

John 6: 60-71

Response to a Hard Saying

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The ever-tightening circle

With these verses we've come to the end of a long chapter, John 6. What strikes us is that the circle of the faithful around Jesus is getting ever-smaller. The trigger for people leaving Jesus is His claims and His instructions. People took offense.

Jesus has proclaimed he is the "bread of life" (v35), and from there got into progressively deeper water. He was proclaiming eternal life and salvation, calling God Father and himself Son, sent by the Father. The Jews grumbled (v41), got caught in dispute (v52), and in our passage many desert Jesus.

Last week Pastor David looked at the preceding verses, a passage in which Jesus said his hearers should eat his flesh and drink his blood. It's not literal eating his flesh and drinking his blood, but a very striking analogy of true belief in Jesus.

In many respects, John chapter 6 is about true belief, faith in Jesus. About Jesus knowing man's real need, getting down to business and putting his finger on our sore points.

Peter's words of confession and profession in Christ (v68-69) would have made a great end to this chapter, don't you think? What a high! But no, John adds verses 70-71 about one of the disciples being a devil, Judas who was to betray him. What a dampner! This surprising ending makes us consider again what we have seen in this chapter.

At the beginning of chapter 6, thousands are attracted to Jesus, attracted by his signs and miracles. As the end of the chapter, Jesus stands there alone with his little band of twelve.

At the beginning, Jesus feeds the five thousand with literal physical bread. They think this is marvelous. As Jesus goes on to expound the bread theme and point to His real mission, that he has come to feed them spiritually and give them eternal life, people lose interest.

Near the beginning, His listeners are still interested enough to ask what they could be doing to do the works of God (v28). After Jesus explains that what they should "do" is "believe in him whom he has sent", they get out of their depth. When Jesus explains that they should feed on his flesh and drink his blood, they flip out.

1Cor. 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

This chapter is also about his disciples. More than the previous chapters, John tells us about Jesus developing and training his disciples. Jesus' signs and wonders now involve them more than the previous ones where they were onlookers. In the Feeding of the Five Thousand Jesus enlists their help as he enfolds the miraculous feeding. When Jesus walked on the water (v16-21), it was a private sign for the disciples alone and addressed their own acute need on the stormy sea.

In today's text we can see two parts:

v60-66. This is about many of the disciples. Jesus is not being a salesman here. He is not lulling as many hearers as possible into buying into his product. He is relentlessly pushing people out of their comfort zone as he teaches, almost provoking them to leave. They do not understand. Jesus' claims and authority are too much for them. Most leave and never come back to him.

vv 67-71, the circle is tighter. Jesus addresses the Twelve. This is the first time John talks about twelve disciples. Up to now we have heard about the calling of Andrew, Peter, Philipp and Nathanael, and John himself is implied. Now it is a defined group, the chosen twelve (v70). Also to them the searching question. "Do you want to go away as well?" (v67). This time there is an answer. Peter speaks up for the group (v68-69). Here also, as with the bigger group before, Jesus says: He knows. One of the twelve is a devil. And John explains for our benefit that Jesus means Judas.

At the end of this chapter, after all the signs and wonders, the marvelous teaching on Jesus's mission to mankind, his salvation to eternal life to those who believe, we have a focus on two sharply defined reactions:

- A clear statement of belief, submission and discipleship.
- Betrayal. Many simply leave in disgust and disappointment. With Judas, we have the prospect of violent mercenary betrayal.

Jesus' teaching demands a response.
Which is yours?

Who takes offence at Jesus?

In v59 we read that he spoke these things in the synagogue at Capernaum. It was respectable people who took offense at Jesus. Religious people. People able to get out and about and move in society, to follow the latest rabbis and trends and interests.

Do you take offense at some of the things that Jesus says, that God reveals in the Bible? Shake your head in disbelief, or even in disgust?

In general, isn't it people with self-respect and dignity and position who are most likely to take offence at things? A man and a woman's status in society, their education, give them some pride. They live by etiquette and standards and social conventions. These are liable to be knocked and challenged. This is what happened here.

