

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 23 CHRIST IN THE CAPERNAUM SYNAGOGUE

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

Exposition of the Gospel of John

CHAPTER 23

CHRIST IN THE CAPERNAUM SYNAGOGUE

John 6:41-59

The following is submitted as an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us: 1. The murmuring of the Jews: verses 41, 42. 2. Christ's rebuke: verses 43-45. 3. The glory of Christ: verse 46. 4. Christ, the Life-giver: verses 47-51. 5. The criticism of the Jews: verse 52. 6. Christ's solemn reply: verse 53. 7. The results of feeding on Christ: verses 54-59. The first thirteen verses of John 6 describe the feeding of the multitude, and in verses 14 and 15 we are shown what effect that miracle had upon the crowd. From verse 16 to the end of verse 21 we have the well-known incident of the disciples in the storm, and the Lord walking on the sea and coming to their deliverance. In verses 22 to 25 we see the people following Christ to Capernaum, and in verses 26 to 40 we learn of the conversation which took place between them and our Lord—most probably in the open air. At verse 41 there is a break in the chapter, and a new company is introduced, namely, "the Jews"; and from verse 59 it is clear that they were in the synagogue. In this Gospel "the Jews" are ever viewed as antagonistic to the Savior—see our notes on verse 15. Here they are represented as "murmuring" because the Lord had said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." This does not prove that they had heard His words which are recorded in verse 33. Note it does not say in verse 41 that the Lord had said this "unto them": contrast verses 29, 32, 35! Most probably, the words He had spoken to "the people" of verse 24—words which are recorded in the verses which follow, to the end of verse 40—had been reported to "the Jews." Hence, verses 41 to 59 describe the conversation between Christ and the Jews in the Capernaum synagogue, as the preceding verses narrate what passed between the Savior and the Galileans. The Holy Spirit has placed the two conversations side by side, because of the similarity of their themes. "The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:41). "In John 'the Jews' are always distinguished from the multitude. They are the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea. It would, perhaps, be easier to understand this Gospel, if the words were rendered 'those of Judea', which is the true sense" (J.N.D.). These Jews were "murmuring," and it is a significant thing that the same word is used here as in the Septuagint (the first Gentile translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) of Israel murmuring in the

wilderness. In few things does the depravity of the human heart reveal itself so plainly and so frequently as in murmuring against God. It is a sin which few, if any, are preserved from. The Jews were murmuring against Christ. They were murmuring against Him because He had said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." This was a saying that offended them. And why should that cause them to murmur? They were, of course, completely blind to Christ's Divine glory, and so were ignorant that this very One whom some of them had seen grow up before their eyes in the humble home of Joseph and Mary in Nazareth, and the One that some of them, perhaps, had seen working at the carpenter's bench, should make a claim which they quickly perceived avowed His Deity. It was the pride of the human heart disdainful to be indebted to One who had laid aside His glory, and had taken upon Him the form of a servant. They refused to be beholden to One so lowly. Moreover, they were far too self-satisfied and self-righteous to see any need for One to come down from heaven to them, much less for that One to die upon the Cross to meet their need and thus become their Savior. Their case, as they thought, was by no means so desperate as that. The truth is, they had no hunger for "the bread which came down from heaven." What light this casts on the state of the world today! How it serves to explain the common treatment which the Lord of glory still receives at the hands of men! Pride, the wicked pride of the self-righteous heart, is responsible for unbelief. Men despise and reject the Savior because they feel not their deep need of Him. Feeding upon the husks which are fit food only for swine, they have no appetite for the true Bread. And when the claims of Christ are really pressed upon them they still "murmur"! "And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" (John 6:42). This shows that these Jews understood Christ's words "I am the bread which came down from heaven" as signifying that He was of Divine origin; and in this they were quite right. None but He could truthfully make the claim. This declaration of Christ meant that He had personally existed in heaven before He appeared among men, and, as His forerunner testified, "He that cometh from above is above all" (John 3:31): above all, because the first man and all his family are of the earth, earthy; but "the second man is the Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47). And for the Lord to become Man required the miracle of the virgin birth: a supernatural Being could only enter this world in a supernatural manner. But these Jews were in total ignorance of Christ's superhuman origin. They supposed Him to be the natural son of Joseph and Mary. His "father and mother," said they, "we know." But they did not. His Father, they knew not of, nor could they, unless the Father revealed Himself unto them. And it is so still. It is one thing to receive, intellectually, as a religious dogma, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; it is altogether another to know Him as such for myself. Flesh and blood cannot reveal this to me (Matthew 16:17). "Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:43, 44). This word is very solemn coming just at this point, and it is necessary to note carefully its exact connection. It was a word which at once exposed the moral condition and explained the cause of the "murmuring" of these Jews. Great care must be taken to observe what Christ did not say, and precisely what He did say. He did not say, "No man can come to me, except the Father hath given him to me," true as that certainly is. But He spoke here so as to address their human responsibility. It was not designed as a word to repel, but to humble. It was not closing the door in their face, but showed how alone that door could be entered. It was not intended as an intimation that there was no possible hope for them, rather was it a pointing out the direction in which hope lay. Had Saul of Tarsus then been among the number who heard these searching words of Christ, they would have applied in full force in his own case and condition; and yet it became manifest, subsequently, that he was a vessel of mercy, given to the Son by the Father before the foundation of the world. And it is quite possible that some of these very Jews, then murmuring, were among the number who, at Pentecost, were drawn by the Father to believe on the

