

Jesus - The Giver of Life

1. Intro

- Even though the Christian message is a message of hope and a message that offers life to all ... it is more often than not a message that is rejected
- The teaching of Jesus has always been confronting and is rarely popular
- People will hear it ... and walk away
- And that's what's happening here in Ch 6

2. Context

- Beginning of Ch 6 > Jesus fed 5000 men plus women and children
- Next day the crowd follow him around the lake because they want Jesus to feed them again and see more miracles
 - Jesus rebukes them for their materialistic motives ...
 - then Jesus says
 - "work not for food that spoils but food that endures for eternal life"
- His point was if we seek to satisfy that hunger and thirst for life in other things, they will spoil, fade and not endure
- But Jesus says, *"whoever comes to me will be never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty"*
- He is the bread of life who satisfies the deep hunger and thirsting of our soul

- Vv41-71 is a continuation of this interaction between Jesus and the crowds
- See in v41 that the crowds are grumbling at Jesus *"because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."*
 - What he has to say is not popular
 - And as he goes on ... what he has to say alienates the crowd more and more

- v60-61 – The disciples say *"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"*
- v66 - *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*
- So in less than a day ...
 - Jesus has gone from being a rock star and having a crowd thousands following him and listening to him ...
 - to the point where everyone has deserted him and only the twelve disciples remain
- I'm sure you won't find that strategy in any church growth manual
 - 'Preach a sermon so that 99% of your congregation leave in a one day'
- Clearly Jesus is not into winning votes and being popular
 - And it's because he's more concerned with speaking truth that will sometimes offend and challenge and confront people ... rather than pandering to the humanistic desires of the masses
- It's no different today
- The truth that Jesus speaks challenge us
- It challenges
 - our views about ourselves
 - how good we like to think we are
 - how in control of life we like to think we are
 - whether we'll be called to account for our life
 - whether we can do anything to determine our eternal future
- We see this in these verses today
 - Even though Jesus is the giver of eternal life ... his hard teaching is rejected by many
- Today want to look at

- What is Jesus hard teaching?
- Why Jesus teaching hard?
- How we respond to Jesus teaching?

3. What is Jesus hard teaching?

God on Earth

- Professors Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz of the University of Heidelberg in Germany are leading critical scholars and authors of the books Historical Jesus
 - *"The mentions of Jesus in ancient historians allay [dispel] doubt about his historicity. The notices about Jesus in Jewish and pagan writers – especially those in Josephus, the letter of Sarapion and Tacitus – indicate that in antiquity the historicity of Jesus was taken for granted and rightly so"*¹
- The historicity of Jesus is not disputed amongst scholars today ... even secular scholars agree that Jesus was a real man of history
- Where there is considerable debate is ... who Jesus really was / is
 - Was he just a man > a miracle worker > a deluded revolutionary
 - Or is what he claimed about himself true?
- Here in v41-42 he says he is divine > he says he's from heaven
 - *"At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven. ⁴² They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"*
- The issue is Jesus divinity
 - It's not whether or not there's something godly about Jesus ... but is this Jesus who

¹ John Dickson, Life of Jesus, p38-39

- lived, breathed, walked, talked, lived in Nazareth, son of Mary & Joseph ...
- Is he from heaven?
- Is he God in the flesh > God on earth?

- From the crowds perspective you can see their point – can't you?
 - Many of them would have known Mary and Joseph
 - Seen Jesus grow up
 - Seen him playing soccer for the Nazareth Numbats U10s
 - Seen Jesus heading off to work with dad in their tradie van – Joseph and Sons Carpentry written on the side
 - Now ... they see Jesus ... and he's claiming he came from heaven
 - "It can't be!?"
 - "He's lost his mind"
 - "Come from heaven ... yeah right ... tell him he's dreaming"

