

The Spirit and the Word John 6:60-65

We started looking at this passage last time we were together. And this paragraph and the next give the response to the Bread of Life discourse. And we always preach to inform and apply truth. But we also want to elicit a response. And this is the response. And we saw that response in verse 60, **“When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?’”** And the disciples here are not the twelve but the large band that followed Jesus because they were enamoured at his miracles that he did. And the meaning of a “hard saying” is not so much that it was difficult to understand but it was difficult to accept. They thought they were righteous. They thought the Messiah would come and lead a popular revolt against Rome. But here they find that salvation is in trusting in Jesus, ingesting his life, and he has not come to defeat Rome. This combats both their dreams and their self-righteousness. It is a hard message to take.

And Jesus knew their response. In fact look at verse 61, **“But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, ‘Do you take offense at this?’”** He knew of their grumbling and unbelieving heart. He knew that they did not want to accept that one greater than Moses was before them. And look at the word “offence.” It comes from the Greek word where we get our English word “scandalize.” And there is the scandal of the cross that someone would have to die in order to give life. This is where so much of the hatred of Christianity comes in. It combats our natural pride and arrogance that we are good enough.

Now we come to verses 62-65 tonight, and one of the things that I find so amazing is how believers do not understand ministry. They do not understand the functionality of ministry, and how God has chosen to work in the hearts and lives of men and women and bring them to Christ. And if we do not understand how God truly has chosen to convert sinners into worshipers who trust Christ, we cannot understand how God works in the hearts and lives of believers to transform them more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.

You might not understand how you overcome that life dominating sin maybe of lust. You just think are over it, but it raises its ugly head and you fall again. You feel the deep shame and guilt of your sin but you just do not know if change is possible. It has just been too many years and the struggle is just too great. Or you have struggled with pride. And you feel that anger raise up every time someone questions your will or your wisdom. You realize you have damaged so many lives, but at this point in my life, you would love to grow in Christ’s humility and overcome pride and anger but is it impossible. Maybe you are someone who has struggled with feelings of abandonment, and maybe even have sought help from others, and it seems to help for a while, but you end up more depressed and more hopeless in your life. And you think maybe hope is not possible for a person like me.

We live in a day and age where we do not understand how God brings change to the sinner or change in the believers heart. We prayed about change and we expect God to magically make in disappear in an instant. Maybe if the preacher was more whimsical or talked and gave more stories about life. Maybe if the services had more

singing or livelier singing, or if the messages were shorter or longer. Maybe if they made the aesthetics better to look at, or the preacher had a better sense of humour. We just do not understand how God has chosen to change individuals or change lives. And that is what I want us to look at tonight. I want us to see two things tonight.

1. We need to realize the truth of the Spirit and Life. Vv. 62-63.

One thing that we rely on so much both in our evangelism and also in our own sanctification or change in our own lives is our own strength and ingenuity. There are so many kinds of different evangelistic programs that will grow the numerical value of your church. They are gimmicks to get people excited about sharing the gospel or trying to get people to make a profession of faith. Some have tried to make promises that Jesus did not make - how he will give you things in this life that you want. Others have tried high pressure tactics and emotional appeals to get people to respond. I can remember one gentleman going forward at a meeting. I ask him afterward why he went up, and he said he didn't know, only that his emotions were stirred.

And I think the same thing happens with our sanctification. There are always new programs both in Christianity and outside of Christianity that promise change. Inside just follow this easy ten step program. Outside, just give the deviant behaviour an official title and people feel good about themselves. We have everything from restless leg syndrome to messy room syndrome. But it is not your fault, but we can help. And what is missing is God and his means for change.

