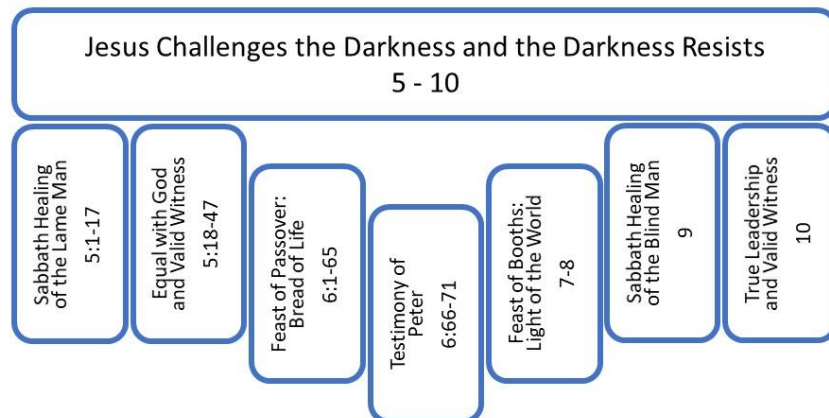


Lesson 13: John 6:52-71 Eat My Flesh and Drink My Blood

Introduction



What do you want from Jesus? That's our overarching question for John chapter 6. The crowd wanted something from Jesus. They wanted him to be who they wanted him to be. And they wanted him to give what they wanted him to give.

Whatever Jesus does for us, whether miraculous signs or provision of our needs or healing of relationships, can lead us to look more closely at him, but as we see in John 6, signs and provision can also distract us from Jesus. What we want from Jesus might be the thing that keeps us from seeing Jesus. Do I want something from Jesus, or do I want Jesus?

While dialoguing with a crowd in Capernaum, Jesus recognizes a hardness of heart similar to the generation that died grumbling in the wilderness. Unlike the Samaritans in chapter 4, this crowd is not willing to follow where Jesus leads. They want what they want and become frustrated that Jesus insists on something different. Faced with their obstinance, Jesus decides to shake them with a test of faith.

John 6 began with two signs, one for the masses and one just for the disciples, a dialogue followed the signs. That dialogue led to a test of faith and two responses. In our last lesson, we looked at the two signs and the beginning of the dialogue. In this lesson, we pick the dialogue back up with the test of faith and then consider the two responses that follow. We will start with the test. This is in John 6:49-59,

A Test of Faith (6:49-59)

A ⁴⁹ **"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.**

B ⁵⁰ **This is the bread which comes down out of heaven,** so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

C ⁵² Then the Jews *began* to argue with one another, saying, How can this man give us *His* flesh to eat? ⁵³ 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 have no life in yourselves.**

D ⁵⁴ **He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life,** and I will raise him up on the last day.

X ⁵⁵ For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink.

D' ⁵⁶ **He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me,** and I in him.

C' ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so **he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me.**

B' ⁵⁸ **This is the bread which came down out of heaven;**

A' not as **the fathers ate and died;** he who eats this bread will live forever."

⁵⁹ These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

Jesus words are best understood as a test of faith.

Like the middle of the dialogue, that began with “I am the Bread of Life” and ended with “I am the Bread of Life”, this passage is also chiasmic. It begins and ends with Jesus repeating that the fathers ate the manna and died. Referring to the physical death of that generation is a challenge to look beyond what you think you want to that which is really, fundamentally essential. You want bread. But bread today does not do anything about eventual death. There is a bread that comes down out of heaven that provides eternal life.

Jesus has already declared of himself, “I am the bread of life.” He has told us that he is the bread, that the bread provides eternal life, and that the way to get this bread is through faith in him. The crowd refuses to follow Jesus in this, intent on the kind of physical bread he has already multiplied for them. That is what they want. They also reject that he is from heaven, asserting that they know who is mother and father are.

