

THE POWER OF RESPONDING (AND NOT RESPONDING) TO GOD'S DRAWING GRACE

John 6:60-71 - "When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" [61] But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? [62] Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? [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. [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.) [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." [66] After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. [67] So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" [68] Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, [69] and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." [70] Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." [71] He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him."

There is a dark side to this text. You can't help but feel a corner being turned. The Jesus story isn't a fairy-tale with a happy-ever-after story line. There are reactions of unbelief and rebellion. His own disciples were "*grumbling*" about His words (61). They were *miffed* and "*offended*" by the same Lord who had multiplied the loaves and fish (61). Everyone wanted to crown Him king then. "*Many*" of these same disciples now gave up on Jesus and "*no longer walked with Him*" (66).

John pulls back the veil on the inner sorrow of Jesus with our Lord's amazing question, "*Are you leaving me too? Is everyone turning away from me?*" (66). It's an *honest* question. Jesus seems to be entertaining the genuine possibility that those whose selection had been a matter of all-night prayer might finally give up on Him. Whatever theology you choose to bring into this text Jesus doesn't assume their continued faithfulness is a *given*. We can't imagine the heart-break in Jesus as He asks whether they'll stay with Him or not.

That's where we are today in our study. This is miles removed from the accolades of the wonder-seekers. And it's right here - at this seemingly low point - that we can find some of the deepest teachings on faith and discipleship. It's a hard place but a good place to study.

1) **FAITH MUST REST DOWN ON AN ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORDS OF JESUS CHRIST**

This is very important. The disciples are having a hard time with what Jesus is saying because they *think* they have His meaning right but they *don't*. We see here it's possible to *hear* Jesus but *misunderstand* Jesus. Watch it happen:

John 6:60-63 - "When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "*This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?*" [61] But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? [62] Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? [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.*"

John doesn't specifically identify which of Jesus' words were the words these disciples couldn't listen to. All we get from John is the general complaint, "*This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?*"(60).

But it's not hard to guess what "*saying*" they had in mind. Probably they were thinking of the words of Jesus in verses 53-56 - "So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. [54] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. [55] For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. [56] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."

And Jesus, seeing their confusion, searches their hearts with another question about an event still in the future - verses 61b-63 - "...Do you take offense at this? [62] Then *what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?* [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.*"

And we immediately wonder what Jesus' ascension has to do with this conversation. *Why* introduce that subject right here? And the answer to *that* question is linked to Jesus' second comment about His words being *spirit* and *life*.

Here's what Jesus is saying. They're not hearing His words properly. He's not introducing **cannibalism** when He talks about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. We looked at those verses in detail last week. Here Jesus is explaining these words are conveying **spiritual** interaction, not physical eating.

And to make this point even more strongly He asks if they would **still** be offended if they saw His **physical body** ascending to the Father right before their eyes. Because that kind of physical ascension would be **impossible** if Jesus had commanded them to eat that physical body and drink that physical blood.

And here's what all of this had to do with us. It is easy to take offense - or to brush off lightly - something we have recorded in our Bible of the Words of Life simply because we haven't taken the time to think through to a correct understanding of what we read. Jesus reminds us reading and hearing isn't always the same as thinking through and understanding. Sometimes our **first** understanding isn't the **correct** one.

And we need this reminder because there is a strong movement in evangelical churches to keep everything light and easy. Leave the doctrine for the theologians and give us the simple practical stuff. Then Jesus reminds us His words are **spirit** and **life**. They're worth thinking deeply about.

Consider this. How many times - in Bible studies, devotions, church services, times of personal reading and study - **how many times** do we need these words of Jesus **re-spoken** to our hearts - **"The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life! Are you seeing that yet? Are you just lumping these words in with all the words from ABC and CBS and the blogs of the celebrities? My words aren't like those words. There's no life in those words! The Spirit doesn't work through them! Think deeply and carefully about what I say to you!"**

We are constantly being trained to **hear quickly and lightly** in this age. Messages are shorter and shorter and less complex. Our brains are oriented around **sound-bites and video images**. And don't think that doesn't have an effect on the Christian community that is called to feed on a Book with long sentences and paragraphs.