Son. The Lord's language was carefully chosen, and left room for that. John 7:5 tells us that the Lord's own brethren (according to the flesh) did not believe on Him at first, and yet, later, they ranked among His disciples, as is clear from Acts 1:14. Let us be careful, then, not to read into this 44th verse what is not there. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). These words of Christ make manifest the depths of human depravity. They expose the inveterate stubbornness of the human will. They explain the "murmuring" of these Jews. In answering them thus, the obvious meaning of the Savior's words was this: By your murmuring you make it evident that you have not come to Me, that you are not disposed to come to Me; and with your present self-righteousness, you never will come to Me. Before you come to Me you must be converted and become as little children. And before that can take place, you must be the subjects of Divine operation. One has only to reflect on the condition of the natural man in order to see the indubitable truth of this. Salvation is most exactly suited to the sinner's needs, but it is not at all suited to his natural inclinations. The Gospel is too spiritual for his carnal mind: too humbling for his pride: too exacting for his rebellious will: too lofty for his darkened understanding: too holy for his earthbound desires. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." How can one who has a high conceit of himself and his religious performances admit that all his righteousnesses are as filthy rags? How can one who prides himself on his morality and his religiousness, own himself as lost, undone, and justly condemned? How can one who sees so little amiss in himself, who is blind to the fact that from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot there is no soundness in him (Isa. 1:6), earnestly seek the great Physician? No man with an unchanged heart and mind will ever embrace God's salvation. The inability here, then, is a moral one. Just as when Christ also said, "how can ye, being evil, speak good things?" (Matthew 12:34). And again, "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another?" (John 5:44). And again, "Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive" (John 14:17). Water will not flow uphill, nor will the natural man act contrary to his corrupt nature. An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit, and equally impossible is it for a heart that loves the darkness to also love the light. The depravity of man is, from the human side, the only thing which will explain the general rejection of the Gospel. The only satisfactory answer to the questions, Why is not Christ cordially received by all to whom He is presented? Why do the majority of men despise and reject Him? is man is a fallen creature, a depraved being who loves sin and hates holiness. So, too, the only satisfactory answer which can be given to the questions, Why is the Gospel cordially received by any man? Why is it not obstinately rejected by all? is, In the case of those who believe, God has, by His supernatural influence, counteracted against the human depravity; in other words, the Father has "drawn" to the Son. The condition of the natural man is altogether beyond human repair. To talk about exerting the will is to ignore the state of the man behind the will. Man's will has not escaped the general wreckage of his nature. When man fell, every part of his being was affected. Just as truly as the sinner's heart is estranged from God and his understanding darkened, so is his will enslaved by sin. To predicate the freedom of the will is to deny that man is totally depraved. To say that man has the power within himself to either reject or accept Christ, is to repudiate the fact that he is the captive of the Devil. It is to say there is at least one good thing in the flesh. It is to flatly contradict this word of the Son of God—"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Man's only hope lies outside of himself, in Divine help. And this is what we meant above when we said that this word of Christ was not intended to close the door of hope, but pointed out the direction in which hope lay. If it be true that I cannot get away from myself; if it be true that my whole being is depraved, and therefore at enmity with God; if it be true that I am powerless to reverse the tendency of my nature, what then can I do? Why, acknowledge my helplessness, and cry for help. What should a man do who falls down and breaks his hip? He cannot rise: should he, then, lie there in his misery and perish? Not if he has any desire for relief. He will lift up his voice and summon assistance. And if these murmuring

