

Unmasking Fickle Faith

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 6:60-71
Preached on: Sunday, June 8, 2014

Once again we have an enormous privilege that we never want to take for granted, the privilege to read the word of God, to study the word of God in freedom and we want to take advantage of that privilege right now so will you take your Bibles, turn to John 6 as we continue our verse-by-verse exposition of this magnificent gospel that unveils the glorious truths pertaining to Jesus, the Son of God. The text this morning will be in verses 60 through the end of chapter 6. Let me read this to you,

“60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, 'This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?' 61 But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, 'Does this cause you to stumble? 62 What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. 65 And He was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.'

“66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, 'You do not want to go away also, do you?' 68 Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. 69 We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.' 70 Jesus answered them, 'Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?' 71 Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.”

This morning I've entitled my discourse to you “Unmasking Fickle Faith,” and this is what we see Jesus doing here in this text but before we examine the words more closely, I would like to have you think with me about a few concepts that really provide a foundation for where our Lord is taking us here. When I was a young man early in my studies in college in preparation for the ministry, I found it fascinating when I began to learn from history that the greatest outpouring of divine power in the salvation of sinners since the birth of the church at Pentecost all had at least one undeniable thread of commonality: each spirit-empowered preacher that called sinners to repentance in faith in Christ had an unwavering confidence in the doctrines of the sovereign grace of God in salvation. Even though I didn't fully understand what Calvinism was at the time because at that time I was a committed Arminian and didn't really know it, I think most people are kind of born that way. But what I began to understand is each of these men were Five

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Point Calvinists, moreover, they believed in the Five Solas of the Reformation as you see around this worship center. It's interesting that after Pentecost, God moved in a very mysterious way in the 16th century, using preachers like John Calvin, Martin Luther, William Farel, Theodore Beza and John Knox, men that spawned the Reformation by the power of the Spirit of God. We witnessed an outpouring of God's power once again during the days of the great Puritan divines in the 17th century, through men like John Bunyan, John Owen, Isaac Watts, Thomas Goodwin and so on. Then again in the stunning spiritual awakening in the 18th century in the English speaking world: God used men like George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Davies and then again in the 19th century with men like Charles Spurgeon. Each of these preachers experienced a profound manifestation of the power of the Spirit of God, the same kind of power that was first poured out in the days of the apostles, which by the way, we pray that the Lord will do again even in our day for it is God, not man, who initiates revival.

These were unlike the phony revivals, many of them that we witness today, many of them products of a 19th century heretic by the name of Charles Finney who denied the reality of man's ruined nature, a heresy called Pelagianism. He believed that a skilled preacher can induce a man to make a decision for Christ and all that was needed for conversion was a resolution signified by standing or kneeling or walking down an aisle to an anxious bench and so forth, methods that are completely foreign to Scripture, as well as the doctrines that spawned them. Sadly, this kind of error in doctrine and these methods are still in vogue today but as history proves, unlike superficial revivals that will light up the sky with claims of mass conversions and then fizzle out like shooting stars, true revivals light up the world permanently with saintly stars that continue to shine forth the glory and the grace of God that produced them. That's why, my friends, it is foolish and it is arrogant to schedule a revival because true revivals come down from God, they are never raised up by men.

I also found it fascinating early on in my studies that since Pentecost, each season of spiritual awakening occurred during a time of spiritual lethargy and even apostasy within the Christian church. Are we not in such a state today? Moreover, in every case, when God decided to pour out his grace in some unusual way, he always did so by using men who were faithful expositors of the word of God, men who accurately conveyed the God-intended meaning of every text that they preached and then applied that meaning to the contemporary issues of life. Whether God will choose to use this pulpit and other pulpits like this in such a way, no one knows but God but we must and we will remain in a position for him to do so and if he chooses otherwise, we will be thankful to serve him in any way that we can. But make no mistake, my friends, it is never the preacher who initiates change in a human heart, it is always the Spirit of God through the instrument of his word. It is always through the word preached.