But there are other people in society who are not so privileged and proud: the down-and-outs, the sick, the radically impoverished, the imprisoned. Take a moment to think about such people you have met or heard about. Some people have heart-rending stories. Think of the homeless, many of them children living on the streets, living from drugs and sexual exploitation. Think of war victims. It is this fallen world into which Jesus came.

Luke 19:10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Mark 2:17 When Jesus heard it (people murmuring that he sat and ate with tax collectors and sinners), He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

In the synagogue in Nazareth Jesus read these words from the prophet Isaiah and applied them to his own ministry:

Is. 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

Is. 61:2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.

Jesus was soon thrown out of that synagogue, as the respectable people took offense at what he was saying.

Peter's confession

Jesus asks the Twelve "You do not want to leave too?"

Jesus is making them answer a question? Jesus is eliciting a response in words.

What follows here is a marvelous confession from the lips of Peter.

John 6:68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,

69: We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.

There is humility expressed here and submission to Jesus' Lordship. The twelve were shocked and made uneasy by Jesus' hard teaching like all the others. But these men were gripped by God, enthralled by the person and power of the Lord Jesus.

There was nowhere else to go, no other real authority and hope besides that of Jesus. There is helplessness here: "we don't know what else we could do". And there is hope and certainty: "Lord".

Peter expresses why they have this hope and certainty. It is not just a feeling. They have heard the words of Jesus and have believed them. Christ's words have entered their ears, penetrated their brains and moved their hearts. And these are not just words that fascinate and entertain, they feed the soul, they impart life eternal.

Why? Because, as Peter is confessing here, this is no other than God himself. Verse 69: "You are The Holy One of God". This is not just a term he has made up, this title has profound significance to mean God himself. It is an Old Testament term the disciples are well familiar with. "The Holy One" is a technical term, used for instance very frequently by Isaiah, as a name for Almighty God, Jahweh.

Peter is saying the unthinkable for any self-respecting Jew. He looking in the eye of a man, of his friend and master, and saying "You are God". "The Holy One of God": Not God the Father, but co-equal God - God the Son.

Words

It's worth taking a closer look at this word "words" in v68.

We remember how John's Gospel opens in a prologue with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God". This is "logos": A magnificently grand concept

to mean the sense of all things, the reason, the foundation. It is loaded with philosophical, scientific and metaphysical content.

“Word” in v68 is not logos, but another much more day-to-day and practical word. rJhema (rhema): word, thing, the “said thing”.

The nuts and bolts of life. There is nothing particularly mysterious about this.

To believe and be saved, to have eternal life that Jesus gives, you do not need to be a philosopher or a scientist. You listen to Jesus. You hear what God says, and take Him at his word, you obey His word.

Faith can be boiled down to this: You take what God has said, and you hang onto that.

There are times in life when God grants you some insight, and you see the big picture, you see the sense and magnificance of his gracious will and the perfect divine rationale of his word. But there are many more times when God does not give you much sight. Circumstances close in on you, you don't see the sense. Then too more than ever: Hang on to what God has said in His Word and through the Lord Jesus.

You might want to find instances in the gospels where Jesus chides his disciples for their lack of faith. On these occasions, in one way or another, it comes down to them doubting what he has said.

Jesus has the words of eternal life. Maybe there are times when you doubt your eternal life. You really try to love and follow Jesus. You know you are a sinner in God's eyes and you confess your guilt to Him. But are you really a Christian? Can you keep it up? How do you know you are saved?

In such times there is little consolation in thinking about what “decisions” you might have made in the past and what religious habits you have. Turn to the Word of God! What has God said? Turn your gaze way from yourself and turn to Jesus.

What does Jesus tell us:

John 6:47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

John 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

Matt. 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

John 10:27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them

John 10:15 ... I lay down My life for the sheep.

Rom. 10:9 if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

1John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1John 2:24 Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

1John 2:25 And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

Bible quotations are from the ESV and NKJV.

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