

Walking away from Jesus or throwing yourself on him

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. If you're a visitor, an outline of what I'll be saying is on the bag of a sheet you got handed when you came in the door this morning. So it might help you.

If you're a visitor, it might help you understand my accent. So in the psychology of human behavior, there's a term called denialism, or it's a process of constantly denying.

And it reflects just that. It's a choice, a person's choice to deny reality. It's a powerful tool people use to protect against ideas that challenge us deeply or even to avoid an uncomfortable truth.

So at a very small level, we use it regularly in relationships. I don't know if you're like me, you find yourself attempting to defend some indefensible behavior.

Some indefensible statement. Something you know deep down was just wrong. But we find ourselves in denialism.

[1 : 11] Trying to avoid, the aim of that is to avoid the awkward, painful truth. We've just messed up really badly. But denialism is right through society.

It happens at bigger pictures. So denialism we often find associated with self-interest. So for example, those who are climate change denialists are often those directly connected to the coal, gas, or timber industries.

And so you can see that denialism is driven by perhaps a fear of losing money or power. Denialism at a big picture is also driven by issues of personal validation and identity.

So at a big picture level, those who deny the Holocaust are often ultra-right-wing neo-Nazi types. It would threaten their whole reason for existence. Or again, closer to home, research shows this sort of thing for men. The research shows that men apparently don't change lines when they're in the supermarket waiting for the checkout.

[2 : 21] They'll observe one line perhaps going faster than their line, but they'll not change. Whereas women will apparently. Why not? Well, it's denialism.

Because men in changing lines would have to admit to themselves they'd pick the wrong line to start with. It's a funny example, but it's denialism.

How powerful it can be. Friends, I want to use that word to move us into the passage this morning. Denialism is a common response to Jesus.

And we see that very much in this passage before this morning. So we're opening at chapter 6, verse 6 to 71. Let me recap the last three weeks. We've been working on this chapter 6 for three weeks now.

Four weeks, actually. And back at the start, in the miracle of the feeding, Jesus demonstrates clearly his ability to provide, provide miraculously for the physical needs of his people by feeding a crowd in excess of 5,000 from a little boy's lunchbox.

[3 : 27] In response, the people love the immediate practical benefits that they can see coming from Jesus as a result of that miracle.

And they're convinced that he's the great deliverer they had been waiting for. The new Moses who would implement their agenda for salvation. Who would free them from the Romans and establish Israel once again as the dominant nation in the world.

But Jesus pushes them to think in deeper spiritual categories of the heart. He pushes them to understand that in their innermost being, they have a hunger, a deep spiritual hunger for life and satisfaction that only he can satisfy.

And that he will satisfy as they come to him, as they see him like the essential ingredient of life, like bread and water. And as they come and feed on him with an urgency and a passion and a

confidence.

He says to them, look, I'm far, far better than physical manna. You look to physical manna, he says to the Jews, you look to physical manna as the gold standard of God's provision for his people.

[4 : 46] Well, let me tell you, I'm far, far better than anything manna could offer you. I'll give you better satisfaction. I'll give you salvation that lasts. I'll give you life eternal.

I'm God's gift of bread from heaven, says Jesus. Sent to give real, spiritual, satisfied, eternal life. Now, when we hear that sort of stuff, we think, what's not to like about that? What's not to like about what Jesus offers? Satisfaction of deep hunger and thirst, which we all know is there.

It drives us to cravings of all sorts as we seek to satisfy it. What's not to like about a guarantee of life and everlasting, never ending?

What's not to like about the promise of intimate, guilt-free relationship with God? Which in our innermost being we sense we're meant to enjoy.

[5 : 50] What's not to like about that? Who wouldn't want this from Jesus? Well, lots, apparently.

The actual response in verse 60 through to 71? Large numbers hear all of that and walk away from Jesus.

Large numbers walk away from Jesus. And the context is important here.

These verses actually represent the end of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. And guess what? But it ends in hostility and rejection, as did his ministry in Judea, if you track back to the end of chapter 3 and chapter 4.

But there's something different about this rejection. It's much more personally confronting. Because this rejection comes after an extended period of very clear teaching and offer by Jesus.

[7 : 10] And it comes from those, verse 60, those who are called disciples. And I take it that means a reference to those in the group who apparently had actually given up their jobs, full of such excitement and anticipation of Jesus' deliverer and saviour and king, and what he was going to do with them and for them.

They'd given up their jobs and they were actually following him around for a period of time. Now, they come to a conclusion about Jesus that makes them pack up their swags and go back home. Mass defection came from where? Well, it came from excitement, giving way to outrage. If you look at verse 60 and 61.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, this is a hard. The word there is actually outrageous or offensive. It's a very, very strong word. This is outrageously offensive.

