

The Scandal of the Son of Man – *John 6:60-71*

Introduction – Jesus has been winnowing a following of thousands to just “*many disciples*” and to finally even just “*the twelve*.” He is not interested in being made King so that He can be our bread-god. But in our flesh, the only reason we turn to Jesus is for the stuff He gives. In our old nature, we will not turn to Jesus because of Who He is and what He claims. Only by means of the Spirit will our hearts be pierced by His Word so that we come to believe, and as Jesus reiterates here, “*no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father*” (v65, cf. v39, 44). Such talk is scandalous and turns people off. But the Word of God was the means by which the universe was brought out of nothing. It is at the Word of God that we are raised from spiritual nothingness and brought to eternal life. Those offensive words, the scandal of the cross, the ascension of the Son of Man, all illuminated through the work of the Spirit, is the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Offensive, Hard Words (vv60-62) – It is not so much that Jesus’ words were hard to understand as much as they were hard to tolerate, which is more what the Greek word, “*skleros*” means. The doctrine of Christ (and the doctrine from Christ) is offensive to the natural man. He implies that He is greater than Moses and greater than the bread Moses provided (v33, 48-51). He declares His divinity in His “*I AM the bread of life*” phrase (v35, 48). He says eternal life only comes to those who feed on Him (v57). Finally, He makes clear that no one will come to Him unless the Father previously had determined to give them to Him (v37, 44). Here are the rudiments of the Doctrines of Grace: man’s inability in his own nature to please God and the necessity of God’s electing grace in salvation. These teachings are hard to tolerate.

Christ knew that they were murmuring about these things “in Himself” (v61). And here is a good practical note. Christ knows your thoughts, your complaints in your heart, your selfish motives and intentions. If you take those complaints rightly to Him, He hears, assures, redirects, teaches, and comforts. If you keep those complaints in your flesh, they will drive you away from Him. So, He knows, and He asks this group of disciples, “Does this offend you?”

And then He pushes the offense: “*What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?*” (v62). Every Jew would have known this was a reference to the One Daniel spoke of (Dan 7:13-14) who would have authority over all the nations. But that ascension would only come through a scandalous work whereby they would see Jesus lifted up on a Cross. This was “*a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles*” (1 Cor 1:23).

The Offensive Authority of God (vv63-65) – But those offensive words are words of life from the Spirit who gives life (v63) and so Jesus will confidently declare them. He leaves no room for our flesh, for “*the flesh profits nothing*” (v63). Luther riffed off that phrase when he argued against Erasmus, saying “*That ‘nothing’ is not a little something.*” This is scandalous in our day as well, even with those who claim to be following Jesus. But if you are resting on the strength of your own righteousness, even a little of it, you are missing what Jesus and the whole Bible is teaching. In your flesh dwells no good thing (Rom 7:18) and cannot get you into the kingdom of God. It is the Spirit who brings life.

People are happy to believe in Jesus as a model to follow or as a lofty ethical teacher. But the cross proclaims us all as failures when it comes to following Him, obeying Him, or believing in Him as our needed Savior. Jesus knew that many of those following Him that day did not believe (v64). “*What the gospel says to every one of us is most galling to the natural man...*” – Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

And this is why the only way we can be brought to Christ is if the Father “gives” us to Him. It must be granted by the Father (v65). It is all gift; there are no works on our part (Eph 2:8-9). And this is a very particular election because it cannot be that the Father has given all to Christ but then He loses some (remember v37 and 39). What does such teaching do? See verse 66.

The Results of Jesus’ Offensive Words (vv66-71) – Paul put it simply, “*To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life*” (2 Cor 2:16). From that time, many left Jesus and walked with Him no longer (v66). Jesus is “*the stone of stumbling and a rock of offense*” (Isaiah 8:14). As we present the gospel, it is important that we are not a cause of stumbling by our own inconsiderate words or actions. “*But it will never be possible for us to exercise such caution that the doctrine of Christ shall not be the occasion of offense to many*” – Calvin. It was for Jesus. It was for Paul. It will be for us if we faithfully preach the gospel. “*What they wanted, he would not give; what He offered, they would not receive*” – F.F. Bruce.

Jesus turns to the twelve and seeks to encourage them in their faith. “Surely, you don’t want to go away too?” (vv67). When God grants faith it becomes obvious that there is nowhere else to go but to Christ. Peter speaks on behalf of the twelve (vv68-69). It may be that he spoke with a sense of pride – everyone else had left, but they had come to believe and know that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus senses this as well and reminds them that even with them, He was the One that chose them. Jesus had come to do the will of the Father and that included choosing one who would betray Him (vv70-71). Imagine the trial this would have been for Jesus as he walked with Judas through three years of ministry knowing that Judas was the devil’s tool. Jesus knew this was the Father’s will and we can learn to walk in the trials the Lord brings upon us as we imitate Christ in this. As we share in sufferings, God displays the perfections of Jesus within us as we endeavor to live for Him in this life.

Spiritual Priorities – Church growth movements place our priorities on the flesh rather on the sovereign work of the Spirit of God who cannot be scheduled by us. “What is urgently needed today is not mesmeric experts who have made a study of how to produce a religious “atmosphere,” nor religious showmen to make people laugh one minute and weep the next, but faithful preaching of God’s Word, with the saints on their faces before God, humbly praying that He may be pleased to send His quickening Spirit into their midst” – A. W. Pink.

Faith to See God’s Plan Unfold – We live in a culture that continues to fall away from Jesus, finding His words intolerable. He can’t be the only way. He can’t really be God and man. He couldn’t have done those miracles. This Bible cannot be trusted as authentic. His demands are tyrannical, mean, and non-inclusive. And He won’t give me the stuff I want when I want it the way I want it. Christian churches are tempted to water down the teachings of our depravity, God’s sovereign election, and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Chapter 6 looks like a plan gone awry. From thousands to just a handful. But, like Gideon’s army, these few, these twelve (eleven), filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, took this gospel to the world, turning it upside-down. Throughout church history, the winnowing of those who were followers of Jesus, their bread-god, has brought the apostasy of many. When you are among a faithful remnant, that is the time to remember what God has done in the past, and, in faith, pray for and watch Him bring forth another reformation and revival. In the meantime, Jesus asks you in the midst of His offensive but true, life-giving words, “Surely, you don’t also want to go away?”

Dave Hatcher – April 3, 2022