

Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live
(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)
John 6:60-71
Walking Away

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” ⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “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.” ⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ 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.” ⁷⁰ Jesus answered 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.

Why do people walk away from Christianity? Why do they often take offense at the name of Christ or when you mentioned the word church? **In a five-year project headed by Barna Group they discovered six major reasons why many young adults leave the church:** **1)** As Christians, they expressed the desire for their faith in Christ to connect to the world they live in. However, much of their experience of Christianity felt stifling, fear-based and risk-averse. “Christians demonize everything outside of the church,” they said. Churches are just too overprotective! **2)** Their experience of Christianity is shallow and lacking. They refer to church as “boring,” “not relevant to my career or interests,” or that “the Bible is not taught clearly or often enough.” **3)** They claim that churches come across as antagonistic to

science - even anti-science! Many say they have been turned off by the creation-versus-evolution debate. **4)** They claim that the church experiences related to sexuality are often simplistic and judgmental. They struggle with how to live up to the church's expectation of chastity and sexual purity in a culture where marriage is often delayed to the late 20s. How do I wait? What is the church's answer? They also say that when they have made mistakes, they feel judged and ostracized from church because of them. **5)** Many wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity. They are the most eclectic generation in American history in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, technological tools and sources of authority. They feel that "churches are afraid of the beliefs of other faiths" and that they are "forced to choose between my faith and my friends." **6)** Finally, the church feels unfriendly to those who doubt or have questions. Many said that they are not able "to ask my most pressing life questions in the church" and are having "significant intellectual doubts about my faith." Now before we simply reject these assertions out of hand, we must remember that these are some of the very people that we are trying to reach with the gospel. Certainly these issues are worth our attention as we seek to be unabashedly faithful to the gospel and yet relevant to the times.

Well as we come to our text Jesus is also experiencing a large-scale defection among his followers. Many have found his teaching offensive, difficult, or hard. Indeed, it seems that his twelve disciples are on the verge of leaving him. "*Do you take offense at this? Do you want to go away as well,*" he asks. Further he makes this startling revelation to his disciples, "*Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.*" John adds saying "*He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.*" "This causes us to ask, **“Why is this happening? What were these teachings the crowd found so difficult - so offensive?”** What caused them and often, for the same reasons, causes many today to walk away from Christ and his church? The text gives us **three reasons** why many walk away from the church and the Christ of the Gospels:

I. Many Struggle with Christ's True Identity.

The whole concept of Christ's person is very difficult and in fact impossible to understand even for faithful believers. Repeatedly in this chapter, Jesus has stated that he "*came down from heaven.*" Here he says, "*Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?*" Christ's heavenly origin is a stumbling block for some. They cannot see beyond Jesus' humanity to his true identity. They have no problem calling him a good man or a good teacher or even the greatest man in all of history. But the fact that Christ is fully God, fully human, and yet one person is a mystery for them - and indeed for all of us. But not only is this a fact, it is absolutely necessary for our faith!

1. Jesus had to be fully God.

Only someone who was infinite God could bear the full penalty for all of the sins of everyone who would believe in him. A finite creature could not possibly have borne that penalty. The Scripture also tells us that "salvation is from the Lord." That is, no human being, no creature, could ever save mankind - only God! Only someone who is truly and fully God could be the one mediator between God and man - both to bring us back to God and also to reveal God most fully to us.

2. Jesus had to be fully man.

Only a man could die for men - die in our place. Only the man Jesus could be our representative and obey for us where Adam had failed and disobeyed. Only a person who was both God and man could be a mediator and represent us to God while also representing God to us. Only as a man could Jesus give us an example and pattern in life so that we could walk "in the same way in which he walked." (First John 2:6) Only one who had walked in our shoes could be our sympathetic high priest. He knew what it was like to hunger, thirst, be confronted by the devil, rejected by members of his own family and hometown. The Savior of the world had to be perfect God and he had to be perfect man!

II. Many Struggle with the Means or Way of Salvation.

1. My good works should count for something!

Jesus says, "*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 a hard saying for many. "You mean to tell me that my church attendance, my acts of kindness towards the poor, my abstinence from alcohol, drugs, or

cigarettes, my refusal to use profanity mean nothing to God!” As my dad use to jest, “We don’t smoke, we don’t chew, and we don’t go with the girls that do.” Yes, these are good things; in fact they are commendable. But the flesh is incapable of saving us in any way. Salvation is not by works because man could never do the work that would enable him to get to heaven on his own. He would have to be perfect. People can understand how salvation could possibly be earned, but to think that Christ had to earn salvation for them, and that they would therefore have to receive it as a free gift from him - or not receive it at all - is for many highly objectionable.

