

You are what you eat!

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Well, you've heard the phrase, you are what you eat, right? And I thought that was just an interesting phrase to encourage you to eat well.

But recently I found out that it is actually literally true. Because biologists tell us, if you think about it, biologists tell us that our cells, every cell in our body, is replaced every seven years or so.

And the material on which it's built, the material used to make those new cells, all come from the food that you eat. So literally, what you are today sitting there in that pew is the culmination of the last seven years of what you have eaten.

You are literally what you eat. What you take in makes you what you are. It's quite a scary thought, isn't it? When you start to think, what are the things we eat? What are our eating habits?

And how does that affect who we are today? Well, it does. Science tells us that. But have you ever considered that that concept of you are what you eat is true spiritually as much as it is physically?

[1 : 10] Because the beliefs that you hold, the ideas that you consume from the world around you, they make you who you are too. They determine how you live.

They determine what you live for, what your priorities are in life. And we eat beliefs and ideas from the world around us without even noticing it on a daily basis. And the truth is, what we consume spiritually is far more important than we might think.

And so it's no surprise in this passage that Jesus, when he comes to talk about what we believe and challenge us in thinking what we truly believe, he talks about it in terms of eating.

You couldn't have missed that if you were listening to this passage being read. And let me give you some context. If you haven't been with us in the last few weeks, Jesus has just performed one of his most incredible miracles.

He provided in the wilderness bread for 5,000 people, food, to eat when they had none. It was a great miracle. But what we saw last week is that he then uses that miracle to point people away from the physical food that he gave them and to consider what they're eating spiritually.

[2 : 23] That was his challenge to them. To challenge them to think what they really believe. To do a bit of soul searching. And specifically, he challenged them to consider what they believe about him specifically.

So, what he goes on to teach is a challenging teaching. Because by the end of this story, you would have noticed most of the people who had up until that point called themselves disciples, what did they do?

They abandoned him. They left him. He was left only with a small handful after this teaching. Because it turns out that these people who called themselves disciples, effectively called themselves Christians, didn't truly believe.

Their belief in him was not genuine. And so that leads us to our question, if that's what happened over the course of this teaching that Jesus gave them about true belief, if these people who thought they believed in him actually ended up abandoning him, the question we've got to ask this morning, which affects all of us, is what does it really mean to believe?

What is true belief in Jesus? A person can say they believe in Jesus. A person can come to church and sing songs. But what does it truly mean to really, in our hearts, believe in Jesus?

[3 : 48] Well, Jesus goes on to teach us. That is what this passage is all about. And what he teaches us here, what he says, the words he uses are actually very shocking.

They're meant to shock us. So let's have a look at really what is the heart of his teaching. You can see from verse 53 to 56, he really gets down to the point of what he's trying to teach us about true belief.

And look what he says from verse 53. Jesus 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.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.

Now, as I said, this was hugely shocking. I mean, it's shocking to us, to him to talk about, you know, eating flesh and drinking blood. It's pretty disgusting, pretty shocking, and it's supposed to shock us, but if you think it shocks us, it shocked even more the Jews of the day who were forbidden in the Levitical law to drink blood of any type.

[5 : 02] So they would have totally taken offense at this. But Jesus uses this language of eating flesh and drinking blood deliberately to illustrate a very important point.

We saw last week already that he's using this to say that just like eating physical food gives us physical life, we need to eat food on a daily basis to have life, to continue to live tomorrow and the next day.

So eating him is what gives you eternal life. It's a very, very simple but profound teaching. Just as you need to eat food for life on earth, you need to eat him for life in heaven, for life eternally, for life beyond this temporary short life.

But then what does he mean by that? What does he mean by eating him? If it's so important for eternal life, we've really got to understand what he means. And throughout the ages, this teaching here of Jesus eating him has been misunderstood.

So the early church were actually persecuted by the Roman government and they were accused and taken to court for being cannibals because of this very passage. They were accused of cannibalism because their scripture supposedly encouraged the eating of human flesh.

[6 : 16] And of course, the Roman Catholic Church, if you know anything about church history, the doctrine of transubstantiation was all about the people coming today and still transforming bread and wine to be the flesh of Jesus so you can literally eat it.

But what Jesus is saying here isn't meant to be taken literally. He's using a metaphor. We use metaphors all the time, don't we, to describe things with other things.

And that's what Jesus is doing. And we find out what he means from something he said earlier on in the same passage. You know, often when we come across something in the Bible that we don't understand, we've actually just got to read on a little bit more or read back a little bit more.

