

THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL CHOICE (John 6:60-71)

8.29.21

INTRODUCTION

The dictionary defines “choice” as: *An act of selecting or making a decision when faced with two or more possibilities.* It is something that every single one of us does many, many times over the course of any given day, often times those choices playing out without our even thinking about them — grabbing something to eat or drink, pulling a shirt out of the drawer, turning on the car radio, things like that. No thought — we just do them.

On the other hand, life is also filled with very major decisions that we put a great deal of thought into — school choices, career choices, is this the person to marry, where should we live, should we have kids, should we really root for the Vikings this year — choices that have very major impacts on our lives.

But today we are looking at the one choice that overshadows any other choice in our lifetime, in fact, in anybody’s lifetime — in other words, there is no more important choice, and it’s this: What do I do with Jesus? What do I do with this Radical Rabbi, this preacher from Nazareth? Why is this choice so far beyond any other choice in importance? This is the one choice that not only impacts this life but, more importantly, the eternal life to come. This is an extension of what we talked about last week, with the often graphic, very vivid teaching Jesus did with the crowds following the miraculous feeding of a crowd likely in excess of 20,000 people. According to Christ, that wasn’t just His version of “fast food”; that miracle had meaning. Last week we talked about what that crowd heard from Jesus. Today we’ll be looking at what Jesus heard from that crowd. So, as we move into this “part two” message from last week, **let’s begin with a very necessary word of prayer.**

TEXT (John 6:60-71)

On hearing it, many of His disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” — John 6:60.

Now before anything else, we need to understand that the “disciples” to which John’s gospel was referring was the many who had been following Jesus for a while, plus those who had been searching for Him following their miraculous feeding. Christ will address the “Twelve” disciples later. And the “it” to which this hearing is referring to is the long teaching session that Jesus had just concluded. In it, Jesus had been trying to get that crowd to think beyond the now, to think beyond the feeding of the thousands from five loaves and two fishes that satisfied their physical hunger in such an amazing, unforgettable way. But here’s the deal — that feeding provided a satisfaction that was only temporary. I mean, in a few hours, they were hungry again, right?

So, with that in mind, Jesus was pointing them to another reality — the reality of another life, a life that, unlike this one, would last forever. To what would they look for satisfaction when contemplating a life that never ends?

Jesus directed them to Himself, memorably saying: ***“I am the bread of life” — Jesus Christ, John 6:35a.*** You can almost hear some in that audience: “OK, not so sure what that means, but it sounds good; I like bread.” And then Christ adds some words of promise: ***“Whoever***

comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty” — Jesus Christ, John 6:35b. Still sounds good to me. But then He continues and, the longer He speaks, the weirder — at least to His audience — His words become: **“Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on Me will live because of Me” — Jesus Christ, John 6:53-57.** To His audience, those words would have sounded wrong on so many levels, especially religiously — not to mention that those words were absolutely stomach-turning! How could a rabbi, any rabbi, even think to say something like that? He appears to be deliberately stretching this crowd’s willingness to follow Him to their very limit.

So, what was His point? Let’s look at it using a simple loaf of bread: So you’re really hungry and you come upon a beautiful-looking loaf of bread. Maybe it’s still warm, having just come out of the oven. The smell is great — and you are so hungry. So, what’s the solution? What do you gotta do to satisfy that hunger of yours? Well, just continuing to look at that bread won’t satisfy your hunger. Knowing what ingredients were used in making that bread won’t satisfy your hunger. Drawing a sketch of that beautiful loaf of bread won’t satisfy your hunger. Going around telling people, “Hey, y’all; you gotta come take a look at this beautiful loaf of bread” won’t satisfy your hunger. Certainly, trying to sell it won’t satisfy your hunger. Only one thing will satisfy your hunger — taking that bread and starting to eat it, to consume it, to get it inside of you. That’s the only way that bread does you any good at all. **“I am the bread of life,”** Jesus said. “So, what does that tell you? Now do you understand what I’m trying to say?”

Aware that His disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before!” — John 6:61-62.

Essentially the crowd was scandalized by what Christ had been saying. Already knowing this, He basically says, “Wow; you think this is offensive? Makes Me wonder what you’d be saying if you saw Me return to where I came from.” This all arose from their totally misunderstanding what Jesus was saying — but also from their being content to misunderstand Him.

