

April 24th, 2016

## UNLESS YOU EAT MY FLESH & DRINK MY BLOOD YOU HAVE NO LIFE

John 6:47-59

No one is more predestinarian than Jesus, and no one is more evangelical than Jesus. Meaning, no one believed more in the free electing love of the Father, no one believed more in the necessary drawing of the Father, and no one believed more in the doctrine of predestination according the good pleasure of the Father than Jesus Christ the Son. And no one believed more in the need to evangelize than Jesus. v.46 which we didn't look at last time acts as a bridge between last week's text and this weeks, so let's look at it now.

In v.44-45, the Son of God tells us that "No one can come to me unless the Father, who sent me draws him." Then in v.45, Jesus says that the Father *draws us* by *teaching us*: "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me" Then Jesus adds v.46 which seems to be parenthetical "...not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father." What does Jesus mean here? Let's put it altogether. **No one can come to Christ unless they are taught by the Father, but no one except Christ has seen the Father.** This *seeing* here means *knowing*. The Father is not physical, so what Jesus means by "nobody has *seen* the Father" is 'nobody *knows* the Father' except one, Christ. What are the implications of this? This means that v.45 *cannot be taken* to mean that the Father draws us to Himself *apart* from the Son. The Son of God *alone* possesses the only saving knowledge of the Father. **John 1:18** "No one has ever *seen* God; [but] **the only God** [μονογενής monogenēs], who is at the Father's side, he has made him *known*." So v.46 comes to mean this 'no one *can know* the Father except through the Son, because He alone *knows* the Father.'

Predestination and preaching the gospel **necessarily** go together. All these verses hang together. No one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him

(v.44),<sup>1</sup> and this drawing takes place by the Father's teaching (v.45). And this teaching is mediated through Christ in the gospel (v.46). It is through gospel preaching that predestination takes place. Evangelism is the *means* that Father has chosen to draw us to the Son. Which makes sense of today's passage. Jesus just told his listeners that they are helpless to believe in Him unless the Father draws them. And then what does he do? He starts preaching the gospel to them and tells them to believe.

Those who have believed in the doctrines of grace has historically been the greatest preachers of the gospel. The English born George Whitefield, the greatest evangelist since the Apostle Paul<sup>2</sup>, sailed the oceans back and forth to America seven times when such travel was very dangerous. He preached over 18,000 sermons to an estimated 10 million people.<sup>3</sup> What spurred his gospel preaching on? The doctrines of grace. He believed the Word that the LORD told the apostle Paul in **Acts 18:9-10** "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent [preach the gospel!] for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city *who are my people* [predestination]." The greatest gospel preachers are those who have believed in the doctrines of grace the most because they know that in preaching Christ, is the means the Father uses to draw men and women to Himself.

Thus as Jesus begins to preach the gospel to us today, the backdrop is predestination. Our passage this morning is going to ask and answer two questions:

- ☆ Our Souls Must Feast If We Are To Live
- ☆ Jesus Christ is the Feast Our Souls Must Have

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<sup>1</sup> Remember when people don't come to Christ, they are **guilty** because when they hear the gospel, all they hear is foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14; Romans 8:7-8).

<sup>2</sup> Who consequently also believed in the Doctrines of Grace

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-38/george-whitefield-did-you-know.html>

## *Doctrine*

Only those who discover Jesus Christ as the feast of their souls will  
gain eternal life

### I. Our Souls Must Feast If We Are To Live

#### **The Jews were looking for physical food**

Our passage begins in the middle of a conversation. Thousands of Jews were miraculously fed by Jesus the day before. When they couldn't find him the next morning they came looking for Him *because* they were hungry. Jesus says in v.26 "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." In other words, 'You're only coming to Me, because you think I'll fill your stomachs. Don't you believe that I can satisfy your souls?' They are offended this, and respond in v.30-31 "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" In effect they were saying, 'Moses gave our fathers bread from heaven *every day*. All you have given us was food for one day. If you are who you say you are give us food again.' So that is the context, they are hungry, and in v.41 these Jews began to grumble, because Jesus wasn't giving them any more bread, instead He began speaking about the true bread from heaven.

