



Last Sunday I had the opportunity to visit all three of our campuses. I heard three sermons on the same passage and each of them was fantastic, but it was so interesting how different they were from one another. I started here in Foster City at 8:00 am and I was impressed at how many people were here (it must have been the good weather). Then I headed to our North campus and got there just as they were starting. In good old CPC fashion the place was empty when I arrived but by the time I left it was almost full! Then I raced down to the South campus in Redwood City and was a little late but it was so fun to see people I hadn't seen for years. I thought they'd left CPC but we still go to the same church!

It all made me realize what a good time this is for CPC and how the Lord has blessed us. When I came here 26 years ago we had about 350 people who called this their church home. I knew just about everybody then, but now we have close to 3,000 who call CPC their church (we count everyone of course; men and women, boys and girls, infants, pregnant ladies count for two; if you bring your pets, we'll count them too).

I also got to thinking a bit about this passage we're looking at today in John 6. I'll tell you why in a moment but it made me wonder: what if after hearing the messages last week hardly anyone showed up today? What if you could count on one hand how many people showed up at each of our three campuses this morning? I know I'd be upset, like, what did we do wrong? Why did everyone leave? Where did they go? How would you feel?

Last week we saw a "great crowd" of people were following Jesus. There were probably over 20,000 people who were part of that crowd. That's a lot of people. The Golden State Warriors play at Oracle Arena. Oracle Arena holds 20,000 fans. That's Oracle Arena packed out! That's Jesus feeding them all with just five orders of garlic fries and two hot dogs. No wonder Jesus was at the height of his popularity! Then we saw how Jesus miraculously walked on water, rescuing the disciples and bringing them to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. It was there Jesus taught the crowd. Starting in verse 25 and going all the way through verse 59 you have a long, meaty and challenging message. Wouldn't you have loved to have been there? But here's the deal: when it was all said and done, that huge crowd thinned dramatically. It appears there were only the 12 apostles left. Imagine Oracle Arena going from 20,000 screaming fans to just 12!

What we're going to see in this passage is this thinning of the crowd is exactly what Jesus intended at this point. And this is going to teach us something about what it really means to be a genuine follower of Jesus, but also why some people seem to follow Jesus for a while and then fade away. In this passage we're going to learn there are disciples and there are disciples. Let's read John 6:60–71.

**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! 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."

**From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.**

"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, "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."

Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

### **Some Disciples Depart Because His Teaching is Hard**

Notice verse 60 talks about disciples. This term was sometimes used to refer to anyone who followed Jesus; anyone who was part of the crowd. As we'll see, these disciples prove not to be what we'd call genuine believers at all. After they hear Jesus' teaching, we overhear them saying, "***This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?***" They don't mean hard to understand, but hard to swallow; hard to tolerate; hard to line up with. There will always be people who follow Jesus as long as he doesn't offend them or cross them.

What are some of the things Jesus said in this message that might have offended them? It's not hard to look back in chapter 6 and

see. It's the same kind of things that cause people to walk away today. Jesus had made some audacious claims in that message.

He said he's the bread of life who has come down from heaven. He didn't say he was "a bread of life" but "the bread of life." There's no one like him. That's hard for people today as well. It's fine to say Jesus is one way to heaven, but not the only way.

He said it's only as you feast on him that you can have his life within you. He even talked about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. That was offensive, especially to Jews who believed blood was unclean, but he wasn't talking literally; he was using eating and drinking as a metaphor for genuine faith. When you really believe in Jesus you take all that he is into your heart. It's like you ingest him into your being. He becomes your meat and drink. He's what makes you tick. He's what you can't live without. That's hard for us too. We're fine to make him an appetizer, or something we snack on, but not our meat and drink!

Jesus also said when you do this you can't take any credit for it. Why? Because it's the Father who drew you near to him in the first place. Nothing you can do can earn you eternal life; it's a gift of God given to anyone who believes regardless of where they've been or what they've done. That's hard too. I'd like to think I'm a decent person who has something to offer.

These were the kinds of things these people were choking on, and it's no different today. And Jesus would never compromise his teaching to keep those people around. In fact, he says right here, "***Does this offend you?***" That's like, "Oh, did I hurt your feelings?" What I would have done at this point is try to convince them they'd just misunderstood me; try to soften the blow a bit, but Jesus doesn't do that. Instead, he gives them something even more offensive! He says, "***Then what will you do when you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?***" What's he talking about? We know he'd ascend into heaven where he came from, but before that could happen he'd first be lifted up on the cross and resurrected. "You're having a hard time now? Wait until you see me hanging on the cross like a common criminal. You think this is hard teaching? Wait until you have to accept that the Messiah who you wanted to make into a king has been crucified."

