

## John 6:66-68

<sup>66</sup> After this, many of his disciples turned back and were not walking with him anymore. <sup>67</sup> So Jesus asked the Twelve, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.

Theme: "The Warrior is Rejected by Many"

Everyday, somewhere, couples get divorced. We remember all the happy moments of that wedding day when the young man and woman declared their love for each other and put rings on one another's hands. They each made promises to love and cherish each other, to be there for each other whether in good times or in bad, whether they were sick or healthy, whether they had many possessions or few. They said they would cherish each other, that they would have each other's backs everyday right up until one of them died.

So what happened to all those happy days? What happened to the heartfelt, "till death do us part" commitment they made to each other? What does it take to break up a married couple? How many disagreements and arguments? How much disgust over things like personal habits, too much alcohol, fits of anger or rage, drugs, video games taking time away from relationships, pornography, physical or mental abuse, child abuse or unfaithfulness? What causes the "Wow" to turn to "Ugh"? As a pastor I have seen so many of these that it makes you want to weep. It is always a loss and a rejection when someone deserts a marriage.

When Jesus began his ministry there were many whom he inspired to say "Wow"! But by the end of his ministry there were some who could only say, "Ugh".

### 1. His own rejected him

Today we find Jesus during the last year of his ministry. For two years crowds had flocked, following, watching, listening eagerly. Not long after he had fed enough people to fill a small football stadium or hockey arena with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, the people began to think that maybe they should make Jesus their king. They were even thinking they should take him by force so they could keep him close by the Sea of Galilee. Then they would have all that free food and healing for all their physical diseases. Maybe we are wishing that during this corona virus outbreak we could have Jesus here with us to take care of all our health care worries. Well, remember that the people at Jesus' time were God's chosen people, the nation God had protected for 2000 years. They knew God had promised a Savior and they were looking at Jesus as the very one whom God promised would come.

How sad that all they were looking for in a Savior was one who would keep their stomachs full and that they would have pain-free and disease free lives. A number of their spiritual leaders had given up on the promises of a Savior from sin who would give all believers eternal life. They had turned the promises of a Savior from sin into a Savior who would throw out the hated Roman rulers and establish an earthly kingdom with unlimited wealth and health. How could that have happened? An enemy had been at work. He had attacked God's Word in the Bible. Satan had convinced the spiritual leaders with a lie, to reject Jesus. And many chose to follow them in their folly.

Jesus resisted, wanted nothing to do with their efforts to make him a bread king. And so he withdrew from them. The next day the crowds caught up with Jesus and had many questions. The conversation naturally turned to the subject of bread. Jesus took the opportunity to share this truth with them. **"I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty."**

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Wow! They had bread on their minds, but the precious bread, the most wonderful bread Jesus had to give them was so much different than what they were thinking. He told them he had come from his father in heaven. He was the bread from heaven, and all who "ate" the bread from heaven, that is, every person who "took him in" by faith would live, not just for a few short years on earth, but in heaven with God forever. He would raise them up at the last day. But right about there is where most of them stopped listening. If you had been there, you would have felt the enthusiasm go right out of the huge crowd, like when the visiting team kicks a field goal or sends the puck into the net and wins the game just as time runs out. From that point on many turned away and headed for home. Jesus wanted to give them hope for eternity. They wanted nothing more than earthly comfort.

But it wasn't just the crowd of thousands who walked away from Jesus. He had a wider group of close disciples beside the twelve whom he was training to reach out with the gospel to a world mission field, to Judea and Samaria and beyond. But Jesus' words that he himself was the bread from heaven were hard to understand. How could he give them eternal life. **"On hearing it many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard saying. Who can accept it.'"** (Jn 6:60) And right after this we learn, **"After this, many of his disciples turned back and were not walking with him anymore."** (Jn 6:66)

It is hard to believe that some of his close followers would just walk away from him and not come back. They were people who had walked many miles with Jesus, had likely slept on the ground many nights, had eaten with him, seen his miracles. Jesus was the most fascinating person who ever lived. When he spoke, he spoke with the authority of God as no one had ever heard before.

This was the Savior of the world who had come to offer his life for the sins of a whole world of sinners on Calvary's hill. He was getting ready to win the final all out battle against sin and Satan. He was preparing his troops to declare his victory for all, throughout the world. But this was more than some of them could believe. And so they left. They did not believe Jesus had the power to grant eternal life. They rejected him; divorced themselves from him. The 'Wow' had turned to 'Ugh.' This is the greatest sadness when his own reject him.

The enemy of Jesus had infected the hearts and minds of the Jewish leaders and others. It is a more deadly and widespread virus than the corona virus spreading through the world right now. With this virus of unbelief Satan had convinced many to believe the lie that Jesus could not be who he claimed and showed himself to be. The leaders of the people were teaching false doctrine of the worst kind. They taught them that they could get to heaven on their own by trying to be good people and by trying to obey the laws of the Old Testament. Jesus was simply telling them what he had taught from the beginning of his ministry, **"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life."** But for that message of God's free grace they planned to kill him.

