

John 6.35,41-51
St Stephens

Aug 8-9, 2009
Sat & Sunday

You Are What You Eat!

As we step into August this summer we are spending most of the month looking at a single chapter of the Bible, the **sixth chapter of John**. It is a famous and profound chapter of the Bible, and it is all about one of the most important issues of life, the **issue of how people change**.

Jesus is putting out his answer to the question of change in this chapter through the **analogy of eating and drinking**. In the first paragraphs of the chapter, Jesus does a remarkable miracle; **he feeds** over 5,000 people with a few loaves and fish. That got everyone's attention, and they wanted to put Jesus in charge of the government, right then and there. Put him in charge of food services, of medical care! But he wouldn't have anything to do with it, because he was focused on a far **more profound problem** than the ever-present problems of food and medical care: the **problem of the heart**.

What he knew and taught was that the **heart** is the **control room** of your life. It directs everything. If you fix everything around you but don't fix the very core of your life – don't fix the heart, then you will revert, again and again to your problem plagued life.

The heart is in charge, and the heart must be fixed. To change the **outside**, you have to change the **inside**. To change the **fruit**, you have to change the **root**.

Have you noticed that we have a preference for the **cheap fix**? I found a great web site called '**ThereIfixedit.com**' **It is full of photos of cheap fixes**, the kinds of things that folks like us do all the time. This first one is how to fix a broken telephone pole. Just tie a 4X4 post to it.



There I Fixed It
Say it with me... 'There, I fixed it!'

I love this next one. When the **air conditioning breaks down** in your car, here's the way to get it going...



Just put that extra home air conditioner in the back window of your car and strap a generator to the trunk! **'There, I fixed it!'**

Or, **speaking of cars**, here's how to get that **defroster** working...



There I Fixed It
'There, I fixed it!'

As you would expect, **duct tape** figures prominently in these fixes. Here's how to **pack up for that next move...**



'There, I fixed it!'

The **last one** is how to **fix your house** when the roof leaks and the windows are broken and anyone in the world could probably put their foot through any wall they wanted...



That new screen door ought'a do it! Say it with me, **'There, I fixed it!'**

What I love about these photos is this is **exactly how we tend to deal with the more troublesome issues** in our lives. **We love cheap fixes!**

Going back to the issue of eating and drinking, one of our favorite 'cheap fixes' is the modern philosophy that goes by a famous bumper sticker phrase *'you are what you eat'*.

The phrase goes back at least to the **19th century** where it was made famous by a German materialistic philosopher **Feuerback**, who argued that the **natural world is all there is** and what is determinative for human nature is **what we consume**. The **world**, he thought, is **our banquet table**. He wrote, **'man is what man eats'**.

We agree with him. Modern consumer culture is driven by the idea that **what you consume will change your life**. Get a new car and it will make you a new person. Or a new house or job or dress or gadget. Or maybe a new spouse. **'A new you!'** We are promised. **It's a cheap fix**. And it doesn't work. As we noted last week, the heart remains deeply unsatisfied, unhappy, unholy. It is hard to change the heart.

Jesus is going for the heart in this chapter, and he is using the **analogy of food**. I think he would agree with Feuerback's statement, **'You are what you eat.'** He might add, 'It all depends on what you eat.' Let's **drop in on his conversation**.

"Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst... I am the bread that came down from heaven"

John 6:35, 41

It was one thing for Jesus to gather disciples to himself and ask them to trust him, but when he **began to describe himself** as *'the bread of life'*, and when he said he *'came down from heaven'*, the Jews sensed that they were in entirely **new territory**. Wouldn't you think the same?

If you **had a new pastor** who called himself the *'The Rev bread of life'*, wouldn't you think that was a bit much? And if he grew up down the road in Leetsdale and went through Quaker Valley and graduated from

Robert Morris – and you heard him say he came *'down from heaven'*, wouldn't you begin to worry about him? Think that maybe he had popped a screw or two loose?

