

JOH 6:59-63 He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. 60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" 61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? 62 What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! 63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

Last week we left Jesus explaining to the Jews the importance of feeding on spiritual food as opposed to the food which only nourishes the body. One food leads to eternal life, the other food only slows down the process that inevitability leads to death.

And what our Lord went on to explain is that He is that food which leads to eternal life. This is why He could say, "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (JOH 6:54)

Of course, He was using language which was not meant to be taken literally. What He meant was that to have eternal life one must take Him to be the only source of life. We must feed on Him in the spiritual sense in the same way we feed on physical food. We embrace it. We take physical food to ourselves and we make it a part of our bodies by eating it.

In the same way we take the life Christ offers by embracing it and taking it to ourselves as we become united to Christ by faith.

And yet, as we saw last week the Jews who heard this were confounded by such language, not because they didn't understand what Jesus said, but because they weren't willing to accept Him as the heavenly food sent from the Father who imparts this life.

And what is interesting about this entire incident is that it is taking place in the one venue which we might find surprising. It is happening in and around the Synagogue in Capernaum.

JOH 6:59 He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

What this means is that Jesus was an invited guest of these Jews to come into their place of worship and to teach on the things of God. Remember, Jesus was identified by most of the Jews as Rabbi, which includes the meaning of teacher.

Jesus was continually teaching on the Kingdom of God and people's need to repent of their sin and turn to God for forgiveness. And by the way, Capernaum was not an unfamiliar place for Jesus as He taught in this area in the past. Even before He called His disciples He had taught here with a message of repentance.

MAT 4:12-17 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali - 14 to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 15 "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - 16 the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." 17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

And now as our Lord returns to this area of Capernaum He begins to make it much more clear in His teaching that the people living in darkness can turn to the light who is Himself.

We might even speculate that at this time in Capernaum, as Jesus was teaching in their Synagogue, He may have been teaching on that passage in Exodus which addressed the Lord supplying the need of Israel in the desert as He rained down manna from heaven on them.

And as our Lord took the fellowship and conversation outside after the service He begins to take questions from the people. You'll remember that one of the questions had to do with how He was able to get to the other side of the Sea of Galilee without a boat.

Our Lord uses that opportunity to launch into the difference between the food they had received from Jesus the day before, (in the fish and the loaves), as He now explains to them that just as Moses received heavenly food from the Father, Jesus is now a better heavenly food who is eternal life to all who receive Him by faith.

Jesus was always taking the opportunity to teach the crowds about the Kingdom of God and how one can now come into that Kingdom. But this doesn't mean the crowds were always willing to accept what He taught, especially when using the kind of language we see in our text where our Lord instructs them to dine on His flesh and blood, in a spiritual sense, if they are to have eternal life.

JOH 6:60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

There's a lot of stuff in this little verse we need to look at. The first thing we see is that John identifies these people listening to Jesus as disciples of Jesus. The word disciple means a learner or pupil.

It infers one who follows a leader with the express purpose of learning from them. For the most part these were not hostile Jews who were following Jesus. These were people who spent the time to listen to the teachings of Jesus. They appreciated the way our Lord taught with authority. And by the way, the disciples mentioned here is a reference to the crowds, not the twelve.

But now we come to a cross roads. Up to this point the way Jesus taught didn't challenge these people in quite the same way as He did in the past. He spoke about the Kingdom of God. He echoed the teaching of John the Baptist of the need to repent of their sin. But now He confronts them with a truth they're not willing to readily embrace.

And the thing they're not willing to readily embrace is the hard sayings of our Lord's teaching concerning Himself. "Choose Me or die," was His message.

When the message is more general in nature, or is not something that can offend, people are more willing to accept it. But when you start teaching where the message touches people in a personal way where they don't want to be touched, or you teach truths that people don't like you often get the reaction Jesus gets here in our text. "...This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

Now, keep in mind that these people are identified as Jesus' disciples, His learners and followers. You would think that if you were a learner of a leader that your attitude would be a little different. Maybe phrasing the response this way. "This is a hard saying. Help us understand it."

But no. What has happened here is that instead of showing these people to be true learners or disciples our Lord has revealed that they are not interested in the truth of who He really is. They've turned on a dime. One moment they are singing His praises and the next moment they don't like what He says, so they reject Him.

This is why there is always the temptation for leaders and teachers in the church to be men-pleasers. This is, in fact, why so many pastors and teachers in the church would rather teach light and

fluffy messages that don't confront or challenge from God's word, but instead give a sense of "how can I make you feel better about yourself."

Now, I don't condone teaching where any leader or teacher is always using God's word to abuse or beat down the flock. And I'm not against teaching ways to encourage the body of Christ, but not at the expense of avoiding the hard teachings which sometimes are not very popular.