Remember back a little while when Jesus was telling the story of the sower who was planting seed, how seed fell on different kinds of soil? At the end of that parable, Jesus had told the crowd who was listening: **“Whoever has ears, let them hear” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 13:9.** Now certainly Jesus was giving them a “heads up,” that what He was telling them was really important. But He was also giving them an opportunity to make a choice: Anybody who wanted to know what His parable meant simply needed to pursue its meaning by pursuing Him, asking Him, and He would make its meaning plain. Remember? Jesus did that with the Twelve, as well as some others who truly wanted to understand Him. But, if you didn’t want to know the meaning, well, that’s easy — just let it go; don’t even bother with it.

Here Jesus is presenting the same choice: “This is really not all that difficult. But if you’re struggling with what I’m talking about, and you want to understand, then stay with Me; I will be more than happy to tell you what you need to know.” But Christ’s teachings were also not like problems in celestial mechanics or any other deep secret of the universe. Jesus was not speaking in riddles. Christianity is not about deep metaphysical concepts or rocket science. If Christianity was rocket science, I for one would be in deep, deep trouble. But that said, what He is telling them is that, if they couldn’t handle what His teaching did mean, how in the world would they ever be able to come to grips with some of Christ’s more impacting truths — like who He was and where He came from.

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you — they are full of the Spirit and life — John 6:63.

Jesus reiterated that His words were figurative and spiritual; they were not to be taken literally. He was basically simply rephrasing what He had said earlier in His ministry: ***“[W]hoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life” — Jesus Christ, John 5:24.*** The point that Jesus was striving to make was very simple: “Just like you eat your food and drink your drink, and those elements then become a part of you in order to give you physical life, so you spiritually must receive Me and My word in the same way so that I can give you spiritual life.” What must have grieved Him no end was that the religious leaders already had access to the concept of receiving God’s word into one’s innermost being through the OT prophet Jeremiah: ***“This is the covenant [this is the contract] I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because [and get this] they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest” — God speaking, Jeremiah 31:33-34a.*** This is precisely the same message that Jesus was communicating to the crowd that, through Him, this same prophesied outcome was possible and, in fact, more than possible: It will happen!

“Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray Him. He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled them” — John 6:64-65.

While this obviously would have very much saddened His heart, it would not have surprised His heart. Jesus knew all their hearts; He always had. And He above all others knew that only His Father was capable of breaking a sinner’s heart and redirecting it from destruction to the salvation found only in His Son.

From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him - John 6:66.

A choice started being made. First one or two, then maybe a small group, and soon many others began deserting this Rabbi, whose message they chose to believe was too radical to handle, too difficult to make a part of their lives. Weren’t their lives already difficult enough? Why do we need this? Why do we need Him?

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve — John 6:67.

Now Jesus is not asking this question from a standpoint of discouragement, but rather to very pointedly ask His disciples, in view of the choices so many in the crowd were making, what their choice concerning Him would be.

Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go [literally, where can we go if we depart from You]? And then he continued: You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God [the Anointed One of God, the Messiah]” — John 6:68-69.

Peter’s wonderful answer simultaneously responds to Jesus and underscores what He would eventually declare before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem: ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” — Peter, Acts 4:12.***

Then Jesus replied, “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray Him.) — John 6:70-71.

Peter in speaking for the Twelve had also shown that Judas, although one of the Twelve, had been pretty successful in hiding his true self from his fellow disciples. Now fooling people is easy, but he would never be able to hide himself from the all-knowing, all-seeing eyes of Jesus Christ. That One he could never fool. Neither could the religious leaders. Neither could anybody in the crowd. And neither can we!

APPLICATION

This message is all about one choice — what do we do with Jesus. And one thing that makes that choice so incredibly important is that our choice will be honored as our choice. Notice that, as the crowd began deserting Him, Jesus didn’t run after anybody — not once. Nor did He change His message or apologize for His words. God didn’t create us as robots; He instead created us with “free will,” that ability to exercise choice. And that is our focus this morning as we look at the opposite ends of the choice we’re being asked to consider.

Let me explain. If somebody’s choice is to reject God — His Son, His salvation, His offer of eternal life — that’s easy: You ain’t gotta do nothing — pardon my grammar! Just live your life, do your thing, please yourself. You don’t have to change, you don’t have to do any soul-searching, you don’t have to worry about regret. Nothing to it, right? I mean, what could be easier than doing nothing? And, at the end of time, you’ll be judged for living your life your way instead of God’s way through Jesus. Like I said, nothing to it.

However, on the other end of the spectrum from doing nothing is something we talked about last week: Craving, desiring, unquenchable passion — for God, for His Son, wanting to hold Him tight and never let Him go. That is what God wants; that is what Jesus came to bring — a passion for His Father. Didn’t Jesus Himself say so clearly: ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” — Jesus Christ, Mark 12:30.*** Short translation: Love God with everything you got. Now that’s passion! Christ is not a choice because we lost a bet. Christ is a choice, and a life, and a destiny, of asserted passion: “I want this — more than anything else possible!”

