

Do we Have a Turning Point?

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to look this morning for a little while at John's Gospel chapter 6, very interesting chapter, and it speaks very powerfully of Jesus, of course, and Jesus is the one who we come to worship and who we serve and who we follow as believers.

And what I want to do today briefly is ask an important question, which I think is for people who are uncommitted to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, but also to us as Christians in our lives to think about our relationship with Jesus Christ and how that relationship or how that Lordship works itself out in our lives.

And I'm wondering whether sometimes we need to ask the question whether we have a turning point for Jesus Christ, whether there's a place beyond which we don't allow Jesus Christ to have Lordship in our lives.

Is there a Rubicon that we don't cross in regard to our relationship with Christ? And I think increasingly that's becoming an issue for Christians and the Christian Church when so much of the society in which we live is in terms of legislation and in terms of its moral compass moving away from a traditional Orthodox morality and understanding of life, really.

And so we may be challenged greatly with our Christian faith, our ethical standing, and our moral standing as Christians.

[1 : 42] And it may be that we're tempted sometimes to go so far with Jesus Christ and go no further and allow Him not that place of Lordship.

So what I want to do just for a moment is think about what Jesus says here and the reaction to some of what Jesus said in this chapter, because it's quite a provocative chapter. He uses very provocative language and illustrations and pictures here.

So firstly just to look at Jesus as he describes himself here, particularly in verse 35, which in many ways is the theme of the whole chapter where he says, where he declares, I am the bread of life.

He who comes to me will never go hungry. He who believes in me will never be thirsty. And it's great, isn't it? Because Jesus is latching on to the discussions that are being had or the discussions or the conversation or the thought process that has already been had with regard to manna and the manna that came down from heaven, which the Jewish people to whom he was speaking all knew about, because that was the miraculous provision of God for the people in the desert.

Wasn't it? It was the bread that they got. It was the manna that came down from heaven and it was to feed them. And so he latched on to that picture and he used that picture to say, well, I am the kind of fulfillment of that manna.

[3 : 05] I am God's manna. I am the bread of life. I've come not just to give physical sustenance miraculously as the people of God received in the Old Testament in the desert, but I've come to give spiritual life and eternal life.

And I like, isn't that great? I like that Jesus uses pictures. He uses simple pictures to get profound truth across. I like that. I'm a simple person.

I like pictures. I don't like books that are full of words. I like books with pictures in them. So theology books really should have pictures in them. And then I'd read them more.

And it's a great thing to have pictures because we, some of us are very visual people. And much of what we do and much of how we communicate is verbal, isn't it?

And yet even within the verbal communication, we can be visual and we can encourage the imagination to think as Jesus was doing to consider in pictorial form the truth that He was getting across.

[4 : 12] Wonderful reality. Jesus says He's the bread of life who has come down from heaven, verse 38. I am the bread of life and I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of Him who sent me.

Jesus come to establish His kingdom and His Christ as citizens today, we still belong to that kingdom. We recognize Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior because of His finished work on the cross, because of what He achieved on the cross and because He rose triumphant over the grave, defeating sin, ascended to the right hand of the Father.

So today we worship Him and that doesn't change. It doesn't change with the secularization of society. It doesn't change with the advance of science.

It doesn't change with anything around us and we come and one of the great things about the Gospel and about the message and the word is we're always coming back to the unchanging truths.

We focus, we fix our lives, our hearts, we put our feet firmly in the ground of an unchanging Savior and that is a great relief and a great release.

[5 : 22] We don't need to convocate and meet all over the place and decide to change the Gospel. We don't need to modernize it or adapt it or bring it into thinking that equips or equates with 21st century thinking because it's eternal truth and Jesus claims to be the one who reveals truth as the bread of life.

Not physical sustenance in this instance but eternal life. My Father's will in verse 40 is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes on Him shall have eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day.

I love the fact that He says what work are we to do? The Jews ask what work are we to do? How can we do work for Jesus to earn His favour?

How can we please God? And Jesus said the work that the Father asked you to do is to believe in Me. Isn't that great? That is the work of faith that we are to trust in Him.

Jesus Christ is the one who is the bread of life as we were made clear in this passage. The work of God is this, to believe in the one who He has sent.

[6 : 37] That is the one who is the bread of life. And again that is a good picture for us, the manna, it was not bread as such, it was God's miraculous food.

