

Text: John 6:60-71

Title: "Bread of Life Discourse 3: True and False Disciples"

Time: 10/13/2024 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Perhaps you have heard a definition of insanity attributed to Albert Einstein: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again while expecting a different result." It turns out that it was not Einstein who said that. It was a lady named Rita Mae Brown. The quote appears in her 1984 novel titled *Sudden Death*, a story about a lesbian professional tennis player who is exposed by the press. The phrase speaks to the main character's troubled love life.

Brown had a troubled youth. Her mother was a teenage girl whose boyfriend, Rita's father, was married to someone else. Rita worked hard to educate herself, sometimes even living homeless as a student at New York University in the late 1960s. As an adult Rita became very active in the anti-war movement of the early 1970's, the feminist movement, and the gay-liberation movement. She was a founding member of The Furies Collective, a lesbian feminist newspaper published in Washington, D.C..

This definition of insanity has been quoted to me a number of times over the years, ordinarily when I was trying to be faithful at a task the Lord has assigned to me, which was not resulting in a very successful outcome. So I never liked this definition of insanity, and I always wondered how a genius like Einstein could be so wrong about something so important. I was honestly relieved when I found out that it was not Einstein's definition after all.

Our passage this morning begins with the word *therefore*. What precedes that word is Jesus's Bread of Life Discourse.

With that message Jesus seeks to save those who are lost. He told those who heard Him that day, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (v.29). This response of faith is why Jesus was sent to this crowd.

What follows the word *therefore* are the results of this gracious purpose and powerful message. Rather than revival, the result is the apostasy of those Jesus sought to save. It was a disappointing result, made more so because it was a result that occurred not among those who had opposed Him, but among those who had claimed to be His disciples (vv. 60-61, 66). By the time we come to the end of the chapter, this work of apostasy has reduced the crowd of Jesus's followers from the 5000 families fed just days earlier to the twelve original apostles He had chosen.

You may remember that already in the Gospel of John we have found two kinds of faith – saving faith that changes the life of one who is truly born again, and a more shallow faith that enjoys seeing miracles, sees Jesus as a man come from God, but never confesses Him as personal Lord and Savior (John 2:23-3:2).

Now we see in this Gospel two kinds of disciples that correspond to the two kinds of faith. There are true disciples who have saving faith and are born again, and there are false disciples with a shallow faith who turn away. The difference between them is the focus of our passage. We will notice this morning that false disciples depart from Christ and true disciples refuse to depart from Christ.

I. False disciples depart from Christ (vv. 60-66).

Illustration: We are beginning the town recreational basketball season. Last Wednesday evening I and a fellow coach

had 25 or so 3rd and 4th graders in the school gym to evaluate skill level so that we can divide the kids up into teams of equal ability. To simplify, we had two categories - 1's were the better players and 2's were the others. To be honest, with the exception of perhaps one or two players, we concluded that everyone was pretty much a 2, but we still had to guess at who else could be a 1. As coaches, we are going to have a lot of work to do this year.

Application: As John tells us about false disciples who depart from Christ, he points out that Jesus knew from the beginning who the false disciples were (v. 64b). Knowing false disciples is never guess work for Him. The phrase *from the beginning* here refers to the beginning of His public ministry, like it does in John 16:4, "But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you *at the beginning*, because I was with you."

Jesus is never fooled by a false disciple, but we often can be, whether the false disciple is someone else or even ourselves. So how might we recognize the shallow faith of a false disciple? Our passage gives us some answers:

1. A false disciple with shallow faith will accuse God's truth of being too harsh and will be offended by it (vv. 60-61). The word *hard* in verse 60 does not refer to *hard to understand* but *hard to endure*. Some translations use *harsh* to translate the word. Jesus's Bread of Life Discourse disappointed those who heard it in a number of ways. They wanted more bread for their stomach, and Jesus told them to eat His flesh and drink His blood. They wanted a king on a throne, but Jesus spoke of His cross. He did not modify His message to make it more palatable to the tastes of sinful ears. When we do so we fail to rebuke false disciples.

In God's eyes, it was not Jesus's message that was harsh, but rather the unbelief of His audience. Jude 15, "[Christ will come] to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard [our word from John 6, *harsh*] speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." In God's eyes, the sin of unbelief is a harsh response to Christ's loving truth (v. 60).

2. A false disciple with shallow faith will consider the cross unnecessary and will be offended by it (v. 62). When Jesus speaks of going to heaven or being lifted up in the Gospel of John, He always views it as a path that beings with the suffering of the cross (see Heb. 12:2). His point to these false disciples is that if you are offended when I say "eat my flesh and drink my blood," you really are going to be offended when your Messiah hangs suffering from a Roman cross. The thought still offends people today.