Now in the human sense, this is something that any of us who are married have experienced firsthand — that miracle that moves somebody from being a first date to that same somebody becoming the passionate love of our life. But even in great marriages, those amazing “honeymoon” feelings can seem to fade. The fact is, with careers, the arrival of kids and houses and mortgages and bills and other “fun,” our days and our schedules become loaded with a bunch of other stuff. When that happens, those first passions seem to get forgotten. There’s just so much more for our passion to compete against.

But we’re not talking about human love today. We’re talking our love for God and for His Son, Jesus Christ. And God doesn’t want our feelings for Him to be just another humdrum piece of our lives that we’re for some reason supposed to do something with. But that’s not relationship; that’s religion — just an obligation to have to do something because, oh well, I guess we gotta. And if life is jammed or complicated or whatever, then let’s see what is the bare God-minimum we can get by with.

But God’s not interested in being just another one of those things demanding our time. God wants us to be passionate about Him — the more we know, the more we want to know; the more we learn, the more we want to learn; the more we love, the more we want to love. Making God the greatest passion of our lives is far more important than anything else we may ever know because God is more important than anything else we will ever know. But frankly, sometimes our passion for God can also seem to be wavering or distant. So, what can we do to grow our spiritual excitement, our passion, for God, for Christ, and for His work? Here are four (4) ideas:

First, the most basic idea: Investing time. Just like any other relationship, time is the most critical element to a successful and growing relationship. The story goes that, once upon a time, Satan was getting more and more concerned and upset with how passionate people were becoming in their relationship with Christ. So, he summoned all his demons to an important conference. Once they arrived, he laid out the problem: “People keep falling more and more in love with Jesus. Now something’s gotta be done. What I want from you all are suggestions.” Many suggestions came and went. Finally, a voice called out from the back of the room: “Let’s make them busy!” A smile slowly crept across Satan’s face. Keep them busy! There’s nothing like a busy schedule to distract people from a relationship. And Satan said, “Make it so; meeting adjourned.”

Remember when love absolutely overwhelmed you? Every time together was too short; every time apart was too long. And each moment built on the previous moment to make something that continued to grow stronger and deeper. And the last thing we were going to do was to wait for mere chance to open up some time in our schedules. We made the time to get together; in fact, that was a rather clear declaration of our love. OK, so a lot of the same things apply with God: He too absolutely loves when we are making time for Him. So, what does that look like?

- 1) Making time for His word. I remember once as a little kid (maybe second or third grade), I was reading “Treasure Island” by Robert Lewis Stevenson. I completely lost track of where I was in the world — one of the coolest experiences of my life. How much more worthwhile is losing oneself in a journey into the world of God’s

word. Not simply skimming a devotional on our way out the door but studying His word, abiding, living in His word, making time to truly experience God through His biblical messages. Spending time in God's word is listening to Him, hearing what He has to say, how He has worked in the lives of other people and other situations. And it will make us consider how infinitely much He has done for us. As much as simply talking built our human relationships, so spending time in the Bible builds our relationship with God as well, making it likewise deeper and stronger; as Peter said: ***Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment — I Peter 2:2 (NLT).*** Spending time in God's word is the greatest way of being passionately connected to His heart. And God has promised to be alongside us as we abide in His word: The psalmist memorably prayed: ***Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in Your law — Psalm 119:18.*** And as God so wonderfully promised through the prophet Jeremiah: ***“Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know” — God speaking, Jeremiah 33:3.*** Wow; God is actually telling us that He will teach us what He wants us to know!

- 2) Making time for prayer. Again, not the little kid's prayer I once heard about: “Lettuce and mayonnaise, Amen” but rather taking a spiritual walk with God, talking to Him about everything — pray without ceasing. According to the Lord's Prayer, we **PRAY** for four reasons: 1) to **Praise** God for who He is, 2) to **Respond** to God for all He's done, 3) to **Ask** of God, to turn over to Him our requests, and 4) to say **Yes** to God, acknowledging His sovereign rule (“Thy will be done”) in fashioning His answers to His will and His plans. All of that gives us the opportunity to watch God work, to see how He is going to answer, to learn His priorities by experiencing how He deals with our requests as He molds our hearts and lives to Him.