#### **Jesus was offering spiritual food**

v.47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

Billions of innumerable millennia hang on those words "Truly, truly..." Jesus says "Truly, truly" here to wake up his crowd. They are focused on temporary

life, when Jesus is offering eternal life. Those who believe *have* eternal life. Presently. Jesus is dealing with the most important subject conceivable. What will happen to you when you die? Will you face the terrible judgment of the wrath of God? Or will you enter into that state of eternal happiness, when death itself has died, and God is your everlasting portion? Jesus says you must believe in order to gain this life. What must we believe?

v.48 I am the bread of life.

There are two types of bread in this world. Physical bread for our bodies, and invisible bread for our souls. Even the unbelieving world knows this. Nobody on planet earth is truly happy if they *only* get food for their bodies. Physical food can't create happiness. Only bread for the soul can do that. Jesus is claiming that He *is* that bread. He is the only invisible, all-nourishing, all-satisfying, all-happiness producing, all-life giving bread. That's what He's telling us to believe in v.47. *'If you want real life, eternal life, then come to Me, and receive Me as the bread for your souls.'* He then compares this physical bread to this soul bread.

v.49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

When the children of Israel were freed from Egyptian captivity in the book of Exodus, they fled into the desert where there was no water and where there was no food. Three million Jewish men, women, and children with nothing to eat or drink. How did they survive? God sustained them by raining manna, which was a type of bread, from heaven every morning. That bread was supposed to be a sign of Christ Himself coming down from heaven to feed His people. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10:1-5**

“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers...(v.3) all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock

was Christ. [5] Nevertheless, with most of them **God was not pleased, for** they were overthrown in the wilderness.”

Why wasn't God pleased with them? Because they didn't see Christ in the bread and in the drink. They were only devoted to their bellies. Eating the manna *in that manner* did not free them from death.<sup>4</sup> It's true that Moses, and Joshua, and other elect Jews also died physically, like all of us will. But they were freed from eternal death because they looked past the physical bread to the Christ it represented.

So when Jesus say here in v.49 “*your fathers ate..and died,*” He is saying ‘you are just like your *unbelieving* fathers. They ate and *died spiritual deaths*<sup>5</sup> because they only cared about the things of this world, they didn't look to Me.’

### Why all this repetition?

[v.50] This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. [v.51] I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever... [v.58] This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

Why all this repetition? Jesus says the same things over and over again in this sermon. Why? When we first started having Josiah babysit the boys, we repeated one thing over and over again to him above all other things. “Don't answer the door.” We were concerned about the children's lives. For Josiah, this was the most necessary thing for him to remember while he babysat. Jesus repeats himself here for our benefit. **There is nothing more necessary for us to know than than Jesus Christ is the living bread came down from heaven.** And this is the very thing that we, as the church even, often forget.

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XVII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 260

<sup>5</sup> Consider how Paul proves this point out in 1 Corinthians 10:6-11

Notice that in v.59, Jesus is speaking in the context of the church “Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.” The church needs to hear this over and over again because we forget it so easily. We are just like Peter who, after Jesus had *already* appeared in His glorious resurrected body, became distracted by worldly pursuits. **John 21:3** “Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” Now there is nothing wrong with fishing in itself, and of course we need to be in the world, but not *of* the world. Why do we work? Why do we stay at home as homemakers? Is it to advance the name of Christ in the world? Do we do treat those things as *means* to eat more of the bread that Jesus offers, or do are we treating them as the real bread of life like these Jews? Jesus repeats Himself here because we are so dull of hearing. He wants to tear away from our hearts all other breads so that we will find satisfaction in Him alone.<sup>6</sup>

### How do the Jews respond?

v.52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

The Jews are responding here to the end of v.51 which says “And the bread that I will give for the life of the world *is my flesh*.” We’ll come back to this at the end. But it is this statement “...the bread...is my flesh” that gets these Jews disputing again just like v.41. The key word is “how.” ‘*How* can *this man* (notice their disdain for Him) give us his flesh to eat?’ On the surface this sounds like cannibalism. And the answer that Jesus gives *seems* to make it even more problematic.

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<sup>6</sup> Real life, real satisfaction, real joy, is only found in spiritual life. It is your spirit that gives life to your body. It is not your body that gives life to your soul. That is why Jesus said **Matthew 10:28** “...do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Jesus is saying that if we feast off of the bread He offers, our bodies may die, but our souls will live forever. This is the main difference between physical bread and spiritual bread.

