

There's the Door

Background: You may not remember, but we studied [John 6](#) two years ago during our "I am" series. Jesus stated that He was the bread of life. If you remember, Jesus fed thousands of followers (an account repeated in all four gospels). The crowd was so impressed by the sign they were about to take Him by force to make Him King. The next day, after Jesus crossed the sea by foot, the crowd found Him in a synagogue. The crowd asked Jesus, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus' response occurred during the third year of His ministry. If Jesus wished to be a popular preacher, one must admit that He chose a poor strategy because, by the end, He would have gone from having thousands of followers to a few.

Perhaps you remember the lesson, but allow me to give a brief description. Jesus called the crowd out for being earthly-driven instead of spiritual. He was more than happy to supply bread, but it would be spiritual in nature. Jesus was the bread of life. Jesus offered them eternal life. The words Jesus spoke were spirit and life. He pointed out that, unlike the bread given by God during the days of Moses, the bread He offered would never perish, nor would they ever hunger again. They would be satisfied. They would never die like their fathers who ate manna.

Then Jesus raised the bar. After stating that the bread He would give was His flesh, He required them to eat His flesh and drink His blood if they desired life. Needless to say, "it was a hard saying." However, Jesus refused to back down. He doubled down and stated, "the flesh is no help at all." Only Jesus could give them life.

Let's read [John 6:66-69](#), "After this many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered Him, "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."

"Many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him." Yes, many of His disciples called it quits after this lesson. It was too much. Too radical. Too confusing. Too offensive. We need to understand what John recorded. He's saying they abandoned Jesus to return to how life used to be. They no longer walked with Jesus. They decided, once again, to walk alone. One can't help but remember Jesus' words in [Luke 9:62](#), "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." They weren't saying "goodbye" to a man. They were saying goodbye to the Son of God and entrance into His kingdom. They were saying goodbye to a new life: a new way of thinking, living, loving, and behaving. But do you think they viewed their decision as we do? It can be difficult to evaluate yourself objectively. Jesus' crowd was in denial. They argued as though their intentions, hearts, and service were genuine. Everyone can struggle to test themselves. "Should I have said that? Should I not have done that?" Or, "Am I being objective? Is there something I need to address? Am I worldly, etc.?" Do you believe they thought they were leaving morality behind? Do you think they understood they were walking toward Satan? Did they know that leaving was a sign of their lack of sincerity?

- **What was their problem?** They heard something they didn't like. I try to not take it personal when I upset others by what I say in the pulpit for this very reason. As long as I'm not using the pulpit to bully and my motives are pure, then I try not to fret over how others react. Why? Because everything Jesus said and did was out of love and sincerity. Everything He did was correct, but the majority were still put off by Him. It didn't matter that He fed them. It didn't matter that He healed them. People don't like to be challenged. We don't like to be corrected. We don't like others pointing out our flaws. We tend to pretend as if we didn't hear or the problem doesn't exist. We act as if everything is fine. We'll even tell others, "I'm doing great!" "Our family is all good!" "Our marriage is getting better", when in fact, it may not be at all and we know it. (As I wrote this portion of the sermon, I noticed all the employees at Starbucks were wearing pink shirts. I thought it was cancer awareness day, but when I searched, I learned it was in support of Planned Parenthood. I'm not shocked that Starbucks would promote that; however, everyone wore a pink shirt. Many profess to be believers. One mother has a family member bring her child by every day so she can breastfeed. I must tell you; that it's troubling watching a loving mother care for her little one while she wears her supportive pink shirt. You don't like to hear that? If that bothers you, then you're probably the one who needs to hear it. I've seen, again and again, Christians who talk big, but when it comes to making the tough decisions, decisions that make you stand out and could turn awkward, cave to pressure, and go with the current. We don't like to hear this kind of thing. We don't want to be corrected. The truth is, we've all struggled in this area. The real question is: are we striving to be better? Are we working on our boldness? Do we strive to be unapologetic about our commitment to Jesus?) We can say all day long that we'd listen to Jesus, but the reality is, majority didn't want to hear it from Him either. One of the sermon requests was, "how do we hold someone accountable to God's word." You can communicate God's expectations for a brother or sister in love and humility, but we cannot make anyone do anything. Jesus wouldn't do that. It's frustrating because we want to help and believe that God's way is best, but we cannot make anyone choose to do what is right. You may distance yourself from that person(s), but you cannot force love and obedience on anyone.