Jews had believed what Christ told them about their helplessness, this is what they had done. And if the unsaved today would only believe God when He says that the sinner is lost, he, too, would call for a Deliverer. If I cannot come to Christ except the Father "draws" me, then my responsibility is to beg the Father to "draw" me. In what, we may inquire, does this "drawing" consist? It certainly has reference to something more than the invitation of the Gospel. The word used is a strong one, signifying, the putting forth of power and obliging the object seized to respond. The same word is found in John 18:10; John 21:6, 11. If the reader consults these passages he will find that it means far more than "to attract." Impel would give the true force of it here in John 6:44. As said above, the unregenerate sinner is so depraved that with an unchanged heart and mind he will never come to Christ. And the change which is absolutely essential is one which God alone can produce. It is, therefore, by Divine "drawing" that any one comes to Christ. What is this "drawing"? We answer, It is the power of the Holy Spirit overcoming the self-righteousness of the sinner, and convicting him of his lost condition. It is the Holy Spirit awakening within him a sense of need. It is the power of the Holy Spirit overcoming the pride of the natural man, so that he is ready to come to Christ as an empty-handed beggar. It is the Holy Spirit creating within him an hunger for the bread of life. "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God" (John 6:45). Our Lord confirms what He had just said by an appeal to the Scriptures. The reference is to Isaiah 54:13: "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord." This serves to explain, in part at least, the meaning of "draw." Those drawn are they who are "taught of God." And who are these, so highly favored? The quotation from Isaiah 54 tells us: they are God's "children"; His own, His elect. Notice carefully how our Lord quoted Isaiah 54:13. He simply said, "And they shall be all taught of God." This helps us to define the "all" in other passages, like John 12:32: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me." The "all" does not mean all of humanity, but all of God's children, all His elect. "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45). This also throws light on the "drawing" of the previous verse. Those drawn are they who have "heard" and "learned of the Father." That is to say, God has given them an ear to hear and a heart to perceive. It is parallel with what we get in 1 Corinthians 1:23, 24: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness: But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." "Called" here refers to the effectual and irresistible call of God. It is a call which is heard with the inward ear. It is a call which is instinct with Divine power, drawing its object to Christ Himself. "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father" (John 6:46). This is very important. It guards against a false inference. It was spoken to prevent His hearers (and us today) from supposing that some direct communication from the Father is necessary before a sinner can be saved. Christ had just affirmed that only those come to Him who had heard and learned of the Father. But this does not mean that such characters hear His audible voice or are directly spoken to by Him. Only the Savior was [and is] in immediate communication with the Father. We hear and learn from the Father only through His written Word! So much then for the primary significance of this verse according to its local application. But there is far more in it than what we have just sought to bring out. "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father." How this displays the glory of Christ, bringing out, as it does, the infinite distance there is between the incarnate Son and all men on earth. No man had seen the Father; but the One speaking had, and He had because He is "of (not "the Father" but) God." He is a member of the Godhead, Himself very God of very God. And because He had "seen the Father," He was fully qualified to speak of Him, to reveal Him—see John 1:18. And who else could "declare" the Father? How else could the light of the Father's love and grace have shined into our hearts, but through and by Christ, His Son? "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). Christ still pursues the line of truth begun in verse 44. This forty-seventh

