

John 6:66-68

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⁶⁷So Jesus asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?”

⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

The Warrior Rejected by Many Followers

I.

No social distancing was going on. Crowds gathered to hear him on a regular basis. There had been plenty of miracles of healing throughout the early part of Jesus’ ministry that convinced scores of people that he was something special.

Everyone had been looking for Messiah. Everyone just knew that he would solve all their problems.

Shortly before our text, they witnessed a very special miracle. There was this basketball-arena sized crowd of 5,000 men, not counting all the women and children who were with them, whom Jesus fed with a little boy’s picnic lunch.

To the crowds, this had been the last assurance they needed. Everyone was *sure* that this guy could be the Messiah. Jesus would break the yoke of Roman rule and lead them all to a glorious day of restoration. Israel would be the predominant country once again.

This was *exactly* the kind of Messiah they had always wanted. Jesus would be their new King, as Messiah was prophesied to be. Not only would he lead them to glorious victory, he could give them all free health care and ascertain they would *never* face any devastating outbreak of disease. Far better than any welfare system, Jesus could continually supply every need for daily life in such abundance that no one need ever work again.

The people who followed Jesus had been euphoric. Easy street was coming. There was nothing to worry about.

An enemy had been at work attacking the Bible and creating all kinds of false ideas in the minds of the people. “When the people saw the miraculous sign Jesus did, they said, ‘This really is the Prophet who is coming into the world.’”¹⁵ When Jesus realized that they intended to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself” (John 6:14-15, EHV).

Still, the day after Jesus had left them, the crowds had tracked him down again with questions. The subject turned to food—bread. That is when Jesus said: “I am the Bread of Life...The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35, EHV).

As people often do, the crowd had the wrong ideas in their heads. They wanted food for their stomachs. Jesus gave them something far different. He had come from his Father in heaven. *He* was the bread from heaven. All who “ate” the bread from heaven—that is, those who took him in by faith—would live *forever*. He would raise them up at the Last Day.

All the enthusiasm went out of the crowd, like when a visiting football team scores the winning field goal as the clock expires. They stopped listening. They turned and headed for home. The fun was over.

It wasn’t just the crowd of thousands who walked away. Jesus was training a close group

of followers to reach out with the gospel to the huge mission fields in Galilee and beyond. The words of Jesus—the Bread from heaven—were hard to understand. How could he claim to give them eternal life? “When they heard it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching! Who can listen to it?’” (John 6:60, EHV). Just then follow the words of our text: “After this, many of his disciples turned back and were not walking with him anymore” (John 6:66, EHV).

It’s hard to accept that some of Jesus’ disciples would desert him. They were people who had walked all those miles with Jesus. They had slept on the ground many nights. They had eaten with him, and had seen his many miracles. Jesus is the most fascinating person who has ever walked the face of the earth. When he spoke, it was with an authority that no one had ever heard before!

This was the Savior of the world! This is the One who had come to offer his perfect life in exchange for our sin at the battle of Calvary. He was getting himself prepared for that battle, and had been preparing the troops to carry the battle on after him. And now...some of them left. They did not believe Jesus had the power and authority to grant eternal life. They rejected him.

The enemy of Jesus had gotten to the hearts and minds of the Jewish leaders and others. He had led them to believe the lie that Jesus couldn’t be who he said he was and who he had shown himself to be. The leaders were teaching false doctrine of the worst kind to their people: that they could somehow make themselves right with God by being good people. Jesus was simply showing them the same thing he told them at the beginning of his ministry: “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16, EHV).

II.

How does the awe for Jesus go out of someone who has been exposed to him on a daily basis? An enemy did this.

The enemy still hates Jesus. The enemy still fights against Jesus. Over time the enemy has discouraged lost people to grow deeper in their separation from God. He has established false religions to lead them away. The false religions offer an alternate path to their false gods, which is no path to the true God at all. He has encouraged secularism and atheism and materialism, which masquerade as substitutes to God. All these false ideas create paths that lead only to hell.

The enemy has made inroads into the Christian Church. You probably know some “dones”—people who have left the church and say they won’t come back. There are plenty of “nones”—people who claim to have no religious affiliation.

