

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

To whom do you go when you have a big problem? Well, that depends on the nature of the problem, doesn't it? For a small child, no matter what the problem, they will go their parents. If they fall and skin a knee, only mom or dad can really take care of it. If they're scared in a lightning storm, mom and dad are the ones who will bring comfort. If they get hungry, mom and dad will get the food. Small children have it simple, don't they? As we grow older, though, we look to different people to help when we have problems. When you are sick, you go to the doctor. When you're being sued, you go to a lawyer. When your faucet leaks, you go to a plumber.

To get the help you need in a given situation, you need to know two things: 1) What the real problem is and 2) who is qualified to help you with that problem. I'm sure any doctor or even anyone working in customer service will tell you, you have to drill down to the actual problem before you can attempt a solution. Doctors will ask lots of questions and do tests so they can determine the real problem. A customer support person will ask questions and get information to discover what the real problem is so a solution can be given. Once the nature of the problem is clarified, it's also clear to whom the person should go for a solution. The doctor may refer the patient to a specialist. The customer support rep may forward the call to a specialist who handles the particular problem.

Friends, it is my prayer today that God would lead you to understand from his Word what your real problem is. Most in this world don't know what it is. And even if we think we know, we often don't live like we do. And second I would pray that God would give you clarity to know to whom you shall go for the solution to your real problem. Let's look at the text.

John 6:60-69 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

What is the "hard teaching" the followers of Jesus were speaking about? It is the teaching we've been considering the previous three Sundays. Again, after the feeding of the 5,000, crowds came to Jesus intending to make him king. Their thinking was that Jesus would provide food for them every day. Jesus needed to use blunt, even shocking language, to set them straight. It wasn't regular bread they needed on a daily basis. What they really needed was bread that would give them eternal life. Jesus told them, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven."

They still didn't get it, so he really shocked them. **"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."** That was last week's sermon. Consume Jesus, the bread of life, and his forgiveness, eternal life and salvation belong to you!

Today's reading tells us the reaction of those present. "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" They thought his words were harsh, strong... even offensive. Eat his flesh and drink his blood? Who can tolerate listening to such teaching? They had enough and didn't want to hear anymore.

There were two reasons they took offense at such words. 1) The first is obvious. Certainly they had some vivid thoughts running through their head of eating flesh and drinking blood. 2) But there's a second reason they were offended too. Some there seemed to understand what Jesus was getting at. He was telling them that he was not a king who would bring them a comfortable earthly life and put food on their tables every day. He was a king who came to give eternal life. Jesus wasn't primarily about the physical right now, but more about the spiritual now and forever. That he would claim such lofty things about himself was offensive to them.

So Jesus said, **“What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!”** So Jesus is saying, “I told you I came down from heaven and I bring eternal life from heaven. If you see me ascend back into heaven, won't that be the final proof that all I say is true? Won't that be the irrefutable evidence that I did not come to be a king who gives free bread for this life, but an eternal king who gives living bread for eternal life? What will you say then?”

Jesus struggled so hard to knock their thinking off their decaying and dying sinful lives. He tried to shock them into seeing the bigger picture and the eternal blessings he came to bring. But the sad truth is, many of them didn't believe. Jesus lost disciples that day.

I've heard people say many times... “If only Jesus would do a miracle in my life today, I would be his follower.” It's not true. Maybe more would become followers, but for the wrong reasons. Think about this: Jesus did a miracle when he fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves and two small fish... and the end result was: he LOST followers! People wanted him to be the kind of savior *they* wanted, not the true Savior who he was. They rejected Jesus' Word when what he said and taught didn't jive with their way of thinking.

Friends, let's stop here and think about this. Are there teachings of Jesus that conflict with your way of thinking? Is your faith in danger because you are trying to turn Jesus into the kind of savior you think you need, instead of allowing him to be the real Savior you truly need?

