

FEEDING ON THE BREAD OF LIFE

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on Me has everlasting life. I am that bread of life.”

John 6:47, 48

OBSERVE carefully the order in which our Lord puts the two blessings He mentions—first, life through believing on Him, and then food to sustain that life. First, “he that believes on Me has everlasting life,” and next to that, “I am that bread of life.” Life comes first and food follows afterwards. It is impossible for a dead man to feed, or to be fed—only the living can eat and drink. I once went into the monastery of the Capuchins at Rome and there I saw certain of the departed brotherhood dressed in their regular habits, although they had been dead, some of them a hundred years, some fifty, and one gentleman, I think, had scarcely been dead more than a year or so. But there they sat, with their breviaries in their hands, just as if they had been alive! Yet I did not see any preparations for feeding them. It would have been as ridiculous to attempt to feed them as it was to keep them there at all!

Now, when we preach the Gospel, unless you have spiritual life, you cannot feed upon it. And if you were to come to the Communion Table, unless you were truly alive unto God, you might eat the bread and drink the wine, but with real spiritual food, the body of Christ, and the blood of Christ, you could have nothing to do. We do not give food to people in order to make them live. That would be a useless experiment, but, because they are alive, they take food in order to sustain and nourish the life which is already in them. Always remember, dear Friends, that the best spiritual food in the world is useless to those who are spiritually dead. And one very essential part of the Gospel is that Truth of God which our Savior so plainly taught, “You must be born again.” All attempts at feeding the soul are of no use until the new birth has been experienced! Even that precious, priceless bread of life cannot be assimilated unless the soul has been quickened by the Spirit of God. Judge, then, my Hearers, whether you are alive unto God, or not. Before you can rightly know the Truth, before you are qualified to learn its mysteries, pray that you may be made to live by faith in Jesus Christ—for before food comes life.

But, next, after life there must be food, for, just as surely as there will be no use for the food without the life, so will there be no continuance of the life without the food. Men have played great pranks with themselves and have even experimented upon the possibility of living for 40 days without food—an experiment which I, for one, have no kind of wish to imitate! Neither would I recommend any of my hearers to attempt it, for the probability is that if one man should manage to survive his 40 days' fast, there will be 40 other men, who try to do the same, who will be in another world long before the end of that time! God meant us to eat if we wish to live. When He made men and women, He made the fruits of the earth on which they should feed. And afterwards He gave them the flesh of beasts that they might feed thereon, but they must be fed if they are to continue to exist.

So is it with the soul—but the soul must be fed on spiritual meat. Souls cannot eat what bodies can eat. But, still, they must eat. All the qualities in a spiritual man, which are gracious, need food. Faith needs the Truth of God to believe. Love needs a revelation of love to keep it burning. Hope needs to be reminded of the things to be expected in the future, so that it may continue to hope. And every Grace within a spiritual man is clamorous for spiritual food that it may feed upon. If there are any of you who profess to be spiritual men and women, and yet you say that you can live without reading the Bible, without attending the House of Prayer, without any outward means of Grace, all I can say is that I do not want to try your system of living, for I should be starved by it, even if you are not! And I would not recommend any Christian to try to see how long his spirit can

live without spiritual food. No, our Lord's order is, first, life—then food. And this implies that where there is life, there must be food. Those two things are very simple, yet many persons live as if they did not know them.

Next, if you look at the text, you will see that there is everlastingness in the life. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believes on Me has everlasting life." Yet there is need of food all the same. The everlastingness of the life does not change the fact of its need of spiritual food, for here the two things are put side by side—"He that believes on Me has everlasting life. I am that bread of life." The life of the Believer is everlasting, yet it needs food to sustain it. Does any of you say, "God has saved me, the Holy Spirit has quickened me, and I shall never perish. Therefore I need not feed upon the Word, I need not be watchful, I need not be careful"? My dear Friend, you err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the analogy of faith. It is quite certain that those whom Christ has quickened by His Spirit shall never die, but it is just as certain that they would die if they did not feed upon Christ and sustain their life by that means! The two things are not contrary, the one to the other. I charge you, Beloved, to be as vigilant in the keeping of yourselves as if you were really your own keepers! Be as earnest that you slip not with your feet as if there were no promise that God would keep the feet of His saints. Be as diligent in prayer and holy living as if everything depended upon yourself. Yet forget not to fall back upon the grand Truth of God that, after all, your safety does not depend upon yourself, but it rests in the hands of Him who has undertaken to keep you from falling and to preserve you even to the end. Your new life is everlasting, yet you must feed it!

