

## John 6:59-69

This chapter is a pivotal chapter in the Gospel of John. When the chapter opens, the new movement of what will later be known in the book of Acts as The Way is a popular movement. Crowds of people come around Jesus. Many call themselves His disciples. But I want us to notice how this chapter ends. I won't give it away if you don't already know what happens. Let's look at the verses.

<sup>59</sup> These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

<sup>60</sup> Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this* said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"

<sup>61</sup> But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble?"

<sup>62</sup> *What* then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?

<sup>63</sup> It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

<sup>64</sup> But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.

<sup>65</sup> And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

<sup>66</sup> As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

<sup>67</sup> So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"

<sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

<sup>69</sup> We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

As you can see, the number of followers dwindled from many down to 12 and one of them was going to betray Jesus.

Now notice that John calls them disciples. However, throughout the text, it becomes very apparent that they are not true disciples, for by the end of the chapter all but the 12 abandon Jesus.

It is interesting to the language of the verse that tells us that. Verse 66. We could say 6:66. As a result many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. The language of this text strongly indicates that they left burning their bridges behind them.

There are a couple of things worthy of noting before I get into what I want to give you this morning.

First thing worthy of noting: there is a name for those who seem to follow, but don't fully commit and then abandon. It's called apostasy. The book of Hebrews has 6 warnings of such people. The strongest is the last warning. The warning is this. Once you have turned from Jesus for forgiveness of sin and eternal life, there is no remedy for sin. Why is that? They have turned away from the only source for forgiveness of sin. Jesus' death on the cross is the only way we can receive forgiveness of sin.

The second thing worthy of noting is the reaction of Jesus toward those who did abandon Him. It saddened Him, even though He expected it to happen. It's kind of like a captain of a ship who has docked on an island having no hurricane shelters but is in the path of cat 5 hurricane. The captain offers the islanders boarding on his ship to escape, knowing that if they refuse, death is a strong possibility. However, the islanders refuse to get on the boat. How that must affect the captain. He is thinking, "I offered them the only path to safety for their lives, yet they refuse."

Jesus turned to the 12 and said, “Do y’all want to go with them?” He says it with the emotion we feel when we are rejected.

This may be a third thing worthy of noting. Note also that though the “disciples” turn away, Jesus doesn’t change the message to make it more appealing. He doesn’t change it so as to compromise God’s standards. It was not about what will get the crowd to come. It was about commitment the commitment of the heart.

Now, let’s get to what I want to share this morning. By looking at this passage, we can see what true discipleship is all about.

Before we do this, I want to repeat something I have shared with you many times over. A disciple of Jesus Christ is one who knows and follows Christ, who is being changed by Christ, and who is committed to the mission of Christ.

### **True disciples initially come to Christ empty and broken**

This is so contrary to how these disciples approach Jesus at the beginning of chapter 6. They come with an entitlement mentality. Jesus, you owe it to us to feed us with this bread you provide. There is an air of pride and demand on Jesus. You give us this bread.

That is not how we come to Christ. How do we come to Christ in the beginning of our discipleship? The answer to that question is found in the opening verse of Matthew 5. This is what we call the Sermon on the Mount.

We come poor in spirit. We come mourning over our sin. We come meek. We come hungry and thirsty for righteousness.

We had a guy in this pulpit many years ago that said, “If you come to Jesus, you better have something to give Him.” There is one thing wrong with that statement. It’s wrong. We come to Jesus empty and broken. That is what I pray for many who are in the crosshairs of Irma. As they lose their gods that they hold on to, in their emptiness, may they find the fullness of life that Jesus offers.

Let’s turn to the second thing about true discipleship. I had a hard time at wording this aspect. This is what I came up with.

### **True disciples understand the true dimension of discipleship**

These “disciples” that initially followed Christ saw that walk only in the physical dimension.

Let me show you some evidence of that. Go back to verse 15. After Jesus fed the 5000, the people saw the sign and said, “This is the Prophet.” Jesus perceived that they wanted to force Him to become king. What does that say to us? The people saw Jesus as the deliverer of the political oppression. “Give us this bread!” they demanded. The people saw Jesus as their free meal ticket to fill their hungry stomachs.

They simply failed to understand that the true dimension of discipleship was that of the spiritual nature. Now hear me out. Understand me clearly. Becoming a follower of Christ may improve your physical life if the life you are living is that of being in the consequences of sin. However, I understand that becoming a follower of Christ will not necessarily change the environment in

which you exist. For one living in a nation where being a Christ follower of Christ, committing to Christ will not make you physically safer. It will move you to a more at risk of harm done to you category. North Korea and Syria are two examples.

When Jesus was talking with these disciples, he was using language that spoke of the spiritual dimension. They people could only understand the physical. That is what caused them to stumble.

### **True disciples are committed to continual obedience to the commands and demands of Jesus.**

This commitment is not because God has created us to be robots who can be controlled by the Holy Spirit. This commitment is because God has given us the freedom to serve Him where service is not tied to duty as much as it is tied to desire.

If we love Him, we will keep His commands. I think as Christ followers, we can say, "Since I love Him, I will keep His commands." Not of duty. It is out of desire.

A pastor visiting New Orleans. Was on Royal Street where all the street entertainers were. Saw a group around one entertainer. Preacher went to investigate. Saw a dog doing all kinds of tricks. Looked carefully and discovered a boy softly giving the commands. The dog was giving his full attention to the boy as if no one else existed wagging his tail the whole time. The pastor said, "Boy, I'll give you \$100 for that dog." No sir. I wouldn't sale this dog for any amount of money in the world." The pastor said in his heart, "Lord, let it be that that is what you will say of me in my service to you."

I was ready to preach this message several weeks ago. However, our attention was diverted to Ephesians 2 and the deacon ordination.

I think God had timed this message given the events of the week. One is the storm. Will the devastating loss that will result from this storm cause some to stop following Christ because He didn't protect what was theirs?

The second event is in regard to something that came out in some news sources this past week. Here's the story. If you are a white Christian, you are now a minority. The reason given for the drop in number is the number of immigrants moving into the nation and the number of people who are now not affiliated with any religion where they once would say they are Christian.

That could scare you. I hope that will cause us to be even more committed to be followers of Christ.

But for today, my question for you is this. Where are you in this story? If you are one considering abandoning Christ, such is a dangerous move for you, spiritually. I hope each will make the statement of Peter. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."