

29. WHERE ELSE CAN WE GO? (6:60-71)

We now come to what is considered by some commentators as a mountaintop portion of Scripture that is rich in theology, and probably the most important section in John 6. Everything that we have learned so far in this chapter comes to a head in these final verses.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. When South Africa won the Rugby World Cup in 2019 and 2023, many claimed that the country was united. Many claim that music is an international language and it unites all people from all walks of life. But do either of those things truly unite people? If so, how, and if not, why not?
2. As Christians we have more in common with one another than we have with blood relatives who are no Christians. What is it about being a Christian that unites us? How should this affect how we see and interact with one another, and how does it help us to deal with conflict situations in the church?

As Christians, we gather for one purpose, and one purpose only, and that is to glorify our Lord with fellow believers. As David writes in Psalm 133, it is a good and pleasant thing when fellow believers live together in unity. Despite our differences on some peripheral secondary issues and personal preferences, and that we come from different backgrounds and upbringings, there is a deep fellowship that we have with one another. We are united on what is truly important – the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

However, the Gospel is also something that divides in that it separates believers from unbelievers. For as much as we want to reach out to loved ones who are not believers and even invite them to church – there is something that separates us from them that causes them to either not come to church, or worse still, to want to have nothing to do with God. And although they may blame it on various aspects of Christianity, be it that the church is full of hypocrites, scepticism, apparent division due to the many denominations, infighting, or simply that services seem boring or long, the reality is, it is the Gospel that keeps them away. Paul sums it up well in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 18 when he wrote, *“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”*.

Unfortunately, the church has added to the problem by ignoring, watering down, or distorting the Gospel, and by its behaviour in certain instances. Many pastors try to make the Gospel more palatable to the unbeliever, while others cover up obvious sin that the world would even condemn. The result is that we end up with large churches filled with people who are not born again.

Part of the motivation behind this is that they want to have a good reputation before men. They do not want to sound offensive or push people away. They want to be all inclusive and just keep the peace. But that goes against the work of the Gospel. For as Jesus said in Matthew 7, verses 34 to 36, *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household".

This division also causes many other disagreements in life (e.g. schooling, parenting, gender issues, ethics, etc.). This is basically because our Christian worldview is completely different to that of the world. And so when you go to them with the Gospel (or anything Bible-related for that matter), they reject it out of hand and may even be aggressive towards you. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 2 verses 15 and 16, *"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life"*.

So clearly, that which unites us Christians is what separates us from the unbelievers. This is clearly seen in our text as we see the difference between false disciples (vv60-66) and true disciples (vv67-71).



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Many claim to be Christian but show very little evidence of it, while others who are not Christian seem to live better than Christians. Why would you say this is the case?
2. What would you say are the marks of a true disciple that all disciples should exhibit?



FALSE DISCIPLES (VV60-66)

Throughout this chapter we have witnessed the crowd as it follows Jesus. Initially in verses 1 to 15 there are thousands of people. Then from verse 22 that number decreases as at first some stay behind overnight hoping to for another free meal. These people catch up to Jesus in Capernaum, but He confronts them and challenges their motives for following Him. From verse 41 we see how the religious leaders react when they hear all of this (what happens to the crowd at this particular point is not stated) to which Jesus' responds by digging deeper into their hearts and speaks of things that are offensive to them (cf. vv52-58). And so the numbers dwindle even more until it is only Jesus twelve disciples remaining.



NOTE: The word *"disciples"* used here simply means *"follower"* (here and verse 66). These are people who have seen Jesus' miracles and heard His teachings, and follow Him hoping to see and hear more. This is not a reference to the twelve disciples. The disciples that follow Jesus during His three years of ministry are referred to as *"the Twelve"* (cp. vv67, 70, and 71). Also important to realise, is that with both of these terms, John is not implying that any of them are saved – disciple does not automatically mean Christian – for as we see in verse 71, Jesus refers to Judas who would go on to betray Him as also being one of *"the Twelve"*, one of His *"disciples"*.

In verse 60 we read, *"When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?'"* (some translations say put is as *"a difficult saying"*). Unfortunately, our English Bibles do not convey the deeper meaning of this word as they tend to express that Jesus' words are hard to understand. But the Greek word means *"harsh, rough, or unpleasant"*, and so a better way to interpret it that His

words are hard or difficult to accept. In other words, this message is offensive to them. They further ask, “*Who can listen to it?*”, or to express it another way, “*Why should we listen to it?*”. To them, the truths that Jesus is teaching them about His deity, His death, and the level of commit He expects of them, is unacceptable, and so to them, Jesus does not deserve to be heard. They will follow Him on their terms, but not on His. To say that He is God in the flesh, to them is absurd, unconscionable, and not worth their time. In effect they want a comfortable and convenient faith that fits their desires, schedules, and preferences, and not one that requires sacrifice and commitment.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. In many ways, these shallow comments and attitudes of the Jews are similar to modern society and even the church. What are some ways that you can think of or have heard, where similar sentiments are expressed?
2. What Jesus is talking about here in John 6 is very similar to His Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23. What are some of the parallels and what are the consequences of such shallow beliefs?
3. Consider a time in your life when you perhaps expressed similar shallow ideas about Jesus or what He expects of you as a believer. If this is true of you today, what do you intend to do to change this attitude and subsequent behaviour?

