

# Counting the cost of following Jesus

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 26 February 2020

Preacher: Paul Brennan

[ 0 : 01 ] Well, it's very good to see you folks and welcome to our Wednesday lunchtime talk. It's great to have you with us this afternoon. If you have not been here before, my name is Paul Brennan, one of the ministers here in the church, and we're working our way through John's gospel.

So please turn in your Bibles to John chapter 6. John chapter 6, and we're looking at the very end of John 6, and you'll find that on page 892, 892 in the Blue Vista Bible.

So we spent a few weeks looking together at this chapter and Jesus teaching on the bread of life, and we reach the conclusion here from verse 60, but I'm going to read from verse 52.

So John chapter 6 from verse 52. The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, how can this man give us his flesh to eat?

So Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

[ 1 : 29 ] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Not like the bread the fathers ate and died.

Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

Jesus said these things in the synagogue as he taught at Capernaum. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, this is a hard saying.

Who can listen to it? But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?

[ 2 : 43 ] It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.

For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. And he said, this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.

After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, do you want to go away as well?

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

Jesus answered them, did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil. He spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

[ 3 : 53 ] For he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him. Well, let's pray, shall we, before we think about this together. Father God, we do thank you so much that we have in our hands your word.

We have in our hands John's testimony of all that Jesus said and did, and that he has recorded these things so that we may not just read them, but that we would believe the testimony about Jesus and so have life.

And so, Lord, that's our prayer this afternoon, that each one of us here would respond to this testimony and we would respond in belief and so know eternal life.

So please help us to that end, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, John's purpose, as we've seen over these weeks, looking together at this gospel account, John's purpose is clear.

He has pulled together this account of the words and works of Jesus so that all who read it would make a commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to know eternal life.

[ 5 : 20 ] It is his focus on people making that commitment, that decision to follow Christ that comes to the fore in this passage this afternoon. We see in the end of chapter 6 here, this section we're looking at, that there is a decision to be made.

There are two possible responses to Jesus' testimony. And the key thing that will sway you one way or the other is a willingness to count the cost of following Christ.

There is. There is a cost to following Jesus. But there is a far greater cost to not following him.

There are eternal realities at stake.

The stakes are high. Now, in the first half of the chapter, what we've looked at in previous weeks, it's been the Jews who've been grappling and wrestling with Jesus' testimony.

But here, it is Jesus' own disciples. Look at verse 60. It's his own disciples who are struggling to grapple with Jesus' teaching. Look at verse 59.

[ 6 : 31 ] Jesus said these things in the synagogue as he taught at Capernaum. Verse 60. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? Now, what hard sayings are they referring to?

Well, it's all that Jesus has been teaching up until this point. It's all that Jesus said last week as we thought about his testimony that he has been sent from heaven by the Father and that he has come to bring eternal life through his death on the cross.

That's what he's been teaching. That is the hard saying that they're grappling with. Look back there at verse 51. Just think about what we looked at last week.

Jesus said, I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. Jesus is not at all talking about feeding on physical bread, is he?

[ 7 : 40 ] He's not talking about physical feeding on flesh. It's about believing that he is the son sent by the Father and come to bring rescue through his death on the cross.

That's what he's talking about. He's talking about the sacrifice he must make, his own flesh, his own blood. And it's only by feeding on him, only by believing in him, that he is who he says he is, is their salvation.

That's clear, isn't it? Only by believing these things is their eternal life. When Jesus speaks of eating and drinking, as we thought about last week, he's using picture language to speak about his death on the cross.

And he wants all who listen to him to believe in him, to come to him, to look to him. And what is on offer here is absolutely extraordinary.

The stakes could not be higher. He is offering life. Life unending. Life in communion with the Father, the creator of all the universe.

[ 8 : 50 ] That is what's on offer. Life eternal. Life eternal. And all we need do is believe. That is how we eat of the bread of life.

Now, we thought about that last week. But that is what those disciples are grappling with. But if that's what they were grappling with, why do we see there in verse 60 that his own disciples are grumbling about his teaching?

It's a wonderful message, isn't it? Why are they grappling and grumbling with it? Well, they seem to be grappling with the fundamental concept of God coming to earth in human form and dying.

That's the essence of what Jesus has been saying. I've been sent by the Father and I've come to die. Now, it's not, I don't think, it's not the case that they don't understand Jesus' words.

