

Sermon outline and notes:
© Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreek.church)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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John 6:51-71 (read 51-54, 59-69) “Are You a Fickle or Faithful Disciple?”

Intro. I want to begin my message by asking a question. Do you profess to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ? There may be some that would honestly say, “I am not yet a Christian. I’m still searching.” But I’m sure the vast majority of my audience would say, “Yes, I am a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ.” But now let me ask a follow-up question to those of us who profess Christ as Savior and Lord: what *kind* of disciple are you? Are you a faithful disciple of Jesus, or is it possible that you would quit following Jesus? My text today will help you evaluate what kind of a follower of Jesus Christ you are.

You see, there are 2 kinds of disciples mentioned in my text. First, there are the fickle disciples. They followed Christ for a while, but as v.66 indicates, they quit following Him. But in stark contrast with them are the faithful disciples. Even though they would fail Christ from time to time, they kept on following Christ all their lives, even unto death. So Jesus distinguished between superficial believers and sincere believers. On the surface we may not always be able to tell the difference, at least for a while. But Jesus was never deceived by the crowds that followed Him. He knew their hearts. John 2:25 says of Jesus, “And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.” Jesus knows what kind of disciple you are. Part of my task this morning is to help anyone who is less than a faithful disciple of Jesus to take corrective action. So it is today. Now which kind of disciple are you? Let’s consider this together.

I. ARE YOU AMONG THE FICKLE DISCIPLES?

Before you can correct a problem, you must recognize the problem. So I want to describe them to you, and tell a few things about them. There are certain characteristics of fickle disciples that are illustrated in my text. First of all:

A. They Are Attracted to Jesus – When are they attracted to Jesus?

1. When He Is Popular. At one time it was popular to follow Jesus. We saw in v.10 that 5,000 men, not including women and children (Mt. 14:21), were gathered until Him at one time! So it seemed that everybody was following Jesus. He was doing miracles on a regular basis. He was preaching great sermons and teaching great lessons. It was exciting to follow Jesus.

There was a time in this country when it was popular to be a Christian, and go to church. It was just the thing to do. After the deadly attacks on September 11, it was popular to go to church, but it didn’t last more than 2 weeks.

Will you follow Jesus only when it’s popular to do so? Will you follow Jesus only when the church puts on an exciting program? Will you gather with others to worship Him only on the Sundays that a popular for going to church, such as Easter and Christmas? Or are you faithful week by week?

Furthermore, such people are attracted to Jesus:

2. When Food Is Provided – Earlier in chapter 6, Jesus fed a great multitude of people. In v.24 we see that they next day, they came to Capernaum, “seeking for Jesus.” They were

seeking Him because He had fed them with the loaves and fishes. After all, Jesus plainly said in v.26, “You seek me, not because you saw the miracles, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled.”

Even so, if we offer a free meal here at church people will be much more likely to come. A lot of churches these days are attracting more people by giving food, but we see from our text that that alone does not produce true disciples of Jesus. It takes far more than physical food to produce a disciple of Jesus!

Finally, such people are attracted to Jesus:

3. When They Believe He Offers a Better Earthly Life – The Jewish people were suffering under the bondage of Rome. When Jesus manifested miracle working power, they hoped He would deliver them from Rome by His great power. In fact, we read in v.15 that the people “were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king...” They thought that if they pledged their allegiance to Him as king, He would deliver them from the Romans. But these people were never born again; they were simply following Jesus for what they could get out of Him, hoping that He would become king and they would profit by having been associated with Him.

Now in each of these cases, they had one thing in common. They would follow Jesus as long as they thought He would give them what they wanted. We live in a consumer-oriented society. There are too many that come to church saying, “What are you going to do for *me*?” If you don’t take care of me and my family with programs from the cradle to the grave, then I will find some church that will. We need more people who will come to church and say, “What can *I* do to help this church win souls, make disciples, and minister to the needs of others?”

So why do you follow Jesus? Why do you come to church? Will you follow Jesus only when it’s popular to do so, or only when we offer food or entertainment, or only if you perceive that we can help you live a better earthly life?

A second characteristic of fickle disciples is:

B. They Become Offended - First we see that they were offended by what Jesus had to say. Jesus said in the last of v.51, “the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” Notice the reaction in v.52, “The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, ‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’” After insisting in vv.53-57 that we also “drink His blood,” look at the reaction in vv.60-61, “Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’ When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, ‘Does this offend you?’” Clearly, they were scandalized by what Jesus said.