At this point, it appears that Jesus has decided to push them away. He is going to push them back. As Christians used to the idea of the Lord’s Supper, we immediately soften the words of Jesus, “eat my flesh, drink my blood.” But for this original audience the idea of drinking human blood would have been extremely offensive. It ought to be offensive to us to think about. To make matters worse, Jesus is saying these things in a synagogue. I think John held on to that detail until verse 59 to emphasize for us the incongruity of what Jesus has just said. Jews, by Torah law, drained the blood out of their meat before eating. God states in Leviticus 17:10, “I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.” 1500 years of Torah practice has ingrained in Jewish people a revulsion for blood in food. And now, Jesus, in a synagogue, tells people that they must eat his flesh, human flesh, and drink his blood, human blood. How revolting! It is just gross. And even if he does have some symbolic or mystical idea in mind, this is completely inappropriate. This is a metaphor, a preacher, a priest should never use, not anywhere, not in a synagogue, certainly. What is Jesus doing?

New birth, eternal water, everlasting bread, those metaphors confused, but they did not offend. But this? Why would Jesus say something like this? And maybe the more important question is, “Why didn’t Jesus later explain himself when so many got offended and stopped following him?” It is one thing to shake people up a bit to make sure they are paying attention. But when they get angry and start walking out on the basis of the offensiveness of the preaching, why not just say, “Hold on there. Wait a minute. I am not being literal. You are not really going to eat me. Of course not. There is a deeper meaning.” Why not clear it up? Why doesn’t Jesus do that? Why does he create this emotional and cognitive dissonance, this internal struggle and tension, and then just allow it to sit there? He lets it stew until the majority of people turn and walk away? Why doesn’t he clarify his words?

I believe Jesus is testing their faith. Clarification has not worked to this point. He has given them a metaphor. But they refuse to take his definition or follow his lead. They insist on defining Jesus as they want to define Jesus. You are a miracle worker. You are the prophet. You could be king. But Holy One of God who comes from heaven? Bread of life? They are resistant. They have begun to grumble. They want what they want and believe what they believe, and they refuse to follow where his teaching leads.

What then is going to be the result for them? Is it a good thing to allow religious people to create their own definitions of church, their own definitions of God, their own definitions of themselves and then to remain comfortable in that delusion? What is the end result of not believing in God the way God has revealed himself to be? If belief in Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life, do we really feel okay leaving people in their own disillusion. Is it the ultimate aim of the church to keep people in or to grow the numbers no matter what? To keep people feeling happy and comfortable and to go along as much as possible with society?

If we are not willing to push back against false views of the gospel, if we are not willing to challenge misconceptions, if we are satisfied affirming each one in his or her own personal beliefs, then what

does that say about our ultimate concern for their well-being? Are we more concerned about gathering numbers or avoiding conflict? Or are we more concerned about the true state of each individual heart?

Jesus is not focused here on numbers. Jesus is most concerned that people wake up to the deadness of their spiritual state. He is more concerned with eternal life than with temporary life. He is not satisfied to leave people in a state of self-delusion. He would rather shake them up and drive them away, for then it least they might come to the realization that they are indeed lost, and they might possibly repent and turn back.

That's what I believe Jesus is doing. He is creating significant mental and emotional distress in this crowd of followers, because they are holding so tightly to their own definition of who he is and what he ought to do for them.

Recognizing that Jesus has just created a faith challenge. Now, let's consider what Jesus' words mean. So, yes, he is challenging the people. He is creating this distress. Can we understand what he is talking about? Does he only create confusion or is there a way to interpret what he is saying?

What does this faith challenge have to do with how we understand the Lord's Supper?

The center of the challenge, the chiasm, comes in 54 through 56.

⁵⁴ **He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life**, and I will raise him up on the last day.

⁵⁵ For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. (Then again,)

⁵⁶ **He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me**, and I in him.