"They said, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

John 6:42

They knew **something** about him, they thought. So they thought they knew **all** about him. 'Familiarity breeds contempt', so the saying goes. But Jesus was **far more** than they knew. And it had to do with the interplay between his humanity and his divinity. During his earthly years, his **divinity hid** under his **humanity**. His **glory was hidden** under his **humility**. We see **glimpses** of glory, glimpses of his divinity, but only glimpses. Over and over again what we see most plainly is **his humanity, and his humility**.

This **hiddenness** of Jesus was **intentional**, a part of his strategy to flip our pride. Let me say it like this; **we have a hard time with his humility, because we have a hard time with our humility**. They would have preferred greater displays of his glory, because they liked glory, especially **their own glory**.

To heal our hearts, he hides his glory and chooses the way of humility. Because the **way of humility is the way of healing** for proud hearts.

So he comes in all his **humility**, all his **humanity**, and then from time to time we get a glimpse of something far more; he says, *"I am the bread of life. I came down from heaven."*

He is **either wacked** – or he is **someone like I have never met before**, and here he is right in front of me, walking on my streets, going through my neighborhood. Right away you know this is **upside down**

stuff. It is glory, real glory, walking the road of humility. And it has the power, if it is true, to **do upside down things in our proud hearts.** And our proud hearts are his single target.

Then he **says something else** just as **provocative** to them. He is commenting here on how hard it is for them to believe in him and he says:

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

John 6:44

It's really **offensive**, too, isn't it, especially to our pride (again)! I don't think there is any idea that is so near and dear to us as the idea that **we are in charge** of our lives and even in charge of our salvation. That **we can choose** to believe or not believe, we think - to repent or not to repent, to follow Christ or not. These things are within our control, a matter of our choice, of our freedoms. That we are **competent and capable** of being the masters of our destiny, the captains of our own ships, free to sail where we like – and so we believe.

But Jesus is saying that is not so, that we are **not as free** as we like to think, that we are **not so strong** as we think. He is saying that deep inside us there is an **inability** to even do the good things we want to do. That inside us and outside us are **forces** that are far more powerful than we imagine, which take us where they will! That instead of being free men and women, we are more honestly **captive** men and women.

- Just ask the smoker who is trying to kick the habit.
- Ask the bitter man about the staying power of his anger.
- Ask the shop-a-holic about what's on sale at the mall.
- Ask the rich man about how much is enough. Or the poor man!
- Ask yourself about all your good intentions, all your new year's resolutions!

We are **not so free** as we think, **not so strong** as we think. This is

why so many of the promises of the gospel pick up language about **blind** men seeing, and **poor** men feasting, about **lepers** being cleansed and **captives** being set free. These people are **you and me**, and the people we live with and work with!

The **greatest barrier** to our salvation is this insufferable, insatiable **pride** in us that needs no help, that thinks we are in charge, that would give God directions on what to do. . And it is **towards this pride that Jesus speaks** with provocative, penetrating, offensive, explosive words.

The first step of salvation is **the breaking of our pride**. Very simply, that we would humble ourselves under the mighty, merciful hand of God. Before this begins to happen, not much is possible. Because it is only the humble man or woman who will **let God be God**. The rest of us are busy telling him what he should do! It is the humble man or woman who is **realistic about who they are** – and are not. It is **in that weakness** that the strength of Christ begins to find room, wonderful room, to move.

At the center of the human problem – your problem and mine – is human pride. Put up that **slide of the broken home** again, the one with the new screen door:



Are we not a great deal more **like this photo** than we would like to

admit? Aren't our fix-it's pretty **pathetic**, and pretty **funny**? Here is the **question** that I want to leave you with today. If this is something of an honest portrait of you, will you **choose the cheap fix** – or something far deeper, far better?

Wouldn't it be **a great deal better** to just be honest about our brokenness, to admit our powerlessness, and ask him to come in and rebuild this whole thing?

When we do, we find that he leads us to a very **special table**, to share a very special meal. The table is the place where all **pride comes to an end**, the **meal** that heals every **heart**, the **food** unlike any other food in the world, the food of **his life giving death**.

How did he say it? *"The bread I give for the life of the world is my flesh."*

We are indeed what we eat!