

John 6.24-35  
St Stephens

Aug 1-2, 2009  
Sat & Sunday

## **Believing in Jesus: Stop, Look and Lean!**

### **The Spirituality of Jewish People:**

People were divided into 2 categories: **the righteous and the sinners.**

- The difference between them was **what they did.** How they acted. How they lived.

The **tipping point** between them was in their response to the law, their obedience, their works:

- The righteous obeyed God's law and the sinners didn't.
- The righteous did the works of God and the sinners didn't.

This is not such a bad way of sorting people out. Jesus would say again and again that you can **tell a tree by its fruit.** How a person behaves is a reliable indicator of what they believe. The **outside is a faithful readout of the inside.**

Now here's the **question** that concerned Jesus. **How do you change people,** outside and inside?

Well, the thinking of the **Jews** went – '**just change the outside**'. Behave differently. Act differently. Work differently. Fix the outside and the inside will follow along. But the problem is, this doesn't work.

If you try and fix the outside but haven't changed the inside, you will **revert.** Every time. **The outside does not have the power** to change the inside. We are **an 'inside out' operation.** The heart is the control room of your life. It directs everything. One of our reformers said, 'What the heart wants, the will chooses and the mind excuses.' That is true; it is how people work.

So what Jesus knew and what he taught was that to change the **outside**, you have to change the **inside**. To change the **fruit**, you have to change the **root**. You have to change the **heart**.

As we step into August this summer we are going to spend most of the month looking at the **sixth chapter of John**. It is a famous and profound chapter of the bible, and it is all about changing the 'root' of the tree, about **changing the heart**.

You might remember that it starts out with a miracle, the **feeding of the 5000**.

*"Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted... So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves."*

(John 6:11, 13)

The feeding of the 5000 was one of the few miracles that were recorded in all **four gospels**. Most of the miracles of Jesus were mentioned in one or two, or perhaps three of the gospels. But only a select few were mentioned in all four. The resurrection of Jesus is recorded in all four, but his birth is only recorded in two. The feeding of the 5000, though, is in all four. That gives you an indication of how important this miracle was to all the writers of the gospels.

John had a special word for miracles like this. He called them '**signs**'.

*"When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, 'Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!' When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself."*

(John 6:14-15)

You know what a **sign** is; a sign is something that **points to something** beyond it, something more important than the sign itself. That is what John thought miracles were. They were signs that pointed to something important and profound.

The miracle of feeding 5000 people with a little bit of bread and fish **pointed to something important** about life and about Jesus. The crowd that was there thought so too. They got so excited about what they had seen Jesus do that they wanted to grab him and **make him King**.

Just think about this a bit – they had found a guy who could **feed the masses**. Food was hard enough to come buy in that ancient world Here was a guy who could feed thousands. *'Put him in charge of the government! Then we'd have something! Free food for life! And did you notice how he healed all those people! A cradle to grave healthcare system to top them all!!'* There are a lot of people who think **this is the way to change the world**.

Jesus wouldn't have anything to do with it. We're told that he **snuck out** and headed up into the hills by himself.

**Why?** Well, because he knew that if you **fixed all the external problems** of the world – food and clothing and housing and medical care and education and government – and this is a list of very important issues - if they all worked very well, you would **still have the biggest problem of all** – the **unchanged heart** - and all the other problems would return in short order. We would revert.

Jesus knew that the biggest challenge in life is **not outside us but inside us**. So he came to fix something far more difficult than the externals of life. He didn't come to run the government; **he came to fix the heart**. BTW, if you fix the heart, you are **well on the way** to fixing every other important problem.

But they were interested in the **externals**. So... they **searched** for him everywhere, up in the hills and along the shore line and into the villages – but couldn't find him. **They didn't give up.** They kept asking and searching and hunting for him. After a day or two they finally ran him down **on the other side of the lake.**

That's where we **pick up the conversation** in our passage today. Remember what Jesus is trying to help them see, and watch how he responds to them:

*Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give you...*

John 6.27

Jesus says **there is food that perishes and food that will last.**

That's true, isn't it! There are things **you want** and you get and all of a sudden you **don't care for them** so much any more. They don't last. They don't satisfy. They don't do what you hoped they would do for you.

How many times have you gone to **the mall** and found that out? One of my girls was at the mall earlier this summer and got a dress and brought it home and tried it on. She looked and looked at it and finally said, *'How come this doesn't look as good as it did in the mall?'* That is actually a profound question!

