

The Discipleship Question: Do You Wish to Go Away?

Series: The Questions of Easter

John 6:56-71

March 13, 2016

Today, we are continuing our series “Questions of Easter.” We are looking through the Gospel of John at the questions Jesus asked as He was making His way on the road towards Easter and the empty tomb.

Four weeks ago, we tackled the Life question: What Are You Looking For? Some seek power; some seek material blessings; some seek eternal life; some seek to love Jesus.

Three weeks ago, we looked at the Grace question, discovering that each and every one of us need to be born again to enter the Kingdom of God.¹

Two weeks ago, we looked at the Change Question, learning that there are a lot of erroneous ideas about religion, and that we have to decide if we want a different life.

Last week, we dealt with the Wholeness question Jesus asks: Do you want to be made well?

Today, we are going to deal with the Discipleship question Jesus asks, and this will be a tough one.

REDS FAN: WE KNOW THAT THERE WILL BE TOUGH TIMES AHEAD, BUT WE DON'T LIKE IT

There is a lack of loyalty in our society. People don't stick with their teams. This summer, there will be Reds fans who once always cheered and now boycott the games because of a win-loss record. The only example of true loyalty is among Browns fans.

People don't stick with their decisions. They change their minds at a moment's notice. “I don't like this dress or that fishing rod. I thought I did, but I don't now, so I will take it back.”

People don't stick with their relationships. They will be around someone until something happens, or something is said, and they will walk away. “As long as you are meeting my needs” is kind of the mentality.

And we will see that this happened even to Jesus.

DREAM TO BE THERE AND ACTUALLY FOLLOW JESUS.

SCRIPTURE POINTS OF JOHN 6:

- Feeding of the 5,000
- Crowd wants to force Jesus to be their king.
- Jesus sends the disciples on ahead
- Storm on the sea and Jesus walking on water.
- Next day, people come back, looking for Jesus, looking for more free food. He had, in effect, become to them, the all-you-can-eat buffet man.

But when, Jesus claimed to come from heaven and be the bread of life, the people (pardon the pun) could not stomach it.

Jesus, though, was trying to encourage them to look beyond the obvious temporal world and a free meal and see the eternal.

¹ John 3:3

But when He does that, they can't grasp it. They say, "This is a hard saying. Who can accept it?"

I get the phrase, "This is a hard saying."

When I read about the geopolitical issues, I often want to say, "This is a hard saying."

When I look at the IRS tax instruction book, I want to say, "this is a bunch of hard sayings."

And when people listen to Jesus, sometimes he is hard to understand. He's on one level, but we're down here on another level. This is especially true of John's Gospel.

The woman at the well encounters Jesus and the Lord says, "I come to give living water." The woman doesn't understand. "Oh really, where's your bucket? Where's this water?" She's on one level, Jesus is on another. She doesn't understand.

Or Nicodemus. Jesus tells him, "You must be born again." "Oh really. And just how am I going to get back into my mother's womb and do that?" He's on one level, Jesus is on another. He doesn't understand.

And now we come to this morning's text.

READ JOHN 6:25-60

Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." He talks about the importance of the Sacrament. "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

Jesus talks about eternal life. He talks about the resurrection of the dead. He talks about how He comes from the Father and how He and God the Father are one.

And the crowd comes to an important decision: they decide not to follow Jesus.

John 6:66: "At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him."²

In fact, thousands of people desert him. At the beginning of John chapter 6, Jesus has a congregation of over 5,000. At the end of this chapter, all but a handful have deserted him.

If I served a church of over 5,000 people, and later the week, all I had left were 12 – the Bishop would have a few words to say to me.

But why do people leave.

People leave because they are weary.

People leave the Army because their tired of fighting. Players leave the football field because their exhausted. People leave their jobs because the work is so hard, it's so stressful, that they just can't do it one more day.

There are examples in the Bible of people leaving because they were weary:

Elijah became weary of fighting against the evil influences of his time, so he ran away. He eventually rediscovered God in the still small voice.

John the Baptist became weary of his imprisonment. We read in Matthew 11:2-3:

John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the Messiah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?"³

² John 6:66 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

³ Matthew 11:2-3 (NLT)

Jesus answered John's doubts by pointing to the acts of healing the blind, lame, and deaf, curing the lepers, raising the dead, and preaching the Good News to the poor. With so much evidence, Jesus' identity was obvious. John just needed to hear it.

Folks, we can be tempted to leave when we get weary. We've worked hard at this thing called Christianity. We tolled a great deal to build Christ's church. We've taught Sunday School lesson after Sunday School lesson, attended meeting after meeting, cleaned and fixed and mowed and served so much that we can get just plum tuckered out.