- Yet ... here he is ... the one who has
 - Turned water into gallons and gallons of Penfold's Grange
 - Healed the sick
 - Feed a huge crowd with a little boys lunch
 - Walked on water
- He is clearly ... much more than just "the son of Joseph whose mother and father we know" ... and much more than just a man of history
- He's the son of God who has broken into history, come down from heaven with divine power to give us bread that will endure for eternal life
- That's the first hard teaching of Jesus ... Jesus divinity, he is God on earth

God's Provision

- The bulk of the section vv47-59 Jesus raises another hard teaching that the crowd find hard to stomach (pardon the pun)

- It has to do with the discussion that started back in v32 about him being the bread of heaven
 - In v35 Jesus said - *I am the bread from heaven, whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty*

- And in v51 he continues that thread telling the crowds
 - I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone **eats** of this bread, he will live forever.
 - This **bread is my flesh**, which I will give for the life of the world."

- This is where it seems to go weird
 - The crowd are confused ... they say in v 52 - *"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"*

- And Jesus says it again – even stronger
 - v53 - *unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.*
 - v54 - *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*
 - v56 *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.*
 - 57 ... *the one who feeds on me will live because of me.*

- So you see the picture changes from bread to flesh
 - feeding on bread, now feeding on flesh
 - Bread of life, now flesh gives life
 - Bread and flesh are being used interchangeably

- What's going on here?

- What is it about the bread that Jesus offers that enables people to have life? Why is he talking about eating his flesh and drinking his blood
 - Jesus is not talking about cannibalism
 - Nor is it talking about the Lord's Supper ...

- As is often the case when reading and understanding the Bible ... context is vital
- Context is provided for us in v4
- John tells us the time of the Passover feast was near
 - John wants us to know this ... to help us interpret the events and conversation that follows > to help us make sense of it all
- The Passover was a time of great rescue in Israel's history
 - When God led his people out of slavery in Egypt, and helped them to escape his judgment
 - God had promised he was going to bring judgment on the land of Egypt and every first born son would die
- But God provided a means of rescue ... a Passover Lamb
 - God's people took the lamb > perfect and without blemish
 - Sacrificed it > put blood on door frame and ate the flesh of the lamb
- And so that night every first born son was saved because a death had already taken place ... in their place

- There's a lovely little story of a Hebrew boy saying to his father that night as he's going to bed ...
 - "Father ... have you done the thing with the lamb yet?"
 - Later around 9:30pm he comes out of his room and again asks his dad ... "Have you done the thing with the lamb yet?"
 - Then later than night, around 11:30pm when everyone is asleep ... the boy comes out of his room > down stairs > opens the door > sees the blood of the lamb > breathes sigh of relief and says "I'm safe"

- And so when the angel of death moved through the land ... God's people were rescued from judgment through the death of a Passover Lamb
 - And so the eldest son can say "that lamb died in my place"
- Every year, faithful Jewish families celebrated and remembered that rescue with the Passover meal

- Now John tells us the time of the Passover festival is near ...
 - and Jesus has been introduced in John's gospel as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world ...
 - and now Jesus says v51
 - *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, **which I will give** for the life of the world."*
 - ⁵⁴ *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*

- See what he's saying ...
 - Jesus is saying he's going to shed his blood and his give up his life like the Passover Lamb ... and you need to trust in my death to save you from the judgment of God and give you life

- And the crowd find this offensive
- And not only do they find it offensive ... but a large proportion of this followers don't like it either ... and they start to grumble

- Second hard teaching is God's Passover provision
- Third hard teaching is God's calling

God's Calling

- Jesus started this in v44
 - *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.*
- And then he returns to it in v63
 - *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.*
- Then again in v65 *He went on to say,*
 - *"This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."*

- Of course his main point here is that is God through the Spirit who gives life
 - We are unable to do anything spiritual ourselves
- In our flesh / humanity ... we cannot see the Jesus of history of ourselves
 - We've don't have the spiritual capacity to grasp it
 - We can't stir ourselves to believe ... we don't have the spiritual capabilities to do it!
 - Unless the Father draws you to Jesus
 - It's not up to you ...
 - You can't come when you want ...
 - You can't come when it suits you
- Jesus is not saying we don't have a will
 - What he is saying our will is dead when it comes to God ... and so we can never turn it towards God until he brings it alive
- By this stage ... even the disciples have had enough
 - Now they're not just grumbling ... they're leaving
 - And all that are left are the 12 disciples
- Jesus hard teaching about him being
 - God on earth
 - God's Passover provision
 - God's calling ... were all too hard
 - Too confronting
 - Too challenging
 - Not in line with what they expected or wanted from the Messiah
 - So many reject him and leave

4. Why is Jesus teaching hard?

- Why do the crowds turn away?

