

Will You Also Leave?

John 66-71

We have just seen this large group of disciples, this would have been the throng that was with Jesus in the wilderness who were fed miraculously by Jesus. And many of them now struggled with the teaching of Jesus, not that the message was hard to understand but that it was hard to take. And the reason why is because of his teaching on salvation which was two-fold. One was that life was found in trusting him alone, not according to their own good works or their own intrinsic value. If they did not believe on him their would be no life. We as sinners hate the gospel of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. We hate the truth that we cannot earn our salvation and we have to trust in the work of another. This is a hard truth. And the second teaching that they struggle with is God's sovereign choice in salvation. No one can come to Christ unless he is drawn sovereignly by the Father. We love our autonomy and think that we have the power to decide, or we have the power to do anything. God is sovereign in all of life and he is sovereign in salvation.

And now look at verse 66 and the response of the crowd, "**After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.**" Look what happens here - many of his disciples depart. You can almost picture the crowds in the morning, clamouring to get to Jesus, and there is real excitement because of the miracle in the wilderness, and now throughout the day Jesus has taught them the truth about the gospel, and now the vast majority of the disciples, of this huge crowd that was following Jesus depart and want nothing more to do with him. Those are sad words: "turned back and no longer walked with him." You can imagine them turning around and rejecting Christ. "Walk with him" has the meaning of following him, and believing in him. We have all known people like in this large crowd that have left Jesus and wanted nothing more to do with Jesus. They were one time excited about Jesus but because the words and the calling of Christ were just too much in their lives they left.

And there is such a good lesson for us as the church of Christ because so often we miss the teaching here. Many of the church growth gurus would have corrected Jesus, and told him to tone down his message or take off the hard edges, make it more palatable, or at least give them another free meal. But Jesus does not change his message half way through the discourse because it was not what people wanted to hear. And we have to realize even as believers what ministry success is. It is not numbers. God can give large numbers if he wants. And sometimes he does. Three thousand were added to the church on the day of Pentecost. But the vast majority even on that day rejected the gospel. What God has called us to is faithfulness. We are to be faithful to God and his message. And also realize as we have seen in this Bread of Life discourse that it is God who gives the increase. We cannot generate the increase by changing the message. We might get more people in a building or structure but that is not more people into the kingdom God. 1Cor. 3:6 reminds us, "**I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.**" We can faithfully scatter seed and water but it is only God who can cause that seed to germinate and grow in the heart. Here is my point: God is the one who causes the growth.

And what we have at the end of this chapter is the line between false and true followers of Jesus Christ. And the line is seen and heard through two searching questions. One by Jesus and the other by Peter. And the line is seen with what we do

with Biblical truth. And as you look at these two questions, ask yourself: what will you do with Jesus Christ? Is there some truths of the gospel of obedience to Jesus Christ that are too difficult for you to accept that will lead to your rejection of Christ? I want us to look at these two questions tonight and ask some hard questions of ourselves and our relationship with Christ.

1. First we need to hear the searching question of our Lord. V. 67

We realize that the gospel of John was written later than the other three synoptic gospels. We call the other three the synoptic gospels because of their similarities. And the gospel of John fills in so much that is missing. But there are similarities. It was about this time after the killing of John the Baptist and rising opposition of the religious leaders that Jesus took this last year and invested in the twelve. And over in the Gospel of Matthew we have a similar situation and a similar conversation. Here they are near Caesarea Philippi, and Jesus asks the probing question of the disciples, "Who do you say the Son of Man is?" And it is amazing question because Caesarea Philippi is pagan territory with all the pagan pleasures before them, anything the flesh could want. And here also is a probing question. And it is amazing that so many will depart from Christ for some sort of pleasure, maybe some earthly relationship that will bring them some moment of pleasure; and others will depart from Christ like this passage because they do not like something he teaches. It is amazing that everyone loves the gospel of unconditional forgiveness until they have to give it to another.

Now listen to this probing question again, "**So Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?'**" So the scene turns from the large crowd of followers to the smaller and narrow band of disciples. And this is the first time the phrase "the twelve" is used in this gospel. And the question is a very revealing question and a very good question. And maybe even a very fearful question. It really looks at the heart and what is going on in the heart of the person - what they truly want and see as important. And in many ways when you realize how fickle the heart is, it should be a very fearful question.

