

The Gospel of John - #26 - 04/04/2021 - ""Prelude to Easter!"" John 6: 60-71

Introduction: IL- Growing up in a Bible-teaching church one thing that still stands out to me about our worship services, especially on Palm Sunday and Easter, was our church organist. She would come early and play a "prelude" for about fifteen minutes before church would start, and then play a "postlude" at the end of the service as people were leaving. The prelude was meant to prepare people's hearts and minds for the proper worship of the Lord. I have titled today's sermon, "Prelude to Easter", because here in John 6 the teaching that our Savior gave the crowd that day at the synagogue in Capernaum was designed to impact the listeners on a personal level and change their thinking about Jesus. As I prepared this message I learned that ***Jesus' teaching, which works at the personal level...***

...includes hard truths for some (verses 60-62) As we celebrate Easter and the resurrection of our Lord we need to take a look at the reality that there are many people around the world who find any teaching from Jesus to be offensive, interfering with one's privacy, tough to process and best to steer clear of if you want your rights to be respected. A couple of key words in this portion of or text will zero our thoughts on the "hard" truths Jesus had been unfolding to everyone in the crowd. The word "disciples" refers generally to followers or even learners but those in the crowd who have been following Jesus are not in the same connection to Jesus as "the twelve" mentioned in verse 66. Som of these Judean and Galilean followers were finding Jesus' words to be "hard"- an interesting word in the Greek text- it means "rough" like sandpaper and has the idea of being rubbed the wrong way. These people are having a rough time processing what Jesus is saying to the crowd because it is coming across to them more like a two-by-four to the head than a piece of sandpaper! Jesus had told them in the earlier part of this chapter that He is the "Bread of life" that came down from Heaven, sent by the Father, to reveal the Father and offer Himself as their Savior from sin and as their source of life lived to the full and to the glory of God. The impact of that teaching must have been, for some, very tough to swallow as they thought about their own good works and religious devotion. But the truth is that it was, and still is, appropriate teaching for anyone to hear and assimilate. For them in Capernaum and for many in our part of the world today, it is not that Jesus' teaching is hard to accept- it is that they have hard hearts! Some, maybe many in that crowd that day, had high expectations of Jesus being their political savior from Rome, but not a spiritual Savior- the only One who could save their souls! Something that pops out at me in this portion of the text is the phrase in verse 61- "But Jesus, knowing in Himself that His disciples were grumbling..." This passage zeroes in on the deity and sovereignty of Jesus, and the undeniable fact that Jesus knows everything and knows all about everyone living then or right up to this Easter Sunday! To try to hide even our thoughts from Jesus, who is God, is pointless because He kows every thought in your mind and every word you will say before it is on your tongue! And while that may be a difficult truth to ponder, it is clear from Scripture that Jesus knows you inside and out. In John 4: 39 the Samaritan woman at the well testified to her townspeople and they heard her

say, "He told me all that I ever did!" Jesus, knowing what they were struggling with, asked them, in verse 62- "What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?" That "where He was before" was one of the hard truths they were considering because He had told them, more than once, that He had come from Heaven and eight times in this chapter He claimed to be "sent" by the Father. So, what would they struggle with if they were to see Him go back to Heaven? A real, pointed statement, not an illustration! Before long He would give His life for the sins of the world, be crucified on a cross and buried in a borrowed tomb, but would rise from the dead on that first Easter Sunday and forty days later He would go back (ascend) to heaven, caught up in a cloud while promising to come back for His true followers! The application is quite clear: do I think of God's Word, the Bible, as a collection of hard sayings that rub me the wrong way and disrupt my way of living or am I thrilled to know that the Risen Savior knows me intimately, loves me unendingly and has promised to come back someday to take with with Him to Heaven to spend eternity in His awesome presence? Am I convinced that if He said it, taught it, and lived it, then I can live it too and trust Him that all that He has promised He will do? Like His promise to send the Holy Spirit- John 14: 26- "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you!"

...thrives on life in the Spirit (verses 63-65) That promise of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in regard to truth is as plain as can be when Jesus says, "It is the Spirit who gives life- the flesh is no help at all." When it comes to personally receiving Jesus Christ as my Savior from sin, I can put no confidence in the flesh- that is, I cannot depend on MY good works, my religiosity, my devotion to man-made rules. I can only depend on Jesus! He is the One who speaks to this crowd with authoritative words, who teaches us how to be right with God, who came into this sinful world to save all those who put their trust in Jesus because of what He accomplished for us at Calvary. His whole life on earth was empowered by the Holy Spirit, just like yours and mine can be as we serve God through the Spirit's power. Jesus promised in Acts 1: 8- "But you will receive power, after the Holy Spirit comes on you and you shall be My witnesses..." How am I doing drawing on the Spirit's power? I can rely on that power in life's tough times and when things are going smoothly. I can literally, spiritually thrive on the Holy Spirit's life-giving power and receive direction from Him through the Word of God about how to please my Savior and accomplish His work, just like Jesus pleased the Father and accomplished His work by the power of the Spirit. And we are reminded again that Jesus "knows" who does and who does not believe what Jesus teaches and what the Holy Spirit reinforces. Jesus knew who in that crowd would believe- He knew that right from the start of His public ministry and over the next three years leading up to His death and resurrection. He knew who would say, "I want to follow Him and learn more from Him" and those who would say, "I can't accept this teaching or take this anymore- I'm going my own way without Him in my life!" He also knew who it was who would betray Him to the authorities, and as we will see in a few moments, it was one of His "twelve" disciples! Jesus also teaches again, as He did in verse 44- "No one can come to Me unless the Father, who sent Me, draws him." Here in this passage He tells it this way in verse 65- "I told you that no one can come to Me unless it is granted him by the Father." God the Father grants