Now think for a minute or two of the converse of that Truth. Because your new life must feed—which is clear from the text, where Christ says, "I am that bread of life"—do not, therefore, infer that your life is not everlasting. All the precepts of the Word of God which admonish us to persevere are consistent with the fact that the saints shall persevere. All the exhortations to feed on spiritual food are quite consistent with the blessed fact that you shall so feed and that, so feeding, your souls shall live forever. Has not a man two eyes? Surely it is that he may see the whole of a truth and not merely one side of it. I believe that some people fall into great mischief because they shut one eye and will never open it—and if anybody tries to point out the other side of the Truth of God, they cry, "Oh, he is not sound!" But, my dear Friend, for my part, I am always quite satisfied when I have the Scriptures at the back of my teaching. I do not care even the snap of a finger for what you may call unsound, or what anybody else may call unsound, so long as it is in accordance with the Word of God! And you may depend upon this fact, that paradoxes are not strange things in Scripture, but are rather the rule than the exception.

Very often, those things which appear to contradict each other are only two sides of the same Truth of God, and he who would get at the Truth, itself, must look at them both, and follow them both. If you are Christ's sheep, you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of His hands—yet it is to you that such a warning as this is addressed—"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." And it is to you that the injunction is given, "Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life." And while laboring for it, bless God that you already have it, seeing that you have Christ in your possession, and He says, "I am that 'bread of life.'"

Notice, Brothers and Sisters, how Jesus Christ, our Divine Lord and Master, is everything to His people. Our life, that is Christ—"He that believes on Me has everlasting life." Our food for that life—that also is Christ—"I am that bread of life." I have come even to love my own necessities, for they seem to be like pedestals whereon the image of Christ may stand! If I did not need Christ, how could He be my life? If I did not need food to sustain that life, how could He be the bread of life to me? The greater my necessities, the deeper is my sense of His fullness! The more I become dependent upon Him for everything, the more I see of His all-sufficiency. You know that if there were no great hollows and deep places on the face of the earth, there would be no room for the seas and oceans. And if there were no deep places in our soul's need, where could be the fullness, the manifested fullness, of the Lord Jesus Christ? Rejoice, then, my Brothers and Sisters, that Christ made you alive from the dead! And then raise another song of thanksgiving because He keeps you alive. Bless His name for grafting you into the vine. And then bless Him for every drop

of sap as it comes flowing out of Him—the Stem into you—the branch. Christ is ALL! Christ is ALL! Christ is ALL and to His name be praise forever and ever!

Perhaps someone asks, “How do we feed on Jesus Christ?” And there are some who say that we feed upon Christ in what is called, “the sacrament.” I do not like that word, “sacrament,” as applied to the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. Regardless, there is no mention in Scripture of such a thing as a “sacrament.” It is an old heathenish word, applying to the oath which a soldier swore to be faithful to his commander. I like neither swearing nor sacraments, and I do not like either one of them anymore than the other, for both of them are contrary to the Word of God! Out of that word, “sacrament,” a great mass of mischief has grown up—it is a bed of rottenness out of which all sorts of evil fungi have sprung. Let us keep clear of that, once and for all!

Some men tell us, however, that in what they call, “the sacrament of holy communion,” the communicants feed upon Christ. Listen. My text was spoken by Christ before the Lord’s Supper had been instituted—a long while before He broke the bread and poured out the wine as a memorial of His death, He had uttered these remarkable words—“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” But there was spiritual life in the Apostles, even then, was there not? Yet they had never eaten of what is called the “sacrament,” for it was not instituted at that time! As there was true life in them, they must have eaten of Christ—and there being no Lord’s Supper then instituted, it is clear that there is a way of eating of Christ’s flesh and drinking of His blood, altogether apart from the communion!

