

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2) Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“You are what you eat.” I’m sure you’ve all heard that bit of warning. Perhaps your mother told you that so that you would eat better. If we eat unhealthy, fatty foods, we will likely be unhealthy and fatty. So I guess the advice is fairly sound.

But have you ever thought of it this way? Everything we eat is dead. Whether it’s meat, grain, vegetables or fruit, we are eating what used to be alive but is no longer. We are eating what is dead. We are what we eat. We are all dying.

Of course, this is even more true in the spiritual sense. We are what we eat. The world we live in is dead spiritually. The more we eat up the greediness, materialism, self-centeredness and the focus on now instead of eternity, the more we are eating what is dead. And we are what we eat. We are killing ourselves spiritually.

Satan and the demons are of course dead spiritually as well. They forfeited life when they rebelled against God and wanted to be equal to him. We often eat up what Satan is peddling. We rebel against God and want to live our way instead of his way. We think we know better than God. We don’t consider his will, but instead do what we will. We follow lock step in line with the original rebel. And we are what we eat. We are eating death. And death is what comes.

Our own sinful nature in us is dead. The more we listen to the nagging of our old sinful nature and follow its lead, the more we are consuming what is dead. We are what we eat. Death comes when living according to the dead sinful nature.

Death is truly a horrible thing. Many if not most of you have experienced the death of a loved one. In my two years here at Good Shepherd I have buried four people. In my years of service as a missionary in Russia, I buried even more. There is a big difference between American funerals and Russian funerals. In America, death is white washed and prettied up. The body is preserved and made up. Visitation is at the funeral home at preset hours. The caskets are beautiful and plush, costing thousands of dollars. At the grave site the casket is brought closed and left that way. And usually people leave the site with the casket still next to the hole in the ground which is neatly covered with green astro turf so that even the dirt and mud are not visible.

In Russia, death smacks you in the face at a funeral. The deceased does not go to a funeral home. The body is washed and cleaned up by relatives. A plywood casket is purchased... it has a white satin inner lining and the outside covered in red fabric. The body is placed in the small living room where it stays for a couple days. A canister underneath the casket collects fluids. Family and friends come whenever to view the body and pay their respects. When the time for burial draws near, final words are said... in the living room. This is when I had a brief funeral sermon and words of comfort for the survivors. The casket, still open, is taken to the street below where a larger crowd can gather. More words are said. The body is loaded in the back of a bus or truck and taken to the cemetery. At the cemetery, final good byes are said... casket still open. Then the casket cover is brought and put in place. Men with hammer loudly pound nails in place to seal the coffin. That nailed lid is clearly not to be opened again. With the mourners still standing nearby, the body is lowered into the grave by hand. Everyone files past the grave, throwing in three handfuls of dirt

upon the coffin. Then the grave diggers quickly shovel in the dirt, making a mound on top. Only then do the mourners depart.

As much as we might try, death is not pretty. It's a horrible reality. It is the separation of two things God didn't ever want separated... body and soul. And how horrible as the reality is of death, the reality of spiritual death is much more horrible. The person who dies in their disobedience and rebellion against God spends eternity separated from God... something God never wanted, but is the result of living in opposition to God. What is it like being completely isolated from the only source of good and blessing? It's horrible! The Bible describes it as being cast out. Weeping and gnashing of teeth. Outer darkness. A lake of fire. Our imaginations cannot grasp what it would be like to not experience any kind of blessing or goodness whatsoever... but that's what eternal death is.

You are what you eat. The person who eats of death, dies. Physical death. Spiritual death. Death is horrible. With that sad and depressing introduction, let's now hear some good news about eating of life.

John 6:51-58 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he 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, "I tell you the truth, 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 him 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 him. 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 forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."

Remember again the context. The people talking to Jesus had tried to make him king by force. Jesus had miraculously fed 5,000 people, and they loved it. They wanted to have a free lunch every day. They wanted more bread. Jesus makes it clear to them, though, that they were barking up the wrong tree. Eating regular bread may sustain life for a time. But in this sinful world, everyone eventually dies. Everyone. We are what we eat. Clearly the bread of this world is not sufficient. It cannot provide the life we need. So Jesus tries to help them, and us, understand that a focus on the things of this world, even something as basic as the bread of this world, is wrong. It doesn't give us what we truly need for eternal life.

And so Jesus points them to a better bread. Not Wonder Bread, or a whole grain wheat, but to himself. He says, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven."