Now what caused them to be offended, and to murmur? The first words of v.66 probably should be translated, “as a result of (*ek*) this,” rather than “from that *time*”, since it refers to what Christ had said. So they were offended because they misinterpreted His words. They took them literally rather than recognizing the analogies that He was using. Notice what Jesus said in v.51, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” It’s obvious from their reaction in v.52 that they kept on thinking at the physical level, and so they interpreted Jesus’ words as cannibalism. He did not turn back from using this figure of speech. Instead, His words were even stronger in v.53, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” To the Jews drinking literal blood was very repulsive, for doing so was forbidden by their law (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; Deut. 12:23). For them this was not simply a difficult teaching (v.60) but something unacceptable. Yet in

light of God's law against drinking blood, it was foolish for them to interpret Christ's words so literally!

Are you the type of person that gets offended easily? That is certainly not a good quality. If you are offended easily that could be an indication that self is on the throne of your life rather than Christ. It may also indicate that you are not a true believer. Jesus knew their hearts and said in v.64, "But there are some of you who do not believe." It was not the hardness of the sermon but rather the hardness and unbelief of their own hearts that had brought about this unfavorable reaction on their part. Sometimes people get offended because they take things the wrong way, as I have already noted. They interpret the words of the preacher the wrong way.

Becoming offended is certainly one of the major causes of people turning away from Jesus and His church. In 40 years of ministry I have seen quite a number of people come and go, while only a smaller number remain faithful. Sometimes they are offended by what the preacher said. Or a church member offends them. Even if someone offends you at church, that is no excuse to quit following Jesus. We are to forgive and move on. Don't allow yourself to become offended, leading to the same result that we read about here.

Now the final characteristic of fickle, insincere followers of Jesus is:

C. They Forsake Christ & Quit Following Him – John says in v.66, "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." The many had even crossed the Sea and sought Him out; now, the many turned their backs upon Him: so unreliable and so fickle is human nature. They went back to the things that they had left behind (Greek), not only their ordinary daily pursuit, but also their former way of thinking and living, not intending ever to return to Jesus. They proved by this action that they were not fit for the kingdom of God. In fact, Jesus said in Lk. 9:62, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." True disciples do not look back, but they keep their eyes on Jesus. 1 John 2:19 warns, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us." Turning back from following Christ is a sign that a person never possessed true faith to begin with! (v.64). By the way, Jesus did not water down His message to keep these folks from turning away from Him, and nor should we!

You know, our church has over 670 members on roll. Almost 200 have moved away and haven't joined another church, as far as we know. We have 181 local members that have become completely inactive in our church. Only God know how many of them are true believers, but I would think that most are described in v.66. They are not going to any church at all. You may have somebody in your family like that.

So what kind of disciple of Jesus do you want to be? Don't be a fickle, faithless disciple. Don't be a drop-out disciple. Instead, the good news is that you can avoid being this kind of a disciple. And even if you have been like this at times in the past, you can be transformed from a fickle disciple, to one of:

II. THE FAITHFUL DISCIPLES

This is what I want to challenge you to be. The text says "many" went back, but not all. Praise God for His work in the hearts of some that continue to be faithful to Christ (cf. v.65), in spite of what others did. So I want to give you 4 characteristics of faithful disciples:

A. Faithful Disciples Do Not Turn Away from Jesus – In v.67 Jesus asked a searching question. The Greek reads, “*You do not want to go away also, do you?*”¹ Jesus did not ask this question in order to find out what the 12 would do. He knew their minds (vv.64, 71). But He asked the question to prove their faith and draw from them the confession made by Peter in the very next verse. Their answer would evidence whether or not a Divine work of grace had been wrought in them. So the question that Jesus was asking was essentially this: Have they fully made up their minds to remain with Jesus, regardless of the fact that the great masses have left Him, including even many of His regular followers?

“Will you also go away?” The same question is still being asked to those who profess to be the followers of Christ. Well, true disciples keep following Christ:

1. In Spite of False Teachers – If someone comes along offering a religion that seems more appealing, will you go away? If cult leaders come to your door, Jesus will ask, “Will you also go away?” 2 Tim. 4:3-4 says, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth....” There are plenty of preachers who have turned away from preaching the Gospel and the truths of the Word of God. Now, they are preaching feel-good pep talks with a sprinkling of Scripture mixed in, often taken out of context. That’s because gaining and preserving a crowd is more important to them than making true disciples of Jesus.

