

The Nature of True Discipleship

John 6:59-71

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Our text this morning, John 6:59-71, presents us, in some ways, with one of the most tragic scenes in the life of our Lord, because the theme of this section is a theme of rejection in which even His own disciples turn their backs on Him. This chapter had started out with such promise with the wake of the feeding of the 5,000, and the enthusiasm of a great multitude. John had told us that there were upwards of 20,000 people. There were 5,000 men, but probably at least 20,000 people in total. They were thrilled by the miracle of Jesus, astonished by His power, excited about the promise and possibilities, and ready to come and take Him by force to make Him king, misunderstanding completely, His mission. But still, the enthusiasm, there seemed so much promise, so much hope. The end of the chapter finds that the great multitude has dwindled down to a handful. So this passage presents to us the tragic rejection of the Lamb of God. In so doing, I think this passage calls us to consider the nature of true discipleship. That's the title of the message this morning: The Nature of True Discipleship. We have in this text a watershed.

We have one of the major watersheds in North America. It runs right through Duluth, Georgia, the Eastern Continental Divide. The Continental Divide, of course, is the Rocky Mountains, but the Eastern Continental Divide, the Appalachian Mountains run all the way down into and through Duluth. There is a place in the center of town where a plaque marks the point as the watershed. The water that goes off one side of that road, running through town, ends up in the Gulf of Mexico. Water running off the other side of that road ends up in the Atlantic Ocean. Hundreds of miles apart. They fall a few inches apart and end up hundreds of miles apart. Such is the nature of apparent discipleship and true discipleship. At first, they seem very close together, in the same group, but over time it becomes clear those who are truly disciples of Jesus Christ. We're going to find in this passage, that kind of a watershed moment where we see for ourselves the reality of that distinction, the things that make the difference.

We're going to organize our thoughts this morning around three points. We're going to, first of all, survey the scene, then we're going to look at counting the costs, and then learn the lesson. Those are the three points.

Let's read *John 6:59-71*:

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

Let's pray together...

Our Father, we bow before Your Word and we ask that You might cause these words which are spirit and are life to become that to us by Your Holy Spirit. That You might illuminate our minds and our hearts to see the glory of the Son of Man. We pray this in His name, Amen.

1) Survey the Scene:

Now, first of all, we want to survey the scene. John tells us in Verse 59: ***These things he said in the synagogue as he taught in Capernaum.*** The entire discourse that we've just worked through over the last number of weeks, from 6:26, all the way through Verse 58, and these following verses, happened in the synagogue in Capernaum. One of the things that's important about that is that John tells us it happens in Capernaum, because we find out as we've already been introduced to the town of Capernaum a couple of different times in the Gospel of John. In John

2:12, after Jesus did His first great miracle, the turning of the water into wine, the Bible tells us that He, His mother, brothers, and disciples went down to Capernaum from the wedding. Most scholars believe that Jesus' home town, originally Nazareth, that His family had moved to Capernaum. Much of His growing up time and young adulthood was in the town of Capernaum, there on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. We see that idea echoed in the passage that we read a couple of weeks ago when Jesus has told them earlier that He came down out of Heaven. He was the Bread that came down out of Heaven. Look at Verse 42. The Jews were grumbling about Him, Verse 41 says.

John 6:42 ~ They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?"

They knew His father and His mother. Joseph has probably died by now, but they knew His mom and dad, they knew His family. So Jesus is in a town where they knew Him, and He's preaching this message. And in this place where they knew Him, this theme of opposition runs throughout. In fact, the theme of opposition and rejection is a growing theme in the passage. I mentioned earlier that in the first 15 verses, we have a great high point in Jesus' popularity and ministry. I mean, upwards of 20,000 people were there at the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6:14. When they saw the sign which He had performed, they said, ***"This is truly the prophet who is to come into the world."*** They have understood something of the miraculous power of Jesus, and they believe Him to be the Messiah. That is a declaration of that. The crowd as a whole believes Him to be the Messiah. The problem is they don't really understand the nature of His Messiah-ship. They want Him to be an earthly Messiah to deliver them from their earthly problems. They have a very world-centered mindset, a temporal mindset. They haven't yet seen the nature of His Messiah-ship and His salvation. They don't see their profound need, the deep, spiritual needs of their hearts. But still, there is this excitement where they say, "We can build on this."