But bread, I think in most societies and even for ourselves, is still recognised and seen as basic nourishment. It is the symbol that is used that we will celebrate tonight when we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

He goes on to link that sacrament when He talks about eating His flesh and drinking His blood and it is that reality that the basic food of life physically is the picture He uses for Himself as the one who will give us spiritual nourishment and the spiritual food and the energy and the life that we need.

And that is the great reality that we need to remember in our lives. Even if practically you do not have toast every morning for breakfast, it is a fairly good analogy that we take bread, the basic of food every day.

And so as believers we recognise our daily dependence on Jesus Christ to nourish us, to feed us and to give us spiritual life.

[8 : 05] He is our life and the Holy Spirit to change the analysis, the breath that we breathe, the oxygen that we breathe enabling us to live.

And so He goes on not just to speak of Himself as the bread of life which is usually significant but also in many ways to describe Himself in very graphic terms and very unacceptable terms as broken bread.

He goes on to speak about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, this living bread that comes down from heaven from verse 53 onwards.

I tell you the truth unless you can eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you, grotesque language, of course.

But He is carrying forward this illustration, this picture. It is not literal what He is saying. It may have been taken literally by some as it was written and caused great offence, but He is continuing to speak spiritually and symbolically for us pointing forward to the kind of death He would die and the substitutionary effectiveness of that death that is.

[9 : 23] It was something that His brokenness would bring our healing and would give us healing in our lives as we trust in Him. He is pointing forward to the fact that this Savior, this Jesus Christ was to be a suffering Savior.

He is laying the ground for the disciples, preparing them for His crucifixion which was to come in the plan of God. And we know we've seen that, haven't we, before we looked at the work in life of the person, the work of Christ, how everything was pointing forward to this death on the cross, this shedding of His own blood which was so significant and so important.

And it led to the ascension finally after the resurrection of the Son of Man which He speaks about in verse 62. He hasn't seen nothing yet. Jesus is saying there's more to come and there would be this ongoing revelation of a Savior who had come to rescue, to redeem, to buy back, to heal and to save His people.

It's broken bread, but also He is holy bread. In verse 69 the disciples, Simon Peter particularly, says we believe and know that you're the Holy One of God.

And this Christ, this Savior, this nourishing Redeemer that we have is also holy. He's separate. He's perfect.

[11 : 03] He's the source of life and the source of purity and the source of righteousness.

And as the source of these things, He remains the unchanging Redeemer. And He is the one who this morning knows and understands our hearts and knows our relationship or not with Him and knows what our need is because He has come into the furnace of our own dirt and He has come in His purity and in His perfection to die in our place and to redeem us from our sins.

So that's the picture that we have of Jesus Christ here very briefly. He is this holy Son of God who is or is to become or was to become broken but was the bread of life.

Now that remains unchanging for all of you and for all of us that His claims remain no different. We need to invoke our spiritual imagination today and consider our need of Him as our bread.

The bread of life for us. You know, He's not a one who offers himself as some kind of specialist food that we partake in now and again as a treat.

[12 : 34] He is the bread of life. He's what we need to survive if you've come on the back of a week or a month of silence before Him as a Christian.

If we haven't cried out to Him, if there hasn't been any sense of need or hunger or appetite spiritually for Him, then we are misunderstanding the nature of the relationship we are to have with Him because He says He's the bread of life that we need Him, that He offers us eternal life and He wants that ongoing relationship with us.

And so we find in this chapter interesting responses, don't we? And interesting terminology in the living word of God because there are really two responses here to the claims of Jesus.

The first come from His disciples in verse 60 on hearing it, many of His disciples said, this is a hard teaching who can accept it.

And many of them from this point on turned away from Him and didn't return to Him from verse 66 from this time. Many of His disciples turned back and followed Him no longer.

[13 : 50] That's a problem for us, is it not? These are His disciples, but they turn away from Him and don't follow Him anymore. So what does it mean that they're His disciples? What is the terminology speaking of?

Well, we know it's not the 12 because we have the 12 in verse 67 answering differently. Jesus turns away from His disciples, turns to the 12 and says, are you going to leave me as well?

Are you going to turn away? So Jesus makes the differentiation between the two groups of people. And it would seem that there was a wider group of people who followed alongside Jesus and who associated with Him as a teacher, student would.

They followed Him, they enjoyed what they had to say. They were inquisitive. They quite liked listening to Jesus. He was an attractive personality. And what's more, He did miracles.

And sometimes they might even have got a loaf of bread off of them, some fish. Maybe we'd have seen a walk in the water or something dramatic or something special. So they liked hanging around Jesus because it was good to hang around Jesus.