Now, having said so much by way of correcting a common error, I want you just as clearly to understand that the Lord’s Supper, as afterwards instituted, was manifestly intended by Christ to be a picture, setting forth by outward and visible signs, the way of feeding upon Him. It is not actually feeding upon Christ, for that took place before there was any Lord’s Supper, but it is an admirable picture of that feeding upon Christ and to all time it remains one of the choicest methods—one method only, mark you—one of the choicest methods by which spiritually-quickened souls are helped to feed upon Christ. We often feed upon Christ while hearing sermons. We feed upon Christ as we read good books. We feed upon Christ in the public prayers of the sanctuary, and in the secret communion in our own chamber. If we are as we should be, we are always feeding upon Christ! And part of the meaning of that petition, “Give us this day our daily bread,” is, “Give us this day to feed upon Christ.” Though we come to no Communion Table, much less approach an altar of sacrifice, we are spiritually and really fed upon Christ in other ways. Still, I say again that this communion service is a very choice way of feeding upon Christ. And I want to try to show you, by this picture, how it is that souls feed spiritually upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

Baptism is a picture of how souls receive spiritual life. The Lord’s Supper is a picture of how that new life is sustained. Both ordinances are only pictures, symbols, emblems—nothing more! Our immersion, by its symbolic representation of death, burial and rising again out of the water, sets forth how we live by dying to all but Christ, and rise again to live in Christ in newness of life. That is the beginning of the new life. And then comes the Lord’s Supper as a picture of how the soul feeds upon the body and blood of Christ. Baptism is the door of the house and the Lord’s Supper is a meal in the inner chamber for those who have been raised from the dead and quickened into life in Christ Jesus. Do not imagine—I do not suppose that I have a single hearer who thinks so—but do not imagine that there is any magic in Baptism, by which water makes men, women, or children, into children of God, heirs of Christ, and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven! And do not suppose that there is any magic about the bread and wine—wafers and wine and water I think some use—but do not think for a moment that there is any magic in them! They are merely pictures setting forth important Truths of God, for souls cannot eat bread and souls cannot drink “the fruit of the vine.” What are these emblems and symbols here for? Only as helps to thought, reminders of certain great facts, memorials of wondrous deeds which are brought to our recollection, so that our memories—and through them our souls—may feed upon these great Truths of God!

Now, after this unusually lengthy preface, which seemed to be necessary to the full understanding of our subject, I want to point out to you the picture, which the Lord's Supper sets before us, of our feeding upon the bread of life.

1. And, first, WE FEED NOT WITHOUT A BLESSING. In coming to the Communion Table, the first thing we do is to give thanks—to ask a blessing—the blessing of God upon the sacred feast. Now, Soul, if you are really alive unto God by Jesus Christ, you cannot feed upon Christ without the Divine blessing. As you could not, at the first, come to Christ without the Father's blessing, so you cannot even now feed upon Christ without the Holy Spirit's Divine assistance. If I were to sit down and say, "I am going to feed upon Christ," and opened at the very sweetest chapter in the whole Bible, I might read it through and yet not be feeding upon Christ at all. If I were to say, "I will get to my knees, and in my chamber I will enter into fellowship with Christ, and spiritually eat His flesh, and drink His blood," I might stay on my knees till they ached, but, apart from the blessing of God, I should get no good out of the action. So, first, when we come to this Communion Table, we ask God to bless what we are about to do, for, unless He shall draw us, we shall not be able to run after Him. Unless He shall open our mouth, we shall not be fed with the bread of Heaven. I charge you, therefore, O beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, whose hearts are longing for communion with the WellBeloved, ask your Heavenly Father, by the effectual working of His blessed Spirit, to visit you with power, and life, and blessing! When you open the Bible, let it be with this prayer upon your lip—"Quicken me, O Lord, according unto Your Word!" When you draw near to God in private devotion, let it be in complete dependence upon the Spirit of God. When you listen to sermons, when you come to the Communion Table, let it always be with a glance to Heaven for the blessing of the Lord to rest upon it all, for all is nothing unless God shall bless it to you.

