

**Bible Text:** John 6  
**Preached on:** Sunday, October 19, 2014

**Tenth Presbyterian Church**  
1701 Delancey Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19103-6714

**Website:** [www.tenth.org](http://www.tenth.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tenth](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tenth)

Please pray with me before we read this evening's text.

*Father, please prepare our hearts to receive your word. Please quiet our hearts and minds as to be able to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Please make Dr. Goligher your mouthpiece this evening. May what you preach be effective, effective to teach, to reprove, to correct and to train for righteousness. May we see and know the Incarnate Word we read about tonight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Please turn with me in the black pew Bibles in front of me to John 6. We are going to read verses 60 through 71 to be found on page 892 in the black pew Bibles. John 6.

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" 61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 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. 64 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 who would betray him.) 65 And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." 66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." 70 Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." 71 He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.

There is a fault line in the souls of men and women who gather as we are gathered this evening for public worship, perhaps who have been claiming to be and making the assertion of being a follower of Jesus, a believer in Jesus, interested as they are in his

teaching and in his life, committed as they are to certain aspects of the Christian faith, there nonetheless has developed somewhere within the core of their being a fault line, a crack, a subterranean almost imperceptible crack in their commitment to him. I had a friend once in Glasgow, he was a professor of engineering at the University of Glasgow and he would describe some of his research into the instrumentality that they had developed there to identify miniature, minor, imperceptible cracks in steel being used in tall buildings. You can imagine that the steelworker who goes into these skyscrapers, if it were to be faulty, it would spell disaster somewhere down the road and he had developed along with his team the kind of equipment that could identify deep within the metal a fissure that would lead over time to the breakdown of that steel and the fabric of these buildings. And the word of Jesus this evening wants to identify and will identify in the hearts of at least somebody listening to me this evening where that fissure lies in your professed faith and allegiance to Jesus Christ. In other words, discipleship for some people only goes so far. All their profession of following Jesus, their profession of accepting his authority in their lives is alright so far as Jesus does not say anything that intrudes into their private life or raises questions about their rational or reasonable conclusions or appears unacceptable to their sensibilities.

We find that lying right at the very heart of Jesus' ministry. We find it here and the issue, the thing that always exposes these fissures in our life are the words of Jesus himself. So for example, in this passage we have just read, we are introduced to some provocative words that Jesus has spoken. You can see that in the very first verse we read, verse 60, "Many of his disciples when they heard this, they said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?'" Let me remind you if you weren't here last week of what these hard things were. Jesus has been talking to them in straightforward language about what it means to be a follower of his. He talks about coming to him, believing in him, going with him and then he has used figurative language to illustrate just how close and vital this relationship of coming to him and believing in him and following him and going with him involves. He has used the figure of eating something in order to teach them that for their salvation, the Son of Man would have to have his flesh, his body given for them. He uses the language of the flesh and the body. He uses that language and says, "You know, my blood will have to be separated from my flesh." He uses that language. Let me just read to you some of it. Jesus said to them, "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 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 remains 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." In other words, not physical material. "I'm not talking physical material, bread like they ate, rather I'm speaking about me as the bread of life." He has introduced himself.

So what he does, he makes the coming to him, the believing in him and this figure, this picture of the eating of him, the condition of life, not biological life but spiritual and eternal life. And the whole flow of the passage explains that when he talks about eating, he's talking about coming and believing and taking and following and he uses the picture

of eating because eating is not a superficial thing, eating is a commitment. You take something and you eat it and you make it part of you. It might be poison and kill you. It might be nourishing and feed you. It is a commitment. Jesus is using the eating analogy as an emphasis on the sheer level of relationship about which he is speaking. It is not superficial. It is total. It is not casual. It is committed. And he's saying to people that coming to him, believing on him, feasting on him so that he becomes part of us and we become part of him is exactly the kind of union and unity of life about which he is speaking and they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

Now understand, it is not that they did not understand. There was a bit of misunderstanding here but the expression "this is a hard saying," that expression means not so much hard to understand as hard to take. Hard to take in the sense of hard to accept. They could accept it. They couldn't accept it because they chose to misunderstand it and so fundamental was this misunderstanding or this refusal to understand what Jesus had said, so fundamental was it that it led to a turning point in the lives of many, many of Jesus' followers. This was not simply 1 or 2 people who were going to abandon him. This was a massive walkout. This is a massive turning away from Jesus of many of his disciples. You can see that in verse 60, "many of his disciples heard this and said, 'This is a hard saying.'" They could not take the idea of what Jesus was saying. They exposed by their behavior this vital principle right at the very beginning, the difference between true discipleship and false discipleship. The true disciple comes up against something he does not understand, something he cannot get his head around that Jesus has said, something that he finds unacceptable that Jesus has said but the true disciple perseveres. The true disciple listens and listens on to learn what Jesus means. The false disciple when they come across something they do not understand or find unacceptable, turns away from Jesus entirely and goes their own way.

