

Sermon Notes

“LIFE IN HIS NAME”: THE PURSUIT OF WHOLENESS AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

TO WHOM SHALL WE GO? (JOHN 6:60-71)

I. Introduction

- A. The deepest longing in our hearts is for *wholeness*—for peace, tranquillity, harmony, fullness of life, dignity, safety, and deep happiness.
- B. According to the Gospel of John, God wants us to have this wholeness. He has placed this wholeness in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Jn 10:10: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”
- C. God wants us to have eternal and abundant life. The only way for us sinners to acquire this life is by placing our trust in the Savior whom God has sent. Jesus Christ is the Source of life for all who put their trust in him.
 - Jn 6:51: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”
- D. The people were offended at what Jesus had been teaching.
 1. They took issue with Jesus saying that he “came down from heaven” (v 41).
 2. They took issue with the fact that Jesus asks people to eat of his flesh (v 51).
- E. All that leads us now to the great turning point in 6:60.

II. Turning Point (Jn 6:60-62)

- A. Picking up from verse 58, Jesus says, “This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”
- B. Verse 60 shows us the response of a number of the disciples:
 - Jn 6:60: “When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?’”
- C. Jesus already knew that his disciples had begun to grumble. He asks them directly: “Do you take offense at this?” (v 61)
 1. The “this” that Jesus was referring to is the teaching that he had been giving; the teaching about eating his flesh and drinking his blood (vv 57, 58).
 2. I seriously wonder whether the disciples were that clueless as to what Jesus was saying.
 3. Since Jesus was teaching in a Jewish context where cannibalism was already assumed to be sin, how likely is it that the disciples understood Jesus to mean cannibalism?

4. In my view, it seems unlikely that the disciples did not know what Jesus was talking about. I think they knew that Jesus was referring to his own death in metaphorical language.
 5. It was precisely this teaching—*that the Messiah must die as a sin-offering*—that was such a stumbling block to the Jews.
 - 1 Cor 1:23: “but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles [.]”
 6. While some in the synagogue may have taken Jesus literally and thought that Jesus really was advocating cannibalism, it seems more likely that these disciples understood Jesus very well. They may have heard Jesus refer to his death at some point.
 8. These disciples could not conceive of a Messiah who would degrade himself to the extent that his body and blood are sacrificed as food and drink for the people.
- D. Jesus asks them: “Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” (v 62).
—If the people reject his death, can they accept his ascension?

III. Words of Spirit and Life (Jn 6:63)

- A. Jesus maintains his position, and reaffirms the truth and authority of his words.
- B. First, he says, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all” (v 63).
 1. When the Lord uses the word “flesh” here, he’s using it as a kind of shorthand.
 2. The flesh is simply human nature *without* grace; human nature *without* God and therefore dependent only upon itself.
 3. I read Jesus as saying that the reason people do not believe in him is because they are merely people of flesh.
- C. In contrast to the logic of the people, Jesus’ logic and words come from another place: “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (v 63).
 1. Jesus’ words are the words of the Holy Spirit.
 2. They are the words that point people to where eternal life.
 3. As such, Jesus’ words are not words that can be accepted by minds that are simply ruled by the flesh.

IV. Falling Out (Jn 6:64-66)

- A. Jesus confronts the unbelief head-on: “But there are some of you who do not believe.”
- B. John inserts a comment here: “(For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.)” (v 64).
- C. If the unbelieving disciples are unable to accept Jesus’ words because the words of Jesus are spiritual and the unbelieving disciples are flesh, how is it possible for anyone to accept what Jesus says?
 1. It comes back to the mysterious work of the Father.
 - Jn 6:65: “And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.””
 2. It is the Father who chooses people for Jesus and brings them to him.

3. Apart from the work of the Father, no one can come to Jesus. The flesh is no help at all.
- D. The big falling out begins.
- Jn 6:66: “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”

V. Confession of Faith (Jn 6:67-69)

- A. Jesus asks his twelve closest disciples: “Do you want to go away as well?” (v 67)
- B. Simon Peter speaks for the group.
1. He asks rhetorically: “Lord, to whom shall we go?”
 2. He follows up with a confession of faith, an affirmation of Jesus.
 - a. “You have the words of eternal life...” (v 68)
 - i. Jesus’ words convey eternal life to all who believe in him.
 - ii. Calvin: “The Law does, indeed, also contain life; but because it pronounces the sentence of eternal death against transgressors, it can do nothing but kill. Far otherwise is life offered to us in the Gospel, when God reconciles us to Himself freely, not imputing our sins” (*The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 178).
 - iii. To say that Jesus has “the words of eternal life” is to say that Jesus has the Gospel, the word of God’s pardon and justification.
 - b. “...and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (v 69). Jesus is the Holy One of God in that...
 - i. he is God’s Special Human Being, God’s Agent of salvation, God’s appointed Messiah, God’s supreme Representative.
 - ii. he lives in a state of perpetual devotion and adoration of God.
 - Jn 5:19: “So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.’”
- C. While the faithful disciples may not have understood all the implications of Jesus’ teaching, they understood enough “according to the measure of their faith, to confess Him as the author of their salvation and submit to Him in everything” (Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 178-179).