verse is not an invitation to sinners, but a doctrinal declaration concerning saints. In verse 44 He had stated what was essential from the Divine side if a sinner come to Christ: he must be "drawn" by the Father. In verse 45 He defined, in part, what this "drawing" consists of: it is hearing and learning of the Father. Then, having guarded against a false inference from His words in verse 45, the Savior now says, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Believing is not the cause of a sinner obtaining Divine life, rather is it the effect of it. The fact that a man believes, is the evidence that he already has Divine life within him. True, the sinner ought to believe. Such is his bounden duty. And in addressing sinners from the standpoint of human responsibility, it is perfectly proper to say 'Whosoever believeth in Christ shall not perish but have eternal life.' Nevertheless, the fact remains that no unregenerate sinner ever did or ever will believe. The unregenerate sinner ought to love God, and love Him with all his heart. He is commanded to. But he does not, and will not, until Divine grace gives him a new heart. So he ought to believe, but he will not till he has been quickened into newness of life. Therefore, we say that when any man does believe, is found believing, it is proof positive that he is already in possession of eternal life. "He that believeth on me hath (already has) eternal life": cf. John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 5:1, etc. "I am that bread of life" (John 6:48). This is the first of the seven "I am" titles of Christ found in this Gospel, and found nowhere else. The others are, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12); "I am the door" (John 10:9); "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11); "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25); "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6); "I am the true vine" (15:1). They all look back to that memorable occasion when God appeared to Moses at the burning bush, and bade him go down into Egypt, communicate with His people, interview Pharaoh, and command him to let the children of God go forth into the wilderness to worship Jehovah. And when Moses asked, Who shall I say hath sent me?, the answer was, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Ex. 3:14). Here in John, we have a sevenfold filling out of the "I am"—I am the bread of life, etc. Christ's employment of these titles at once identifies Him with the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and unequivocally demonstrates His absolute Deity. "I am that bread of life." Blessed, precious words are these. 'I am that which every sinner needs, and without which he will surely perish. I am that which alone can satisfy the soul and fill the aching void in the unregenerate heart. I am that because, just as wheat is ground into flour and then subjected to the action of fire to fit it for human use, so I, too, have come down all the way from heaven to earth, have passed through the sufferings of death, and am now presented in the Gospel to all that hunger for life.' "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die" (John 6:49, 50). This is an amplification of verse 48. There He had said, "I am that bread of life"; here He describes one of the characteristic qualities of this "life." The Lord draws a contrast between Himself as the Bread of life and the manna which Israel ate in the wilderness; and also between the effects on those who ate the one and those who should eat the other. The fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, but they died. The manna simply ministered to a temporal need. It fed their bodies, but was not able to immortalize them. But those who eat the true bread, shall not die. Those who appropriate Christ to themselves, those who satisfy their hearts by feeding on Him, shall live forever. Not, of course, on earth, but with Him in heaven. "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die" (John 6:50). It is obvious that Christ gives the word "die" a different meaning here from what it bears in the previous verse. There He had said that they, who of old ate manna in the wilderness, "are dead": natural death, physical dissolution being in view. But here He says that a man may eat of the bread which cometh down from heaven, and "not die": that is, not die spiritually and eternally, not suffer the "second death." Should any object to this interpretation which gives a different meaning to the word "death" as it occurs in two consecutive verses, we would remind him that in a single verse the word is found twice, but with a different meaning: "Let the dead bury their dead" (Luke