But only Christ through the Spirit can save us. It is the Spirit of God that regenerates us, births us, or brings us eternal life. It is the Spirit of God that speaks to our minds and hearts convicting us of our sin and convincing us that Jesus is the only one who can provide the righteousness that we need. The flesh can provide nothing of comparable importance. Jesus tells them that his words are “spirit” and “life.” That is, you must believe the spiritual message that he is communicating in order to receive eternal life. You must believe that he is the “spiritual bread from heaven” who sustains and nourishes you spiritually. Jesus is saying that it is through the words he said and the life he lived that we are blessed with eternal life. It is not the external trappings of religion that bless the soul, but rather the teachings of Scripture that are made understandable by the supernatural intervention of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives. So it is not baptism, communion, Bible reading or even prayer (although they are good things and necessary things) that save us.

2. How can you say that Jesus is the only way?

This is probably the most common objection that we hear today. In John 14:6, Jesus will make it very clear that he is the only way to God and that you cannot come by any other way or through any other “God.” It is not we who are making these exclusive claims, it is Christ himself. This is why it is imperative that we get the good news out. It is rationally unacceptable to believe that there are different paths to heaven when, for example, the God of the Bible and the God of Islam are quite different “Gods.” We must deal with the question, who is the true God? It cannot

be the God of the Christian **and** the God of Islam. One must be true and one must be false.

3. Why would God put his own Son to death?

In John 6:51 Jesus says “*And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*” Here he is clearly speaking concerning his own death on the cross. Jesus’ crucifixion was in a sense the first step in his ascending back to the Father, since it permitted him to do so. It was imperative that he die first bearing the penalty for the sins of the world, and then rise from the dead demonstrating God’s acceptance of his sacrifice. Only when his work on earth was done, could he ascend into heaven and continue his ministry as our advocate and intercessor before the Father. Jesus’ crucifixion was absolutely necessary, and yet it is the most humanly offensive, objectionable aspect of his entire ministry (First Corinthians 1:23). It is a difficult thing for people to realize that their sin is so vile that it demands such a horrifying death on behalf of them. “Come on now, I’m not really so bad,” they say.

III. Many are repulsed by the idea of God’s sovereign choice.

John says, “*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.*” Many do not understand and in fact are repulsed by the idea that the human decision to believe or not believe rests ultimately in God’s elective purpose (6:37, 44). The Bible clearly states that we did not choose God on our own, but that God chose us and then drew us to himself. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit we would never have chosen God. Nothing is more calculated to arouse the ire and rebellion of the human heart than this teaching, but it is true because Christ did not hesitate to proclaim it repeatedly.

Conclusion

As we come to the end of the chapter we find two powerful examples: one who walks away in Judas Iscariot and one who eventually stands tall confessing Christ as Lord. Judas is the classic example of a person who experienced Christ in so many ways but who never truly believed on Christ in a saving way. He walked, talked, shared meals and

a variety of different experiences with Christ. But eventually Jesus did not live up to his “messianic expectations” and he betrayed the Savior.

Peter will deny Christ three times, but here he displays amazing God-given wisdom in a thought-provoking question, “*Lord, to whom shall we go?*” For Peter, it is unthinkable to turn back now. What would he go back to? Indeed, if you are considering turning back, what would you go back to? Do you really want to go back to your *former way of life*? Even in the best of times there was that underlying sense of emptiness and lack of meaning and purpose. And then there were those sins that were constantly taunting you and enslaving you - sins over which you had no power. What’s more, would you go back to the *secular ideologies of our age*? With all the advances in commerce, science, medicine, communications, and transportation, are we really in a golden age in which all live in peace and all forms of ignorance have been wiped out? Would you be better off? Are the real answers to life found in atheism and agnosticism? Is it really satisfying to deny the possibility of finding answers to the deep questions of life? Who am I? Why am I here? What happens when I die? Would you go back to the *moralism of our age*? Is the “anything goes” attitude toward sexual expression really satisfying? Are you really free when you throw aside all moral constraints? Would you, would your partner, would your children, would your friends benefit? Is there anything really of lasting benefit worth going back to? Peter says, “Absolutely not!” Jesus is our only hope and his teachings show us the path to eternal life. I certainly do hope that there is something beyond this troubled and, at times, terrifying world. Indeed I am absolutely convinced that there is. Jesus is the Holy One who has lived the perfect life for me and died the fully satisfying death to pay for my sin. In him and only in him is life! How can I turn from such love as this? It could not possibly be worth the trouble nor the time to walk away.