

Main Idea: In John 6:60-71 we see a very different kind of invitation than is often given in our day. Here we see how Jesus dealt with two kinds of responders.

- I. Jesus dealt with those who resisted His message (60-66).
 - A. He confronted it (60-62).
 1. He asked them questions.
 2. He forced them to face the truth about Himself.
 - B. He explained it (63-64).
 1. He pointed out what the Spirit must do.
 2. He pointed out what they were failing to do.
 - C. He clarified what needed to happen (65).
 1. They needed to come to Him.
 2. They needed the Father to enable them.
 - D. He let them go (66).
 1. They were a contradiction of terms.
 2. They wanted Him to be the bread-giver but not the bread.
- II. Jesus dealt with those who accepted His message (67-70).
 - A. He gave them opportunity to leave Him (67-69).
 1. They believed because of the superiority of Jesus’ words.
 2. They believed because of the superiority of Jesus’ person.
 - B. He revealed why they came to Him (70).
 1. He chose them.
 2. He knows that one of them is a fraud.

Make it personal: Ask yourself the following...

1. Am I a contradiction in terms?
2. What am I doing with Jesus?

How you finish a message is important. That’s true whether it’s a Sunday School lesson, or children’s devotional, or youth challenge, or an expositional sermon. Whenever we proclaim the Scriptures, we must urge our hearers to respond rightly to what they have heard.

Here’s how our God-given assignment works. We start by proclaiming the truth of the Scriptures. That’s the objective of a sermon, or a Sunday School lesson, or devotional. The preacher presents, not his own ideas, but God’s Word. Yet that’s not the end of his assignment. He’s not giving history lesson, or a feel-good pep talk either.

And so, having proclaimed God’s truth, we must then call for a proper response to that truth. If it’s a promise of God, to believe it, and thus, believe *Him*. If it’s a command from the Lord, to obey it, and thus, obey *Him*. If it’s a word of encouragement from the Lord, to rest in it, and thus to rest in *Him*. And so on. The hearer is invited to respond to what he has just heard.

And he may need help. So the preacher must look for ways to assist those responding. Do they understand what they have just heard? Do they need more truth to address questions? Do they need challenged to see the implications? Do they need time to think about it, or better stated, do they need time for the Spirit of God to do His office work in their hearts?

That’s the preacher’s assignment. To proclaim God’s truth, explain it, call for a response to it, and then leave the results up to God knowing that His Word will never return void but will always accomplish the work He intends in the heart of the hearer (Isa 55:11).

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

What I've just described is the very thing we see Jesus doing in John 6. He's preaching a message in the synagogue in Capernaum. It's often referred to as His *Bread of Life* sermon. It's called that because four times in this message Jesus announces, "I am the bread of life," and thus offers His hearers the gift of eternal life.

"Do not work for food that spoils," He told them in verse 27, "but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

Of course, they didn't get it. "What must we do to do the works God requires?" they asked in verse 28. They had a works-mindset. Eternal life is linked to something *we* do, isn't it?

Jesus answered and gave the premise of the whole sermon in verse 29, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." That's what's needed, not to work but to believe, and not some vague, generic faith either, but to believe *in the one He sent*.

"Do something big, and we'll believe in You," they insisted. "Like Moses did. Give us more bread."

"No, it doesn't work that way," said Jesus. "God has already sent you something big, true bread from heaven. *I am the bread of life.*"

And so the Master Teacher said as He proclaimed the truth about the eternal life He brought from heaven to the hungry souls of men on earth. But He didn't just give them truth. He spelled out for them precisely what they needed to do with the truth they heard.

Verse 35—"He who *comes to Me* will never go hungry, and he who *believes in Me* will never be thirsty."

Verse 37—"Whoever *comes to Me* I will never drive away."

Verse 40—"Everyone who *looks to the Son* and *believes in Him* shall have eternal life."

Verse 47—"He who *believes* has everlasting life."

Verse 51—"If anyone *eats* of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh."

Verse 53—"Unless you *eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood*, you have no life in you."

Verse 54—"Whoever *eats my flesh and drinks my blood* has eternal life."

Verse 57—"The one who *feeds on Me* will live because of Me."

Verse 58—"He who *feeds on this bread* will live forever."