I can see church growth leaders thinking this is an opportunity to build. "We've drawn the crowd. Let's keep them here and let's see that they'll eventually get the message." What Jesus does is systematically sift the crowd. As we look at this passage, we're going to see that He basically, through a series of hard words, a series of strong rebukes, puts the cost of discipleship there again and again until He sifts the crowd down to the fact that there is almost no one left. In fact, you have crowds there, in Verse 14, on a high. Then you see that they dwindled after the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus sends them away. Then He walks on the water. The

miracle of walking on the water was just for His disciples to see, but the crowd knows something of it. We saw a few weeks back, when you look at Verses 22 and following, they were wondering, “How did He get over here? We saw His disciples leave in the boat but He didn’t. We were where He would have had to walk by us to get to Capernaum. How did He get here?” So in some sense, they understood something of even the power of His walking on water. They’ve seen these two great miracles, but what Jesus does in Verses 26 and following is basically humble them with hard words, so that you find, as the passage goes on, more and more discontent in the crowd. In Verse 41 that we looked at a moment ago, the Jews were grumbling about Him. “He says He’s the bread out of Heaven.” So there is opposition growing in the passage.

Then in Verse 60, many of His own disciples, *...when they heard this said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?”* So in Verse 66, after He responds to the disciples’ grumbling, as a result of this, many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. In fact, in Greek, withdrew is not a worthy translation of that passage. The NIV says this better: They turned their backs. They withdrew, yes they went away from is the verb. They went away from Him to the back, to their former things. They left Him. They put Him behind them, is the idea. A decisive turning away from Him, that the words that He has taught have been so unappealing that those who were followers of Christ have now abandoned Him. That’s the picture. A crowd of 20,000, then a multitude following Him, a smaller multitude in Capernaum. And now, even His disciples have gone away so that the 12 are left with Him, Jesus says, “Are you also going to leave?” Simon Peter answers with that wonderful answer, as he often is the spokesman for the disciples. Sometimes wrong, sometimes right, but never in doubt. He leaps to the floor and says, “Where 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.” It’s interesting in that context that Jesus makes mention of Judas. What’s happening? He’s even saying, “Among the 12, one of you is going to betray Me.” So you have this theme of rejection going on, this winnowing, this funneling down. It starts with a large crowd, then the smaller crowd, then down to the disciples, then down to the 12, now down to the 11. This constitutes a stunning reversal. Popularity, a massive crowd, now to a small, believing remnant. I don’t think it’s just the 11, but the focus of the text is just the 11. There probably are some other disciples, but most of the disciples that would have called themselves disciples, those who were following Jesus from place to place, most of them have turned their backs on Him.

Now how are we to understand this? What is this passage teaching us? What encouragement, what lesson is in this passage? Really we're seeing what separates true disciples from false disciples. When we survey the scene we see this large number of potential disciples winnow down to a very small handful of true disciples. What is it that separates the true disciple from the false disciple? That's a very important question, because in our day, the idea is that if anybody just professes faith in Christ, then they're a genuine follower of Jesus. There are many who teach that if you at one time sincerely meant to follow Christ, even if now you repudiate that, "Well, you're still saved because of what you did years ago." The fact that you prayed a prayer means that you're truly saved forever. Well, that's not the picture the Bible gives. The Bible gives this picture: If you truly prayed the prayer from your heart, yes. If you truly, from the depth of your being embraced Jesus as your Savior, you cannot be lost. But the reality is that there are many who have a superficial faith. We've seen this in John's Gospel. In John 2:23-25, we have Jesus doing many signs at the first Passover that He went to after His ministry began. "Many of the Jews therefore believed in Him," John says, in John 2:23. But Jesus was not entrusting Himself to them. Why? Because He knew what was in the heart of man. He knew that their faith was superficial, shallow, unsaving, and not genuine. It was not genuine faith. They were intrigued by Him. They were moved emotionally, and would have made a decision by coming forth in an altar call, but they were not truly saved. That's why the Bible, the New Testament, teaches us not to look back to a past emotional experience to test the validity of your salvation. The New Testament doesn't teach you to write it down and never doubt because, "I wrote it down on this day. I had this experience." That is foreign to the Bible. It's the invention of man and it's something that I fear has damned many people. The reality is, the Bible teaches you to examine yourself to see if you are in the household of faith, 2 Corinthians 13:15. 2 Peter 1:9 says that you are to make every effort to make your calling and election sure. How do you know? How do you examine? You look at the fruit of your life. We're saved by grace, but if we're saved, we're saved apart from works, but if we're truly saved, good works are going to follow. There is now a change. John 2:23-25 is where it says that Jesus wouldn't entrust Himself because He knew what was in the heart of man.