John's point here seems to be that it was not so much because they didn't understand Jesus' words, but rather that having understood them very well, they find them hard.

[ 10 : 01 ] They find them hard because they did in fact grasp something of the implication of Jesus' words. Namely, his forthcoming sacrificial death. They had understood what he was talking about.

It's clear, isn't it, as you read those words back in verses 51 and 53, that Jesus is pointing to the necessary reality of his coming death. You can't escape it.

Look at verse 51. I'm the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he'll live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

Verse 53. So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds of my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.

I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food. My blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me.

[ 11 : 05 ] And I in him. I think they grasped the magnitude of what Jesus was saying. But they found it hard.

It's not only the scandal of the cross itself that's the shock here. But also the cost for those who will follow. They refuse, don't they, to grasp the essence of the words Jesus has spoken to them.

Look again at verse 63. He says, It's the Spirit who gives life. The flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Jesus seems to be tackling here. Their lack of willingness to embrace and believe the words he's spoken to them. Namely, about the cross.

It's not that I understand, but it's a lack of willingness to actually believe it and count the cost. He's urging them to consider the deeper meaning of his words. He was not at all talking about material bread and wine.

[ 12 : 14 ] He was talking of deeper spiritual realities. That's why he says there at the start of verse 63, That it's the Spirit who gives life. The flesh is no help at all.

Jesus is saying, Receive through the life-giving Spirit what you cannot get through the flesh. Don't get sidetracked into thinking that all I've said is about actual bread and wine.

No, if the words of Jesus in the section are to be rightly grasped, then instead of rejecting Jesus, people will see him as the bread from heaven. The one who gives his flesh for the life of the world.

The one who alone provides eternal life. And they will receive him and believe in him, taste eternal life, even now, and enjoy the promise that he will raise them up on the last day.

You can't feed on Christ without feeding on his words, truly believing his words. But that belief involves a cost.

[ 13 : 23 ] Which is why, verse 64, some did not believe. You see, this offer of the bread of life, it implies and involves fellowship with Christ in his death.

And this means putting to death of all that is natural and fleshly in the heart. If we would taste of this hidden bread and be satisfied, it means living for eternal and unseen realities instead of for the visible and the immediate.

and that's hard. Jesus was saying to these people in front of you, I'm not talking about physical bread. I'm talking about something unseen, something eternal.

And what Jesus is saying will mean dying daily to sin, accepting the discipline of the cross daily in our lives, letting its message slay all manner of evil things within us.

it's just another way of saying that in the Christian experience, we die in order to live. Crucifixion precedes resurrection in the experience of the believer.

[ 14 : 45 ] And this is a price that many are just not willing to pay. And they go through this life spiritually hungry, poverty stricken and eternally lost because they're not willing to pay the price now, not willing to count the cost now.

For them, the message of fellowship with Christ in his cross is far too devastating. It demands too much.

It is a stumbling block because the life of the flesh, the life here and now, with all its seductive charms, is too attractive.

It means too much. And that seems to be the case here, even with some of these disciples. Notice verse 66. After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

Throughout this whole discourse on the bread of life, the people sought to turn back from the spiritual and reside in the material only.

[ 15 : 58 ] They were clearly attracted by the offer of life Jesus was making, but they were held back by their earthly interests. So there are two responses to Jesus' teaching here.

Two responses to the reality of the cross and the cost of following Jesus. The first is rejection and the second is belief. Look at verse 66 again.

We see the first reaction to Jesus' message and its rejection. And it is striking, isn't it, that in this section, it isn't the Jews' rejection of Jesus that's in focus, but his own disciples.

And the term disciple here is used in its broadest sense. In other words, those who were following Jesus, walking with him, listening to him, spending time with him. And they had heard and seen amazing things, hadn't they, just in this chapter alone.

They've seen amazing miracles, they've heard remarkable sayings. They've been caught up in the miracles and all the excitement. They had enjoyed being part of the crowd. But when the crunch came, when the reality of Jesus' mission, and ultimately his death became apparent, they walked away.

[17:17] When they heard Jesus' words, we've just been listening to in chapter 6, when they heard what he said and grasped what he said, they walked away. They were not prepared to follow a Messiah who would die.

