

John 6:35-71

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[0 : 0 0] John, chapter 6, verses 35-71. It is found on page 988 and 989 in the White Bibles.

Again, that's John 6, verses 35-71 on pages 988 and 989 of the White Bibles. Please stand for the reading of God's Word.

All right. So the Jews grumbled about him because he said, I am the bread that came down from heaven.

They said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I have come down from heaven? Jesus answered them, Do not grumble among yourselves.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, and they will all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.

[1 : 4 4] Not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God. He has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.

Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that no one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.

[2 : 5 2] This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever. Remember, Jesus said these things in the synagogue as he taught at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, Do not take offense at this.

Or, do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh is no help at all.

The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.

And he said, This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father. After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

[3 : 52] 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.

Jesus answered them, Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil. He spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning.

Good morning and welcome to Holy Trinity Church. And I want to give a special welcome to those of you who might be new to the neighborhood or new to our church. My name is Dave Helm, and I'm one of the pastors here, and we're glad that you've come.

We're in the midst of a series, really between the start of summer and Advent, that runs us through the first half of John's Gospel.

[5 : 00] And so we're right now in the middle of that first movement of this great book. By the looks of it, that is, by the looks of chapter 6 in John's Gospel, Jesus, you could say, not only knew how to pastor a church full, but he knew how to preach the pews empty.

I suppose you could put a tagline on this message, preaching the pews empty. If you were here last week, we saw all the way from verse 10 that in his pastoral work, out on the street, he fed 5,000 men, possibly more if by that term it was to include children and women as well.

Between 5,000 and 14,000, some have said. But by the end of the chapter now, with this sermon from the synagogue, verse 59, he had preached the pews empty and is left with only 12.

He's gone from megachurch to minibar in the course of a single day. And to add insult to injury, the writer seems intent to let the reader know that even though he's down to 12, it's really 11 because one who is still standing there is yet to depart from him later.

I mean, it is the reversal of fortunes for Jesus. He has pastored the church full. He now, from verses 35 to 40, with one single sermon, preached all of his pews empty.

[7 : 06] They moved then from verse 34, Sir, give us this bread always, to verse 66, turning back and no longer walking with him.

I mean, this is the opposite of what we saw a month or so ago in John 4 where a woman on her own says, Sir, give me this water that I will not have to come here and draw, which results in an entire village descending upon that same sight that they would listen to him.

Here, give us this bread always, the many, and it shrinks down to 11 people. One in their midst, not really even among them.

In other words, Jesus went from a Meals on Wheels success to everyone turning on their heel.

And so we're right to ask, what accounts for this? And what does it mean for us? I suppose like many postmortems on dot-com startups or business ventures or life works, it all depends on your perspective.

[8 : 42] A failed enterprise on the backside by way of retrospect will have many causes. What accounts for this?

I suppose you could say it depends on who you ask. And I want to look at that today. I want to ask some people what accounts for this in the ministry of Jesus.

Let's take a look. Let's ask Jesus from the text. If he were here today, we could hand him a handheld and say, how is it that you go from a mega church to a handful of people on the basis of a single sermon?

We have never seen any public speaker fall as hard and as fast as you have. What's the reason?

I suppose if we gave the mic to Jesus, he would say from the text, well, the fault lies all with the people. Take a look.

[9 : 51] Jesus says they were after him for the wrong reasons. It was their fault. That's hinted at all the way back in the second verse of this same chapter.

A large crowd was following him, here it is, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. And that which is hinted at has an effect by verse 15, perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew.

Jesus is averse to being viewed as someone who acts on behalf of the state to well order the socioeconomic enterprise of the Judean countryside.

and so he resists moving into a governmental position. He does. I'm not saying all Christians should. But he resists it because they are looking for the signs that he brings.

In fact, that comes full bore in verse 26 and in verse 27 where you see the reason that he feels accounts for their departure.

[11 : 11] He says to them, truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me not because you saw signs but because you had your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you for on him God the Father has set his seal.

Jesus, what accounts for the departure of all of your followers? His words to us from the text the fault lies entirely with the people.