Immediately, what happens next is the story of Nicodemus. What's the theme of the story of Nicodemus? Here is a religious man who knows the Scripture, the Old Testament, backwards and forwards. What does Jesus say to him? "Nicodemus, you must be born again." Until you are born again, your faith is worthless. You must have a true salvation that can only be wrought by the Spirit of God. God must take out your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. That's what true salvation is, not an experience, a human emotional experience. Certainly human

emotion often accompanies genuine salvation, but a true spiritual experience where God does something that we cannot do—that’s what makes the difference. And time will tell, and this is the nature of Jesus’ teaching.

The four soils, the Parable of the Sower, is there to show you that there are many responses to the Word. Four different soils, remember that parable. The preaching of the Gospel is like a man who goes to sow and he sows the seed. Some of the seed falls on the wayside, that is the pathway. It doesn’t penetrate the earth at all and the birds eat it. There is no apparent salvation experience and people aren’t moved at all. The Word just hits a hard surface. Other soil is like that which is thorny soil. The seed falls among thorns and the plant grows up and is choked out by the thorns. The idea is that there is no real spiritual, lasting life because there was no real repentance. Others are on rocky soil, and Jesus says, “A thorn on rocky soil is like someone who receives the Word with great joy.” They have an emotional experience, but because there is no depth of earth, when the sun comes out, the seed that is sown on rocky soil, that can’t go below the surface very far because of the limestone under the surface there in Israel, it goes down a little bit and can’t penetrate below. It withers and dies. That is not a true convert. That is a person who hasn’t really exercised saving faith. When tribulation comes, with their shallow faith, they depart. They fall away. The one that is truly saved is the one who falls upon the good soil, and over time they produce fruit. That’s the mark of the true believer, and the true disciple is the same. So here we have a passage that completely comports with all that Jesus has taught in the Gospels. It shows the nature of true discipleship.

2) Counting the Costs:

The true disciple is the one who counts the costs and who learns the lesson. Those are our next two points: Counting the costs and learning the lesson. A true disciple counts the costs. Now that we’ve surveyed the scene, let’s count the costs. In Verses 60 and 61, we have two key words in our passage that help us to see this theme that runs throughout the entire chapter. Those two words are, first of all, in Verse 60, the word ‘difficult’. I’m reading from the New American Standard. **...“This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?”** The word difficult translates to the Greek word ‘*sklēros*’ which means hard. Literally, “This is a hard word. Who can hear it?” Who can listen to it? Who can heed it? Who can really obey it? This is a hard word. We have, in this passage, a series of hard words we’re going to see.

The second word that is key, is in Verse 61: ***But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, “Does this cause you to stumble?”*** The verb ‘stumble’ in Verse 61 is from the Greek word ‘skandalizō’. We transliterate the word ‘skandalizō’ into our English word ‘scandalize’. So the word really is scandal, or scandalize, and is the trigger of a trap or a snare, in common usage in ancient times. It was that trigger that caused the trap or the snare to fall and to catch the prey. You touch the stick of the snare. You have a snare sitting up with a stick, and the animal hits the trigger, and the stick falls out, and they’re ensnared. So the trigger itself is the scandal. Jesus says, “Does this scandalize you? Does this trap you? Is this word which I’m teaching, because of the hardness of your own heart, causing you to be trapped by Satan in unbelief?” So He basically acknowledges that His Word has this sense of having the potential to scandalize and to be hard, but in reality, John Calvin points this out in his commentary, the disciples say His Word is hard.

I think we can look at these, as we looked at last time, and we can see there are some hard words here, but in reality, the reason these words are hard, and this is very important, is because of the hardness of the human heart. God is merciful, and kind, and good, and if there were a way to do it with less hard words, He would. But you know that when you’ve got to break up concrete, you’ve got to get out a jackhammer. The heart of the unbeliever, our hearts when we came into this world as sinners, children of Adam, were like concrete, and you’ve got to break it up with something powerful. God’s words, His hard words that come are also spoken. And these hard words of Jesus in this chapter, we’re going to look at a number of these in a moment, were spoken by One Who spoke some of the most tender, and loving, and gentle words that have ever been uttered. ***Come unto Me you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.*** (Matthew 11:28) ***...for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*** (Matthew 11:29) ***...My yoke is easy and my burden is light.*** (Matthew 11:30) That’s the Savior you come to.