[14 : 55] They just enjoyed what He had to say, but they were uncommitted to Him. Jesus himself says earlier, you know, that's why some of you still haven't believed. So Jesus knows their hearts and although they're called His disciples, His followers, as it were, they weren't genuinely believers and those who trusted in His lordship and in His Savior credentials, could we say, they were uncommitted.

And here as we go towards the cross, Jesus testing the allegiance more and more. And so He throws out this rather revolting and strong picture of eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

Picture, illustration, following through from Him, describing Himself as the bread of life. But they didn't accept that teaching. They didn't like what He had to say about coming down from heaven.

He's just Joseph's son. He's just a punter who happens to have a lot of gifts. Who is he? What is he talking about? He's talking himself with manna and with provision from God and with eternal life and the offer of eternal life.

He's a liar. He's a lunatic or his lord, you know, the old challenge that we talk about when we talk about responding to Jesus.

[16 : 19] These were those who went back to the things they'd left behind. That's really what verse 66 means.

They didn't follow any longer. They went back to the things they'd left behind. They weren't genuinely His disciples. They were inquisitive. They were hanging around Jesus.

They kept the company of believers. But they weren't genuinely Christ. When the hard sayings began to hit, then they were unwilling to trust Him and unwilling to follow through His teaching about their own need.

And I would argue there's always a turning point for you and for me, at least the temptation of one. There's always a time in our lives, and there may be several times every week, that there's a Rubicon where we say, I'm going to cross this because Jesus Christ is my Lord.

Or we may be saying, this is a hard teaching. I'm not going to follow Him anymore. And that's a challenge to us because sometimes we have Christ in this little box, don't we?

[17 : 34] It's nice and it's got lovely wrapping and it's got a big bow in it, and it's pretty. And that's where Christ is for Jesus. He's just a nice guy.

He's our imaginary friend that we just wheel out and that we come alongside us and we're struggling. And spiritually we use our imagination and we hope Spirigie rubs our back and he gives us a good time because that's who Jesus is.

He's Mr. Nice Guy. He's the friendly. He's our my lucky charm. But what we find in the Gospels is this great and glorious and good and loving and attractive Savior is also the one whose eyes are piercing into our souls and who says, look, I see your heart and I see you are in grave danger of being lost eternally unless you come to me for repentance and stay close to me and eat me and drink my blood.

Spiritually speaking that we take him as our Lord and master and we recognize that he's the one who will all as long as we live and the longer we're living here in Scotland, 21st century secular Edinburgh, the more we will find it challenging to follow Jesus Christ and the more Rubik's we will be tempted not to cross because his morality, his teaching, his lordship, his glory, his strength are not what this world wants to hear and this world wants something completely different.

And so the danger or the challenge for us is to just turn our backs and say, well, these are hard things and we don't believe anymore. We can't follow this guy. I'm going to go back to what I left behind and yet this Savior has the words of eternal life.

[19 : 23] No one else makes that claim. No one can make that claim. His death and resurrection on the cross remain absolutely crucial and foundational to keep us on that path.

Nothing else will. A trendy happy young church will not do it. A fantastic someone else minister will not do it. Nothing else will do it apart from a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Great friends will remain with you here in the church, but that will not keep you from crossing that. Even if it's an unseen Rubicon that no one else sees and you will continue to be part of the church and you'll continue to take communion, but in your heart of hearts, he is no longer Lord.

He's no longer God. And the question that is begging to be asked from a chapter like this for all of us is again, on whose terms do we believe? Is it on our own terms that we believe?

Is it merely intellectual? Is it as long as it accords with modern science or modern philosophical thinking? Or are we those who have come to terms with a Christ who rips us apart from the inside out and is renewing us there and making us whole and dealing with the sin which deceives us and takes us away from him?

[20 : 44] This is the great reality and challenge of the gospel is that the faith in Jesus Christ requires, it does require turning round, but not the kind of turning round here that was going back to what they left behind.

It's a turning towards him. That's what it is. It's in repentance and in our very being. And we don't move from that, you know.

There's some people here who have been Christians for 50 and 60 years. They don't cease to be repentant Christians. They are constantly, and we are constantly turning back to the living God because his face shines with grace and with love and he never turns us away, you know.

He never says, well, I'm tired that you keep coming back to me. You know, you've had three strikes, 30 strikes, it should be time you're out now. It's not like that with Jesus.