Now, you can see this. This is the principle that is developed in this passage as Jesus now speaks these probing words to them. Look at verse 61, "But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this." In John's Gospel whenever you read about Jesus knowing things that are going on in people's minds and hearts, it's meant to underline the fact that Jesus is God in the flesh and as God in the flesh, he knows what's going on in the hearts of his people. He knew that they were grumbling. Just as the children of Israel had murmured and grumbled under Moses, so these people were grumbling and mumbling over Jesus. Knowing that they were grumbling about this, he said to them, "Do you take offense at this?" I think in particular what he's saying here or what they were grumbling about was the idea that had actually hit them that they didn't like and the idea was that Jesus had been talking about death. If you talk about blood and flesh, you're talking about sacrifice. In the Old Testament, the blood and the flesh were never mixed together, they were separated. The animal was drained of blood as it was sacrificed. That was a vital separation that took place. That's why when later Jesus inaugurates the Lord's supper, he separates the 2 elements: the bread and the wine. He separates those so that we clearly understand that a sacrifice has taken place, violent death has occurred, a draining away, a separation of the blood and the flesh to indicate that an offering has been made to God on our behalf.

They were offended. It was a scandal to them. That's the word "offense." It scandalized them and they take offense. RC Sproul distinguishes between an offense given and an offense taken. Sometimes people take offense when no offense was intended. Some people are prone to take offense at the slightest things and as Christians, we are not to give offense or to be unnecessarily offensive and we are not to take offense either. But these people, these people had listened to Jesus, he had not intended to be offensive but they had taken offense at his words and he noticed this. So what does he do? Does he apologize? Does he say to them, "Well, I'm really sorry that you picked me up wrong. I'm really sorry that I said this thing about the separation of the blood and the flesh and suggested that I might have to die or that my death might be a sacrifice and that's offended you. I'm really, really sorry I offended you. I shouldn't have said anything about that. That's a part of my religion that obviously you don't like and therefore I should really not mention it." It's a bit like what we do today. We decide that there are some things that are going to annoy people in our culture and we don't mention them because we don't want to be offensive. Jesus doesn't apologize. He had nothing to apologize for because what he had said was the truth. He was giving his flesh for the life of the world. His flesh was given in death. It was an offense, however, to the Jews. It was a cause of stumbling, that's what the word means. It was an occasion for them to fall away. Whenever this word is used in the New Testament, it refers to people falling away. They turned away from him. People who were close to him, following him, obviously not born again but looking like they are born again, they fall away. They turn their backs. They go away from him.

So Jesus confronts that. He probes their hearts. "Do you take offense at this? Are my words causing you to consider abandoning me, leaving me?" You might want to ask yourself a question this evening: what might it take for Jesus to say to you, that would cause you to turn away from him? Jesus heightens the stakes here. Suppose, he said, "What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" He's saying to these apostate followers of his, "These are the serious consequences of your actions." He's getting them to think about what's wrong about him. If they walk away from him because of the prospect of his death, they are walking away from something even more profound. He's talking here about his ascension into glory. He's talking about the time in the future when he will be carried up to the glory of God, to the throne of God to assume the place of all power. He's talking about the future glory of the Son of Man who will return to the glory he shared with the Father before eternity. He's saying to these people, "If you are unwilling to accept the shame of siding with me because you find this talk of death scandalous, you will miss out on that joyful, thrilling day when in victory I resume my place in the Father's glory." Will you not take the shame of walking with Jesus here for the sake of the glory that you will share with Jesus when he comes in to his kingdom?

