

To Whom Shall We Go?

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[0 : 00] All right, well, as we get into the Word of God this morning, we are going back into the Gospel of John. If you have your Bible with you, you can open it up to John chapter 6, and we're going to be starting about verse 60.

We're coming close to the end of this long conversation that Jesus has been having with the crowd. And you'll remember that some of the people there were at the feeding of the 5,000, and Jesus has been declaring to them that He is the bread that has come down from heaven.

He's been telling them that He is the bread of life. He's been offering to them eternal life and inviting them to come to Him and believe in Him. And the crowd there has had some pretty telling questions and responses to Jesus.

They've demanded that He do a sign before believing. They've been grumbling about what He is saying. And Jesus has kind of told them straight up, you guys have seen, and yet you still do not believe.

Two weeks ago, we saw how all of this came to a head as Jesus said some things that were pretty shocking. In verse 54, He said, Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.

[1 : 26] And we talked about these words two weeks ago. We talked about what Jesus meant by them. Of course, He was not talking about actually eating His flesh and drinking His blood, but about how people need to partake in the deepest way possible of what His death will accomplish in order to have eternal life and to be saved from death.

But it got the crowd arguing sharply about whether Jesus was speaking in metaphor or not. How can this man give us His flesh to eat?

Some of them said. And all of this, John tells us, was said while He was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. So this morning, we want to look at what happened after this conversation.

Let's read it starting in verse 60. On hearing it, many of His disciples said, This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it? Aware that His disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before?

[2 : 48] The Spirit gives life. The flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you. They are full of the Spirit and life.

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.

He went on to say, This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them. So not only did the crowd grumble that day at what Jesus said, but even Jesus' disciples grumbled that day.

This is a hard teaching, they said. Who can accept it? And I love how Jesus handles this. There's no beating around the bush.

He just goes straight to it and asks them, Does this offend you? Do my words offend you? And then Jesus goes on to help them with this teaching.

[4 : 00] We're not going to have time to look at everything He said here, but one thing I will point out is what He says in verse 64. He says, 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. And so again in the Gospel of John here, we see that Jesus knows what's going on in the hearts of His followers.

Even as He looks them in the eye right now, He knows which of them believes, and which of them does not. In fact, John tells us that all along, He has known which of them believes, and which of them does not.

And this is not only referring to Judas, notice it says, Which of them, plural, and it's especially clear in the original language, which of them, plural, did not believe, and who, singular, would betray Him. It's as though Jesus sees right through them. He sees what's going on in their thoughts, in their hearts, and this reality that some of them do not believe, really leads into what we read next in verse 66.

[5 : 25] From this time on, many of His disciples turned back, and no longer followed Him. Let's stop and think about those words for a moment.

Many of His disciples turned back, and no longer followed Him. So there were a lot of people following Jesus. And you can imagine that some of them just kind of came out for the day, or maybe two days, you know, just to see what He's saying and doing, to check Him out.

But then there was a good number of people who were His disciples. They followed Him from place to place. The twelve disciples were among them. There were also a number of women that we know about from the other Gospels, and there were probably even more.

This was probably a group that was a few times larger than the twelve disciples that we're all familiar with. And yet, John tells us that many of them turned back and no longer followed Him after this conversation.

Let's think of this from the perspective of the twelve disciples. They were likely in the minority of people who stayed with Jesus and continued to follow Him after that day.

[6 : 46] Evidently, there was a large group of His followers who did not believe, just as Jesus said. And this whole conversation in the synagogue about, eat my flesh and drink my blood, it was like the spark that lit the fire.

It was like the straw that broke the camel's back. They stumbled over what Jesus said that day in the synagogue. And the result was this mass exodus of many of His followers.

You can almost imagine maybe what they're thinking. Like, man, eat my flesh and drink my blood? Like, that's too much for me. No way. That's over the top.

I'm done. I'm going home. I imagine it a little bit like that moment where probably most of you have experienced, where you're at somebody's house for a gathering, and it's already getting late, and a number of people are thinking about going home.

The conversation's kind of petering out, but it's still going. And then finally someone stands up and says, all right, well, I'm headed out. I'm going home. And then all of a sudden, everybody else kind of sees that opportunity.