9:60). This is one of the many, many verses of Scripture which affirms the eternal security of the believer. The life which God imparts in sovereign grace to the poor sinner, is—not a life that may be forfeited; for, "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29.) It is not a life which is perishable, for it is "hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3.) It is not a life which ends when our earthly pilgrimage is over, for it is "eternal life." Ah! what has the world to offer in comparison with this? Do the worldling's fondest dreams of happiness embrace the element of unending continuity? No, indeed; that is the one thing lacking, the want of which spoils all the rest! "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:51). How evident it is then that Christ is here addressing these Jews on the ground, not of God's secret counsels, but, of their human responsibility. It is true that none will come to Him save as they are "drawn" by the Father; but this does not mean that the Father refuses to "draw" any poor sinner that really desires Christ. Yea, that very desire for Christ is the proof the Father has commenced to "draw." And how Divinely simple is the way in which Christ is received—"If any man [no matter who he be] eat of this bread he shall live forever." The figure of "eating" is very suggestive, and one deserving of careful meditation. In the first place, eating is a necessary act if I am to derive that advantage from bread which it is intended to convey, namely, bodily nourishment. I may look at bread and admire it; I may philosophize about bread and analyze it; I may talk about bread and eulogize its quality; I may handle bread and be assured of its excellency—but unless I eat it, I shall not be nourished by it. All of this is equally true with the spiritual bread, Christ. Knowing the truth, speculating about it, talking about it, contending for it, will do me no good. I must receive it into my heart. In the second place, eating is responding to a felt need. That need is hunger, unmistakably evident, acutely felt. And when one is really hungry he asks no questions, he makes no demurs, he raises no quibbles, but gladly and promptly partakes of that which is set before him. So it is, again, spiritually. Once a sinner is awakened to his lost condition; once he is truly conscious of his deep, deep need, once he becomes aware of the fact that without Christ he will perish eternally; then, whatever intellectual difficulties may have previously troubled him, however much he may have procrastinated in the past, now he will need no urging, but promptly and gladly will he receive Christ as his own. In the third place, eating implies an act of appropriation. The table may be spread, and loaded down with delicacies, and a liberal portion may have been placed on my plate, but not until I commence to eat do I make that food my own. Then, that food which previously was without me, is taken inside, assimilated, and becomes a part of me, supplying health and strength. So it is spiritually. Christ may be presented to me in all His attractiveness, I may respect His wonderful personality, I may admire His perfect life, I may be touched by His unselfishness and tenderness, I may be moved to tears at the sight of Him dying on the cruel Tree; but, not until I appropriate Him, not until I receive Him as mine, shall I be saved. Then, He who before was outside, will indwell me. Now, in very truth, shall I know Him as the bread of life, ministering daily to my spiritual health and strength. In the fourth place, eating is an intensely personal act: it is something which no one else can do for me. There is no such thing as eating by proxy. If I am to be nourished, I must, myself, eat. Standing by and watching others eat will not supply my needs. So, dear reader, no one can believe in Christ for you. The preacher cannot; your loved ones cannot. And you may have witnessed others receiving Christ as theirs; you may later hear their ringing testimonies; you may be struck by the unmistakable change wrought in their lives; but, unless you have "eaten" the Bread of life, unless you have personally received Christ as yours, it has all availed you nothing. "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever." Divinely simple and yet wonderfully full is this figure of eating. "And the bread that I will give is my flesh" (John 6:51). Exceedingly solemn and exceedingly precious is this. To "give" His "flesh" was to offer Himself as a sacrifice, it was to voluntarily lay down His life. Here, then, Christ presents Himself, not only as One who came down from heaven, but as One who had come here to die. And not unto we reach this point do we come to the heart of the Gospel. As an awakened sinner beholds the