Then he goes on to explain that these so-called disciples are thinking according to the flesh and apart from the Holy Spirit we can never grasp any of this: "***The Spirit gives life the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.***" In our own flesh we'll never really be able to comprehend and accept the "hard" things of God; only the Spirit can open our eyes to those things. That's what he means when he says, "***This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.***" Again, you can't get this on your own.

John says when they heard that "***...many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.***" By the way, Jesus was constantly doing this. He was always saying things to weed out the crowd. It's like he knew there'd always be those who were part of the crowd for the wrong reasons, and he had no problem at all trying to smoke them out. Listen to what he said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount about the final judgment, "***Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'***" (Matthew 7:22, 23). It seems that for Jesus false belief under a veneer of belief was far more dangerous than outright unbelief. It's like what kind of cancer would you rather have? The kind that shows up on the surface or the kind that insidiously wraps itself around your organs and you don't even know it's there? Of course, you want the kind you can deal with because it's right there. Again, unbelief under a veneer of belief is far more dangerous than outright unbelief because it's harder to see and it's harder to root out. You can fool yourself into thinking you're okay when you're not.

It reminds me of how Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "***Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!***" Some people's faith is skin deep. Louise C.K. said this, "I have a lot of beliefs... And I live by none of them. That's just the way I am. They're just my beliefs. I just like believing them... They're my little "believies." They make me feel good about who I am. But if they get in the way of a thing I want, I sure as heck just do what I want to do." For some, that's about how deep their belief in Jesus goes. That's why Jesus was constantly trying to get his disciples to realize the full implications of what he was saying, and if some of them left, so be it.

You wonder why these people would follow him in the first place. There are probably many reasons. There's always that mob mentality and with 20,000 people that could have been in effect. That's a real thing today as well. People love to jump on the Jesus band wagon if there are lots of others on it. Another reason Jesus mentions back verse 26 is many of them were following him because of what they could get out of it: "This guy fed 20,000 people with a sack lunch. If I just stick close to him I'll never have worry about another meal!" There are people like that today. As long as Jesus satisfies my needs, as long as he gives me everything I ask for, I'll be his disciple." Here's another reason we see all the way back in verses 14 & 15—they wanted a king. They wanted a political deliverer. There are people today who follow Jesus because they think he somehow supports their political agenda, but as soon as he says something that doesn't fit, they move on.

So there are many reasons people follow Jesus that are really inadequate. The funny thing is that you'll find all of these things as you follow Christ. You'll find new friends. You'll find that he does

satisfy your needs. He does have something to say about politics. But you can't come to him for those reasons; you have to follow him on his terms, just because it's him.

It's like when you take a quarter and you put it into a machine to buy some food, like a candy bar or a bag of chips. You put it in and what happens if the coin doesn't go all the way to the bottom? Nothing comes out, right? Your coin is stuck. So what do you do? That's right! You bang on the machine to get that coin to drop all the way to the bottom. You can even hear it when it does. You see, there are disciples and there are disciples. There are some who follow Jesus but the coin hasn't really dropped all the way to the bottom. They haven't really come to grips with the full implications of his claims and what that means for them. They want Jesus as a side dish, but not as their meat and drink; not as their everything. And one of the ways you know that is because sooner or later they're gone. That's what happened here. They vanished! It's very interesting, years later when John was pastoring a church he addressed the same issue and he said, *"They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us"* (1 John 2:19). So leaving the community of God's people is an indication that these people were not the real deal to begin with because the coin never really got to the bottom.

For me, one of the most satisfying things as a pastor is to see someone who has been hanging around here for years finally have the coin drop all the way to the bottom. It happens, and when it does, you know it; you see it. There's a change. There's an excitement about what God is doing. There's an unquenchable optimism in their spirit because they know God works in everything. There's a desire to serve and make an impact. There are disciples and there are disciples. In this story, we also see genuine discipleship.

### **Other Disciples Remain Because Jesus has the Words of Eternal Life**

Jesus turns to the Twelve. I can just see them standing there with Jesus. The sun is setting; the dust has just begun to settle from the stampede of people who'd left. The hum of the crowd is silenced and you could hear the chirping of a single Thrush. The Twelve are standing there wondering, "What happened?" Jesus turns to them and asks, *"You do not want to leave too, do you?"* Jesus states that question in a way that anticipates a "no" answer. He believes the best of them. But he still poses the question. This is a question we should all ask ourselves occasionally. "You don't want to leave too, do you?" How would you answer that question? How would the Twelve answer it? Remember Judas is among them. He's watched this whole thing unfold. Things were taking a turn for him. This deal wasn't working out like he

thought it would, but he said nothing, and the rest of them had no idea that he'd be a betrayer.