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Paul reminded Timothy of this in 2 Timothy 3:15. He said to remember “the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation.” By the way, the sacred writings in this case referred to the Old Testament. In verse 16 he said, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” In chapter 4:2, he commanded Timothy to “preach the word.” He said, “be ready,” which means stand by, take advantage of every opportunity, “be ready in season and out of season,” in other words, when it's convenient and when it's not, when it's popular or when it's not, when it's legal or when it's not, when it's night or day, whether in danger, whether in safety, in prison and threatened by death or when free, whether you're in church, in private, in public, be ready. Read to “reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.” Why? Because we know that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. You see, friends, it is the preaching and the private study of the word that helps a man acquire an increased hatred of his sin. That's what produces a broken heart in a person; that's what causes a man to see and feel his inward corruption and produces within him a deep humility for God. It results in a practical understanding of how to deal with sin and it produces a deeper acquaintance, a deeper love for God, a deeper love for his people, a passion to serve and worship him.

So we preach it. We preach it no matter how offensive it is and you may not realize how offensive the word even from this pulpit is because we all kind of live in this bubble here but if you could read the emails and the comments I get on the internet, which by the way I refuse to read. Every now and then they'll pop up and I can see even from the language that I don't want to read the rest of that but you can see how offensive the word of God truly is. This precisely, however, what Jesus did and in so doing, he unmasked the fickle faith of the vast majority of the disciples that were following him. There were literally thousands of them following him for the wrong reasons but his word also proved the faith of a few.

So I want you to return with me this morning to that beautiful synagogue there in Capernaum. I hope you will look it up and on Google you can see pictures of the ruins there. It's a beautiful place. Jesus is preaching to a large contingent of his disciples. Almost all of them were following him for the wrong reason, they had not placed their faith in him as Savior and Lord but they wanted to make him king. Also in attendance in the synagogue, you will recall, were the Jewish religious leaders and they were all becoming increasingly offended with what Jesus was saying. In fact, a year later, these Galilean Jews would join with their Judean brethren in Jerusalem and say, “We will not have this man reign over us. Crucify him.” Yet knowing all of this, Jesus kept on preaching the word.

Let's look closely at the words of Jesus' sermon. We're going to see three things: words of offense, words of spirit and life and words of eternal life. As we examine the reactions of

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the people, we will see how history repeats itself because, my friends, as the word of God makes clear, most people will hate the truth and die a second death but a few will love the truth and be born-again and live forever. As someone has well stated: born once, die twice, born twice, die once.

Let's examine first the words of offense in verse 60, "Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, 'This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?'" Doubtless they took umbrage with the overall content of the preceding discourse which, by the way, I'm sure we don't have all of it recorded here, but especially his claim to have come down from heaven. Moreover as we look at it, they grumbled over his assertion that somehow he was the source of eternal life and that they must repent and place their faith in him in order to enter the kingdom. This was blasphemy to them and they despised his insistence that they were so depraved, that they were so alienated from God that unless the Father draws them by his uninfluenced sovereign grace, they would never be saved. A doctrine that continues to offend the sensibilities of non-believers and many believers who reject the clear teaching of the word of God. Furthermore, they could not reconcile Jesus' allusions to his death with their views about their Messiah and the kingdom. In fact, later when Jesus was teaching the Jews in Jerusalem about his impending death in John 12:34, "The multitude said to Him, 'We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can You say, "The Son of Man must be lifted up"? Who is this Son of Man?'"