The words of Jesus and the apostles require **understanding** and **diligence**. They're **meant** to take effort. Remember, **Satan** works through the level of our **desires**. The Holy Spirit works through **truth rightly understood and treasured**. And immediately our thoughts are called back to **John 6:27** - **"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.** For on him God the Father has set his seal."

2) JESUS SEARCHES THE APPETITES AND AMBITIONS OF THOSE WHO PROFESS TO BELIEVE IN HIM

John 6:64-66 - **"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.) [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.' [66] **After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.**"

I wonder how this group of disciples reacted when they heard Jesus say some of them didn't believe in Him. John means for us to notice that these graciously revealing words of Jesus didn't bring about **caution and repentance**. Rather those exposed were miffed to the point that **"many"** (not just **Judas**, but **"many"**) of them **"turned back and no longer walked with him"** (66). In other words, they quit following completely and permanently. They wanted nothing further to do with Jesus. How dare He question their sincerity?

And how exactly did Jesus **determine** sincerity of belief? How was He **measuring** when He said **"...there are some of you who do not believe."** (66)? That's a very tough question. What we know for sure is Jesus lays out **two issues** in these verses.

First, John tells us plainly Jesus knew who were true believers and who weren't. He even knew who would betray Him. This isn't the first time John includes these ideas in his gospel account. John first alerts us to false belief in **John 2:23-25** - **"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing."** [24] But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, **because he knew all people** [25] and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man."

Jesus knew the *motives* of the applauding crowds. He looked deep into the *aspirations and hopes* of His followers. Some loved multiplied bread but didn't like to hear about His broken, mutilated flesh and blood. False believers *use* Jesus more than they *obey* Jesus. They like having their needs met but refuse to take up their cross in sacrificial devotion.

Second, Jesus reminds them only those drawn by the Father would come *redemptively* - **John 6:65** - "And he said, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.'" People could *marvel* without the drawing of the Father. They could be *fascinated* without the drawing of the Father. But they couldn't come *redemptively* - to find *eternal life* - without the Father's work.

I spent most of last Sunday morning dealing with *how* the Father draws and how that drawing is related to our hearing and believing. But I want to scratch into it once more just briefly.

If the only verse of Scripture we had was **John 6:65** we could be excused for thinking Father God picks whom He will draw and whom He won't. In other words, the drawing could be taken as the *only random factor* in determining who is saved and who is lost.

Except. Except there are other passages that pick up this very same theme and flesh it out in greater detail. I gave three or four examples last Sunday. I want to look at one more today.

Consider **Matthew 13:10-16** - "Then the disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' [11] And he answered them, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. [12] For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. [13] This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. [14] Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.' [15] For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' [16] But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear."

It's easy to forget that the crowd didn't get to hear this explanation of the parable from Jesus. The parable itself wraps up with Jesus benediction in **verse 9** - "He who has ears, let him hear." That's it. Jesus closes His sermon and walks away. All the crowd hears is the story of a farmer planting his crop. Period.

And the question I want to ask is *how is anyone supposed to get saved from that?* Would you or I have naturally come up with the exact explanation of **verses 18-23** completely on our own? I seriously doubt it. So how fair is this? The disciples - those already *following* Jesus get the whole explanation. The crowd - those only interested in seeing Jesus do neat works and miracles - they get nothing. It all seems backwards - **Verse 11** - "And he answered them, 'To you (the disciples) it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (the unbelieving crowd) it has not been given.'"

And then Jesus explains in detail what He only mentions briefly in John chapter 6. He explains the mystery of the *Father's drawing* and links it permanently to the *hearing* of those drawn:

Matthew 13:12-16 - "For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. [13] This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. [14] Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.' [15] For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' [16] But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear."