If you grew up in a Christian church, then your interpretation of Jesus' words are affected by what your church teaches about the Lord's Supper. Even though Jesus has not instituted the Lord's Supper, yet, at this point in his ministry, we still cannot help thinking about it. If your church understands taking the bread and wine as a more literal act of eating the body and blood of Jesus, you likely read that into this passage. But if your church teaches the taking of bread and wine as a symbolic act, then you probably automatically interpret Jesus' words as symbolic.

The challenge, then, is to put aside assumptions about how to interpret this text and try hard to question how the original hearers were supposed to understand what Jesus was saying. And since John is the one who has created the literary context, we should interpret the words of Jesus, according to the information John has given us in this passage and in the Gospel as a whole.

Now Jesus certainly uses literal language. He literally says, "eat my flesh and drink my blood", and he says the result is eternal life. This is abiding in me. If you are from a church that treats this symbolically, you might immediately conclude that it is ridiculous to believe that we can somehow eat the flesh of Jesus or drink the blood of Jesus. But then, Jews and Muslims will tell us that it is ridiculous to believe that God is both one and three or that God could become a man. We would argue that the trinity and incarnation are not ridiculous at all. Rather, they are mysterious, being beyond our full grasp because we are speaking about the nature of God. Well, the same could be said about the Lord's Supper. A Christian could argue that we do eat the flesh of Jesus and drink the blood of Jesus in a real way that is somehow beyond our full comprehension because it has to do with the nature of God. It is not ridiculous. It is mysterious.

So, without concluding too quickly whether Jesus is speaking somehow literally or symbolically, we can ask whether the text points us in one direction or the other. What is our reason for interpreting the text in the way we interpret it? In fact, you may want to pause this lesson right now and think about that. If you believe this text is speaking symbolically, then what in the text leads you to discount the fact that it sounds literal? Or if you think it is literal, what in the text leads you to reject the idea that Jesus is speaking symbolically? What observations lead to your interpretation?

Here are my thoughts. Here are four reasons why I think Jesus is speaking symbolically here about spiritual realities.

(1) First, the teaching of Jesus recorded in John has shown Jesus speaking symbolically about spiritual realities. We have seen this before. Nicodemus questioned whether a person must enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born again. The answer was no. Nicodemus interpreted literally a metaphor about spiritual regeneration. Similarly, was Jesus speaking literally to the woman at the well about physical water? No. And we will see in chapter 7 that Jesus connects water welling up inside the believer with the Holy Spirit. He was not talking about a real well or a real water that would continually produce. Jesus' words were about a spiritual reality of which physical water was only symbolic. We come then to the teaching about bread and find that Jesus is not talking about any bread at all. There is no real bread. But about himself, "I am the Bread of Life!" It is a metaphor. So then, when Jesus begins talking about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, we have good reason to believe Jesus is using physical metaphor as symbolic of spiritual reality. It follows.

(2) Second, taking the statement, "I am the bread of life" as having a material reference that we can somehow eat would set this "I am" statement off from the ones that will come later in the Gospel. Jesus will also declare that he is the light. But we do not have a ritual that imagines him as physically light. He will claim to be the door and the vine, but both of these are also taken symbolic of spiritual reality. Jesus is not a door to be literally opened nor is he a vine to be literally planted. If we interpret Jesus words consistently through John, then he is not saying that we can somehow literally eat his flesh and drink his blood. I am the bread of life points to a spiritual reality, not a material ritual.

(3) Third, let's consider the spiritual reality. If Jesus is declaring that literally eating his flesh and drinking his blood produces eternal life, then we would have to conclude that eating the Lord's Supper is the means by which we gain eternal life. And some indeed conclude that. They stay consistent with their belief. But is that what Jesus has been teaching through the Gospel of John?

No, it is absolutely not. That is not what Jesus has been saying. Jesus has repeatedly taught that the way a person receives eternal life is through faith in him. That is the point of the dialogue in chapter 6 that we studied in our last lesson. It was also the message to Nicodemus. It was the message to the Samaritan woman. It is the message here. Jesus began his teaching about the bread of life by declaring, "he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." Jesus is talking about spiritual satisfaction, spiritual completeness. He identifies himself as the bread and the way to get the bread is faith. Eating and drinking of Jesus become synonymous with faith.