We've just got to read the passage in its context. Our problem is we don't read enough. We don't sit down and read large chunks of scripture. So often things are out of context and they don't make sense to us. But this, if we look at it in context, actually starts to make sense, what Jesus is saying.

So in verse 54, you'll see he says, he says this strange metaphor. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day.

[7 : 26] But he's actually already explained what he means back in verse 40. Have a look. There he says, everyone who looks to the son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day.

Practically the same phrase, but he's equating the two. So he's saying to eat his flesh and drink his blood means to look to him and believe in him.

That's what the metaphor means. Okay, fine. We get that. But why not just say, look and believe then? Why use this very graphic language of eating and drinking flesh and blood?

Well, because Jesus wants to make a point. And the point that he wants to make is that the type of belief he's talking about, to believe in him, is so much more than what we think it is.

You know, I can believe that the plate of chicken dinner exists in front of me. I can sit there and I can look at it.

[8 : 29] I can even smell it. And I can believe in it. I can believe it exists. I can believe that it's there. But that's very different to actually sinking my teeth in and consuming it.

Believing and consuming are two very different things. That's what Jesus wants us to understand here. And that's what he says we must do with him. We must sink our teeth into him and consume him.

Okay, so again, what does that mean? It's a very strange phrase. But we've already discovered that it's a metaphor for belief. But it's not just what we think belief is.

It's not just believing in him as some historical figure. So much more than that. True belief. So what is it? What does it mean to sink our teeth into Jesus? What does it mean to consume him?

Well, to understand that we need to consider something else about this story. If you go back in your Bibles right to the beginning of this chapter to verse 4 you'll notice that John says that this all happens during the Jewish Passover feast.

[9 : 35] And if you read further in John you'll realize that this whole chunk of the Gospel of John is during a number of different Jewish feasts.

And we're meant to understand what those feasts are about to understand what's going on. So it's not for no reason John mentions that this was during Passover. Now what happened at Passover?

What was the meal that you ate at Passover? Anybody know? I'll give you a hint. I had some at the seniors Christmas lunch on Thursday that I'm very delighted that I was invited to.

Anybody know? Lamb. Roast lamb. Roast lamb was the Passover meal. Quite a nice Passover meal wasn't it? But the lamb that you ate at Passover wasn't just any lamb.

It was in fact the same lamb that had been sacrificed. And that was a very important detail. Now you'll remember the original Passover we read from Exodus earlier. the original Passover that God's judgment was coming over Egypt.

[10 : 36] The Israelites were in Egypt. And he was busy judging Egypt for the Egyptians' complete rebellion against him. Pharaohs' complete ignoring God's authority. And so he sent increasingly hectic plagues on the people of Egypt to warn them and to judge them.

And they carried on ignoring him and ignoring him. And so the final plague was the angel of death passing over the whole land and the firstborn of every family dying.

It was a very, very hard and shocking judgment. But his people, God's people were there in Egypt and what he did for them is he gave them escape from his judgment.

He gave them a way out of having this judgment on themselves through the sacrifice of a lamb, a Passover lamb. And then what they would do, quite gross, is they would take its blood and they would paint its blood on their doorpost so that when the angel of death passed over it would, you know, pass over that house and the firstborn wouldn't die.

Hence the name Passover. That's where it comes from. So the idea was that the sacrifice of this lamb, the life given in place of the life of the firstborn and its blood is what protected God's people from his judgment.

[11 : 57] But interestingly, part of escaping that judgment in the Passover wasn't just sacrificing this lamb. You had to eat it as well. In Exodus, we learn that you didn't just have to kill the lamb and paint its blood.

You actually had to take it and make a meal of it. You had to consume it as a way for these Israelites to identify the life that was given to save their own, to identify that there was a real flesh and blood life that was given in payment for theirs, to save their lives from judgment.

Well, you see, here Jesus is saying that each of us need to do the same with him if we're going to escape God's coming judgment. Because, let me tell you, God's judgment is coming.

It wasn't only coming on Egypt. That was nothing compared to the real, ultimate judgment that is coming at the end of all our lives. when God wraps up this stage in history and he brings his judgment down on all the sin and rebellion and all the ignoring and turning our backs on him that we've done in our lives, all of our sin is going to face, God is going to face judgment.

But, just as in Egypt, you see, what happened in Egypt was a foreshadow of what is ultimately happening to the whole human race. And, just as in Egypt, God has provided a way out of that judgment through a sacrifice.