person of Christ, as he reads the record of His perfect life down here, he will exclaim, "Woe is me; I am undone." Every line in the lovely picture which the Holy Spirit has given us in the four Gospels only condemns me, for it shows me how unlike I am to the Holy One of God. I admire His ways: I marvel at His perfections. I wish that I could be like Him. But, alas, I am altogether unlike Him. If Christ be the One that the Father delights in, then verily, He can never delight in me; for His ways and mine are as far apart as the east is from the west. O what is to become of me, wretched man that I am! Ah! dear reader, what had become of every one of us if Christ had only glorified the Father by a brief sojourn here as the perfect Son of man? What hope had there been if, with garments white and glistening, and face radiant with a glory surpassing that of the midday sun, He had ascended from the Mount of Transfiguration, leaving this earth forever? There is only one answer: the door of hope had been fast closed against every member of Adam's fallen and guilty race. But blessed be His name, wonderful as was His descent from heaven, wonderful as was that humble birth in Bethlehem's lowly manger, wonderful as was the flawless life that He lived here for thirty-three years as He tabernacled among men; yet, that was not all, that was not the most wonderful. Read this fifty-first verse of John 6 again: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Ah! it is only in a slain Christ that poor sinners can find that which meets their dire and solemn need. And His "flesh" He gave in voluntary and vicarious sacrifice "for the life of the world": not merely for the Jews, but for elect sinners of the Gentiles too. His meritorious life was substituted for our forfeited life. Surely this will move our hearts to fervent praise. Surely this will cause us to bow before Him in adoring worship. "The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52). "It is difficult, or rather impossible, to say what was the precise state of mind which this question indicated on the part of those who proposed it. It is not unlikely that it expressed different sentiments in different individuals. With some it probably was a contemptuous expression of utter incredulity, grounded on the alleged obvious absurdity of the statement made: q.d., 'The man is mad; can any absurdity exceed this? We are to live for ever by eating the flesh of a living man!' With others, who thought that neither our Lord's words nor works were like those of a madman, the question probably was equivalent to a statement—'These words must have a meaning different from their literal signification, but what can that meaning be?' "These 'strivings' of the Jews about the meaning of our Lord's words were 'among themselves'. None of them seemed to have stated their sentiments to our Lord, but He was perfectly aware of what was going on among them. He does not, however, proceed to explain His former statements. They were not ready for such an explication. It would have been worse than lost on them. Instead of illustrating His statement, He reiterated it. He in no degree explains away what had seemed strange, absurd, incredible, or unintelligible. On the contrary, He becomes, if possible, more paradoxical and enigmatical than ever, in order that His statement might be more firmly rooted in their memory, and that they might the more earnestly inquire, 'What can these mysterious words mean?' He tells them that, strange and unintelligible, and incredible, and absurd, as His statements might appear, He had said nothing but what was indubitably true, and incalculably important" (Dr. John Brown). "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6:53). This verse and the two that follow contain an amplification of what He had said in verse 51. He was shortly to offer Himself as a Substitutionary victim, an expiatory sacrifice, in the room of and in order to secure the salvation, of both Jews and Gentiles. And this sacrificial death must be appropriated, received into the heart by faith, if men are to be saved thereby. Except men "eat the flesh" and "drink the blood" of Christ, they have "no life" in them. For a man to have "no life" in him means that he continues in spiritual death: in that state of condemnation, moral pollution, and hopeless wretchedness into which sin has brought him. Observe that it is as Son of man He here speaks of Himself.

How could He have suffered death if He had not become incarnate? And the incarnation was in order to His death. How this links together the mysteries of Bethlehem and Calvary; the incarnation and the Cross! And, as we have said, the one was in order to the other. He came from heaven to earth in order to die: "but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26). "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death" (Heb. 2:9). "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." Difficult as this language first appears, it is really blessedly simple. It is not a dead Christ which the sinner is to feed upon, but on the death of One who is now alive forever more. His death is mine, when appropriated by faith; and thus appropriated, it becomes life in me. The figure of "eating" looks back, perhaps, to Genesis 3. Man died (spiritually) by "eating" (of the forbidden fruit) and he is made alive (spiritually) by an act of eating! "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54). Notice the change in the tense of the verb. In the previous verse it is, "Except ye eat"; here it is "whoso eateth." In the former, the verb is in the aorist tense, implying a single act, an act done once for all. In the latter, the verb is in the perfect tense, denoting that which is continuous and characteristic. Verse 53 defines the difference between one who is lost and one who is saved. In order to be saved, I must "eat" the flesh and "drink" the blood of the Son of man; that is, I must appropriate Him, make Him mine by an act of faith. This act of receiving Christ is done once for all. I cannot receive Him a second time, for He never leaves me! But, having received Him to the saving of my soul, I now feed on Him constantly, daily, as the Food of my soul. Exodus 12 supplies us with an illustration. First, the Israelite was to apply the shed blood of the slain lamb. Then, as protected by that blood, he was to feed on the lamb itself. "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." This confirms our interpretation of the previous verse. If we compare it with verse 47 it will be seen at once the "eating" is equivalent to "believing." Note, too, that the tense of the verbs is the same: verse 47 "believeth," verse 54 "eateth." And observe how each of these are evidences of eternal life, already in possession of the one thus engaged: "He that believeth on me hath eternal life"; "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life." This passage in John 6 is a favorite one with Ritualists, who understand it to refer to the Lord's Supper. But this is certainly a mistake, and that for the following reasons. First, the Lord's Supper had not been instituted when Christ delivered this discourse. Second, Christ was here addressing Himself to un-believers, and the Lord's Supper is for saints, not unregenerate sinners. Third, the eating and drinking here spoken of are in order to salvation; but eating and drinking at the Lord's table are for those who have been saved. "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (John 6:55). The connection between this and the previous verse is obvious. It is brought in, no doubt, to prevent a false inference being drawn from the preceding words. Christ had thrown the emphasis on the "eating." Except a man ate His flesh, he had no life in him. But now our Lord brings out the truth that there is nothing meritorious in the act of eating; that is to say, there is no mystical power in faith itself. The nourishing power is in the food eaten; and the potency of faith lies in its Object. "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." Here Christ throws the emphasis on what it is which must be "eaten." It is true in the natural realm. It is not the mere eating of anything which will nourish us. If a man eat a poisonous substance he will be killed; if he eat that which is innutritious he will starve. Equally so is it spiritually. "There are many strong believers in hell, and on the road to hell; but they are those who believed a lie, and not the truth as it is in Christ Jesus" (Dr. J. Brown). It is Christ who alone can save: Christ as crucified, but now alive for evermore. "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:56). In this, and the following verse, Christ proceeds to state some of the blessed effects of eating. The first effect is that the saved sinner is brought into vital union with Christ, and enjoys the most intimate fellowship with Him. The word "dwelleth" is commonly translated "abideth." It

