

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 8-16-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### John 6:56-69

[Jesus said] <sup>56</sup>Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup>Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup>This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” <sup>59</sup>He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

<sup>60</sup>When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” <sup>61</sup>But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? <sup>62</sup>Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? <sup>63</sup>It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. <sup>64</sup>But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. <sup>65</sup>And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” <sup>66</sup>Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. <sup>67</sup>So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” <sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

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Most of this beginning passage is repeated from the end of last week’s reading. This helps give us some context. This is indeed a continuation of the bread of life discourse we have been looking at for several weeks. Remember, the feeding of the 5,000 was not a stand-alone miracle, but was rather a “sign” (as John calls the miracles of Jesus) which points beyond the miracle itself to the truth of Jesus’ identity and mission. Jesus continues to teach in ways that seek to explain who he is and why he has come into the world, but this results in confusion and rejection as we will see. Interestingly, v. 59 (which was not in our reading last week) tells us this teaching took place in the synagogue at Capernaum. Back in v. 24 Jesus and the crowds arrived at Capernaum, but there we heard nothing about the synagogue. On the contrary, it would be natural to assume that Jesus and the crowds engaged in this dialogue there beside the sea, although this is not directly stated, either. Perhaps this discourse took place over a number of hours or days in various locations, or perhaps John neglected to mention this detail about the synagogue earlier. Nonetheless, the synagogue setting is important because Jesus’s teachings take place in the traditional center of the Jewish community—the place of instruction and the communal experience of God.

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Jesus evidently had many disciples apart from the 12. We assume that many who were among the crowds and ate their fill of the loaves and fish were, in some sense, disciples or followers of Jesus. Many, it turns out, were fair weather followers—willing to follow when it meant rich blessings and free food, but falling away when Jesus’ teachings or life itself became too difficult. The mention of disciples falling away in v. 60 may reflect not only the historical reality of Jesus’ sometimes polarizing ministry, but also the reality of John’s later Christian community and their struggles to maintain unity. Jesus’ reaction shows that he expects his ministry and teachings to cause offense. He has just spent many verses explaining that he is indeed the bread of life which has come down from heaven. Now, rather than talking about his coming down, he mentions his going up—his ascending to where he was before. He is saying, in essence, “If you’re offended that I told you I have come down from heaven, wait until you see me crucified, raised, and

ascended!” Jesus knows that his strange language about consuming his flesh and blood are mild compared to the coming scandal of the crucifixion and resurrection.

**<sup>63</sup>It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.**

At first look, this verse seems to contradict what Jesus said earlier in chapter 6 about his flesh being true food that is necessary to consume in order for one to have life. Further, it seems to contradict the very message of the gospel of John from the beginning—“The Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth.” Flesh is profoundly important in John’s gospel because it is in taking on our flesh that Jesus truly shows he is indeed God’s Son. It is in giving up his flesh on the cross that Jesus shows his true power and wisdom. Yet also in John’s gospel in chapter 3, we hear in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus this same contrast between flesh and Spirit. That which is born of flesh is flesh, Jesus says. Yet that which is born of Spirit is Spirit. It is in this same context that Jesus says “the flesh is useless.” He is speaking not about his own body, but rather about the failure and frailty of human reason and wisdom. Jesus knows and explains that the Spirit is necessary to truly grasp and receive Jesus.

**<sup>64</sup>But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. <sup>65</sup>And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”**

Jesus’s statement that one cannot come to him without the Father’s granting is troubling because it raises questions about predestination and the role of human will in salvation. What do we make of those who do not believe? Do they not believe because they choose not to, or do they not believe because God has not (yet?) granted it? There are no easy answers here, but John underscores Jesus’ omniscience about such matters. It is worth noting that, even knowing some would not believe and even knowing one of his beloved 12 would hand him over, Jesus still went and loved and ministered to all of them.

**<sup>66</sup>Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.**

It is not clear what “this” refers to here. It refers most immediately to Jesus’ previous statement in v. 65: “No one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” Upon hearing this, perhaps the crowds decided en masse that they were not likely to make the cut and so decided to leave. “This” could also refer to all of the preceding discourse in which the people consistently misunderstand and grumble about Jesus. The latter seems more likely to me, but I think it is most accurately a combination of both factors—the people have decided they cannot stay within Jesus’ new religious movement.

**<sup>67</sup>So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” <sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”**

Jesus’s question to the twelve anticipates a negative answer. We might better translate it as, “Y’all don’t want to leave, too, do you?” As he does using different language in the synoptic gospels, Peter gives the right answer here: Jesus is the one whom they have been waiting for and they will remain faithful, at least for now.

#### **Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. What do you think the disciples found difficult about this teaching of Jesus?**
- 2. Why do you think Jesus seems willing to allow some of his disciples to leave him and no longer follow him?**
- 3. We often sing a version of Peter’s response to Jesus’ question as part of our Gospel acclamation during worship. Why do you think it is important that we use these words often as a part of our service?**