[13 : 21] The ultimate Passover lamb, which is Jesus Christ. That is what he was pointing to, that he is the lamb, that he, when he died on the cross, was going to pay for the sins of other people so that his blood, like it did in Egypt with God's people, his blood literally protects us from God's judgment.

It is the greatest rescue story ever told. But, if you and I want to benefit from that great sacrifice, where he shed his blood to pay for our sins, if we want to benefit from that, we're not just to believe that it happened.

No. We must eat it. We must take it in. Like those people in Egypt had to eat that sacrifice. And we must identify ourselves with the life that was given to save our own.

We must look upon it and realize the cost of our sins. and recognize how much we actually needed that death for ourselves.

Just like, you know, we eat physical food because we know we need it. We feel we need it, don't we? And when we eat it, then we feel satisfied.

[14 : 34] It's the mechanism that God has put in our bodies to keep us physically nourished. That he gives us hunger and then we eat and then we feel satisfied that we have what we need.

And so, just as that mechanism exists physically, it exists spiritually. We are to feed on the death of Jesus firstly by knowing that we need it, feeling that we need it, realizing the weight of our sins, realizing that we are, that we face God's judgment apart from atonement, apart from the death of Jesus.

So we feel our need for it and then we feel the satisfaction of consuming that, of our need being satisfied. That's what it means to really believe in Jesus.

it's knowing our need for it and then it's feeling the satisfaction of having that need fulfilled. So let me ask you this morning, do you feel that hunger in your own life?

Do you feel that need for Jesus? Do you feel the weight of your sin? Do you? Do you feel the imminence of God's terrifying judgment over you for that sin?

[15 : 47] Do you feel the hunger for forgiveness? Ask yourself. Have you felt that? Maybe you say no. No, I haven't. But actually deep down inside you know that you're a sinner.

You know you're not right with God. You actually deep down inside yearn to be right with your Creator. You hunger for forgiveness. But then in those moments if you do feel that and you know that and it is part of your experience, do you then remember the death of Christ and feed on that?

Do you believe that he died for all of those sins that you have committed on your behalf and because of that you can escape God's judgment and do you feel the immense satisfaction in that moment, the relief, the peace that every true Christian has experienced, the immense satisfaction of knowing that your sins were atoned for completely on the cross.

Have you felt that? Do you feel that? Because that is what it means to feed on Jesus. And so do you do that? Do you feed on Jesus?

Because we all have that hunger but do you satisfy that hunger for forgiveness in Christ on a regular basis? Well maybe you forget to. Maybe you get so bogged down in daily life and your own sins, you feel the weight of your sins and you just can't get rid of them and you forget to feed on Christ and you forget to find that satisfaction, that spiritual nourishment and you drift away from God rather than towards him.

[17 : 22] Is that not your experience? Certainly is mine. We forget, don't we? We so easily forget and then we sin and then we feel the weight of that sin and this weird thing is that it actually takes us away from God because God is holy and sin and God repel one another and when we have sin that's not dealt with we drift from God, we go from God.

Like when you try to put two magnets of opposite polarity, Michiel help me here, the same polarity, you know you put those magnets together and you just can't get them, they push against each other.

Well God and our sin inside us pushes us away from God. Do you feel that? Do you? Do you feel the weight of your sin pushing you away from God?

Well it's not just you. We struggle don't we to come back to our spiritual rest in Christ. We struggle to come back into that open and free relationship with a holy God because of our sin despite all that Christ has done to earn it for us.

And you know what that is? When that happens, when we feel that being repelled from God because of our sin, that is the devil laughing. That is the devil's victory over us because yes the devil exists and his greatest goal is to keep you away from God.

[18 : 42] You see his greatest goal is not so much to make you sin. Yes, of course he'll try to do that as and when he can but he knows that far more damaging to you and far more damaging to God's people and to God's church is when a believer sins and fails to know forgiveness for that sin.

and has that sin weighing down in their conscience day after day and they feel out of favor with God because of it. That is the devil's victory and the longer he can keep it going the more we drift away from God.

And that is why Jesus wants and makes a point here to feed on him. He wants us to feed on him regularly to find satisfaction for that, to come back again and again and claim the benefits of his death for us.

Just like when we come back again and again to eat physical food. You know, I ate yesterday and I'm hungry today. And I know I'll be hungry tomorrow even if I eat today because it's a regular process we need to go through to have this physical nourishment and so we need to come back over and over again to have this food for our souls, this forgiveness that is available to us in the death of Jesus.

to eat him, to find satisfaction in that. And it's so important for us to do that, that Jesus actually made a point before he left earth, he made a point of commanding us to have a regular way of doing it together, of feeding on him together.