They were seeking me for the wrong thing. They wanted me to be a leader of a different order. They wanted a kingdom of this world. I had not come for it and my sermon was intended to put a great divide before them so that they would choose.

well what was this wrong thing? It seems to me then that they had they had actually traded the primary for the secondary and in doing so gave away the very thing he came to give them.

Think of this word primary. I looked it up. it means of chief importance. It's described in terms of what stands first in rank.

[12 : 41] They put it this way it's the one thing that is more important than anything. It's the thing that supersedes everything.

And so what was it? What what was Jesus thinking is the primary thing for which he came? If he were here and we gave him the mic the text discloses that as well.

It couldn't have been more clear. Jesus thinks that he came for the fundamental primary purpose of eternal life. Of resurrection on the last day. Of helping people escape divine wrath which presently rests on a fallen race.

That's his words not mine. We can take him and use him for whatever we want. But he would indicate that the primary thing the one thing the chief thing is not plural.

It's singular. It would almost be for Jesus the word priorities wouldn't be in his dictionary. You can only have one priority.

[13 : 58] You can only have one thing that is the chief thing. All other things important though they may be fall within and under that which is primary.

And if you only grab hold of secondary tertiary! things you are in danger of losing the thing. And that's what Jesus said happened to the people. Take a look.

Chapter 6 verse 35. His words on the one thing he's come for. He says I'm the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger.

Whoever believes in me shall never thirst. There's this life for which he comes. Take a look at verse what you'll see it there in verse 39.

This is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that is given me. Look at this phrase but raise it up on the last day. That phrase is repeated again by Jesus in verse 44.

[14 : 56] And I will raise him on the last day. That phrase comes a third time in verse 56. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood I will raise him on the last day.

Three four times in the text Jesus is indicating I have come to give you life.

A life that is distinct from the one you're living. And it will extend into all eternity. Get this 21st century listener and reader.

He seems to indicate that there is a final day of judgment. His belief. faith. And that you and I will go on into eternity.

That there will be some mysterious reuniting of the human soul and the body that is everlasting. That having been created and been born from the womb of your mother outside of your own effort or control, you have been born into a state of what will be everlasting existence.

[16 : 21] And that upon departure from this life, there will be a day of judgment and that we will stand before God our maker and give an account for what is done in the flesh and that Jesus has come to raise you up on that day that you would escape the wrath of your divine maker for having lived in ways that are not pleasing unto him.

I mean, this is a stunning belief. I looked through the text this week again to see how often he's referring to life, an eternal life.

It is overwhelming. Verse 40, whoever believes in him should have eternal life. Verse 44, whoever believes has eternal life.

Verse 45, as well, eternal life. According to Jesus, the most significant question you and I are to settle in this life is what do you make of an afterlife?

Wow. What do you make of a final judgment? What do you make of a heaven and a hell? And what do you make of Jesus who claims that he has come to secure your bridge or entrance into something everlasting?

[17 : 53] I am aware that for many and many here today, there is no present belief in our mind, generally speaking as a culture, that there is an afterlife of such consequence, which is why we just give it all to what we can do now.

John Updike, in his book, Pigeon Feathers, presents a jarring description of what many people believe happens when you die.

This is what he writes concerning a character named David. Without warning, David was visited by an exact vision of death, a long hole in the ground, no wider than your body, down which you are drawn while the white faces recede.

You try to reach them, but your arms are pinned, shovels pour dirt in your face, there you will be forever, in an upright position, blind and silent, and in no time, no one will remember you, and you will never be called.

As strata of rocks shift, your fingers elongate, and your teeth are distended sideways in a great underground grimace, indistinguishable from a strip of chalk, and the earth tumbles on, and the sun expires, and an unaltering darkness reigns, where once there were stars.

[19 : 26] There are others who believe differently. The scriptures continually speak of what Jesus here testifies to, that there is an everlasting life, and a final judgment, and a moment where you and I will walk into a reuniting of our body, and resurrection of life, or penalty of judgment.

The clearest place in the Old Testament scriptures, from my own exploration anyway, is in Daniel chapter 12, beginning verse 2, where the prophet writes, and many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

the prophet Isaiah will concur. It isn't just Daniel. In Isaiah chapter 26, and in verse 19, we read, your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise, you who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy, for your due is of due of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

I have often contemplated this word when I stand in a cemetery, and we sprinkle dust upon the grave, and I think of the shovels filling back in the earth, and my own mind wrestling with that most important of all questions, will this very ground, the very soil, is this resurrection ground, will this one day, at the final day, give way, open up, and will all of humanity receive back within their own person, their own mind, their own sense of who they are, their own body, and will we stand before the judgment of God?

