

# LENT – “IMAGING FAITH”

## “WHY THE REBEL MUST COME”

Prepared by Patrick J. Griffiths © 2010 - [pastorpat@waukeshabile.org](mailto:pastorpat@waukeshabile.org)

March 14, 2010

*Reflecting on His Work and the Storyline of the Bible*

Read: John 6

Prayer:

*Almighty God, who sees that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*  
(<http://www.bcponline.org/>)

The Story written by God speaks of a rebel's insurrection against his God, Creator and Master. It is because of this rebellion that the sinner must die. God's justice speaks and its execution is non-negotiable and direct. Yet God made promises and provided pictures whereby a vicarious, voluntary and victorious sacrifice would enable the rebellious to pass from death to life. Although the magnitude of the provision is inexhaustible, there is still the necessity on the part of the sinner to accept God's provision as his own. If such an invitation is rejected, then all hope is lost. Thus there is a call to obey, to have faith, to believe, and to trust. All four ideas speak to the rebel's necessity to receive the offer freely and graciously extended to him by God.

There is an action to faith that moves it from being mere knowledge. When we say to an individual, "Just trust me," or "Will you not trust me" we are inviting them to accept or act a certain way. This trust on their part is visualized by some action. This same idea comes from the biblical record. Jesus says, "He who believes has eternal life." This belief will then be visualized when one takes and eats His flesh and drinks His blood. Again stressing the idea that faith is not only knowledge of and assent to, but unreserved trust in.

The gift must be accepted (John 1:12; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8) and the object must be believed (John 3:16). Yet what does this look like? How might we visualize faith? Both the Old and New Testaments provide such an answer. The New Testament record builds on the foundation laid in the Old Testament text. From the Passover Feast will come the language employed by our Lord and then continued by Paul to speak to and explain "faith". It is clearly noted in John 6 and then reiterated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11. Let us consider John 6.

<sup>47</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, **he who believes has eternal life.** <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life <sup>49</sup> Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, **so that one may eat of it and not die.** <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; **if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever;** and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.' <sup>52</sup> Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?' <sup>53</sup> 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 yourselves.** <sup>54</sup> **He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood**

has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. <sup>55</sup> For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup> He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup> As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever.' <sup>59</sup> These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. <sup>60</sup> Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, 'This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?' <sup>61</sup> But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, 'Does this cause you to stumble?' <sup>62</sup> As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. <sup>63</sup> So Jesus said to the twelve, 'You do not want to go away also, do you?' <sup>64</sup> Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. <sup>65</sup> We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.' <sup>66</sup> Jesus answered them, 'Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?' <sup>67</sup> Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him" (John 6:47-71).

**First**, the text invites the audience to believe who Jesus is and what He is saying. The two cannot be separated. What He speaks embodies who He is. To "accept Christ" without "accepting His words" is unreasonable. This is the primary thought contained in the text. You can see the parallel ideas in the text.

- He who **believes** has **eternal life** (v. 47)
- So that one may **eat** of it and **not die** (v. 50)

To believe in Him is to have eternal life. To "eat" Him is to have eternal life. The two ideas are working synonyms in this text.

**Second**, Jesus uses the imagery of bread to explain what believing looks like. It is more than mere intellectual assent. There is an "ingesting" of who He is and what He says (vv. 53-56). The implication is one of life and death. To the normal person such thinking is repugnant. Yet the invitation is clear; you must eat my flesh and drink my blood, if you will have eternal life.

Paul speaks to this same idea in 1 Corinthians 11. It is not always possible to understand the immediate question that solicited the response, but it is something that dealt directly with the Lord's Supper.

<sup>23</sup> "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' <sup>25</sup> In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Each and every time we partake of the elements we are signifying our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We must not allow those who differ with us to keep us from accepting the thought as it is noted in Scripture. The partaking of the elements simply visualizes saving

faith. It is your faith in the object, in what those earthly elements speak to, that saves. It is the object of faith and not faith itself that has the power to save.

**Third**, although belief appears ethereal, it is concrete and is an either-or proposition. You either believe or you do not believe. You either eat or you do not eat, but there is no middle ground. You can not say you receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and NOT eat His flesh or drink His blood. Faith is seen in the accepting of His proposal. If you say you trust someone, but fail to follow them, then your affirmation of trust is invalidated by your action of distrust. The same is equally true of saying you believe and trust Jesus but fail to follow Him. You are not a follower of Jesus unless you partake of Jesus.