And let me name a couple of reason why this is such an impactful question that Jesus asks the twelve and by extension he asks each one of us. One is that some betray Christ and disown him. Some that happened to be passionate and staunch followers of Christ will want nothing to do with him. This is like many in the crowd. They were passionate in following Christ. They even wanted to do great things like crown him king and probably march and take over Jerusalem with him. We even see this in the passage that even one of the twelve, one in the inner circle of disciples has a devil in him, and will betray Jesus in about a year. And one of the saddest and frightening and heart-wrenching truths is that many who were sitting right where you are sitting, who professed some sort of trust and allegiance in Jesus Christ no longer walk with him. Look back at the previous verse, "**After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.**" Look at the beginning of that verse, "After this." After what? After the hard teaching of the Bread of Life discourse that life, eternal life is found in Jesus alone.

And sometimes I wonder even as you teach certain truths from the pulpit in public how many will be turned off by what the Scriptures say about God, about them, about their need in their lives. I have had many difficult conversations about passages

that have been preached through Scripture. And the temptation of the preacher is just teach more practical lessons that allude to Scripture that are not so controversial. I have had many difficult private conversations where you indicate to a person that their greatest problem is their own personal sin and their need to trust Christ. No it is my environment that is making me do this, or it is the way I am made. It is genetic but it is not sin. Or it is Satan or a demon in because I am really not that bad. And the temptation is not to say anything. Because look at the outcome of this teaching, **“After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”** That phrase at the end of the verse is so strong, “no longer walked with him.” In the ancient world when you no longer walked with a teacher it meant that you totally disavowed his teaching, didn't hold to it and didn't believe it anymore. It is to resign as a disciple from the teacher. That is scary. It is fearful and frightening to think that some here tonight could go in the same direction.

And there is no reason to doubt that could happen because I can think of so many like the crowds that used to occupy a pew right here, and sing songs to the praise of his grace with such emotion that are no longer here. And it would be easy to say be careful what you preach. Be careful not to give too much truth and not too hard truth. But our calling is not to make disciples of us but disciples of Christ, which in the end he can only make. And at times it may be discouraging, but it is not about us but about Christ. And in the end would we rather have a small band of struggling disciples that are going to heaven than a large throng racing to damnation?

And it is also a fearful question because we know our hearts. We can see how easily led astray we are toward the things of this life. And it is amazing how close sin is, and how close apostasy is. We are all just a couple of decisions away from wrecking havoc on our testimonies in Christ. That is how close we are. And I also find that the ones who hear the question of Christ and it sends a shock of conviction and fear in them happen to be true believers. One of the means that God uses to keep us following Christ is that fear of departing from the One we love. It causes us to guard our hearts. It causes us to cling even tighter to Christ. God uses that healthy fear to sanctify us. And when we see people depart because of gospel truth, that this really is the work of God in purifying his body. Spurgeon wrote, **“There is a constant winnowing going on in all churches, and this drives away the light and chaffy ones. There is a fan at work upon this floor... Be not as the chaff... Better far that we die than that we deny the Lord.”** We always need to guard our hearts and examine our calling in Jesus Christ.

2. Then we have the second question which is the response. V. 68-69.

It is amazing how many people ask this question. So many dream of going back maybe to their sin or the easy lifestyle with family and friends. But when they start to really ponder the question they realize there is nothing to go back to for those who are truly believers in Christ. They realize the emptiness and the lostness of their lives back then. They realize the emptiness and purposeless of the philosophies that were once their's. Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Now there is a philosophy of absolute hopelessness. Just get enough of this world because death will rob you of everything. Or there is materialism, but everything we have will one day be gone. And