2. In Spite of Worldly Pleasure – Jesus warned in the parable of the sower that some would allow the “pleasures of life” to choke out any spiritual fruitfulness (Luke 8:14). Paul warned that in the last days people would be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4). When a so-called friend comes along, and says, “Don’t worry about going to church in the morning. Come with us. We’re going to get drunk, or get high on drugs.” The question for you will be the same, “Will ye also go away?” Don’t be like these fickle disciples. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:10, “For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” But true disciples remain faithful to Jesus.

3. In Spite of Trials and Tribulations – In the parable of the sower Jesus also spoke of some who are like shallow, rocky ground. They profess Christ and get excited, but as soon as trials and tribulations come their way, they get offended, and fall away (Luke 8:13). When a child dies, when you lose that job, when that husband or wife walks off and leaves you, Jesus asks the same question, “Will you also go away?” Too many have fallen away from Christ when trials and troubles came their way, yet true disciples remain faithful.

Listen, the next time something bad happens to you, and you get offended at God for *allowing* it to happen, why don’t you just stop, and ask God to show you why. Give Him some time. You may not understand it today, or tomorrow, or next week. But the more I study the Scriptures, the more I understand the ways of God. Besides, just because we are believers, that does not mean that we will be exempt from the human sufferings that are a part of living in this sinful, fallen world. God promises there will be no more sorrow, crying and pain in heaven (Rev. 21:4), but He never makes that promise for this life! So we should not be offended when bad things happen to God’s people.

I believe our church library still has a Billy Graham movie called, “The Ride.” It the story of a 12 year old boy who had cancer. He had a wish. He wanted so badly to learn how to ride a bull. He prayed and asked God for a teacher. God allowed a washed up bull rider to be assigned to that ranch for boys as a public service requirement. He wasn’t a Christian. When he learned about the

¹ The form of the inquiry indicates that He expected a negative answer.

boy dying of cancer, he said, “I can’t get with a God who will allow that to happen to a boy.” That boy kept witnessing to that unbelieving bull rider. On one occasion the boy said, “It’s not how long you stay on the bull, it’s how well you ride.” Well, in that story, the boy died. And though his life was short, he lived it well, and that bull rider was eventually saved. I can’t explain all the mysteries of life, but I know that I can trust God to make all things right in the end!

Beginning in v.68, Peter answers the question on behalf of the faithful disciples. Peter’s confession was a courageous act, for it committed him and the disciples to One whose popularity was waning and whose words they understood only with difficulty. Peter had his faults, but there were times when he really shined forth for Jesus. Notice his answer gives the next 3 characteristics:

B. Faithful Disciples Recognize the Emptiness of Others – Peter said in v.68, “Lord, to whom shall we go?” There was none other to take the place of Jesus—no other teacher, no other master, none to whom they could go. No one else offers a solid basis for the forgiveness of sin. No one else satisfies the deepest needs of the soul. They believed the words of Jesus in v.35, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” Does the world have anything else to offer? You can turn away from Jesus, but you will not find a better friend or source of true satisfaction.

C. Faithful Disciples Recognize that True Life Is Found in Christ – I want to bring out two aspects of this truth:

1. Christ Is the Source of True Life – We see this in the context. Jesus said in v.35, “I am the bread of life.” Now if you are going to live, what do you absolutely need to live? One thing is water. Another thing is food. You can’t live very long without food. Now what is food? It is made up of something that at one time was living, whether vegetable or animal life. And so in order to stay alive, one form of life must die so you may live. Life is transferred from the eaten to the eater. If you eat meat for lunch today, think about that animal that died in order that you might live! [Use Chick-fil-A cow to illustrate?] And you vegetarians need to remember that those plants also died so you may live. So Jesus says He is the bread of life. You must have Jesus to have eternal life.

How did Jesus make it possible for sinners to have eternal life? Again, Jesus said in the last of v.51, “the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for² the life of the world.” Then in vv.53-57 Jesus mentions His blood in each verse. The flesh, the body of Jesus was to be sacrificed on a cross for our sins. His life’s blood would be shed that we might be forgiven of our sins³ and have eternal life. This thought parallels 1:29, 36, where Jesus was described as the “Lamb of God.”

Do you recognize that Jesus is the only source of eternal life? Well, just because Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood does not mean His sacrifice will benefit you. When Jesus talks about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, He is simply saying that you must receive or appropriate that sacrifice by your own personal faith in Him. John 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” True disciples have recognized that Jesus is the only source of life, and they have believed in Him.