The reality is, of course, that perhaps what offended the Jews then is not what offends us this evening but there is no doubt that the teaching of Jesus in its entirety has something offensive to say to people in every generation and in every age and the question you and I have to ask ourselves is: what is it that Jesus might say to our generation in our age that might pose such a challenge to my rational mind or my sensibilities that I would even entertain the thought of not walking with him? Well, let me put it like this: believing

Jesus as well as believing in Jesus is what's required. Believing Jesus as well as believing in Jesus. Not only that, that means, in turn, believing what Jesus believed and believing what Jesus taught. And it's precisely here that people stumble today. Did Jesus get the Old Testament Scriptures wrong? Did he misquote them? That's what some some scholars are saying. Was Jesus characterized by the prejudices of first century Jews? Did he read into the Scriptures things that weren't there? Is it that that will cause you to fall away from Jesus? Or perhaps it's Jesus' view of origins. Jesus believed despite the scientific consensus, that the world was made by God, that Adam was an historical figure. Will that offend you? Does that offend your sensibilities? Is that what will cause you to abandon Jesus? Because the scandal of being identified with Jesus' views is too great. It runs counter to your rational view of the world. It is a challenge to your sensibilities. Will this be the fissure in your soul that will mean that you will turn your back on Jesus? Or repackage another Jesus other than the one that is here in the Gospel?

Is it Jesus' doctrine of God? He does not draw a great distinction between himself and the God of the New Testament and the God of the Old Testament. Is it his doctrine of God that will offend you? Is it his teaching on the atonement that will offend you? Or perhaps you don't like his call to repentance or the moral values that he underlines. What is it that will cause that fissure in your soul? I want you to see in light of his exaltation above all things that if you have him, if you come to him, if you believe in him, if you partake of him, on that day, you will not be offended, on that day when you see him in all his glory. Jesus' probing question highlights what's at stake in our reaction to him. Then ask yourself: what is the contemporary scandal of the cross today?

Well, Jesus speaks to them probing words. He speaks to them provocative words. He speaks to them living words. Look at what it says in verse 63, "It is the Spirit who gives life." Just as earlier on in chapter 3, he had talked to Nicodemus, the great religious leader, and he addressed the matter of what was or what is not acceptable to human thought as compared to divine reality, he does the same to these people. He distinguishes. He says, "There is that which belongs to your rational human world, the realm you live in, and there is that which belongs to the Spirit, that which has been revealed, that which has been made known." He distinguishes these 2 sources of revelation. He says, "You're either building your life on reason or you're building it on revelation." That's the big challenge that we face today. What do we build our lives on? Reason is good so far as it goes but human reason is fallen. It is sinful. It is not neutral. Only revelation is infallible, is inerrant and can be trusted entirely.

Well, look at what he says. He underlines to these wavering people 2 important truths. 1. He says it is the Spirit who gives life and the flesh is of no avail, he says. Let me read it to you, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all." He's talking there about sinful flesh, human nature, human nature in its natural state, human nature in its natural fallen state. Human nature by itself cannot produce spiritual life. In our fallen state, we cannot and will not go in for the things of God. We just don't do it naturally, we don't do this. Naturally, an unrenewed mind cannot comprehend divine realities. It doesn't matter how brilliant you are. You can read Richard Dawkins, he's not all that brilliant but he's good in a certain narrow sphere of interest but when you read what he writes about

religion, you realize this man is absolutely clueless. He has never grasped it. His mind however brilliant he may be in some specific scientific area, when it comes to the things of God, the man doesn't have a clue. He can't even represent what he's against with any clarity. He doesn't know what he's against because the natural man doesn't understand the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him. They are absolute folly to him. The unrenewed mind cannot comprehend divine realities. It will instinctively reject them. It is not suited to grasp them. The flesh cannot understand, cannot begin to turn toward God. It is powerless. It cannot hear the word. It takes offense at it. It misunderstands it. It misrepresents it. It disbelieves it.

That was really what was wrong with these people. They did not believe. They followed but they did not believe. They went after him but they did not believe. There was a failure of faith. Even the best of human religion, the best of human religion is inadequate when it comes to knowing God. There is that great statement that comes from this verse. He uses this verse that gripped the mind of Martin Luther when he was writing to Erasmus of Rotterdam at the time of the Reformation and Erasmus held onto this idea that there was a little island of righteousness within humanity by which it was possible with the help of the Spirit of God to come to God. So the Spirit helped and your own little island of righteousness connected with the Spirit and it brought you to God. And Luther wrote to Erasmus and he quoted this verse. He quoted it in another translation, a literal translation, the verse that says here, "The flesh is no help at all." Basically it says: the flesh is nothing; the flesh profits nothing. Luther quotes this to Erasmus and he says, "The flesh profits nothing and that nothing is not a little something." That nothing is nothing. The flesh profits nothing when it comes to moving toward God or understanding or comprehending God. The flesh profits nothing and that nothing is absolute. It profits nothing at all. Nothing at all. We cannot get into heaven in our own strength. We cannot enter the kingdom of God apart from a supernatural work of God. It is the Spirit, you notice, as the author of God's renewing, redeeming work who makes us alive, who illumines our understanding, who subdues our foolish will, who makes us willing in the day of his power.

