

“To Whom Shall We Go?”

Since I have moved to Statesville I have had the opportunity to get to know coach Gene Abercrombie and CA Frye (former football coaches at Statesville). Both of those men also coached at my High School, Walter Williams High School, in Burlington.

Many of the kids I grew up with dads played for coach Frye so I had heard stories of how tough he could be. I also read the 1971 Sports Illustrated article about coach Frye’s leaving Williams High School and being replaced by Jerome Evans, the first black head football coach to coach in a predominately white high school in the south. I want to share an excerpt of that article with you.

There were times, if I had a knife I would have killed Coach Frye," said Mike Pierce, a white player. "He had no patience with anyone. When I was on the junior varsity I could hear him yelling from the other field and I was scared at the thought of ever playing for such a man. But one day in school he called me Mike and said how the team would need me the following year, and after that I was crazy about him. He screamed and cussed all right, and when you stunk he made a little raspberry sound and did a war dance around you like you were burning at the stake. He made you want to quit football and just grow your hair. And a lot of boys did quit, but maybe Frye gave them an excuse to do what they wanted. He brought out a lot of things in you that you never knew existed—both the best and the worst.

Frye was old school and this story sounds like the stories that I heard in Alabama about the legendary Bear Bryant.

There are two things going on here. One, the coach is trying to bring out the very best from a player by building up within him toughness. If he can handle Frye’s practices there will be nothing that he can’t handle on game day. And two, the coach is trying to get rid of people who aren’t really interested in playing on the team with the level of commitment that it would take for them to win. The coach only wants those who are 100% sold out to the system. Inevitably, such an aim is hard on the players, but it is for their own good and the good of the team.

We see some of this tactic going on in our text today. In John 6 there is the sense in which Jesus is saying, doing, and demanding some very hard things that anger people, challenge people, and even lead some people to quit.

Jesus’ teaching angered people

First, let’s revisit the matter of anger. As we learned from last week Jesus made the claim that he is God. He did not say that I am like God, or that I am one who simply contains a “spark of divinity,” but I am actually God, fully and completely in human flesh.

Jesus made this audacious claim when he said to the crowd “I am the bread of life.” Remember, the Hebrew personal name for God in the Old Testament is Yahweh (we translate it in English as

Lord) and it means “I AM.” So every time Jesus used the words, “I am” it was like a lightning rod to his hearers. It made some angry.

People today can accept Jesus for many things but if the claim is put forth that he is God in the flesh, “King of Kings” and “Lord of Lords” over all things, then it will make some angry, especially since we live in a world where truth is considered to be relative. “What’s true for you is true for you” but don’t you dare impose some kind of supreme, objective truth over me. I will not accept it! Yet this is what Jesus did two thousand years ago (I am the way, the truth, and the life) and he still does it today and it can anger people.

Jesus teaching challenged people

People were also challenged. In v. 53-59 of the text Jesus said “unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real is real drink.”

The critics of Jesus understood him to be talking literally. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v. 52) That is absurd! They were not catching (like so many people in the gospel of John) the spiritual meaning of the words of Christ.

The disciples were also baffled by what Jesus had just said. They found his words to be challenging. They responded to Christ by saying, “This is hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

It is still hard teaching for us today. For there are many things in the scriptures that our Lord puts before us that challenge us, are hard to accept, and difficult to put into practice in our lives.

Jesus’ teaching caused some people to quit

Next, there were those who quit.

As the disciples grumbled and wrestled with the words that Jesus had spoken to them about “eating his flesh” and “drinking his blood” he said to them, “Does this offend you?” (v. 61) because if it does you haven’t seen the worse of my offensiveness. Wait until you see the “Son of Man ascend to where he was before.” This was a clear reference to the scandal of the crucifixion because in order for Jesus to raised to where he was before (with his Father in heaven) he had to first be crucified and that they would **really** find offensive.

Do you remember when Jesus began to explicitly tell his disciples how he must suffer and be crucified and raised again on the third day? Do you remember how that offended Peter? The wobbly rock (Peter) rebuked Jesus and said, ‘No, never Lord! Not in a million years! I will not stand for it.’ (Mt. 16:22)

The Bible says that the cross is offensive to those who are perishing. If you start talking about the idea that sins must be atoned for through the shedding of blood then people get offended, they reject the claims of Christ. Why does that need to happen? Why does someone need to die on a cross for my sins? I’m not that bad? Does that not make God a cruel tyrant?

