

The Food That Gives Life

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[0 : 0 0] this not Jesus the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know how can he now say I came down from heaven stop grumbling among yourselves Jesus answered no one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws them and I will raise them up at the last day it is written in the prophets they will all be taught by God everyone who has heard the father and learns from him comes to me no one has seen the father except the one who is from God only he has seen the father very truly I tell you the one who believes has eternal life I am the bread of life your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness yet they died but here is the bread that comes down from heaven which anyone may eat and not die I am the living bread that came down from heaven whoever eats this bread will live forever this bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves how can this man give us his flesh to eat 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 at 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 just as the living father sent me and I live because of the father so the one who feeds on me will live because of me this is the bread that came down from heaven your ancestors ate manna and died but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever he said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum this is the word of the Lord food is really important to us ros and i have a wonderful ministry which is um of cooking lots of food for lots of people and we usually often do it in a christian context and everyone is just so grateful it is just uh it's such a pleasure to do it and and everyone loves to to receive the food food gives life and if we don't eat then we die takes a little time but we die and uh so food is really important but even if you have food what you choose to eat is also very important there was a recent study in france which you may have heard about on the radio that um researchers classified a number of food foods including cakes and chicken nuggets and mass-produced bread as ultra-processed i don't think this is a very scientific study myself never mind um a study of 100 000 105 000 people suggested that that's the more of such foods such ultra-processed foods people ate the greater their risk of cancer and the results over about five years showed that um if your proportion of ultra-processed foods increase by 10 percent then your the number of cancers detected would go up by about 12 percent it's really scary data it's it's only correlation it's not showing direct causation but sadly we have plenty of proof here in the west of scotland that a lot of processed foods contributes to a very bad state of health and to a shortened lifespan in contrast a typical mediterranean diet the sort of thing that's eaten in southern europe seems to be quite healthy it includes lots of vegetables fruits beans and cereals and cereal products and moderate amounts of fish and white meat and some dairy produce and this seems to protect against

many diseases and leads to an increased life expectancy people used to say that uh because people in the mediterranean area drank quite a lot of wine that wine was also quite good for you and one of my colleagues former colleagues at glasgow university uh had a great line of research because he was studying the level of antioxidants in in red wine in particular and antioxidants are reckoned to be good for you and so he was paid a lot of money by the wine producers to go around testing their wine to see how many antioxidants it had and he took the opportunity to sample the wine in other ways as well so it was a good line of research this chapter of john is about what food you need for life but as is clear at this stage when we get to this this part of the of the chapter that jesus is talking about not so much the food we need for our ordinary physical life but the food we need for the eternal life the everlasting life that jesus came to offer us and if you've been here on the past two sunday evenings then matthew and darren have looked at the earlier parts of the chapter it begins with the miraculous feeding of the 5 000 with bread and with fish tiny bits of of food then being available to feed large numbers of people and lots left over at the end it's um it's a wonderful picture of god's great abundance to us and in doing this jesus was reenacting in some ways the feeding of the israelites in the desert with the manna that came down from heaven and of course it was mooses who led them but as jesus said it was god who provided the manna the miraculous bread from heaven but jesus is saying here that it's not physical bread that gives real life for eternity so if we look at verse 35 in the previous part of the of the of the chapter jesus says i am the bread of life whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty so in tonight's passage that alien read jesus continues to talk about the food that we need for life of course the life he's talking about is a life that's ultimately independent of the functioning of the human body it's a life that depends on living in relationship with god which continues beyond physical death and is of a perfect quality which we alone can't achieve and how do we achieve this eternal life this special life well as with physical life it needs food but the food we need jesus says we receive by believing in him by believing in jesus so we've come to verse 40 for my father's will is that everyone who looks to the son and believes in him shall have eternal life and i will raise them up at the last day so now we come to the part of the passage that we're dealing with tonight and i've entitled the first part of this as the invitation to life the invitation to life so it's god the father who is the one who sends out as it were the invitation to the meal to eat the food which gives eternal life the invitation to the the feast of good things that god offers so in verse 44 no one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws them and i will raise them up at the last day it is written in the prophets they will all be taught by god everyone who has heard the father and learned from him comes to me the holy spirit works in the hearts of men and women to draw them to jesus i'm sure many of us would

have experienced this it's like the fisherman throwing out a net into the lake of galilee or anywhere else and then drawing the net back in with a fish in it so it's uh the fish don't necessarily know what's going on they certainly aren't choosing to come but god is drawing them or the fishermen are drawing them in the illustration or it's a picture of a what we now talk about to think about as a cowboy and throwing out the lasso and and suing a horse or a or a cow and pulling it back in god calls us to believe in jesus and he's calling you to believe in jesus if you don't already do so the quotation in verse 45 is from isaiah chapter 54 and in isaiah it reads in the niv all your children will be taught by the lord and great will be their peace so jesus doesn't quote it exactly that way but it's uh obviously very um the same same sense and in isaiah this was part of isaiah's prophecy to the people of israel people of jerusalem at a time when their city lay in ruins and they were in exile and isaiah came to give them a message of new hope for the future and the promise is what was to them that a time would come when the holy spirit would speak directly into people's hearts rather than through the law and the prophets people still needed to be told the good news but when they hear it they find it hard to resist however much they may have intellectual or practical misgivings about it if you've read c.s lewis's surprised by joy he talks about it there in his life he says so you must picture me alone in my college my room in in maudlin college night after night feeling whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work the steady unrelenting approach of him who i so earnestly desired not to meet that which i greatly feared had at last come upon me and in the trinity term of 1929 i gave in and admitted that god was god and knelt and prayed perhaps that night the most dejected and reluctant convert in all england and he was echoing there the thought of an earlier writer francis thompson who wrote a poem called the hound of heaven i fled him down the nights and down the days i fled him down the arches of the years i fled him down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind and in the mist of tears i hid from him and under running laughter up visited hopes up up visited slopes i sped and shot precipitated down titanic glooms of chasmod fears from those strong feet that followed followed after so god sends out the invitation and it's an invitation which is very attractive and but we still have to accept it why should we because it is to a feast where the food that is served is food that brings life that is eternal which overcomes death which lead us into the best life we can have in this world and life in the future in god's perfect new world of the new creation so that's the invitation but what is that food that food that gives this real life and of course jesus tells us in this chapter that he himself his flesh is the food that gives this eternal everlasting life not surprisingly those who hurt him found this very difficult to understand

