

# ***“What About You?”***

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures quoted are from 2011 New International Version.)

***“You do not want to leave too, do you?” (Jesus)***

***John 6:60-71***

***February 13, 2022***

## ***Questions***

This coming Wednesday, our Board of Evangelism has invited Dr. Frank Turek to speak here in the sanctuary. He'll give an hour-long talk based on his book, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, and then take questions.

It seems to me there are two kinds of questions – investigation and interrogation. The questions might be similarly worded, but the motives and maybe the tone are different. You could ask a spouse or child, “Where have you been?” as investigation or interrogation.

Dr. Turek will hear both interrogation and investigation during the Q&A Wednesday night. He addresses some commonly asked questions in his book. Why should we believe anything? How do we know God exists? Do we have credible testimony about Jesus? Did Jesus really rise from the grave?

One of my favorite books of questions about our faith is Rebecca McLaughlin's 2019 *Confronting Christianity*. She addresses in refreshing ways many questions raised by our 21<sup>st</sup> century culture: Doesn't Christianity crush diversity? Doesn't Christianity condone violence? Is Christianity homophobic? On that last question she writes as a same-sex attracted woman, so her story deepens her argument.

Every book addressing questions about faith has to address the oldest and most persistent question: How could a loving God allow so much suffering in the world? Wouldn't Jesus be more believable if he solved more problems in the world? Even with that question the overriding issue is motive. Is it investigation or interrogation? Are you wrestling out of your own pain or intent on accusing God?

## ***A pivotal chapter***

Jesus asked a lot of questions in the Gospels. He also fielded so many of questions and sometimes addressed questions he overheard from his disciples, his detractors, or the crowd. John 6 offers several questions Jesus addressed.

In these 71 verses, John takes us from the height of Jesus' popularity to the low point of his rejection, all in Galilee. At the beginning of the chapter he multiplied a five small barley loaves and two fish into enough food to feed thousands. The crowd is so impressed they're ready to initiate a populist movement that puts him on the throne.

From that high point in John 6 Jesus seems intent on thinning the crowd. At the end, the only ones left are the Twelve disciples, one of whom, John points out, is Judas (70-71).

All of this is quite intentional on Jesus' part. John, like Matthew, Mark, and Luke, doesn't want us to forget that Jesus came to die. It wasn't an accident. It was a divine setup.

Jesus/approval rating plummets in John 6 for several reasons.

- First, for the masses the miracle-signs raise the expectancy that Jesus has come to fix everything. He'll be the prophet, the king, the breadbasket. Jesus disillusiones them by making himself scarce, disappearing into the hills.
- Second, the religious leaders are shocked that he claims to be greater than Moses. He says he offers better bread, he comes directly from heaven, and he will give eternal life to those who believe him.
- Finally, and most scandalously, he uses language that offends both his skeptics and his disciples. If you think about it very much, it will offend you too. "Eat my flesh," he says, "and drink my blood."

He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum (59), where there was a mix of skeptics and disciples (followers).

## ***God using words***

The "Jews" (John's way of identifying the religious insiders) had already expressed their disgust in verse 52 when Jesus mentioned eating his flesh. They probably stormed out in protest when he mentioned drinking his blood. The Torah explicitly forbade drinking blood or even eating meat before all the blood was drained.

As today's reading begins, even his "disciples" question him. At this point, don't think of "The Twelve" when you read "disciples." Jesus had a broader group of followers who were his groupies. Since we're in a synagogue, it's probably a lot fewer than the thousands who were fed on the mountainside.

They say, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” (60). I have some difficulty with what Jesus says next. If it were Pastor Bob, I might say gently, “Oh, I’m sorry. Let me explain. It’s a metaphor. Of course I didn’t mean it literally.”

It *is* a metaphor, but that’s not what Jesus says next. Jesus overhears the “grumbling” and seems to say, “If that offends you, wait until you hear what I say now!” (61) He follows that with a partial conditional sentence – a protasis without an apodosis. You say, “What does that mean? I don’t get it.” Exactly.

Jesus doesn’t always put the cookies on the bottom shelf. Sometimes he wants you to stretch for them. Some of his words are intended to confuse and even offend so you’ll have to pursue him further.

“If then you should see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before...” (62). John’s gospel had begun with Jesus’ pre-existence: “In the beginning was the Word” (1:1). As John’s readers, we know that – but the synagogue worshipers in Capernaum don’t. He’s just being enigmatic again. He’s giving them one more reason to say, “I don’t get him. I’m done.”

His next words are pregnant with meaning and the point of the whole chapter if not of his whole life on earth. “The Spirit is life-giving; the flesh profits nothing. The words I spoke to you are Spirit and are life” (63, literal translation).

All through John’s gospel (and the other gospels), hearers miss the intent of Jesus’ stories and metaphors. Some of what Jesus says is intended only for those who will investigate, will dig deeper. Nicodemus misunderstood when Jesus said, “You must be born again.” The woman at the well didn’t get it when Jesus said, “I’ll give you living water.” Now these disciples miss the point when Jesus says, “You must eat my flesh and drink my blood.”

When Jesus talks about fleshly things, he’s not talking about fleshly things. They ultimately pass away. Jesus wants his Spirit to connect with your spirit. The life Jesus is most interested in is not your flesh and blood.

This is what the crowd with their bellies full misunderstood. Jesus did not come into the world primarily to make our flesh feel better and our blood flow longer. The physical life we have is itself a metaphor.

He came to bring real life, Spirit-life, eternal life. That doesn’t mean that he only cares about you going to heaven and not you right now. He wants you to experience that Spirit-life right now, in the flesh.