In verse 40, "This is the will of my Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in him may have eternal life." The promise of eternal life Jesus gives in 54 says that whoever "eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." Belief is parallel to eating and drinking.

Eternal life does not come through the Lord's Supper. Eternal life comes through believing in Jesus. That is the consistent message of John up to chapter 6 and that is going to be the consistent message after chapter 6. And, in fact, it is a consistent message through the New Testament. We do not see an emphasis on the Lord's Supper through the letters. We see an emphasis on faith in Jesus. That is everywhere. The eating and drinking of Jesus in this chapter is symbolic of true faith. To eat and drink is to believe in, to receive Jesus. That is why the result is eternal life.

(4) Fourth, a final point, we need to be careful not to mix symbol with reality. The Lord's Supper is not the primary background for the words of Jesus here. Right? He is not talking about the Lord's Supper unless it is somehow in the future. The Lord's Supper has not been established, yet. It would be more right to say the Lord's Supper is about what Jesus is saying here. The background for what Jesus is saying here is the Passover feast. And, later, at the last Passover, that is where Jesus is going to institute or establish the Lord's Supper. So, there is a connection between Jesus words here and the Lord's Supper. That connection is the Passover. So, we need to go back to the Passover to consider the meaning. The words here and the words at the Last Supper, both draw from the reality of the Passover feast. Both take meaning from the Passover feast.

We think back in the Old Testament, flesh and blood, what is flesh and blood about? Well, in Leviticus chapter 17 it is pretty clear that flesh and blood are connected to a sacrifice of atonement.

They are not to be taken separately like flesh is one thing and blood is one thing but as a whole. It is flesh and blood. Flesh and blood are the whole sacrifice both together representing the animal whose life is given up. The life of the sacrifice is offered in place of the sinner. That is what atonement means. This is the kind of sacrifice that is offered in place of someone else. As the blood drains from the animal, the vitality of the flesh is seen to drain away. The eyes close. It is like the animal goes to sleep. The body stops moving. The life is gone. So, giving up the flesh, giving up the blood, is giving up life. The animal is sacrificing life. And if we don't want to be completely scandalized by the words of Jesus, thinking he is talking about some kind of mysterious cannibalism, then we need to understand his reference to flesh and blood as a reference to sacrifice. And since John has already informed us that this is the time of the Passover, and all our language has been from the manna in heaven and the coming out of Egypt, the most immediate reference of sacrifice is the Passover Lamb. That is what we are supposed to think about at Passover. When Jesus institutes later the Lord's Supper, that is what people are supposed to be thinking about. When he talks about flesh and blood, you are supposed to be thinking about the Passover lamb. And you remember that the lamb had its blood smeared on the doorposts of Jewish homes during the last plague in Egypt, so that the angel of wrath would pass over those homes and the firstborn would not die. That lamb was symbolic. That lamb did not really protect people. It did not really take away sin. It pointed ahead to a true sacrifice of atonement. John the Baptist recognizes that this symbolic sacrifice of the lamb comes true in Jesus. So, when Jesus comes to be baptized, we read this in chapter 1, John the Baptist cries out, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)."

So, what is Jesus talking about when is talking about flesh and blood? He is talking about Passover lamb that people ate. People ate the Passover lamb. He is talking about himself as the sacrifice. This is the spiritual reality that Jesus is pointing us to through his shocking metaphor, that he himself is the sacrifice that must die for our sins. That is why it provides eternal life. Jesus provides eternal life for us by taking punishment on himself so that the wrath of God will pass over. His flesh and blood is the sacrifice of atonement. Eating the bread and wine at the Passover feast was a reminder to Jews of God's great salvation out of Egypt. Eating the flesh and blood of Jesus is not something we do literally. It is a symbolic way of remembering God's even greater deliverance from sin. Jesus is calling on us to believe in him as the Passover lamb. Eating is receiving. When we take the Lord's Supper, we proclaim our faith in Jesus through a symbolic act. By eating the bread and drinking the wine, we proclaim our faith that Jesus indeed gave up his own flesh and blood for us as the true sacrifice of atonement that takes away our sin and makes possible eternal life.