Instead, Simon Peter speaks up. By now we're used to Peter being the one who speaks for the rest of them. Usually he puts his foot in his mouth, but not here. Here he says three things that are the irreducible minimum for authentic discipleship. First, he declares the uselessness of going elsewhere. *"Lord, to whom shall we go?"* That's a rhetorical question, no answer needed. It's like Peter and the others have thought this through. There's isn't an unexamined faith. To whom shall we go? Have you ever thought that through? You could go back to your old way of life. For Peter that means fishing. Matthew could go back to the tax booth. Simon the Zealot could go back to holding political rallies. You could go back to your old ways, habits, friends and lovers. You can even go back to your old religion, your old way of thinking about God or spirituality. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" It's like Peter is saying, "Lord, we've thought through all the options and we can't turn back.

In John Bunyan's book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, as Christian is on his way to the Celestial City, he comes face-to-face with the devil. He thinks how much he'd love to go back and escape the conflict. However, when he thought of his armor, he remembered that he had none for his back. He had a shield, a breastplate, a helmet, a sword, but nothing for his back. He realized if he turned around, it would just take a moment for the devil to kill him with his spear. So he resolved that however bad it might be to go forward, it'd be worse to go backward. So he pressed on. Real disciples can be discouraged and tempted, but retreat is impossible.

Second, he declares the reason for staying. This is the second irreducible minimum. Peter says, *"You have the words of eternal life."* Isn't it interesting how the crowd had choked on Jesus's words (his hard teaching) but for Peter and the others the same words gave life. It's like, who else could possibly give us that? By the way, you can't separate Jesus Christ from his words. People want to do that today. They like the stuff Jesus did. He healed people and cared for the broken and the hurting. But we don't like some of his words. You can't say that. His words and his life go together, and his words give life! Jesus said back in verse 51, *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* Notice he refers to the fact that he'd offer his own body as a sacrifice for sin, to pay the unfathomable debt we owed to our Creator for our sin and rebellion.

Third, he declares the conviction they've come to. *"We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."* Throughout the Old Testament God is referred to as "the Holy One of Israel." For that reason, the Jews were very careful not to call anyone but God "the Holy One." To call Jesus "the Holy One of God" is to give him the same honor as God himself. This is the

fundamental conviction of a genuine disciple. There's no one like him. Again, an irreducible minimum.

I can imagine at this point the disciples are proud of themselves. You know that feeling you get when you decide you're all in despite what others are doing. You know, "The few, the proud..." The disciples are expecting at least a pat on the back, and it seems like he gives it to them. He says, "**Have I not chosen you, the Twelve?**" I'd be feeling pretty good about myself at that moment. It's like they were picked in the first round of the NFL draft. But then he drops a bomb on them. "**Yet one of you is a devil.**" Don't you love Jesus? He just knows how to pull your chain. "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve?" All right! High fives all around! But even that doesn't guarantee loyalty, "Yet one of you is a devil." Not **the** devil, but **a** devil. And this, of course, stands as just another reminder that there are disciples and there are disciples, and sometimes it just takes time to figure out which is which. Judas had been with Jesus for two years at this point. He worked miracles in Jesus' name and preached. He brought converts into the fold. But somewhere along the line something happened, some virus of disappointment and cynicism began to run through his veins and no one but Jesus could see it. And we know that today both grumbling disciples and rebellious Judases are among God's people today.

Some of you are here and you're actively exploring the Christian faith. You haven't crossed the line of faith yet, but you're really trying to figure out who this Jesus is and if you're all in. I don't want you to misunderstand this message. What you're doing is a good thing and I'd encourage you to keep asking the hard questions and keep seeking for answers. However, I do have one word of caution for you—all the statistics show that the longer you continue to hang around church without making a real commitment, the less likely you are to ever become a real Christ-follower.

So I encourage you to not become passive in your quest. Press on for answers and make a decision.

There are also those people who are what I'd call passive attenders. You may believe much of what you hear when you come to church, but you're still in charge of your life. You still believe you can run your own life. Some of what you hear you go along with but there are still areas you're holding back on. Your love has grown cold. You rarely pick up the Bible much less open it. You have your beliefs, but if they get in the way of something you want, you just do what you want to do. If you hear something and you don't like it, you may even consider leaving. I think this passage is an encouragement to you. Jesus says to you, "You don't want to leave to, do you?" That's not a rebuke; that's an invitation. That's an invitation for you to finally let the coin sink all the way to the bottom. Maybe even today as we take communion you'll bring yourself under the tender power of that question and finally say, "Lord, where else can I go? You have the words of eternal life."

Finally, there are those people who really have done that. The strange thing about you is that you're the ones who right now are most likely questioning your own motives. You're the ones asking yourself, What kind of disciple am I? You know how weak you are. You know how far you fall short. There's a part of you that's crying out right now, "Oh God save me from myself! Oh God, don't let me turn back." And that's what the Lord's table is for. It's a time for you to hear him say, "Look, I've broken my body for you. I've poured out my blood for you. After all I've done, you won't leave; you can't leave. You're my disciple."

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*