The key verse is **verse 12** - "For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." Don't miss the fact that everyone *has* something already given. It's crucial to Jesus' point that even in describing the *"one who has not"* Jesus can still say that *"even what he has will be taken away."* Everybody *has* in Jesus' accounting.

I take this to be exactly what John meant in **John 1:9** - **"The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."** John clearly says everyone has been **lit up** by Jesus in some way. There is revelation in the created world. There is the revelation of conscience, which Paul calls the law of God written on the heart of mankind. **God has done something in Christ that is as broad in effect as was the sin of Adam.** That is the Scripturally undeniable truth of **Romans 5:18** - **"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."**

This divine grace is the key in Jesus' words - **"To him who has more will be given...."** (Matthew 13:12). Notice - everything is **given**. Jesus' words are **grace** words. Everything is **given**, not **earned**. And what about the stuff this individual already **"has"** - **"To him who has...."**, and **"To him who has not, even what he has...."** Where did he or she get that? It too was given. Everything in Jesus' words is freely, sovereignly **given** by God.

But here's the key. The grace is **given** as the grace is **used**. What do individuals **do** with this **God-initiated, grace-filled drawing**? That's the point Jesus is expanding in Matthew chapter 13. And it relates to how much **additional grace** people will receive - **Matthew 13:12** - **"For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."**

People play a role in the Father's drawing. They don't and can't **initiate** it. But people who **yield** and **respond** get **more**. People who reject and refuse lose what they were freely given. And the **giving** and the **taking away** are both God's sovereign decision.

Then comes the clincher for the parable of the soils. Now you have to put all these threads together because Jesus is telling us **why** the disciples get the full explanation and the crowd does not - **Matthew 13:10-13** - **"Then the disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' [11] And he answered them, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. [12] For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. [13] This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.'"**

The disciples had **responded** to Christ's call. They had obeyed Jesus when all they had to go on was the bare **"Come and follow me and I will make you fishers of men."** But they used what they had been given and now they were being given more.

The crowd had seen many miracles from Jesus. They had rejected the law and the prophets. Jesus told them they had not listened carefully to Moses (**John 5**). He told them they searched the Scriptures but refused to come to Jesus. And now, they are getting less. They didn't get the interpretation of the parable that was given to the disciples. They had closed their eyes and ears too often.

But there's still more. Jesus answers another very important question we might all have from John chapter six. **"Doesn't Father God want these people to respond and come? Is He just randomly shutting them out?"**

Jesus **tells us** that's not the case at all - **Matthew 13:14-15** - **"Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.' [15] For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them."** God **wants** to heal them. God **wants** to reach them. That's His will. Jesus **says so** - **verse 15** - **"I would heal them...."** God draws. God gives grace and light. But, says Jesus, it can either grow in fullness and momentum or it can turn to deafness and blindness.

I don't believe in **eternal insecurity**. I never have to rely on my performance for my safety in Jesus Christ. I merely keep believing. It's the **believer** who is eternally secure. I rejoice in that truth. And Jesus presses all of us to see the importance of

standing ongoingly, each moment, in faith. Spiritual life is **cumulative**. Jesus longs to deepen and fortify my life in Him each day.

And all of this relates to Jesus' closing words about Judas. He is very **deliberate** in the way He words what is coming for Judas - **John 6:70-71** - "Jesus answered them, 'Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.' [71] He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him."

To each his own, but I can't escape the force of Jesus' question - "**Did I not choose you, the twelve?**" I get the impression He means for me to answer, "**Yes, you chose twelve. Not eleven. Or twelve, sort of. But yes, you prayed all night and then chose twelve disciples.**"

But it takes more than the first nudges of grace. We open and we close to God's initiating grace. Some are careful and repentant. Some are careless and belittle opportunities and warnings.

I think Judas **heard** these words. I think he **knew** Jesus was talking about him. And **why** this carefully placed warning? Why does Jesus sound this alarm? Is it to teach that being **chosen by Jesus Himself** isn't the same as listening and responding and repenting and following. And I need to hear that grace-filled exhortation every day.