[20 : 18] And you know how that is? You guessed it, the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion. It's not just something we do to tick a box. This is a very significant sacrament, a very significant Christian discipline because the night before Jesus died, he commanded his disciples to come together and as they ate physical food and drink that nourished their bodies, he commanded them on a regular basis to use that, to use that act of eating as a way of also feeding on him and his death for them.

Now, here in John 6, he hasn't actually instituted communion as a command to his disciples yet. And so when he talks about feeding on his body and blood here, he's not talking about the act of taking communion as if communion will somehow save you like the Roman Catholic Church might teach.

No, communion doesn't save you. The act of taking communion doesn't save you because what Jesus is talking about here is the act of feeding on him in your heart by faith. But he gives us this, he gives us the act of communion as a way to help us, to aid us, to feed on him in our heart by faith.

And so when we take holy communion, the act itself means nothing unless it's accompanied by faith that is feeding on Christ's death and believing in the forgiveness that it has earned us and finding the satisfaction in that.

that is what holy communion is. It is here to help us to feed on Christ, to find satisfaction for our souls. It's a way Jesus gave us to use the physical food as a God-given visual aid.

[22 : 09] And then as you eat it, it's a way for you to confirm that you really personally do believe in Jesus' death on your behalf and you remember what it means for you personally.

That's why you take the bread, you drink the wine, you consume it because you are affirming that this is my faith, this is what I truly believe.

And when you do that, if you truly believe, when you are taking communion, if you truly believe in what those elements represent, the body and the blood of Jesus given for you, when you use holy communion to feed on Jesus by faith, then there are some amazing results which we learn about in this passage.

And I just want to mention two of them. The results of feeding on Jesus. Firstly, we remain in Jesus. Look at verse 56.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them. You see, when we remember the death of Christ and we feed on it and we find the satisfaction again of the forgiveness that he has earned us, that is how we actually remain in fellowship with him.

[23 : 24] That is how we prevent Satan from carrying out his plan to remove us from God. You know, I said earlier, Satan's greatest weapon against you and me is accusation. It's guilt. Because the guilt, like those magnets, when we have that guilt in us, it will push us away from God.

That is his greatest weapon. It's the most effective way of keeping you out of relationship with God. That guilt for your sin, whether you recognize it consciously or subconsciously, he is going to accuse you day after day.

He is going to say you're not good enough. He is going to say that you do not deserve to be in relationship with the Holy God. And he's going to, through that, keep you sinning.

It's a vicious cycle. The more you sin and feel the guilt for that, the more that you're away from God, the less you have God's help to stop you from sinning, the less you have motivation to live God's way, and the more you actually get into a cycle of sin, when the guilt leads to more sin.

But, when we regularly feed on Christ's death for our sins, and remember, and meditate, and know the forgiveness that we have because of it, and we feel those sins being washed away, and we feel the satisfaction of that guilt being removed, and we appreciate truly what Jesus did for us, you know what?

[24 : 44] Satan loses all his power over us. He loses his power to accuse us, because we can look at Christ, and we can tell Satan to go jump, because he's got nothing on us.

And, he loses his power to keep us sinning, because when we look at the cross, and meditate, and realize what Jesus did for us, we grow to love him more and more, and we grow to love Jesus more than we love our sin.

And so, regular feeding on Jesus helps us to remain in him. That is why we have Holy Communion on a regular basis. But, of course, Holy Communion is not the only way we feed on Jesus.

This is the main way when we come together that we feed on Jesus, to remind us to feed on Jesus. But, throughout the weeks, when we go about our daily lives, when we are driving the car, when we are walking in the street, we remember what Holy Communion signifies.

We remember back to our last communion at church, and the body and the blood that was given for us, and we feed on Jesus in our hearts. Even between the times that we meet for Holy Communion, we can feed on Jesus.

[26 : 00] And, as we do that, we remain in him. But, there is something else that feeding on Jesus does. And, it's the most glorious thing.

Secondly, feeding on Jesus assures us that we have been chosen by God. It assures us of our salvation. It does. Look what Jesus says in verse 44.

And, this is incredible. He says, No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them. Okay, now Jesus is responding to these people who fail to believe in him, who don't believe in him, who resist him.

And, he tells them, quite bluntly, that the reason they don't believe in him is because the Father hasn't drawn them. God the Father has not given them belief in him. He's saying that no one can actually believe in him without God doing it, without God giving them that belief.

