

Sermon on John 6:60-71 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Following Jesus costs you but it's the only way to real life.

John 6:60–71 “When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” [61] But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? [62] Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? [63] It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. [64] But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) [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.”

[66] After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. [67] So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” [68] Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, [69] and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” [70] 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.” (ESV)

Following Jesus costs you but it's the only way to real life.

Again we come to the Scripture, and find good news for our weary souls. Something to cling to when high or low, fast or slow!

This text has me thinking about reality. The truest reality there is.

Our family finally finished the *Marvel universe* of movies so this will probably be the last illustration... but in *Infinity War*, Thanos is claiming the six infinity stones. One of which is the reality stone. Of all of them, the power of this stone is most interesting.

With it, the holder can determine what is real and what isn't. In one scene he uses the power of the stone to make a gun produce nothing but bubbles! He can use it to cloak reality, and to expose it when he desires.

It is appealing to us because not unlike Thanos, we desire to shape reality - to determine what is real, what is valuable, what is true. Making a world in our likeness, as we wish it to be. (Just me?!)

But reality beckons. From a sermon in Capernaum, to a cross and empty grave in Jerusalem, and in these words we have read today. Reality, real life can be found but it's only in Jesus.

What do I mean by “real” here? This is where ontology meets function - our being meets our created purpose. It is not the life we design based on temporary desires or inclinations. It is the life humanity is intended for.

Everyone experiences reality, we are not living in a Matrix waiting to wake up. But only in Christ can we experience the eternal. All that we are meant for. It is what we have come to tap into as believers today.

Set-up: Jesus has been preaching and he has claimed to be the “bread of life.” Exactly what humanity needs, true food, his body and blood. He tells us how everyone who comes to him is a gift from the Father. And he gives an invitation to believe. “Eat his flesh, drink his blood.”

And it is in the response to this teaching we realize that following Jesus is hard but there is nowhere else to go. He is the only one that gives real life.

Following Jesus Costs

Coming to Jesus, to the experience of grace will mean a surrender of your perspective as supreme and your ways of proving yourself. And when those that were following him heard it, many of them recognized it. “This is a hard saying; can anyone listen to it?”

A couple of tracks of opposition are at play here. Those that question: “Can we really eat?” And those that ask “can we really believe?”

In both categories, what Jesus says trips people up, they find offense in it and they can't abide it.

1 Corinthians 1:18 “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (ESV)

“A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” (1 Peter 2:8)

This is a key example.

“Can we eat?” This is the absurdity argument. Essentially it says that what Jesus says is ridiculous.

A fairly common way of rejecting Christ. Highlighting belief or the way of life we are called to and finding it absurd. We should expect this one. A faith that calls those that believe to give of themselves rather than exploit. To love not just neighbors but our enemies. To surrender our time, treasure and sometimes “dreams” to the purpose of Jesus and his kingdom. These are things in utter opposition to the way of the world. And if people don’t think any of that is crazy, let them know that we worship a God-man who was killed but rose from the dead and reigns in heaven over all things!

“Eat his flesh, drink his blood, is he crazy?”

Jesus dispels this argument by indicating it is a spiritual reality... If they had seen him on his heavenly throne they still wouldn’t believe.

John 6:63 “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” (ESV)

Just as he changed the category of life to the eternal, here he uncovers that life to be spiritual. There is no physical food or drink which supplies or preserves the spiritual life of the soul. It is only found in belief in him, consumed by faith.

This raises the second objection. “Can we believe?”

How can it be that all we have to do is believe? Shouldn’t there be tasks to be done, the right sacrifice to be offered? Surely faith in this man can’t be all that is required to experience life. What of all my achievements, my pedigree, my superiority?

Many disciples are offended here because they still cling to the notion of righteousness through good works and find it absurd that salvation should come through faith in Christ. Along with that, they are disappointed because Jesus has not fulfilled their hopes for the establishment of an earthly kingdom. So they regard Jesus' discourse as "hard."

We can relate. The gospel of Jesus is good news because those striving and attempting the perfection required can rest. Another lives in our place. We are given a righteousness alien to us.

"For the gospel reveals the depth of our need and our total inability to save ourselves. When we trust in our own cleverness or obedience or resources or abilities, we abhor God's grace. But when God kindly deconstructs our treasured self-sufficiency, our hearts come alive again."

"The flesh is no help at all."

At the summation of his sermon in the synagogue the application is too much. Come and believe. Give up your trust in self, your perspectives of what the kingdom he brings should be. Learning to walk with him under different rules of life, a new way. This is following Jesus.