There's what you must do, said Jesus. Believe in Me. Come to Me. Look to Me. Eat the bread I have brought which is My flesh. Eat it, and drink My blood. Feed on it.

He's not talking in literal terms. And He's not talking about Communion either, for reasons we discussed last time, chiefly, He's talking to non-believers months prior to the Lord's Supper. He's defining what it means to *believe* in Him.

He's making it clear that believing is more than just agreeing with some facts about Him. Believing is personal—believe in *Me*. Believing involves repentance—you must *come to Me*, which implies you must leave where you are. Believing is like *eating*—no one can do it for you, and it requires that you take Me into your life so that I become your source and substance for living. And when He talks about His flesh and blood, He's talking about His sacrificial death on the cross. That's the content of saving faith. My death must become your food, says Jesus. That's what it means to *believe in Me*.

Now it's response time. The truth is before the house. The questions are clarified. Now what are you going to do with what you've just heard?

Quite frankly, you're about to see a very different kind of invitation than is often given in our day. There are no sentimental stories told. There's no music playing.

There's no instruction to walk to the front of the synagogue or to an inquiry room in the back. There's just some very frank concluding words from Jesus to two groups in attendance. As we look at John 6:60-71 we'll see how Jesus dealt with two kinds of responders.

I. Jesus dealt with those who resisted His message (60-66).

Notice verse 60, "On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'"

There are actually four responders identified in John 6. First, there are "the Jews" already mentioned in verses 41 & 52. They responded by grumbling about Jesus (verse 41) and arguing sharply (verse 52). Simply put, they didn't believe in Jesus before this message and they certainly didn't as a result of it.

Next there are the "disciples" mentioned in here in verse 60, as well as in verses 61 & 66. The Greek term for disciple, *mathetes*, refers to a person who attaches himself to a teacher as a student or learner, says John MacArthur, "but does not imply anything about the disciple's sincerity or devotion."¹ Up to this point in Jesus' ministry there were scores of people, perhaps more than a hundred, who identified themselves as His "disciples. They were following Jesus wherever He went. They liked His miracles. They liked His free lunches. They enjoyed His authoritative preaching. They hoped He would soon get rid of the Romans and establish His earthly kingdom. In a moment, we're going to see how the majority of these "disciples" responded to Jesus' sermon.

Thirdly, we're introduced to a sub-group of Jesus' "disciples" in verse 67, called "the Twelve." They too were followers of Jesus and had been traveling with Him, listening to His sermons, watching His miracles, and even assisting Him in His work. But as we'll soon see, they responded to Jesus' message quite differently than did the rest of the "disciples."

And fourthly, we learn about a sub-group of the Twelve in verse 71, a disciple named Judas Iscariot, who responded to Jesus' sermon, not as the Jews did, and not as the disciples did, but as the rest of the Twelve did. At least so everyone thought, everyone *but Jesus*.

All four responded to Jesus that day. The Jews did. The disciples did. The Twelve did. And Judas did.

How did the "disciples" respond? According to verse 60, many of them, not all but certainly many, responded negatively. They resisted Jesus and His invitation. They said, "This is a *hard* teaching. Who can accept it?"

Interesting choice of words. *Hard*, they said. The Greek is *sklaros*, which means "rough" and "dry" (like the bones of a skeleton) and can refer to violent, strong, and harsh winds (as in James 3:4). It's the word Jesus used when He brought Saul to his knees on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is *hard* for you to kick against the goads (Acts 26:14)."

Hard here doesn't mean hard to understand, but hard to accept. They're not saying they don't get it. They do get it and they don't like the implications of what they've just heard. As Leon Morris explains, "It was the part they could understand rather than the part they could not that bothered them."²

¹ John MacArthur, p. 268.

² Leon Morris, p. 383.

They just heard Jesus tell them that He had not come to be their personal bell-hop. He said He had come to give them eternal life, and that's not what they want. They want the stuff of *this* life because they think they already have eternal life.

Don't read too much into that word "disciple." Sure, they've been following Jesus, that's what a disciple does, but it's with a distorted perspective of Jesus, not to mention a distorted agenda. They are *false* disciples, as MacArthur explains, "False disciples do not follow Christ because of who He is, but because of what they want from Him."³

And now things begin to click. "This isn't what we signed up for, to follow a man who says He's come from heaven to die for us, and that we need to appropriate His shed blood if we want to have eternal life!"