then as now cannibalism was taboo unthinkable in any religious context both to jews and gentiles. Jesus then went on to say something even worse that they had to drink his blood as well and it's a very shocking idea drinking or eating blood was specifically forbidden to the jews and the kosher system of preparing food is designed to prevent one eating blood. Blood has to be drained out of the carcass before the meat is butchered and cooked and eaten. The jews had in their scriptures that the life of an animal is in its blood and therefore they refrained from eating the blood but that's what Jesus said so what did he mean and the answer starts to appear in verse 51. This bread that I'm talking about is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world so it was Jesus' death that was to be the way that we were to be given this food, this free food of eternal life. He would give us his flesh so that we might live, he would give us his blood so that we might have life. But how then do we eat Jesus' flesh and blood so that we can benefit from it? The first clue has already been given earlier in the chapter in verse 35: whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. We need first to come to Jesus to let the Father draw us to him to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking into our hearts that here in Jesus is the key to all we need in life and then we need to believe in him. This belief is not so much when we first come to Jesus to close our minds to our uncertainties and doubts but it's to decide to act on the assumption that Jesus' teaching is true and start to put it into practice and find out in practice whether it is so. When I was a young student many years ago, I found that my way forward given that I was very uncertain about whether God even existed was to accept Christianity and Jesus' teaching as a sort of working hypothesis to see what would happen if I live my life as though it was true because it was a very attractive message to me and I really wanted it to be true but I wasn't at all sure and so I decided to live as Jesus taught and see what happened. And over the years I found that the hypothesis was increasingly substantiated by the evidence of life with Jesus that God is indeed real and that Jesus is the way to God and to life that is the best they keep can be at least for me so that's our part. Then that's the at least the first part of what we have to do: we have to believe in Jesus. We'll come back again in a moment to what Jesus said about his own death that's not all we have to do because there's another clue in verse 57: just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. So believing in Jesus then is entering into the sort of relationship with Jesus that Jesus himself had with his Father. Of course we can never have the closeness with Jesus that Jesus has with his Father but in as

far as we can and with the holy spirit's help we need to live in harmony with him so we enter that relationship through the cross through accepting the forgiveness freely given there but we build that relationship by starting to see the world through jesus eyes and by following the directions for life written in the bible and seeking to act as part of jesus team on earth to bring the good news and the and the new life to those around us just as the food we eat the physical food we eat some of it becomes part of us because our bodies naturally turn over and we our proteins are replaced um over a period of time so just as the food we eat becomes part of us and some of it being incorporated into our flesh so as we feed on jesus and believe in him and live with him we become identified with him so we deliberately do this we seek to self-identify with him but the holy spirit is doing the same for us much more deeply as if it was incorporating some of jesus physical molecules into our body his amino acids his uh his nucleotides his fatty acids into our into our into our into our molecules and as we have that we increasingly become identified with him then we find that we begin to experience the life in all its fullness that jesus promised to give us the life of jesus but thirdly i want to ask how do we keep together these strands of the christian life the dependence on jesus finished work on the cross and our call to obey god's instructions for life in the bible and to and to be jesus agents in the world it's as though these three things the belief in and dependence on jesus work the obedience to god's instructions and the activity of being being jesus agents in the world these are the main ingredients of a recipe if you like which all need to be there and by design i think not by accident we can see them all illustrated in a communion service but as we have tonight so it has various parts there's what is called sometimes called the liturgy of the bread and wine which we should be coming to in a moment and this is a visual a visual and sensual um portrait if you like of how how we are dependent on jesus death on the cross to give us our new eternal life so as we eat a piece of bread and drink the the the wine then we fulfill the command to do this in remembrance of what jesus did that command of course came in the description of the of the last supper given in the other three gospels it's not actually in john but there is a strong sense that it's being alluded to here in what john wrote so jesus instituted this this uh this this lord's supper the the holy communion as we also call it so that we may to keep into the forefront of our minds our dependence on jesus death for our salvation and new life it's not the actual bread and wine that matters what matters is that it's there to remind us of jesus death on our behalf giving his flesh and blood so that we may have eternal life and it's important too because we are fulfilling his command to remember him so there is a sense in which the actual act of of of the holy communion is important in itself so that's one ingredient if you like in the recipe the second item is obedience to jesus words and the teaching of the bible

[20 : 18] and that's how we develop jesus character in us and this is represented in the communion service by what's called the literature of the word the reading of the passages and the sermon and in the communion service we also look outwards so in our intercessions and in the blessing at the end we look out to the world and to our service in the world and so from this place we go out into the world to love and serve the world in the name of christ jesus mission as he stated it in luke 4 was to proclaim good news to the poor to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind and to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the lord's favor so that let that be our mission as well let's pray we thank you lord jesus that you came to give your body and your blood for the life of the world for our life so that we might have eternal life and we pray that we may have grace to depend fully on you for that life we pray that we may have grace to hear your word and believe it and to act it out and we pray that we may have grace to go out as your followers in the world to continue your mission to bring the good news and to bring freedom from oppression to those around us in jesus name amen