II. Secondly, WE FEED ON JESUS WHO DIED FOR US. The Blessing is asked. Now what follows at the Communion? Why, next, bread is taken, and broken. That bread is the emblem of the body of Christ. But what is that wine cup? It is the emblem of the blood of Christ. So, you see, we have flesh there without blood, and blood there, as it were, drained out of the flesh. What do the two emblems together make up? Why, death. If we were to dip the bread in the wine, it would be no proper observance of the Lord's Supper—but these two emblems are separate, the one from the other—because they are intended to symbolize to us the death of Christ. Now, Brothers and Sisters, the food of your faith is to be found in the death of the Lord Jesus for you and, oh, what blessed food it is! Some of us know what it is to be bowed down in despondency almost to despair and I, for one, bear my testimony that under such circumstances, nothing revives me like a sight of my Master on the accursed tree! Unless He died for me, I, for one, am eternally lost. I can see no merits of my own which I dare present to God, for I am a mass of sin, and I should be a mass of misery, were it not for those dear wounds of His, and that bloody sweat, that Cross and passion!

Think much of this great central Truth of the Atonement, for it is the food of your soul. The bread and the wine cannot spiritually feed you—all they can do is to help you to remember the sufferings and death of Jesus and, by remembering them, to show forth His death till He comes. It is in this way that your faith is nourished, your hope is nourished, your love is nourished, your whole soul is nourished in every gracious and holy way! Read the life of Christ as recorded by the four Evangelists, but feed most on the death of Christ. Study the example of Christ, yet that is not your food—let your food be His body broken for your sake, His blood poured out in grievous agony, even unto death, as Atonement for your sin. The Lord's Supper is a very beautiful and impressive method of instruction to us because, as there we have to feed upon emblems which set forth a cruel death, so our souls must feed, by contemplation, upon the real death of Christ, and all good things within us must be sustained by faith in that death!

III. Now we will go a step further—WE FEED UPON CHRIST BY RECEIVING HIM SPIRITUALLY INTO US. We have looked at what is on the table. The next thing, in order to celebrate the Lord's Supper, is that we must eat, and we must drink. It would be no observance of

the Supper if I were to break the bread and leave it on the table, or if the wine in the cup should stand there simply to be looked at. No, the bread must be eaten, the wine must be drunk. Learn, therefore, that if your soul is to be fed, you must take Christ into you—you must not merely think of Him as belonging to somebody else, but as your own Savior, whose death was in your place, who loved you and gave Himself for you. Make bold, by faith, to cry, as Thomas did, not only, “Lord and God,” but, “My Lord, and my God.” Say, “In this blood, which He shed, I wash away my sin. This body of His, which He gave to death, He gave up for me. And in His sufferings my heart confides because these sufferings were endured for me.”

It is palpable to everyone that there is no feeding of the body by just rubbing a loaf of bread outside of it. You have to break up the loaf and get it into yourself. And there is no feeding the spirit by merely believing the doctrines of the Word and knowing the facts of the Gospel—you must accept Him who is the very essence of the doctrines. You must receive Him to whom all the facts relate. You must, indeed, by faith take Jesus Christ into yourself! O Beloved, this is the way to feed on Christ! Your new life will be vigorous enough and strong enough when this is the case with you.

IV. Further, WE FEED UPON CHRIST BY DELIBERATE THOUGHT. I remind you that in the eating and the drinking at the Lord’s Supper, there is much deliberation to be manifested. It is not a helter-skelter rush, and a hurried feeding. There are two signs, two symbols, both of which very wonderfully represent Christ’s suffering. I have often sketched for you the process by which we get our bread—it is very significant and instructive. The wheat is taken, and cast into the ground and buried. It is subject to frost and snow, and all manner of ills. It springs up. It grows. It ripens. Then comes the sickle and it is cut down. Being cut down, it is carried away upon the loaded wagon and thrown upon the threshing floor. Then it is beaten with the flail till each grain of wheat is separated from the straw. Then the wheat is taken and put into the mill, and in the mill it is ground to fine flour. Nor have its pangs and tortures ended. It is made into dough and kneaded. And then it must go into the oven to be baked. Through all sorts of painful processes it must go till it finishes up with being broken to pieces and with being ground between the teeth of the eater. In this way it becomes a most significant symbol of the sufferings of Christ. His life is, all through, a story of grief—“Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows,” and you and I are to think over that history of Christ with due deliberation and care as we ponder the symbolism of the broken bread.