What is it about our desires that makes them so hard to satisfy? This is the great challenge of the heart.

Thousands of years ago, Solomon asked the same kind of thing,  
*"Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content."*

Ecc 1:8

Say, **'never satisfied'** with me...

Jesus said it like this: *'It is foolish to spend all your resources laboring for the food which perishes'*

He's got a point. What he is not saying is *'give up your jobs. Quit your career. Forget about your work'*. Maybe some of us were hoping he would say that. Nope. What he is saying is that these things are **not where we should put our greatest efforts** in life. 'Put your greatest efforts into the things that matter.' *'Labor for the food which endures to eternal life. Work for what lasts.*

Ok. *'You've got my attention'* they said.

*"What must we do to do the works of God?"*

John 6.28

Again and again in the hour of crisis in their lives people in the Bible ask **this question**, *"What must I do to be saved?"* In moments when we stand before God, we have this sharp, crushing sense that we **haven't done enough**, that we **aren't good enough**. And so we ask, 'What must we do?' Can't you just see the people lean in towards Jesus, their minds racing? *"What is the work he wants us to do? Pray more? Give more? Memorize the Torah? Make it up to Jerusalem for the great feasts more often? Leave our homes and follow him?"* What is it, then, that God wants us to do?

Jesus' answer is stunning...

*"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom he has sent"*

John 6.29

That's it. Just **believe** in him. Don't work, but believe. No demands to keep the law. No demands to be more religious. Just believe in him. They could hardly have been more stunned.

It's worth thinking about what Jesus is saying to them; let me give you **three 'believe' words to unpack it: 'Stop, Look, & Lean'**

**'Stop'** is the first word of belief. Stop all your incessant doing. Stop trying to prove yourself. Quit trying to be good enough. You aren't. You won't be. Not in this life anyway, and not by yourself - ever. Quit trying to earn your way. You can't.

Haven't you noticed that you have this **ongoing project in your life to prove yourself?** It shows up when you get quickly defensive or explosively angry. It shows up when relentlessly and ruthlessly pursue ambitions that cease to make much sense. Most of us have a lifelong commitment to proving ourselves. Here is **Jesus' word** about this: **Resign**, resign, resign. It is a hopeless project!

Give up on your decency and take mine. I give it to you.

Give up on your goodness and take mine. It's a gift for you.

Give up on your failures and take my forgiveness.

Give up on fixing yourself and let me do it.

**'Look'** is the second word of belief.

By that I mean **look at Christ**. Look at who he really is. Look at the facts about Jesus, the truth about Jesus, the reality of Jesus. Most people in America today do **not believe there is such a thing as spiritual truth**. They think all spiritual matters are just a matter of **opinion**, your or mine or that of others. But there is spiritual fact and spiritual truth. Who Jesus is is not just a matter of my opinion or your opinion. It is a matter of truth and fact. Take a hard look at him, get close to him, read about him, and be confident that what the bible says about Jesus is true. He claims to be **'the one sent by God'**. That is **true or false**. He claims to be the **bread of life** and the **savior of the world**. The bible says he fed 5000 people with a few loaves, walked on water and rose from the dead. We are not talking about opinions here, we are talking about fact, about truth, about reality that you can **know**.

The **vitality of your faith** depends on this knowledge, this

**confidence that we are dealing with reality**, and that will grow if you will look at Jesus, read the scriptures and look to him to know him as he really is. For some of us here today, this is an important word. Because your faith has grown weak. You don't know what to say when friends say, 'Well, that's just your opinion!' Look at Jesus. Look deeply and look long. Read the gospels and look.

The **Facts** about Christ will strengthen your **faith** in Christ. The **Truth** of God will undergird your **trust** in God. If you will look.

'**Lean**' is the third word of belief.

It is possible to believe some facts about Jesus but not to trust him. To have some convictions about him, but yet not yield to him.

**(Chair Illustration)**

When he invites us to faith, he says to us,

Come to me. Listen to me. Yield to me. Believe in me. Trust in me.  
Depend on me. Lean on me. Do exactly what I say! Stick with me.  
No matter what. No matter where...

Maybe there are some of us here today who can see that you have **been holding back**. That your convictions are solid, but you have still **held onto control** of your own life. Maybe today you could **release that** to Jesus, and **learn to lean** on him.

These are the words of faith: Stop, Look and Lean.

**Prayer**

Three words of faith:

**Stop** proving yourself

**Look** at the truth about Jesus

**Lean** on Him, trust him, follow him.

This is how he heals your heart.