Second, confess and repent; confess and repent of any sin(s) you are hanging onto in your life. Another way to say that? Remove all the other loves in your life. Once upon a time, those of us who are married made that commitment; as the wedding vows acknowledge: *Will you live together in holy marriage? Will you love each other, comfort each other, honor and keep each other and, forsaking all others, give your heart, your life, your all to each other and to each other alone as long as you both shall live?* Sin is, most basically, loving ourselves by forsaking God, and therefore choosing ourselves over God. It is deciding that the joys of sin outweigh the joys of obedience. Sin will destroy passion every time because sin is selfish; sin is for itself. It has no room for anybody else. That's why the author of Proverbs 28 wrote: ***Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy — Proverbs 28:13.*** That's why the apostle John wrote: ***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness — I John 1:9.*** Confessing our sins, telling God those three most difficult words, “I was wrong,” acknowledges that we desire God's lordship over us, and not Satan's.

Third, be surrounded by saints; in other words, surround yourself with people passionate about God. Now one thing Christ made very clear while He was here on earth was the origin

of this idea of His that He called the “church” (in the Greek, the assembly of God’s people) — He told His disciples: **“I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it”** — **Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:18b**. Two things: first, the phrase “My church” signals that, while the church is made up of God’s people, its ruler is Christ; and second, not even all the power of Satan can take the church down, because the power of Satan cannot take Jesus down. But the fact that Jesus built it, bought it, paid for it and brought our lives into it tells us in no uncertain terms that our belonging to it is not optional. It’s not to be something we casually include in our lives “when we feel like it” or “when there’s nothing better to do.” It is the gathering place that Jesus designed for His people — a place for them to be supported, to be built up, to be challenged, to be accountable, to be prepared for ministry. As Paul wrote so clearly: **Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it** — **Paul, I Corinthians 12:12-14, 27**. None of that is accidental or just the ideas of human beings. Christ doesn’t invest Himself in anything just for fun or because time is weighing heavy on His hands. He invests only in those things that reflect His perfect purposes. The church is one of those things. And He is absolutely free to weave into it each and every personality of each and every person He brings here. Every life in our church was brought in by Christ as an additional means to help impact our lives for Christ. The church is a gift of God, given through Christ for our spiritual benefit. And every life here is precious because God placed it here. And the fact is, there are fewer things more inspiring and motivating than hearing about how God has worked in one of our lives — how God has answered prayer, how God has taught us, how God has changed us, how God has rescued us. Seeing the passions of others can leave an enormous imprint on our lives. All those things make God and His Son incredibly relevant to today’s world and should fuel our desire to bring all those stories out into our ministry worlds. So, when the author of Hebrews says: **[L]et us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another** — **Hebrews 10:24-25a**, we should take that as a righteous command to be together because it is a way that Christ reveals Himself to us. Why would I want to avoid that? That’s something to cherish; that’s something Jesus designed for our joy for His glory!

Fourth, serve. As Paul wrote to the Ephesian church: **[W]e are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do** — **Paul, Ephesians 2:10**. Passion will develop as we use our God-given gifts for the work of the Kingdom. We are, each one of us, gifted in a particular way — by God, for God. He created us this way and has even created the opportunities for us to use those gifts. Serving does a couple of really cool things: We get a chance to see the fingerprints of His creative skill all over us, and also, we get to see firsthand how much our work for the Kingdom can’t. And, to top it all, serving allows us a unique opportunity to connect ourselves with Christ; after all, it was His most basic attitude while serving on earth: **“[T]he Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many”** — **Jesus Christ, Mark 10:45**. Watching that whole process work together is amazing, and can truly fire the passions

for the next opportunity for serving a God who is revealing Himself through us in such a personal way.

CONCLUSION

Finally, as we close, one of the things that sometimes comes out of “marriage encounters” or sometimes simply from pastoral marriage counseling are words similar to this: “I know I love them, but I feel like they have become so distant.” One thing that needs to be said before we close: I’ve heard that same sentiment shared by people who were expressing their relationship with God. I got news for you: If that is how you feel, then you’re the one who moved. God doesn’t distance Himself from us. We distance ourselves from Him. Remember these words of God from the book of Joshua? ***“Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go”*** — *God speaking, Joshua 1:9b*. Remember these words from Paul: ***Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*** — *Paul, Romans 8:35, 37-39*. God leaving us, God no longer interested in us, is one of Satan’s great lies. Don’t buy into it. He’s lying — and he’s wrong!

Folks, God wants us to grow in a passionate relationship with Him — just like the psalmist said: ***[G]ive me an undivided heart, that I may fear Your name*** — *David, Psalm 86:11b*. Or just like Isaiah said: ***[Y]our name and renown are the desire of our hearts. My soul yearns for You in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for You*** — *Isaiah 26:8b-9a*. Jesus was willing to die because of His passion for us. So, what is our passion for Him? Let’s pray!