

Our Only Hope John 6

I have an announcement to make. Our Christian faith is no longer welcome in the country in which we live. I do not claim to be a prophet and I am not claiming to know the future, but with full conviction today I can say Christianity is no longer revered or respected as it once was in America. I foresee with much evidence things are likely to get worse before getting better. In a world that claims to be growing more inclusive and tolerant everyday is actually growing less tolerant and less inclusive of Christianity. I don't believe I need to spend a great deal of time trying to convince you that this is true. Unless you're living under a rock you see daily the walls are closing in on our freedoms to live out and propagate our faith.

I am not trying to scare you. In fact, if we're thinking biblically I am actually giving believers a reason to rejoice. James said that we are to count it as joy when trials come. And they are indeed coming. I have come this morning to offer from the living word, hope and encouragement to all.

The times seem bad. Indeed, they are not good. However, ever since the fall of man the world has been in bad shape. This world has always teetered on the brink of utter destruction and collapse. Were it not for the grace of God it would have self-destructed a long time ago. But God in his benevolent mercy with great patience has spared us thus far and will continue until his appointed time.

We should not be surprised. Jesus and the apostles and the prophets warned us sufficiently that this world would indeed hate us. It will speak ill of us, falsely accuse us, and persecute us. It hated Jesus and it will hate us because we are the manifestation of Jesus on this earth. But we can indeed fulfill the Scriptures; we can consider it joy. We can rejoice during the most difficult trials

because we are never without hope. This world is not our home. These burdens are not our future. We are bound for eternal glory. And while we wait we have been given the Spirit of God to empower us with everything we need to persevere and prosper during the trials.

I say there's hope, but know this, there is only one Hope. I am going to share that Hope this morning with every ear that hears my voice. I'm going to do so from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John. Our pastor last week did a great job of explaining the context of the world which Jesus ministered in. It too was riddled with political unrest, social discrimination, injustice, poverty, slavery, hatred and anger. Our current circumstances are not unprecedented. They are new to some of us but they are not new to this fallen world. When Jesus walked the earth proclaiming the kingdom of God, he did so to a people suffering just like us and wondering if there was any hope in a broken world. Let's turn to John chapter 6.

The sixth chapter of John opens with another telling of the miraculous feeding of five thousand. Jesus multiplies five loaves of bread and two fish to feed five thousand people and they even had leftovers. If the heads of the families were the only ones counted this could have been upwards of 20,000 people. These people saw the sign and proclaimed that Jesus was indeed the "***Prophet that was to come into the world***" (14). Then in verses 16-21 the disciples were heading across the sea to Capernaum when they found Jesus walking on the water in the middle of a wind storm. They freaked out, he calmed them down, got into the boat and they landed on the other side of the sea.

The five thousand that had just eaten their fill of the loaves and fishes had begun to grow. Some other boats filled with people arrived from Tiberias. They all decided to go looking for Jesus. So they found him and the disciples on the other side of the sea.

This is where things get interesting. (As though multiplying bread and fish and walking on water wasn't). The rest of the chapter recounts the preaching of Jesus. Picture, if you will, a montage in a movie where the audio is Jesus preaching one sermon but the scene changes as the sermon continues. The sermon most likely consisted of several teachings that Jesus taught repetitively throughout his earthly ministry. While John is recounting these major teaching points he is describing the different reactions of hearers based on actual historical events. In other words, the sermon happened on several occasions but these scenarios recorded in this chapter really happened.

I have decided to structure this message around the crowds in the story and focus our attention on their responses to Jesus' teachings. My hope is that this will help us accomplish two things: accurately understand Jesus' message in this chapter and see where we may find ourselves in how we receive his teachings. The crowd morphs throughout this chapter in this fashion: It begins with a very large crowd made of people who witnessed the miraculous feeding and even ate of the fish and bread, some people from Tiberias that joined them after the feeding (Perhaps they heard about it and came to check it out), some Jews, synagogue crowds (Jewish leaders and common Jewish folks), a crowd of people that all considered themselves disciples, and then finally just the Twelve disciples.

1. The Crowd (22-40)

When the crowd arrived they asked Jesus, "***Rabbi, when did you come here?***" (25). The interesting part of that question is their address of "Rabbi". Using this title they hoped to express that they saw Jesus as their teacher and they considered themselves now followers of his. But, Jesus quickly challenges their confession by exposing their true motive for seeking after

him. He says, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. (26)*** He is basically saying, “let’s be honest here, you are not seeking spiritual things but you are looking for another free meal. They are focused on earthly physical things and not the things that matter most, spiritual things. So, knowing they were not really interested, Jesus redirects them to the things that matters most (spiritual and eternal things and most importantly, himself). He says, ***“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” (27)***

The majority of the crowd were people who were not interested in spiritual or eternal things and Jesus knew that. The vast majority of people we meet and interact with everyday are carnal people fixed on the material things of this world and have little to no interest in eternal and spiritual matters. Take note: Jesus did not use this as an excuse to avoid having the conversation with them anyway and neither should we.

