

407 The blood is the life

In Saint John's Gospel Chapter 6 we read first of "the feeding of the five thousand" (vv.1-15); then of Jesus "walking on the sea" (vv. 16-21); and then of Jesus' discussion in Capernaum with the people who were following Him everywhere but who had little understanding as yet of His Person and His mission.

Arising from the startling miracle of the loaves and fishes in which many of them had just participated (v.24), Jesus uses the theme of bread, (that is, "meat" sometimes in the KJV), to explain to the crowds Who He is and what He is about. Thus for example, "Labour ... for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give to you" (vv.27). God's work is that they "believe on him whom he hath sent" (v.29). The Father is giving them "the true bread from heaven" (v.32b) which is of course Jesus Himself, who has come from heaven and gives "life unto the world" as "the bread of life"; whoever comes to Him shall never hunger, and whoever believes on Him shall never thirst (vv. 33,35,48,50,51).

Jesus emphasises His Father's primary role in His earthly ministry. God the Father has "sealed" Jesus as His own (v. 27end), and has already given people to Jesus! (v.37) – all of whom shall come to Jesus, drawn by the Father (vv. 44, 65), with none being cast out, none lost, and all to be raised up at the last day; and throughout, Jesus is doing His Father's will rather than His own (vv.37-40).

In verses 48-57 Jesus' discussion with His listeners takes a new turn, as He speaks very directly about the necessity, for those who do believe in Him, of "eating His flesh and drinking His blood". Now as Christians such words are familiar to us: we know what Jesus is meaning, and in response to His command, together we partake spiritually of the bread and the wine as representing Jesus' flesh and blood (eg., Luke 22.19-20 and parallels / I Corinthians 11.23-30).

But to Jesus' Jewish hearers, His words about the need to eat His flesh and – worst of all – to drink His blood, were outrageous! For the Law of Moses is explicit time and again that no blood was ever to be consumed because "the blood is the life" (eg., Genesis 9.4 / Leviticus 17.10-14; 19.26a / Deuteronomy 12.16, 23-25 / see your Concordance for further references regarding blood's central place in God's dealings with us, under both the Old and New Covenants).

Yet here was this remarkable Teacher, doing such remarkable deeds in their midst and speaking such remarkable truths, telling them to break the Law by “drinking His blood”! No wonder that the Jews “strove among themselves” over Jesus’ words (v.52), and many of His disciples “murmured” that this was “a hard saying” (vv.60-61). Despite Jesus’ further explanation (vv.62-65), “many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (v.66). The twelve He had chosen stayed firm (John 6.67-69), but even here there was a twist (vv.70-71).

The need for believers in Jesus to “drink His blood” was intended to shock. Until Jesus’ arrival on the scene, no blood was to be consumed, for “the blood is the life”, literally. But the blood is also the life “typically”: that is, each blood-shedding sacrifice under the Old Covenant of Law pointed forward to the blood of Jesus Himself. Then Jesus came as the antitypical “Lamb of God”, shedding His own blood for “the sins of the world” (John 1.29).

So The Life Himself had come, here, in our midst! (eg., John 14.6). Yes, “the blood is the life” (from Deuteronomy 12.23) - and Jesus’ Blood is The Life. So of course all who believe in Him MUST now “drink His blood”, for that is how His very life is received into our lives. Jesus’ life is everlasting: by “drinking His blood” we now have Jesus’ life, so our lives are now everlasting also. Jesus’ life has been raised up: by “drinking His blood” we now have Jesus’ life, so our lives will be raised up also.

What a wealth of beautiful, yet so simple, spiritual truth we are given here, from the Father, through the Lord Jesus as the Son of man, by the Holy Spirit! Does not Jesus - Who He is and all that He has done, does and will do - demonstrate for our comfort and assurance that Covid-19 and all the other ills of this age are temporary and passing? Truly, because of Christ, “weeping may endure for a night, but joy [cometh] in the morning” (Psalm 30.5b).

Meanwhile on we go together in good heart, conscious of “the hope laid up for us in heaven” (Colossians 1.5a), and serving “the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus”. Yes indeed, “To him [be] glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen!” (from I Peter 5.10-11).