VI. Did I Not Choose You? (Jn 6:70-71)

- A. John 6:70: “Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the Twelve?...’ The reason the Twelve (or most of them) are not leaving is because Jesus had chosen them for himself.
- B. It seems to me that Jesus says this to demonstrate a point. Jesus is showing the disciples that the reason they are not leaving is precisely because he had chosen them for his purposes.
- C. One of these purposes is salvation.
1. Verse 70 connects well to some preceding verses.
 - Jn 6:37: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

- Jn 6:45: “It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—”
- Jn 6:65: “And he said, ‘This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.’”
- 2. The choice of the Father precedes—indeed, creates!—the belief of the (believing) disciples.
- D. But judging from what comes next, we see that this choosing that Jesus is not only to eternal life.
 - 1. Judas is the exception.
 - Jn 6:70-71: “Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.’⁷¹ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.”
 - 2. Calvin makes a very interesting observation here. He says, “we do not read that he [Judas] was moved” (*The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 179).
 - 1. Judas was so hardened in his heart that he did not even appear to be shaken by what Jesus said.
 - 2. There was seemingly no demonstration of fear that he might just be the one who betrays Jesus. Such people do exist in our society—and in the Church at large.
- E. Notwithstanding Judas’ betrayal, God will have the last word. Judas’ evil will lead to the Son’s death on the cross, which will end in the salvation of sinners, the exaltation of Jesus, and the greater glory of God.

VII. To Whom Shall We Go?

- A. While we can’t always understand why God chose Judas for his purposes, we can certainly try to answer Peter’s question for ourselves: “*To whom shall we go?*” Other ways this question is asked are as follows:
 - To whom shall we go for eternal life?
 - To whom shall we go for the words of peace our anxious souls crave?
 - To whom shall we go for the dignity that cannot be diminished by any loss of face or social standing?
 - To whom shall we go for the moral goodness that God requires of us in order to stand confidently before him on the Day of Judgment?
 - To whom shall we go if we want to attain the wholeness we long for—the wholeness that cannot be shaken by any threat of evil or mortality?
- B. The resounding Gospel answer is that this life/wholeness is in Jesus himself.
 - Jn 6:51: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”
 - Jn 3:14-15: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”
 - Jn 3:36: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”
 - Jn 20:31: “But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

VIII. The Heart of the Matter

If you forget anything else in this series on the Gospel of John, I want us to always remember the Heart of the matter. The Heart of the matter, the Heart of what God is calling us to do, is to *believe in his Son Jesus Christ*—to rest the full weight of our hopes on Jesus; to eat and drink ravenously of Jesus; to follow Jesus; to cling to Jesus the way a dying man clings desperately for life. All that we have read in John's Gospel was to get us to do that One Main Thing (Jn 20:31), because everything else flows from that One Main Thing.

- A. And the reasons for believing Jesus are ample. Jesus alone is:
 - the Bread of Life
 - the Speaker of the words of eternal life
 - the Holy One of God
 - the Giver of the Water of eternal life (Jn 4:14)
 - the divine Bridegroom who will give unlimited wine at the wedding feast to come (Jn 2:7-11).
- B. Jesus is all these things, because he is, has always been, and will always be the only-begotten Son of God (Jn 1:18), to whom the Father who has life in himself has granted life in himself (Jn 5:26).
- C. If you are not yet a believer, this is where it all begins for you.
 - 1. Jesus is the start of your new day.
 - 2. Recognize that judgment is coming for your sins.
 - 3. But know that God has provided a way for you to be saved both the condemnation of his judgment and the addictive power of your sins. It is by fleeing to his Son and believing in him.
 - Jn 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”
- D. If you are already a believer of Jesus, God is calling you to keep on doing what you are doing. Keep on believing in Jesus.
 - 1. As you do this, it soon dawns on you that God is calling you to believe more and more in Jesus, to allow that belief to permeate more of our lives, so that we follow harder after Jesus, love him more and more, and submit to him more and more.
- E. Jesus speaks to our life problems.
 - Do you have problems in your marriage? Is the love dying?
—The first step toward healing is always to return to Jesus, recognizing that Jesus is the true Savior and Lover of your soul, not you or your spouse.
 - Do you struggle with anxiety disorders?
—No matter what medication or therapy the doctor may recommend, faith in Jesus will always be the foundation of God's treatment plan for you.
 - Are you wondering what God is calling you to do with your life?
—Find your wholeness in Jesus and the answer just might become clearer.
 - Do you want to resist and overcome your cherished sins?
—It is by looking to Jesus again and again that we weaken the attraction of our cherished sins.

- Do you want to persevere in the Christian life?
—You don't persevere by looking at the storms. You persevere by fixing your eyes and your hope on Jesus moment-by-moment, hour-by-hour, day-by-day.
 - Do you want a stronger prayer life?
—You have to start by believing all that Jesus has done for you.
- F. So to whom shall we go? To Jesus, again and again.

Questions for Reflection

1. Was there anything in particular about today's sermon that blessed and encouraged you?
2. Was there anything with which you disagree or found difficult to accept?
3. Jn 10:10: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." What does this teach us about Jesus' attitude and desire toward us?
4. In v 58, Jesus says, "This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." How do a number of disciples respond to this (v 60)?
5. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all" (v 63). "And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father"" (v 65). How do these statements help us understand why people believed or disbelieved Jesus?
6. Jesus says, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (v 63). What does this mean?
7. Jn 6:66: "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him." Discuss.
8. How does Peter explain the twelve's ongoing belief in Jesus?
9. How does Jesus' words in v 70 explain the eleven's ongoing belief in him?
10. What is the Heart of the Matter?
11. How does belief in Jesus change or shape everything else in your life?