

John, Part 24: The Threshold of Offense

John 6:60 ESV 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.”

- I. We are continuing our verse-by-verse journey through the Gospel of John this morning, and God willing, we will complete chapter 6 next week. It is the longest chapter in John’s relatively concise gospel, but I hope you have enjoyed our time in this amazing portion of this incredible book.
 - A. My goal today is show how Jesus revealed his true identity throughout John 6, and yet regardless of this fact, the people still failed to believe who he was. On the contrary, the more he revealed his true identity, and his redemptive plan for mankind, the more the people became offended and resisted him.
 - B. I hope to convince you that no one has any inherent ability to know God or “figure him out” unless the Lord chooses to reveal himself to us. In many ways, this is the central theme of John 6.
 1. You’ll recall that we began chapter 6 several weeks ago by seeing how Christ fed up to 20,000 men, women and children by multiplying a few small barley loaves and a couple of fish. His **true identity** was revealed as one with authority over created matter; able to alter the laws by which it is usually governed. This was the right of the **Creator** of all things, proving Christ to be God Himself.
 - a) However, you’ll also remember that the people’s reaction to this miracle was to wonder aloud if Jesus was the prophet that Moses prophesied was coming to Israel (which he certainly was!). But in their thinking, Christ was only on the **same level** as Moses or Elijah, so they failed to recognize him as the Ultimate Prophet of Israel, speaking God’s ultimate message.
 - b) On the basis of this miraculous sign, they intended to take him by force and make him their king. It is assumed they thought they could exploit his miraculous power for their own benefit against the Romans. They missed entirely the point of the signs that Christ was performing, and were oblivious to his **true identity**.
 2. Similarly that same night, Christ came to his frightened disciples during a windstorm on the sea; not in a boat, or even by swimming to them, but by walking atop the waves!
 - a) Not only was this further proof that he was “The Great I AM”, ruling over creation, but he also showed his **true identity** as the “Wave-Walker”; the

one who is unshaken by what we call “crisis”, but rather that he was the master over it.

- b) And yet, after seeing such an amazing display, the disciples are unmoved. **Mark 6:51 ESV** And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, **52** for they did not understand about the loaves, but **their hearts were hardened**.
3. When Christ and the disciples finally made it to land, they saw that the crowd he had fed the day before followed them. Jesus pointed out that they had followed him, not in submission to his Lordship, but for another meal.
 - a) They balked at this, asking for yet another sign to prove his **true identity** (namely, more free lunch!). After all, hadn't Moses provided bread from the sky to feed the children of Israel in the desert (Exodus 16)!
 - b) Jesus, however, said that it wasn't Moses that gave the miraculous bread, but the Heavenly Father. And then he dropped another bombshell...**John 6:35 ESV** Jesus said to them, **“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.** He could not offer them anything that would ultimately satisfy them, except himself.
4. Christ then proceeds to tell them in graphic, yet figurative language that only as they fully consume and devour him, taking his life into themselves (as though they were eating his flesh and drinking his blood), would they ever they become satisfied, experiencing true life.
 - a) **John 6:53 ESV** 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.
 - b) Yet those who heard him that day in the synagogue in Capernaum missed the truth of all of this! The Bible tells us in verses 41 and 52 of John 6 that the Jews were arguing, grumbling and complaining. Christ was revealing to them who he really was, but they missed it! Who he **was** wasn't who they **wanted** him to be!
- C. I wonder how many times you or I have missed what Jesus was trying to reveal about himself, his true identity, because of our cultural or religious preconceptions? We had already designed a neat little box to contain Jesus, and we became deeply offended when he refused to sit quietly within it!
- II. This is where many of Jesus disciples find themselves in our text this morning. They are bewildered by what Jesus has said. They are dumbfounded and just a little bit shell-shocked. He is failing to meet their expectations of exactly who the Messiah ought to be and what he should be saying and doing.
 - A. **John 6:60 ESV** When many of his disciples heard it, they said, **“This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”**
 1. When this verse refers to “his disciples” we know that the 12 were present for this exchange, because Jesus will address them directly later.

