

JESUS' TEACHING IS HARD TO SWALLOW

John 6:60-69 | Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost | August 27/30, 2015

"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Jesus

Dear fellow disciples of Jesus Christ,

Do you like to try new foods? Are you an adventurous eater? Some people are. They love to try every different kind of food available – sushi, haggis, Rocky Mountain oysters, those little suckers with the bug in the middle. The more exotic the food, the better. Other people don't want to try anything new – ever. The last thing they want when they sit down to eat is a surprise.

Regardless of which type of person we are, from time to time we all run into new types of food. We touch it with our fork, we smell it, and we slowly take a little bite.

Sometimes we're pleasantly surprised; sometimes we're not. Occasionally we run into a food that's hard to swallow. On the basis of God's Word before us today we are going to learn about such a food. In John chapter six Jesus says, **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."** In other words: "I am the only Savior.

Forgiveness and eternal life come through me alone." That teaching is hard for us sinful human beings to swallow. It's not what we expect. But it is what we need.

I. Jesus' Teaching is Not What We Expect

Our text begins with these words: **On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"** Let's review what had happened to get us to this point. Not long before this Jesus had

miraculously filled the bellies of the thousands with a boy's picnic lunch of bread and fish. As you can imagine this interested the people. So they followed Jesus and asked him for more bread. But instead of giving them physical bread he gave them spiritual bread. He preached a sermon. He told the people that he is the bread of life from heaven. Eating earthly bread would fill their bellies and keep them alive for a while. But eating the bread of life, believing in Jesus, would fill their souls with eternal life.

How did they react to this teaching? **From this time on many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.** Isn't that something? This wasn't just a crowd of people who wanted something to eat. These were disciples. They were followers of Jesus. Why did they leave? Well, they didn't leave because Jesus' message was hard to understand. His message was clear: I am the Messiah. I am the only Savior of sinners. Believe in me and live. They left because that message was difficult for them to accept. Jesus' teaching was abrasive to their human reason and contrary to the thinking of their sinful natures. It was hard for them to swallow.

The Bible is filled with so-called "difficult" teachings. For example, human reason has a hard time accepting a universe created in six twenty-four-hour days. People have a hard time believing in a worldwide flood. Many attempts have been made to explain it away

with science. The miracles of Jesus, like the feeding of the 5,000 – most people dismiss them as bunch of tall tales. And, of course, certain doctrines cause many to raise an eyebrow. Does God really say that we should be separate from other Christians who don't believe all the same things we do? Does God really say that the husband is the head of the wife and that she should submit to him? Does God really say that marriage is one man and one woman only? The problem isn't with God's Word. It's easy to understand. It's a lamp and a light (Ps 119:105) – it's clear. The problem is with our sinful human flesh. If something in God's Word doesn't agree with our way of thinking, if one of God's teachings cramps our style, we have a hard time swallowing it.

By far the hardest teaching for sinful human beings to accept is the teaching of the cross. Most people don't mind a Jesus who is a great teacher, a fine example and a really nice guy. But they don't like a Jesus who is the world's only Savior. They don't like to hear Jesus say, **"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"** (John 14:6).

It's at the foot of the cross that many people stop following Jesus. The cross has strong implications for us sinners. If Jesus went to the cross for our sins then we must admit to being sinners. That's hard to swallow. If Jesus went to the cross to secure heaven for us that means we can't obtain heaven for ourselves. That's difficult, because we like to help. If Jesus is **the only name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved** (Acts 4:12) – well, that's hard on our ears which are so used to hearing from the world around us, "It doesn't matter what you believe; just believe something."

Why is Jesus' teaching hard to swallow? His teaching isn't what we expect. We don't expect a God who hates sin and punishes the sinner. We don't expect a Creator who demands absolute perfection from his creatures. And we certainly don't expect a gracious Father who gives salvation as a gift with no strings attached.

But, friends, that is exactly what God has done! He has given us his one and only Son, Jesus, the bread of life. He satisfies our souls with free forgiveness and life. That teaching is hard to swallow. It's hard to believe because it's not what we expect. We expect God to tell us to do something to earn his favor. But he doesn't. He gives us the unexpected. And that's just what we need.

II. Jesus' Teaching is What We Need

Imagine Jesus' reaction when all those disciples walked away. I bet you could read the sadness on his face. He knew what was in store for those who rejected his teaching: the eternal pain, loneliness and regret of hell. His voice was probably choked with emotion when he asked the Twelve, **"You do not want to leave too, do you?"** But his sadness was replaced with joy by the answer to that question.

Peter, who often served as spokesman for the Twelve, said, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."** That's a beautiful confession of faith. Those disciples didn't look at Jesus just as a great teacher, a fine example and a really nice guy. They believed in him as God's promised Messiah. They trusted in him as the long-awaited Savior of the world. They knew that the bread of life come down

from heaven was the only one who could feed their souls with forgiveness and life.

Sadly, only eleven had put their faith in Jesus. One, Judas who would betray him, found Jesus' teaching too hard to swallow. What about you? What is your reaction to Jesus teaching? You don't want to leave too, do you? No, you don't. By God's grace, and by God's grace alone, you don't want to walk away from the teacher. In fact, you are here today in this house of God to hear Jesus' teaching. You are here to feast on the bread of life. You are here for the strengthening of your faith in Jesus.

That faith is a precious gift of God. The Scriptures tell us in 1 Corinthians that **the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (2:14)**. To natural, sinful human reason, the gospel is utter foolishness. We have no capacity on our own to swallow the teaching of the bread of life. That's why Jesus said, **"No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."** Luther explained: **I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him.**

What grace the God has shown us! He has enabled us to come to Jesus. He has enabled us to believe the unexpected teaching of Jesus. He has done so through the power of that teaching. Jesus said, **"The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."** The gospel takes us from spiritual death to spiritual life. Paul tells us that the gospel is **"the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"** (Romans 1:16). Through Jesus' teaching, through the good news of forgiveness and life, God has given

us the gift of faith so that we confess with Peter, **"I believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."** Through the gospel God has convinced us that Jesus is exactly what we need.

It's true. We need the one who for 33 years lived perfectly in your place. We need the one who for six hours suffered hell on the cross to pay for our guilt. We need the one who after spending three days in the tomb proved his victory by rising back to life again. We need Jesus, the bread of life, who nourishes our souls with his pardon and peace.

Friends, to whom will you go? To whom will you go when stress and worry are driving peace and contentment from your heart? To whom will you go when chronic pain and the weakness of old age become a burden almost too heavy to bear? To whom will you go when broken relationships leave your soul hungry and growling to be filled? To whom will you go when the guilt of your sins leaves you starving for forgiveness? The answer is the same every time: Jesus. He has the words of eternal life. He is your only Savior. He is the bread of life. No other food will satisfy your soul's hunger.

Are you an adventurous eater? During my vicar year in Falls Church, Virginia, I taught English to a Korean lady. She was always bringing me strange foods, like kimchee, a kind of fermented cabbage. One day she brought me two dried squid to try. Now this wasn't the processed strips of seasoned squid that can be purchased in any oriental grocery. This looked like squid road kill. It was unseasoned and utterly unappetizing. But I politely bit off a part of a tentacle and chewed it for about half an hour before I could swallow. Needless to say, I wasn't

pleasantly surprised. Friends, Jesus is a pleasant surprise. He gives forgiveness and life – free of charge. That’s totally unexpected. And that’s totally wonderful. Friends, feast on the bread of life! Put your faith in Jesus!

S.D.G.