Isaiah prophesied about Him and said, ***He will not break the bruised reed, and a smoldering flax He will not extinguish.*** (Isaiah 42:3) The reed that is bent over and ready to be broken, Jesus will walk through without trampling upon, without breaking. Such is His gentleness as a Savior. That’s His heart. But He knows that hard words have to break up hard hearts. And there is a wonderful reality when we learn the lessons of discipleship, and we learn to sit under the hard words of God, which is one of the distinguishing marks of the true disciple. We stand under and we stay under the hard words of God until we see the glory of God. Hard words produce soft hearts, and soft words confirm hard hearts. The Gospel is full of hard

words, things that at first are difficult, that confront us, but when we stay under them it softens us. Christians, true believers, are the softest people in the universe. We are soft because we've been trained by hard words. God has changed our hearts. He's taken out the heart of stone and given us a heart of flesh, and He's kept on softening through His Word.

A few weeks ago, a number of our men had the joy of going out to the Shepherd's Conference, John MacArthur's church. There were 3,500 men from 48 countries around the world there at the Shepherd's Conference. We heard some wonderful preaching. One of the things that sets it apart from all the other conferences, and this is basically a stated fact accepted by all the other guys that have conferences out there, because I've been to some where they talk about it, but the Shepherd's Conference sets the standard, not only for the preaching, but also just the way they care for you. Do you know that that church, Grace Community Church, has 700 volunteers, most of whom take vacation time to come and serve the pastors that are there that week? They have coffee, Cokes, ice cream sandwiches. It's hard not to gain weight out there. Donuts. They are just so filled with joy at having the opportunity to serve shepherds, men who lead the Church of God. 700 people who have to sign up because it fills up. They can only accommodate 700, but they have more people that want to serve that way. They had a five-year-old volunteer. I forget his name but John shared that his mother had gone home to be with Jesus about six months before, and he and his dad were volunteering that week. To an 85-year-old man that was the oldest volunteer. They just love to love on shepherds from all over America that have come there, many of whom are very discouraged and are beaten down, and are coming for the encouragement. One of the things that hit me as he was talking about their joy in that was, "Hard words produce soft hearts." So many people think John MacArthur is such a hard guy. The reality is that he's one of the softest people you'll ever meet.

I had the opportunity a few years back to actually be in his home because I went to a conference where they had 18 of us go over and we had breakfast and lunch at his house. He's the most gentle, humble man. He speaks the Word and he proclaims it, and it comes across hard, but in reality, he's just like the apostle Paul. If you had gotten to know the apostle Paul, he'd say, "My words and my letters come across harsh, but when you see me, I have come in weakness." That's the nature of the true follower of Jesus Christ. Hard words produce soft hearts.

Now, I want to show you how Jesus systematically hammers home hard words in this passage with a series of hard words, because in Verse 61, actually, He's saying, "***Does this cause you to stumble?***" Now what does this refer to? What is

He talking about? Why are you stumbling? Well, in the immediate context, they were stumbling particularly at what He had just said, but in reality they were stumbling at all He had been saying. In the immediate context in Verses 52-58 that we looked at last time, were Jesus' hard words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, which we saw was a metaphor for true, saving faith. But it was an offensive metaphor, a hard to listen to metaphor. Hard to listen to because Jesus was teaching in that metaphor something that needed to be impressed on the hearts in a stunning way. That is that His death, His violent and offensive death, is the only way that you can be saved. That's the only way that you can have life. But that wasn't the only hard word in this passage.

In fact, look at Verse 26. The day after the feeding of the 5,000, you have the crowd finding Him in Capernaum. Apparently just outside the synagogue or maybe this is in the synagogue. We don't know, but we know He's going to go in the synagogue in Capernaum and teach somewhere along the way. They come to Him, and Jesus, in greeting this large crowd of disciples and interested people, says: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.*** This is not the way to win friends and influence people. He's not ingratiating Himself to the crowd. This crowd comes and He says, “You guys have a real problem in your motivation.” The first words to come out of His mouth were, “You are worldly and temporal. You have missed the point.” This is the Sovereign Lord speaking here and He is speaking authoritatively. That's a hard word.

Let's give you 4 points here under this second point, Counting the Costs. Let me show you 4 hard sayings of Jesus:

A) He's Confronting the Worldliness of the Crowds in Verse 26.

B) He expresses the supremacy of His person (Verse 32) over against Moses: He said something that wasn't a popular thing. After they said, “We'd like to have some manna out of heaven. Moses gave us manna, and we'd like some more bread. Why don't you do a sign for us?” He says in Verse 32:

John 6:32 ~ Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.

It's not Moses, but Jesus. That's what He's saying, and He's going to make the point emphatic by saying, "I am, I am, I am." Three different times in the passage, He claims to be Yahweh. We've seen that.

