

THE COUNTERINTUITIVE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

#4 – “Flesh and Blood”

July 16-18, 2005

⁵²Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just 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. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. ⁶⁰On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” ⁶¹Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.

John 6:52-63 TNIV

Introduction: Having studied together a teaching of Jesus that exists in paradox, one that seems illogical, and a third that first appears an unreasonable demand, let’s turn our attention to a teaching of Jesus that falls in a fourth counterintuitive category. Some of Jesus’ teachings first strike us as nonsensical, even ludicrous. Such is surely the case with Jesus’ instruction that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to have eternal life. What could he possibly mean by this?

I. Nonsensical Claims

- A. “Nonsense” is “language, conduct, or an idea that is absurd or contrary to good sense.” (Webster’s)
- B. Common Nonsense Food Claims
 1. Sugared cereals with almost no nutritional value that are fortified with vitamin and minerals.
 2. Foods advertised to prevent cancer or heart disease based on dubious science.
 3. Bottled water.
 4. Foods that purportedly lead to weight loss.
 5. KFC, or Kentucky (Fried) Chicken, as diet food.
 6. We want to believe that “you are what you eat,” because we want to be able to control our health easily.
- C. Jesus’ claim that eating his flesh and drinking his blood surely seems a nonsensical claim.

- D. Some Christian traditions have preferred to take Jesus’ “flesh and blood” teaching literally, giving them control over salvation itself.
- #### II. “Eat my flesh and drink my blood:” What Did Jesus Really Mean?
- A. The Biblical context of this teaching is important.
 1. In verses 25-34, Jesus teaches his disciples that he gives them the true bread from heaven, as opposed to physical bread that perishes.
 2. In verses 35-51, Jesus goes further by telling his disciples that he is himself the “bread of life,” clearly interpreting the expression spiritually rather than physically: “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (v.35)
 3. The dispute of the Jews, who took Jesus’ words literally, in verse 52 reminds us that Jesus’ life could not have been a sacrificial atonement were his flesh and blood consumed, as this would contradict God’s sacrificial law. (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 3:17, 17:10-14; Deuteronomy 12:23)
 4. The imagery of ingesting God’s truth was common in Hebrew Scripture, as in Psalm 119, vv.97-103: “Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long. . . How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey in my mouth.”
 - B. Jesus told of a spiritual reality—salvation—that could only be mediated by his physical life, death, and resurrection.
 1. Jesus taught that his physical coming was as divinely providential as manna from heaven had been for the Hebrew people in the Exodus from Egypt. (vv.32-33)
 2. Jesus clearly stated in his flesh and blood teaching that “whoever believes has eternal life.” (v.47)
 3. When Jesus explained his teaching to his closest disciples, he told them, “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”
 4. However, Jesus wanted his followers to understand that salvation was impossible apart from the historical reality of his coming and personal relationship with him.
 5. The identity of giver, God, and the gift, Jesus, “the bread of life,” requires that salvation cannot be accepted unless Jesus himself is accepted by faith.

Conclusion: When Jesus’ teachings seem nonsensical, we search for deeper spiritual meaning. When Jesus asks us to eat and drink his flesh and blood, he is asking for personal relationship.