It's easy and delightful to teach on God's love and mercy. It's easy to teach the crowds what wonderful people we are and how much God needs us. It's not as easy to expose sin. It's not as easy to teach the truth about the results of sin, which is eternal damnation and God's wrath.

I find it amazing that these Jews could so easily question the God and Creator of the universe who is now clothed in flesh as He teaches with such authority. And where only hours before they would have seemingly followed Him anywhere, they now question His sanity.

On an infinitely smaller scale I've experienced the same thing as a teacher and pastor. I marvel at how people will say amen to the exposition of the word of God here at Calvary Chapel. But the moment you say something challenging, or the moment you expound on a passage of Scripture that shatters someone's preconceived idea, they're ready to jump ship. "This is a hard saying, who can accept it?"

The fickleness of man, who can understand it? But I've learned from my Lord many years ago that when it comes to teaching the word of God there will be only one person who will be standing at the throne of God who will answer for what he or she has done in handling accurately God's word.

And that person is the one commissioned by God to teach the whole counsel of His word without compromise. I will not be judged on my ability to tell a joke from the pulpit or give amusing anecdotes. I will be judged by God when it comes to feeding His sheep. And it is an awesome responsibility.

JAM 3:1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

1CO 4:2-4 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.

My challenge to all Christians, including those men and women who teach God's word, is to teach it faithfully and without compromise, not fearing that someone may not like what that truth is. But we must teach with love and compassion and with the realization that it is Christ's church, for whom He died, that we feed.

The alternative is to approach such a task as one's who are hirelings, who teach only to satisfy men so as not to offend at any time or to make sure that one's job is secure. When that happens the shepherd becomes the follower as he relinquishes his responsibility before Christ to lead. And Paul made it clear to another pastor how that will turn out.

2TI 4:3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

In Capernaum the itching ears were not satisfied by Jesus. He did not teach only what they wanted to hear. He taught what they needed to hear even if they weren't willing to accept it, which by the way is not a very smart way to start a new movement.

Those of today's "church building" guru's would never recommend the approach of the One who happens to be the true Head over the church. To build a successful church you never alienate anyone. The last thing you want to do is call someone a whitewashed tomb full of dead men's bones.

And of course you don't want to alienate yourself from other church leaders in your area whether they believe the truth of God's word or not. As long as they name the name of Jesus, let's just all get along. But of course Jesus was not very wise in this area either.

MAT 23:15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are."

And you didn't think there was much we could get from one little verse. But these Jews in Capernaum were not serious about God's word. They simply wanted to be part of a "happening movement" which didn't challenge them to accept such hard sayings, no matter how true they were.

Jesus loved these people too much to hide such needed truth as it related to their eternal destinies. He wasn't about to sugar coat the truth, that unless you came to Him by faith, embracing His death, as His body was broken and His blood was shed, you would have no life; only eternal separation from God.

This is serious business. And if these Jews had taken it seriously they would have openly come to Jesus for further explanation instead of grumbling behind His back as they divisively complained.

JOH 6:61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"

A more literal rendering can be found in the NASB which says, "Does this cause you to stumble?"

The idea here is, does this type of language trip you up to where you take offense instead of seeking Me for an explanation?

They weren't willing to come to Jesus, but it appears that Jesus was willing to bring it up in the hopes that maybe someone will change their attitude and seek the answer from Him.

I don't know about you, but I don't know if I would like my God and Creator coming to me and asking me if I was offended by what He said. No, I would hope I would respond like that song which says, "God said it, I believe it and that settles it."

By the way, I once had someone tell me that you probably don't want to derive your theology from popular songs even if the artist is a Christian seeking to encourage the body of Christ. He told me that the saying, "God said it, I believe it and that settles it" isn't quite accurate. He suggested, "God said it, that settles it, and I believe it."

I have to agree. But Jesus is not going to let this pass. He is not going to allow these Jews to continue in their ignorance though they will still continue in their unbelief. He goes on to challenge their premise that His sayings are hard and therefore should not be believed. And so He makes this statement in verse 62.

JOH 6:62 "What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!"

Well, what's this got to do with the hard sayings about eating His flesh and drinking His blood? Well, in the context Jesus is putting another truth back into the laps of these Jews. It is as if to say, "well, if you can't believe that you must eat My flesh and drink My blood for eternal life, how about believing that I will ascend back to heaven where I came from?"

Oh yeah, that will be easier to believe, as they continue to grumble at another hard saying. And by the way, there are a couple of things to be noted in that truth regarding the ascension of Christ.

In the context this ascension has to do with Jesus dying to secure our salvation. Drinking His blood and eating His body, as we saw last week, is in reference to receiving His payment for our sin on the cross by faith. With this in mind, for Jesus to ascend back to heaven necessarily means that He must first bodily rise from the dead, defeating the grave.

Now, obviously the Jews didn't understand all of the nuances of what Jesus was saying. But there is something they could have understood in regards to ascending back to heaven.