We begin to see the tremendous forces lined up against Jesus. How does the awe and respect a person has for Jesus just leave him. An enemy did this. But it was just back at His time.

It still happens today. The enemy still hates Jesus and fights against him on every level he can. Satan has encouraged people to grow deeper in their separation from God by establishing false religions such as Islam, Hinduism, atheism, materialism and many more. All of them offering some sort of path to God or a substitute for God—paths which only lead to hell.

This same enemy has also infected people within the Christian church, spreading false teaching, attacking the Bible and using critics of Christianity in the media, at universities, and in politics to damage and destroy saving faith. You know about the growing numbers of people who say they are done with religion and won't come back. And you know that there are growing numbers of people who say they have no religious affiliation. Satan is a terrorist

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who is cornered and knows he is going to die. And he wants to take as many people with him as he can.

Even in our own congregation there are some members who once enthusiastically declared their faith in Jesus right in the front of our church, promising to remain faithful to Jesus even if they had to die for their faith. But those vows have been broken. Something has happened to take away their joy of hearing the word of the Lord in his house.

Maybe you know someone who is slipping or had lost his or her faith. Yes, we all struggle at times; we have doubts about what God says. Our doubts keep the questions buzzing in our brains. So you can understand Jesus when he turns to the smaller group, the twelve and asks them a simple but important question. Listen to it carefully. "**You do not want to leave too, do you?**"

Jesus gives them an opportunity to make a clear answer. Was their emotion in his voice? Did they hesitate? Did they want to see first how others answered before they gave their answer. The bible does not tell us those details. But it does tell us this with no uncertainty.

## 2. His gracious words of life draw us ever closer to him

Simon Peter answered him, "**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**" Peter is right on. He proclaims the power of God's word in their hearts. Jesus there is no one else who has the words of power that you do—your words bring eternal life.

When God created the universe, he used his word. Let there be...and there was light, land forms, rivers, lakes streams, insects, birds, wild animals and livestock—all in such variety and abundance, you and I probably can't imagine. He just spoke—and the universe came into being. What power there is in God's words.

I am holding in my hands, and you have in your pew or on your electronic device—God's own love story toward us—his words of life, forgiveness and salvation. Those words have almighty power. You know the passage where Paul says, "**Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.**"

God alone knows how many Christians there are in the world. But of this you and I can be sure. Not a single one of them did anything to create saving faith in their hearts. Everyone one of them, and that means you and me as well—came to believe in Jesus by only one powerful means—whether it was spoken, read or received in Holy Baptism. It is the single most powerful force for Good in our world: God's Word. That is what brought you and me to trust that the life, death, resurrection of Jesus Christ has purchased and won for us eternal life with our God. He did it all, he paid for every sin. He loves us enough to die for us so that we might live with him forever. So you can see why Jesus fought so hard against false teachers.

He said, "**Watch out for false teachers. They come to you in sheeps' clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.**" They continue to oppose Jesus. They would love to get you to abandon your Savior. They have all kinds of opinions and theories, but they do not have Jesus' words of eternal life. And right now false teachers and Satan would really like to get you to doubt God's love as this corona virus pandemic sweeps across our world. How can a loving God allow such a terrible tragedy. They ignore the truth that Jesus came so that we might have life and have it to the full, with him in eternity. False teachers do not have the words of eternal life. Only one has those words. Peter had it right: "**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**"

Peter and the other disciples were blessed and did not want to lose what Jesus promised them. We are also blessed. You and I are here, washed in the blood of our Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God. We are forgiven, with not even a single stain of sin. We have eternal life.

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In effect Jesus is our guest preacher every time we come to listen to God's Word. He promises to take us through the door marked "Death." He is the Way, the Truth and the Life." Martin Luther said, "If you were to ask a Christian what his task is and what makes him worthy of the name of Christian, there could be no other response than hearing the Word of God, that is, faith. Ears are the only organs of the Christian." **Ears are the only organs of the Christian.**

We are now, just a week and a half away from Easter. If not for this corona virus, many amateur baseball teams would be heavy into spring training. But this disease will not stop you and me from a spiritual spring training that we need very urgently. Take this time while we need to be in our homes and use a small portion of to allow the Holy Spirit to renew and build you up in your faith. Take time to start your own personal scripture reading program or home devotions. You might want to start by reading the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel and reading one or two chapters a day to the end of John's gospel. It is the account of our Savior's last week on earth and it is riveting reading.

We are challenged every day to hold tightly to God's Word when we see everything the world, our sinful nature and Satan throws at us. We are challenged to hold tightly to God's Word when Satan would use the corona virus pandemic to shake our faith in God's love for us. All those things come at us in a steady barrage. So if Jesus were to ask us right now, "You do not want to leave, too, do you? Join me in answering with all believers everywhere, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life! Amen.