What do we do when this happens? How do we as a church respond? The modern church-growth movement will tell you to make church services more enjoyable, to introduce new programmes or methods to keep them in church, to make the Gospel more inclusive, or even to not tell people that they are sinners. But is that what Jesus does here in John 6? Definitely not. Jesus does not sugar-coat or water down His message or try some tactic to keep them following Him. He simply continues to preach the Gospel uncompromisingly.

He is no interested in having a large crowd follow Him, nor thousands of fans or followers on Twitter or Facebook, He wants disciples. He would rather have a handful true disciples than twenty thousand people in a crowd. And so in verse 61, even though what He has already said offends them, He proceeds to offend them even more by asking them directly, “*Do you take offense at this?*”



NOTE: The Greek word for “*offense*” that Jesus uses here is *scandalizō*, from which we derive the English word “scandal”. Jesus is equating His words with someone caught in a crime or a shocking moral failure. He is essentially asking them, “Is what I am teaching you equivalent to someone caught with their hand in the cookie jar?”

But Jesus continues to press them even further and adds in verse 62, “*Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?*”. This is a rhetorical question where the expected answer is “No”. Because the truth is, even if they see Jesus ascend to heaven and sit on the throne of God surrounded by legions of angels, they would still not believe that He is God. The same is true today when

we share the Gospel with the world or point out false doctrine or sin in the lives of believers, and they still respond negatively and do not believe. Even if they were to see Jesus with their own eyes, or hear Him point out their error or sin, they will still not believe.

This is because it is offensive to them. But why would they still not repent and believe even if confronted by Jesus? He tells us in verse 63 as He turns up the heat even more with yet another offensive statement, *“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”*.



This is the key verse in this section, and has both negative and positive aspects. It is negative in that because the Spirit first needs to give life before anyone can believe, it means that because these disciples do not believe, they, therefore, do not have the Spirit. This is like telling someone who claims to be a believer that in reality they are not. This implies that there are also people in the church that assume they are believers who are in fact False Disciples. They attend every week, do and say all the right things, at least in public, they wear the t-shirt, but deep down they are just like the crowd here in John 6. They do not seek Jesus with pure motives, nor truly believe in Him. Instead they believe lies, chase signs and wonders, and follow a different Jesus. Paul says of these kind of people in Galatians 1:6-10 that they are following a different gospel, which he goes on to say is no gospel at all.

Notice too that Jesus says that the flesh profits nothing, in other words, in the flesh you have no spiritual ability to believe in Jesus. Instead, the only way you can ever believe is for the Spirit to give you life and when the spirit gives life, He also gives you the gifts of repentance and faith to believe. It is all a work of God as we saw back in verse 34.

Jesus also says in verse 63, *“The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life”*, and so here comes the positive aspect. Since sinful flesh is incapable of believing, the Holy Spirit, through the Word, performs a miracle in the individual so that he or she can believe the spiritual truths. The crowd thought that they saw a miracle when Jesus fed the five thousand. The twelve disciples thought they saw a miracle when Jesus walked on the water, but in reality, the true miracle happens inside the individual as the Holy Spirit converts the soul. This is the greatest miracle in the Bible, the salvation that occurs within the hearts of individuals as the Holy Spirit gives eternal life to those who are enemies of God, dead in trespasses and sin, and who want nothing to do with God, yet causes them to repent, believe, and ultimately obey the Lord.

The amazing thing about this miracle is that it has occurred millions, if not billions of times throughout history, and even happens in the souls of people today. So no matter who you are. No matter what sin you have committed, and no matter who you may have hurt, the Holy Spirit can give you eternal life. So whether a person wants to have nothing to do with God and currently does not want to even hear about Him, or whether they are false disciples, the Holy Spirit can and does give eternal life and turns them into true believers.

However, as great as that fact is, it does not remove the fact, that there will remain those who do not believe, as Jesus reminds us in verse 64. Despite the fact that the Holy Spirit gives eternal life, we must not forget the fact that not everyone will receive that gift. And Jesus reiterates why in verse 65, essentially repeating what He said earlier in verse 44, those who do not believe, do so because it has not been granted by the Father for them to believe and so He is not drawing them to the Son (see study #27, *Grumbling and Grace*). It all comes down to your view of the sovereignty of God who does all the work in our salvation (cf. v29). His sovereignty in salvation is even seen in two places in our text where we read that Jesus knew who did not believe and who was going to betray Him (vv64 and 71).



