

## Who Can Understand?

John 6:60-71

This is the fourth week of our study in the sixth chapter of John, and for the last three weeks there has been one overarching image that Jesus has used in his teaching. Bread. Three weeks ago, we studied how Jesus made bread by his own supernatural power. He took those five barley loaves and two fish, and he fed four thousand people. The leftover fragments filled twelve baskets.

Then two weeks ago we saw how that great miracle pointed so personally to Jesus, by studying Jesus' own declaration, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

And then last week, we studied Jesus' response to the grumbling of those who followed him. Jesus spoke in such graphic and descriptive language as to make himself perfectly clear, saying, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world..Most assuredly, 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 eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed."

"I am the bread of life."

This afternoon we will enjoy the great New Testament sign and seal of those spiritual truths. We will observe the Lord's Supper, eating together the flesh of our Lord Jesus and drinking his blood, not carnally nor in the flesh, but in spirit and in truth. In

that way we were made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to our own spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

So what do we find at the conclusion of this great chapter of John 6, after all that grand teaching about the bread of life? Rejection! Many so-called disciples turning away. And it is a sad occasion, for it is an occasion on which,

### I. JESUS EXPOSES THE HARDNESS OF HUMAN HEARTS.

You might think that what should follow these great words of life would be a description of those who were saved, a description of those who believed. But the emphasis is upon the others, those who wouldn't believe. Those who were not saved. Those who walked away.

And so we see Jesus having to respond again to grumbling. Complaining. And although they kept silent in their grumbling, still it was known to Jesus.

v.61

How could it be, you might think? How could these great words of life be a stumbling block? How could Jesus words about being the bread of life cause offense?

Self-righteous pride, perhaps, in their unwillingness to honor Jesus despite his outwardly low position. They would not recognize his deity, and would not, could not, believe that eternal life is found in him. Therefore, they couldn't understand what Jesus meant by giving his own flesh and blood and blood for the life of the world. They would not believe that Jesus would be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. Simply put, they would not honor Jesus. They would not worship Jesus. They would not exalt him as the son of God. And so it is, that,

**A. Men unwilling to honor Jesus will not understand his words.**

And that's exactly the problem here, they would not honor Jesus.  
v.60

"This is a hard saying." "This is a difficult statement." Jesus' words about his own flesh and blood being the atoning sacrifice for sins, that was a hard statement. Indeed, it was THE great stumbling block for these Jews. It was the point at which they chose to separate themselves from Jesus. They were unwilling to honor him, for as we studied last week, they knew his mother and father. They knew him as a little boy. He couldn't be the son of God, or so they thought. And so they could not understand his words.

There is a very important point in that. Honor and submission to Jesus comes first, then understanding. Not the other way around.

The problem with unbelievers is not that things haven't been explained adequately. It's not a problem of understanding and intellectual comprehension. It's a moral problem. A problem of rebellion. A problem of rejection. Those who reject Jesus cannot, therefore, understand him. And to those who would want to come to salvation and receive eternal life by means of understanding, I would say this, the first step is surrender. The first step is the choice, the commitment, the decision to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord! The first step is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. To honor him as the second person of the trinity, the eternal God, who was with God the father in the beginning, through whom all things have been made.

Once that commitment is given, understanding follows. Once

the moral issue is resolved, once a person submits his whole soul to Christ, once he is willing, by faith, to believe to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein, once he is able to renounce his own claims of righteousness and confesses that all his own righteousness is as filthy rags, then full understanding comes.

These unbelieving Jews asked a probing question. Who can understand these things? And the answer, only those who believe. I believe, in order that I may understand. Therefore, men unwilling to honor Jesus will not understand his words. And as a consequence,

**B. Men unwilling to honor Jesus will not remain faithful to him.**

That's the sad reality of our text this morning, though it came as no surprise to Jesus.

v.64

And so, v.66

That rejection of Jesus is made pointedly personal in the person of Judas Iscariot.

v.70-71

Why the rejection? Was it because Jesus was just too difficult to understand, that his teaching was just too far over their heads? No, absolutely not. The problem was that they wouldn't honor him! They wouldn't bow their knee and surrender their lives to his sovereign Lordship.

Jesus will always continue to separate men in this way, those who love him and those who hate him. Those who submit to his authority and those who rebel against him. There is no middle

ground. There is no room for the foolish thoughts that Jesus could somehow become your savior but that you would not be required to bow before his lordship. For only,

Rom. 10:9 "...If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

So what about you? You who have an outward and external connection to the church. Is your heart hardened this morning? That is, do you wish to retain authority over your own life, to be your own lord, to do with yourself and with your life whatever you choose to do?