Let me sum up these four points. We could interpret Jesus words as a mystical eating and drinking of the flesh and blood of Jesus in some mysteriously real way. But to make such an interpretation is to reject the information we have been given through the Gospel of John. Up to this point, whether with new birth and Nicodemus or living water and the Samaritan woman or bread of life and this crowd gathered, the metaphor has always pointed to a spiritual reality apart from any material counterpart. The material is not in mind, only the spiritual. We do not really crawl into our mother's womb to be born again. So, why would we then at this point argue that the eating of Jesus' flesh and the drinking of his blood deviates from our consistent interpretation of John, in this one instance to require a real material eating of Jesus.

In fact, to this point in the narrative, with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman and the gathered crowd, John has emphasized that the inability to understand Jesus use of metaphor to point to a spiritual reality shows a lack of faith, a lack of sight. To insist on a physical or material meaning in the metaphor of eating and drinking is to make the same interpretive mistake that has been consistently pointed out in those who do not see, who do not believe. Eating and drinking here is intended to shock the audience, but the interpretive principle remains the same in John. Jesus is speaking about spiritual reality to all who are willing to follow where his teaching leads. He is the bread of life. He is the source of eternal water. To eat and drink is to believe and receive.

This is a test of faith. We read next how the majority responds to the test. This is John 6:60-66.

The Majority Response (6:60-66)

⁶⁰ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this* said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?” ⁶¹ But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, “Does this cause you to stumble? ⁶² *What* then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. ⁶⁵ And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” ⁶⁶ As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

Notice that John’s identification of the audience just changed. Earlier, in verse 52, John told us that Jesus was talking to the Jews. And this is not the Jews down in Jerusalem the leaders who were opposed to him. In this context, the Jews are a broad term for a crowd of gathered people, everybody in Galilee is Jewish. So, they are the Jews. Now he tells us that many of Jesus’ disciples found Jesus’ words difficult to accept. These are disciples. They are not the Twelve. We know that because after these disciples have turned away and left, Jesus is then going to speak to the Twelve. So, these are not the Twelve, but they are also not a randomly gathered crowd of Galileans. These are people who in some way identify as a follower of Jesus. That is what the word disciple means. It means follower.

We know that people identify with Jesus without truly understanding who Jesus is. Way back in 2:23 many believed in Jesus at the Passover feast, but Jesus, knowing what is in the heart of a man did not entrust himself to them. They said they believed. But what did they believe? Jesus knew they did not truly believe. We are told the same thing about these disciples here. Jesus tells them in verse 64, “But there are some of you who do not believe.” And then John says, “Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe.” Jesus sees into their heart. Jesus is not surprised by the fact the many of these who followed him do not truly believe in him. Just as we have recognized in John that there is belief that is not true belief and life that is not true life, so also there are disciples that are not true disciples.

For these disciples, the word of Jesus proves too difficult for them. In this case too difficult means offensive. And if we are honest about it, there is stuff in the Bible that is too difficult for us, even offensive. We read parts of the Mosaic law and we say, “Who can accept this?” We have all kinds of struggles whether it is emotional or intellectual. We have struggles about predestination, the conquest of Canaan and the killing of people, the reality of hell, slavery, homosexuality, dinosaurs, the flood, creation of Adam and Eve, laws of purity that apply only to women and not to men, women’s roles in ministry, hard sayings, things that seem unfair, too harsh, contradictory. There are things that offend, things that are too hard. Who hasn’t said at some point about something in the Bible, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?” What do you do with the teaching that shakes you up, that troubles you emotionally and intellectually? What do you do with it?