I like MacArthur's observation, "It finally dawned on them that following Jesus meant far more than merely hanging around Him."⁴

In response to their negative response Jesus did four things. First...

A. He confronted it (60-62). That's verse 61, "Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you?'"

How's that for getting to the point? First, the Jews were grumbling (back in verse 41). Now many of His own disciples are grumbling too (same Greek word *gonguzo*). No use beating around the bush about the murmuring in the room. Jesus confronted their resistance in two ways.

1. *He asked them questions.* Two questions, in fact. First, "Does what I have just said *offend* you?" The Greek term is *skandalize* from the noun *skandalon*, which referred to the bait-stick in a trap or snare. The verb means "to cause to fall into a trap," and figurative means "to cause to sin."

"Are My words causing you to sin?" asks Jesus. "Have I led you into sin?" Of course He hadn't. Jesus didn't cause these hearers to sin. Their sinful response came right out of their sinful hearts. His sermon merely exposed what was already there.

Hendriken explains, "It was not the hardness of the sermon but rather the hardness of their own hearts that had brought about this unfavorable reaction on their part."⁵

Do you see what Jesus is doing? By asking if He had offended them...

2. *He forced them to face the truth about Himself.* Yesterday they were cheering for Him and wanting to make Him king. Now they're grumbling and refusing to accept His teaching.

Then Jesus asked a second question in verse 62, "What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!" Interesting. A few moments ago the Jews were grumbling because He said He "came down from heaven" (42). Now He asks if His disciples will be offended if He ascends back to heaven. What's He getting at? Why would His ascending back to heaven offend them?

Keep in mind what they're wanting. They want Him to stay and bless them *now*. They want Him to make life better *now*. More food, better living conditions, *now*. But if He ascends back to heaven, that makes it clear He's not going to give them what they want *now*, that He's operating on a different agenda, one that focuses on heaven, not just the earth, the future, not just the present.

³ MacArthur, p. 269.

⁴ John MacArthur, p. 269.

⁵ William Hendriksen, p. 246.

Friends, if you're living for *this* world, you won't be content with Jesus. Oh, you might hang around Him for a while, trying to get what you want out of Him, but in time He will force you to face the truth about Himself, and about yourself too.

Remember the parable of the four soils? Remember the rocky-soiled hearers? "They believe for a while," says Jesus in Luke 8:13. "But in the time of testing they fall away."

A couple of months ago I began working with a person who told me they had just come to know Christ. "That's wonderful!" I responded. "Now let me show you from His Word the kind of life that pleases Him." And so we began to search the Scriptures together. And things went great, for a while. Then two weeks ago the person made it clear they were done. Living for some present pleasure seemed to make more sense than living for a future hope.

How do you help someone who responds that way? The first thing Jesus did was to confront it.

B. He explained it (63-64). How can a person who says they are Jesus' disciple now refuse to accept Jesus' teaching? Here's how. Listen to Jesus' explanation as He points out two factors in verses 63-64. First...

1. *He pointed out what the Spirit must do.* That's verse 63, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." In other words, it's the Spirit of God alone who can enable people to accept hard teaching. They can't generate faith on their own. They need the Spirit to bring life to their dead hearts, and when He does, then they'll believe.

That's the same thing Jesus told Nicodemus back in John 3:6-7, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"

Friends, you can follow Jesus, but only the Spirit can make you a true follower.

"That's why you're resisting My message," explained Jesus. "You need the Spirit to make you alive. You can't do it yourself. Flesh counts for nothing."

By the way, Jesus here makes it clear that His language about eating His flesh in this message is not to be taken literally. His words are *spiritual*, He affirms. There is no salvation in *flesh*. It's not a sacrament you need. You need *my words*.

Here's the second factor...

2. *He pointed out what they were failing to do.* That's verse 64, "Yet there are some of you who do not believe." When the Spirit makes people alive, they believe. But that hadn't happened to these people. The Spirit had not yet made them alive, and they had not yet truly believed in Jesus. And He told them so.

Did this catch Him off guard? No. We're told at the end of verse 64, "For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him."

Friends, Jesus knows. He knows all things. People may look like they believe in Him. They smile at Him. They listen to His teaching. They invite others to come and hear Him. They even serve Him, and some even do miracles in His name. But He knew who truly believed and who didn't.