Then comes the cup. Here, the grape has been crushed in the winepress till its ruddiest juice has been poured forth, its very heart’s blood being shed beneath the extreme pressure. This is another picture of Christ’s suffering—of His suffering even unto death. So the one picture has two panels and many subdivisions, as if the Lord would say to us, “If you want to feed your soul upon Christ, you must think a great deal about Him. You must not merely say, by faith, ‘Yes, Christ is my Savior.’ That is well, so far as it goes. That Truth will give you life, but you must see who He was, and what He was, and what He did, and why He did it, and what He is doing now, and what He has yet to do. And so, by taking it in detail, you will feed your soul very wonderfully.” Look at many half-starved Christians. Why you can see each rib, you may tell each bone in their spiritual anatomy. They have scarcely enough life to be able to sing in a whisper—“‘Tis a point I long to know, Oft it causes anxious thought, Do I love the Lord, or no? Am I His, or am I not?” Now, if they thought more of Christ—if they broke up the Truth about Him more than they do—if they looked more into His passion—if they studied His wondrous Person—if they relied upon His promises—if they rested in His work more in detail by contemplation, they would grow to be spiritual giants—they would be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.”

Is there not much instructive teaching, then, in this Supper, as far as we have gone? But, I want you, dear Friends, to notice that every point about the Lord’s Supper is full of gracious spiritual meaning.

1. Next, WE FEED UPON CHRIST BY RECEIVING THE COVENANT. When the Lord Jesus Christ passed the cup to His disciples, He said to them, “This cup is the new testament (that is, Covenant,) in My blood, which is shed for you.” Listen to the word, “Covenant, Covenant.” Brothers and Sisters, are you very hungry? Do your souls want the richest

food that God Himself can give you? I will tell you of a cupboard where there is locked up bread such as they never ate in the wilderness! It is better even than the manna. Take your Bible and go through its many chambers, and up and down the corridors of its wondrous teaching, and you will see, over one coffer that stands there, this word, in golden letters, "Covenant." That is the place where God specially meets with His people. "He has given meat unto them that fear Him: He will ever be mindful of His Covenant." The man who can fully understand the word, "Covenant," is a theologian! That is the key of all theology—the Covenant of Works by which we fell, and the Covenant of Grace by which we stand—Christ fulfilling the Covenant for us as our Surety and Representative, fulfilling it by the shedding of His blood, which is typified by the cup, and so leaving for us a Covenant wholly fulfilled on our side, which is Christ's side, and only to be fulfilled now by God! And what God has to fulfill is this promise of the Covenant—"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments, and do them...And you shall be My people, and I will be your God."

Ah, Brothers and Sisters! This is what we call "a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Some of our fellow Christians have very poor spiritual digestion—they cannot feed upon this sort of food. When they try to partake of it, they fancy that it is too rich for them, so they say, "It cannot be good food for souls." Yes, but there are some of us who, by reason of age and use, have had our senses exercised, and we have now grown old enough to digest the strong meat of the Gospel, and we are glad to get our teeth into it Brothers and Sisters, to do the same. If you really want to feed your soul, take care that you try to understand the Covenant, for the Lord Jesus gives you a hint that the richest wine is found there by saying, as He was passing the cup, "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood."