[8 : 02] Yep, I was thinking the same thing. It's time for me to get going. And all of a sudden, there's just this mass exodus towards the door, and the party is over. Something like that, only here, not as friendly.

There has been arguing, grumbling, and murmuring. And this is not just about going home tonight. It's about going home to stay. Like, we're done with following this Jesus guy around like we've been doing.

All of a sudden, everybody, it seems, just stands up and walks out the door. And the picture that we have here is that there are relatively few left with Jesus.

And Jesus turns to the 12 themselves. And he says, you do not want to leave too, do you? Jesus asked the 12.

There's the door. If you've been thinking about it, if you've been thinking you might not want to follow me anymore, or you want to leave, you've seen the majority walk away from me all at once here, do any of you wish to join them?

[9 : 17] And it's here that Peter speaks. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God. These are precious words. What is Peter saying here? Well, first there's the question, Lord, to whom shall we go? And what we notice is that it's not so much a question as a statement.

Master, there are no other alternatives here when it comes to the faith of our fathers, when it comes to the scriptures, when it comes to the fulfillment of all that we have longed and hoped for.

To whom shall we go for those answers? To whom shall we look for that hope to be fulfilled? John the baptizer, he was a great guy, but he pointed us to you.

[10 : 23] We certainly aren't seeing our longings and hopes fulfilled in the other rabbis or the people on the Jewish council. Nicodemus didn't seem to have the answers.

The chief priests don't seem to have a real love for God as you do. They were all too happy to make a buck through the sellers and the exchangers at the temple.

The teachers of the law don't seem to truly love people like you do. They're trying to get you in jail for healing a man on the Sabbath.

Lord, to whom shall we go? There's no one else that we see as being from God the way that you are. And it's not just that you're the best of the worst.

It's not just that you're the best that we've got in our day. If this question, to whom shall we go, was all Peter said, then we might be tempted to think that Peter is just desperately settling for Jesus.

[11 : 31] But he's not. There's more. He has some things to affirm about Jesus. He goes on. He says, you have the words of eternal life.

we have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God. What a statement of faith. For years, I've looked at these words of Peter, and I'm not sure that I quite heard what Peter was saying. I think I was bringing a lot of my own perspective to these words, and I thought Peter was saying something like, well, what's the alternative?

Nobody else, no other religion, no other faith offers eternal life the way that you do, so I guess we'll take our chances with you because there might just be the real possibility that you could give us eternal life.

We've got nothing better to do. We've got no one better to follow. Yet the more I listen to what Peter said that day and really reflect on all of it, the more I hear something different, the more I hear that this is not just a desperate gamble kind of a statement.

[12 : 45] It's not as though Peter's saying, we're going to keep following you simply because we've got nothing better to do, no one better to listen to. Rather, I'm seeing in these words an affirmation of faith.

This is Peter saying out loud what he truly believes about Jesus. words of eternal life you have.

And we have believed and not just believed, we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. We're not going to go out the door.

We don't want to leave. You have the words of eternal life and we know that you are the Holy One of God. Why would we leave? Where would we go?

There is no other. It's as if Peter is saying, you are the one. We believe it. We know it. None of the other religious people around us here have these words.

[13 : 53] We believe you have the words that lead to eternal life. We believe you are the one he has sent, the Holy One of God. And not just believe, we know it.

Jesus said some hard things that day. Eat my flesh and drink my blood. Yet Peter doesn't stumble too much over these words of Jesus, like many did that day.

He probably found these words difficult. He was probably initially a little red in the face as Jesus said them, and maybe even upset as people started walking out the door on Jesus.

But I think when we read these words, when we hear what he says, we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. There wasn't a chance that Peter was going to be walking out that door. What Peter saw, somehow he saw and knew about Jesus what many did not see and did not know about him.

[15 : 03] What Peter saw and believed and knew about Jesus was enough to keep him following Jesus, even when Jesus said some things that were difficult or shocking or hard to understand.

What he saw and believed and knew about Jesus was enough to keep him following Jesus even when the majority left and mocked and balked and turned away.

I don't know about you, but these words have a special place in my heart. These words of Peter over the years since I first believed, they have been words of deep comfort and assurance.

In fact, I would even say that these words have held me and kept me as a follower of Jesus. in those moments where I've wrestled with doubt and unbelief in my own soul.