The Old Testament scriptures indicate that this indeed is the most important question we must decide on. The Old Testament isn't the only indication.

[21 : 44] In intertestamental times, there are a number of texts within Judaism that indicate a similar belief. First Enoch reads, In those days, Sheol will return all the deposits which he has received, and Hel will give back all that she owes, and he shall choose the righteous and the holy ones from among the risen dead, for the day when they shall be selected and saved has arrived.

The Psalms of Solomon read, Those who fear the Lord shall rise up to eternal life, and their life shall be in the Lord's light, and it shall never end. At another place in the same work, the Lord is faithful to those who live in the righteousness of the commandments and the law which he has commanded for our life.

The Lord's devout shall live by it forever. Second Ezra chapter seven, the dust shall give up the souls that have been committed to them.

The Testament of Judah reads, And those who died in sorrow shall be raised in joy, and those who died on account of the Lord shall be wakened to life. The Testament of Benjamin reads, And then you will see Enoch and Seth and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob being raised up to the right hand in great joy.

Then shall we also be raised every one of us over our tribe and we shall prostrate ourselves before the heavenly king. Then all shall be changed. Some destined for glory, others for dishonor, for the Lord first judges Israel for the wrong she has committed and then he shall do so for all the nations.

[23 : 18] I could read from 2nd Barak, I could read from texts all through the centuries. Jewish texts, that are wrestling with the question that Jesus is presenting.

He says the people left him from 5,000 to 12 because they exchanged the secondary for the primary and in doing so lost hold of the one thing for which he came to raise us up on the last day that we would know life.

It is a sobering text. and an indication in John 6 that many will dismiss it. But at least having been here today you have opportunity to entertain it.

Is it true or is it not? Jesus says the problem lies with the people. They seek him for the wrong thing.

He goes on and says in the text the problem lies with the people. Because their disposition is to reject him and the one thing. Look at chapter 6 and verse 36.

[24 : 40] Jesus said, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I have said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

All that the Father gives me will come to me. In other words, that we are by disposition and I will not kind of people unless God takes an initiative to arrest us from the convoluted thinking of our own mind.

That we are naturally resistant to God. Some of us antagonistic to God. Universally resistant to God. so that in verse 44 Jesus words again not mine no one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him.

Or verse 55 where he again will say for my flesh is true food my blood is true drink whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood will abide!

in me but who will do this only those who the living father helps assist in other words Jesus indication upon the human condition is that we are of a natural disposition not only to exchange his primary thing for a secondary thing but to resist coming to him at all and it's true is it not this is what I find those who become Christians are the most surprised lot of us all I'll speak for myself I am surprised that at the age of 18 I came to believe because I had no intention of believing C.S.

[26 : 40] Lewis actually titled his own narrative about his experience in becoming a Christian as the most reluctant of all converts as though he was dragged into this belief but the title of his book is interesting he calls it surprised by joy there's a book out by a bunch of academics called surprised by faith they are the most surprised at their own conversion Malcolm Muggeridge actually indicates that these difficult sayings are what continued to help him in his belief because he knew them to be true rather than trite Spurgeon says God must have wanted me to become a Christian long before I was born because he had no reason to choose me after I was born in other words people who become Christians actually understand the surprising truth that we naturally resist Jesus says the problem lies with the people they were after the wrong thing and they resist the very activity of

God without whom they will never change anything what about the people take a look at the text Jesus leaves the stage he hands the mic off to two groups verse 41 what's referred to as Jews they also appear in 52 and then in verse 60 he hands off the mic to those who are disciples and both the Jews and the disciples are grumbling you'll notice that both the Jews and the disciples would indicate no no no no no no we we didn't leave Jesus because we after the wrong thing or that we resist the only thing we left Jesus because of his preaching thing his sermon in 35 to 40 was so scandalous that we could no longer follow him it moves from grumbling 41 and 61 to disputing 52 to 71 the