"Do you want to go away as well?" There's the door. How does this statement sit with you? Does this match the cartoon figure of Jesus holding a peace sign? I think it's good to ask this question from time to time. I didn't mention this in last's week's message, but Jesus didn't compliment people because of their morality. I meant to say something, but I forgot. No, He's typically complimentary of one's faith, and that doesn't happen often, and when it does, it's from the unexpected. Jesus expected others to see their need for Him. Jesus didn't sacrifice holiness for selfishness. Jesus didn't soften His message so the masses wouldn't be offended. Brethren, there's no reason to think He's any different today. He'll leave the 99 to get the 1, but He won't change for the 1 or 99. The 100 sheep are the ones who are called to change. The 100 sheep are the ones who need to follow because they don't have it in themselves to lead their own path. **So, do you want to go away as well?**

- **A sincere challenge.** Before challenging us to be like Jesus in this particular way, I'd like to immediately acknowledge that Jesus was perfectly balanced and did not stumble regarding His approach or approachability. He knew when to come in hot and when to pump the

brakes. Jesus knew what was in a man in a perfect way we cannot know. He also acted in love, righteousness, and justice at all times. Hopefully, most of us are working towards that balance, but none have reached the goal. We would be wise to acknowledge this about ourselves with humility. I'm sure we all understand and agree.

- Time is a gift from God. It allows us the opportunity to learn more about God and ourselves, as well as others. We're all psychologists in the loosest sense. We have all observed human behavior, some much longer than others. Let me be clear: what I'm about to share are my observations. They're open to criticism and may very well be wrong, so it's on the record now. It seems to be that, in general, people tend to be extraordinarily optimistic and encouraging while others are more "realists" or pragmatic. Both, I believe, are needed in the kingdom. Both have pros and cons.
- For example, an optimistic individual is to a troubled soul what a cup of cold water is to a lost sojourner in a desert land. They refresh and revive the soul. They give you the motivation to continue and the hope to endure hardships. The "realist" is also needed. They will let you know what's ahead of you, the challenges around the corner, and practical gear or knowledge to help you navigate the terrain. However, both types typically have their weak points. The optimist may struggle to give sound advice to the sojourner because they don't want to break their spirit. They don't want to cause sadness. They may want to avoid possible conflict resulting from bad news. They struggle, in other words, to help others in a practical/realistic way when it becomes critical. I'm sure you know the weak point of the "realist." Through their unapologetic advice (for the sake of saving another), they may lose the ability to promote help and may turn from a "realist" to a "pessimist." Sometimes, given the circumstances, a person needs to know the glass is half empty, let's say, because they need to drink 8oz of water with their medication and that 8oz glass is only half full. However, some people always see it as half full, and some see it as half empty no matter what. Either extreme needs to be avoided. Having said that, I'm afraid that, generally speaking, we all struggle to find the courage to say what needs to be said. Jesus comes across to me as a sober-minded individual by nature, though I believed He laughed, had a sense of humor, etc., as we do. Remember, we were made in His image. However, I think He had a beautiful way of directly addressing challenges gracefully.
- The point I'm trying to make is that not only do we need to be willing to hear hard truths about ourselves, but we also need to be able to deliver hard truths in love. When we say that most people don't want to hear hard truths, we need to be humble enough to admit we could be in that category and struggle to share hard truths because of our own struggles. There is a way to do both lovingly that does not leave someone without hope. If we're doing our part correctly, and the one we're seeking to help is offended, then we need to have the wisdom to realize the problem is not with the message deliverer but the message receiver.

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words to eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." God bless Peter. This is what Jesus wanted to hear. He didn't want His disciples to turn back. In fact, He knew they wouldn't, but an invitation to leave offered an opportunity for them to reflect on why they stood by Jesus' side.

Why do you stand by His side? Why do I stand by His side? That's the question for today. It's one thing to say, "I won't leave Him." It's another thing to want to say. It's better to articulate, like Peter, why you are by His side. "Well, it's the best answer, so I guess I'll stay." Do you doubt the Biblical claim of Jesus? It's one thing to say that Christian evidence offers the best explanation for life. There's nothing wrong with considering evidence to guide your beliefs and convictions. That makes sense. However, Peter and the apostles (save Judas) were convinced and committed. They weren't looking for something better to come along. They weren't hoping they could find a way to escape following Jesus.

What about you? What keeps you here? Tradition? Family? Fear of going to hell? Do you know where you're at? Take a look at your life and honestly ask, "Am I walking with Jesus or doing the bare minimum to be associated with Him?" Observe your life choices and behavior for the answer. Be honest with yourself. Why are you here today? Are you here today because you feel pressured to be? Honestly answer the question. Would you take it if God gave you a pass on worship and community gatherings? If God allowed entrance into His kingdom for simply admitting, intellectually, that Jesus was the Christ without any expectations in your day-to-day behavior or obedience, would you prefer that life?

I have no desire to leave anyone here without hope. Jesus may have offered the door, but the reality is that He's always there. Do you remember His words to the church in Laodicea? Even those who had turned lukewarm, Jesus said to them, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me." **Revelation 3:19-20.** So today, while it's still called today, be like Peter and let the Lord know where you stand and why you stand by Him. After all, "to whom shall we go?"