It's like that with us. Now, someone keeps coming back to me. I'm going to say, well, you know, I've tried. I've given my best. But Jesus Christ is not like that. He says, I know what you're like and I simply want you to eat my flesh and drink my blood.

[21 : 57] I simply want you to put your trust in me, to eat, to be nourished by me, to come to me for forgiveness and for life and for glorious hope and a future.

And so I guess a chapter like this does challenges us to commitment. For those who are parents here, it is a great reminder and we'll be baptising children shortly.

The brocks and the coals will be coming forward. And you know, they have to think of their own children. And we have to think of our own children growing up in this hellish world that we live in.

And we have to give them a foundation that is unchanging. We have to point them to Jesus Christ and remind them that He is Lord and He is God.

And it's not a game. And this is the bread of life and it's eternal life. It's a great challenge. And it's a great chance for all of us because we're all part of it.

[23 : 02] You will all take vows shortly or you will make an ascent, answer a question that you will pray for and that you will support the work of the Gospel, but through the families that you will pray for the children.

And that's not just for the children. It's for all of us that we'll pray for one another. We'll support one another, that we will help one another with the Gospel and with remaining close to this foundation.

We're not fighting one another. We're not disinterested in one another. We are a people who desperately seek the bread of life and we're all coming to the same place.

And this evening will be just luxurious as we sit at the Lord's table together. This is because we need Him and we need to sit together with Him and feed on Him spiritually and be blessed because of that.

Commitment and commitment to Jesus Christ. I can't go beyond committing myself to Christ. Something no one else can do for you. You must make that stand as believers and I must.

[24 : 11] And then lastly and very briefly before we finish, we see the reaction of the disciples who are His disciples who were loose followers, but then we also have the response of the 12 spoken of by the representative, Simon Peter, 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. It's not a great response of faith with limited knowledge and insight.

Although He was with Jesus, He hadn't yet seen all the things that we see by faith through the word of God completed. Great response. Whenever you're tempted to give up, when you wonder about the hard sayings of Jesus and about the toughness of being a Christian, of going against the grain that everyone else is going with, then these are great words to memorise, aren't they?

To whom can we go? You know, who else? Who else loves us like Jesus Christ? Who else redeems us?

Who else has transformed us? Who releases us? Who knows us? Who has accepted us as we've turned to Him? There's nobody. There's no one to whom we can turn.

[25 : 27] He is the only saviour that there is and He is the one who offers eternal life. Come to me, I will raise you up.

I will look after you. I will love you. That's what He says. And we are to trust in Him against all the odds. We are to trust in Him and deal with that deep-seated rebellion that makes us want to go our own way and sometimes reacts against the teaching and the message of salvation that comes from Jesus Christ.

It may be that each of us are able to say to whom shall we turn, you of the words of eternal life, and may that be the anthem that you take with you into this week, and may it be something that reminds us of our dear friends and family members who don't know Jesus Christ, that we would long for them to share that same testimony in their lives.

Let's bow our heads and pray together. Lord God, we pray that you would buy your Holy Spirit in livin' us, that you would empower us, and that you would help us to persevere as Christians.

May we not be content with being on the edges of commitment or in the draft of your company at a broad level, like the disciples who turned away from you were.

[26 : 59] But may we believe in our hearts and be committed to you wholeheartedly. Lord, again we pray for this city that we love and we pray for a powerful movement of your Spirit for the good of every individual that we know and love and don't know in this lost and broken city.

We pray for this world of which we're apart with its confused sexuality and the ongoing and brutal violence of ISIS, the terrible tragedies that we've seen over this week.

We pray that somehow these dark events would remind us of the light of the world, Jesus Christ.

We pray that the economic crisis in a country like Greece also and the terrible cost to ordinary people while politicians sit in bright rooms and discuss it all theoretically.

Lord we pray that you would give us strength and love. We pray that you would bless us as we move to the baptisms at this point and that you would bless the coals and the brocks as they bring their children to us.

[28 : 27] We pray for them in their lives and in their families when they're so far from their own homes also. Thank you for having young Christopher with us today. We pray your blessing on him and pray that he would grow up strong and well.

Remember us all as individuals and as people. We thank you for all that we are and all that we are able to be. We thank you for the building today that we're able to worship in that has been restored from the outside.

We know that that is not a spiritual thing but we know it's a practical help and we thank you that the provision has been made. Bless us we pray and may it be a building used for your glory and for the furtherance of the gospel.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.