## Feasting off Christ's flesh and drinking His blood *is* believing

v.53-54 So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

What is Jesus saying here? Well He's certainly not referring to cannibalism. The law of God, which Jesus treasured, prohibited any thing of the sort. And in fact strictly forbade the drinking of blood (cf. **Leviticus 19:26**). Nor is Jesus referring to the Lord's table which wasn't even instituted yet. If Jesus were talking about the Lord's table here, then He would be saying that ‘Unless you participate in the Lord's table, you have no life in you.’ Or conversely, ‘All who do participate in the Lord's table are guaranteed to gain eternal life.’ But we know that there have been many who have participated in the Lord's table who will not see eternal life. (cf. **1 Cor. 11:27-31**)<sup>7</sup>

The answer to what Jesus is saying is found if we compare v.54 to v.40. Please look at these two verses, because they interpret each other.

**v. 54** *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood* has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

**v. 40** *Everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him* should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Everything is the same in these two verses except for the first parts. v.54 says that *if we feed on Christ's flesh and drink His blood* we have eternal life and will be

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<sup>7</sup> “And yet, at the same time, I acknowledge that there is nothing said here that is not figuratively represented, and actually bestowed on believers, in the Lord's Supper; and Christ even intended that the holy Supper should be, as it were, a seal and confirmation of this sermon.” John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XVII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 266 Likewise “In short, John 6 does not directly speak of the eucharist; it does expose the true meaning of the Lord's supper as clearly as any passage in Scripture.” D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 298

raised up on the last day; while v.40 says *if we look on the Son and believe* we have eternal life and will be raised up on the last day. **Jesus is saying that feeding on his flesh and drinking his blood is the same thing as looking on the Son and believing on Him.**<sup>8</sup> As Augustine has said “Believe and you have eaten.”<sup>9</sup>

When I see things like this in Scripture, I can’t help but ask: ‘then why use this language if all?’ If all Jesus meant by eat my flesh and drink my blood was believe on me, then why didn’t Jesus just say ‘believe on me?’ Doesn’t speaking like this make it more unclear?

Actually it makes more clear, because it explains what belief looks like! Belief in Christ is coming to Christ like you come to food and drink. “Jesus if I don’t have you I die.” And that is how Jesus is inviting people to receive Him. ‘Receive me as food and drink to your soul. Get all your spiritual nourishment from Me. Get all your spiritual strength from Me. Get all your spiritual satisfaction from me.’ **Psalm 34:8** “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” **v.55** “For my flesh is **true** food, and my blood is **true** drink.” The food and drink that we consume are not true food and true drink. Those things only sustain our physical bodies. Jesus Christ is **true** food and **true** drink, and if your soul doesn’t receive Him like that, you are dead even as you live.

Jesus threatens death to those who will not receive Him like this. v. 53 says that unless we eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood **we have no life**. Our souls must feast on Him if we are to live.

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<sup>8</sup> Calvin disagrees with this interpretation. He says “The inference which some draw from this passage -- that *to believe in Christ* is the same thing as *to eat Christ, or his flesh* -- is not well founded. For these two things differ from each other as former and latter; and in like manner, to *come to Christ* and to *drink him*, for *coming to him* is first in order. I acknowledge that Christ is not eaten but by faith; but the reason is, because we receive him by faith, that he may dwell in us, and that we may be made partakers of him, and thus may be one with him. To *eat him*, therefore, is an effect or work of faith.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XVII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 260.

While I sympathize with Calvin’s view, he doesn’t offer a Scriptural rebuttal like the one provided here (which is what both John Piper and D.A. Carson put forward in their respective writings). Additionally, as v.53-54 points out, this eating is necessary to have eternal life. It seems to me that Jesus is using this word necessary as a “necessary cause” as opposed to “necessary to the nature of faith.” In other words the eating proceeds the life as a cause, rather than eating is the necessary nature of faith.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/it-is-the-spirit-that-gives-life> accessed April 23rd, 2016



## II. Jesus Christ is the Feast Our Souls Must Have

If we now return to the end of v.51 we can see what it is Jesus is asking us to feast upon. The end of v.51 says “And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” There are three things we need to take notice of in this verse. 1) There is a feast that Jesus *will give* 2) This feast will be *for the life of the world* 3) This feast is *His flesh*.