Jesus says something very interesting here to these disciples that would be easy to pass over. We can miss this. Jesus says, “Does this cause you to stumble? *What* then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?” What does that mean? Why does Jesus say that? “What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?” Jesus has just spoken to the crowd, and they do not like what he is saying. If Jesus were at this moment to ascend into heaven, would that change their response to his teaching? The question is this, “Who do you really believe that Jesus is?” Do you expect Jesus to ascend into heaven? Do you see Jesus sitting on the throne of heaven? If the teaching of his word causes severe emotional or intellectual dissonance, distress, but you truly believe that he is the Son of Man who sits the throne of God, are you still going to walk away from him? You don’t have to be happy and comfortable with all your Bible problems. There is a lot of teaching to agonize over. But in the end, do you believe that you care more about people than God cares about people, that you discern better than God discerns, that you understand science better than the Creator of the universe,

that you understand sexuality better than the Creator of sex, that you understand justice more than the eternal judge, that you understand suffering better than the one who took all of human suffering and sin on himself. It comes to this. Do you really believe that Jesus has truly risen as the Son of Man to the throne of heaven? Do you really believe he is God and his Word is his Word? And if you do, can you seriously turn away from any of it? Whether you get it or not.

If Jesus is who Jesus claims to be, if he holds the power to give life and authority to judge, then the question of his teaching is a question of who really has authority over truth. Is it me or is it him? You do not have to understand it. You do not even have to good about it. You don't have to like it. You don't have to get it all. But you do have to choose whether you are going to hold on to Jesus, or you are going to walk away from Jesus, in spite of whether you get what he is saying, which should not surprise any of us that we don't totally, emotionally or intellectually get what the King of the Universe is saying . So, if you don't get it, do you still believe in him?

As he says, "Does this cause you to stumble? *What* then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? If you imagine Jesus on the throne of heaven, what then are you going to do with his teaching?

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe."

Jesus does here give them here a little bit of insight into his teaching about eat my flesh, drink my blood. He does not explain the whole metaphor. But he gives them just a bit if they are listening. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing." We are not talking about material, fleshly reality, we are talking about the Spirit and the spiritual. When we talk about new birth, when we talk about living water, when we talk about the bread of life, we are talking about something you cant see or touch or eat. Eternal life comes from the Spirit not from the flesh. The flesh profits nothing. He has been talking about the Spirit. And he says it here plainly, "the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." You don't abide in Jesus by eating, really, his flesh and drinking his blood. That is not mentioned at all in the great abiding in Jesus chapter in John 15. There he is a vine. Life is about abiding spiritually in Christ, through faith. It is a spiritual relationship with God. And he gives them that hint. He does not stop, and he doesn't cry out, "it was just a metaphor! Wait! Come back!" He has given them a faith challenge, and they are going to have to choose whether they say with Jesus, even without understanding, or whether they turn away because they don't understand. They are going to have to make a choice. Jesus is forcing that on them.

Jesus goes on to repeat an important point about faith he has made already in this dialogue. It is not really up to these disciples. It is not by their own will or intellect or spirituality. They cannot in fact believe out of their own flesh. And this is one of those hard truths that might drive you away from Jesus. You have to decide. It comes out of Jesus' mouth. Is it too hard? Are you going to hold onto Jesus or are you going to walk away? The Bible both challenges people with the responsibility to believe in Jesus as an act of their will and also declares that people cannot do so unless God first opens their eyes to see. God must do something in the human heart in order for a person to see and believe.

But even if Jesus were to ascend into heaven in front of them, they would not as a result of that sign accept his teaching. Miraculous signs do not bring about true faith. God brings about true faith. Remember what Jesus said in verse 37, "All that the Father gives me shall come to me." And then in verse 44, "No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him." And then here again in verse 65, "No one can come to me unless it has been granted him from the Father." Even seeing Jesus ascend into heaven is not going to change the heart of a person. God must open our eyes and draw us to himself.