So, all that Jesus was saying offended their sensibilities; all of these things conflicted with their pre-conceived views. The vast multitudes following Jesus, as you will recall, were interested in a social welfare state that would meet their physical needs. They saw a political Messiah, not one that would save them from their sin and I might add that many people today see Jesus as a political figure, not the Son of God who came to save sinners. We see this in many ostensibly Christian denominations that try to apply the gospel to the plight of the poor, to the disenfranchised, the social gospel, if you will. Our current President is a product of such thinking. He was a member of a church in Chicago that held to black liberation theology which focuses primarily on helping blacks being liberated from all forms of bondage and injustice whether real or perceived, whether social, political, economic, religious or whatever which, by the way, is a blatant distortion of the gospel that reduces black identity to victim-hood. Even beyond that, we have millions of people today who treat Jesus as if he came to save them from their unhappiness. This is at the very heart of prosperity theology which I prefer to call greed-based theology, the gospel of health and wealth. You hear this all the time, you can go into Christian bookstores and it's just filled with this type of garbage. People that insist that financial blessing is the will of God for all Christians and that faith and positive speech and donations to certain Christian ministries will always increase one's material wealth.

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My point is: the mindset of the early Jews toward Jesus was not isolated; we still continue to see similar kinds of thinking today. Man's fallen nature will always seek a religious system or some kind of a religious idol that appeals to the basest of our human instincts, that is the desire to avoid suffering which is this passion to be healthy and also a desire for pleasure, to be wealthy. But like these Jewish people in Capernaum, when people like this are confronted with the true gospel, when they're pressed to believe the true gospel, they will balk and they will bolt as we will see whereas true disciples will remain and they will rejoice and they will follow Jesus. In fact, in John 8:31, "Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed in Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.'" Said differently: the nature of true discipleship consists of continued obedience to the word of God.

But most of the people that followed Jesus were false disciples. As Jesus says in Matthew 7 is true to this very day, they had fickle faith, they had an indecisive faith, a vacillating faith, an unpredictable faith. Those in the first century like people today, preferred the false gospel of self-fulfillment over the true gospel of self-denial. They abhorred being told that they were spiritually dead, that they were morally bankrupt, alienated from God, dependent wholly and solely on his sovereign grace to save them, truths they had to confess in order to be saved. So, the cost of discipleship for them as is true today with some many people, was just simply too high and yet Jesus said in Luke 9, beginning in verse 23, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must," what? "Deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?"

Back to verse 60, "Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, 'This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?'" By the way, the answer to that is those whom the Spirit quickens, all others will reject it and so Jesus' words unmasked their fickle faith as they always will. Then notice verse 61, "But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, 'Does this cause you to stumble?'" In other words, does this cause you to take offense to want to stop believing? Now, obviously the grumblers were not teachable, therefore, they were unwilling to come to Jesus to ask him to explain more of what he was saying which, by the way, is always typical of people with a spurious faith, phony disciples. In fact, many hundreds, perhaps thousands of people have come and left this church because they heard something that conflicted with their cherished beliefs and challenged their heart attitudes. And what do people typically do? The same thing that the Jews did: they grumbled to themselves; they murmur among themselves. They are more interested in garnering support from others to join with them in their offense rather than trying to reason together to understand the word of God.

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So, what happens is they slip into the shadows to whisper, to criticize, to slander, look for opportunity to sow seeds of dissension rather than seeking the light of truth. But as we see here, Jesus is able to peer right into their hearts. He knows what they are thinking. He knows what we are thinking. He must have seen that the most scandalous thing of all that offended them, that caused them to stumble, was his claim that he came down from heaven, basically a declaration of deity because notice in verse 62, he says, “What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?” This is a curious statement. What is he saying here? Well, think about it: what would be the portal or the doorway for his future ascension back into heavenly glory? The cross. No doubt Jesus knew they would not understand what he was saying until maybe the next year when during that same Passover time, they would see this same Jesus, the Lamb of God, hanging on a cross when as God promised through Isaiah in chapter 52:13, “Behold, my servant will prosper. He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.”