God knows this. He inspired the prophet Isaiah to write:

*"Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."*⁴

That's the key. We will grow weary if we are relying on our own strength. Instead, we must rely on God's strength.

Zechariah 4:6 reads,

*"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts."*⁵

Another reason people leave is **People leave because they don't get what they want.**

Jesus said in verse 26, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs."⁶

Jesus criticized the people who followed Him only for the physical and temporal benefits and not for the satisfying of their spiritual hunger. Many people use religion to gain prestige, comfort, or even political votes. But those are self-centered motives. True believers follow Jesus simply because they know he has the truth and his way is the way to live.⁷

My friends, the Church is not about what we want; it is always about what God wants.

I remember the story of a church that was angry with their new pastor about the way he was doing communion. It got to the point that the new pastor called the former pastor to ask his advice.

"Are you using the liturgy?"

"Yes, every word."

"Are you breaking the bread and lifting up the cup?"

"Yes, every time."

"Are you inviting the people to come forward and handing them the bread?"

"Yes, without fail."

Back and forth they went until the former pastor asked, "Are you touching the cross on the altar table before you give them the bread?"

There was a pause. The new pastor replied, "Why would I do that? That's not something taught in seminary. You touched the cross before giving the bread? Why?"

The former pastor said, "I didn't want to shock the people with static electricity, so I would touch the cross to get rid of it."

⁴ Isaiah 40:30-31 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁵ Zechariah 4:6 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁶ John 6:26 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

⁷ Life Application Study Bible, John 6:26

The Church is not about what we want; it is always about what God wants.

Third, People leave because they don't agree.

The crowd that day was stuck in the old days of Moses. Verses 30-31 reads, *"Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What can you do? After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, 'Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"*⁸

We can hear this teaching more easily now because we understand the concept of Communion. But when Jesus said, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you,"⁹ it was difficult for them to take in.

It's ok for someone to go to a different church because they believe something different about baptism or spiritual gifts or theology. But for people to leave the church because you don't agree with Jesus is a very sad thought.

Finally, People leave because discipleship is too hard for them.

"Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" they asked."¹⁰

*"One day when large groups of people were walking along with him, Jesus turned and told them, 'Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters—yes, even one's own self!—can't be my disciple. Anyone who won't shoulder his own cross and follow behind me can't be my disciple.'"*¹¹

When I read a passage like that, I am amazed by Jesus' willingness to let people walk away if they weren't completely committed to following him. He didn't always make it easy to stick around. You would think He would say more positive, easier things, if He wanted to start a new church.

But Christianity is not easy; that's why it is called the narrow way. It means we put ourselves under the authority of Christ, not our own will. It means we follow a lifestyle that was set thousands of years ago, not today. It means we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him.

Verse 66-67 reads

*At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?"*¹²

This is today's Question of Easter: the Discipleship Question: Are you going to leave?

Peter says it best:

*"Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life."*¹³

Tim Hansel in his book "When I Relax I Feel Guilty" wrote:

"I was almost your person today, Lord. Then I thought what it would have been like if Jesus had done the same thing. What if God had almost revealed himself in Jesus Christ? What if Christ were almost born and almost lived and almost died? What if he would have said, 'Ask and it will almost be given you; seek and you will almost find; knock and it will almost be opened to you'? What if he would have said, 'Come to me,

⁸ John 6:30-31 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

⁹ John 6:53 (NRSV)

¹⁰ John 6:52 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

¹¹ Luke 14:25-27 (The Message)

¹² John 6:66-67 (NLT)

¹³ John 6:68 (NLT)

all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will almost give you rest'? And what if Jesus had told his disciples, 'For whosoever would save his life will lose it, and whosoever loses his life for my sake will almost find it'?

"My Almost Christianity took on a much different light. I realized how many times I had played the game of being one of Jesus' 'almost disciples.' I recalled how many times I had prayed almost believing and walked through my days as if he were almost risen.

"It was not a question of theology. It was a question of lifestyle. Whether or not I had a lifestyle that could match what I said I believed, whether or not, as some have said, 'I could walk my talk.'"¹⁴

John 6:40 in The Message reads: "This is what my Father wants: that anyone who sees the Son and trusts who he is and what he does and then aligns with him will enter real life, eternal life. My part is to put them on their feet alive and whole at the completion of time."¹⁵

Today, see the Son. Trust Who He is, Do what He does, Align yourself with Him.

¹⁴ Tim Hansel, When I Relax I Feel Guilty, p. 51.

¹⁵ John 6:40 (The Message)