They went on to entertain the conversation. ***Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” (28)*** This sounded promising. Like they are starting to turn the corner. So Jesus said, ***“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” (29)***. It seems like with everything they just went through less than 24 hours ago, the majority of them would flood the altar right here. But no. Instead they continue the conversation. ***So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ (30-31)*** Think about how crazy this response is. Less than 24 hours earlier the majority of the crowd ate bread and fish that had been miraculously multiplied. John said they saw the sign

and proclaimed he was the Prophet who was to come into the world and they wanted to take him by force and make him king, which again demonstrates their focus on earthly things (14-15). And now they claim that if he can show them a sign like Moses did to their fathers, they would believe. Listen to Jesus' response.

Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (32-33) God gave their fathers physical bread through Moses to feed their earthly bodies and direct their attention to a greater work that was to come through the Prophet that was to come into the world.

Let me have everyone's undivided attention right now. This is it. Here is the answer to every human beings greatest dilemma. These very words of Jesus were the hope for the first century and for every century to follow until He returns.

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. (35) This world will always leave you wanting more. It will never satisfy. Every time we eat food, it digests and we find ourselves hungry and needing more. Jesus is trying to use this as metaphor for the inability for earthly things to satisfy the souls longing for righteousness. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied if only they believe what he just said.

But here is the problem with the majority of that crowd and the majority of the crowd hearing my voice right now. ***But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.*** (36)

There are 5 main teaching points in the rest of this section (37-40) before the audience changes.

a. The Father's divine election

37a All that the Father gives me will come to me, (More on this in the next section)

b. Man's responsibility in salvation

40b everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life

b. The security of salvation to all who believe

37b whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

38-39a For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me,

c. The resurrection

39b I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day

40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

d. The Incarnation

38a For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

The text does not explicitly tell us but we can safely assume that a large portion of the crowd left after these teachings and no longer pursued Jesus. I believe these were the ones seeking

another free meal. Whatever the case may be, the audience immediately shifts to some Jews.

2. The Jews (41-59)

These Jews were grumbling (complaining) because Jesus said ***“I am the bread that came down from heaven.” (41)*** Their argument was, ***“Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” (42)*** Things had not changed much since God had provided manna in the wilderness through Moses because they grumbles also right before and after it happened (Ex.16 & Num. 11:4ff). Notice that the heart of their argument is with the incarnation, or claim to be from heaven. They can’t understand how he could claim to be from heaven when they know he is a Galilean from Nazareth. Very similar to the suspicions raised in Nazareth (Mk. 6:2-3 & Lk. 4:22)

The next section of verses 43-51 contain another short sermon from Jesus. In this section he reiterates his previous teachings on:

The Father’s divine election in salvation, ***44a No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. 45 It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—***

man’s responsibility in salvation, ***47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.***

The resurrection, ***44b I will raise him up on the last day. 49-50 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so***

that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

That he is the source of salvation

No one can come to me

I will raise him up

Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—

I am the bread of life.

the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

The Jews struggled with Jesus in ways the Gentiles did not and they still do to this very day. From our human perspective we see them as stuck in their ways, extreme traditionalists, and prideful stubborn people. While those things are true, we cannot forget that Jesus just taught a very hard truth to swallow, especially if it pertains to you. He taught that people will only understand his teachings if God the Father reveals it to them. And that they will only believe him and come to him to be saved if the the Father draws them. Think about how insulting this is to someone who is convinced they know God and God loves them and they are loving God the right way.

The teaching that Jesus is referring to is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Sinners are born into a fallen state and are dead in sins and trespasses. Spiritual death is the state of inability to hear, see, feel, or understand the things of God. Therefore, the inability to respond to the gospel in the right way of believe and obedience. God instructs and draws sinners by giving them his Holy Spirit to make them alive in order to hear the gospel, understand the veracity of the gospel, see themselves as sinners

and Jesus as the Saviour, and respond in faith and repentance. As controversial as this truth may be, it is not the most offensive thing Jesus teaches in this chapter. He concluded this mini sermon with a bombshell. He said, ***“the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (60b)***

Imagine you're visiting a synagogue for the first time with a friend. You're not a spatial or religious person. You're not that deep of a thinker. You typically struggle to see past material things in life. A guest speaker stands up and he says these words...

(53-58)

“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.