John 6:35 ~ I am the bread of life;

John 6:48 ~ I am the bread of life.

John 6:51 ~ I am the living bread...

That's the supremacy of His person. That causes the people there to bristle, "This man is claiming to be God, claiming to be far greater than Moses."

C) The supremacy of Christ's provision: In those same verses, 32-40, He's making the point that, "I'm the One that gives you the true bread out of Heaven. It's not the manna, but it's My bread that you need. So Moses is not the one, though he was a sign. He was My instrument. But he's not the point, I am. And the manna was not the point. I am." Not the manna, but Christ. The supremacy of Christ's provision. "Forget the manna," Jesus is saying. And He says quite emphatically twice in the passage, "Your fathers ate the manna and they died, but the bread I have, if you eat it, you'll live forever." That's offensive to them. "You're putting down Moses and the manna. That's our high point."

D) He impresses upon them His Heavenly origin that He is from above: Out of Heaven is a key phrase throughout the passage. Three different times, Jesus speaks of coming out of Heaven. In Verse 32, Verse 33, and Verse 38. Then in Verse 41, we find them being offended at it. We looked at this earlier.

John 6:41 ~ Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven."

They were grumbling. "How could He have come down out of heaven? We know His father and His mother." When they stumble with something, when they're struggling with something, He doesn't then soft pedal, and explain, and make it easier. I think what you can see in the passage is that every time that they get offended, rather than backing down, Jesus doubles down. He says, "Are you offended by the fact that I came out of heaven? Let me tell you a little more about how I came out of heaven." He lifts up His glory in the face of opposition.

In fact, you see this even more clearly later. In Verses 44-50, He reiterates. And ending up in Verse 51, He says: ***I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; ...*** And then He takes it even deeper. ***...and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.***” Now He’s really offended them.

John 6:52 ~ Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”

Now here’s a place you would expect Jesus to step back and try to explain and soften things, but He doesn’t. He says, “Do you have a problem with flesh? Well let me give you one better. Flesh and blood is what you need.”

Three times in Verses 53-58, He says, ***“You must eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood.”*** A fourth time, He says, ***“My flesh is true food and My blood is true drink. You have to partake of Me.”*** We saw last time that this is not meaning literal, physical, but this means Spiritual. If you weren’t here last week, listen to last week’s message, because we dealt with it clearly. He’s talking about the figurative point. “You’re offended with this idea of flesh? Let Me just take it farther,” and He uses an image that is cannibalistic and is offensive. He knows it, and He does so advisedly. He never does anything that’s not the right thing. He never says anything that’s not the perfect thing. He says, “The offense of eating My flesh and drinking My blood, I want to bring you out of your hardness. To succumb to faith, you’ve got to see that something so utterly offensive must happen for you to be saved.” And the greatest offense of all time is not the metaphor of cannibalism. The metaphor is that it’s a picture of the horror of the cross which in one sense, the cross is the most despicable event that has ever happened and it is at the same time the most glorious event that has ever happened. It is both. That is what He’s saying, and it took that despicable event to save you and me. We are so sick in our sin. We are dead, and the only hope is something so radical, so breath taking, so revolting, that God Himself must come down and hang on a tree to save you and me. That’s the point. So Jesus talks about the offense of the cross in Verses 53-58. This is more than they can bear, these false disciples. When they heard this, they say in Verse 60, ***“This is a hard word. Who can listen to it?”*** Jesus says in Verse 61: “Is this causing you to stumble? Is this scandalizing you?” And He doubles down again.

John 6:62 ~ What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?

“Are you stumbling at the fact that I’m saying it is all about Me? That I am superior to Moses? That I am the bread that has come down? My death is the most offensive thing that is going to happen, and it’s going to be the greatest point of glory in the world. If you’re stumbling at that, then you’re going to stumble when I ascend to heaven in my enthroned glory.” He’s making clear that their only hope is to see the reality of who He is. They must be broken. This is why the word of the cross is foolishness to Gentiles and it’s a stumbling block to Jews. But it’s the wisdom of God and the power of God to those who are being saved. Jesus Christ is the corner stone of our faith. He’s everything that we build our whole salvation and our whole life upon, and yet the corner stone is the stone of stumbling and offense to those who don’t believe. The miracle of God is salvation, and yet the horror of man in his wicked unbelief. He takes that which is intended to give life and he turns it into that which confirms him in his death.