What Jesus combats here is unbelief. They need something else or something more than Jesus Christ. Look at verse 62, **"Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?"** Right after he asks them the question whether they were offended by his message, he asks them another question. And in one sense it seems out of place. We realize from the opening chapter of John that the Christ came down and took on human flesh and dwelt among us. In other words he descended from heaven. And remember what he just said toward the end of the Bread of Life discourse in verse 51, **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."** What is the bread of life? It is his life given for the world. But where did he come from? He came down from heaven. Well here, he speaks of the preeminence of his personhood and the eternity of his personhood by speaking of ascending to the place he once occupied. But here is the point: what hope would these people have if Jesus ascended? You think this was offensive, well what would happen if I did not give my life as that ransom and right here and right now ascended into heaven? It is another challenge and opportunity to see their need and trust in him.

But look at what he says in verse 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."** Now, what does he mean that it is "the Spirit who gives life"? And to understand that phrase, it is helpful to understand the next phrase, "the flesh is of no help." The flesh is our natural and sinful self. And here it is: we cannot help ourselves and will not help ourselves. We will base our lives on another philosophy or whatever, but will not come to Christ. Isn't that encouraging! This is why the crowds say in verse 60 that this is a hard saying, but not only that - "who can listen to it," or who can accept it? And the answer is no one.

Paul says in Romans 8:7-8, **“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”** The crowd asks “who can listen to it,” and the answer is no one, there are none that can please God in the flesh. All are dead in trespasses and sins.

So what do we need? We need something that we cannot give ourselves, and that is life. So who gives life, and the answer is the Spirit. Jesus speaks of being “born of the Spirit” to Nicodemus. It is the Spirit that gives life. Titus 3:5 says, **“he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”** Now here is the question: how does the Spirit give life? And look at what Jesus says here: **“The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”** How does God the Spirit give life to dead and lifeless individuals? Through the words that Jesus speaks. So our trust is in God alone to bring life where there is death through the preaching and teaching of God’s word, or the words of Jesus Christ. 1Peter 1:23 says, **“since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”** And this should inform all of our evangelistic efforts. God has chosen means to bring life and trust in Christ. Those means are prayer and proclamation of his gospel - his word. But how active are we in praying for the lost? Have we given up? Do we ever even attempt to share our faith with those outside of Christ. Remember the means that the Spirit uses. Paul says in Romans 10:17, **“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”** What people need is gospel proclamation.

The Scriptures are essential in the ministry of evangelism but they are also essential in our individual lives as believers as we seek to grow and change. Do you ever long for a Spirit-filled and Spirit-saturated life that is so vibrant and living and joyous, where our God is so necessary and close and real? I know that all true believers want that but so often we seek that life and the necessary change that needs to take place in our lives apart from the Scripture and learning and dwelling and meditating on the Scripture. We say that we want to delight in Christ and want to the Spirit to control us but how often are we truly in the Scriptures? How committed are we in listening even when the Scriptures are preached. Listen to Psalm 119:14-16, and see if this joy resonates with your soul because this is evidence of the Spirit’s activity and the Spirit’s control over our lives, **“In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.”**

So many people are praying for the filling or control of the Spirit looking for some power from their problems and struggles. And Paul commanded in Ephesians 5:18, **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”** He says just like individuals let wine control them or something else in the created world, let the Spirit control your life. And how do we do that? Col. 3:16 says, **“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”** Let Christ’s word or the Spirit inspired words of Scripture dwell in

your heart. And as they do they control your inner person, because if they do the Spirit is in control.

We get ministry and change so wrong. Jesus has chosen to change us through the Spirit working through the Word. Where are you looking for change? What are you trusting in tonight? There is life. God the Spirit can change our lives and have Christ-centred and Christ-controlled lives. He has chosen to use his life giving word? How often are we in the Scriptures? How often are we letting them inform our thoughts and change us from one degree of glory to another? It does take work and time and effort, but he will change us.

2. Our trust is in the God who knows and the God who acts. Vv. 64-65.

We have talked about the scandal of the gospel, and the doctrine of penal substitution, but when you come to these verses, they are equally hated both inside and outside the church. One is that God knows everything. And therefore he knows all about your struggles and difficulties of your life, and could have changed it if he wanted to. Open Theism in the church has tried to address this issue. They have said the future is open in that God does not know everything that will happen. But Christ is all knowing not just of the present but of the future as well, which we see in this passage. But the other doctrine that is hated in is the doctrine of election or God choosing and acting to bring those who are his chosen to salvation. Not based on anything good to them. People can stomach many times certain aspects of the gospel, but they hate the bondage of the will and God's sovereignty in salvation.