eternal life to those who put their confidence in the blood of Jesus for forgiveness of sin. You cannot force your way into Heaven and no amount of "hard labor" will win you a spot in Christ's future glory. But God WILL grant or give you life in Jesus' name by His grace. All that is required of you and me is believing- nothing more but also nothing less than truly believing that Jesus is THE way, the truth and the life! In verse 47 earlier in this teaching, Jesus plainly stated, "Truly, truly I say to you- whoever believes has eternal life." Simply put, that is the Easter message in a nutshell. A Philippian jailer who was put in charge of Paul and Silas, when an earthquake rumbled through the prison block, came rushing in to check on the prisoners and asked, with a sincere heart, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And Paul's answer, in Acts 16: 31, was as easy to understand as any words can be- "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved!" Not hard- not complicated- certainly not difficult to comprehend. Yes, it rubs some people the wrong way, but it doesn't need to if I have a heart and mind opened to take the love of God seriously and experience it personally like that jailer! Once I have made that decision, I can begin telling others about it, promoting my Savior with a heart full of love and committing myself to serve Him every day of the year and not just on an Easter Sunday!

...operates through unswerving commitment (verses 66-69) As plainly as I can put it, that is the simple plan of salvation according to Jesus and His teaching. Yet, still today, and maybe even more so today, there are many who will walk away from the Gospel of Grace and go it alone and end up eternally separated from the Savior who loved them enough to die for them and rise again, offering them the gift of all gifts! Many at that time in chapter 6, who had followed Jesus to see a miracle or two or who hoped for free bread and fish at the hands of this miracle-worker, bailed on Jesus and on becoming a committed disciple- a life-long learner and not just a follower. Jesus used that group departure to ask a very direct question of those who had been chosen by Him to be His inner core of disciples. "Do you want to go away as well?" He knew already that at least eleven of the twelve would remain by His side, but He gave them opportunity to assess honestly whether they had had enough or they really were unswerving in their commitment. Peter, as a spokesperson for the rest, gave an amazing, powerful testimony that centered on the divine nature and Spirit-directed teaching of Jesus. Peter wants to say, in essence- we couldn't possibly abandon You! "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." Such a clear testimony, it is a word that rings with passion and emotion, but emotion supported by and operating by truth- truth about Jesus' teaching and about His holy character as the Son of God! What Easter should mean to you and me, assuming we know Jesus as our Savior from sin, is that we know too that **only Jesus** could possibly save our souls, set us free from our sins and shower us with His grace and mercy while allowing us to serve the King of kings and Lord of lords! Who could possibly walk away from that, and on Easter Sunday, no less?! **IL-** Mario Guerrero. There is one more section of this text that we will deal with without ignoring the issue of a traitor in the midst of devoted disciples...

...sees with spiritual eyes as God's plan unfolds (verses 70, 71) Jesus chose twelve men over the period of His first few months of earthly ministry. We can say many of their names from

memory, like Bartholomew, Andrew, Peter, John- but then there is also Judas Iscariot. I will not spend much time this morning talking about Judas except to say three things about him. First, Jesus knew him too and we might wonder why Jesus would select him when He knew Judas would betray him. I don't have a full and sufficient answer for that question except that Judas made his own choices to become a paid informant for the Jewish leaders who sought Jesus' life. Jesus knew he would do so, but that also moved things along regarding Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, the illegal trials Jesus had to endure and the brutal beatings He experienced. Second- Judas was loved by Jesus even though Jesus knew what he would do. He called Judas "friend" when the authorities came to arrest Jesus as they got the "thumbs up" from Judas. That has always been an amazing text to me, calling Judas "friend"! Thirdly- Judas could have, at any point, repented of his evil plan. He was NOT a robot. And if he had experienced a change of heart he would have been forgiven, I believe. But all of this worked out to fulfill God's plan for Jesus to willingly go through Roman crucifixion, spend parts of three days in a borrowed tomb, and rise again from the dead on that first Easter Sunday. Hard truths? To a point, yes, depending on our spiritual condition. But with hearts of faith and trust we can learn from Jesus' teaching here in chapter 6 that all that will come in the next 15 chapters will be the fulfillment of God's plans for the Son of Man! We will learn more about life in the Spirit as we work our way along in this Gospel record. Today, if we choose to, we can tell God, from the depths of our heart and soul, that we are committed to doing His will, without question or pause because we know Him and believe His words to be true! And I believe God gives His children spiritual eyes to see what will cause our faith to grow, our hearts to swell in love toward the Lord Jesus and the happy, life-long commitment to seeing God's plan worked out on earth as it is in Heaven!

Conclusion: The Gospel song-writer John Newton must have written the classic, "Amazing Grace" on an Easter Sunday. That is not hard for me to believe! But that second part of the modern version of the song, "My chains are gone" is just as compelling, since those chains could keep u and maybe have kept us bound to turn from and run from the hard truths and be hesitant at best to receive life through the Spirit. All that can change today- right here, right now- no more disbelief, no more frustration over things hard to believe, but rather trusting that Jesus knows me, loves me, died for me and rose again to offer me life that really matters and that lasts forever!