Then you ask the question: then how does the Spirit do this? What is the means by which the Spirit illumines minds and enlightens spirits and minds? Jesus tells us in the second principle here, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." In other words, the Spirit brings to life and brings understanding and he does it through the very words of Scripture, the very words of Jesus, the words that Jesus authorized to the apostles and the Old Testament. He uses that word and those words as the very instrument to give life to those who are dead. To give light to those who are in darkness. To give sight to those who are spiritually blind. He uses by his word and the Spirit, he uses the word to bring new birth. You were born again. "You were brought to life," says James, "by the word of truth that was spoken to you." He gives life from the dead. That's how the Spirit makes us alive in Christ. That's how he makes sense to us. In Christ, the spirit and life are found through the words of Christ. Jesus speaks living words.

And Jesus speaks saving words. Look at verse 64, "There are some of you who do not believe." There is the core issue, you see? I say that really lying at the heart of their

inability to comprehend and their misunderstanding was their disbelief. That was the issue. Their disbelief. Now, you would think that Jesus had persuasive powers. This is a human being that had persuasive powers. Or you would think that the very things that Jesus did, all these miracles the feeding of the 5,000 and so on, that if these miracles that were done in Palestine then were done in Philadelphia or Toronto or London or Beirut today, you'd think that people would go in droves after Jesus. You would think so. You might think that people would be bound to believe, but nothing would be further from the truth. Jesus knows what's going on in these people's hearts. "There are some of you who do not believe." How does he know this? Well it tells you in brackets, "For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him." He knew who wouldn't believe and he knew the person who would betray him. He knew that. He had that supernatural sight. He absolutely knew where these people stood. He knew that was the state of affairs among his followers: unbelief was kicking in among his followers.

I read a book this week and the author of this book purports to be a Christian but he takes views of Scripture, frankly, that Jesus would not recognize. He is offended by the stories in the Old Testament. "They didn't happen," he says. They were simply part of normal propaganda. He's offended by New Testament quotations of the Old Testament. Here it is, here we discover that it is possible for people to follow Jesus, to be impressed by his works and words and in some sense to believe in him but to have a faith that is not a saving faith. Now, I don't know the heart of this man, all I can say is: if I had written what he wrote in light of what Jesus talks about, the Son of Man ascending to where he was before, I would be terrified. I would be terrified. I quake for him. He has so far gone from the things of God and you see, these people at the heart of it was unbelief. Unbelief. A heart of unbelief. In every generation, there is something scandalous about following Jesus. Right now at this moment of time, the kind of attacks that are going on on the Old Testament has become a way of assaulting the Christian faith. It is the Christian faith. It reflects on Jesus. It's unbelief. It is downright unbelief in our seminaries.

You notice what Jesus goes on to say: "I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father, it has been granted to him by the Father." True saving faith which is here described as "coming to me" is not possible in the flesh but is a gift of God to those who are born of God, to those who are born from above who are taught of God. The doctrine of predestination is behind everything, you see. It just won't go away. You may want it to go away but it won't go away. It keeps on coming back. And he's making it, do you notice, he's making it clear that without the intervention of God, some of those who followed him would be lost utterly. That isn't to say it was imposed on them, it was their own choice. It was their own unbelief. They are responsible for their own unbelief. They're just not responsible for their faith but they're responsible for their lack of faith, their refusal to believe.

They were like little children. We've got 2 little boys staying with us and one of them is old enough to feed himself and you can see him sometimes and he's playing with the food on his plate. He rearranges the food. He's supposed to be eating the food but what he's doing is he's pushing away the bits he doesn't want and he plays with his food instead of

eating his food and there are some people who are like that with Jesus. They kind of play around with him. They push him here and there and they look at him from every angle but they never make him their own. They take a kind of detached, scientific, rational view of what Jesus has said and done, "What we find in Scripture?" and they analyze it and they critique it and so forth on the basis of their reason because they have never taken him. They have never believed in him. They have never surrendered to him. There is no wholehearted commitment and what we're going to learn is you have to believe before you understand. You have to believe before you see. That's the way it is in the Bible. You believe first, then you see. You don't see first and then believe. That's the way it goes.