And I have wrestled with doubt and unbelief over my years of being a Christian. It's been less and less as I've grown in the Lord, less often and less deeply, deeply.

[16 : 18] But I still remember times in which these words of Peter became my own words in moments where I was feeling confused and doubtful and desperate.

I remember when I first discovered when I was younger that the Bible wasn't written in English. And I began to wonder and doubt whether we even have the very words which God spoke.

I started looking at the big differences in some of these translations and reading the footnotes in the Psalms on some of them where it says that the meaning of this Hebrew word or phrase is uncertain. And doubts began to rise in my mind. What if it's all lost in translation? What kind of foundation is my faith built on?

And in the confusion of those moments, these words became my words as I wrestled words? And I thought, eventually I came to that question.

[17 : 19] Lord, to whom shall I go? Where else will I look? There are no other words except your words which make sense of this world, this life, and everything in it.

I have come to know that you are the Holy One. I remember the first time I read some of those passages in the Bible that I would be honest and say I don't like or I didn't like.

Reading how God decreed the execution of children in Canaan or how God struck one of the Levites dead for reaching out his hand to steady the Ark of the Covenant so that it didn't fall off the ox cart.

I remember the first time I read in some of the prophets the writings there of God's severe wrath and anger towards the children of Israel. And even passages like this one where Jesus says some things that initially I think, why did you have to say it that way?

Eat my flesh and drink my blood. And here again, Peter's words over the years have become my words. In the wrestling of those moments I come to the question, Lord, to whom shall we go?

[18 : 44] Nobody else has a better explanation of what's going on in our world. Nobody else has a better answer about where evil and suffering come from. I remember several moments in which I began to entertain the thoughts of the alternatives.

Thoughts like maybe there is no God. Maybe we are all just part of just the product of a big explosion that happened long ago and suffering and evil and death are just part of the normal stuff of our natural world.

Aside from the fact that that view is totally hopeless and depressing and takes all the beauty and purpose out of life, nobody who believes that has been able to answer the question at least for me of how we got there, how we got here.

How did we as human beings actually get here in all our wonderful complexity? They will say it's a long, long time plus chance but I look at my hand I think about who I am in all my wonderful complexity.

Complexity and I just know there's not a chance that it was just chance and time. God, you have the words which brought life long ago and you have the words which will bring eternal life and hope beyond the grave.

[20 : 17] I remember a few moments when I was working as a courier and I'd be doing my rounds at the mall in Edmonton and a few days I thought to myself, what are the chances that the majority of our world has got it wrong and doesn't see the truth of Jesus and the truth of what's really happening in our world?

How can it be that only a relative few see the truth and know the truth? Why is it that so many think that what I believe is foolish and a waste of time?

Why can't God just show up in power and glory and convince everyone? I don't like this feeling of being in the mocked minority. Maybe I should throw in the towel and be done with it.

And here again, Peter's words became my words. Well, to whom will I go? What other belief or view of the world will I adopt?

There are no other alternatives. Deep down inside, I believe that what Jesus says is the truth. I see something about him that others do not see.

[21 : 38] And I would say I know that he is the Holy One of God. Somehow by God's spirit at work within his people, these words of Peter are our words when we consider whether or not we should walk out the door on Jesus and just go our own way.

I've come to learn that we, like Peter, I think, realizes in this moment, we don't have to have every answer. We don't have to have every last word of Hebrew poetry translated with certainty into our own language.

We don't have to like everything that God decides to do in his own freedom and justice. We just need to believe and know by the grace of God that Jesus is the Holy One of God.

That was enough to keep Peter there with Jesus that day. That's enough to keep me here with Jesus, even if everybody else walks away.

I believe he does have the words that lead to eternal life. Do you? Let's imagine ourselves in that moment with the other disciples.

[23 : 10] Jesus says, there's the door. door. Do you want to leave too? I know my answer.

What's your answer? door. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for sending your son. And we confess, we do believe that he is the Holy One. We also admit that we have doubts. At times, we wrestle with things. And we thank you that you are patient with us and gracious to us. Thank you that you bring us around. You convince us. You lead us back to this place where we come to assurance and faith. Help us to grow in our faith, Lord.

We do have unbelief, but help us in it. Guide us and keep us. We ask this in Jesus' name.

[24 : 22] Amen.