He says the way you experience it is through his “words.” Remember, Jesus is the Word. Words are how we connect. I’m aware that much communication is non-verbal. But words are, in large part, not only what distinguishes us from the animal

kingdom; they are what it means to be in the image of God. We relate to each other as human beings primarily by words.

When my four-year-old grandson throws a temper tantrum, his parents say, “It’s OK to be upset. It’s OK to be mad. Use your words. Tell me what’s wrong.”

Jesus is saying, “I’m interested in connecting with you. God wants to connect with you. God has sent me from heaven in human flesh not only so you can see God, but so you can hear words from God, words from the Word. Don’t get derailed by the flesh-talk. It’s really about God’s Spirit and your spirit. My words give you life. What would it mean for you to respond to my invitation?”

Not all of them believed, which didn’t surprise Jesus. He already knew who would believe and who would betray (64). Jesus repeats what he had said earlier – that no one comes to him unless the Father enables him (65). I know that raises questions. I’ll return to that theme.

It was at “this time” that “many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (66). That’s surprising, isn’t it? We sometimes think, “If we could only have been with Jesus and seen his miracles, we would follow him completely.” At different times he was popular in Galilee, Samaria, and Judea – but at this point he doesn’t even try to stop those who are saying, “I’m out.”

Jesus turns to the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” (67). In John’s gospel we haven’t even met “the Twelve,” yet another indication that John assumes the reader knows the story told in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. He’s only introduced a handful of disciples by name, and they don’t all correspond with the Twelve. In any case, the Twelve are apparently the only ones left in this conversation.

To walk away as a disciple from your rabbi was the same as turning in a letter of resignation. We would say to “unfriend” him or “unfollow” him.

Peter, the always impulsive one, says, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God” (68-69). All the key words are there – believe, life, words.

The chapter ends on an ominous note. Again, if I’m John telling these stories, I don’t want the last words of Jesus in this section that began with trying to make him king: “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” (70). John tells the reader he’s talking about Judas.

That’s the problem with the takeaway from this chapter that essentially says, “See, that’s what it means to be like Jesus. You offend people. You’re not supposed to be nice. Make them mad.” Maybe, sometimes. But don’t forget that Jesus’ life purpose is to be crucified. He told us to die to self so that we might draw others to him.

## **MYOB**

This is one of those passages of Scripture that raises the issue of God's sovereignty vs. human responsibility, predestination vs. free will, Calvinism vs. Arminianism. In short, does God choose or do we choose? Since "Reformed" in our church name puts our church on the side of "Calvinism," you might expect to hear regularly about this topic. I prefer only to touch it if our Scripture does.

You can argue either way by quoting from today's text. Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them" (65). He adds that *he chose* the Twelve (70), knowing that one of them was a devil (70) who would later betray him (71).

On the other hand, Jesus asked the Twelve, "You do not *want to leave*, do you?" In other words, you have a choice. John tells us Jesus "had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him" (64). He seems to be saying that he only chooses people based on his foreknowledge of what they're going to do.

If you've always wanted a pastor to settle this question once and for all, you've come on the right Sunday. But I'm only going to say it once, so pay attention.

Before I give you the answer, I need to ask. Is the question about investigation or interrogation? Do you really want to know or do you just want to have an argument – with me, with somebody else, maybe even with God? If it's interrogation, I'm never going to satisfy and you're not going to remember what I said anyway.

If it's investigation, I can help. If it's really something on which you want a clear answer, today's your lucky day. Here it is.... MYOB: Mind your own business.

The word "you" appears eleven times in the *New International Version* of today's text – about one per verse. Jesus says, "Does this offend *you*?" "There are some of *you* who do not believe." "*You* do not want to leave too, do *you*?" "Have I not chosen *you*?" Peter says to Jesus: "You have the words of life.... You are the holy one of God."

The reason Jesus says what he says about no one coming to him unless the Father draws him and about choosing the Twelve and about Judas betraying him is not to make them arrogant ("God chose me!") or anxious ("Why didn't God choose them?") but to make them humble ("I could never be here if he hadn't chosen me").

So mind your own business. God's business isn't your business. What God is doing and why is *way* above your pay grade. What he's doing in Judas or anyone else is not your business. You don't really gain a whole lot by trying to discern what God is doing in other people or how it all fits a master plan.

This is a passage about *you*. Jesus is interested in you. He really wants you. John is inviting you to hear the words of Jesus as words to you. Some of those who walked away that day undoubtedly were among the pilgrims who hailed him on Palm

Sunday, then were conspicuously absent on the morning of his conviction and the day of his crucifixion. But 500 people saw him after his resurrection and believed, and that number only grew after Pentecost. It's never the end of the story when someone walks away.

Today there are many people walking away. Many may come back. I have a sense that God is doing something unprecedented, that even the pandemic is part of his plan to purify and strengthen the church. But who am I to explain how God's plan is working out? I certainly don't think I have the ability or the right to interrogate him.

But I can tell you if your questions about this or any other topic are real and heartfelt, he invites investigation. When Nicodemus asks, "How can someone be born again when he is old?" or the woman at the well asks, "Where can I get this living water so I don't have to come here and draw again?" Jesus patiently answers even though the question badly misunderstands, even twists, what he said.

If you want to know more truth, Jesus welcomes your questions because he wants you. The abundance of resources we have today when our minds or our hearts are asking questions – even hard questions – far exceeds that of any previous generation. If something about today's Scripture and sermon raises interest in certain questions – and you really want to know – I can put you in touch with people or direct you to resources that can help. Attending Wednesday night's talk and Q&A could be a good starting point.

Let God be God and let him do what he's doing in the lives of others. What's the next step in your response to believe, to let the Spirit in, to live life the way he intended? Mind your own business and take the next step. Amen.