

The Tough Truth of the Gospel

John 6:35-70

The Bible is filled with hard sayings, truths that we find difficult to embrace. The doctrine of hell. The exclusivity of Christ. Sins that are against current trends in our society. As I'm reading through both the gospels of John and Luke, I'm reminded of how Jesus would feed the masses physically, yet He would only feed those spiritually who were willing to follow Him after the hard sayings. Sir Ernest Shackleton posted an ad for men to join him on an Antarctic expedition. The ad was very honest and read: "Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in event of success." The story claims this candid approach attracted 5,000 applications, which Shackleton sifted into piles labelled "mad", "hopeless" and "possible" before selecting his 27-strong crew.

After Jesus crosses the sea in the night, the crowds follow him the next day. Significantly, these people are "seeking Jesus" (John 6:24). He knows many of these people are seeking him because they ate their fill of the loaves and want more.

What's more, it becomes clear that the people want Jesus on their terms. They want to negotiate with him. "Give us a sign and we'll believe in you. Give us magic bread from heaven and we will come to you. Be like Moses, who gave our ancestors manna in the wilderness." Jesus knows their heart and He separates the spectators from the truly sincere followers of Him! Those who make it through the toughest parts of their life make it because they have a strong sense of purpose, they have an answer to the why! My purpose is Jesus, my answer to the why is Jesus! He is my strength; He is my reason!

Jesus Gives the Hard Truth (John 6:35-40) In the face of their demand for bread, Jesus gives them a hard saying. "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Jesus doesn't want to merely fill their bellies; he wants to satisfy their souls. And though these people have seen Jesus, they have not yet believed in him (John 6:36). That is, they've not yet come to him as the bread of life. And then Jesus describes how this coming to him happens. Listen to these hard truths in Luke. (Luke 9:23-27; 57-55)

Some People Will Grumble About the Truth (John 6:41-42) The people respond to this hard saying by grumbling (just like their fathers in the desert). Jesus is not multiplying magic bread but saying that he himself is the bread. In their grumbling, they stumble over the hard saying. "Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph? We know his mom and dad. How can Joseph's son be heavenly bread?" (John 6:41-42).

Jesus is the Granter of Life (John 6:43-51) Jesus answers their grumbling by explaining how people come to him. “I am the bread of life... 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” (John 6:48, 51).

Some People Will Get Mad (John 6:52-65) The truth of the gospel is offensive. After this, their grumbling turns to quarreling. They begin to dispute among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat? What are we? Cannibals?” (John 6:52). And again Jesus presses the hard saying. “You must eat my flesh. You must drink my blood. This is the only path to life. My flesh is true food; my blood is true drink. To eat me is to abide in me and I in you. Those who ate the manna still died; those who eat me will not” (see John 6:53–58).

Those Who Can't Handle the Truth Will Go Away (John 6:60-70) Now, at this point, even Jesus's disciples begin to grumble. “This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?” But Jesus is not discouraged. “Are you offended by these words? What if the Son of Man ascends to heaven? These words are spirit and life. But there are some of you who don't see things that way; there are some of you who don't believe” Jesus is calling them out, separating the fans from the followers! Jesus is separating the spectators from the soldiers of Christ!

At this, a number of his disciples turn back and stop following him. And so Jesus turns to the twelve and asks them, “Do you want to go away as well? Have the hard sayings driven you away?” (John 6:66–67) And Peter, speaking on behalf of the rest, answers, “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” (John 6:68–69).

“Hard sayings are truly invitations. They call us to see past Jesus's gifts to Jesus himself. We no longer see Jesus has a celestial Genie in a bottle, but as the Creator worthy of following, worthy of doing hard things for His glory!

The Christian faith is filled with its hard sayings. But if we come to Jesus as the satisfying bread of life that He is, if we believe and have come to know that he is the Holy One of God, then, like Peter, even the hard sayings will not deter us. Jesus himself, as the living bread, will satisfy our souls that, though we still may have questions about the hard sayings, we don't turn aside. We continue to seek Jesus.

In other words, embracing Jesus despite the hard sayings is the mark of those who are truly seeking Jesus for Jesus.