Jews rejecting or to verse 60 and 61 those who no longer walk with him the people have the mic they indicate this it was Jesus preaching that sent me away from his hearing look at what they say there in verse 41 so they grumbled and said I am the bread that came down from heaven is this not Jesus the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know how does he now say I have come down from heaven in other words they reject Jesus teaching because they feel he overreaches in claiming to do a God thing he claimed to have origins that rest with God that he had come from heaven how can he do this when

I know Joseph and his family tree for Jesus to come and do the bread that's one thing but for Jesus to claim provenance of heaven that's an unbelievable thing skepticism comes in they were willing that Jesus would feed them all but when he begins to indicate that he is from before all there's a departure from his word when Jesus comes to perform a sign that was adequate but to claim that he's the second person of the trinity that's unintelligible for Jesus to do mighty works that help us in our temporary situation that's a good thing but for

Jesus to claim that he's almighty God who claims to do for us an eternal thing it's beyond my comprehension notice how Jesus responds to this in verse 45 this is for me the center piece of this message and if you've lost me come back look what he does with this perplexed state of the people Jesus says in verse 45 it is written in the prophets and they shall all be taught by God in other words they said how can you do the God thing and he pulls a sentence fragment not even a complete sentence he pulls a sentence fragment from Isaiah chapter 54 and verse 13 now I don't normally have you look in different places in the Bible when we're trying to put our attention on something as strong as this but you really need to look at this on your phone on your device on a

[32 : 13] Bible next to you you need to look at the verse Jesus pulls from in Isaiah 54 I was stunned by this the fragment is right there in verse 13 all your children shall be taught by the Lord that's what Jesus is pulling on how do you think I'm doing a God thing well didn't Isaiah claim that God would come to do a teaching thing that's his argument and look at the context what was read as our call to worship this morning Isaiah 55 come everyone who thirst come to the waters and he who has no money come buy and eat come buy wine and milk without money and without price here it is why do you spend your money for that which is not bread or verse 10 for as the rain and the!

come down from making it bring forth and sprout giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater Jesus is pulling on Isaiah 54 where the promise was that God actually would come from heaven and provide bread but that that bread would be nothing less than the strength of his word look at what happens in Isaiah 55 and verse 11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth it will not return empty what Jesus is arguing when you wonder whether or not he's doing a God thing and he's overreaching he will say to you but don't the Hebrew scriptures promise that the Lord will come and do a God thing and doesn't he embed the

God thing into the bread thing and doesn't God equate the bread thing with a word thing and Jesus is saying you are rejecting my word which is the fulfillment of prophetic promise which was the stamp of divine vindication that I had come to claim to do what I could do and you want me for lunch he says you want a loaf of bread and you'll be hungry!

tomorrow you'll want the kind of bread from me that the people had in the desert and they're going to die anyway I've got a bread for you that is my word that will bring you eternal life if you would but receive it I mean it is the most stunning of all arguments and not only that but there's every indication from this text that what Jesus promises he can do through his word of life that it's available to all it's available to all take a look back at John 6 and verse 51 I'm the living bread that came from heaven if anyone eats of this bread he's going to live forever take a look at verse 57 and 58 as the living father sent me and

I live because of the father so whoever feeds on me will live because of me this is the bread that came down from heaven not like the bread that the fathers ate and died whoever feeds on this bread will live forever this is what I want to say to you this morning if you have come and been arrested by the idea that the most significant question you will have to answer or resolve in life is whether or not there is a hereafter and whether or not we will stand before a creator and whether or not Jesus came to bridge that gap for us through his own body given to us then you should know it's open to anyone who would believe what's fascinating though is they didn't they moved from what you're saying

[36 : 49] Jesus is beyond our sensibilities to verse 52 what you're saying Jesus is beyond all intelligibility the Jews disputed among themselves how can this man give us his flesh to eat this is nonsense absolute utter nonsense you know what I wish Jesus would have done here I wish he said well it's also written in your law and he would have taken them back to Deuteronomy 8 and said you know when they were in the wilderness and they wanted manna it was a test and God really wanted even the real material bread thing to be a test for a spiritual thing because in Deuteronomy 8:3 it says that while he gave them bread to eat he was testing them so that they would learn that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from his mouth Jesus could have given them another biblical argument that would help them to believe but he is done at this point in the conversation with trying to win them to his belief what he says next blows the doors off of the unbeliever and gives them every reason to abandon their attachment to him

