

Sermon Notes - August 22, 2021
(John 6:56-69)

I heard about two football teams (a large team and a smaller team) who were competing on the football field. The small team was losing and the larger team was giving them a “run-for-their-money.” The smaller team had this one guy (named Calhoun) who was the fastest running back in the league. As they are playing, the coach kept telling his small team - he told the quarterback, “Give Calhoun the ball.” Well, the quarterback agreed and so anyway, he kept looking for the running back to break free and be where he could get that ball. Calhoun just turned away and didn’t look at that ball. Second play went down - same thing. Third play went down. The coach is getting infuriated. “I told you, quarterback to give that ball to Calhoun!!” Fourth play and guess what...? The ball was snapped, the quarterback stepped back, and all of a sudden, he was sacked and the game was over. Coach came up to the quarterback and he said, “I told you four times to give that ball to Calhoun.” He said, “Coach, you don’t get it! Calhoun didn’t want that ball!” Sometimes, you can be the fastest running back in the league and not be committed to the game, right?

Jesus is asking us today, “Are you committed to me?” In Jesus’ conversation with the people in our scripture passage today, he’s trying to get them to examine their motives and their depth of commitment to him. Some of his followers fell by the wayside. Jesus even turned and asked his disciples, his twelve closest, “Are you going to leave me, too?”

I want you to think about that today as we go through this lesson. You know, Jesus had been telling the people that he was the one that would give life and salvation to them and to us. It’s through his death and resurrection - his loving sacrifice for us - that we have eternal life. He told them to eat his flesh and drink his blood -- they took it literally, and they thought, “Wow, Jesus! Are you talking about vampires or something? We don’t get it.” Jesus was symbolically telling them that his body would be broken and his blood spilt for the forgiveness of our sins

- that he was the one that was the key to eternal life; he was the one sent by God for us and to us, but they didn't get it.

Some of them had already begun to get discouraged about Jesus because they began to realize Jesus wasn't going to be this conquering King Messiah that they were looking for, who would overthrow Rome and put the Israelites back in power. Some of them didn't agree with what Jesus said about Moses. You see, they believed that the Messiah would be a prophet (kind of like, Moses), but Jesus claimed to be superior to Moses and they didn't like that. Jesus told them that they were to accept him as the one sent by God and they didn't want to accept that. In our scripture, if you go back and read it, you'll find that it says, "Why, isn't he Joseph's son? Isn't he the one from Nazareth? Can anything good come from the little town of Nazareth? Why does he say that he came from heaven and from God?" You see, they began to doubt who Jesus was.

There were others there who just wanted what Jesus could give them. Jesus had given them physical bread; he had made the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear; he had cast out demons; he had fed the 5,000 with physical bread. There were some folks that just had their hands out -- "Give me, Jesus. Give me, Jesus. Take care of me."

Jesus begins to ask them to think about their motives and the depth of their commitment to him. Our scripture said, "From that day forward many of his disciples turned back and refused to follow him." Then he asked the twelve, "What would you do?" Peter said (I want you to notice his words. He gave a strong statement of faith) - "Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to know and believe that you are the Son of the Living God. You're the one sent from heaven." There's a man named Win Arn, who is a church growth consultant. Several years ago, he went to the mid-west and researched the views of American Christians about why they go to church - what does the church exist for? - what purpose? One of the things that he found out was (of the 88% of the thousands he interviewed over a period of five years) - "The church exists for me and my needs." Wow - for me and my needs. He also said that he went to a fast growing church in

Minnesota. He said, "They had a plaque or a statement in their building that said, 'We want our members to wear aprons, not bibs.'" He thought that was rather odd. "You want them to wear aprons, and not bibs... what does that mean?" So, he asked some of the staff, "How did you come up with that phrase and what does it mean?" They said, "Well, if you wear a bib, you want to be fed - you want to be served. You don't know that you belong to the body of Christ and you have work to do. You're like a baby Christian. But, when you wear an apron, you have a heart for serving in Jesus' name -- serving others. You know that you are a part of the body of Christ. He's given you gifts and talents to use and serve him. You want to grow and feed on his Word, but you also want to help challenge others to grow and serve him. Those wearing aprons are the ones that want to serve. They don't mind getting their hands dirty." Jesus said, "For the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many." Win Arn, the church growth consultant who said that 88% of American Christians said that the church exists for, "me and my needs and my family" - also said those 88% were still wearing their bibs rather than their aprons.

Jesus called us to be highly committed, not casually interested. I want you to think about some of the reasons people drop out of church or "lose their faith" or backslide. There are people who drop out of church because something happened in the church (some event) that disillusioned them. They were disappointed and dropped out. They said, "If that's the way people are in God's house, I don't want to go." There are some that saw a prominent member in the church in some sin that they couldn't get over and it really disillusioned and disappointed them, so they quit coming to church. There's some who prayed for God to answer their prayer in a certain way and he didn't do it that way, and they dropped out of church. Some have backed-up on their faith in God. There's some that are caught up in sin themselves and they drop out of church and back away from their faith. There are lots of different reasons that people drop out of church and back away from their faith. Sometimes they've gone through a devastating experience in the loss of someone and they struggle with God. That's okay! We ALL go through that -- even Simon Peter, one of Jesus' big disciples and main disciples.

He professed his faith in Jesus and at the same time, he'd say, "Now, Lord, you can't die on the cross over here. We don't want you dying." And Jesus said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." And yet, Peter went on to follow Jesus passionately and Jesus said, "You're the rock. I'll build my church on you." ***We are like Peter in some ways. But, Jesus is calling us to be highly committed rather than just casually interested or having shallow or superficial commitment to him.*** "For the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve." Jesus wants us to be committed to him.

Martin Copenhaver is a UCC Minister, and a few years ago, he retired. At one of the last churches he served (not the very last one, but the next to last one), he decided to do something different on his last Sunday there. He said, "I don't know why I felt led to do that. But, UCC Ministers are known to have a reputation to be liberal and intellectualize their faith. Sometimes they aren't quite as passionate at proclaiming the gospel like some of our counter parts in the Baptist and non-denominational churches. We get caught up in the social issues. We feel the passion, but we don't always express it as well as some of our counter parts. For some reason, that day I needed to tell people about Jesus Christ and what he meant to me." He went on to say, "That Jesus is everything to me. Jesus will be with you whether we're together or apart, and when you're going through the difficulties of life, you can always lean on him. He will always be there. Everything in life depends upon Jesus. Jesus means the world to me." After the service was over, this lady waited until everybody else had left the church and she came up to him. With tears in her eyes, she said, "Dr. Copenhaver, why did you wait until now to tell us that?" He said, "You know, her words still haunt me. I guess I just assumed that as a Minister of the Gospel that everybody would assume that Christ is the Lord of my life, and how much he means to me. But, maybe I needed to tell them more often."

So, today I want to ask you: "What is your statement of faith in Jesus Christ?" Is he the Son of the Living God? The Savior of the World - your Savior and Lord? For me, he is the reason for my existence. He gives me purpose and meaning in life. I wouldn't be a Minister if it weren't for him. I wouldn't do this calling without the strength and power of the

Holy Spirit. He's been there in the bad times of life; in the difficult and hard times when I wanted to give up; he's always been there. He is my Savior; he is my Lord; and he loves you and he loves me. His grace is amazing; his love bountiful. God loves you and me. Today, I want to call you to a deeper commitment in Jesus Christ. Don't settle for being casually interested -- don't settle for superficial and shallow. Go forth to serve and make a difference for the glory and honor of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.