### **There is a feast that Jesus *will give***

At the time when Jesus spoke these words in v.51, He had *not yet* accomplished His work. The verse says “And the bread that *I will give...*” This sermon that Jesus is giving was worthless unless He finished the work. He could not be a feast (or bread) for anybody, unless he ultimately went to the cross. If we are to find bread that will give us eternal life, it has to be bloody. It has to be nailed to a Roman cross. And this is incredible for Jesus to speak these words. As He is offering everlasting bounty to us, and to these rebellious Jews, He knows it will cost Him hell. Let’s not fool ourselves with childhood notions of the cross. Jesus absorbed the infinite and holy and terrible wrath of God in His soul, which is the essence of hell, when He went to the cross. That was the price for bread for us. And yet I don’t at all imagine Jesus giving this sermon begrudgingly as if He is looking at the cost of this eternal bread, and His soul is half-heartedly offering itself to us. No! At every point, He’s repeating Himself, He’s clarifying, He’s answering objections, He’s taking away all the road blocks, and pleading with people to believe. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” **Matthew 23:37** In some mysterious way, it grieved Jesus Christ that scores of men and women would not to eat the bread that would cost Him His life. How often do any of you when you have company over think about the cost of the meal, and perhaps scale back on company so you don’t bankrupt your account. And yet Jesus in this chapter is inviting, and

pleading with sinners to eat the bread that would cost Him the absolute torture of His soul.

### **This feast will be *for the life of the world***

Some have taken v.51 to mean that Jesus died for every single man and woman that has ever lived. And on the surface, this sounds like a very generous death on Jesus' part. But this interpretation comes to mean that Jesus only died for an *opportunity* for people to be saved, His death didn't actually effectually save anybody. The whole world could have been lost under this interpretation, because the whole world could have missed their opportunity.<sup>10</sup> Look at v. 51 again, Jesus said "And the bread that I will give **for the life** of the world is my flesh." Jesus actually purchased **life** when He went to the cross. Actual human souls. He didn't go to the cross so that He could purchase an opportunity for people to be saved. He went to the cross to purchase **life**.

Dear congregation, if Jesus Christ didn't actually purchase my soul on the cross, if He only purchased an *opportunity* for me to come to Him, I'm lost, I'm undone, I'm ruined. And so are you. He gave up His flesh for the actual purchase of all those whom the Father gives to Him. That's the only way the atonement of Christ can be called "good news."

So when Jesus uses the word *world* in v.51, He means all the redeemed of God *from* every tribe and tongue and nation. (cf. Revelation 5:9) Jesus is not just a Jewish Savior. He is a Savior for all of His specific people scattered abroad in every nation. Which is why when Jesus offers up His prayer in John 17:9 He says "I am praying for them. *I am not praying for the world* **but** for those whom you have given me, for they are yours."

### **This feast is *His flesh***

I said earlier that when Jesus said 'eat my flesh and drink my blood' He meant 'believe on Me.' That is still all true. But my question here is, how is Jesus'

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<sup>10</sup> In just a few verses, Jesus uncovers the fact that Judas would betray Him and he calls him a devil (v. 70). Are we to suppose that Jesus purchased life for Judas—a devil?

flesh our bread? v.51 says “And *the bread* that I will give for the life of the world *is my flesh.*” Jesus accomplished *something* in His flesh and blood, that is, His human nature that ushers in eternal life.

It was Jesus’ flesh and blood that merited all righteousness and all forgiveness. The imagery of the OT sacrificial lamb is simply astounding. The Jews were required to give a lamb without spot or blemish. It had to be perfect. I imagine if I were living in OT times, my youngest son asking me ‘Dad why does the lamb need to be put to death?’ Well because son, we need what it has. Or rather we need Who it points to. That lamb was without spot or blemish. Jesus is without spot or blemish. He has a perfect righteousness earned by His obedience in the flesh to His Father. In His Divine nature, the Son of God has eternal and infinite righteousness. But as our substitute, Jesus had to earn our righteousness. In His flesh. He grew up as a tender lamb, and kept Himself from spot and blemish. I can’t even imagine that. I can’t keep myself from spot or blemish for a minute, and Jesus Christ in the flesh did this for 33 years. Every thought held captive by the word of God, every affection white hot for the Person of God, every action in obedience to the will of God.