So, in essence what Jesus is saying here is: if you are offended by the truth of my heavenly origin when I descended from glory to give my life for you so that you can partake of my flesh and of my blood and have eternal life, as he's been saying, what will you say when you see me hanging on the cross? What will you think when you see me lifted up upon that tree? And then hear that I have risen from the dead and ascended back into glory? To be sure, Christ's crucifixion would become the greatest offense of all to the Jewish people and it continues to be to this day. They could not conceive of anything more blasphemous than someone claiming that their Messiah was crucified on a Roman cross. Such a thought would be inconceivably odious to them. In fact, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1, beginning in verse 22, “For the Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Then what happened when Jesus rose triumphant from the grave? He ascended back into glory where he is now seated at the right hand of the Father. But before he went to the cross, he prayed to the Father in John 17:4 and he said this, “I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hadst given Me to do. Now glorify thou me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was .”

So, this explains verse 62, “What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?” Well, the answer is that most of them were even more profoundly offended if anybody insinuated that, “There is your Messiah.” But a few responded the same way and I want you to hear this carefully: few responded the same way that a future remnant of Israel will one day respond when they see this same Jesus return in power and great glory. In fact, their confession is recorded in detail in Isaiah 53, when they will say, “Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” By the way, these questions imply that despite all of the prophecies in the Old Testament

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concerning the Messiah who must first come and suffer and die as the sacrificial lamb, most would never recognize the Savior when he appeared. That's what Isaiah was saying, "Who is going to believe this?" And then he answers this, here was their thinking, this is the confession of the Jewish people, "For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him." But then he goes on to say, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted." In other words, they thought that God was punishing Jesus for his sins, not theirs. Verse 5, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth."

So, we ask the question: why is it that most of Jesus' disciples were offended by his words? Why would they abandon him? Why would they later on cry out for his crucifixion? Why would only a small few believe? Jesus gives this answer here in his next comment in verse 63. Here's why, because "It is the Spirit who gives life." Is the Spirit who gives life. We've examined first how Jesus' words were offensive but here we see how they are secondly, word of life. I'm convinced this is a reference to the Holy Spirit because we know that apart from the work of regeneration, man will remain spiritually dead, unable to believe. And, of course, what he's saying here is, in keeping with what Jesus has been stating regarding the sinner's inability to come to Christ apart from the Father doing that work of drawing, the wooing of the Father's love. In fact, according to chapter 5, verse 21, John tells us that it is the Father and the Son who join with the Spirit in the miraculous work of regeneration which is that supernatural, instantaneous, impartation of spiritual life to the spiritually dead.

So Jesus says, "It is the Spirit who gives life the flesh profits nothing." The flesh, what John calls in chapter 1:13 as the "will of the flesh," the flesh contributes absolutely nothing to the working of God in salvation. Nothing. And so Jesus says, "the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." In other words, they are a product of the Spirit who gives life. We must remember, dear friends, that throughout Scripture we see that the Spirit of God is the agent of regeneration who uses his word as the instrument of regeneration to cause a man to be born-again and we have to remember this in evangelism. James 1:18, we read, "In the exercise of his will he brought us forth by the word of truth so that we would be a kind of firstfruits among his creatures." Then in verse

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21, he says, “In humility receive the word implanted which is able to save your souls.” Likewise, Peter said in 1 Peter 1:23, “For you have been born-again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.”

We must apply this to the church today before we go on. My friends, what's needed today is not more creative music that alters a man's state of consciousness, that somehow helps create a mood that will make him more likely to make a decision for Christ. What is needed today is not more sensuous sounds and sights and showmen that capture the sinner's attention. What is needed today is not more tear-jerking stories or celebrity testimonies or seeker-sensitive gurus to tell us how to create the right atmosphere for a man to believe the gospel. Dear friends, what is needed today is the faithful preaching of the word of God. That's what the Spirit uses. All of those other things that are so popular today are utterly useless when it comes to regeneration. Man's techniques to raise the spiritually dead are no more effective in a church service than they would be in a morgue to raise the physically dead. Regeneration is the work of the Spirit, not of the flesh, that's what Jesus is saying here. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing,” so the point here is unleash the Spirit through the faithful preaching of the word. Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word of Christ and I know I've heard this so many times, “Yes, but people don't want to hear that. It is just so boring to them. We don't live in that generation. People won't endure Bible teaching.” Well, of course they won't, they're spiritually dead. They are spiritual cadavers. God says they are alienated from him; they are separated from God; they are at war with him; they serve their father the devil. In Romans 3, Paul says that they have no understanding, none of them seek after God, they have no fear of God before their eyes. But friends, hear this: for those whom the Father is drawing, they will hear the word and they will be saved by the power of the Spirit. And the question is: do you want a church or do you want a crowd because the two are radically different. That's what we see here in John 6.

