

Living Water

Jay Kim · The Gospel of John (Part 2) · John 6:53-71

AT A GLANCE

David Tieche opens John 6:53-71 to ask why the same crowd that thrilled to Jesus's miracles turned and walked away once he began to teach hard things. His claim: spiritual highs can spark faith but cannot sustain it, because discipleship's real work happens when Jesus's words expose what we'd rather keep hidden — and faithfulness means returning to him even then.

- Miracles and mountaintop moments inspire faith, but the deepest discipleship happens when Jesus's words confront our hidden assumptions and desires.
- The teachings of Jesus that offend us most often reveal exactly where he intends to change us, not where he's wrong.
- Faithfulness isn't flawless obedience — it's returning to Jesus again and again after we've failed or resisted him.

“The teachings of Jesus that offend us often reveal where Jesus wants to transform us most.”

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

[John 6:53-71](#) — Jesus said, “Believe me when I say that you must eat the body of the Son of Man, and you must drink his blood. If you don’t do this, you have no real life. Those who eat my body and drink my blood have eternal life. I will raise them up on the last day. My body is true food, and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my body and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them. The Father sent me. He lives, and I live because of him. So everyone who eats me will live because of me. I am not like the bread that your ancestors ate. They ate that bread, but they still died. I am the bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.” Jesus said all this while he was teaching in the synagogue in the city of Capernaum. When Jesus’ followers heard this, many of them said, “This teaching is hard. Who can accept it?” Jesus already knew that his followers were complaining about this. So he said, “Is this teaching a problem for you? Then what will you think when you see the Son of Man going up to where he came from? It is the Spirit that gives life. The body is of no value for that. But the things I have told you are from the Spirit, so they give life. But some of you don’t believe.” (Jesus knew the people who did not believe. He knew this from the

beginning. And he knew the one who would hand him over to his enemies.) Jesus said, "That is why I said, 'Anyone the Father does not help to come to me cannot come.'" After Jesus said these things, many of his followers left and stopped following him. Jesus asked the twelve apostles, "Do you want to leave too?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, where would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe in you. We know that you are the Holy One from God." Then Jesus answered, "I chose all twelve of you. But one of you is a devil." He was talking about Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Judas was one of the twelve apostles, but later he would hand Jesus over to his enemies. (ERV)

The argument

Spiritual Highs Inspire Faith But Cannot Sustain It — the turn from miracle to hard teaching in John 6

After Jesus feeds the five thousand and walks on water, the same crowd that thrilled to his miracles turns and walks away once he begins to teach. David Tieche names the pattern: mountaintop experiences are real gifts, but they are not the whole of discipleship. "Spiritual highs, breakthroughs and miracles... can inspire our faith but they cannot sustain it," he says. He locates the real work of following Jesus not in the wonder but in the confrontation that follows it: "the deepest work of discipleship does not happen on the mountaintop. It happens when the words of Jesus confront our assumptions, challenge our desires, and invite us to trust him anyway."

Insight — Enthusiasm can spark faith, but only submission to Jesus's hard words sustains it over time.

Life Is Born Through Death — eating Christ's flesh as an invitation to die to self

Jesus's command to eat his flesh and drink his blood, David Tieche argues, foreshadows his body and blood poured out, and invites hearers to partake of both his life and his death. "Life is born through death," he says, tracing the same pattern through Galatians 2:20 and Philippians 3:10, where Paul describes being crucified and buried with Christ in order to live. The question, he insists, is not only whether we believe Jesus died for us, but whether we're willing to die to ourselves: "We receive his life by surrendering the life we've been trying to control." That surrender of comfort, ego, and control is precisely what makes the teaching hard.

Insight — Receiving Christ's life requires surrendering the life we have been trying to control.

The Jesus We've Edited Versus the Jesus Who Edits Us — hard teachings expose our functional idols

David Tieche argues that offense at Jesus's words is diagnostic, not incidental: "the teachings of Jesus that offend us often reveal where Jesus wants to transform us most." Love your enemies exposes our desire for revenge; forgive exposes our bitterness; do not worry exposes our illusion of control. Rather than let Jesus reshape us, our instinct is to edit him down to a version

we can manage. He cites Tim Keller: "If your God never disagrees with you, you may simply be worshiping an idolized version of yourself." The real barrier to following Jesus, he suggests, is often not rejecting him outright but quietly replacing him with an easier one.