always has reference to communion. But mark the tense of the verb: it is only the one who "eateth" and "drinketh" constantly that abides in unbroken fellowship with Christ. "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." This language clearly implies, though it does not specifically mention the fact, that Christ would rise from the dead, for only as risen could He dwell in the believer, and the believer in Him. It is, then, with Christ risen, that they who feed on Him as slain, are identified—so marvelously identified, that Scripture here, for the first time, speaks of union with our blessed Lord. "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me" (John 6:57). How evident it is, again, that Christ is here speaking of Himself as the Mediator, and not according to His essential Being: it is Christ not in Godhead glory, but as the Son incarnate, come down from heaven. "I live by the Father" means He lived His life in dependence upon the Father. This is what He stressed in replying to Satan's first assault in the temptation. When the Devil said, "If thou be the Son of God, command," etc., he was not (as commonly supposed) casting doubt on the Deity of Christ, but asking Him to make a wrong use of it. "If" must be understood as "since," same as in John 14:2; Colossians 3:1, etc. The force of what the Tempter said is this: Since you are the Son of God, exercise your Divine prerogatives, use your Divine power and supply your bodily need. But this ignored the fact that the Son had taken upon Him the "form of a servant" and had entered (voluntarily) the place of subjection. Therefore, it is of this the Savior reminds him in His reply—"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." How beautifully this illustrates what Christ says here, "I live by the Father"! Let us then seek grace to heed its closing sentence: "so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." Just as the incarnate Son, when on earth, lived in humble dependence on the Father, so now the believer is to live his daily life in humble dependence on Christ. "This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever" (John 6:58). There is an important point in this verse which is lost to the English reader. Two different words for eating are here employed by Christ. "Your fathers did eat (ephazon) manna"; "he that eateth (trogon) of this bread shall live forever." The verb "phago" means "to eat, consume, eat up." "Trogo" signifies to feed upon, rather than the mere act of eating. The first, Christ used when referring to Israel eating the manna in the wilderness: the second was employed when referring to believers feeding on Himself. The one is a carnal eating, the other a spiritual; the one ends in death, the other ministers life. The Israelites in the wilderness saw nothing more than an objective article of food. And they were like many today, who see nothing more in Christianity than the objective side, and know nothing of the spiritual and experiential! How many there be who are occupied with the externals of religion—outward performances, etc. How few really feed upon Christ. They admire Him objectively, but receive Him not into their hearts. "These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum" (John 6:59). What effect this discourse of Christ had on those who heard Him will be considered in our next chapter. Meanwhile, let the interested reader meditate upon the following questions:— 1. At what, in particular, were the disciples "offended": verses 60, 61? 2. What is the meaning of verse 63? 3. What is the force of the "therefore" in verse 65? 4. What does the "going back" of those disciples prove: verse 66? 5. Why did Christ challenge the twelve: verse 67? 6. What was the assurance of Peter based on: verse 68? 7. Why was there a Judas in the apostolate: verse 71? How many reasons can you give?

Source:

<https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/exposition-of-the-gospel-of-john-chapter-23-christ-in-the-capernaum-synagogue/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net