2. But we also know from other passages in the gospels that there were many others who identified themselves as his disciples, followers and students. So the disciples mentioned here probably includes some of the larger group of unknown and unnamed “disciples” as well.
3. But no matter who is speaking in verse 60, listen again to their conclusion about Jesus’ statement about his being bread from heaven that must be consumed by them, eating his flesh and drinking his blood. They say, “This is a **hard saying**; who can listen to it?”
 - a) If we really want to be followers of Christ, we will all eventually come face to face with these “hard sayings”. When Jesus speaks to our sinful, hardened hearts, there is an immediate, knee-jerk reaction because our flesh is overwhelmed with an unpleasant sense of reality, challenge and conviction by that which is pure, holy and spiritual; like throwing ice water into the face of a sleeping person.
 - b) The many “hard sayings” of Jesus are unapologetically meant by him to wake us, break us, and slay what is earthly and fleshly in us. The hard sayings are the means by which we “count the cost” of following him, as he said in Luke 14. They are where we discover his requirements.

B. Luke 14:25 ESV Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, **26** “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. 27** **Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 28** For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? **29** Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, **30** saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ **31** Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? **32** And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. **33** **So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”**

1. “Whoever does not **love me so much** it feels like they hate everyone else... whoever does not **bear what I bear to the very death**...whoever does not **renounce everything they have**...is **disqualified** from being my disciple. Count the cost of what you’re doing. I won’t just let you jump on my bandwagon.” Are these “hard sayings”? You bet! And who can listen to them? No one in the power of their own fleshly efforts. You’ll lose every time.
2. But oddly, these hard sayings are not the exception with Jesus, they are the rule. And what is the result? **John 6:61 ESV** But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were **grumbling** about this, said to them, “**Do you take offense at this?**” The disciples did not like what Jesus was saying, and they were grumbling openly about their dissatisfaction. But Jesus knew the root cause of their dissatisfaction - they were offended!

- C. In our culture the cardinal sin is to offend someone. Because of this, society has constructed elaborate rules of what to say and how to act in order **not** to offend. Sometimes we call these the rules of “political correctness”. Jesus and the other Gospel writers, however, seem to have little awareness or esteem for these rules which govern our modern times.
1. Furthermore this offensiveness was anticipated as a part Jesus’ ministry prophetically 600 years before he was born in Bethlehem! **Isaiah 8:14 ESV** “And he will become a sanctuary and **a stone of offense** and a **rock of stumbling** to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. **15 And many shall stumble on it.** They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”
 2. Both the Apostles Paul and Peter quoted this verse and applied it to Christ. The great protestant reformer Martin Luther recognized this truth and said, “The Gospel cannot be preached without offense and tumult.”
 3. Reading the scriptures, I would find it hard to conclude that a person who has never been offended by the message of Jesus Christ has ever really heard or embraced it.
- D. You may well say, “But didn’t Paul say to the Corinthians that “we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the Gospel of Christ” (1 Cor 9:12)? And to “give no offense to the Jews or Greeks or to the church of God” (1 Cor 10:32)? Is it not then a contradiction to say that the Gospel should offend?
1. The confusion happens for us when we misunderstand **what exactly** should offend those who hear our message! It should **only** be the claims and demands of Christ that are offensive to the hearts of sinners, never the **hypocrisy, insensitivity and unkindness** of the one proclaiming the gospel.
 2. But Paul said to the Galatians that when we water down the gospel and sand off it’s sharp points and rough edges, we are removing the “offense of the cross” (Gal. 5:11). And that is something he was unwilling to do.
- E. When I speak of the offense of the cross, what do I mean? For a great explanation, take a look at the words of writer David Mathis. “**The cross embodies some of the most offensive things possible you could say about someone in relation to God and eternity. This gruesome death Jesus died, you earned it. The hell Jesus endured, you deserved it, forever. The shame he underwent, the scorn, the disrespect, the hurt — all these are as suitable to us sinners as they’re unsuitable to the sinless one.**” -David Mathis
1. Intrinsically, we want to be masters of our own destiny; and when compared to others, we view ourselves as basically good people.
 2. But the cross says **exactly the opposite** about every living human being. When that reality invades our well-ordered delusions, we are primed and ready to be offended.
- F. It is interesting to me that the statement of Christ’s that seems to have caused the most offense in John chapter 6 was not the requirement to eat Christ’s flesh and drink his blood, but the assertion that he was of heavenly origin, which he made at least 7 times in his discourse with the Jews that day!