I met a young woman from Iran here in Zagreb who rejected Islam and chose to identify herself as a Christian. In her long journey from Iran to Europe she found herself stuck in Serbia unable to go further. The night before crossing into Croatia, she had a dream about Jesus. When she woke from the dream, she prayed to Jesus for safe passage. She got it. Somehow, she miraculously, according to her, was able to cross into Croatia. And so, she became a disciple or follower of Jesus.

Like many asylum seekers from the Middle East, she did not want to be in Croatia. She hoped to go further to a more affluent country like Austria or France or Germany. But being an E.U. country, all who register in Croatia must stay in Croatia to apply for asylum. Instead of staying, she prayed to Jesus for safe passage into Germany. But that was breaking the law. She was caught trying to cross the border and brought back. And she was in trouble. Jesus failed her. So, now she no longer calls herself a follower of Jesus.

A dream and a perceived miracle led her to proclaim faith in Jesus. She said she believed. But her faith was not true spiritual sight. She had not been born again through the work of the Holy Spirit. She responded to something powerful. And she claimed to be a disciple, but she was not a true disciple. She had in her own mind who Jesus is and she had what she wanted from Jesus. And when Jesus did not give her what she wanted, he did not live up to her expectations, she walked away. That is not the Jesus she wanted.

Interestingly, I have also met a man from Iran who had a very similar story who I believe truly has come to faith in Jesus. God can use dreams and miracles. But the key ingredient is not a dream or a miracle. The key ingredient is the internal work of God in the heart of a human being. You cannot come if God has not granted it, and he does not draw you.

Judas is the specific example used here and also later in verse 70. Judas is not an example of a true believer who falls from grace. That is made very clear here. We are told that Judas didn't believe because God never did the work in his heart that was necessary in order for him to believe. And so, Jesus was not surprised that Judas betrayed him, and he was not surprised here that many of his disciples left. Because Jesus from first to last sees what is in the heart of a person. He is not fooled. That is why he creates the faith test. That is why he challenges them, so they will not follow him in self-deception.

Now, Jesus is not done. We have had one response. We need to get the other. Next, he turns to the twelve, and he challenges their commitment. This is in verses 67-71.

The Minority Response (6:67-71)

⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" ⁷¹ Now He meant Judas *the son* of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.

What do you think about Peter? Did Peter understand what Jesus was saying about eat my flesh and drink my blood? Did he get it? No! He had no clue what Jesus was talking about. Read through the rest, the disciples don't get the teaching of Jesus, yet. They are confused with everybody else. Peter was not with Jesus because of his clear understanding of theology. Peter was with Jesus because of Jesus. He did not get what Jesus was saying, but he got Jesus. Peter trusted Jesus. He believed in Jesus. Peter held on, even though he had no idea what Jesus was really talking about. "Lord, to whom shall we go? (Where are we going to go?) You have words of eternal life. You are the Holy One of God! (I am sticking with you)."

This is the contrast. When Jesus asked, "What if you saw the Son of Man ascend into Heaven?" Those who had left had never believed that Jesus really was the Son of Man who was really going to ascend into heaven. Peter does. So, he was shaken too, but he was holding onto Jesus.

When the teaching of Jesus shakes you up, you have to ask yourself what you believe about Jesus. What do I believe about Jesus? When life does not make sense, when you are confused or hurt or your prayers go unanswered, do you cling to Jesus. Do you say with Peter, "Lord, to whom are we going to go? You have the words of eternal life. You are the Holy One of God." And when this happens, having been shaken, you discover what you really believe about Jesus.

Conclusion

This story of a mass desertion in Galilee follows a couple of chapters after the story of revival in Samaria. The disciples were journeying with Jesus through that despised country where people believed in a partial, twisted version of Torah. And they were moving from ministry in Judea where ministry happens to Galilee where ministry happens through Samaria where nothing happens. They just stopped there for lunch.