So, it's fascinating, Jesus keeps giving them the truth. The vast majority are all offended so what does he do? Does he change the message to make it more appealing? Can't you hear Peter saying, “Jesus, you need to lighten up. I mean, people are getting upset. People are leaving.” What does Jesus do? Does he bring in the local musicians? Bring in some comedians to soften up the crowd? Bring in some actors to do some skits? Or have the disciples do some creative dance to somehow get the point across? No, we don't see any of that. Good grief, people, think about it: the day before Jesus created over nine metric tons of food to feed 20,000 of these people. They have seen him for months cause the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear. He has raised the dead. He has cast out demons. But now what does he do? He keeps preaching the word. No gimmicks. No techniques. No focus groups to learn how to address the felt needs of his people. He keeps preaching the same offensive truths they don't want to hear. Why? After all, if he keeps doing this, he's going to drive them all away. Why does he do it? Here's why:

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because he knows that all the Father had given him would come to him, right? He knows. That's what he said in John 6:37 and he knows that "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."

Now, I want you to understand that the words that Jesus spoke to them included far more than what's recorded here in this text or in other texts in the gospels. Plus, earlier before he fed the multitude, many of which were hearing him right now, Mark tells us that he began to teach them many things. In fact, Luke records that he began speaking to them about the kingdom of God. Bear with me. Later on, we even know that after his resurrection, remember he met with the confused disciples traveling to Emmaus and in Luke 24, verse 27, we read, "Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." Moreover, Paul said in Acts 20:27 to the elders at Ephesus, "Do not shrink from declaring the whole purpose of God." Here's my point with this: the broader your understanding of the word of God, the more effective you will be in your evangelism. I have discovered over the years that some Christians are one string banjos. That doesn't produce a very pretty sound. There are those who all they ever teach about is Bible prophecy or all they will ever teach about is the believer's armor or spiritual gifts or the doctrines of grace. I remember one lady came here and she told me that, "I've been teaching the women of the Bible for 20 years," and I asked her, "Do you ever preach about Christ?" And we got into a conversation and she didn't really like that too well. But, folks, if your only tool to hammer everything that tends to be a nail then your ability to be used by the Spirit will be limited so always be expanding your grasp of systematic theology of the word of God.

I recall, I had an opportunity last October when I went to Israel and as an answer to my prayer, God sent a young, very successful Jewish businessman who came to sit by me to travel all the way to Europe with me and he saw a book that I was reading and he asked, "What are you reading?" and I thought, "Oh Lord, is this ever an answer to prayer," and so I began to explain to him what it was. So he said, "You're a minister, then?" "Yeah, I'm a minister of the gospel." He said, "You know, I've always wondered what is the gospel?" I mean, how often do you get somebody to say that? And then I'm finding out from him that he is traveling as he does every year, to Israel, to Jerusalem to study in one of the primary Jewish schools there in Jerusalem. He says, "I'm from Jewish background." He said, "In fact, my family can be traced back to the Levites." He said, "I really don't know what all we believe but I'm trying to figure it out." And so he's asking me to explain the gospel to him and for the next couple of hours, by God's grace, I was able to take him through the word, answer his questions and believe me, he wanted to know a lot more than women of the Bible, okay? I'm not saying that that isn't important but he wanted to understand how does Jesus' sacrifice relate to the Levitical system? How does that relate to the furnishings in the tabernacle and then later the temple? Help me understand how this relates to the kingdom of God. I understand that some of you think

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we're in the kingdom now. Do you really believe that? I said, "Well, some people believe that. I don't," and I explained that. The point is: we need to have a grasp of the word and you will be more effective in your evangelism.