1. **John 6:41 ESV** So the Jews grumbled about him, *because he said*, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” **42** They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? *How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?*”
 2. This was so offensive because if he had descended from Heaven, he had come on God’s commission and bearing God’s authority. What he said about them would take on a new weight had he truly come down from the Father in Heaven. They’d much rather think of cute lil Jesus, playing in Daddy’s shop!
 - a) So Jesus, knowing that this had offended them, goes on to say, “*what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?*” If the fact that He descended from the Father gave him credibility, what would his soon coming ascension to his throne at the right hand of the Father say about him after his resurrection?
 - b) The Ascension of Christ would be the ultimate proof of his divinity and acceptance by the Father! John chapter 2 tells us that he was not motivated by the approval of men, yet the Father would soon exalt him and demand that worship be granted to him for all eternity, and it was this that drove him forward.
- III. John 6:63 ESV** 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.”
- A. Those who were grumbling, complaining and arguing about Jesus’ claims were stumbling because they could not perceive the truth through their senses. As Jesus said, “the flesh is no help at all”. We can never discover or accept spiritual truths by means of the flesh. The flesh is of no help to us in making the demands of Jesus more palatable.
1. This is why it is so dangerous to try to relate to God through **subjective** feelings and experiences. When our feelings are not present we want to come to conclusions about our relationship with God that are not true.
 - a) “I don’t feel God, so he isn’t here!”, you say. But Christ says in scripture (which is **objective** and unchanging) **Matthew 28:20b ESV** “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
 - b) “I don’t feel like God’s child, so I must not be!”, you speculate. But Christ has said in the Bible, **John 10:28 ESV** “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”
 2. It is also dangerous to gather mere information about Jesus and assume that you know him when you merely know about him. I can tell you a lot about many singers, actors, and athletes, but I have no idea what makes them laugh or cry; what they are afraid or proud of. But Jesus would have us know him **intimately**. **Psalms 25:14 ESV** The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.
 3. We can only know the true identity of Christ by the help of God’s Spirit. Our fallen and corrupt flesh is of no help at all!

- B. “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 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.)
1. Though they seem offensive to us, the words of Christ are Spirit and Life.
 - a) They are “spirit” in the sense that they are the living Word of God. They are not of earthly origin, higher than all the words of gurus and philosophers. They are superior because they are God’s own words.
 - b) They are **life** because we cannot truly live apart from them.
 2. **Deuteronomy 8:3 ESV** And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that **man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.**
 - a) Remember, Christ said that HE was the manna from Heaven, and John says in chapter 1 that HE was the WORD. Try reading that familiar verse, not in a Charlton Heston, 10 Commandments context, but in a New Covenant, Jesus-as-the-fulfillment-of -everything context!
 - b) **Deuteronomy 8:3 (Sharp Paraphrase)** And he humbled (offended) you and let you hunger and **fed you with Jesus**, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that **man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by Jesus, the Living Word, that comes from the Father.**
 3. It is Christ who reveals the true identity of not only Himself but also of us! You cannot schmooze him, fool him, or pay him off. He knows the true condition of your heart. I ask you this morning - do you really believe or are you drowning in unbelief? He knows.
 - a) The most terrifying thing about being a pastor is knowing that no matter how well or how poorly I present his words to you that in the final day some of you will hear him say, “My words were spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe...” And there will be no argument to be made. He knows.
 - b) Wake up from your sleep today and press through your offense, your apathy and your self righteousness and cry out to the Lord to give you the help of the Spirit to believe, that you might receive life!
- C. **John 6:65 ESV** And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”
1. May the Father grant you admission into the kingdom of his Son this morning!
 2. Do not put it off. Obey his call and be made new this morning.