I've run into this many times in my ministry. People will say, “Pastor, *I* think and believe... it makes sense to me...” and I say, “But here's what God says.” And they say, “Well, I just can't believe that. My way makes more sense so it's what I will believe.” When we think along these lines, we are in grave danger of losing our faith and our eternal salvation.

Some quick examples. Scripture says we are utterly sinful... sinful to the core... from the time of our birth. We commit sins because sin is deep in our heart. We are utterly incapable of pleasing God. We cannot do enough good that we would deserve God's favor. This is clearly taught in Scripture. But some are offended at such teaching. “I can't believe that! I think people deep down are good. I think people are essentially good, but do some bad. Not that people are essentially bad and do some good.” The teaching is of the Bible is an offense to our natural way of thinking. So some simply reject it.

Another example: Jesus clearly said that the bread we eat in communion *is* his body, and the wine *is* his blood. For some this is an offense and difficult to believe. I had a member once who was a vegetarian, and the teaching of Scripture about communion was offensive to her. A hard teaching she struggled with for many years.

Another offense to the natural mind is the cross of Christ. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. We rejoice. The world scoffs. And is offended. I don't need it! I don't want it! I will find my own way and make my own peace.

Others here God's teaching about abortion, homosexuality, or the roles of man and woman, and those are hard. They deny the Bible's teachings because of their own opinion and their own conclusions in the matter.

And finally, even the basic premise of Jesus in this text and its context is offensive. This world is sinful and dying and passing. It's temporary and therefore secondary in importance to God's kingdom which is eternal. This is an offense to our way of thinking.

In all of these matters, many, many people... many who even call themselves followers of Jesus... say, "**This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?**" And they don't. And they are no longer followers of Jesus. Jesus lost many followers that day. Jesus loses many followers these days as well when Jesus words and teaching conflict with the world or our natural way of thinking.

So here is the bottom line. Will we follow him and trust him on *our* terms or *his* terms? Is Jesus a king who gives us a free meal every day? Or one who gives us nourishment for eternity? It can't be both ways. Is he a partial savior who gives us some strength to work ourselves into a right relationship with God? Or do we trust him as our complete Savior because we are unable to be perfect? It can't be both ways. In every teaching of Jesus, there is what Jesus said and taught, and contradicting it in some way is what *we* think Jesus *should* be saying. It can't be both ways. Jesus Word is the truth. May God give us faith to trust Jesus fully and to submit our way of thinking to Jesus in every way.

And what of the others? Did they get it? Did they now understand who Jesus was, why he came and what kind of salvation he offered? Listen to this:
"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. So many leaving. So many disillusioned with Jesus. What about the twelve? Would they leave too?

Simon Peter (the one who always seemed to be the most outspoken – for better or worse) **answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."**

There were times when the disciples didn't get it, when they were confused, off base, and clueless. But Peter sure hit here, didn't he? **"Lord, to whom shall we go?"** Peter recognized his biggest problem and need. He needed much more than a free lunch every day. He needed most the salvation of his soul because of his sin and rebellion. He needed something much more important than a comfortable life here on earth. He needed blessings for eternity. Peter recognized his problem. And he knew and believed that there was only one possible person that could help him with a problem this big. Jesus. Jesus. Only Jesus. **"Lord, to whom shall we go?"** There were no other possible options. He said with faith that could only have been worked by the heavenly Father himself, **"You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."**

God has revealed some amazing things in Scripture. Some of those things are hard, even impossible, to grasp with our reason. Some of those things even strike us as offensive. When you find yourself struggling to accept a certain teaching in God's Word, take yourself back to basics. What is your biggest problem? Sin has broken my connection to God. What can I do about it? Nothing. Who is the only one who can fix it? Jesus. Has he done it completely? He has. And he who loved me so much, always speaks the truth to me. Always tells me what's best for me as I live my life in service to him... even when it's hard for me to understand. And so we join our hearts with Peter's in his confession. In your life there will be problems, questions, struggles, confusion. Whenever that happens, may God strengthen our faith that we may confess with Peter: **"Lord, to whom shall we go? YOU have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."** Amen.