That's the way it went here. "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him." Can you imagine the shame of that? In that ancient society, a teacher's status was derived from his success and from the loyalty of his followers so losing followers was dishonorable. It was not a good thing. But many followed him no longer. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine a mass exodus from our church because people did not believe? I mean, we've been upset recently when some people have gone to other churches but we are really grateful they went to other churches. That's fine, they're still following the Lord Jesus. That's okay. But imagine people leaving the church altogether, defecting from Christ and in their defection denying things that they once claimed to believe, denying them outright? It's part of Christian history. It's part of our Christian experience that people can get pretty close to Jesus and then stumble over his teaching when it turns counter to their reason or their presuppositions or their lifestyle choices. And I want to ask you today for your soul's eternal well-being: do you have a controversy with Jesus about something? Only you know. Do you have a controversy with Jesus about something? Is there an issue in your experience or your life? Is there an intellectual question that you have and you have a controversy with Jesus? I want you to resolve it. Let the word of God resolve it. Let faith in Jesus resolve it. Or it may very well be the very means by which you are exposed to be an apostate.

You know, this was a burning issue at the time John is writing his Gospel. We know that from his letters that this was going on in the churches. There were mass deviations, defections, from the church. John writes about this in 1 John 2:15 and following when he says, "Don't love the world or the things of the world. If you love the world, the love of the Father isn't in you for all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the eyes and the pride of possessions and so on, don't come from God but from the world. Children, this is the last hour and you have heard that the antichrist is coming and many antichrists have come, therefore we know that is the last hour." He goes on to say this, "They have gone out from us. They were not of us for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out and it became plain that they are not of us. But you have an anointing of the holy one and you all have knowledge." Do you see what John is saying? John is saying there that we don't know who apostate people are until they leave and then when they leave, we see them moving in a direction, in a massively unbelieving direction and we realize that all the time we thought they were part of us, they weren't really. And he's saying to the church, he's saying to ordinary believers, "You have an anointing from God. You have knowledge." Why? Because faith breeds knowledge of the truth.



Here was this massive defection from Jesus when only 12 men were left standing. Jesus says, "Even one of them was a devil." Even one of them was a devil. He was still there. He was still in the church. Jesus turns to his 12 and he says, "Do you want to go away as well?" I want to ask that question of you this evening: in Jesus' name, do you want to go away as well? It was a testing question, wasn't it? What's the mark of true faith? What's the mark of true faith when you come up against big questions you can't answer? I frankly don't know whether God created the world in an instant or took billions of years to let it unfold or how that all works out. I don't know. I know what the Bible says and I have to be content, I think, with what the Bible says and wait until I get the full video when we get to glory. I think that's the way it was meant to be, actually. You believe and then you see. You believe and then you see. Now, that may not satisfy your intellectual inquiry, spirit of inquiry. It may not be satisfying to you but maybe that is because this is the big test of your faith. Maybe this is the scandal of your day and your generation, in which you have to make the decision that those people back there had to make regarding the crucified Christ. Is this the stumblingblock over which you will stumble to your soul's eternal destruction? I ask you that question: will you leave also? Will you leave also?

What does a true believer do? Look at what Peter says, Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." You see, what Peter was not saying was this, he was not saying, "Lord, we understand it. We get it." We know perfectly well they didn't get it. They still weren't getting it at the end before Jesus went to the cross. They were still talking past each other. That wasn't what he was saying, he wasn't saying, "I get it all. I'm all sewn up. I've got all the answers." That's not what Peter is saying. He's saying to Jesus, "You have the answers. We're going to hang out with you because we know you have the answers. You alone have the answers. You have the words of eternal life. We're not going back." There is the feature of saving faith, saving faith is persevering faith. Saving faith doesn't defect. Saving faith hangs out with Jesus to the bitter end. Why? Because saving faith is faith. It's faith. It's belief. It's trusting. Peter trusted in Jesus.

The 12 have nowhere else to go. Why? Because they have crossed the line, a line of faith and that was irrevocable and irreversible and when life is at stake, there is no other way to go than that of following Jesus. "We have believed." Listen to Peter, "We have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God." Do you see the order? We have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God. The believer doesn't talk about himself but of him on whom he believes.

So let me ask you this evening: is there something in your soul, a controversy you have with Jesus which if allowed to grow might be the very means of exposing that your faith has not really been in him at all but in some mental image of him, some idea of him? Or will you say with Simon Peter, "Lord, we have believed and are coming to know that you are the holy one of God. We're going to hang around here because there is more of you to find out, more of you to learn, more of you to know." That's what faith does. Faith perseveres. Faith hangs out with Jesus and faith has its eyes opened to see.

Let's pray.

*Father, as we come now to handle sensible objects, bread and wine, things that appeal to the senses that we can see and touch and taste, we pray that your word would help us to have grace in our hearts, Christ for ourselves. We pray this in his strong name. Amen.*