Insight — What offends us in Jesus's teaching usually names exactly where he intends to change us.

Walking Away Doesn't Always Look Like Leaving — changing context, or hiding in study, as quiet forms of avoidance

David Tieche widens the picture of what it looks like to resist Jesus's hard teaching. It isn't always dramatic departure — sometimes it's changing churches, relationships, or jobs while leaving the actual issue untouched: "you can change your context and never change."

Sometimes it's disguised as devotion — reading Scripture more, but only to keep learning without ever obeying: "that's just an excuse to keep learning without ever having to do what he actually says." He names the honest diagnosis plainly: "the issue isn't that we don't know what Jesus is saying. The issue is that we know and we don't want to do it."

Insight — Avoiding obedience can wear the disguise of changed circumstances or deepened study rather than open rejection.

Faithfulness Is Returning, Not Perfecting — Peter's confession and the practice of naming what's hard

Given the chance to leave with the crowd, Peter answers instead: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." David Tieche notes that Jesus warns Judas but not Peter, though Peter will soon deny him three times — because Jesus knows Peter will fail and keep returning. "The good news of this story is not that Jesus is looking for perfect disciples who will return, but those who will return over and over again." He offers a concrete practice for that return, drawn from Ronald Rolheiser: saying "I'm sorry," "thank you," and "I bless you" — each one a small death to pride, self-focus, or self-defense.

Insight — Faithfulness is measured not by never failing but by always turning back.

Cross-references

- [Galatians 2:20](#) — quoted to show that being crucified with Christ is the pattern for receiving his life
- [Philippians 3:10](#) — quoted to show that knowing Christ means sharing in his sufferings, not only his power

DEVOTIONAL

There is a version of following Jesus that only wants the loaves multiplied, the water walked upon, the miracle delivered on schedule. It is not a false following — the wonder is real, and it

is a gift. But it is incomplete, because it has never yet heard Jesus say the hard thing and stayed in the room. Somewhere between the feeding of the five thousand and the emptying of the twelve, the crowd discovers that the same voice that broke bread also breaks assumptions. And most of us, if we are honest, have a private list — teachings we wish had never made it into the book, because obeying them would cost us the very thing we came to Jesus hoping to keep. Love the enemy. Forgive the debt. Stop protecting the image. Die to the version of ourselves we have spent years curating. What if the offense itself were the mercy? What if the very words that make us want to leave are the words most precisely aimed at the place we most need to be healed? This is not a summons to shame. It is an invitation to notice: Peter does not stay because he has finally figured everything out. He stays because he has nowhere better to go, and because something in him already knows that the man standing in front of him holds words that actual life is made of. He will fail. He will deny. He will weep bitterly in a courtyard not far from here. And he will come back. That, more than any unbroken record of obedience, is what faithfulness looks like from the inside.

Reflection

- What teaching of Jesus do you secretly wish wasn't in the Bible, and what might that reveal about where he wants to change you?
- Where in your life have you changed your context — a church, a relationship, a job — rather than let Jesus change what's actually asking to be changed?
- Is there someone toward whom you owe an 'I'm sorry,' a 'thank you,' or an 'I bless you' — and what is the small death in finally saying it?

Closing prayer

Jesus, it is honestly hard sometimes to follow you, to obey your teachings — we don't know how else to say it. But where else would we go? We have tried other places, and we have come to believe and know that you have the words of eternal life, that you are the Holy One of Israel. So we come back to you again and again as a church family. May we be marked not by perfect obedience — there is no such thing — but by people who say, over and over, Jesus, we have failed, and we come back to you. Let your grace and mercy sustain us. We will build our lives around you. Amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

Faithfulness isn't flawless obedience — it's returning to Jesus again and again when his words are hard to hear.

This week

This week, name one hard teaching of Jesus you've been quietly resisting, and identify one person toward whom he's inviting you to die to yourself. Say to them, honestly, one of these: 'I'm sorry,' 'thank you,' or 'I bless you' — then bring your struggle to Jesus in prayer and ask him to help you return.

Return to [John 6:66-69](#)
