

To Whom Can We Go?

阮欲去尋是誰啊？

約翰福音 John 6: 59–69

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The sermon last month covered the entire sixth chapter of the Gospel of John. The title focused on "bread" (bread that was made, the living bread, the bread of life), like a four-part drama series. Today is the conclusion of this theme. We have "seen" and "eaten" the miracle of the five loaves and two fish, and we have also "heard" the teaching of the living bread. Finally, we look at the response and attitude of the crowd and the disciples. This is also the time for our own response!

Jesus knew what they were thinking in their hearts. Jesus saw many disciples leaving and asked them and us, "Do you also want to leave?" How will you answer?

Peter's answer is our theme: "You have the words of eternal life; to whom shall we go?"

Prayer: "Lord, You are the living bread, the eternal sustenance. May we long for and seek after You all our lives, and may You be the one we desire. Today, we ask You to pour out the Spirit of wisdom upon us. Stir our hearts and encourage us to act on the inspiration You have placed within us."

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue (John 6:69), explaining the scripture mentioned by the crowd in verse 31, where they referred to "food from heaven." Jesus continued to explain this scripture about manna, and in verse 58, He continued discussing the same theme. He declared that He Himself is the manna, saying, "I am the bread of life" (6:35). Just as manna gave life in the wilderness, Jesus also gives life.

Although many Christians are familiar with Jesus' words, "I am the bread of life," in this passage, the disciples declared that this is a "hard saying."

Looking at the response and attitude of the crowd and the disciples, they can be simply divided into two different groups:

1. Many disciples decided to leave Him and no longer walked with Him, saying, "This is a hard saying; who can accept it?"
2. Some stayed and continued to follow, like Peter, who said, "Lord, You have the words of eternal life; to whom shall we go?"

Through examining the two different responses, we can reflect on ourselves:

1. **Those Who Decided to Leave.** Despite the crowd's initial enthusiasm at the idea that Jesus, like Moses, could provide this miraculous bread, they said to Jesus, "Lord, always give us this bread!" (John 6:34). However, they refused to accept Jesus as their manna. In verse 60, the

disciples said that His teaching was "too hard," and from then on, many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.

First, some left because they found Jesus too ordinary. In verse 41, when Jesus said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," they grumbled, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? He was just a carpenter, a friend of fishermen, and a regular person in the synagogue."

Many people come to church seeking special feelings and experiences, looking for grand visions, or seeking adventure and new knowledge. It's similar to the excitement people get from watching a sports game, or the euphoria drugs can induce, or the supernatural abilities or deep insights some religions claim to offer. For some, Jesus may seem too ordinary, not providing an instant solution to all of their problems.

Secondly, others left Jesus for the opposite reason of the first. Among His disciples, many heard what He said and remarked, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

We love the idea of "eternal life" and "never being hungry again." But when Jesus touches on heavier topics—such as loving your enemies, washing others' feet, or giving all you have to help those in need—His ideals seem too distant, too lofty, demanding too much, and too difficult for anyone to live up to.

The two reasons why Jesus' disciples turned away are also often reasons why we might hesitate or even leave. Some people find Jesus too ordinary. Others see Christianity as appealing but feel the expectations are too high, feeling they can't meet them and don't want to try. We might have the same feelings as many of those disciples, leading us to leave Jesus and stop following Him.

2. Those Who Stayed and Continued to Follow

Seeing many people turning away, Jesus gathered the twelve disciples and asked them, "Do you also want to leave?" "Are you going to leave too?" This was a critical and pivotal moment, a crossroads in life, a moment of choice.

Even though those around them chose to leave, the disciples represented by Peter responded, "Lord, You have the words of eternal life; to whom shall we go?"

Imagine Peter taking a deep breath, facing Jesus directly, and saying, "Lord, You have the words of eternal life; to whom shall we go?"

It sounds like a firm and decisive affirmation from Peter. However, can you imagine the inner conflict and struggle Peter might have felt? Some disciples were saying, "His words are too hard; who can accept them?" Jesus knew that the disciples were grappling with these doubts and difficulties.

