

Sifting and Sorting

Livin' the Life

John 6:60-71

June 24, 2018

David Taylor

We have been looking at the life of Jesus and the life he offers in our series in the Gospel of John, Livin' the Life. We finish chapter six today, Jesus' sermon on the bread of life (6:60-71). The hostility between the Jews and Jesus reaches a climax today and many of Jesus' disciples turn from following him, abandoning any hope of eternal life. Abandoning Jesus is a danger for all of us; none of us are immune to it. We are not saved by good works but none of us will be saved without good works. There is a difference between the two. Let's look at the passage as we read 6:60-71.

This is the same crowd Jesus fed at the beginning of the chapter. It is made up of many disciples, those who identify as following Jesus (60). Yet they cannot accept Jesus' teaching about giving his life for theirs (51-52). How can someone die and their death earn eternal life for another person? Knowing that they are grumbling about this, Jesus questions them (61). Grumbling is the same word used of Israel in the wilderness when they grumbled or complained about God's provision. Grumbling or complaining are symptoms of an unbelieving and hard heart. God's word softens and it hardens hearts. God's word softens or inclines the heart toward God so that we are sensitive to God. A soft heart longs for more of God and desires to turn from unbelief and obey Jesus. And when there is spiritual dullness or unbelief in a soft heart, the individual is concerned and intentionally fights their unbelief. But the word also hardens hearts so that the individual who may be dull or uninterested, becomes more resistant and the result is that the word has less impact on the heart and if not reversed, the heart becomes immune to the word. It can happen swiftly, like when someone has an affair or it can happen slowly when someone slowly drifts away from Jesus. If your heart is becoming hard, and I have been there, then you should be very concerned it. You are on the edge of the bluff, the soil is giving way, and you are losing your balance. You should fear for the loss of your life, eternal life. Repent and come back to Jesus. Christianity is not a game. Ask God to soften your heart. This is why I regularly mention the objective work of the Spirit and subjective work of the Spirit.

Jesus asks these disciples if they are offended at this teaching (61)? If so, then how are they going to respond when they see the Son of Man ascending and returning to where he came from (61-62)? He is talking about the cross, the resurrection, and his ascension to the right hand of God. He will ascend when he accomplishes his work, dying as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Heb 1:1-3). Jesus is sifting and sorting out the crowd. He is seeing who will count the cost and make the commitment to follow him. He is seeing who will genuinely put their faith in him for who he is and who will not. Then Jesus tells them why they find his teaching hard to swallow. The Spirit gives life; the flesh, human effort, cannot merit eternal life. The words that I have spoken are Spirit and life giving (63). Recognizing your need for Jesus and coming to him for eternal life is not a human work but the Spirit's work. The Spirit comes to us, overcoming our mental resistance and attitudes so that we see Jesus as precious and come to him in faith. This is similar to what Jesus said to Nicodemus (3:5-8; see also 1:11-13). So, we see here the Father, the Son, and the Spirit working together to give and to secure eternal life. God has revealed himself through Jesus and God redeems human through Jesus' work. The work of the cross is applied to us by the Spirit who gives eternal life through Jesus' words. So, Christianity identifies one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit who work in unison to accomplish what they want.

Then Jesus says that some of the "disciples" don't believe (64). So, in this massive crowd, there are many disciples and within the group of many disciples, there are some who genuinely believe and some who do not. The latter may have said that they believe but it is not the kind of belief Jesus requires. And Jesus is sifting them out. Then John tells us that Jesus knew from the beginning those who did not believe and who it was who would betray him (64). All along Jesus knows who does not believe and knows specifically the one who does not believe and is going to betray him. Jesus goes on to give the reason they do not believe. I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted

him by the Father (65) or as we saw earlier in chapter six, unless the Father draws them (6:44). And because of what Jesus said, many of these disciples turned away and no longer walked with him (66). We started the chapter with thousands following Jesus and now he is left with twelve. Jesus is sorting out those who will genuinely believe, embrace him for who he is, and those who do not (6:14-15). It is not that they stopped believing, but they did not believe in him for eternal life. Notice the progression of their "faith." First they grumbled or complained at his teaching, then did not believe, they turned away. They believed in him as fans but not followers of the giver of eternal life. It can take a long time for fans to be exposed. Jesus is not looking for fans, he is looking for followers who repent of their sin and turn to him in faith for eternal life and follow him.

Jesus is left with the twelve, maybe a few more. He turns to them and asks, do you want to go away also (67)? Peter says, 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 (68-69). Peter's confession is the Spirit's work in him. Then to remove any sense of self sufficiency, Jesus responds, did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil, referring to Judas, who was going to betray him (70-71). Judas is an example of someone who can be close to Jesus and to the other disciples and yet in the end, turn way and reject him. Jesus is sifting and sorting.

There are at least four types of people here today. There are those who genuinely believe but have a very sensitive temperament and are always questioning themselves. Then there are those who have some sort of belief but do not follow Jesus nor have any desire to do so. You have been taught that following Jesus or obeying Jesus is optional so you feel safe/secure but should not. That is not Jesus' message. You need to repent and come to genuine faith in Christ and follow him. Then there are the rest of us, whose desire for Jesus comes and goes, yet we still trust and follow him. We need to enjoy Jesus when the desire is there and take the intentional steps to fight for the desires when they are not there. The first step to fighting is cultivating your relationship with Jesus daily by hearing God's voice in the word and then responding to God in prayer. You need this as a daily spiritual exercise. Second step in fighting is seeking to obey what you hear in his word by faith. The third step in fighting is to get involved in a Life Group where others will encourage you as you seek to follow Jesus. The last step to fighting for your faith is to be even more intentional in following Jesus by getting involved in a Discipleship group. The last type of person is someone who has not come to faith in Jesus for eternal life. If that is you, then John 3:16 tells us how to put your faith in him.

Questions for Life Groups:

1. Why are the Jews grumbling?
2. What is the teaching they are grumbling about?
3. Describe how God's word softens and hardens hearts?
4. How do you know that your heart is hard?
5. Can you remember a time your heart was hard toward God?
6. How did you overcome your hard heart?
7. Do you remember a time you were offended by the truth? Even as a Christian?
8. What does it mean to be a disciple?
9. How can someone claim to be a disciple yet not believe?
10. Describe what it means to repent and believe?
11. What role do affections and desires play in the Christian life?
12. How important are affections in the Christian life?