So He says about the ascension: “If you think that what I have said is offensive, how are you going to deal with Me ascending to where I was before?” And then He takes it to another level. In Verses 63-64, He says basically at this point saying, “You need to be born again. That’s your problem.” He’s talking to His disciples and He says, “It’s the Spirit who gives life,” reminiscent of what He told Nicodemus. Remember He said, “You must be born again. You must be born of the Spirit. You’re dead apart from the birth of the Spirit. You must be born from above.” Born again means born from above. “You must be born of the Spirit. The Spirit of God must come. You’re not able to manipulate it. This wind blows where it wills. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. You must be born again.”

John 6:64 ~ 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.

His omniscience is there on display. “Are you stumbling at this?” In Verse 65, He climaxes His offensive words with one last statement about the sovereignty of God in salvation:

***John 6:65 ~ 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.***

He hammers home again the sovereignty of God in salvation, wherein only those who believe or those whom the Father has given to the Son can come to Him. He said it in Verse 65 and He said it in Verse 44 as well:

John 6:44 ~ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6:37 ~ All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

This passage teaches with great clarity that the only people that are going to be saved, ultimately are those whom the Father chooses to save. Without apology, Jesus declares this. The reality is, like the rest of the Bible teaches us, we all deserve hell. God offers salvation freely to all, and no one comes. And only those come who are born again by the Spirit of God, by the Lord's electing grace, and this offense and these offensive truths, the Lord Jesus brings out and proclaims with Heavenly authority to break up the fallow ground of those hearts in front of Him. And in explaining why, 20,000 has now dwindled down to maybe three or four dozen. The twelve plus some others. How do you understand this?

John 6:65 ~ ...“For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”

The reason that so few come is because that is a continuing testimony to the need for electing grace, and the reality is it doesn't matter whether we like it. When I was studying in seminary, I didn't like the doctrines of grace. I didn't like what people call the five points of Calvinism. I went to a seminary where they believed that, because they were one of the only inerrancy schools around when I was in seminary. There weren't many that believed that the Bible was inerrant, so I went there and I had read some books like J.I. Packer – Knowing God. I loved that book. I thought, “Man, I want to go study from people like that.” He wasn't a professor there, but they were in that same camp. But I didn't like Calvinism. When I first heard about it, I thought, “They teach that? You've got to be kidding.” But the reality is I went there and I argued with guys for three years, because I was protecting God's Name, His justice, I thought. I'm the hard-headed guy. I was studying theology full time. I wasn't doing it part time. And it took me 3.5 years til after I graduated, and I was reading Romans 9, and I could not escape the clear teaching of the passage. You can play gymnastics with it if you want to, but if you really look at it honestly and you look at the context and what he's saying there,

it's the same thing He's saying here. And thankfully God had convicted me of something about a year and a half into my seminary days.

One day I had the thought as I was wrestling with Romans 5 and the fact that God said all men were condemned through one man's sin, and I thought, "That's not fair." And I believe the Spirit of God put this thought in my mind: "Who are you to say what is fair or not?" For the first time, I stepped back and looked, and said, "Wait, who am I to say? What do I know?" and I determined right there to bow before the scripture whether I liked it or not. I wanted to be clear about that. That's why it took me another 2 years after that. But whatever it said I'm going to bow before it, and so Romans 9 just finally brought me to my knees, and I said, "Lord, even though I don't necessarily like this when I look at it, I praise You. It's Your Word." And when I knelt and I received that, then it became beautiful and sweet.

It's just like Jonathan Edwards. He struggled with the doctrine of divine sovereignty as well. He wrestled with it. He'd been taught it as a young man. He wrestled with it and finally he embraced it, and from then on, he said, "After I crossed that threshold, from then on, the sovereignty of God became to me the sweet sovereignty of God." There is no doctrine more wonderful, because the Lord, not owing anyone salvation, yet offering all men salvation, preaching it from the heavens, the heavens declaring the glory of God, inviting men to turn to Him, the gospel going out and being preached to every creature but no one believing, yet the Lord then in that context, setting His sovereign grace upon some, opening their eyes, so that when they see the gospel and hear the gospel preached to them, they with new hearts respond in repentance and faith, so that our salvation is from first to last, all of grace, and we will be to the praise of the glory of His grace with Him. It's all of His grace. That's the glory of the gospel.

3) Learning the lesson:

A disciple is actually a learner. The word disciple – mathetes – comes from the word 'manthana' which means to learn. A disciple is a learner who attaches himself to a teacher and sits at his feet to learn from him. That's a good picture of how we truly come to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. There are many wonderful believers who don't believe in the doctrines of grace as I shared, and like I said, I think I was a believer in seminary, and I didn't believe in it. But the principle of learning is one that every true Christian must accept, that is that you come to God to learn. We're all in process. It takes us a long time to learn. We're still learning. We're going to be learning all the way until the end of our lives, and

I think we're going to be learning throughout eternity, actually. But the true disciple is the one who comes as a learner.