- What is it about Jesus teaching they find so hard that they're unable to accept it

- It's because what Jesus has to say fundamentally attacks our human pride
- The common factor in each of those things that Jesus taught ... each of them undermines our pride

- The fact that
 - God had to come to earth as Christ the son
 - He had to die a sacrificial death in our place to rescue us from judgment
 - The only way we can understand and believe that ... is if he calls you
- All that says ... your flesh counts for nothing
 - You and I are helpless when it comes to gaining eternal life
 - It means I can't save myself
 - I can't contribute to my standing before God

- Because in my human pride ... I like to think my performance matters
 - I like to think my goodness makes a difference
 - I like to think I'm a good person
- But the fact that God had to send his OWN son to die in MY place
 - Tells me I'm a rebel ...
 - and on my own merits I stand under the judgment of God
 - and I desperately need someone to rescue me
 - Tells me I'm not as good as I like to think I am
 - Tells me my goodness cannot make a difference
 - Tells me that my performance doesn't determine my eternal future
 - And that's humbling ... and that's confronting

- It's no wonder the crowds deserted Jesus
 - They were looking for Jesus to satisfy their own agenda
 - Political Jesus > bring about the political kingdom they wanted

- NRMA Jesus > just come to Jesus for healing when we're sick and for a helping hand when we're in trouble
- Vending Machine Jesus – just give us the things we want Jesus
- They didn't want to be confronted and challenged
 - They just want Jesus to fit **their** agenda
 - and when they realise Jesus wasn't going to give them what they wanted ...
 - and then he challenged them as how they desperately need to be rescued by him ...
 - they walk away
 - they turn their back > too confronting > too challenging
- But take a look in v66 at what they're walking away **to** ...
 - *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*
 - Literally says ... *from this time many of his disciples turned back to the things they had left behind*
- But as we saw last week in v27 ... those things they've left behind like career, money, relationships, success ... they don't satisfy the deepest desires of our soul
 - They fade, they spoil, they don't endure ... and so they leave us hungry and thirsty
 - They're going back to things that will not satisfy their hunger and thirst
 - They're going back to things that cannot give them life
- They fail to see their greatest need is not their material need for bread to feed on ... but their spiritual need for a Passover lamb to feed on
 - They fail to see that Jesus came not to satisfy their physical hunger ... but to satisfy their spiritual hunger ...
 - their need for forgiveness and rescue from God's judgment

- The masses of Jesus time are no different to the masses today
- The divinity of Jesus still causes offense
- In early church history there was a man called Arius (c. 256–336)
 - Arius believed that Jesus, although fully human and the highest created being, was not fully divine
 - It became known as the Arian heresy

- And there are churches today who will say the same thing ...
 - Christadelphians
 - Church of Latter Day Saints / Mormons
 - Jehovah's Witnesses
 - Muggletonians & the Shakers
- Talk to you Muslim neighbour ... they will tell you Jesus was a prophet ... not divine ... to say Jesus was from heaven would be blasphemy
- Talk to your punter on the street about the divinity of Jesus ... and they will think you're a nutter

- Not only does Jesus divinity cause offense, his sacrifice for our sin causes offense
- We don't like to be confronted with the truth that
 - We're sinners and rebels and we're not right with God and
 - That we need help if we're going to have eternal life
- **Illustration - In Christ Alone**
 - About 3-4 years ago Presbyterian Church in America were putting together a song book ... and they wanted the lyrics changed in the song 'In Christ Alone'
 - *Till on that cross as Jesus died the wrath of God was satisfied*
 - *Till on that cross as Jesus died, the love of God was magnified*
 - Thankfully, Stuart Townend and Keith Getty have refused
- Chairman of the committee said