It is impossible for us, spiritually dead, to come to believe in Jesus in and of ourselves. God has to do it through his spirit.

[27 : 13] And, when God does that, when God gives someone true faith in Jesus that transforms their life and causes them to trust in Jesus and feed on him, he doesn't take it away.

Look back at verse 39 in the previous passage, this great assurance that Jesus gives. He says, and this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up on the last day.

See, Jesus is personally assuring that all whom the Father has given him, all who believe in him and are feeding on him, he will see through to the end.

And, he will give them eternal life. It's a done thing. If God has given faith to someone, he won't take it away. Now, think of what that means for when you take Holy Communion, if you are a Christian.

Just you taking it. Just you partaking in Holy Communion, if it is genuine. If you eat the bread and drink the wine and really believe what they represent. In other words, if you are feeding in on Jesus in your heart, believing that his death has paid for your sins.

[28 : 28] If you simply believe that. If you simply, as you feed this, feed on this. As you eat this bread and drink this grape juice we're about to do. If you, when you do that, truly believe in what it represents.

If you truly believe that Jesus died for your sins. If you can do that at all, it's because God has allowed you to be able to believe that.

it means that you are one of those whom God has chosen and will preserve for eternal life. Just the act of taking communion, if it is genuine, is an assurance that you are saved.

Because you wouldn't be able to do it. You wouldn't be able to believe this if God hasn't caused you to. And so, as you take communion, it's not just a remembrance.

It's a celebration. It's a celebration of what God has given you. You should feel hugely excited and elated if you believe what this represents. Because it means God has chosen you.

[29 : 30] God has elected you. God is preserving you for eternal life. God has called you to believe in this. And so, those are some of the amazing benefits of feeding on Jesus in your heart by faith.

Not only is that feeding the way that God keeps you united to him, but it is the way he reminds you that you are one of his. No wonder the old church fathers described the act of holy communion as nourishment for our souls.

There is no better way to feed our souls. And then it's in those assurances. It's as we feed our souls. It's as we are assured of those things that we grow as Christians.

It's by remaining in Christ. It's by feeding on him. It's by looking forward to that sure hope of eternal life in God's new creation that we reorient our lives towards that.

That we follow Christ all the more and we are conformed into his image. We become like him because you know what? You are what you eat.

[30 : 49] Spiritually as well as physically. And if you feed on Christ slowly but surely you will become like Christ. God will replace all of your cells with the material of Jesus himself essentially.

That's what the Bible promises. As you feed on Christ you can't not become like him if that feeding is genuine. The question is do you truly feed on him?

That's the question I want to leave you with this morning. Do you truly come to Jesus and consume him or are you still watching from a distance? Are you still looking at Jesus from afar but you're not in personal intimate relationship with him?

Well no more. If that is you but you believe in this but you believe in Jesus dying for your sins don't there's no more watching him from afar. Will you feed on Jesus now?

Will you come to him? Will you consume? Will you eat and drink communion and look and believe in the death of Jesus on your behalf? Will you meditate on what he did for you personally so that you grow in your love for him?

[32 : 07] and will you rest in the assurance that by your faith expressed here today God has already secured your eternal life? And will you go out into this week and live in light of that truth?

Will you join me to do that now? If you do believe in Christ well we're gonna we're gonna do that we're going to use the way that Jesus has given us to remember I'm gonna call the stewards forward and then in a moment we're going to say a prayer together which will appear on the screen behind me but before it does you therefore who truly trust in Christ as your savior earnestly repent of your sins love your neighbors and intend to lead a new life obeying God's commands and following his holy ways come now near with faith and take this holy sacrament to strengthen you and let us make a humble confession to almighty God together we do not presume to come to your table merciful Lord trusting in our own righteousness only in your great mercy we are not fit to gather up the crumbs under your table but you

Lord are always the same your mercy is everlasting grant therefore gracious Lord that we may by faith eat the flesh and drink the blood of your dear son Jesus Christ that we may be united to him and he to us amen almighty God our heavenly father of your infinite mercy you gave your only son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption who made thereby his one offering of himself never to be repeated a full perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world and who instituted and in his holy gospel commanded us to continue a perpetual memory of his precious death until he comes again hear us merciful Lord and grant that we receiving this bread and wine in accordance with your son our savior Jesus Christ holy institution to remember his death and suffering may share in his most blessed body and blood who on the night he was betrayed took bread and when he had given you thanks he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying take eat this is my body which is given for you do this in remembrance of me in the same way after supper he took the cup and when he had given you thanks he gave it to them saying drink from this all of you for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me amen