They did not see the Samaritans as people. They did not pay any attention to them. But Jesus did, beginning with the simple woman at the well and moving on to the whole village. And Jesus rebuked the Twelve for their lack of awareness, informing them that the harvest has come early. You don't have to wait until Galilee. The fields are ripe, ready, right here, right now.

But are the fields white for harvest everywhere? That's a question I've asked myself after 23 years of working to proclaim the gospel in Europe. Some countries seem fairly open and experience significant response. Other places seem quite hard, closed to the gospel. And when I look out past Europe, there are other peoples even more responsive than the most open here and there are still others even more closed than the hardest here. Are all peoples ripe for harvest? Is that the message of John 4?

Well, according to John, the answer seems to be, "No." That's one of his points. Sometimes individuals surprise us, like Nicodemus not being able to follow the thought of Jesus whereas the Samaritan woman did follow the thought of Jesus. And as groups, peoples can also surprise. The Samaritan village was ripe for harvest, willing to believe in large numbers. But in his own birth region of Galilee, Jesus met stiff resistance and stubbornness of heart. "He came to his own, and those who were his own did not receive him (1:10)."

I do not think I could have held out as Jesus did when he saw so many Galilean followers turn and walk away. I would have cried after them, "It is just a metaphor. I don't really mean eat flesh and drink blood." What an awful prayer letter to have to write, especially just after the feeding of the five thousand. That was awesome. I know exactly what I am going to say about this. "We saw a great miracle. It was great. But nobody believed in Jesus and almost all our people left us." Who wants to write about that? A complete desertion. I've got twelve left.

It gives insight into the wisdom and heart of Jesus. Jesus was not about big numbers. He was about transformed lives. He did not want surface followers who in reality refused to give up their own definitions about Jesus. He was willing to challenge their false belief even if it meant he would lose everybody. He would rather push all away, so that some might truly believe.

The faith challenge was also for his own, for his close disciples. Jesus, I don't think, expected them to walk away. He knew they would not. He knew they were true, all but one. He expected them to hold on. His challenge to them provided an opportunity for them to experience the testing of their faith, to be strengthened by that testing in their own conviction that Jesus is all. "Where are we going to go? You are the one from God."

So, after everybody left, we could ask did Jesus fail in Galilee? Was his ministry a failure? Everybody left. Well, how you answer that depends on your spiritual math. How do you count success? Through this faith test, Jesus pushed away from his movement the many who did not truly believe, but he held on to a dedicated few. And when we look ahead into the future, we see something really interesting, really interesting. On the Day of Pentecost, Acts chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit comes upon the followers of Jesus and they began to miraculously witness in Jerusalem in the languages and dialects of those present, people in the crowd are going to marvel, they are going to be amazed, and they are going to say, "What is going on here? Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? Aren't they all Galileans?"

Why, yes, indeed. Was Jesus successful in Galilee? Maybe not if you go by breath of numbers, but if you go by depth, those who held on, these are from Galilee. And they are about to turn the world upside down.

Reflection questions

1. Read John 6:52-71. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. What are the results of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood, according to 6:54-56? And how do you understand these results as having come from "eating" and "drinking?"
3. How do you understand the connection between what Jesus is saying about eating and drinking in 6:54-56 and what he says about himself as the Bread of Life in 6:35?
4. How do you understand Jesus' statement in 6:65 that "no one can come to me, unless it has been granted him from the Father"? In 37 and 44 Jesus makes similar statements in connection to his promise of security for all who have been given to him. What do these truths do for you emotionally or intellectually? Is your response one of peace or do these truths create some dissonance in you?
5. When in your life has some truth of Scripture created in you an experienced of significant dissonance or instability? What was your response? Did that truth drive you from Jesus for a while or drive you to Jesus?
6. Would you say you are seeking something from Jesus currently in your relationship with him or you are seeking Jesus himself? If you are seeking Jesus, who do you understand him to be?