

Gospel of John Chapter 6 - John Karmelich

Chapter 6 is a long self-contained chapter, meaning the text before and after it are different topics from what's here. The good news is this chapter has an obvious theological question for us to ponder, "What does it mean to eat Jesus' body"? To state the obvious, this has nothing to do with cannibalism. Let me start with the fact Chapter Six includes a famous miracle: Feeding 5,000 men with only a few pieces of bread plus a few fish. Jesus then gave a sermon where He says in effect, "we are to feed off His flesh". The chapter's also a rebuke of the "name it and claim it" crowd, who claim God will give us "whatever we want" by praying hard enough for it. Those who ate that food wanted free food for the rest of their lives! Jesus rebukes that by saying we are not to strive for things that perish but to strive for what is the important thing which is to use our lives for His glory. Obviously we need food to survive. Jesus is not talking about that. So what does He mean by "feed off of Him"?

Let me answer that by explaining much of the last 30 years of my life. During all that time I've had the daily habit of bible study. Over the decades I've studied the text, archeological evidence, prophesy and statistical evidence about Jesus as well as the manuscript history. I'm more convinced Jesus is who He says He's (God, Lord of our lives) than I am over say who my family is. The evidence is overwhelming and it's been the joy of my life to draw close to Him by never stop learning truths that affect every part of our lives. Even if that's not you, realize Jesus calls us to "feed off Him regularly". I can't imagine a day without Him. That's in effect how we feed off of Him.

The other benefit is we don't desire anything to prove our worth to Him. Most religions require us to do things to prove our worth to their god. Christianity teaches God is perfect so we can't earn His love by any sort of effort. The reason we are called to live differently and do good works isn't to earn His love, but to be a witness for Him. The only thing I require of God is He keep His promise that He'll resurrect us to live forever. To me anything over and above that is a bonus! That's why we "feed" off of Him to remind us of His truths and learn how to be a good witness for Him! I suspect most of us know that but may not have thought of that in those terms. OK then, time to go through this chapter to show how the chapter ties to us "feeding" off of Jesus hopefully for the remaining day of our lives!

The last chapter ended with Jesus healing a man in Jerusalem and its aftermath. This chapter opens in the Sea of Galilee area so we know there's a time gap (estimated to be six months to a year). This text now says Jesus went up to a bare mountain area in what's called the Golan Heights today. The text also says the Passover holiday was coming. That's mentioned because a lot of travelers were going by there on the way to Jerusalem for that holiday. Bottom line: between those just "checking out" Jesus who did hope to see a miracle and those traveling to the feast, a large crowd was forming around Him.

Jesus tested the "12" by asking them how shall we feed this big crowd? The correct answer would be a disciple to say, "No idea Jesus, what do You got in mind?" Instead we get a bad answer: They said, "If we had eight months wages, it'd only be enough for a little food for everyone. One of the twelve found a boy who had a bit of food and Jesus used what he had for the biggest grand-scale miracle that we get in the Gospels! What Jesus did with that food was enough to feed 5,000 men as stated in the text. Most likely there were women and kids in the crowd. Therefore some estimate the crowd at 20,000. Another gospel says the crowd was asked to sit in groups of 50 and 100 so it was easy for the disciples to count the size. The miracle was done instantly for enough food to be distributed to everyone with 12 baskets leftover! Remember, John wrote this gospel many years after the other three. He gives us a few details the others didn't. John included this story to emphasize how Jesus is the "true bread" that comes down from heaven as opposed to the free food.

The text mentions after that, the crowd tried to make him "their king" but He refused. It shows He was not interested in being the "ruling Messiah" but one who pays for their sins.

Then that evening the disciples took a boat to sail across the lake. (For those who know the geography in California, the Sea of Galilee was fresh water about the size of Lake Tahoe. One can see across it.) I just wanted to emphasize that the disciples sailed without Jesus so He could "walk on water" to join the disciples in the next part of the story. The famous story of Peter coming out on water to join him is not mentioned in this gospel as the emphasis is on feeding on Jesus for spiritual nutrition. So why walk out to them on the water? Since Jesus is God He could have parted the Sea or do a Star Trek "Beam me to there" type of action. (I liked a movie made some time ago where a man playing Jesus invited a man to walk on water with Him. When the other man asked why can't we just "leap there", the Jesus character said where's the fun in doing it that way?) My view's the miracle was done to reinforce to the disciples reminder that He's God as much as the big "eat my flesh" discussion is coming up next.

The next day the big crowd was hungry again and since they saw the disciples sail across the lake, it is likely a "ferry service" was formed to bring many of the crowd to Jesus. In effect the group said, "great meal, can you keep it up?" A perfect example of the "name it and claim it" crowd who expects Jesus to fulfill their every desire. Jesus then goes into a lecture how God provides the true bread from heaven a reference to Jesus of course. The rest of the chapter is in effect a dialogue between the Jewish leaders, (By the way when John's Gospel says the Jews, it always refers to the Jewish religious leadership. That is not a reference to all Jewish people!). Anyway Jesus teaches how anyone who believes in Him has a "punched ticket" to eternal life, which of course refers to His resurrection and trusting Him to guide us to be a witness for Him. As I preach the key promise He makes is we get resurrected if we believe who He is, that He's Lord of our lives and He died for all our sins. To me, anything He does over and above that is a bonus! I have no right to order Jesus to do anything (as this crowd demanded free food for the rest of their lives)! We ask God to do things for us, which is ok, but the only promise we're guaranteed is our eternal life for trusting in Him!

This leads to a lecture Jesus gave in a synagogue in Capernaum. This was on the northwest coastline of the Sea of Galilee. In effect Jesus gives the same lecture I gave to start this lesson on how we're to feed off Jesus. I'm not going to repeat all the key points I made at the start of this lesson, I just want to state that for us to have eternal life, we must "feed off of Him" by trusting Him for daily guidance, a trust in who He is, desiring to learn how He desires we live (by studying His word) praying for His guidance, and using our lives as a witness for Him. That's how we feed off of Him and that is in effect our orders after we accept the fact He's God and paid completely for our sins.

I'm well aware it's hard to summarize over 70 verses in these two pages, but the key point comes at the end of this chapter that eternal life depends on our desire to feed off of Him. I'm well aware that is old news for most of us, but we need to daily remind ourselves that's why we were created in the first place to use our lives for His glory!

By the way, most of the people hearing this lecture walked away at this point. They just wanted to eat free food for the rest of their lives. Let's be honest if one sign said, "Come here for all the free food one can desire" and another sign said "Come here to learn how to have eternal life" which sign would draw a bigger crowd? Jesus then asked the "12" if they wanted to leave. They replied, "Where can we go as you are the way to eternal life? They chose correctly and obviously I hope we do as well!

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! To read the other one, click on one of the two links on this page. Thanks again for reading this. John