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WALKING AWAY FROM JESUS (John 6:53-71)

*John 6:53-71 - 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. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 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." Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 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. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." **After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.** So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "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." Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.*

THE CROWD'S REASONS FOR LEAVING

Generally, people responded to Christ's powerful teaching in one of three ways: scoffing and rejection, shallow faith, or true faith. The majority of Christ's audience in this text responded with weak faith, following him only as long as he worked miracles and didn't ask too much commitment from them.

There are many layers to this passage, but we find several reasons why the crowd began to walk away from Jesus. The first was **his claim to be eternal**. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven." This was difficult for some of the crowd to see, but Jesus consistently described himself as the eternal Son of God who was sent for the purpose of bringing life to the world.

The next teaching that was hard for the crowd to grasp **Christ's claim to energize**. "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day." Raising the dead to life was a statement some could not buy. But we know now from other Scriptures that Jesus not only has the ability to raise people up on the last day, but he also raised people from the dead during his earthly ministry.

Some in the crowd (and many people today) have a problem with **Jesus' claim to be exclusive**. "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." In this text and others, Jesus made it clear that the only way to eternal life, to true salvation, is through him. He is the only way.

Christ's claim to establish life was another sticking point for some of his hearers. He said, "...so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me." Jesus was and is the life-giving Savior. For many who look for their answers apart from God, this is a tough teaching to believe.

A very hard concept in this passage is all this talk of eating flesh and drinking blood. **Christ's endeavor to illustrate** caused several in the crowd to say, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Many can still have trouble with it in our day.

The Greek word for “hard” used here (“skleros”) does not mean hard to understand, but hard to accept. I believe the key to understanding and accepting what Jesus is saying with these phrases is found 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*.” These are spiritual ideas, not literal. The flesh and blood in Jesus’ illustration here show the commitment it takes in a relationship with him. For God to truly abide with someone, there has to be an acceptance of him and inward change because of his presence. That is the evidence of a real bonding between God and a person.

TO COME TO CHRIST AND BELIEVE ON HIM MEANS TO RECEIVE HIM WITHIN, JUST AS YOU RECEIVE FOOD AND DRINK.

Warren Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary

Finally, there may have those in the crowd who didn’t agree **Jesus’s claim that God is the essential mover in belief**. When he said, “no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father,” Christ pointed to God as the one who first initiates salvation. Right after he said that, we read that “many disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”

It is true that a person has to agree with God and decide to obey and follow him, but God himself is the one who draws the heart of someone to Christ. We don’t naturally make that decision. That is why it is important to make this part of our prayer life – asking God to draw the hearts of people to him so they will love him and be satisfied with him rather than the world.

All of these reasons played into people walking away from Jesus and it still happens today. Sometimes his teachings are too hard to accept or a person just can’t place himself under the ultimate authority of God. We should be careful, though, to submit to the words of Christ, and if there are difficult areas of teaching that we read, ask for wisdom and perseverance to continue to follow him as faithful disciples.

THE DISCIPLES’ REASON TO STAY

The passage tells us that it was some of his disciples who walked away from Jesus that day. So he had more followers than the twelve we usually think about. But the word for disciple (“mathetes”) really just means “learner”. So a group of those who had been following him, hearing his teaching, and watching his miracles decided that continuing to follow was too much to commit to.

It’s a very sad scene and must have been a quiet few minutes as the crowd dispersed and these people headed another way. Jesus then turned to the twelve disciples and checked on their commitment level. They had the option of leaving at this point as well.

But the answer Peter gives is the same attitude we should have as we seek to follow the Lord. “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.” Once a person truly repents of their sinful life and decides to make Jesus their Master, there is no going back. There is nothing worth turning back for in a world that is passing away.

The passage ends with some foreshadowing of the betrayal to come, because even one of these twelve would turn on Christ the night before his crucifixion.

THE REAL DIFFICULTY OF CHRISTIANITY IS TWOFOLD. IT DEMANDS AN ACT OF SURRENDER TO CHRIST, AN ACCEPTANCE OF HIM AS THE FINAL AUTHORITY, AND IT DEMANDS A MORAL STANDARD OF THE HIGHEST LEVEL.

William Barclay, The Gospel of John

BIBLE STUDY

Legislators and Staff (During Session)
Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.
(ZOOM)