- *"The song has been removed from our contents list, with deep regret over losing its otherwise poignant and powerful witness," ... The "view that the cross is primarily about God's need to assuage God's anger" would have a negative effect on the hymnal's ability to form the faith of coming generations"*²
- You see the cross of Christ and his death for our sin ... is offensive
- You see why it's offensive?
 - Because the prideful heart of man says I don't need fixing ... or I can fix it myself
 - I'm alright, I don't need God to come down from heaven and die for me!
 - I don't need that, I'm not that bad!
- But Jesus says ... unless you eat the flesh ... which I give for the life of the world ... you have no life in you

5. How we respond to Jesus teaching?

- We can be like the crowds and grumble at the things Jesus taught
 - And you can take offense
 - And you can walk away ...
- But where are you going to go?
 - What are you going to turn to?
 - Like the crowds ... are you going to turn back to the things you left behind ...
 - If you do ... you know if your heart those things are going fade, and spoil and won't endure
 - You know in your heart those things can't give you eternal life
- So where do you go?
 - What can you turn to?
- Listen to what Peter said in v68

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/keith-getty-on-what-makes-in-christ-alone-beloved-and-contested>

- *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*
- *We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."*

- Peter and the disciples lived with Jesus
 - Saw all the miracles
 - Heard his teaching
 - Saw with their own eyes that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh ...
 - God who had broken into history, who had come with divine power to rescue and save people from judgment

- As eye witnesses to the life and person of Jesus Christ ... what was Peter's conclusion ...
 - *"We believe and know you are the Holy One of God"*

- And given their conclusion about Jesus ... they know the only place to turn to is him > there's nowhere else to go
 - *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

- The Lord Jesus is the one who is life and the one who gives life
 - When you turn to him ... the bread from heaven ... he gives you life
 - Life to the full
 - Life with meaning and purpose and contentment and joy
 - Life that is endures

- And when you come to the one who is from heaven and feed on him ... you have great confidence
 - Because he has chosen you ... you can never be lost
 - *6:37 - all the Father gives me will come to me I will never drive away and I will raise them on the last day*
 - Nobody will snatch them out of my father's hand

- **Illustration**

- Playing a game with a child > son, daughter, nephew, niece
 - Hold a lolly in hand > hold out to your > close fist > they cannot snatch it out
 - I can't do that now with my kids > I just get beaten up > they're far too big now > stopped wrestling them about 10 yrs ago
 - I only have monetary means of controlling them now!
- You're like that lolly ... you can never be snatched out of the hand of the Father
- Because in Christ ... you're safe > you're his

- But first you need to see the hard teaching of Jesus is pointing to our greatest need
 - Our greatest need is not have NRMA Jesus or Vending Machine Jesus or Moral Jesus ... meeting our material or humanistic desires
 - Our greatest is to be set free from our sin and from under the judgment of God

- And Jesus hard teaching that we find hard to accept ... is that
 - In his divinity, Jesus has stepped down into this world in order to give his life and carry God's judgment at your sin and mine
- That means letting go of our pride and humbling ourselves before the Him
 - If you want to be raised up on high and have eternal life ... you need to be willing to take yourself down and give up your life

- If you and I want Jesus to meet that need and give us the life we so desperately need ... then you and I need to feed on him
 - We need to feed on his body and his blood
 - That is ... we need to come to him, believe in him, look to his death on the cross as our Passover Lamb
 - And like the little Hebrew boy ... we can breathe a sigh of relief and say with confidence "I'm safe"

- If you and I don't like the hard things Jesus taught ... we can turn back to the things we left behind
 - But where else are you going to go?
- Or will you go to the one who has come from heaven ... and who has the words of eternal life?

PRAY