We have had members who once enthusiastically promised at the front of the church that they would remain faithful to Jesus and his Word, even to the point of death. They later broke their confirmation vows. Something happened to take away their joy at being in God’s house.

And now...this. Our current situation. The term COVID-19. A term that has quickly dominated the headlines and has affected everyone’s life. Everything is shut down. You can’t go to a restaurant and enjoy a night out. You can’t go to a ball game. You can’t even make *plans* to attend some event in the future—you have no idea what *might be* cancelled.

No one can assure you of what will be available months from now, let alone weeks from now. The tourism industry—*everywhere*—is devastated by the turmoil. The stock market changes daily—usually with more losses.

More than anything else, however, the enemy has been trying to use this turmoil to separate people even further from Christ. Far too many in our society and our world are without Christ. These are tumultuous times for absolutely *everyone*, but those who do not have Jesus have nothing. No source of comfort. No sense of anyone who is really in control. Nothing.

III.

Maybe *you* have had your doubts, too. Questions keep popping up into *our* heads with everything going on. Maybe you don't have a headache from flu-like symptoms so far, but your head hurts as you try to muddle through a life that has been drastically altered in a matter of days.

Maybe all this can help you understand Jesus when he turns to the smaller group of his disciples. Listen carefully to his question: "Jesus asked the Twelve, 'You do not want to leave too, do you?'" (John 6:67, EHV).

Can you hear the emotion in his voice? "You do not want to leave too, do you?"

Jesus gives them the opportunity to make a clear answer. Did they hesitate? Did they want some time to see what everyone else was doing before they gave their own answer?

"Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life'" (John 6:68, EHV).

Right on, Peter! To whom shall we go? To whom could we *possibly* go? *You*, Lord Jesus, have the words of eternal life.

God spoke and the whole universe came to be. He just spoke! What power God has in his words!

I have right here in my hands the very Words of God. I know, I have them on this electronic device. Perhaps you like to read them on paper. Either way is fine. In God's message recorded for us in the Bible is his own story of love for us—his words of life, forgiveness, and salvation.

These words have terrific power. You know the passage in Romans where Paul tells us: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17, EHV).

Only God knows how many believing Christians there are in the world. This I do know: not one of them did anything to create saving faith in their hearts. It was God's Word that brought you and me to trust that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has purchased and won for us the forgiveness of all our sins. He did it all. He paid it all for us. He loves us enough to die so we might live with him forever.

Can you see why Jesus fought false teachers so hard? He said: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15, EHV). They come to oppose Jesus and lure you to abandon the Savior. They have a lot of opinions. They have all kinds of theories. But they do not have the words of eternal life. There is only one source for that. Peter had it right. "Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68, EHV).

IV.

We are blessed, you and I. We have been washed in the blood of the Lamb of God. Even

though you can't be here in the church today for worship and are watching on the internet, you are part of this service. You know that you are forgiven. You know that you have the words of eternal life.

Some of you watching are from congregations other than Holy Trinity. Your congregation doesn't have the capability of live streaming the service, so you are watching a guest preacher.

Jesus becomes our guest preacher every time we come to listen. He promises to take us through the door marked "Death." He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Martin Luther once said: "If you were to ask a Christian what his task is and by what he is worthy of the name of Christian, there could be no other response than hearing the Word of God, that is, faith. Ears are the only organs of the Christian." (Theology of the Reformers, Timothy George, p. 56).

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It's time to sit and think. With everything shut down, there's not much else you can do, anyway. Why not spend time in God's Word, thinking about the great things God has done for you? Remember the *greatest* thing God has done for you. He has taken your sins away. Jesus has paid for them in full.

While you sit and think about these things, start your own personal reading and devotion program. Start by reading chapter 12 of John's gospel. Read a chapter a day to the end of John's gospel. It's the story of our Savior's last week on earth. It is riveting reading.

Every day—especially right now—we are challenged to hold on tightly to God's Word. When we see and hear all the things this world, our sinful flesh, and Satan throw at us. We get bombarded. If Jesus were to ask us right now: "You do not want to leave too, do you?" what would your answer be? Answer with Peter: "Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life." Amen.