

2019-20-18 **John 6:66-68 - To whom will we go? Fifth Sunday after Lent March 29, 2020**

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God's grace and peace are yours through Jesus Christ. Amen.

God's Word makes it clear that no one can replace Jesus in our lives in John 6:66-68.

These are the words of our God. May they help us value His saving Word of Christ for life! Amen.

Dear Redeemed in Christ,

What could make people who have been together a long time separate? What happens to the ties that bind people together? There is social distancing, but that doesn't permanently separate long-time friends, a married couple, or a close family. It would be something harmful like the virus or a drastic change in thinking that ends relationships. Jesus' faithful disciples probably wondered "what happened" when they saw many followers leaving Jesus. The crowds had been amazed by His early miracles. But when He told the truth about God, they left rather than listen, but not all. There were a few disciples who said of Jesus:

To whom will we go?

First, there are no good reasons to leave Him. For two years, large crowds followed Jesus. They began a movement to make Jesus their king shortly after he had miraculously fed over 5,000 and then fed over 4,000 people. It's tragic that their expectations were only for a Savior who would give them food and good health. They had neglected the promises of the Savior to forgive their sins and offer eternal life. Today in our Covid 19 virus world, many people are looking to God for help. They want a Savior who can provide shelter, food, jobs, and healing. But, they stop there. Our daily needs are important, but it's only 1 of the 7 petitions in the Lord's Prayer. Jesus offers more! He offers to fill people who are empty spiritually. He said, *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty"* (John 6:35).

Jesus was the "bread" from heaven. All who received Him by faith would live forever. But, if you had been there standing in line with an empty plate or if you were extremely sick, wouldn't you have been upset? Because of the virus many people today are asking, "Where is God?" Why is He letting this tragedy happen? How can He be a loving God and let my family get sick or lose their jobs? Our verses state, *"On hearing [Jesus], many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'"* (John 6:60). *"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him"* (John 6:66).

We need something strong that will keep us and others from getting discouraged about God when bad things happen. First, God created a perfect world. It was people who brought sin into it. As long as there is sin in the world, there will be deadly viruses, loss of jobs, and people who don't know the love of God. Second, although God often gives undeserved blessings to people, He also allows outbreaks of evil to discipline people. In ancient Israel, He allowed famines and enemies to attack so that they would realize their need for God. The same is true for us. Third, there are times when God prohibits us from doing things we like to do with family events, sports, concerts, and travel. He wants us to value what is most important. Jesus said, *"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?"* (Mark 8:36).

Fourth, Jesus did not come here to make a heaven on earth. He came to rescue us from this sinful world and take us to heaven. When the disciples wanted to see the goodness of God, Jesus said to them, *"The one who has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9). Paul wrote, *"God shows his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). Because of this virus, we have law enforcement, firefighters, and health workers risking their lives to save people. Jesus willingly laid down His life to save us.

How sad that instead of hearing God's Word to focus on Christ, there are churches who question God's Word with false doctrine, attack the Bible, and use the media, universities, and politics to damage saving faith. Sadly, there is a growing number of "dones"—people who left churches and say they are done with them. And there's the "nones"—people who claim they have no religion. Maybe we know someone who has lost his or her faith. We can better understand Jesus' question: "*You do not want to leave too, do you?*" (John 6:67). Did they hesitate to answer? Did they take a poll to see how the majority of people would vote? No!

Second, Jesus' words graciously drew them closer. Peter answered, "*Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life*" (John 6:68). Peter was right! What power God has in His words! When God created the world, Jesus simply said, "*Let there be . . .*," and there was light and seas, stars and galaxies beyond our understanding. I'm holding God's Word in my hands, which is His story of love for us. To sinners like us, He offers words of life: "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). God's message powerfully was at work! Paul wrote, "*Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17).

Only God knows how many believing Christians are in the world. This we can say: Everyone, including you and me, came to faith by one powerful means. It may have been spoken or received in the visible means of Baptism. But now we can say: we trust that Jesus' life and death have won the forgiveness of sins from our loving God! All who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus have it all!

Yet, people who don't have Christ seek to keep us from believing. Jesus said, "*Watch out for false prophets*" (Matthew 7:15). They continue to lure us to abandon our Savior and replace Him with temporary or ungodly things in life. But, there is only one source that gives life: "*Lord... You have the words of eternal life*" (John 6:68). Even if we can't meet in church, whenever we hear or read God's Word, Jesus becomes our preacher. Right now we hear on the news of 100's of people dying around the world of the Coronavirus. It's troubling news that affects grandparents, parents, and children. But, Jesus promised: "*I am the way, the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6). The Bible tells us that while on the lake, Jesus didn't always keep the disciples from storms. But He was with them in the boat to save them.

We're only a few weeks away from Easter. It may not feel like it without worship services in church. We may feel more like the disciples the day after Jesus died. They were isolated and sad. Yet, this is a time for us to grow in trusting God's Word. If we're not reading the Bible, I suggest we start today at John 12 and then read a chapter each day to the end of John. It is reading that will give us lasting hope!

Daily we see and hear of all the suffering, death, and problems caused by this virus, we are tested to hold on to God's promises. Let us remember that God loved us so much He sent Jesus to suffer and die to take us from this world to heaven someday. "*You do not want to leave, do you?*" May our answer always be: "*Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.*" Amen.