I mean he escalates their disputation to a level unseen in any other text by Jesus look at verse 53 it's almost as if he is looking to empty the pew truly truly I say to you unless you eat the flesh of the son and drink his blood you have no life whoever feeds on my flesh drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him on the last day for my flesh is true food my blood is true drink Whoever!

feeds on my flesh drinks my blood abides in me and I in him I mean these are repulsive words that defy the listener's ear it's scandalous in fact that's the very word that the disciples take of it in verse 61 they were grumbling and said he said do you take offense at this are you also scandalized by this I mean this is cannibalism like language if you are to take it in a wooden and literal way and that actually was an accusation that the early Christians faced there are writings a then agorist an apologist a defender of the Christian faith wrote a treatise called plea to the Christians and he mentioned that there were Romans who were charging the Christians of his day with Thiestian feasts and from what I've read if you know your

Greek mythology you're way ahead of me poor Thiestias was a guy who was tricked into eating his own children and Homer says that they were cooked up in a concealing dish and that is what they claimed of the Christians this scandalous exercise but some people say no that's not the case what Jesus is referring here is to the Lord's supper no this is neither scandalous nor a reference to sacramentalism this is a reference to his substitutionary death but what I have come to believe what accounts for this word most clearly is simply not scandal not sacramental not merely substitution but what it really means when he says these words he's wondering will you receive my word my word let me let me let me put it to you as only

Flannery O'Connor could she of course writes that work the lame shall enter first and she has that narrative of the unexpected belief that falls upon a man named Johnson his social worker ironically named Shepard sits in front of him and they're at a dinner table and this is what said what's that you're reading Shepard asked sitting down the holy bible Johnson replied Shepard leaned forward and said in a low furious voice put that bible up and eat your dinner the boy stopped and looked up his expression was startled!

[41 : 44] but pleased the book is something for you to hide behind Shepard said it's for cowards and he reached across to grab the book but Johnson snatched it and put it in his lap that is the bible I believe it Johnson said you don't believe in that book I do believe it you don't believe it you're too intelligent I ain't too intelligent the boy muttered you don't know nothing about me even if I didn't believe it it would still be true you don't believe it Shepard said I believe it Johnson said breathlessly I'll show you I believe it and he opened the book in his lap and tore out a page of it and thrust it into his mouth and his jaws worked furiously and the paper crackled as he chewed it stop this

Shepard said the boy raised the bible and tore out another page with his teeth and began grinding it in his mouth his eyes burning Shepard reached!

the table knocked the book out of his hand leave the table Johnson swallowed what was in his mouth and his eyes widened as if a vision of splendor were opening up before him I've eaten it I've eaten it like Ezekiel and it was honey to my mouth leave the table Shepard said his hands clenched beside his plate I've eaten it the boy said wonder transformed his face I've eaten it like Ezekiel and I don't want none of your food after it no no more ever more that that's literary genius to capture the receptivity of the word as the means by which you will cross from this life to the next into a good eternal state rather than one that you and

I would regret forever and ever and ever more will you receive the word will you believe what Jesus claims he came to do and that he can do it for you look at Peter there's only 12 left verse 67 and I'm done with this do you want to go away as well Simon Peter said to him Lord to whom shall we go notice look at this you have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God what do you think not about the sermon what do you think about what

Jesus says is primary and is this what you're willing to come to him for he knows not many will in fact we live in a day that is continually trying to remake Jesus into something less and in fact is the church that generally leads the charge let's let's trade the Jesus of the scriptures wherein what is primary is everlasting life and the receptivity of his word that will bring me and let's trade that for a secondary Jesus make him merely a function of good government wherein he will meet my personal needs my temporal needs or assist in the orchestration of a better community or city and

[46 : 25] Jesus is saying look don't miss for secondary reasons the very reason for which I came our heavenly father help us help us to listen at the word of Jesus or or the writer John help many here today to receive him to believe in him that he would give us the right to become children of God being born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but born of God we ask it in his name amen men!

men! men! men! men!