² The word "for" (Gk. *huper*) means, “on behalf of,” and is used in sacrificial contexts (John 10:11, 15; 11:51–52; 15:13; 17:19; 18:14).

³ Lev. 17:11 says, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”

Furthermore, true disciples recognize that true life is found in Christ because:

2. Christ Has the Words of Life - Peter said in the last of v.68, "You have the words of eternal life."⁴ He is affirming the words of Jesus found in the last of v.63, "...The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." When Jesus says that His words are "spirit", He means that they are spiritual, and employed by the Holy Spirit to impart life. They know that the words of Jesus are more than mere sounds. They are dynamic, full of spirit and life. Those of us who have believed in Jesus know that there is something special about Jesus and His word. This Bible is not the words of mere man; it is the word of the living God. And as we hear these words, and believe them, they have the power to impart life, and change lives. 1 Thess. 2:13 says, "...when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

A blessed reply was this. The wondrous miracles had attracted the others, but the teaching of Christ had attracted them. The words of Christ had sunk deeply into their souls. They had felt their power. And this is a distinguishing mark between a true disciple and a false disciple. The role of the Word of God is very important (cf. Rom. 10:17; Jn. 5:24; James 1:18; I Pet. 1:23; Acts 11:13, 14).

What is urgently needed today is the faithful preaching & teaching of God's Word. Praise is important. Prayer is important. Fellowship is important. Ministering to physical needs has its place. But sharing the Word of God is of utmost importance, for it is foundational to everything else!

So since Christ has the words of life, let the sinner read God's Word; let him see himself mirrored in it. Let him believe what it says about the way of salvation. And Christian, there is no substitute for reading your Bible daily, and going to a church where the Bible is taught and preached.

D. Faithful Disciples Will Always Affirm Christ as Savior & Lord - The reason Christ has the words of eternal life is because of who He is.

1. The Statement of their Faith – Peter says in the last of v.69, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The older and better Greek manuscripts read "Holy One of God" rather than "Christ, the Son of the Living God."⁵ That designation refers to one consecrated unto God to fulfill His Messianic task; He is set apart and qualified to perform whatever pertains to His office.⁶

How could they conclude otherwise? Just the night before He had walked on water. In the minutes preceding these words, Jesus demonstrate His omniscience when He knew what the disciples were thinking and saying, even without hearing them (v.61).

2. The Confidence of their Faith - Notice carefully the word order here in v.69: "...we have come to believe and know." Though some knowledge is required before we will believe (Rom. 10:17), yet a full understand of God does not come until we believe. Heb. 11:3 says, "Through faith we understand..." There are some who insist that they understand the mystery of the Trinity before they will believe it. But we must realize that assurance and spiritual knowledge are the fruits of "believing."

This affirmation of Peter marked a new advance in the faith of the disciples as a group. It was the expression of a settled conclusion rather than of a single decision; a state of mind rather

⁴ The emphasis in Greek is upon "words of life."

⁵ It was probably not until later that Peter made the stronger confession found in Mt. 16:16, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

⁶ The only other time this exalted title was attributed to Jesus was by a demon possessed man in the synagogue (Mark 1:24).

than an initial act of will. That's because the verbs are in the perfect tense in the Greek. Literally, it is "We have believed and have known, and continue to believe and know...." Though their faith will be weakened by the crucifixion of their Lord, they will be reassured by the Lord's resurrection. Then, they will share their confident faith with the world!

Is that the kind of faith you have in Jesus? Is it a settled conviction that cannot be shaken? Yet even the faith to believe, and the spiritual understanding that you need, are both gifts of God. After all, Jesus said in the last of v.65, "no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." That is why intercessory prayer is so important.

Conclusion: So what kind of a disciple are you? Have you been like these fickle disciples? Well with God's help, you can change and become a true and faithful disciple. Can Christ count on you follow Him no matter what others do, and no matter what happens in this life? Have you arrived at a settled conviction of faith regarding Jesus?

Perhaps some here today haven't begun to walk with Jesus. You've never professed Christ or been baptized. Who else can save you from your sin? You cannot save yourself. Just one of your sins is enough to condemn you. The prayers of a priest or preacher cannot save you. Jesus is the only Savior. Trust in Him today!

Sources: Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to John, Vol. 1* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1966); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); Herschel H. Hobbs *John: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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