54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 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. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread^[c] the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

The Jews would have been especially offended as they had laws forbidding the drinking of blood. Not to mention cannibalism was frowned upon by most cultures and thankfully still is. In all seriousness, even those who understood it to be spiritual were introduced to a concept unlike any other. That a physical sacrifice of the One who was sent from heaven was necessary to provide salvation and eternal life to the world. And, that participation of that sacrifice was necessary for the appropriation of salvation to individuals. And, that just as food was necessary for the survival of the body, this man's death was equally necessary for the survival of the soul. Jesus taught this to the

crowds and in the synagogues and you talk about offensive. The results were... ***When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (60)***

This brings us to another aspect of the crowd

3. The disciples "little d" (60-66)

The people listening to Jesus preach in this next section (661-65) are ones the Scripture calls disciples. D.A. Carson says in his commentary, "The dividing line for John is never race but response to Jesus. "Disciples" must be distinguished from the Twelve. ... At the most elementary level, a disciple is someone who was at the point following Jesus, either literally or by joining the group that pursued him from place to place, or metaphorically in regarding him as the authoritative teacher. Such a disciple is not necessarily a Christian, someone who has savingly trusted Jesus and sworn allegiance to him, given by the father to the son, drawn by the father and born again by the spirit. Jesus will make it clear in due course that only those who continue in his word are truly his disciples."

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

Another interesting point here is that the Greek word for "hard" (skleros) does not refer to "hard to understand" but "harsh and "offensive".

Jesus knew these disciples were also grumbling at his flesh and blood teaching so he addressed them directly. He says,

"Do you take offense at this? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 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. 64 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.) 65 And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

As Carson pointed out, these were not truly born again believers. They did not have the Spirit of God in them giving them understanding. He points out that even if they saw him ascending into the heavens where he came from they would still not believe. They were living in the flesh and the flesh is no help at all. ***1 Cor. 2:14 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.***

This is where the audience gets tricky. These people followed Jesus and called him Lord. Their devotion was such that John himself called them disciples. From all appearances we would think they were devoted followers of Jesus. Until they were confronted by the hard teachings of Jesus. Their departure from the faith evidences that they never truly believed. As John would say in ***1 John 2:19 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.*** This too was a very offensive teaching and the result was ***“many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”*** (66)

4. The Disciples “Big D” (67-71)

And then there were Twelve.

So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” 68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

The crowd that remained was made up of people that didn't necessarily choose to be there. Jesus chose them. He didn't choose them because he knew they would believe at some later date. In fact, quite the opposite, He says to them, ***“Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” 71 He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him. (70-71)***

He chose them because it was the Father's will. The Father drew the 11 by the Spirit and they came because they saw that Jesus was good. They didn't understand much at this point but they knew that Jesus had the truth and no one else did. Jesus' ways were far superior to any other worldly system and they knew that. They knew what they had seen; the miracles, the healings, walking on water, controlling nature. They knew he was who he said he was, the Son of God. Sometimes that's all we know and that's enough. No matter how hard his teachings are, they are the truth, the life and the way. NO one else can offer eternal hope and abundant life.

Closing:

In closing I want to tie in some of our readings from this week to help us understand this chapter better. Let Scripture interpret Scripture.

1. We see the parable of the sower. Some seeds were planted on rocky ground. When the teachings got hard to accept they left. Some seeds were planted among thorns but they were scarred off by the idea of having to feed from the flesh and blood of Jesus so they left. They were too committed to the world for that. But there were 11 men there where the seeds were falling into good soil. They couldn't leave. Tremendous fruit would later grow out of their lives.
2. We see the reality of the division Jesus came to bring. ***Matt. 10:34-39 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. 37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.***
3. We see how hard it can be to follow Jesus. ***Mt. 8:18-22 Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. 19 And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." 20 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 21 Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." 22 And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."***
4. Most importantly we see why ***"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*** Because Jesus is the only hope for

the world. There are no other options. There is no other rescue coming. His death, burial, and resurrection is our life source beyond this world. Come to him and believe. Behold him and trust him.

CG Discussion Questions

1. What was the purpose for Jesus' miracles and signs?
2. Why do you think people could witness the signs and still not believe?
3. Can you recall the 4 main aspects of Jesus' hearers in John 6?
4. Which group do you find yourself in?
5. Do you know people who represent each group and how can you pray for those people?
6. Is it okay that even true Christians can still find some of Jesus' teachings to be difficult?
7. Is it okay for Christians to ignore Jesus' teachings that they find hard?
8. Everyone who has truly been born again was drawn by the Father to Jesus. Can you remember ways in which that was evidenced in your life?
9. What does it look like for a Christian to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus?