Number one, they are being reminded that Jesus is not of this world and in fact is once again claiming that He came from heaven thus making His residence a heavenly one. In fact, He already established this fact back in John 3:13.

JOH 3:13 "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven - the Son of Man."

By this Jesus means that His original home was heaven which is to say that He is God. That is different from saying that any spiritual being from heaven is God. We know the angels live in heaven, but it was not their heaven to live in until God created heaven for them and invited them in. Jesus was not invited to live there He created it.

But if this escaped the Jews there is a second thing they might have considered Jesus saying. If they knew their Old Testament's, and I'm sure many of them did, they would have realized that there were only two people in all of history who never experienced death: Enoch and Elijah who were taken into heaven without dying.

And so, the idea of Jesus ascending to the Father is not so far-fetched when we look at other biblical examples in the word of God.

The point is that it didn't make any difference what Jesus said regarding His unique position with the Father. Once the hard sayings started coming these Jews were not willing to accept those sayings or the One saying them.

Unless they had eyes to see and ears to hear they would remain in the dark which is essentially what Jesus says in the next couple of verses.

JOH 6:63 "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

Here Jesus defines the language He has been using. And He defines it as spirit language. In other words, He is speaking the truth which is spiritually discerned. It all goes back to that age old question, what is truth? And what this really means to sinful men is that truth to one may not be truth to another.

But in God's economy there is truth which leads to life and which cannot be altered or ignored no matter how much someone tries to redefine truth for their own purposes, and their own justification of their sin. Pilate did this with Jesus when the issue of God's truth came up.

JOH 18:37-38 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." 38 "What is truth?" Pilate asked.

Pilate was not inquiring of truth. He was scoffing at the idea that Jesus could suggest that there was one truth which people must listen to so as to arrive at the truth. People are no different today. In fact, this is why the world scoffs at the idea that Christians can unequivocally say that there is only one way to heaven; Jesus Christ.

They would say that no one can claim that as truth since everyone knows there are many paths to God. They would accuse us of being intolerant of others when we suggest that Jesus Christ is the way and the truth and the life, and that no man can come to the Father but by Him.

But in trying to take our voice and burying it, who are the intolerant ones? My intolerance relating to salvation doesn't deny someone else in speaking their mind. My intolerance is in a truth which directs my life. My intolerance regarding salvation doesn't force people to accept such truth.

The truth, as it relates to how one is saved from the penalty of their sin, doesn't originate from me. It is God who is intolerant as it relates to eternal life. That's the truth we're talking about, and about which Jesus is speaking in our text.

In fact, I find it ironic that of all people, the Jews are intolerant of God's plan of salvation. They will not accept the Messiah promised in their Scriptures. And so, it shouldn't surprise us that the rest of the world wouldn't accept Him.

This is why the Spirit must give life where there was death and denial. Nothing of the flesh can attain to this life. There is nothing in this world that can be gained that God will deem good enough for man to earn a righteousness before the throne of God.

It is God who must impart and impute this life into sinful, spiritually dead, human beings. This is exactly what John says in the very beginning of this gospel.

JOH 1:12-13 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

To be born again is to be born from above. It is just as the words imply. It is a new birth. It is life given to those who are dead. By definition this must be a work of the Spirit who gives this life. It is not a life we can conjure up, nor seek after if we are dead in our trespasses and sins.

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing." By the way, the phrase, "the flesh counts for nothing," comes on the heels of Jesus saying that unless you eat His flesh you have no life.

This is not a contradiction. This, by the way, is one reason we know that Jesus is not talking about mere flesh when it comes to eating our Lord's flesh. Rather, He is talking about a spiritual truth which leads to the Spirit giving life. And we know what that spiritual truth is that the Spirit uses to give life. Paul talks about it.

ROM 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Jesus Christ is the gospel. He is the good news. The Spirit of God opens the eyes of the spiritually blind to our Savior. This is what Jesus alludes to at the end of verse 63.

"The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life," which is to say, the words you reject is the truth you need which the Holy Spirit must illumine you to. 'On your own you are in the dark. I am the Light and one day many of you will finally see this light as My Father does a work in your spirits.'

And we know that many of the Jews, after Christ's resurrection, were touched by the Spirit of God; even some of the Pharisees, not the least of whom was Saul who persecuted the church. Paul testifies that left to his own he would have continued to be a party to murdering innocent Christians. But the Lord opened His eyes after He literally blinded them to this world.

Though people will not come to Christ on their own, that is to say, according to their sinful nature, God is in the business of opening our eyes as He gives life as only He can.

Think about this the next time you share the gospel of Jesus Christ with someone. "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." That's powerful. Speak the truth in love and pray the Holy Spirit takes these words of life and gives life and that many come to believe in the One who is Life, our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.