There are three things Jesus is saying in that phrase. 1) He is bread. Just as bread give and sustains life. Jesus gives and sustains life. But the life he gives is forever. 2) Jesus, unlike all other food which is dead, is *living* bread. Jesus is living and when we consume what is living... well, we are what we eat. If we eat life we live. Jesus is living bread and so eating of him, we have life. 3) He is living bread which comes down from heaven. There is death, both physical and spiritual, because we've challenged the one who dwell in heaven... the eternal, living God. We have disobeyed, revolted and declared our independence. There is war between earth and heaven... specifically between sinful, earth-bound man and the holy God, our Father in heaven. If there will be a solution, it must come from heaven. We cannot attain what God requires. We cannot climb our way to him in heaven. But he can send a rescue mission to us here on earth. And that's exactly

what Jesus describes when he says he is the living bread that comes down from heaven. He is God's solution to our death!

Jesus wants to make sure everyone understands what he's saying, so he spells it out clearly: **"This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."** Jesus speaks clearly of his sacrifice for world. Every sin committed is a debt to God. Do we ever stop and think about that? Every sin is a new debt that is owed to God. Failure to honor God first in our lives: we've incurred a debt. A curse word slips out of our mouth... another debt. We get lax in studying God's Word... debt. We dishonor our parents... debt. We hurt or harm our body... debt. We lust... debt. We slack when we're on the job... debt to God. We gossip or hurt someone's reputation... debt. We lack contentment and want more and more... debt. And what is owed for each one of those debts to God? Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin"... that is, the debt that is owed for each one of our sins... "is death." If you managed to be perfect your whole life, then sinned once, you've got a debt to pay. You owe God your life. Death is the payment needed so justice can reign.

Now here's the good news from Jesus: The bread he's talking about that he wants us to eat is his flesh. And his flesh is what he gave on the cross "for the life of the world." So for each debt of sin which earns death, Jesus steps in and says, "I'll pay." Time and again, he says "I'll pay." For every last debt of sin, each one deserving of death, Jesus says, "I'll pay." And he did. He paid dearly on the cross where is Father separated himself from his Son. So the Jesus cried out in anguish, "My God, My God. Why have you forsaken me?" Remember we said hell was separation from God? Separation from God was what Jesus experienced on the cross. He suffered hell. Jesus died there. He died physically. He died spiritually. Because that was the payment for sin.

In love the Father gave his one and only Son *for you*. In love the Son gave his very life *for you*. Jesus is the living bread from heaven.

This sacrifice of Jesus becomes yours when you eat his flesh and drink his blood. When you hear that, if you're like me Communion pops into your mind, doesn't it. But Jesus isn't talking about communion here. He hadn't yet instituted it. So what does he mean?

First, imagine how shocking these words were for the original listeners. Eat my flesh. Drink my blood. Especially that drinking of Jesus' blood would have been appalling to Jews. For the Jews the blood of an animal was considered its very life. The Jews were forbidden from ever drinking the blood, or eating meat with blood still in it. And here is the reason found in **Leviticus 17:11 For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.**" The blood served a purpose: it was always sacrificed on the altar to make atonement for their sins. The animals life, symbolized in its blood, for the sinner's life. An imperfect sacrifice pointing forward to a perfect sacrifice that would come when the promised Messiah shed his own blood, making atonement for the life of all people.

Jesus drives this point home when he invites all to eat his flesh and drink his blood. You are what you eat. Jesus wants us to consuming him completely. Which means to trust in him wholly. When we accept Jesus as true God and true man, the promised Messiah and as the Savior who removes our sin-debt in full, we are eating his flesh and drinking his blood. By faith we appropriate Jesus into our hearts and lives. He lives in us and we live in him.

We are what we eat. Whatever is of Jesus is then of us. Jesus is holy and perfect and blameless. Consume him. Trust him fully. God considers you holy and perfect and blameless. Jesus is the Son of God. Consume him. God considers you to be his sons and daughters. Jesus is

the heir of the kingdom of God. Consume him! You are the heir of the kingdom of God. Jesus received all life from the Father. Consume him! You receive all life from the Father. Jesus was given all authority. Consume him and the Father gives you authority in eternity as well!

What Jesus says here is so easy to understand and yet so deep we will never full grasp it all. Eat the living bread that comes down from heaven and you have eternal life.

Death is a horrible thing. Whether it takes place in Russia or America, death reminds us that things just aren't right. Sin has messed things up on the most fundamental level. But Jesus came to set things straight once again. Eat of the living bread from heaven and you will have life. And even when you or a loved one dies, we have Jesus assurance that it's not the end. **"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."** In Jesus, death doesn't have the final word. Jesus does when he calls the believer out of the grave on Judgment day. Body and soul we will live forever. Why? Because we have eaten of the living bread from heaven. And we are what we eat! Amen.