So much so, it says, not that we can accept it, but who can even listen to it? It's the picture of them closing their ears, covering their ears, saying, this is so outrageously offensive to us.

[8 : 33] We can't even bear to listen to the guy anymore, let alone respond to him positively. And so the grumbling, as mentioned there in verse 61.

We saw that last week and talked about it a fair bit last week. The grumbling, that sort of simmering, gut-dwelling hostility, now erupts. Overflows into outrage and offence at both Jesus and his teaching.

Jesus' response, verse 62. Seems not the way to win friends and influence people. He hasn't obviously been to the right courses.

What does Jesus do? He promises them more offence. Think that offends you? Well, says Jesus, listen up. Look out for what's ahead. Now, it's not exactly clear what verse 62 refers to, except that it's the source of even greater offence.

Most likely, I think it's a reference to his approaching death, resurrection, and ascension, because that's the pathway to him being king and savior. And that was even more offensive to the Jews, that Messiah should actually be killed.

[9 : 52] And so, verse 66. After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

They became so angry, so disillusioned, so disappointed with what they had heard from the lips of Jesus, given what they expected to hear from the lips of Jesus, that they just said, this is rubbish. We're out of here. So the decision to walk away from Jesus, as we've seen right through each week as we've been looking at chapter 6, is a very knowing decision.

And Jesus identifies the trip point for their outrage and exposes it in verse 63. It is the spirit who gives life, says Jesus. The flesh or human agency or human means, human ability, is of no avail.

The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some among you who do not believe. And so, the cause of walking away from Jesus, when you drill down through the outrage, is laid open before them.

[11 : 23] There's no wriggle room. Yes, they're walking away from Jesus, but Jesus wants them to understand why they're walking away from him. It's a clash of agendas.

I talked about that last week and the week before. So the crowd were happy to accept Jesus as God's Savior and King, as long as he worked to their agenda, what God's Savior and King would look like and what he would do.

But when they realized that Jesus was pushing a very different agenda for him as God's Savior and King, they became outraged.

This isn't what we signed up for. This is nonsense. So they walked away. And let me spell out again, as I've done in previous weeks. See, it comes down to this.

According to Jesus, salvation or acceptance with God, relationship with him and enjoyment of the good life forever, is not an outside-in practice, as the Jews believed it to be.

[12 : 24] On the contrary, says Jesus, salvation is an inside-out work of God's Spirit. And it's inseparably tied to believing and accepting the words of Jesus.

And so the two agendas part company. It was not, says Jesus, salvation was not, says Jesus, an entitlement that came to them because they were God's special people.

It was not a process they could apply and control and work towards using their own physical resources. On the contrary, says Jesus, it was a spiritual gift, something he would give them, something that they could not and would not and did not merit for themselves.

It was grace, not performance. And so the agendas part company. And God would not happily accept them, says Jesus, on the basis of your religious actions, sacrifices and prayers and tithing and keeping the law of Moses, observing religious festivals and celebrations.

No, says Jesus, God will only accept you on the basis of my merit, which he identifies earlier as his death, foreshadows earlier as his death, for forgiveness and God's work of the spirit renewing them.

[13 : 46] And so the agendas part company. And the agendas part company to such an extent that explains self-satisfied rejection of Jesus.

He says, your deep spiritual hunger will only be satisfied through feeding on me. Their denialism was a choice to continue their own pathway to satisfy their spiritual hunger.

It was a clash of agendas. Now notice here that at no point does it suggest they were giving up their commitment to God. They continued to be very religious people.

But it was religion and commitment to God in their terms, on their agenda. With God's agenda through Jesus rejected.

And friends, the scandal of Jesus, the scandal of the gospel is still causing outrage. We see it.

[15 : 02] We see it. We see it weekly. People continue to come to Jesus with a tremendous anticipation and excitement about life. Only to walk away again so often when they actually start to comprehend what it is that Jesus is offering and that it's significantly different to what they think Jesus is going to give them.

And their denialism cuts in. They opt for their self-satisfied rejection of Jesus and their pursuit of satisfying of their own hunger in different ways.

And so denialism means that people still choose the deeply ingrained, the comfortable pathway of religion. We see that everywhere. We even see it in church communities like this.

And it's driven by self-righteousness. It's driven by self-salvation strategies because it's a determination to keep salvation in control, in our control, in our own hands.

Tim Keller says that if you're a religious person, then he says you're so full of pride, this is a very, very powerful statement if you're a religious person, you're so full of pride, which is self-righteousness, that you will do the right thing before God so that you actually don't need God.