These are significant costs. To embrace the absurdity or "otherness" of faith. Trusting in spiritual food of flesh and blood. To let go of self-sufficiency, ability, and accomplishment. And we haven't even mentioned how he will give you a new "family" of interesting people to call brother and sister!

Many can't deal. The cost is too high.

John 6:64–65 "But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) [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." (ESV)

He is aware of his audience. He knows who is his. And he knows that the call to come and die to self is hard. For many it is too costly.

John 6:66 “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.” (ESV)

They no longer walk with Jesus. We are even told for the first time that Judas, one of his twelve, will betray him.

There is a fair bit of this going on these days. Rejection of Jesus and his way. Preferring our pseudo-reality shaped by fads and perspectives that in the end are far more absurd than believing in Jesus.

But the cost is worth it.

Jesus gives real life

It seems from the text that everyone but the twelve left Jesus here. The word we translate “many” represents significance (much, great.) It is as if the sermon he preached was for different ears (maybe ours) because the crowd couldn’t accept it here.

Jesus doesn’t force himself on anyone. And we see that by his question to the small group of disciples.

John 6:67 “So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” (ESV)

Peter responds, as someone who has counted the cost and determined Jesus is worth it.

John 6:68–69 “Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, [69] and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” (ESV)

"Now, that response of Peter is truly perfect and holy. First, it reveals an enormous love for Christ. For by this statement Christ is placed in a place of preference to all things. Second, it reveals that Christ alone is the one whom all should deservedly and securely follow. He truly is that pillar of cloud and fire which goes before us in the desert, and he is able to lead us to our homeland. Third, he reveals by this statement that those who withdraw from Christ do not have anywhere else to take refuge." Johann Wild (German Franciscan)

They believe and have come to know Jesus is the Messiah. Life bears it out. His love of them and their love for him. They recognize that the Father has drawn them here to belief.

He has the words of real life, eternal life. He has reality. His words justify, give life, restore and console. His way is salvation, righteousness, presence with God.

There is nowhere else to go. Nothing else works, no other teacher will do. It's as if Peter has surveyed the thousands of ways this life could go and only one is eternal. It is right here with Jesus.

This week as I was praying the refrain from Psalm 51 that the Lord would restore to me the joy of his salvation I realized I want Peter's answer to be mine. I have lived this life long enough to realize there is nowhere else to go, even when it is costly, when things don't make sense, when I have more lament than praise, when we are weary and anxious, when we don't see a way. He keeps us, provides, and holds us.

I have come to know that Jesus is the Holy One of God. Rescued by him with nowhere else to go. And it is where we meet our purpose for his glory and our good.

1 Peter 2:4–5 “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [5] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (ESV)

In the 1950's a professor at Johns Hopkins University was studying perseverance using rats. He took 12 domesticated rats and 12 wild rats and made them to swim to find out how long they would keep swimming. The first few domesticated ones gave up pretty quick but nine of them kept going for days.

Then the researcher tried the wild rats, renowned for their swimming ability. They were recently trapped and fierce and aggressive. One by one he dropped them in the water. But within a matter of minutes they all stopped swimming and sank.

He had no idea what the difference was but he eventually surmised that it was hope. Tweaking the experiment: “He took other, similar rats and put them in the jar. Just before they stopped swimming, however, he picked them up, held them a little while, and then put them back in the water. “In this way,” he wrote, “the rats quickly learn that the situation is not actually hopeless.”

“The rats that experienced a brief reprieve swam much longer and lasted much longer than the rats that were left alone. They also recovered almost immediately. When the rats learned that they were not doomed, that the situation was not lost, that there might be a helping hand at the ready—in short, when they had a reason to keep swimming—they did. They did not give up, and they did not go under.”
(Psychology Today)

We are just a bunch of rats! We keep going because we’ve been rescued. Peter has experienced it. Those that count the cost and still cling to Jesus experience this. It is the only way of hope, it is the only way of eternal life.

Following Jesus costs you but it’s the only way to real life.

Count the cost - Some of us have been searching and trying to find the other way... there is nowhere else to go. Real life is only in Jesus. But it will require surrender. A turning from self-sufficiency and the disregard of God that has been our way of life. It will mean the embrace of truths that the crowd can’t handle. But this is the way of life with him. It is forgiveness, salvation, eternity, and a shedding of what is worthless.

We keep counting, but we come to know that he is the Holy One of God, that our refrain would be “to whom shall we go?!” This is where comfort is, peace, passion, purpose. This is where we belong, following our King.

Keep swimming.

We don’t decide what is real. God alone does. All that is lasting, right and good is found in Jesus.

May we ever cling to him and experience his life.