

John 6.60-71
St Stephens

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Sat & Sunday

Tough Stuff!

This August we have been looking at the **sixth chapter of John**. It is a famous and profound chapter of the bible, and it is all about **changing the heart**.

I want to start with a look at the **bookends** of this chapter. You remember that the chapter starts out with a miracle, the **feeding of the 5000**. The crowd got so excited about what they had seen Jesus do that they wanted to grab him and **make him King**. There were some 15-20,000 people there (5000 men plus women and children) who were so enthusiastic that they wanted to put Jesus in charge of the government! So at the start of the chapter, Jesus and his disciples are riding a large **wave of public enthusiasm**. People were excited about Jesus, and they streamed from miles around to get near him.

I can imagine the **excitement of the apostles at the team meeting that night**. 'Wow! This is really going well!! Have you ever seen anything like this? Just wait till we get down to Jerusalem.'

But the second **bookend** comes at **the end of the chapter**, when all the excitement was over...

...After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him."

(John 6:66)

John tells us that almost **everyone left him**. Look carefully at the 66th verse. John says that these thousands of '*disciples*' '*turned back*'. They '*no longer walked with him*.' Those are **loaded phrases**. This is a dramatic **turning of the tide**. I can imagine the team meeting that night, how **discouraged** the apostles must have been, how confused.

What happened between these bookends? Well, we find the key in vs 60...

they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"
(John 6:60)

At least three times over several days, **Jesus had said things so offensive** that by the end of the chapter, the crowds gave up on him and left.

This kind of thing **happened more than once** in the years of Jesus' ministry. Just when things seemed like they were going really well, just when word was getting out and crowds were gathering, Jesus would **say something almost insulting**. Really hard. And people would walk away fuming.

Think with me about **this phrase, 'hard saying'** for a moment. There are some things in the Bible that are hard to understand because we have **lost the language, or lost the culture**. Those can be hard sayings of a sort. But that is not what they meant by the phrase. What they meant by 'hard saying' was that Jesus said something that they understood well enough. And it was **offensive**. And it seems that **he intended to offend them**. So they **took offense** and left.

We like to talk about **'Jesus, meek and mild.'** We talk about his kindness, his patience, and his mercy. If you think about this a bit, you might wonder why such a **nice guy** was ever crucified!!

But here in this chapter we find a **'Jesus mean and wild'!** I've been reading a book this week on the hard sayings of Jesus. That is its title, *'Jesus, mean and wild!'* (M Galli, *Jesus Mean and Wild*)

Do you know that Jesus, the one who sometimes says offensive things, who does explosive things, the one who can walk into a church and overturn the money tables, the one shows up at a funeral and

raises the dead, the enters a room and calls out demons – the one who is not quite tame, not quite safe?

Annie Dillard wrote,

'Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT (on) a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews.'

(quoted in M Galli, *Jesus Mean and Wild*, p.18)

Look at the kinds of things **Jesus said** that were so disturbing...

*"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into **hell**."*

Matthew 5:29-30

That's pretty serious stuff. And all this talk about **hell**. Do you know that meek and mild Jesus talked about hell more than anyone in the Bible?

How about this one:

*If anyone comes to me and does not **hate** his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*

Luke 14:26

No way to sugar coat that one. And speaking of hate, how about this?

*No servant can serve two masters, for either he will **hate** the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. ""*

Luke16:13

Just to make sure we **offend everyone**, let's give these a hearing:

"Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

"Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.

"Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

"Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."

Luke 6:24-26

You had to think twice before you invited this guy to a party! And in our passage today he does it again:

"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you."

John 6.53

There is hardly anything that would be so **deeply offensive to a Jew** raised in the kosher traditions of ancient Israel as eating flesh with blood still in it – or drinking blood. This was not done! Not ever. And human flesh and blood!! Cannibalism?

And Jesus intentionally used that imagery. Repeatedly. You have to conclude he was being **intentionally offensive**.

Or how about this one from the same chapter:

The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. John 6.63

Literally this is, 'The flesh profits nothing.' So quit 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. So, he says, '**resign**'.

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.
That's the **gospel**. And **it has a bite to it**.

Mark Twain once said, *"It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me; it's the parts I do understand..."*

Why does he do this? Because he means to change the heart, and it will take **stiff medicine**. We would much rather have him fix the externals, but he knows that the externals won't matter unless you fix the internals.

You might notice when you look carefully at the hard sayings of Jesus, that they most often land on **the allegiances of the heart**. John Calvin, hundreds of years ago, observed that *'the human heart is an idol factory.'* An idol is a substitute for God. You and I are always making **substitutes for the living God, and we are good at it**. Money. Possessions. Our loves and hatreds can all be substitutes for God. **Even good things**, like our families can take God's place in our hearts. Human accomplishment and pride are things we treasure. **We ourselves** are the greatest idols of all. Self-love and self-fulfillment are the most dangerous idols. In the west today, **human desire is the ruling god**.

You see these Jesus engaging people again and again in the gospels over these issues. He goes right at them. It's 'shock and awe.' As FF Bruce put it, *"What they want, he would not give. What he offered, they would not take."*

Jesus means to free our heart from our idols. So he provokes us, offends us, deliberately, with words that land hard. And as his ministry goes on he begins to **talk about death, his death** as the way to **life**. About eating his flesh and drinking his blood. About the cross, his cross, as the way to a new kind of life, an eternal kind of life. He will go on to talk about **our death**, about dying **with him** that we

might **live with him**. This is stiff medicine. But it cannot be avoided.

What do you do when Jesus offends you?

- **Take Offense at Him. Give up on him.** Walk away from him. 'Turn back.' People still do that today.
- **Try and Tame Him.** Domesticate him. 'Uhh, he really didn't mean what he said! It was a deliberate overstatement designed to provoke thought.' Well, true enough. But if you find that you have an explanation for everything, and that his words no longer provoke you, no longer disturb you, no longer get under your skin, maybe you might think a bit about what you are really doing. It is just **another way of walking away...**

- **Stick with Him**

"So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.""

John 6:67-69

Who else will you go to? It's a good question. But these disciples had settled the matter. They knew Jesus was the one. And note it well, Peter and these disciples didn't understand any better than the others, not yet they didn't. In a few more months, Peter would rebuke Jesus for talking again about the cross. So he didn't understand any better than those who left, but **they would stick with him, even when they didn't fully understand him.** Let me repeat that...

When I first came to Christ, one of the short gospel tracts that was so helpful to me was written by Bill Bright of Campus Crusade back in 1965. It was called the **Four Spiritual Laws**, and the first of the four laws was this familiar phrase: *"God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life."*

When you read some of the hard sayings of Jesus, though, I wonder if a more honest phrasing of that first law might be, "*God loves you and has a difficult plan for your life.*" There will be **difficult seasons** and there will be **difficult words**.

But **if you stick with him**, even when you can't figure it out, especially when you can't figure it out, he will bring you through to something wonderful, to a new kind of life and a new kind of you. Completely new. Stick with him!