They say, this is a hard saying. who can listen to it? You see, the cross of Jesus Christ, it divides. And that's a sobering reality. And there is a cost to following Christ. And it involves a sharing in the scandal and the shame of the cross in the here and now.

But also a sharing in life for all eternity. that's what Jesus is holding out. Eternal life. But first, I've got to give my own flesh.

I must die on a cross. And the problem, the problem for these disciples was that they were living for physical and material realities only.

[18:27] They were not prepared to live for the spiritual and the unseen. you cannot escape. As you listen to Jesus, you read what he does.

You cannot escape the fact that Jesus is captured by unseen eternal realities. It drives everything he does. And so the question for us, for you and for me, is do we see, do we live for the unseen and eternal?

Or do we just live for the here and now? that was the choice before these disciples. And these ones, the ones that walked away in verse 66, they chose the here and now.

They saw, they heard what Jesus was offering, but they were ashamed by the cost, the death of Christ on the cross. They couldn't handle that. And so they walk away.

And if we, if you and I live for the temporal and the seen, the material, then we'll do just what the disciples of verse 66 will do.

[19:32] We'll walk away, unwilling to count the cost. But to do that, to walk away from Jesus now, it is to pay a far greater cost than we're ever willing to pay, I think.

It's a greater cost than we even realize because the cost is eternal. To walk away now is to forfeit life then. all eternity.

So that's one response to Jesus. It's rejection. Walking away. But there is another response. And it's the one we see in verses 67 and 69.

Believing. Believing Christ. We can reject Christ or we can believe. And the division between these two responses could not be starker, could it? Jesus, having just spoken with these grumbling disciples, having seen many turn and walk away, he now turns to the inner circle, to the twelve.

Verse 67. So Jesus said to the twelve, do you want to go away as well? And Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go?

[20:46] You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. God. So Simon Peter, he has heard everything Jesus said, he's seen these disciples walk away, and so Jesus turns to him, do you want to go as well?

And Simon Peter responds with the rhetorical question, to whom shall we go? To whom shall we go? There is no one else. There's no one else to go to, given who you are, Jesus.

Given all that we've heard, there is nobody else to go to, is there? He's understood that Jesus has the words of eternal life, that he is the Holy One of God, and his belief, as we've seen over and over, is based upon evidence.

It's all he's seen and heard. And given those realities, given all that Simon's come to understand about Jesus, there is no one else they could possibly turn to.

Who else could offer eternal life? No one. Here is the Son of God, the one who alone brings life and hope and forgiveness. Nobody else can do that.

[22:12] And Jesus, he is the only Savior we need. There is no one else to turn to, no one else worth following. And the evidence that we have in front of us in John's gospel, it ought to lead us, it ought to lead you, as it did Peter, to believing that Jesus is the one who can give eternal life, that he is exactly who he claimed to be, the Holy One of God.

And grasping those realities, grasping the realities that Peter grasps, puts the cost of following Jesus in perspective, doesn't it? There is a cost, there is, but it is a price worth paying.

And Peter is prepared to pay it, but not all the twelve. Verse 70, yet one of you is a devil.

He spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. In the end, he lived for the seen and the unseen. The silver offered to him to betray Jesus was just too attractive. He wasn't willing to pay the short-term cost, and so he forfeited eternity.

[ 23 : 35 ] So what will you do with the scandalous message of the cross and Christ crucified? What will you do with the message of John 6 and all that Jesus says about himself?

Will you be prepared to take up your cross daily to count the cost, to be willing to be known as one of his and all the scandal and shame that may bring?

Yes, there may be much to bear now, but eternity beckons. Will you count the cost?

or will you keep your horizon limited to the here and now, to the scene, and being unwilling to pay the short-term costs, forfeit eternity with your Savior?

That's the choice we all face. That was the choice for those disciples at the end of chapter six.

Rejection, walking away, living only for the seen, or belief, and living for the unseen and eternal.

[ 24 : 45 ] It's the choice we all face, belief or rejection. And John would urge you, he would urge you, plead with you, urge everyone to respond to Jesus, turn to him, trust him, and so know life.

Let me pray, and we'll finish. Father God, we do thank you for this clear testimony of Jesus' life.

And Lord, would you please help each one of us to respond to this testimony, not with rejection, not with our eyes seeing only what is temporal, but rather lift our eyes to see eternal realities above the here and now, and so follow you with belief to follow Jesus.

Help us, we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.