then there is the afterlife. So many turn to agnosticism - you just do not know if there is a God and who he is and what he requires. But you do know. You see his witness before you in creation. You know his morality because of the morality that is in every person. And for the true believer, although this question might arise. There really is no where to go except loving and following and trusting and cherishing Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 68, **“Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”** It is not that he would not have struggled with the teaching of Jesus on one level or been discouraged as he saw so many depart from Christ. No doubt the twelve got caught up with the popularity of Jesus. But this is what Peter realized - there is no alternative. Life can and does get very tough and trying, but there really is no other place to go for eternal life. It is found in Jesus Christ and him alone. And let’s observe several things about his response. First, look at how Peter addresses Jesus: **“Lord, to whom shall we go?”** It is a great question when you look at that first word. Remember how the crowds addressed Jesus when they found him in Capernaum? Look back at verse 25, **“When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’”** They saw him as a teacher and a miracle worker but not as Lord. And the meaning here is that he is the ultimate authority. He is none other than God in human flesh. There were certainly other pagan religions they could follow or they could turn back to the legalism of Judaism but Peter realized there is only one Lord and he is before them. The twelve had witnessed the feeding of the five thousand and the stilling of the storm. So if Jesus is Lord where else can you go?

Notice secondly, **“You have the words of eternal life.”** Notice that the crowds wanted signs but Peter grasped something of the significance of the message. Jesus has the words of eternal life. He said in verse 35, **“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.’”** He will say a little later in this gospel in 14:6, **“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”** If Jesus is where eternal life is found then where else can a person go. This is the writer of Hebrews gives that fearful warning in 10:26-27, **“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”** What he is talking about here is a person who turns away from Christ. He is not saying that person can never be saved again, but if you turn away from Christ, you can expect the eternal judgment from God because there is salvation in no one other than Jesus Christ. True believers realize this. Even though this life is filled with trials, temptations, it is still a shock and horror of the thought of departing from Christ. It is only in him that eternal life is found. John Calvin wrote, **“as soon as they have gone away from Christ, nothing remains for them but death, wherever they go.”**

The third observation is that Peter really explains saving faith in verse 69. Look at what he says because it certainly is unique, **“and we have believed, and have come to know.”** Isn’t it amazing that the words of the gospel came to us with such power and clarity. It is not that we needed every single question answered but when

that gospel was explained and the more it was preached the more we saw the truth and glory of that message, and that there was no other way. The words came as Jesus said in verse 63, **“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”** The words came to us through the Holy Spirit, and came as spirit and life. There is no other way. Look at what God has done through Christ for a sinner like me. Paul says in 1Cor. 2:12, **“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.”** The meaning here is not that the unbeliever doesn’t understand the message as far as the meaning but does not see the glory or significance of that message. We glory in Christ as the only way and we believe.

And then notice he says, **“we have come to know.”** We know further through the study the significance and all that Jesus is for us. It is the opposite for the unbelieving crowd. Listen to verse 30, **“So they said to him, ‘Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?’”** Prove yourself because we are not quite convinced. Jesus had just fed them in the wilderness and yet they refused. That is the wisdom of the world that it is never enough. Apologetics or arguments for the faith are great, and they really help the believer see the rationale of his faith but it does not matter how many questions we answer it will never be enough for those who are hardened in sin. But it is amazing because for most of us we didn't think of every question under the sun. We knew the truth of the message. It is an evidence of the Spirit’s work in our life to show us the truth of the glory of Christ. And once we see it there is no place to go but to follow him.

And the fourth thing is what they have come to know about Christ, which is really a description of him in verse 69, **“that you are the Holy One of God.”** This title is so significant because the crowds were looking for a military leader. They were looking for someone to march on Jerusalem and establish that as the capitol of a free Israel. The disciples were very early on were willing to confess that Jesus is the Messiah, but now they have a fuller meaning, and the fuller meaning is that he is the “Holy One of God.” And it is a peculiar title of Jesus because it is only used one other time. And guess who it is used by? None other than a demon in Mark 1:24, **“‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.’”** He is the all holy one who came to do the perfect will of his Father above and give his life as that perfect payment for our sin. And although the full message might not be clear to them as far as what Jesus would do, the message is clear - He is the one we need. He is where eternal life is found and only in him.

I believe there are tougher days ahead for those who are believers in Christ, and faith in Jesus Christ will be so much more costly than it is right now. And many are going to be faced with this question. Many are going to look at the cost of following Christ and they are going to be like the larger group of disciples and depart, turn their backs and renounce the very Lord himself. But for us as believers, if life is found in Christ where can we go? If this world really is not our home where can we find a place in the here and now? What we need to do is constantly preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to ourselves and constantly bask in the truth no matter how difficult life becomes

nothing of eternal importance is ever in jeopardy. Look to him, see him, revel in our Lord.