Illustration: Radio host Eric Metaxas interviewed the journalist Naomi Wolf recently about her experience 18 years ago with what she called "a heavenly being" she believed was Jesus Christ. This was shocking for her as a Jewess, and it was something exciting for Eric Metaxas as a Pentecostal Christian. But in the interview, Naomi said that this "heavenly being," whom she viewed as Jesus, told her that he was saddened by how many focus on his death and resurrection rather than on the love he showed during his life.

That was a heart-breaking part of the interview, because it is only false disciples who consider the cross unnecessary and are offended by it. When Naomi described light emanating from this being, I was sadly reminded of Paul's warning in 2 Cor. 11:14-15, "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the

ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”

3. A false disciple with shallow faith will reject the authority of God’s words (vv. 63-65). The Father gives the privilege of coming to Christ to those who believe Jesus’s words. Jesus claims here that each word of His Bread of Life Discourse is the Holy Spirit speaking and life itself speaking. Each word must be believed. Where there is no respect for and trust in God’s inspired words of life, the Father prohibits coming to Christ.

4. A false disciple with shallow faith will go back (v. 66). Jesus told some of His disciples who were fishermen to leave their nets and follow Him. Every disciple leaves behind a former existence to walk with Christ. It is never a mere matter of having Christ walk with us while we keep our nets. It is always leaving behind what we once were to follow Christ to where He is going. Paul put it this way: “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Phil. 3:7-8).

False disciples depart in these ways from Christ. How well do these departures describe you?

II. True disciples refuse to depart from Christ (vv. 67-69).

Illustration: Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote a poem called “Solitude” that expresses well the pathos of Jesus’s question to His disciples, “Will ye also go away?” (v. 67):

“Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone;

For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth,
But has trouble enough of its own.
Sing, and the hills will answer;
Sigh, it is lost on the air;
The echoes bound to a joyful sound,
But shrink from voicing care.

“Rejoice, and men will seek you;
Grieve, and they turn and go;
They want full measure of all your pleasure,
But they do not need your woe.
Be glad, and your friends are many;
Be sad, and you lose them all, —
There are none to decline your nectared wine,
But alone you must drink life’s gall.

“Feast, and your halls are crowded;
Fast, and the world goes by.
Succeed and give, and it helps you live,
But no man can help you die.
There is room in the halls of pleasure
For a large and lordly train,
But one by one we must all file on
Through the narrow aisles of pain.”

Application: In contrast to this way of the world, Jesus is the Shepherd who goes with us through the valley of the shadow of death, but the question of verse 67 is a question He asks us all from time to time — will we go with Him? True disciples say “Yes” for two simple reasons:

1. They have no place else to go for words of life (v. 68).

Illustration: My best friend in high school died of HIV/ Aids. He gave me my first Greek New Testament. We went

to the Bible Institute of Ohio together after high school. Halfway through that year, Mike quit school and left a note behind saying that his doubts about the faith had overcome him and that he no longer wanted to follow the Lord. Mike joined the Airforce and later studied astronomy at the University of Hawaii. He probably contracted HIV/Aids with a dirty needle. When Mike fell sick he returned to the Lord, and he died with a firm faith that Jesus is the Bread of Life and that He would raise him up on the last day.

Mike found out the hard way the truth of Peter's insight. When we depart from Christ, there is nowhere else to go, because only He has the words of eternal life.

2. They both believe and know that Jesus is who He is (v. 69). There is some variety in the manuscript evidence for Peter's confession here. Earlier manuscripts have Peter confessing that Jesus is "the Holy One of God." The later manuscripts used by the Greek edition the KJV translators employed have him confessing, "thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." While experts believe that the first reading is likely correct, Peter believed both truths about Jesus, and He not only believed, but also by believing he knew.

Illustration: I know that my Mom died years ago, not because I saw her die, nor because I ever saw her dead body. I know that my Mom died because I believe those who told me she did, and because I know that those who told me she died are credible people who care about me and would not lie to me about something as important as that.

That is how the true disciple knows what he knows too. We know that Jesus is who He claimed to be, the Christ the Son of the living God, the Holy One of God, simply because Someone who cares about us and would not lie to us about

something so important has told us so. This Someone is Christ Himself. This is how I both believe and know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This is how I know I have life in His name. Is it how you know? Do you believe?

Conclusion: Peter does misspeak in one detail. He says *we* in verse 69, but Jesus knew better. Jesus knew that one disciple to whom Peter referred would betray Him (vv. 70-71). In the end, Peter's confession can be guaranteed accurate only if it begins with *I* instead of *we*. Peter could say "I believe and know" with great accuracy, but he could not say "We believe and know" with the same accuracy. I can say "I believe and know," but I cannot say it for you.

Each of us must say so for ourselves. I pray that you will. I pray that you do indeed believe and know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that you truly do have life in His name. I pray that Jesus gets to hear you say so too.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching