

Which way will you turn?

Text: John 6:60-69 for 8/26/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

⁶⁰ On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" ⁶¹ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. ⁶⁴ Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." ⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. ⁶⁷ "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Imagine you are out hiking on a path in the woods when you hear a rumble of thunder in the distance. You know you need to quickly get back to where you started, yet you have traveled too far to go back the way you came. So you start walking faster and soon you come to a place where the path goes in two different directions. The first path looks wide, level and seems to be well traveled. The others path goes up hill. It appears bumpy, rocky and is overgrown with weeds. Which path is best to get you to your destination? It might seem obvious, but is it?

In this portion of God's word before us this morning the people listening to Jesus had reached a similar point on the road of their lives. Before these people were two paths. One path did not look very good to most of the people and they chose not to travel on that path. But to those who had faith it was clear which way to turn. As we listen to Jesus words he sets before us with the same choice, and our Lord wants to know ...

Theme: Which way will you turn?

- I. Will you turn away from what is offensive?
- II. Or will you turn toward words that give life?

Sometimes Jesus' words can be offensive to our human reason, and to our way of thinking. This is what was happening with the crowd of people who are with Jesus. Jesus had miraculously fed these people with just a few loaves of bread. Now this group came looking for Jesus to see if he would give them more. Jesus then told the people to should stop working for food that spoils, and instead they should trust in him as the Savior God sent from heaven.

When Jesus didn't give the people what they wanted they demanded that he show them another miracle to prove he was from heaven. Again, they were hoping Jesus would miraculously produce more food for them to eat. This crowd did not want to hear the spiritual truths Jesus was teaching them.

So Jesus tries shocking them out of their spiritual apathy. He says, "**Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you**" (John 6:53). These are the words of Jesus from last week's Gospel reading. What Jesus was trying to get the people to understand was that you "eat" Jesus, the Bread of Life, by taking in his words. When you take in and believe Jesus' words then forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life are yours! So, how did this crowd react to Jesus' wakeup call? **On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"** (v. 60) The people say that Jesus' words are too hard to understand. They were offended by Christ's words, and because of that they refused to accept what Jesus said.

Which way will you turn?

Text: John 6:60-69 for 8/26/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

So Jesus tries one more time to make clear the spiritual reality of what he was saying. **Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life”** (vs. 61-63). The people wanted unending food for their bodies. Jesus offered them unending food for their souls. When the people didn’t get what they wanted they took offense at Jesus. So Jesus makes things perfectly clear: the crowd’s focus on feeding their bodies would all come to nothing, because in the end every one of them was still going to die. If they wanted to live forever they needed God’s Holy Spirit, and that Spirit of God comes to them through Jesus words. Jesus words are the source of spiritual life for all who believe!

The more Jesus tried to reach out to these people with the truth, the more they rejected his words. We are told: **From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him** (v. 66). Notice, it says “many of his *disciples*” no longer followed him. These were people who claimed to be students of Jesus and followers of his teachings. Yet when Jesus’ teachings did not line up with what the people wanted they became offended and turned away from following him.

Are there teachings of Jesus that are “offensive” to us? Are there things God says that we reject because they go against what we want? There are many teachings in God’s word that the people of this world find offensive. God’s teachings about abortion, sex outside of marriage, or the roles of men and women are hard for many to accept. Many people deny the Bible’s teachings because for them it is their own opinions and ideas that matter.

The teachings I just mentioned may not seem offensive to us. Yet, there is a teaching of Scripture that is most offensive to our sinful nature. It’s the Bible’s teaching that in our lives God must always be first. God says, **“You shall have no other gods before me”** (Exodus 20:3). Now, we want the one, true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – to be our God. When we hear this command of God we do not find it offensive.

That is, until Jesus explains exactly what God means in this command. Jesus says, **“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple”** (Luke 14:26). Jesus said, “hate.” If you put *anyone* before God, then you are breaking God’s First Commandment. If you put *anything* ahead of Jesus and his teaching, then you are not really a follower of Jesus Christ. Any time we chose to ignore what Jesus says for the sake of our parents, our spouse, our children, or even to get what we want for ourselves, Jesus says when we do that we cannot be his disciples.

