

60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? **62** Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! **63** The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit[a] and life. **64** 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. **65** He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

67 “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. **69** We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Endless Options

You know what I loved about buffets growing up? The endless choices and possibilities. They were always special nights where my parents would turn us loose and let us eat whatever we wanted. There was the bread bar, the pasta bar, the pizza bar, the ice cream bar. They had everything I wanted and I wanted to try it all. It was good, very good all the way through college until (just like our Bible studies) “quality became more important than quantity.”

It was no longer about so much food. My choices became a lot more specific. Organic, MSG free. Without any High Fructose Corn Syrup. It had to taste good and be something that I couldn't make at home better. That certainly limits your choices at a buffet or anywhere else. Because there is only certain food worth eating.

But Israel has just returned from an all you can eat buffet of bread and fish. Jesus just fed 5,000. But now he's getting to the specific point of who he is as the bread of life. And it's not about food. It's about faith and how one is saved. The options are limited. This isn't an endless buffet of options. This so much more specific because it's not about quantity but quality. Jesus says, “*The flesh counts for nothing, but the Spirit gives life.*” *These Words. This bread. This food is the only life among endless options.*

The disciples are troubled. This is a turning point in Jesus' ministry as the crowds walk away. Up to this point he has been growing and gaining in popularity. But then he says, “*I am the bread of life.*”

The living bread coming down from heaven.” At this they argue among themselves, not because they don’t understand but they understand all too well. This is not an endless buffet with multiple options. Jesus serves up a meal and it’s like eating at home as a child. You eat what’s set before you or you go hungry.

What Jesus serves up is his body which he calls bread. But instead of backing down when they grumble and complain he ups the ante. He leaves them no room for any other option. It is this body they need. “Eat my flesh. Drink my blood.” *Does this offend you?* Obviously. It’s repulsive for a Jew. It’s not Kosher.

It’s not that they are thinking Jesus is about to pull off his arm for a bite to eat but they think they are already right with God. They’ve been to the buffet and know they’re children of Abraham. They have endless options of being right with God through the sacrificial system. They have the laws and Moses, their works, their pious living. It’s a buffet of endless options. But Jesus says, *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.”* It’s nothing you can say think or do that saves you. It’s not the quantity of sacrifices. It’s the quality of the sacrifice.

Are you troubled by this? Probably not because we love Jesus. We believe Jesus, but then Jesus begins to speak and we may not like what he has to say. We may take offense at his words. Just look at how we react to fellowship principles, close communion, and the roles of men and women. Jesus speaks and his Word runs counter culture to our educated society when he affirms a six day creation. And then it’s as if we become apologetic to offended people and want to appease them by changing God’s Word, ignoring portions that are difficult to swallow.

What’s on the plate? Our options are limited. Jesus says to us, *“No one comes to the Father but through me.”* The Bible doesn’t speak of a Free Will. There is no sinners prayer or altar call. No age of accountability. But rather, *“The flesh counts for nothing.”* Jesus isn’t talking about his flesh but our flesh - anything we can say, think, or do. It is the Word of God that must work upon us. We can’t do anything. Some might say we are like a block of wood upon which the word of God must work but it’s much worse than that. We were not only dead in sin - we were hostile to God. The walking dead, zombies in search of anything to eat - unable to eat anything good, let alone to know what is good for us. John repeats these words, “no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.” Paul restates Jesus Words, *“No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:3)*

But, there is something we can do. There are options. There are endless choices. There is a buffet. You can walk away. Like so many of Jesus’ disciples. They had endless options but we don’t know what they turned to. We only know they stopped following Jesus. They went on their own way. *“There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end it leads to death.” (Proverbs 14:12).*

As the crowds are leaving. As the crowd of 5,000 dwindles down to twelve, Jesus turns to his inner circle and asks, “*You don’t want to leave too, do you?*” And Peter confesses, “Lord, *Where are we going to go.*” *You are the one who has the words of eternal life.* There is no other place to eat. It was a take it or leave it picnic. The Word and the Spirit were at work in Jesus’ word even when so many were turning away.

The Word and the Spirit were at work in Jesus’ word even though so many were turning away that Word worked. The Holy Spirit working through that Word has led them to believe that Jesus is the Word through whom all things were made, that this word became flesh. This Word gives his flesh for the life of the world.

They understand what Jesus is saying but they don’t know yet know how it would happen. Soon they would see his flesh flayed and the blood dripping to the ground from the cross. Soon they would see his body given for the life of the world. At that time all would abandon him. The church, the body of Christ looks pathetic. Only his mother and one disciple remain and we’re not even sure Mary believe Jesus was who he claimed to be. Jesus mission does not depend on popular opinion. Only Jesus.

When God’s Word offends, Jesus calls to us in the same way, “*You don’t want to leave too, do you?*” Jesus isn’t angry or demanding but still inviting and calling all to follow. It is through his Word that the Holy Spirit is at work among us. We hear these words. That word works. God promises, “*My word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which it was sent.*” (Isaiah 55:11).

Because his Word has worked among us we too can confess along with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” There are no other options. Through God’s gift to us of saving faith through Baptism, His Word and the Lord’s Supper, these sayings are are not only acceptable they are our confession. Because of this faith created in us we treasure these words. We cling to them. Because in them Jesus forgives our offense at his Word. he forgives us for becoming apologetic people pleasers when he simply wants us to speak the truth.

God has taken my salvation out of my hands, making it depend on his choice and not mine, and has promised to save me, not by my work but by his grace and mercy. Our flesh counts for nothing but Jesus’ flesh is given for the life of the world. He has chosen to make you and me his children. He has drawn us to himself and brought us to faith in Jesus through these Words. Treasure them. Reorganize your priorities. Commit yourself to the Lord like Joshua in our first lesson. And even if so many are walking away from Jesus because they can’t accept his word - be it, “Baptism now saves you...(1 Peter 3:21), Take and Eat for the forgiveness of sins... (Matthew 26:28), or salvation full and free by Jesus atoning sacrifice (1 John 2:2)... Even if they walk away - where will we go? Jesus has given his body for the life of the world.

The choices are endless, but there is only one choice when you consider quality. The quality of Jesus flesh outshines the quantity of anything I could ever do. The quality of his food, his flesh is better than any buffet. It's more like mom's home cooking. Which is why we gain weight when we go home. When you have that, everything else seems insignificant. You don't want to dine on anything else. Besides there is no where else to go. Jesus has given his flesh for the life of the world. That's impossible for us to accept but by the Holy Spirit working through this word - we believe and we are saved. To God be all glory. Amen.