



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES: JOHN (GOSPEL OF TRUTH)

LESSON: AFTERTASTE

JOHN 6:60-71

APRIL 11, 2021

MAIN POINT

True disciples of Jesus endure. They believe that He is the Holy One of God and that his words are spirit and life (even if his words, at times, are hard to grasp).

JOHN CONTEXT

Every lesson's purpose: "but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John 20:31

When we discuss the context of John 6:60-71, two things are helpful to note: the number of disciples that were following Jesus and the immediate context of our passage.

The Number of Disciples:

Up to this point in the Gospel of John, Jesus' disciples have been introduced and occasionally referenced, but they have not been at the forefront of the story. John recounts the story of Jesus calling Peter and his brother Andrew (1:35-42). He also tells the story of Philip and Nathanael choosing to follow Jesus (1:43-51). Beyond these examples, the author John doesn't include how other disciples chose to follow him, not even James, Matthew (Levi) or himself. Yet, the disciples do appear present in many stories:

- The disciples are present when Jesus turned water to wine (2:2).
- The disciples remembered OT Scripture in regard to Jesus cleansing the temple (2:17, 22).
- They witnessed many in the Samaritan village believe in Jesus (4:31-42).
- They were tested by Jesus (6:5-7) and served as "waiters" when Jesus fed the 5,000.
- Lastly, the disciples witnessed Jesus walking on water (6:16-21).

Ever since Jesus got into the boat with the disciples, they have been with him. At the present moment in the story, Jesus has taught (or perhaps debated) with the crowd. The disciples have been listening in the background.

What is helpful to point out is there are more disciples than the "Twelve" that we are most familiar with. John has subtly mentioned this. In John 3:26, some of John the Baptist's disciples came to him and seem to alert him that some of his disciples are leaving him and going to follow Jesus. Of course, John the Baptist is humble and happy about his disciples leaving him for Jesus. John the Baptist says, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30). So too, John 4:1-2 says, "Jesus was making and baptizing *more disciples than John* (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples)." Thus, John seems to reference more disciples than the "Twelve."

It is interesting to note Luke 10:1-12, 17-20 identifies as many as 72 "others" that Jesus appointed and sent out to announce the Kingdom of God is near (Lk. 10:9). And perhaps helpful to note in regard to our passage today, according to Luke, Jesus sends the 72 others out after he feeds the 5,000. Thus, it appears that the 72 others in Luke followed Jesus even after many disciples in John 6 seem to have left.

Immediate Context:

Within the immediate context to John 6:60-71, Jesus has made a "hard saying" (6:60). Most likely the hard saying refers back to when Jesus said he was the "bread that came down from heaven" (6:41) and that "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you . . . for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." (6:53-55). Admittedly to our ears, this may seem like a hard saying. Jesus seems to be saying that people must *literally eat* his flesh and drink his blood because his flesh is *true* food.

What is Jesus saying by (1) bread of life, (2) coming down from heaven, and (3) my flesh is true food? Jesus has referred to himself as the Bread of Life (6:35). Jesus uses the analogy to explicitly say that whoever believes in him shall not hunger or thirst, which in the context

clearly means that whoever “believes in him should have eternal life” (6:40). Thus, the analogy of eating the bread of life = believing in Jesus for eternal life.

So, what does Jesus mean by “coming down from heaven?” By saying he is from heaven, Jesus is saying he is God. Jesus refers to his virgin birth, conceived by the Holy Spirit. He eternally existed with God the Father in heaven prior to coming to earth as a baby.

By saying he is *true* food, Jesus, of course, is not advocating for cannibalism. Instead, Jesus means that he gives life. Food, as we think of it, *sustains* life but it does not *give* life. To put it another way, food *maintains* life, but it does not *start* life. More so, food can only sustain or maintain life *temporarily*. Jesus, on the other hand, *gives* life and *sustains* life *eternally*. Jesus does more than what food can do. He is “true” food in the sense that he does what food can only partially do.

Thus, when John references a “hard saying” in verse 60, the Jews had difficulty understanding what Jesus meant. Or perhaps they understood to a certain degree, but disapproved of what Jesus was saying of himself.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Can you ever think of a time when you were “starving?” How much of a priority to you was getting food? What did you eat?

How do you handle the hard sayings of Jesus (or other Biblical authors)? Do you try to find an answer on your own, ask a pastor or go to a trusted resource, ignore the hard saying, or begin to doubt your faith?

Is there a trusted place you go to for helping you understand the Bible? A book or website?

The more you study Scripture, the more you will find hard sayings. How do you respond? In the 1983, well-known Biblical scholar F.F. Bruce published a book entitled *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*. Can you guess how many sayings were included in his book and deemed in their opinion as difficult to understand? Answer: 70. In 1996, a collection of rebuttable scholars published a near 800-page resource entitled, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*.

In our lesson we will learn that one of the marks of a true disciple is that they work through the hard sayings. And as our lesson will reveal, one of the reasons disciples work through the hard sayings is because the Father has drawn them to the Son. Meanwhile, others who apparently desert following Jesus do so, in part, because the Father has not given them the ears to hear.

EXPLANATION // ...believe Jesus is the Christ...

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 6:60-62

When many of Jesus' disciples heard the things he was saying, they grumbled. They admitted that Jesus said something hard to understand and they questioned who can understand it.

Now... it is one thing to admit that sometimes Jesus' sayings are difficult. However, there is a difference between admitting the difficulty and *grumbling* about the difficulty. One can admit the difficulty while also expressing wonder or asking for help or even persistence in trying to understand. However, the attitude for many disciples was that they grumbled, that is, they complained. In their minds they could have concluded that Jesus' saying was nonsensical or that Jesus was a madman or that he was being offensive.