I want to give you five principles of learning the lesson:

A) The true disciple is one who stays under the word: He stays under the word even though he's uncomfortable with it. He stays there. This is what Peter and the eleven do. They stay under the word. They know that they can trust Jesus because of what they do know of Him. They can trust Him with the things that trouble them.

John 8:31 ~ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you remain in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

What's the difference between a true disciple and a false disciple? Continuing in the word even when it offends, even when it hurts. Continue in the word. Stay under the word.

B) Go to God with your questions: In your perplexity, go to the Lord. One of the things that you see throughout this passage is that the Jews who were grumbling and the disciples who were grumbling, they grumble among themselves. ***"How can this man say He came out of heaven?"*** They're talking among themselves. Why don't they say, "How can You say You came from Heaven? We know Your mother and Your father." Why are they not asking Jesus? ***"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"*** Why are they not saying, "Lord, what do You mean by this? How can You give us Your flesh to eat? We don't understand that. Please teach us." They say, ***"This is a hard word. Who could bear it?"*** They're talking among themselves. Talk to Jesus. The Psalms are filled with perplexity. The psalmist wonders at the ways of God, yet where does the breakthrough come? Just like in Psalm 73: ***When I went into the sanctuary of God, then I understood.*** Go to the Lord with your perplexity. Stay in the word. Don't run away. So stay under the word, and go to God with your questions.

C) Expect defections: Be brokenhearted over them, but expect them.

1 John 2:19 ~ They went out from us for they were not of us.

There will be those who come for a time and then leave. We should go after them. We're supposed to go after them and we're supposed to be shepherds in that sense of going after the lost sheep. We must do that, but when they won't come back, when we've done all that we can do and we've prayed, and we've shed tears over

them, and we've gone beseeching them to come back, and they don't, don't let that shake you from your faith. If tribulation breaks out and most of the visible church rejects Christ, don't let that change your faith. That is to be expected, because only those whom the Father has given Him will come to Him and remain with Him. So expect defections.

D) In the face of opposition or wavering, lift up Christ: What Jesus does in this passage in the face of opposition, in the face of wavering, on the verge of belief and unbelief, what does He do? He lifts Himself up. He doesn't soft pedal. So we are to be gentle and reason things together, but when we encounter opposition, when in doubt, lift up Christ. Lift Him up because that is the way He brings His elect to Himself. We know that it wasn't a massive experience of salvation here. There weren't 3,000 who got saved in this sermon, though there certainly could have been had God chosen to do it, but there were those who were called out of darkness into light through Jesus' hard words. He's confirming even the eleven in their salvation through this process. So stay under the word, go to God with your questions, expect defections, in the face of opposition, lift up Christ, and then finally:

E) Be ready to always be asking God that you might behold His glory: When you stay under the hard words of God, you will see the glory of God. It is His desire to unveil His glory. In reality, this passage has been unveiling His glory to those who are able to see. I think Peter and the disciples didn't fully understand all that's going on, because they hadn't had the Spirit yet given to them. In fact, John tells us in a number of different places that the disciples didn't fully understand this, but later after Jesus was resurrected, they understood. I don't think they fully understood this either. When those guys said, "This is some hard teaching. We can't bear it," they must have been thinking, "Yeah, it's some hard teaching, but Lord, where can we go? Where else would we go? You may say things that trouble us, You may say things that are hard for us, You may say things that mystify us, but when You speak, the ring of eternity is in Your voice. You speak as One having authority. Your words are not theoretical. Your words are life, and we have come to know, we have come to believe, we have come to know that You are the Holy One of God. You are the One set apart by God, set apart unto God, and unique from God. No one else is like You. You stand in a class all by Yourself. There's never been a prophet or an apostle like You. You and You alone, Lord. We know You are the One that we must cling to." When you see that, when you stay in the offense of the gospel, when you stay in the offense of the cross, when you stay under the word, when you deal with things in the Old Testament that are troubling,

when you stay there and you remain there and you ask God, then those things which are initially offensive become resplendent and glorious.