When He faced unbelief, He confronted it. Then He explained it. Thirdly...

C. He clarified what needed to happen (65). Take a look at verse 65, "He went on to say, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.'" Don't miss that. He said two things needed to happen.

1. *They needed to come to Him.* Again, as we saw back in verses 37 & 44, that's another way of saying they needed to *believe* in Him. People who truly believe in Jesus

leave where they are in their thinking and living and *come* to Him. That's what sinners must do if they want Him to save them. And for that to happen...

2. *They needed the Father to enable them.* "No one can come unless the Father has enabled him." It's the Father who enables people to come to Jesus and believe in Him. He *draws* them, says Jesus in verse 44. And He *enables* them, says verse 65. *Enables* comes from the verb, "to give." The Father gives sinners the ability to do what they are powerless to do (and not interested in doing) on their own.

Interesting, isn't it? Jesus isn't perplexed when people refuse to believe in Him, nor should we be. Apart from a miracle performed by the Father, unbelief is to be expected.

My unbelieving friend, if you haven't come to Jesus and are struggling with doubts and fears, then turn to the Father. Ask Him for help. You can't come to Jesus unless the Father *enables* you, and He delights to do so when He hears a sinner humbly cry out to Him, as in Luke 18:13, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." (see Luke 18:14; James 4:10).

Then what happened? When Jesus saw people resist His message, He confronted it, then explained it, then clarified what needed to happen. And then...

D. He let them go (66). That's what verse 66 says, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." And He didn't go after them.

Astounding. They *turned back*. Back to what? They went back to their old ways of thinking and living. That's odd. These disciples of Jesus ended up doing what the unbelieving Jews did at the outset. They removed themselves from Jesus.

What are we to make of these people? Two things...

1. *They were a contradiction of terms.* Disciples who turn back? Followers who don't follow? Believers who don't believe? Some say, "Backslidden," that's what they are. "They're still believers, just backslidden." No, Jesus just said, "There are some of you who *do not believe*." I called them "unbelieving believers" back in John 2:23-24. Sure, they believed some things about Jesus, but they didn't really believe in Jesus. To put it another way...

2. *They wanted Him to be the bread-giver but not the bread.* And such a person is not a true believer, nor a true disciple, for that matter. To borrow from F. F. Bruce, "What they wanted, he would not give; what he offered, they would not receive."⁶

And so they left Him.

And Jesus' response? He let them go. He did not plead with them to stay. He let them go.

This is one of the most painful parts of being a pastor, dealing with people who initially say they want to follow Jesus, and even follow Him for a while, but then just walk away from Him and from His Body, the church. It breaks my heart to see people walk away, but what can we do? Ignore that there's a problem? Keep them on the church membership roll and call them backslidden Christians? What did Jesus do? He confronted the negative response, and explained it, and clarified what needed to happen, and then let them go. Oh, that doesn't mean He was done with them, for He's going to go to the cross to provide exactly what they need. It's not what they want now, but it's what their souls need, a blood-bought salvation, forgiveness, and a real relationship with Him and His people.

⁶ F. F. Bruce, p. 164.

Quite a way to close a service, wouldn't you say? I mentioned there were two responders that day. We've just seen the majority response. They resisted what they heard. But now everyone did.

II. Jesus dealt with those who accepted His message (67-70).

Notice verse 67, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve." There's the first reference by title to *The Twelve* in John's Gospel. What did Jesus do with them?

A. He gave them opportunity to leave Him (67-69). "Do you want to do what the others just did?" He asked. Actually, the way Jesus framed the question implies a negative answer is expected. "You don't want to go away as well, do you?"

Look who served as the spokesman in verses 68-69, "Simon Peter answered him." It's not the last time Peter will assume a leadership role with the Twelve.

"Lord, to whom shall we go?" As Hendriksen points out, "Man is so constituted that he must go to someone. He cannot stand by himself."⁷

"You have the words of eternal life." Notice, *eternal*, not just temporal blessings like manna and free lunches. Peter's interested in *eternal* life, and that's what Jesus came to give.

"We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." There it is. "We believe," says Peter in behalf of the Twelve. That's what the previous group failed to do. They didn't believe in Jesus, not for the eternal saving of their souls. *We do*, says Peter. And why? Peter mentions two reasons that convinced the Twelve.