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Before continuing, spend some time reflecting on and giving God thanks for the work that He has done in your life.
2. Read Psalm 139:23-24 and reflect on its meaning. Then spend some time asking God to do for you what David asked for himself. Repent of any ways that He reveals to you where there are any “grievous ways” in you.
3. Now spend some time in prayer for those you know who do not believe asking the Lord to perform the miracle of salvation in their lives too.

We now come to verse 66 which is probably one of the saddest verses in the whole Bible, “*After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him*”. This is a verse that those who hold to the church growth or seeker sensitive movements will say in a sense shows Jesus as a failure in ministry.

Consider for a moment just how many, the “*many*” is in this verse. In verse 11 we learn that five thousand were present, a figure that we learn from Mark 6 verse 44 only includes the men, so there could have been close to twenty thousand people if you add in the women and children who could have been present. Then in verse 67 we see Jesus speaking to “*the Twelve*” who we see in verses 68 and 69, through the words of Peter, are the only ones who choose to continue to follow Him. So the “*many*” is the twenty thousand whom Jesus fed in verses 1 to 15.

This highlights a very important truth that Jesus taught in Matthew 7:13-14 of the way leading to destruction being wide, and the way to life being narrow. Sadly the world is full of people who do not want to hear about Jesus, and the church is filled with people who only want a Jesus that fits their picture of Him. The faith of the many is superficial at best, and their end, sadly, is destruction.



TRUE BELIEVERS (VV67-71)

After the many leave, Jesus turns to His remaining disciples and asks them in verses 67, “*Do you want to go away as well?*” Here Jesus is testing them – not in the sense of them having to prove to Him that they will not go, but for them to be certain within themselves that they will remain.

As usual it is Peter who answers. Only this time, instead of later putting His foot in his mouth, he is spot on with his answer and does not mess up afterwards. He replies, *“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”*.

At least three things stand out from Peter’s statement:

1. Peter addresses Jesus as Lord – *kurios* in Greek, which means master, ruler, owner, sovereign one. He can not appeal to anyone higher than that. This implies that Peter recognises Jesus as sovereign and implies that he understands that what he refers to next is only possible because of God.
2. He asks, *“To whom shall we go”*, or in other translations, *“Where else can we go?”*. This shows Peter’s steadfastness – a steadfastness that only a true disciple can have. He acknowledges that they have left everything to follow Jesus and that there is no one else to whom they can go to hear the truth that Jesus is speaking.
3. Peter acknowledges that they now believe and have come to know who Jesus is. He is, in effect, testifying that the Spirit has given them eternal life, and that through the words of eternal life that Jesus speak, the Holy Spirit has performed the miracle of salvation causing them to believe.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. If Jesus had to ask you, *“Do you want to go away as well?”*, what would your answer be?
2. In the midst of crisis and feelings of doubt, do you have the conviction to turn only to Jesus as the source of strength and life, both physical and spiritual? Does your life testify to the fact that the Holy Spirit has done a work in you? Can you truly say, with Peter, and many others who have remained steadfast and even died for the faith since, *“He died for me, I’ll live for Him”*¹⁰⁴?

Just to note, Peter is not only presuming these things about the other disciples, because John confirms it is true of ten of the other disciples, by the word *“them”* in verse 70, *“Jesus answered them”*. Jesus also uses the plural *“you”* in His answer. This implies that although only Peter answered, his statement is true of the other disciples too, except for Judas, who we are told in verse 71 will betray Jesus.



NOTE: Jesus’ statement in verse can lead to confusion, so some clarity is needed. *“Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil”*. This means that Jesus chose all twelve disciples, including Judas. Can we conclude from this that Judas was saved? That even though he betrayed Jesus, he was still saved as he was simply doing what he was tasked to do? No, we cannot. We need to make a distinction with the word *“choose”*. Jesus is not referring to choosing Judas for salvation. We know this based on what we learned earlier in this chapter. The Father chooses, draws, and presents those who are to be saved to Christ as a gift. Jesus does not choose for salvation, He only re-

104 From the song, *The Pledge*, by DeGarmo and Key, 1989.

deems those who are given to Him. But He does choose for service, and that is what He is referring to here. Judas, along with the other eleven, was chosen for service, but he was not chosen for salvation.

Why then choose someone for service when they are not chosen for salvation? Simply because of the task that Judas was to fulfil – to betray Jesus – which was a fulfilment of the prophecies in Jeremiah 19 and Zechariah 11 that Jesus would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. Judas also provides an example of someone who is active in ministry, respected and liked by others, trusted and appears close to Jesus, but who has never been born again and does not believe. He is an example of those Jesus spoke about in Matthew 7:21-23 that Jesus declares He does not know despite them doing things in His name.



CONCLUSION

John 6 is a passage that calls every who considers themselves to be Christian to examine themselves as to whether they are true or false believers. Because the truth is, you can be in church but not be in Christ. You can know the Bible but not know the saviour. Your name may be on a church membership list, but it is not in the lamb's book of life.

So honestly examine yourself today!