In the initial story of manna, the people's reaction to God's deliverance was complex. Despite their initial praise for God's victory in the Exodus (Exodus 15:1-21), the Israelites quickly began to "grumble" or "complain" against God and Moses in the wilderness (e.g., Exodus 15:24; 16:2).

They did not truly believe that God would take care of them. The Israelites repeatedly played out the same drama regarding issues of water, food, and personal safety.

Do we believe that God will take care of us? Like the ancient Israelites and Jesus' disciples, we initially accepted the miraculous food in John 6:1-14 and declared Jesus to be a prophet (v. 15). However, after Jesus' teaching about manna, we might start to "grumble" against Him (John 6:42 and 61 use the same term for "grumble" as in Exodus to describe the Israelites' complaints). The disciples' reaction is an ironic example: they rejected Jesus as the living manna, just as their ancestors had despised the manna.

Just like in the Exodus story, the issue is not just the people's complaints but their lack of trust in God, which is reflected in the statement, "There are some of you who do not believe" (John 6:64). The Greek word **pisteuo**, often translated as "believe" in the Gospel of John, more commonly means to trust or rely on someone.

The difficulty in John 6 lies not only in understanding the content about Jesus but also in the lack of trust demonstrated by the disciples. Like the Israelites, they experienced God's miraculous provision but did not trust that God would continue to provide for them in the wilderness.

Accepting Jesus as the manna means relying on God. John's Gospel focuses significantly on the theme of "faith," often expressed through the concept of "abide" or "remain" (**meno** in Greek). This concept runs throughout the Gospel (e.g., John 15:5-6). In John 6:56, the same Greek word **meno** is used, though it is frequently translated as "abide": "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in them." To take Jesus as our daily sustenance means to remain with or be close to Him. It is through this closeness that Jesus brings life to those who receive Him (John 6:57).

Remaining with Jesus is challenging. Being with Him and learning from Him is a long process. For many, quick solutions are more attractive. The crowd was initially drawn to Jesus because they saw Him as a new Moses—someone who could perform miracles and provide political victories. As they continued to follow Jesus, they realized that what He offered was not an easy victory but a long path of discipleship.

Peter's words, "To whom shall we go?" can be understood in two ways:

1. Surface-level Interpretation: This could be seen as a reluctant, painful resignation, a sense of having no other choice. It reflects a feeling of inevitability: "I've invested so much in this relationship; now I have no other options." There is an element of helplessness.
2. Deeper Interpretation: On a deeper level, it can express genuine dedication and commitment. Peter is entrusting himself fully to Jesus, acknowledging that he will remain steadfast and not waver, no longer considering other options. This reflects a sincere and unwavering devotion.

Peter's words express a profound, ultimate concern and anxiety: "If I don't find meaning in faith in God, where else could I find it?" This reflects a deep sense of searching and commitment, recognizing that without Jesus, there is no other source of true meaning and fulfillment.

Each person must answer this question for themselves: If I do not believe in God or follow a religion, where else might I find meaning in life? Receiving the Lord's salvation can offer fulfillment, never leaving you hungry or thirsty again. It's a matter of deeply considering where true satisfaction and purpose come from.

Peter's words reflect a range of sentiments. They might seem like stubborn faith or unwavering belief. The term "faithful" could sound more positive, and "persistent" might seem more devout. Ultimately, the best word is "love." This captures the essence of loving God—it's a matter of deep, committed affection and devotion.

Peter's statement supports and strengthens your resolve to move forward: "Lord, You have the words of eternal life; to whom shall we go?" It declares that Jesus is the only one worth following.

In the process of serving God, amidst worries, difficulties, and witnessing failures and setbacks, declaring your commitment to follow Him is not just a question but a statement of steadfast, enduring obedience. Compared to everything else, Jesus stands out as the sole source of true value and meaning.

In the future, as problems and trials arise, challenging our love for the Lord, do not be afraid. Many fellow believers have faced similar tests, sometimes finding Jesus too ordinary or His demands too high. Don't be discouraged. We walk the same path and may see many leave, but we have the opportunity to learn from God's eternal words of life. May we continue to yearn for the food that never perishes and the water that never leaves us thirsty.