So Jesus continues to unleash the word that is spirit and life and in verse 64 we read, "But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him." Now, I want you to notice here the blame falls squarely on those who chose not to believe and here the emphasis, once again, is on human responsibility. They had no need for anymore information, they simply refused to believe the information that was given to them and the omniscient Savior saw that. The words he spoke to them were the product of the Spirit and properly understood and embraced, they would generate life. But human nature as it is, they rejected the truth, they would not eat of the bread of life, the only one who could give them eternal life. My friends, I would say to you that you cannot feed upon Christ apart from feeding upon his words. Our Creator made us in his image; he designed us to live by the words of God, not by the words of man. In fact, Moses said in Deuteronomy 8:3 that "man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord." Jeremiah said in chapter 15:16, "Thy words were found and I ate them and thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart."

Think about it: here standing before them is the Incarnate Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, but they refused to eat which, sadly, may be true of some of you. Some of you may be like Judas who would betray him, the one that Jesus alludes to at the end of verse 64. Think about it: he spent three years with the Son of God who cared for him, who trained him, who did all of these miracles right in front of him. He knew Jesus was God. He knew it. He knew he was the Messiah of Israel yet he would not humble himself, he would not bow before him as Savior and Lord. Instead what happened is, his heart grew increasingly hard because he was motivated by avarice and by greed and worldly ambition. Like so many people, he hung around Jesus to cash in on Jesus. He was the quintessential hypocrite. He was even able to fly under the radar of the other eleven; they had no idea Judas was the betrayer. And yet God chose him, isn't that interesting? To be a part of the initial 12 knowing that from the beginning he was a devil, the son of perdition. Why would he do that? May I give you just a few thoughts in passing? I believe he did this to show the power of sin in the human heart, to show how people can be so deceived that they can actually be content with external, outward conformity in association with Christ but never embrace him in their heart. I believe he chose him to show the danger of wasted opportunity, to show that constant exposure to the truth can actually harden the heart of a seasoned hypocrite. I believe he chose him to show us how Satan can infiltrate the ranks of the redeemed. There is a special place reserved in hell for all of those like Judas who with full knowledge would reject Christ.

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In light of their unbelief in verse 65, Jesus was saying, “For this reason,” in other words, their unbelief, “I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” Once again, Jesus reinforces this tension between God's sovereignty in salvation and man's responsibility to believe. Man is commanded to believe and man will be held accountable for what he does with that, how he responds, and yet we also see that a man will never believe unless God takes the initiative and overpowers his sin nature. This inscrutable mystery that seems incompatible to us but perfectly compatible in the mind of God.