Some people in the faddish “emergent church movement” are starting to say things like this, most notably Brian McClaren. He said the idea that God’s wrath and judgment was laid out on the cross is akin to “cosmic child abuse.” He is wrong and it is his theology that is a theology of death! But the point here is that what Jesus was saying in the text was so offensive that it led some to quit the faith.

After this happened Jesus looked to his inner twelve, his core group of twelve guys who were supposed to go to the front lines with him, and he asked them, “Do you want to leave too? Are you going to quit now that the going has gotten tough?”

Once again, Jesus puts this question before us today when the gospel gets tough, Will you too leave? Will you quit because you find my teaching hard to stomach?

Application of the Text for Christian Living

Now let us turn our attention to how this text applies to our Christian lives. I will make application using the same three points I highlighted from the text-How Jesus teaching angered people, challenged people, and led people to quit the faith.

First, anger. It might strike you as odd to hear me say this but sometimes the Bible can anger us.

Last week as we considered the touchy topic of predestination we talked about how that doctrine can cause feelings of anger among some. “Predestination? That’s no good. I refuse to believe it. I think it is cruel and unfair.”

But my friend it does not have to be something like predestination to make us angry. I remember when I preached through the gospel of Matthew, not avoiding any of the text, and I had to deal with the very hard saying of Jesus when he said:

- Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother... anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Mt. 10:34-37)

After that sermon I had a member of the congregation come to me “red hot” about those words of Christ. She said she didn’t know if she could believe it.

That’s just one of many places that I could take you to in the Bible, really not just the whole Bible but from within the scope of the gospels alone, which challenge us to the point that it almost gets our “blood boiling” if we are forced to deal with the text. Light shining into the darkness can be a painful thing!

I must tell you I don’t always like what Jesus has to say to me in scripture. “Forgive your enemies. Turn the other cheek. Love your neighbor. If you’ve lusted in your heart you’re an adulterer. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth. If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” But Jesus says these

difficult things to me because he has my best interests at heart. He wants me sold out and he's even willing to make me mad in order to ensure that I am sold out. Making me mad is actually part of the plan in helping me to grow in holiness. And if I am not willing to take that step of costly discipleship then he does not want me on his team.

Jesus said to the church in Laodicea,

- I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm- neither hot nor cold- I will spew you out of my mouth. (Rev. 3:15)

Christ will **not** compromise his standards in order to keep us in the flock.

If Jesus encounters you with a difficult word (and he will if your in his Word-the Bible) then my encouragement to you is to trust him to know what he is doing and to obey him, even if it upsets you. Your anger shall pass.

Closely related to this first point of how Jesus' teaching can anger us, is simply the exhortation to pursue intimacy with God in your life. Jesus has issued a challenge to us today: be intimate with me.

Intimacy is the key word. Are you intimate with Christ? Do you hunger and thirst for him?

In the text Jesus talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Obviously, contrary to what the Roman Empire thought about early Christians, Jesus was not advocating cannibalism. He is not speaking literally here; he rarely does in the gospel of John. Jesus is speaking spiritually. What he is talking about is an intimate relationship with him.

Some interpreters have understood this text to be some type of early liturgy for the Lord's Supper and I don't deny that this text has wonderful imagery for the sacrament, but I do believe that what Jesus is primarily talking about is a relationship of intimacy with him. Are we feeding off his body and drinking his blood? Do we hunger and thirst for the cross?

You see, to eat and drink with another person is a very intimate act. That's why conversations, friendships, and relationships are always built over good meals and that's why Jesus uses this explicit imagery.

He is telling us that this where real life is to be found. Without the intimate pursuit of him in our lives we will not "remain in him." (v.56)

The final application of the text is simply the exhortation to stay the course in your faith. Don't quit.

Don't quit just because Jesus is stretching you with "hard teaching" and his call for deeper intimacy.

“Run the race that is set before you and fix your eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith.” (Heb. 12: 1-2) “Fight the good fight and keep the faith,” as the apostle Paul says. (II Tim. 4:7-8)

When Jesus asked his twelve disciples if they too wanted to quit, Peter replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

That is still true today. Where and to whom will you go if you quit Christ? Yourself? Work? Sex? Money? Booze? Power? The golf course? Sundays on the lake? You will never find fulfillment in such things.

Jesus said “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

I believe that to be true with every fiber of my being and I want to stick close to him because what I have found to be true in own my life is that he really does “have the words of eternal life.”

So for me there is no where else to go, even when what he has to say to me is “hard teaching.”

To whom shall you go?

Amen.