[16 : 46] So you're not in any sense indebted to God. What he means by that is that relationship with God is worked in such a way that it's not about the need for mercy and the need for forgiveness.

It's not about the gift of new life by the Spirit and a thankful response to all of that. No, it's a contract. God, I have done this for you and I need you to understand what I've done for you so that in turn, God, you will do this for me.

It's a contract. It doesn't actually need relationship with God. It doesn't have an urgent dependency. It's almost an agreement between equals.

Self-righteousness thrives on denialism because when we do good, we feel good and the denialism is there because every day, even though we're doing good, we know jolly well that we cannot consistently meet our own standard of goodness.

And so, in reality, we're actually secretly crushed by a sense of failure, a sense of fear, a sense of guilt. I haven't quite got it good enough to be in relationship with God and yet our denialism, our self-righteousness, will actually override that.

[18:18] And we continue to ride the roller coaster of despair. Then go to Jesus for true freedom, true security, true satisfaction, true life.

You know as well as I do the drive within us. Keller says self-righteousness, pride, the drive within us to have religious actions that we can bring before God, convinced because of them that we'll be more loved by God, more accepted by Him.

You know what we trot out. I believed. I believed. I believed. I believed. I was baptized. I'm a big fan of taking Lord's Supper.

I read my Bible every day. I pray regularly. I go to church every week. I'm engaged in evangelism. I'm a church member and so on and so on. But this is spiritual pride rising up and imposing our physical salvation categories of self-gratification and happiness.

and at different points we see those coming out, don't we? That we impose our categories of salvation on the expectation that salvation means health and wealth, success and relationships, having lots of things and being happy.

[19:49] It's the contractual thing. We've done this for you, Lord, and we expect you to do this for us. We expect you to do this for us. So denialism is alive and well among us because deep down we have the sense that those things just won't cut it with God because God's standard of holiness is just way beyond those things.

but we ride the roller coaster. That's pretty confronting stuff, isn't it?

Well, friends, let me tell you equally confronting is the challenge of throwing yourself on Jesus. It's a different sort of confronting but equally confronting and that's what the disciples were challenged to do by Jesus or as a result of being challenged by Jesus.

Verse 67, you think when all this has gone through you think we're reading this we're not even part of it. Our minds are still reeling that people would walk away from Jesus and what do we get?

Verse 67 said to the 12 as it were if you want the last of the last but what are you blokes?

[21:09] Do you want to go away too? Simon Peter answered Lord to whom would we go?

To whom would we go? Because you have the words of eternal life. Peter speaks to the 12 and there's something confronting but something comforting about these words because immediately they see that while a majority may walk away others believe precisely as Jesus said it would be. they too had made a personal life defining decision like everybody else in the crowd had made. They too had decided on the same evidence they had decided based on the same teaching as others who had defected but their life defining decision was belief to move towards Jesus to throw themselves on Jesus to whom shall we go?

Jesus we recognize you are God is effectively what Peter is saying uniquely holy and to be honored as Lord and Savior we believe and come to know that you are the holy one of God Jesus we understand and are confident that you alone are the source of true life as you said you are having seen and heard and been taught by Jesus for Peter speaking with half of these twelve walking away was unthinkable walking away would be to commit spiritual suicide now notice Peter's awareness of how he came to this conclusion about Jesus Simon Peter answered him Lord to whom shall we go you have the words of eternal life notice verse six nine we have believed and have come to know does that strike you as unusual sort of back to front the way our modern scientific world would push you the believing comes before the knowing it started with believing the process of coming to the conclusion started with believing believing as their eyes actually observed

[23:48] Jesus doing miraculous things which they knew that only God could do making wine from water healing a child who was as good as dead without even seeing the child giving instant mobility to a paraplegic of 38 years feeding a crowd of over 5,000 from a children's lunchbox these were things that their eyes saw and their brains told them only God could do to believe the starting point my friends for certainty and spiritual things in the matter of life and salvation is not outrage and denial but believing believing why because the evidence and the words that go along with evidence

are compelling even though it severely challenges what they had always believed these twelve were no more clued up about what Jesus was on about than the rest of the crowd but having seen with their eyes having understood what they saw with their eyes as being something only