Well, the outcome, you know what it is, verse 66, “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.” In other words, they completely abandoned him. I had to laugh when I thought about it this way: this is probably the greatest church split in history. Think about it: Jesus has over 20,000 people eating out of his hand literally, wanting to make him king and in a day he reduces the church to 12. You know, the same thing would happen today in most churches if preachers preached the same message Jesus preached. It's so sad, isn't it? These Galilean Jews responded the same way as Jesus' followers in Jerusalem, a trend that will continue because Jesus would never adjust his message to pander to the felt needs of his listeners. I found it fascinating as I was meditating upon this particular narrative: this is so reminiscent of the first time Jesus taught in a synagogue. Do you remember when that happened? It's recorded in Luke 4: he was in Nazareth in his hometown. If you read the story, you will see that at first the people were just marveling, “This is our Jesus! Our hometown hero here. Listen to him teach. His speech is so gracious.” But then their reaction began to change very, very dramatically when Jesus claimed to be their Messiah and reading their minds like he did here in Capernaum, what did he do? Well, let me tell you what he didn't do: he didn't soften his words. He kept preaching the word and what he did was he reminded them of how their ancestors also rejected Elijah and Elisha who called them to repentance. He reminded them of how God saved an outcast Gentile widow and a Syrian leper terrorist named Naaman instead of all of the self-righteous Israelites. Talk about offensive. Well, why did he do that? Jesus explained basically, “It's because the widow and the terrorist were willing to humble themselves before the word of God and acknowledge that they were spiritually poor, that they were prisoners of their own sin, they were blind to their sin and their need for a Savior and they were oppressed by Satan and sin. They were willing to see this.” Then Jesus, therefore, closes his remarks to the Jews in the synagogue in Nazareth the same way he did in Capernaum and that is by emphasizing the sovereign grace of God in salvation. Do you remember what happened? Let me read it to you, Luke 4:28, when they heard these things, “all in the synagogue were filled with wrath and they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.” What a striking example of how God is opposed to the proud but he gives grace to the humble.

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Unmasking Fickle Faith

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 6:60-71
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The point here, dear friends: we have to be so careful. There is a balance here in all of this. We have to be so careful with avoiding this seeker-sensitive mindset that panders to the tastes of those who are alienated and hostile to God, who are spiritually dead and blind and deaf because it is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing. We have to preach the word: do it with love, with kindness, with compassion but we must do it. Be bold and confrontive and forthright. Don't be ashamed of the gospel and know this: that the greater the religious hypocrite, the greater the outrage. But let God sort all that out.

Finally in closing, we see that these are words of eternal life. Verse 67, "So Jesus said to the twelve, 'You do not want to go away also, do you?'" By the way, he asked this for their sakes, not his. He's basically saying, "Where do you take your stand? Are you going to join the popular opinion and go with the crowd or will you persevere in what appears to be a lost cause?" Verse 68, "Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.'" Let me underscore something very important here: Peter says that we have believed and we have come to know, perfect tense verbs which means these are acts that have been completed but they have ongoing results and notice the order: first, you believe and then you come to know more of who he really is. This is the proper order and too often the natural man wants to know before he will believe. He wants to have proof before he will humble himself but as the writer of Hebrews puts it in Hebrews 11:3, "By faith we understand." By faith we understand. Augustine summarized this so well. He said, "Seek not to understand that you might believe but believe that you might understand."

Beloved, if I can put it this way: no man comes to repentant faith in Christ because of compelling arguments, because of Christian evidences and apologetics, just look at all the miracles they saw Jesus do, a man comes to faith because he believes in what God has said in his infallible, inerrant, inspired word. We need to rejoice in this. We need to relax in this. We need to unleash this like a man would unleash a lion and then watch what God will do with his word.

Then Jesus makes this shocking statement, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" He's speaking about choosing them to be apostles, not choosing them for salvation. Verse 71, "Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him."

My friends, both here in this historical narrative and in the days to come in Jesus' ministry, we're going to see how the word of God will continue to unmask the fickle faith of those who follow him, even Judas, while at the same time confirm the faith of those who have truly been born-again and who will love Jesus and serve him to the very end,

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come what may. Words of offense? Yes, but words of spirit and of life, words of eternal life so let's hear them, let's believe them, let's preach them and let's rejoice in them forever. Amen?

Let's pray.

Father, thank you for the power of your word, how it speaks to our hearts. May the seeds of what we have heard today find a place deep within our hearts and may they bear much fruit for the praise of your glory. And, Lord, I pray that if there be one here today that has never truly believed in you, never repented and placed their faith in you, Lord, they have heard the word, I pray that by the power of your Spirit, you will draw them unto yourself and cause them to be born-again. We commit them to you in Christ's name and for his sake. Amen.

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