VI. Yet again, WE FEED UPON CHRIST AS WE SIT AROUND HIS TABLE. To my mind there is something very beautiful and suggestive in the right posture for the observance of the Lord's Supper. What is that? Coming up here and kneeling as if there was something to worship? That is a relic of old Romanism that ought to be done away with by all Protestants! What is the proper way to observe this ordinance? Why, just sitting around the table on which the emblems are spread. Look at that remarkable picture of Leonardo de Vinci—a picture which I have seen hanging up in a Romish church, as you may see it in many Romish churches. It represents Christ and all His disciples sitting at a table, and that is the right posture for us. How did they at first eat it? They reclined—they lay along, in the easiest possible posture that they could take, sustaining themselves upon the left arm, and so feeding, one with his head on his neighbor's bosom. Now, translating the Oriental into the Western fashion, the nearest approach to that is to sit as much at your ease as you can—and the spiritual meaning of that posture is this—You are saved men and women. The life of God is in you, therefore, rest. "We who have believed do enter into rest." And whenever you want to feed on Christ, do not feed on Him in a hurry. Do not fidget. Do not worry. Do not stand with your loins girt, and with your staff in your hand, as the Israelites were to eat the Passover in Egypt. You are out of Egypt—you are past the wilderness, for we who have believed in Christ have entered Canaan—and are at rest.

VII. Once more, WE FEED UPON CHRIST AS WE SIT TOGETHER TO OBSERVE THIS ORDINANCE. A very blessed way of feeding upon Christ is pictured by our sitting together around this Communion Table. One person could not celebrate the Lord's Supper, for a primary part of it is fellowship with others. "We being many are one bread, and one body." If you want to feed rightly on Christ, do not keep to yourself, and do not try to keep Christ to yourself. No, Brother, Christ Jesus is not Head over only you! He is the Head of the whole body, which is His Church. I believe that, sometimes, when you cannot pray alone, you would be helped if you would associate others with you in your supplications. There is a way of feeding upon Christ by getting others to come in and feed too. Mind that and let your communion with Jesus, while it should be alone full often, not be always alone, but lay hold upon your Savior, and take Him to your mother's house, and to the chamber of her that bore you, and there will He show you His great love. He may come to Peter or Magdalene alone, but He most of all delights, on the first day of the

week, to stand in the midst of His assembled ones, and to say not merely to any one of them, but to them all, "Peace be unto you." Live in holy love with all who love Christ so shall you be helped to feed upon Him, remembering that we are made to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus our Lord.

VIII. The last point is this—WE FEED NOT UPON CHRIST WITHOUT PRAISE. When we come to the close of the Lord's Supper, we always do what our Lord Jesus did. After supper, they sang a hymn. So the right way to close the celebration of the Supper is to sing a Psalm of praise. And, dear Friends, whenever you want to commune with Christ, take care that you praise as well as pray. Mingle thanksgiving with your supplications, for Jesus loves to hear the praises of His people. I am afraid we lose a great deal of communion with Christ because we do not give Him more praise. I heard a Brother say, the other day—and, oh, how greatly did I enjoy his conversation when he said it!—"There are some times, when I am alone with God, when I cannot pray. I do not feel as if, just then, I needed anything of Him. Then," he said, "I always sing, or in some way or other praise God. And I find communion with God in praise to be as profitable to my soul as communion with Him in prayer. And, oftentimes, before my praise is done, my prayer begins to spring up like a living well." Try that plan, Brothers and Sisters, for it may help you still more blessedly to feed upon Jesus Christ.

I wish that all my congregation knew the sweetness of feeding upon Christ. Every man feeds on something or other. You see one man getting his Sunday newspaper—how he will feed on that! Another goes to frivolous amusements, and he feeds on them. Another man feeds upon his business, and upon the thought of his many cares! But all that is poor food—it is only ashes and husks. If you did but possess true spiritual life, you would know the deep necessity there is of feeding upon Christ. But you do not possess that life, you say. No, then do you know what will become of the dead? What will become of the dead? And after death comes corruption. The old Jews, in the times of the kings, took the corrupting bodies of the dead out into the valley of Hinnom—and there they kindled great fires, that the corrupting corpses might be burnt. And something like that, only far worse, will be the lot of everyone who is not quickened of the Spirit of God and made to live with Christ! You will go to the place "where their worm dies not." That is the place of corruption—"and the fire is not quenched." that is Tophet's flame. God save you from it! But there is no salvation from it except for those who have life through believing in Jesus—"He that believes on the Son has everlasting life: and He that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on Him." God save you, dear Friends, from that awful doom, for His dear Son's sake! Amen. HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—282, 295, 942.