Yet it is these doctrines as believers that are our hope, and without them there would be no hope of anyone coming to Christ. There would be no hope of Christ's plan coming to pass and keeping those who are his unless he knows everything past, present and future. And it is hard to run to Christ if we think that he is unaware, and cannot control or bring change or orchestrate his good purposes. If salvation is not of the Lord but up to every single person then why pray for God to change hearts? These Bible truths are given not only that we would know the true Christ but trust in him.

So look at verse 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.)**" Jesus says of this larger group of disciples that there are "some who do not believe." This is what we love and also struggle with when it comes to the Scripture and the words of Christ - they both reveal Jesus and who he is, but they also reveal who we are. They reveal our sin and unbelief. There is no hiding from God. God knows all about us and his word also exposes our inner life that we think is hidden. Heb. 4:12 says, "**For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**" I am always amazed how this ancient book can speak so accurately and powerfully exposing who we truly are.

And we shouldn't be surprised because we know the author of this book. Jesus knew that many in the crowd, not all but many did not believe. And John gives a little explanation of Jesus' knowledge, "**For Jesus knew from the beginning (there is prior knowledge, not just present knowledge) who those were who did not**

believe.” Now here is the question? What does it mean “from the beginning”? The beginning of what? Well if he is eternal Christ who has always existed you have to say from the beginning of eternity, in other words always. The phrase seems to echo back to the first verse of this gospel, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** He has always known what is in man. Now it would be really easy to say that he knows about people generally that they are sinners but does not know people specifically, but look at how the verse bends, “and who it was who would betray him.” He knows specifically what Judas would do. He is never caught off guard by the decisions and action of man.

But it also teaches that there is no hiding from Jesus. There is no hypocrisy before him because he knows the truth about you. If you are unbeliever, there is no hiding. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God, and everyone will one day face him. Are you ready? Have you trusted Christ? If you are a believer, this should be the greatest of comforts. I am never alone. That means wherever I am, whatever location, struggle, or temptation, I am never in the battle alone, and he knows all about me specifically and give whatever I need for the battle at hand. So often we forget the glorious comfort of Christ’s omniscience. He gets us and understands and is able and willing to help us as his people. Glory in this truth. It is him that we need.

Then he rounds out and repeats a teaching that we have seen through the Bread of Life discourse. He never backs down from this truth or tries to soften its edges. He says in verse 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.’”** He is explaining their unbelief. And it is extraordinary because remember these are the ones that witnessed and experienced the glory of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand in the wilderness. People often think, if I was just there, then I would believe. If Jesus came back and caused me to float out of my chair then I would believe. If Jesus would write his name in the clouds then I would believe. And it forgets two truths. One is that our hearts are dead and lifeless before God, which we have just said. You see if we left to ourselves we are just like the crowd. We would not believe no matter what Christ did. And the second error is to believe that faith is self-generated rather than God-generated gift from his hand. That is what is meant with the term “granted.” Faith is gifted by the Father through the Spirit so that one believes in the Son.

And I cannot tell you how much this truth has encouraged my heart both in evangelism and in my own personal walk. In evangelism, although some did not believe but some did, and why? Because Jesus preached the Bread of Life discourse and the Father granted or gifted faith to them through the Spirit. The reason why we are hear tonight is because someone opened the gospel to us, and the Father granted faith so that Jesus would not be a curse word but a precious Saviour and Lord. And it is encouraging in my walk, because if he can give life and change here, he can take my life and truly make it a trophy of his grace. My potential is never in me. My great potential is in the one who has all knowledge and has the ability and power to conform Christ in me. My plea for you tonight is to look at this text and realize God is still active and even in the face of so much unbelief he can bring life and change. Praise God for his grace.