

The Winnower – *John 6:41-59*

Introduction – From ten-to-fifteen thousand hungry followers to a crowd finding Him in Capernaum, to the leading Jews of a synagogue, to what will finally be just the twelve, John 6 records a shift, a winnowing of those who originally wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him their king. This is the overall theme of this chapter: Come to Jesus for Who He is and not just for what He gives. In 6:14-15 He departs from the crowd. Now in v41 they are provoked by His teachings, and by v66, most have left Him. If we walk with Jesus, we need to expect to be tested, goaded, and eye-poked. For those the Father has given to Him, He doesn't want them to die spending their lives trying to get the stuff, dissatisfied until they have _____. He wants them to come to Him and find everlasting and resurrecting, eternal life in Him (vv32-33, 40).

Grumbling and Complaining (vv41-42) – Because of what Jesus said, the Jews (from the synagogue in Capernaum, where Jesus had grown up) began to grumble about Him. He didn't "*come down from heaven.*" He grew up right there around them, with His father and mother. Their patience with Jesus is thinning. But this complaining is the of the same spirit as that displayed by those in the wilderness who complained before (Exod 16:2, 8-9) and after (Num 11:4ff) the manna was provided. Followers of Christ are not to be grumblers and complainers about God's providence as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12-16). When we do grumble, we act like those who do not believe that the Giver of all things is right before us...

Only Those Drawn and Taught by God (vv43-47) – ...and we begin to become quite full of ourselves, arrogant to believe that we can determine for ourselves who we really are and who God really is. Jesus tells them to stop that and then dares to tell them that they won't come to Him (believe in Him and Who He is) unless the Father draws them (v44). Jesus quotes Isaiah 54:13 which should be considered in its fuller context (54:11-15). This prophecy describes a renewed and fruitful Israel (54:1) who must enlarge her tents, so many are coming in (54:2). Though her home and temple-city had been ravaged, it is restored with glorious new gems (54:11-12) where "*all your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children*" (54:13). Established in righteousness, we will be fully secure in that temple; "*no weapon formed against you shall prosper*" (54:14-15, 17).

Consider what Jesus is alluding to as He quotes from this passage. This is New Jerusalem, New Temple language, and Jesus has said He will be that Temple (John 2:18-19). We are those living stones, those new gems (1 Pet 2:5, Rev 21:18-19). Cities were places of security and prosperity, and Jesus said, "*that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day*" (John 6:39). In this New Covenant, God would put His law in the minds of His people and write it on their hearts (Jer 31:31-34). When Peter would make his great confession, Jesus says that this revelation came directly from the Father (Matt 16:17).

Jesus now pokes them – "*Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me*" (v45b). No one has seen the Father except Jesus, who came from heaven (v46) and so, "*Amen, Amen,*" everyone who believes in Jesus has everlasting life (v47). They are not believing and all that means is that they have not been given by the Father to the Son (v39-40).

The Bread of Life from Heaven (vv48-51) – Jesus returns to His original argument, "*I AM the bread of life*" (v48), but makes it even more scandalous, "*and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world*" (v51). This is different, better, than the bread which their fathers ate in the wilderness. They ate and yet died. The bread Jesus gives brings life. In fact, "*he will live forever*" (vv49-51).

From One Offense to Another (vv52-59) – Understandably, the Jews were mystified by this claim of eating His flesh (vv50-51). And it says that they began to dispute violently among themselves. But again, rather than settling them down, Jesus turns up the heat, leans into it, and goads them on, "*...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you*" (v54). He reiterates these apparently abhorrent practices without apology (vv55, 57-58).

This section has been and remains one of the most debated of Jesus' discourses. The language of eating His flesh and drinking His blood certainly has eucharistic language to us. But there are a couple big problems with that. First of all, this is spoken before (and long before) Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and this language would be mystifying at best and definitely offensive (as we can see in the next verses) to the Jews then. And second, to take it on the face of it is to prove too much. If it is speaking of the Lord's Supper straight up, then verse 53 teaches that if you haven't had communion you ain't going to heaven.

But think of it this way. First, we do know that Jesus said other things that John tells us the disciples didn't understand until after His resurrection (i.e. John 2:19-22). Second, the sacrament of communion is to come with the Word - actually, after the Word. Word and then sacrament. So this discourse is not a sermon on the Lord's Supper. Rather, the Lord's Supper, once initiated by Jesus, is a ritual laying out the truth of this sermon whereby the Spirit seals this sermon, this Word, these promises, in us. The Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of what the Lord promises to us.

Jesus took the most provocative and controversial sermon and turned it into a perpetual memorial to be observed and imitated (Word and sacrament). He is goading us along to ponder and wrestle with coming to Jesus for Who He is and not simply for the other things He gives.

We come to Jesus only when the Father gives us to Jesus. He is from somewhere else, the One who has come down from heaven. He is the Son of God - and that knowledge doesn't come from your brain. It comes when and only when God brings it down to you (again vv43-45). This is hard to swallow. The knowledge of God is a gift and not something you come up with by yourself. This is the gift of faith.

And the only way we come to believe that is if we are goaded, poked, and bothered by God, by the Word and the words of Jesus. *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent"* (Rev 3:19). This is part of what it means when the Psalmist writes *"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me"* (Ps 23:4). And it is the ongoing work of our sanctification - *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes"* (Ps 119:71). He goads you to bring you to Himself, just as He did to Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-5).

And if you are receiving His Word from the Father, *"taught by God,"* then the Word is going to bother you, mess with you, and change you. And then you come to the Table, and there you receive the signs and seals of the work of the Word, the goading of Jesus. The point, you find, is that He always wanted to give you - Himself.

"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:7-11).