

A summary John 6:52-71.

There are at least four questions that we may ask in this passage:

- 1. Why does Jesus speak in this way, knowing that many would leave Him?** John 6 begins with the miracle or sign of the feeding of perhaps more than 10,000 people to satisfy their human need. Because they were satisfied, many of them began to follow the Lord and seek for Him because they had been blessed by Him. This is also our case. We like to follow the Lord because the Lord blesses us. But the question is whether we will continuously follow Him? Will we follow Him next year, in two years, in five years, in ten years etc.? Therefore the Lord left the crowd to perfect His disciples so they would know Him. He provided the proper environment (the wind and the waves), that is a difficult situation, and deliberately made as if to pass them by. This was a test or a perfecting, not only for the disciples, but also for the crowd that saw the disciples loving the Lord and following Him. The crowd, or the general disciples, were able to know that those who closely followed the Lord would be perfected. Thus, the perfecting was a testimony, not just for the close disciples, but for the general crowd of disciples. This progression is important because now, from verses 25-66, Jesus turns back to the crowd following Him, and all His speaking is addressed to them. Now, Jesus, having met the human need, wants to bring the crowd, and us, higher, so we can know Him as the resurrection life, the eternal life. He wants us to know His purpose, His need. He wants us to know Him, to believe in Him, and to hear Him. Why does the Lord speak in so seemingly a harsh way, insisting on the fact that unless we eat His flesh and drink His blood, we have no life (eternal life) in ourselves (v. 53)? Because of His purpose, which is to die for us (seen in the separation of flesh and blood) in order to build up the church. Indeed, He wants to meet our human needs, but He also wants us to meet His need. Therefore, the Lord progresses from the human need to revealing Himself as the “I am,” the bread of life, the living bread, and the One whose flesh and blood must be eaten and drunk. In v. 63, He further reveals that such an eating is not fleshly but a matter of receiving His words (the rhema or instant words) in spirit. We must be brought to the word of God that speaks to us so we can know and understand God. The Lord seems almost desperate to cut through all the layers of blessings that we are satisfied with, to bring us to realize Him as the source and the purpose, and to receive His instant speaking. Eventually, we need to come to the realization that our real human need is indeed God’s need, which is the real meaning of our human life.
- 2. Why did so many of His disciples leave?** (vv. 60-66). To follow the Lord is not easy. It is so difficult to understand God. It is so difficult for people to stay in the church life. For example, in Montreal, since 2011, every Lord’s day (Sunday morning), there has been an average of 6 different new people who have come. This is truly a blessing to the church. At the same time, it is a sober reminder to us of how challenging it is to stay. Why do people come? The main reason why we begin to come is that our human needs are met. We enjoy being with brothers and sisters. They may even help us to find a job or get married. We feel loved and cherished. We may even pray for a particular need, and it seems that the Lord answers our prayer almost immediately. Everything seems rosy. However, we may not understand what Christ needs. We may not understand the Bible. We hear sharing every week on the Bible, but we feel the Bible is too hard. Our human needs are met, which are endless and unlimited, but we have little realization of Christ’s needs. The longer we stay in the church life, the harder it seems to get. Now, when we pray, our prayers don’t seem to be answered right away. The prayers that received immediate fulfillment now seem to be ignored by the Lord. The Lord’s word seems far away, and nothing in the Bible seems to fit our needs. Unless we know Christ and have had a genuine speaking from Him through His word, there is no reason to stay. This is not to judge or condemn anyone, but to realize that without Christ, it is inevitable that we will depart from the Lord.
- 3. Why did the Lord ask His eleven disciples if they also would go away? Why did they end up staying?** (vv. 67-69). Actually, this question is asked to us. Peter’s answer (“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,” v. 68) is for us. In fact, this word was not

only hard to the other disciples, but it was hard to the twelve, and it is hard to us also. We are no different from the disciples. The difference is that this hard word attracted Peter. Did Peter understand? Yes, to a certain extent, but not fully. He followed Jesus, but later denied Him when another test came. Somehow, we are attracted to the word of life, but we don't understand that much, just like the disciples who left. The difference may be that even though we may not understand, we realize that Jesus has the words of eternal life, and that we can still come to Him. Our degree of understanding is relative. Therefore, by the Lord's mercy, we may continue to be in the church life. However, there is no guarantee that we will be here in ten years. Therefore, day by day, we need to come to the rhema word of God, individually and with saints, to hear the word of God through the servants of God, so we may be attracted to Him, even though our understanding may be very little.

- 4. Why did Judas still follow the Lord?** Ironically, if anyone should have left, it should have been Judas Iscariot! Referred to by Jesus as a devil, and the one who would eventually betray Him, Judas, of all people, continued to follow Jesus. Of course he must have been present in the feeding of the multitude, and he must have been in the boat during the storm with the other disciples. Now he is still around when Jesus speaks a hard word, and he continues to stay. He did not understand but He still followed Jesus as a great man, a great teacher or prophet, and because of a great environment. He never went hungry, and all his needs were met. He knew nothing else. He was satisfied with his group, but he did not believe in Jesus. We may also be like Judas. We may have grown comfortable in our "social" group. Judas even had the responsibility of serving in the finances. We also may be taking care of one or more services. We may feel useful and needed and recognized by others. If we leave the church life, in a sense, we may not know what to do. We will lose what we have gained. The world may not want us, and even another Christian group may not want us. This is perhaps the most miserable existence that we could have. Therefore, we may prefer to stay. That is why some Christians may stay in a group all their lives without ever knowing God or His word, but perfectly satisfied with their living. This may be our case. We should not criticize Judas or Peter too harshly. When we believe in the Lord, we may be like Peter, bold to follow the Lord, to walk on the water to come to Him, and to be the first to acknowledge Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. But when we deny the Lord, we may be like Judas. This is a warning to us to struggle to know the Lord in every situation and environment that He gives us, and to always come to Him and His word.
- 5. The living bread and the bread of life becoming the flesh and blood of Jesus to be eaten as our enjoyment (v. 48, 51, 53).** The living bread and the bread of life are botanical in nature, and mentioned first by Jesus as something to be eaten in order to receive life. This is God's purpose, that we may have life. But how can sinners such as we receive the divine life? Eventually, this bread becomes the flesh and blood to be eaten and drunk by us. The flesh and blood in separation, typified by the symbols of the Lord's table, indicate death. Jesus died on the cross for our redemption, so we can have access to His divine life. We partake of His death by eating and drinking His word (v. 63), which leads us to experience His death. His word becomes our food as our enjoyment. However, this enjoyment is not merely something emotional that we may experience, for example when singing a song with the saints, or sharing the love feast with brothers and sisters, but it is based on the death of the Lord Jesus, through His word, causing us to decrease and Christ to increase. For example, talking to people to preach the gospel may be against our character or disposition, especially if we are shy or feel awkward in talking to people. However, when the word speaks to us, it may be a hard word, and we may not have much emotional enjoyment because it goes against our character. This is a test to us. What do we do with the word spoken to or read by us? Do we ignore it or do we carry it out right away? Neither response may be according to the Lord. Rather, this word must become a food to us that is good for us, decreasing us and increasing the degree of Christ in us. In a sense, the question is not so much whether we carry out the word or not, but first whether the word has nourished us and been enjoyed by us. The result is secondary, though still important.