Or will you, by faith, believe what the Bible says and set out to do it! Will you bow your knee and confess that Jesus is Lord, your Lord, the lord over every area of your life. Without such a commitment, you must read this text with great fear, that although you would be one of those following Jesus outwardly, yet the time could well come when you, too, will withdraw and walk with Jesus no more.

If you are not willing to honor him, and worship him, above all else, then you will not persevere if your attempt to walk with him.

These things should be in your mind when you talk to unbelievers also, trying to tell them about eternal life in Jesus Christ. You need to explain some things, but more of all, you need to urge them to believe. You need to urge them to embrace Jesus Christ as he is offered in the gospel. And don't think that it depends upon your ability to answer all their questions! It doesn't. You don't win people to Christ by winning a debate. You don't lead people to salvation by proving to them what is true by presenting all the evidence. Because in the hardness of the sinful

human heart, all the evidence in the world will not cause a man who is unwilling to honor Jesus to worship him.

His heart must be changed. And so, in evangelism, we should respond as Jesus did. Instead of debating all the evidence, he simply proclaimed his own glory.

## **II. JESUS EXPOUNDS HIS OWN GLORY.**

He points to himself. He says, with obvious paraphrase, "So, you think my claim to be the bread of life is a hard statement, listen to this,..."

v.62

Jesus is not trying to win over these disciples by making it easy for them to believe! He doesn't soft-pedal the truth nor hide anything that might be a stumbling block for them. Instead, he emphasizes that which would be the very hardest for them to understand. He emphasizes his own glory, specifically,

### **A. Jesus declares his pre-existing and future glory.**

Jesus is such a marvelous communicator. Just one sentence, just one probing question, and he forces these disciples to consider the eternal glory of his pre-existence and the eternal glory of his future ascension to the right hand of God the father.

He declares, in the form of this question, that he will ascend to where he was before. That is, of course, the presence of God. That's where he was, before he was born! And that's the answer to those who say that Jesus is only a man, that he was born of earthly parents just as we were. Jesus says, "Before I was born, I was with the Father in heaven." In fact, as this gospel began, we know that,

John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was

with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

Likewise,

Heb. 11:3 “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”

And about Jesus, the son of God, we read specifically that God,

Heb. 1:2 “...has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

That’s Jesus. He is one through whom God made the worlds. He is the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of his person. And he, Jesus, when he had satisfied God’s wrath and condemnation which our sins deserved, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Now, that’s what we need to proclaim to this world around us. We need to proclaim the glory of Jesus. And if that is an offense, if that is a stumbling block, if that is too difficult for people to accept, then so be it!

As Jesus said,

v.64

We need to preach Christ, the fullness of Christ, the fullness of

the glory of Christ. We must proclaim the greatness of Christ, both in his pre-existing glory and in his present and future glory, and then say to those who don’t believe,

Act 16:31 “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

And we must pray that God would pour out his Holy Spirit upon them so that they would be able to believe! Don’t ever manipulate people to try to bring them to salvation. I’ve seen that done. The invitation system itself lends to such manipulation, especially when it is grievously abused. I’ve seen people walk through groups of people urging them to go forward, urging them to do something outwardly, as if those outward actions will save them.

“It is the spirit who gives life!”

v.63

Here,

### **B. Jesus defines the spiritual nature of life.**

It’s not the works of the flesh that bring life. And those works of the flesh include intellectual understanding. It’s not mere intellectual knowledge that brings life. It is not anything that we think or do. It is the spirit of God who changes our hearts, who enlightens our minds and renews our wills. That’s what it means to be born again.

Being born again is not a decision that you make! It is the work of God’s holy spirit, just as Jesus himself declares,

John 3:5 “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, `You must be

born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

You must be born of the spirit, for life is essentially spiritual. Again,  
v.63

That’s what we need to proclaim to a generation that thinks and believes that the highest end in life is self-advancement, whether in the form of materialistic advancement or hedonistic enjoyment. The world in which we live finds its highest value in the fulfillment of a man’s own needs. Think about that. It’s a correct evaluation, isn’t it?

And how sad a commentary it is on the state of the church to note that the church has taken in that highest objective and incorporated it into the program and work of the church. Churches exist today with the specific intent of giving people what they want, of fulfilling their own felt needs. And in that, we lose the proper perspective, that which has framed our whole understanding of what we call Reformed Theology, namely, that “the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy HIM forever!”