Hearing Jesus say this, we are tempted to say right along with the crowd, **“This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”** (v. 60) What Jesus says is offensive to us because we love our parents, our children, and our spouse. Ultimately, we love ourselves. We love our lives and what we want more than anything else. That makes it very tempting to turn away from Jesus when we don’t like what we hear. There is a very real danger to our souls in this temptation.

So which way will you turn? Will you turn away from what you feel is offensive? Or will you turn toward the only words that give life?

Jesus said to those listening, **“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life”** (v. 63). Yet many from the crowd rejected Jesus’ words. So our Lord turns to his Apostles. **“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve** (v. 67). Peter’s reply reveals to us the power of Christ’s word. Peter says, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have**

Which way will you turn?

Text: John 6:60-69 for 8/26/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

the words of eternal life” (v. 68).

These words Peter spoke might not seem all that special until you compare them to the words Peter spoke when he first met Jesus. When Jesus revealed his almighty power as God to Peter, Peter said to Jesus, **“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”** (Luke 5:8) But instead of going away Jesus called Peter to be one of his disciples. As Peter listened and learned from Christ’s words, Peter’s faith grew. The faith that lived within Peter was only there because of the power of Christ’s words. So as the crowd turns and walks away from Jesus, Peter and the others turn toward the only words that give eternal life.

Those words are God’s words. They are words that promise you a Savior. Not some worldly hero who will give you whatever you want, but a King who comes to save you from sin, death, and hell. They are words that speak of the life of Christ: a perfect life that was lived as the substitute for our sin filled lives. They are Jesus words when he says, **“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him”** (Mk 10:33-34). They are words that speak of how Jesus’ death paid for our sinful turning away from Christ’s word of truth. And with his words, **“It is finished”** (John 19:30) we are assured that Jesus has fully paid for every last one of our sins. And God’s word gives us even greater assurance because it tells us Jesus rose from the dead to prove that he conquered sin and death. And in the words of our resurrected and living Lord we find hope as Jesus says to you and to me, **“Because I live, you also will live”** (John 14:19).

This good news of what Jesus has done for us moves us to say right along with Peter, **“[Jesus,] we believe and know that you are the Holy One of God”** (v. 69). God given knowledge that comes through a God given faith, created by God given words. All God’s work. All done for your benefit.

Jesus’ words do more than just give us faith. His words also help us make sense of this life. Jesus says, **“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life”** (v. 63). Those who live only to satisfy their flesh may live a life full of pleasure, but what does that do for them when their lives come to an end? What does satisfy the cravings of their bodies get them when they die? Without Jesus’ words the Holy Spirit cannot work in a person’s life. And without the Spirit working faith in a person’s heart there is no eternal life. Seeking a life of pleasure is just a confusion of what life is really about.

For those of us who have Jesus’ words, life starts to make a little more sense. We realize life is not just about satisfying the cravings of our bodies. We realize that this life is the only time we have to come to faith in our Savior.

When the Word of Life works in us it gives us focus and purpose. It turns our eyes from focusing on this world to focusing on heaven. The Word gives purpose to our lives, showing us how we can glorify God by loving and serving those around us. Jesus’ words make us content with what we have. The words of Christ also move our hearts to give to others out of the excess that God blesses us with. And when we stumble and fall into sin, the words of our loving Lord move our hearts to repent. Jesus gives us the power to turn away from sin, and to live in the joy and peace of his forgiveness. Christ’s words are words of eternal life. They are words that help to guide our hearts and minds through this life.

So, which way will you turn? It can be tempting to turn away from God when he says what

Which way will you turn?

Text: John 6:60-69 for 8/26/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

we feel is offensive. But turning away from God only leads you down a *dead* end. May God continue to pour out his Spirit on us so that we have the power to turn toward the only words that give life. May God's word continually guide our hearts and our lives as he leads us down that narrow path to the glorious joy of heaven. Amen.