And then imagine that lamb without spot or blemish being brought to the slaughter. It’s once pure white wool now ruined with crimson red blood. The righteous lamb is ends it’s life in brutal violence. Again I imagine my son with a shaky voice asking ‘Dad but that lamb didn’t do anything wrong.’ Yes son, but we did. That is the death that we deserve. He is bleeding so that we don’t have to. Blood is required for our forgiveness. The smallest sin requires a reckoning from God. “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22) But if we had to shed our blood for our own forgiveness we could never be with God, we could never have eternal life. Jesus shed His blood for our sins, so that we could live.

That is how Jesus’ flesh becomes the feast for our souls. We feast on His perfect righteousness because we have none. And we feast off the forgiveness of sins purchased by His blood. In v.56 Jesus says “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” When we feed on Jesus in this

way, we come into union with Him. He abides in us, and we in Him. We become joined as the body is joined to it's head or a husband is joined to His wife. We feast of His righteousness, and drink in His forgiveness. There is no feast better than this.

## *Application*

*Our Doctrine:* Only those who discover Jesus Christ as the feast of their souls will gain eternal life

A message like this might be discouraging for a true Christian with an introspective spirit. One might say "I don't treat Jesus as a the feast for my soul. There are sometimes whole days where I don't think of Him at all. Perhaps I'm not saved." Certainly it should grieve your spirit if you go a whole day without feasting on Jesus. It should grieve all of us if we go an hour without feasting on Christ. So what do we do? Are we lost because Jesus isn't the constant feast of our souls? Ask yourself: If you could choose to have your heart constantly in communion with Jesus Christ, where all sin is finally gone, and there is only perfect blessedness between you and Him, and God were to grant that prayer, would you pray it? If yes than consider, it is not your true heart that is slothful and forgetful about Jesus Christ, but your old sinful nature. The apostle Paul struggled with the same type of grieving spirit, and loathed when He did not feast on Christ. But He said in **Romans 7:17** "So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."

He wasn't dismissing his sin or saying it didn't matter. In fact he crescendos the chapter by saying "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."

**Romans 7:24-25**

*Our Duty:* Preach the gospel in a way that displays the all-satisfying bread of Jesus Christ

Preach the gospel in the way Jesus preaches it in this chapter. Believe that no one can come to the Father unless the Father draws him, *and* believe that the way that the Father draws people to His Son is by showing them that Jesus is all-satisfying bread. And let those two things inform how you share the gospel. Don't stop preaching the all-encompassing sovereignty of God, and don't stop preaching the all-satisfying feast of Jesus Christ.

Gospel preaching is mainly about displaying Christ. Consider how the apostle Paul talked about his own conversion. **1 Timothy 1:15-16** "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, **Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience** as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." Did you catch that? Paul said he received mercy, that Jesus Christ might be on display! You know the amazing thing about John 6 is that Jesus already knew that most everybody in the crowd would reject him. Jesus says in **John 6:64** "But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe...) Yet He preached the gospel anyway. Why? Because He was displaying His and His Father's glory. (**1 Timothy 1:16**) We don't preach the gospel *mainly* so that people would be saved. Jesus preached the gospel here to a bunch of people who would not believe. We preach the gospel *mainly* to put Jesus on display. Yes we hope that people would believe, we pray and plead with God that people would believe and be saved. But we mainly preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified because He is worthy to be preached! He is glorious and deserves to be put on display as the all-satisfying, treasure that He is, regardless if people believe or no.

*Our Delight:* It is Christ's good pleasure to satisfy His people

John 6 is amazing chapter because Jesus is not only displaying Himself as the all-satisfying bread, but He is also displays His good pleasure in satisfying us. At every point He's offering Himself as the true food and true drink of our souls. And He's made it clear that He will have to shed His own blood in order to give us this food and drink. Why? Because He desires for us to be infinitely happy. That's what eternal life is. Infinite happiness in Jesus Christ.

And this is how Jesus reflects the kind heart of Father. **Luke 12:32** "Fear not, little flock, for it is your **Father's good pleasure** to give you the kingdom." Jesus can only do what He sees the Father doing. So He see's the Father's good pleasure in desiring to give us the kingdom, that is, infinite happiness in the Son, and therefore He follows. It is His good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

This is stunning. Why would Jesus the Son, who is perfectly happy, with no need of us, desire to satisfy us, knowing that it would cost Him his life to do so? Dear congregation, the answer to that is why eternal life will be so good. We will forever be in wonder with the God who was already infinitely happy in Himself, who did not spare His only Son so that we could share in His happiness.