilliant. It doesn’t matter what we are doing, he is the smartest person on that job. So, we’re constantly in school and he is our master and teacher. We are learning how to do things on his behalf and with his resources – or might we say, doing all things “in his name.”

I remember hearing the story about Jimmy Carter’s chief of staff asking the following question at a Christian seminar: “How do you get Christianity in the boardroom?” The speaker had a very simple answer: have a Christian - a fully-functioning disciple of Jesus - walk in and sit down, there is no other way.

One might ask, what does a fully-functioning disciple of Jesus look like? The following characteristics are foundational: (1) a growing trust and confidence in God (2) a willingness to say no to ourselves - to move away from a life that says, my will be done, to one that says, thy will be done, (3) a life that is increasingly filled with agape love – a life able to give and receive love in their relationships.

A Sacred Responsibility

John 6:53: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood - One of the most moving stories about King David concerns the time when he was fighting the Philistines who had occupied his hometown of Bethlehem. Among David’s loyal fighting men, he had three who were known for their bravery and their willingness to do whatever the king might ask. When they were pinned down one day, David longed for a drink, and said out loud how much he would like to have water from the well at Bethlehem – which was of course behind enemy lines due to the Philistines. But that didn’t stop his mighty men. Off they went, they broke through the Philistine army, got water from the well at Bethlehem and brought it back to David.

But David didn’t drink it. He didn’t want to be seen to profit from the readiness of these men to put their lives on the line for him. ‘God forbid’, he said, ‘that I should drink the blood of these men, who went at the risk of their lives’ (2 Samuel 23.17; 1 Chronicles 11.19). He poured the water out on the ground.

As we consider Jesus words, it is hard to think of anything more offensive that he could have said to this gathering in the synagogue. Of the many Jewish regulations about food and drink, blood was absolutely prohibited (Leviticus 17:10-14). Among the chief aims of kosher butchering is that no blood should remain in the animal so to avoid the risk of being eaten or drunk.

Into this backdrop Jesus speaks these words to those who would come after him as his students. If one wants to gain any value from what he is doing, he says, you must eat my flesh and drink my blood. Jesus means what David meant when he refused to drink the blood of his friends – to profit from the risk of their lives. Jesus, the true Messiah, is going one better again. He will put his own life at risk - indeed he will actually lose it; and his friends will profit from his death as they take the substance of Jesus’ life and make it their own.

John 6:56: Whoever eats...and drinks...abides in me, and I in them - What Jesus is driving at is eternal life is the impartation of Himself to his apprentices - we can abide in him, and he in us. Christ has extended the life of God to us, and he is showing us the way. Our life becomes eternal as we make what we are doing part of what God is doing, this is the kingdom of God - it is God in action. Jesus, in saying, eat my flesh and drink my blood is teaching how one steps into this life. We are his students, and as such, we seek to learn from him how he lived so that God acts with us. It is God acting with us that makes our life eternal. As God’s ideas, character, and

Jesus' Life Living Through Us (cont'd) - John 6:41-71

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intentions shape our lives, we are better able to find out what God is doing and join him there (Matthew 6:33).

John 6:57: *The one who feeds on me will live because of me* - Naturally many will consider communion when hearing this language; but even as we reflect upon the elements of the bread and wine, we are to take these elements with the attitude of Christ. As we receive these elements, we are receiving Jesus into our lives and surrendering our lives to him all over again, we are saying we want your will to be done through us - just as he did the will of the Father perfectly. Without question the elements have power in them, Paul warns us to not eat the body and blood of Jesus in an unworthy manner, he continues by saying that, some are weak and have fallen asleep because they have brought judgment on themselves. (1 Corinthians 11:27-31). But this power is available all the time, not just in communion, the elements simply drive the point home as a consistent reminder of the sacred responsibility we have as apprentices of Jesus, to live our lives in a similar manner out of love for our Lord, teacher, and friend.

Jesus Brings the Words of Life

John 6:61: *Who can accept it* - Several in the audience began to grumble about Jesus' teaching. This continues the theme of the Israelites grumbling in the wilderness, even while the new exodus is taking place, and Jesus is feeding them the manna from heaven. All that he said was demanding, but particularly in the context of first-century Judaism, while they might be prepared to follow a prophet like Moses, or a possible Messiah, as long as he kept within the framework they had in mind, the thought of someone who spoke the way Jesus did was too much for them.

John 6:62: *See the Son of Man ascend to where he was before* - As Jesus seeks to explain how the whole thing fits together he mentions two things: the ascension of Jesus, and the Spirit. At first glance this seems only to add confusion to an already complicated situation. But it is the key to unlocking the puzzle. In mentioning the ascension of the Son of Man, Jesus is saying: maybe you need to come to terms with the fact that the one you are dealing with is equally at home in heaven and on earth. He is a citizen of both, he is the place where heaven and earth intersect. He is the living and breathing Word of God that has become flesh.

John 6:63: *The words I have spoken to you - they are full of the Spirit and life* - Jesus is seeking to help his hearers to move beyond a one-dimensional understanding of what he is doing and saying. The spiritual reality of the words of Jesus are this: we are to consume his substance, we are to take his reality into our lives. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, the Word of God is living and powerful, it has the power to correct the thoughts and attitudes of our inner world (Hebrews 4:12-13). When we take in his words, when we receive the Word of Christ into our lives, what we are admitting to ourselves is that Jesus is right about everything, and we are open to all the ways he might change the orientation of our lives so that our life becomes eternal living.

Those Ruined for Anything Else

John 6:66: *Many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him* - The crowds who pursued Jesus to Capernaum and wanted to make him king a day earlier are leaving in droves along with the religious establishment who thoroughly questioned Jesus. Also included in this mix were those who identified as being disciples of Jesus. By contrast to this mass exodus, we find Peter standing as an example of the progression found in a student of Jesus. While facing the difficulties of what he currently heard, he responds to the same challenging teaching that caused many to leave with a growing trust and confidence in Jesus.

John 6:68: *"...to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."* - Peter says, to whom would we go? What we come to find as we make progress in our discipleship to Jesus is this fact, Jesus has ruined us for anything else but him. There is nowhere else to turn, we have heard too much in being with him, seen too much as we've walked with him, and experienced too much of the reality of which he spoke in our lives. There is nowhere else to go. The words of Jesus are bringing about a change in our life, and we are coming to know the truth of what he is saying. Now, when confronted with a difficult teaching to grasp, Peter was willing to trust Jesus, to place his confidence in him, even though he couldn't connect the dots this side of the cross.

John 6:68: *We have come to believe and to know you are the Holy One of God.* - In the earlier part of this chapter, Jesus says repeatedly that you have to believe on him (6:29, 35-36, 47). In Peter we find a tangible example of this taking place, and what follows in his life is an unshakeable confidence in Jesus. This is way faith works: you put into practice what you believe. For Peter, by participating in the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, as well as witnessing Jesus walking on the water; he now acts upon what he has come to believe and knows about Jesus by staying loyal and continuing to follow him. But Peter goes farther when he says of Jesus, "you are the Holy One of God." He not hoping that is true; he has come to the point that no one could convince him of anything different based upon the integration of his thoughts about Jesus and his experience with him. Jesus has been using the concept of eating and drinking him to emphasize that believing on him does not stop at head belief but always moves one into interaction with him, a process of making him an intimate part of one's life. Jesus is the Holy One of God, this truth can to able to be known by any who act upon what they believe about Jesus.

Book referenced:

Wright, NT. John for Everyone. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002

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