Let me just briefly speak about the cross for a moment. It's the most utterly offensive and completely repugnant act ever perpetrated in history. The most innocent and the most Holy human being that ever lived was the most brutally mistreated person ever. The One who was most worthy and deserving of most honor, was most dishonored, but you must not turn away in revulsion from the cross, but instead fix your gaze upon the cross and ask God to help you understand it. Don't turn away at the image of eating flesh and drinking blood, the utterly and completely disgusting image. No, stay there with the Lord. Ask Him to show you. And what you see in the cross, in this image, the most ignominious defeat, is in reality the most resplendent victory. The most awful picture of what sin can do, and the ugliness of sin, and the power of evil as it is unleashed upon the precious Lamb of God, as we see the crowd say, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" we see the Roman soldiers, the Gentiles, who don't know anything about the Jewish King that is to come, enraged against Him, beating Him with their fists, and mocking Him, the King of glory. We see Him hanging on a tree, and yet it was unlawful for any Roman citizen to die on a cross, and unthinkable for a Jew to hang on a cross, and yet Jesus, the King of glory, the Lord of glory, was crucified. How can this be? And yet this ugly picture is the supreme revelation of the beauty and glory of God for what we see in it. We see the attributes of God at their zenith.

There is no place that you can see the glory of God more clearly than Calvary. You see the beauty of every attribute of God most supremely on that hill. In that cross, you see the justice of God. You see that He is keeping a record of every wrong, and He will right it, and He has done so. Romans 3:25 says that in the cross the Lord vindicated His righteousness. How? In that He had passed over all the sins previously committed. All these wicked people who had been sinning throughout history. Particularly now we're talking about the ones who would believe. Things like David killing Uriah, stealing his wife. How can a Holy God abide the fellowship of a man like that? Isn't that a heinous thing that David has done? Of course it was, but if you think God's unjust, behold the cross. There Jesus is suffering for the sin of His father David. There Jesus is receiving in His own Person, every bit of the wrath that David deserved. Abraham, Moses, everyone that had come before, fulfilled His justice. If you want to see God's wrath, where would you see it more clearly than at Calvary? There's no other place. Don't go to Sodom or Gomorrah. You could see the wrath of God, but no place like Calvary displays the wrath of the Holy God, the desire to punish sin to the full, to chase

after sinners and punish them. That's God's wrath because He is Holy, and that is a good thing.

It would be a terrible thing to live in a world where there was a God who did not have wrath. It would be like living in a world where there is no police force, with murderers just running about and nobody's chasing after them. But praise the Lord we have a God who is a God of wrath who punishes sin. How do I know? Look at the cross. You see the wrath of God, the justice of God, but you see the mercy of God. You and I need to be chased down and cast into hell. That's what I deserve. As a Christian knowing the things of God, I still sin. How can that be? I deserve to be cast into hell, and yet God looks at us in our misery, He looks at us in our helplessness, and His heart is moved with mercy. An infinite well of mercy wells up from the heart of God and pours out, and where it lands is Calvary. God moved to deal with our misery in a decisive way.

Where would you look for the love of God? Look at His relationship with Abraham or the way that He cared for the Nation of Israel. Look at Hosea. Those are all places where you see it, but where would you see it more than at Calvary where the love of God is set on display for all the world to see? Behold the Love of God. God demonstrates His own love for us. He sets on display His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Oh, the love of God. The song writer says that were every man by trade a scribe and were every reed a quill, and were the oceans filled with ink, it would still be impossible with all of us working together to write the love of God across the canopy of heaven. We could never do it like Calvary has done it. Behold the love of God. There at the cross, all of the attributes of God converging at that one point in history, showing the glory in a way that we could never have imagined so that the most ignominious defeat is the greatest victory. The most awful display of wickedness of sin and the heinousness of evil becomes the avenue to see the greatest display of goodness and glory that we could ever see. This is why we sing 'The Blood of Jesus'. This is why we sing about the cross. It is the most wonderful moment in all history. It towers over all time as the greatest display of the glory of God, the cross of Jesus Christ.

A disciple is one who has learned to stay under the hard words of God to keep trusting in what you know of Him, to deal with what you don't understand, until you come to see His glory. True disciples remain. May God grant that you are a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Let's go to Him in prayer...

Our Father, we praise You for the glory of the salvation which You've made known to us in Jesus Christ. We marvel, oh Lord, at Your ways. We marvel at Your wisdom, how You could punish sin to the full, meting out an absolute, complete justice, nothing left undone, and yet at the same time, pardon us completely, not just pardon us, but declare us righteous forever and make us Your own children. Lord, we glory in what You've done, and may our supreme boast always be in the Lord. Father, be with those here who have not yet repented and believed. Grant them eyes to see and ears to hear, even now to run to Christ and to keep seeking You until You speak words of life to them. We pray these things in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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