1. *They believed because of the superiority of Jesus' words.* "You have the words of eternal life." Peter gets it. He recognizes Jesus isn't talking about eating literal flesh. What matters are Jesus' *words*. His words produce eternal life. "We've heard You speak, Jesus, and Your words have convinced us that You are the key to what we need most, *eternal life*."

But not just Jesus' words...

2. *They believed because of the superiority of Jesus' person.* "We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Peter uses a title for Jesus you rarely see in the Gospels, only one other place that I'm aware of. The demon-possessed man in Mark 1:24 used it. And now Peter uses it. *Jesus, You are the Holy One of God.* And with those words Peter highlights Jesus' purity and consecration and assigns to Him "the highest possible place."⁸

Now that's a great profession of faith. But Peter's wrong on one count, isn't he? As Wiersbe points out, "The only mistake he made was to bear witness for the entire group. Peter was sure that *all* of the Apostles were believers, which shows how convincing Judas was. Even Peter did not know that Judas was an unbeliever!"⁹

Look at verse 70, "Then Jesus replied, 'Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!'" That's significant. The Twelve make it clear they don't want to leave Jesus, and what does He immediately do?

B. He revealed why they came to Him (70). And why was that? Because they're smarter than the rest? No. He reminds them that...

⁷ William Hendriksen, p. 248.

⁸ Observation by Leon Morris, p. 390.

⁹ Warren Wiersbe, p. 314.

1. *He chose them.* “You did not choose me,” He later told them in John 15:16, “but I chose you.” Chose them for what? First, for salvation, then for service. They didn’t sign up to be His disciples. He recruited them.

“Follow Me,” He told Matthew as he sat at his tax collector’s booth (in Matt. 9:9). And Matthew got up and followed Him.

“Follow Me,” He likewise said to Peter and Andrew (Matt. 4:18). And they left their fishing nets and followed Him. James and John did the same (Matt. 4:22). So did Philip (in John 1:43), and Nathanael (John 1:45), and the rest. They knew what Jesus was talking about. They didn’t initiate this relationship. He did. He chose them.

And if we’re following Him, it’s the same for us. In His amazing, unexplainable, undeserved love, He chose us. And for that we owe Him eternal thanks.

But He made something else clear to the Twelve that day. He said...

2. *He knows that one of them is a fraud.* He is “a devil,” an *accuser*. He is going to stand against Me and oppose Me and all that I came to accomplish.

He’s talking about Judas, says John, Judas the son of Simon, a man from Kerioth (probably in Judah, acc. to Joshua 15:25).¹⁰ In Matthew 26:24 Jesus said, “The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

I can’t think of anything more tragic. The Jews didn’t hide their displeasure with Jesus—we saw that in verse 41. And the unbelieving disciples flat out left Him—no question where they stood. But here’s what makes Judas so devilish. He too rejected Jesus that day. He too refused to believe in Him. But he stayed. He actually remained with Jesus and acted as though he believed.¹¹ When Peter spoke for the Twelve and said, “We believe!” Judas nodded his head in agreement. He made everyone think he was different from the other defectors, that he was a devoted follower of Christ. But it was all a sham.

And Jesus knew it. And Jesus let him know it. “Yet one of you is a devil.” Do you hear the Savior’s mercy in those words? Judas would never be able to say, “Nobody warned me that I was in trouble.” Jesus Himself sounded the alarm. *Only a devil would act like he knows Me and then turn against Me.*

Now it’s our turn. Remember, that’s the purpose of any message. You preach truth and then call for a response.

Make it personal: Ask yourself the following...two questions...

1. *Am I a contradiction in terms?* A follower of Jesus who’s not following Jesus—that’s a contradiction, isn’t it? It doesn’t make sense to say you belong to Him and not live for Him, cherish Him, cherish His people, cherish His Word, cherish His service. It boils down to a very simple question...

2. *What am I doing with Jesus?* He gave His life for us, shed His blood on the cross to pay sin’s penalty, and then conquered the grave. Have you believed in Him? And are you demonstrating the validity of your faith by living for Him?

¹⁰ Later John will have this to say about Judas in 13:2, “The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.” Then in 13:27, “As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. ‘What you are about to do, do quickly,’ Jesus told him.”

¹¹ Observation by William Hendriksen, p. 249.