And so, in evangelism, in the church, in the preaching of the gospel, our primary aim is to expound and proclaim the glory of God as it is fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. And we must find in Jesus our delight and our joy. Not in the pleasures of this world. Not in the material riches and wealth of this world. Not in the sensual indulgences of this world. But in Jesus Christ.

Now, that’s radical, because it means that some people just won’t accept it. Some people just won’t want a church that is focused upon the glory of God. And these things are really too

hard for them to understand. And Jesus has no hesitation in exposing the hardness of their hearts by declaring his own glory!

v.59-64

And then Jesus does something else that blatantly contradicts the foolish teachings of the so-called church growth movement of our day. He proclaims a particular doctrine that is especially troublesome to men of all ages, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

It grieves me that churches seeking to be very large and popular tend to hide this doctrine and seldom proclaim it, let alone emphasize it, thinking that this doctrine might offend someone and cause them to leave the church. And so the gospel, the whole counsel of God, is watered down to the least common denominator that would be acceptable to the largest group of people. And people lose the grandeur of the glory of the greatness of God. And God becomes insignificant.

Jesus has no such hesitation. In fact,

### **III. JESUS EXALTS THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD THE FATHER.**

v.65

We saw this same thing last week, and it is repeated here for emphasis. Go back to,

v.44

#### **A. No one will come to Jesus for salvation unless the Father draws him.**

And that’s why Jesus says in verse 64 that he “knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him.” He knew it, not because he gazed into his crystal

ball and was able to predict it. No, he knew it, because those whom the Father would draw to him were chosen before the creation of the world. We read in Ephesians 1 that,

Eph.1:4 “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.”

And having chosen us, God calls us to salvation. We read, Rom.8:29 “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

No one will come to Jesus for salvation unless the Father draws him. Those are Jesus’ own words. So what should we do with those whom we know are in great need of that salvation? Ours is not the place to try and figure out who is and is not chosen. Ours is not the place to figure out whom God is drawing and whom he is not. But understanding that work of God, it is our place to preach the gospel and to pray. So proclaim to them the truth, and pray that God would enable them to accept it.

And understand why some will continue to reject the truth, and why some would rather perish in their sin. No one will come to Jesus for salvation unless the Father draws him. And,

**B. No one will understand the words of eternal life unless the Father teaches him.**

Here we have Peter’s good example. So many of Peter’s

example prior to Pentecost are bad examples, but here is his great shining moment. It came at Jesus’ prompting, at his personal and pastoral provocation, provoking the people to declare their own faith.

v.67

Peter’s answer,

v.68-69

What a good answer!

Now, let me ask, “How did Peter come to believe that?”

I have an definitive answer.

Mat.16:13 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" 14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

“My Father who is in heaven has revealed this to you!” That’s how Peter knew! And no one will come to believe that any other way!

Note what Peter says first to Jesus,

v.68

Where do people go? They go all sorts of places, don’t they? They go to themselves, for the religion of self-exaltation and self-fulfillment. The gospel of self-esteem and the doctrine of self-love. They look to themselves, and they end up very empty, and

psychologically confused.

Or they go to the indulgent pursuit of worldly pleasures, whether that's simply good things like food or drink taken to horrible excess, in gluttony or drunkenness. Or they give themselves wholeheartedly to immoral pleasures such as illegal drugs or illicit sexual relations outside of a life-long marriage relationship.

We speak of those things as an escape, don't we?

Some people go to their work, and seek to find meaning and purpose in it. Others, escaping the rigors of their labors, seek to find themselves in the relaxation of leisure. Others look to other people, their spouse or their children, trying to find purpose in life in that.

And many turn to organized religions, false organized religions, promising something which they are totally incapable of delivering. Religions such as Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism, Islam, or the New Age manifestations of Hinduism, Buddhism and other eastern religions.

And some, some have nowhere to turn, and in their hopelessness of despair, they often end their own lives in a desperate attempt to establish control.

So what about you? How would you answer Jesus' question? "Do you also want to go away?" Do you? But where will you go? Where will you go to find truth and life? Only Jesus has the words of life.

You need to know this about people, all people. You need to know that they are searching for life. And you ought to be ready

to tell them the only place they will find it. For Jesus, and Jesus alone, has the words of eternal life.

And he says to you,

John 6:35 "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst...51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

This, then, is his invitation,

Mat. 11:28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."