Jesus knew what many of his disciples were thinking in their hearts. So, he challenges them. Instead of speaking softer, he doubles down on what he said. In fact, he questions why they were offended. In essence, Jesus says if you were offended by what I said, then how much more would you be offended if you see "the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" (6:62).

The idea Jesus conveys is his future ministry will be even more offensive. John uses the word "ascending" to describe two events: Jesus' ascent to the cross (3:14; 8:28; 12:32) and Jesus ascending back to the Father in heaven (Lk. 24:50-52; Acts 1:9). *It is extremely noteworthy to mention the way Jesus ascends back to heaven to "where he was before" is by ascending to the cross.* The point Jesus is making is: if my words are offensive, wait until you see me give up my life on the cross. Such a death is as offensive as it gets. Indeed, Paul says of the cross: "a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Cor. 23).¹

¹ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (1991), 301.

Did the message of Jesus dying on the cross ever seem offensive to you?

We can be honest. Do you ever find yourself grumbling at some of God's commands? On a scale from 1-10, where would you rate your grumbling spirit?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 6:63-65

These verses give explanation for why the disciples were grumbling. One might be tempted to think it wasn't the disciples' fault that they did not understand. Instead, some might think it was Jesus' fault for saying something too difficult to understand. With this line of thinking, to correct the grumbling spirit, Jesus should have spoken softer or more clearly.

But Jesus says his words were not the problem.

Jesus explains his words are "spirit and life." His words are not the problem. In other words, Jesus has spoken truth that gives life. The trouble with these many disciples is that they do not have the Spirit to enable them to understand. Instead, they are hearing Jesus' words in their flesh. First Corinthians 2:12-15 captures the idea:

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely give us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught but the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned* (See also Jn. 3:4-12).

The problem is that these many disciples were trying to understand the words through their flesh. And their "flesh is no help at all" as Jesus says. They needed the Spirit to help them believe. And Jesus knew from the beginning those who would believe and those who would not. Indeed, Jesus explains, "no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." Thus, the many disciples grumbled because they were not drawn by the Father. And because they were not drawn by the Father, they did not believe.

Can you look back on your life and see evidence of ways the Father drew you to himself?

When you pray for lost friends, co-workers, classmates, or neighbors to be saved, do you ever ask God to draw them to himself? Are there some specific phrases or words you use to pray for non-believers to be saved?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 6:66-71

“After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with Jesus.”

This verse may seem shocking—that there were some who committed to follow Christ, but later turned back. Yet, our passage explains how some disciples turn back from following Jesus. The explanation this passage gives us, according to the prior verses, is that they were never true believers to begin with. Jesus said to them just prior, “there are some of you who do not believe.” First John 2:19 gives a similar explanation for those who appear to fall away from the faith: “They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.” Indeed, those who are truly disciples “continue.” Those who are not disciples, will eventually “[go] out.”

And here perhaps is a good thing to note. Jesus does not appear overly alarmed that many disciples turned back from following him. He doesn’t despair. And He doesn’t feel like he has to abandon his mission. Jesus presses on. The reason is because he already “knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.” Jesus is not caught off guard.

Jesus turns to the Twelve. He asks, “Do you want to go away as well?” One way of reading Jesus’ question is that he is genuinely asking or extending an opportunity for the Twelve to leave. But the context of the passage tells us that Jesus knows full well what their decision will be. It is better to see Jesus’ question as a statement more so for the benefit of the disciples, than for himself. D.A. Carson summarizes the sense of the question when he says, “Surely, you don’t want to go away to, do you?” The sense behind Jesus’ rhetorical questions is that he knows the Twelve will stay. (Ha! In fact, I talk to my 5-year old son like this all the time when I say things like, “Surely, you want to do a potty check before we leave right?” or “Surely, you want to wash your hands after you played in the mud, right?” Even though I might phrase things in a question, the answer to the question is obvious.)

Peter speaks up for the rest of the disciples. His answer embodies many of the elements that were lacking in the other disciples who left. Peter says, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know that you are the Holy

one of God.” Do you see the contrast with Peter’s words and how Jesus identified the grumbling disciples who left?

Jesus to the many disciples who grumbled

- The *words* that I have spoken are *life*
- There are some who do *not believe*

Peter to Jesus

- You have the *words of eternal life*
- And we have *believed*

As Peter and the rest of the Twelve hear Jesus’ hard saying, they do not grumble in disbelief. Instead they believe his words are the words of eternal life.

Jesus concludes by admitting that the ultimate reason the Twelve believe is because he chose them. For he says, “Did I not choose you, the Twelve?” Again, the sense of this question is rhetorical. Jesus is not really asking the question, but like his previous question, he is confidently making an assertion.

Yet, even at this point, Jesus acknowledges that even amongst the Twelve, Judas Iscariot would betray him. This is a foreshadowing moment. Jesus reveals that even now he will not be taken by surprise when Judas betrays him. Everything that happens to Jesus, even those who choose to follow him and not, is part of the divine plan.

Is there anything in this text that you think is hard to understand?

How would you describe Jesus’ reaction to many disciples leaving him?

Does Jesus’ reaction surprise you?

How do you feel about God choosing those who will follow him? Does that excite you? Bewilder or confuse you? Something you struggle to agree with?

APPLICATION // ...have life in His name.

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Does this passage of Scripture teach you anything about making disciples?

Without naming names, but have you ever had a disciple that no longer followed you? What was it like for you? Was it despairing, disappointing, or something else?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to press this truth that was studied.