God could do and then hearing the teaching and went along with it even though they were clueless about the spiritual depth of it they still were pushed towards belief and believing leads to knowing so saying was a big help towards their conclusion about Jesus but ultimately it was the hearing and accepting of the words of Jesus the words of eternal life as Peter calls them here it was ultimately the words and the teaching that sealed the deal for these guys observing the things that Jesus did convinced them that he was authentically God and so being authentically God automatically his words deserved to be believed they came with authority unique authority and while they couldn't be understood necessarily they at least deserved the attitude of believing and so having seen Jesus do signs or miracles Peter had no hesitation in believing the words of explanation that followed even though at points the things that Peter heard and understood were as offensive to him as they were to others in the crowd remember Peter's response when he fully understood that Jesus was going to sacrifice himself he was furious not in my watch you want Jesus so ultimately my friends at a bigger picture if you look at the structure of John's gospel ultimately these twelve are an illustration of the very reason John is writing his biography so that contemplating the evidence you will believe that Jesus is the God the giver of life but at a micro picture these guys in throwing themselves on

Jesus have come to experience personally that what Jesus had promised them throughout this passage eternal life they were proof of the drawing power of God they were proof of the renewing power of the Holy Spirit they were not more clever more insightful than others in the crowd they had been taught by God as Jesus said last week if we looked at those earlier verses quoting from Isaiah that all God's children will ultimately need to be taught by God evidence of being taught by God properly is that they come to Jesus the drawing power of God the renewing power of the Holy Spirit is shown in the response of these guys and the outcome hungry embracing of Jesus hungry embracing of Jesus they had come to know that

Jesus was the one they hanged for as Jesus had told them he was the one they hanged for they had come to see in Jesus the one in whom satisfaction and life was to be found for them there was no alternative to whom else would we go where else would we go there was no way back Jesus you are all we need which is what Jesus was saying right through I am all you need Jesus you are all we desire there was no authentic alternative savior on offer so they throw themselves upon the mercy and grace of Jesus my friends it was not just that they didn't walk away with the rest of the crowd but that they positively embraced

[29 : 08] Jesus and Judas is a real evidence and a foil for this I think there's lots more can be said about this and people argue endlessly about the theology of it but I just want to use Judas in the story as a foil of showing that the disciples had to not just walk away but they had to positively embrace Jesus because at the end of the day Judas was one in their midst who didn't walk away from Jesus openly but nor did he come to Jesus and throw himself in Jesus there's unbelief right at the heart of this believing community and man that's a scary thought as I look around here this morning being being part of a community of those who believe being in close proximity in

Jesus being in close contact with his word stating openly and identifying with others who believe in Jesus is never enough there needs to be a recognition of deep spiritual need or hunger and an embracing of Jesus personally and deeply feeding on him as the terminology of last week feeding on it as the satisfaction of your hunger my friends hungry embracing is very very challenging verses 68 and verse 69 hungry embracing is equally confronting and challenging as walking away from Jesus because you see embracing Jesus means giving up our agendas and that's really hard for us to do it means believing that Jesus is God's king and savior sent into the world that Jesus is the only way to acceptance with God and life that salvation is a spiritual reality received from Christ alone as a gift of grace and that's hard to keep believing that when our agenda says well look now surely we've got something we can bring to the table salvation means entrusting your salvation entirely to God giving up any thought of controlling or being entitled to relationship with God on the basis of your own understanding your abilities your desires your religious actions and that's really hard to keep focused on isn't it when our agenda says well actually I actually think I'm a basically good person certainly compared to others that I look at in the wider world friends throwing yourself in Jesus means staying true to him even when from within the community believers we bear the

hurt and the cost of those who secretly betrayed Jesus by their life and their actions and their practices and that's a real cost isn't it because we look around we see these things and we think maybe the gospel doesn't work at all but my friends when we see that we see evidence the gospel is working exactly as

Jesus said it would work some will walk away some should walk away have walked away theologically and emotionally from Jesus but still stay in the community and some can't walk away there's nowhere else to go so this is a real turning point in the biography of Jesus written by John John proves a genuine consideration of evidence from a believing attitude prepared to go where the evidence takes you asking that the Lord actually might reveal truth to you will result in belief and life if you're a person here this morning who thinks well it seems so out there I want to get a hold of this but I haven't been able to get a hold of it maybe that's what you're missing maybe you need to look at this process of how you come to the evidence that runs counter to what we tend to believe in our scientific world we say and we're told and we're taught we need to know something and be sure of its truth before we believe in it well

God reverses the order and challenges you this morning to do the same in your mind reverse the order come to God's word believing because it is God's word and come to God's word believing as the first step in walking towards Jesus because the alternative is to walk away from it let me pray Lord help us to Lord help us to understand your word it's confronting at both levels it's confronting for those Lord who've walked away and it's confronting for those who like us say we want to walk towards you and throw ourselves on you help us Lord to throw ourselves on you and your agenda for us not imposing or insisting our agenda over yours in Jesus name I pray Amen