**Fourth**, the idea of believing/eating Jesus for some is repugnant and therefore dismissed, and yet fully accepted by others. Many within hearing distance found His statement “difficult” (v. 60), and “grumbled at” (vv. 61) what Jesus declared. Jesus knew what He asked would cause some to “stumble” (v. 61). And “As a result of this many of His disciples **withdrew** and **were not walking with Him anymore**” (v. 66). Was Jesus encouraging “**physical** cannibalism”? Was He implying “spiritual cannibalism”? Most assuredly, Jesus said to those who would follow Him, “You must eat my flesh and drink my blood or you will perish.” Let us push past 2,000 years of theological debate concerning spiritual presence, transubstantiation, consubstantiation and symbolism and let us sit with His original audience and listen to what He is saying. Although Peter has a strong propensity of putting the proverbial “foot in mouth,” he also often gets it right. Listen to how Peter understands what Jesus is saying, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know You are the Holy One of God” (vv. 68, 69). BINGO, Peter gets it. What if we replaced the idea of believing with that of eating? Listen to how this text would then read.

“Lord, whose flesh would we eat and whose blood would we drink? You have words of eternal life. We have eaten your flesh and drunk your blood and have come to know you are the Holy One of God.”

Peter took the plunge and fully entered into what Jesus meant. When we eat and drink we are openly stating that we are full followers. What I find interesting is how many “disciples” turned back (vv. 60, 66, 70, 71). Simply because someone looks like a “Christian” or professes Christ this does not guarantee that they are followers of Christ. Only those who eat His flesh and drink His blood have denied themselves, taken up their cross and followed Him (Matt. 16:24). For those Christians who find such thinking repulsive, then I would invite them to do what Paul suggests in 2 Corinthians 13:5, 6.

<sup>5</sup> **“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!** Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test? <sup>6</sup> But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test” (2 Cor. 13:5, 6).

One of our struggles is the idea that salvation happens only once, and indeed this is a true idea. But the difficulty lies in our thinking that once we are saved the gospel is never revisited. Often when I speak with someone who struggles with their profession of faith, it is often because they made a profession of faith at a very young age and cannot remember what they actually said. It is almost as if they have faith in their faith, or their salvation rests on their

prowess in remembering. When confronted by such scenarios I often tell them, "I'm not asking you if you believed, but if you believe. Do you believe right now?" As believers we are marked by belief. We do not simply believe at a point in time and then never believe again. We believed and are to continue in that belief. Believing is a continuous and daily activity. I fully understand justification happens in a point in time moment. But I am also convinced that justification happened and continues to happen. I am to "preach the gospel to myself everyday and everyday I am to believe the gospel." I am not worried about losing what grace gains, but I am worried that I will forget what grace gives, and in forgetting I simply fall away. I am neither denying nor addressing the issue of eternal security at this time. The issue for me this morning is direct, do you believe the gospel? What might we do to protect ourselves from this lethargy of unbelief? A means of reminding ourselves of this believing is found in the regular celebration of the Lord's Table. Each time we partake we are saying, "I believe Jesus is the one and only offering for sin and in His provision and sufficiency I rest." May we lay aside a spirit of indifference or mechanical compliance and may we once more in receiving His body and blood say, "I come to you denying myself, shouldering my cross and following you."

I do find it dreadful that we partake of the elements without ever remembering the gospel. I find it unfortunate that we can take the elements so casually without any affirmation of faith. When we partake of the elements without forethought of its significance and to what it speaks we are desecrating the sinless offering of God's own Son. Friend, unless and until the rebel comes, he will continue to identify himself in the unholy alliance and face the full wrath of God. Jesus made a way that is vicarious, voluntary and victorious, but unless and until we come all is for naught personally.

The Bible says in Ephesians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). If you've never accepted His invitation to believe, then I would invite you to do so today. What does this internal faith look like? It looks like what Jesus said in John 6 and Matthew 26.

<sup>26</sup> "While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, '**Take, eat; this is My body.**' <sup>27</sup> And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; <sup>28</sup> for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins'" (Matt. 26:26-28).

So today I ask you, will you believe in Jesus, will you accept His words and will you visual your faith by eating and drinking?