

4. Peter was young, uneducated, and trying to figure life out. To make such a profound statement (vv. 68-69) couldn't have come from human understanding, it had to come from God, for God revealed it to Peter. As you think about the way God reveals himself, what hope does this give to you?

5. If you decided not to follow Jesus today, what life would you return to? What does that life promise? What does it usually deliver?

6. Like the crowd, many good, church-attending unbelievers eventually walk away from Jesus. Sometimes they leave because they have been hurt or disillusioned by people. What temptations did they face? What choices were before them? What would it cost them to follow Christ? Do you know anyone like that? How can you help them?

7. Judas was hollow. As a counterfeit believer he no doubt spoke the language, but lived as a false disciple. How could he have been a part of the conversations, experience the love of Christ first-hand, and yet be party to a plot to kill Jesus? How is it possible to have Jesus revealed, to experience the most intricate community of church life and lash out against it with the intent to destroy it? How can we, the church, identify and guard against those who seek to destroy God's work within the church?

John 6:59-71

Lesson 12

For December 14 2008

Dori Sear and Dr. Jerry Nelson

LEADER'S GUIDE

For discussion following the sermon on December 14, 2008

Deserting Jesus

When you think of what gives you "life", what words come to mind? Perhaps they are words like: "Congratulations!" "Well done!" "The test came back negative!" "It's a girl!" All of us can think back to words that have been a great source of encouragement and joy. Conversely, when you think of words that produce "death", they may be words like: "I want a divorce." "You're fired." "You'll just have to live with it." "The prognosis is terminal."

Words of life mean that we often experience greater joy or benefit. But words of death signify loss. Whether it is loss of relationship, income, health or emotional well-being, something valuable has been taken from us.

Key Points

In today's passage, was Jesus speaking words of life, or words of death? It depends on the response. Consider the reaction of:

- The Disillusioned (The crowd)
- The Devoted (Peter)
- The Deliberate Betrayer (Judas)

To the disciples (not the twelve, but the unbelievers who were simply following Jesus), his words of life became words of death. Belief and obedience meant that they would need to walk away from the traditions they clung to, to denounce all merit and embrace grace, to engage Jesus relationally, and to follow him all the way to the cross. At this point they would not fully understand what we understand-- that belief will lead to responsive obedience, which ultimately will entail both death and life. We must "take up

our cross”¹, become like a kernel of wheat that falls to the ground and dies ², and find life by losing it³. But they understood enough of what Jesus said to cause them to walk away and never return. Do you ever wonder if what they returned to produced the “life” they had hope for?

Though Jesus’ words were hard to embrace, Peter understood. He knew that the promise of living bread meant that life with Jesus would be better than life without him, that something in the cost would make it worth the price. For this brash, uneducated young fisherman, with all of life ahead of him, he truly had no place else to go. His simple statement had profound implications; “You (Jesus) have the words of eternal life”⁴. Jesus, you are the real thing!

Yet among the twelve we find a false disciple—a follower who lived in community but watched from a distance, who understood Jesus but never embraced him, who developed superficial relationships and was never transformed by them. Judas didn’t openly denounce Jesus, he covertly betrayed him. Is it possible to attend church, develop relationships, be touched by the sermon, and yet keep yourself at a safe distance from the cross?

As we consider the people in today’s passage and the decisions they made, we know that we are faced with the same options: be disillusioned or devoted to Jesus. And, we have to be aware that some can convince others around them (and more importantly themselves) into believing that they are true believers when they are not.

¹ Luke 9:23

² John 12:24

³ Mark 8:35-37

⁴ John 6:68

Leader’s Guide

Personal Preparation

Jesus asked a very penetrating question: “Does this offend you?” They understood that they had to sell out to Jesus and follow him all the way to the cross. As you consider your spiritual journey, try to identify a few things that you had to lay down, something that felt like death. How did God enable you to lay them down? Why was it so painful? What work did God accomplish in you as a result? Praise and worship God for his grace in your life!

Group Preparation

In this passage we once again wrestle with the tension of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. God draws us to himself and enables us to believe, but we still choose. As this issue is surfaced in the questions, try to guide your group to a greater trust in and appreciation of God’s great love, mercy and grace. Many people are tempted to believe that God is somehow unjust or unfair and that they have no choice.

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus asked “Does this offend you?” The crowd understood that they had to sell out to Jesus and follow him all the way to the cross. At this point, many turned away. Did they leave by choice, or was God somehow to blame for not enabling them to believe?
2. As you wrestle with the tension of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility, how are you tempted to question God’s justice? What do the scriptures teach about God’s holiness, justice, and goodness? How do the scriptures help you guard against the temptations of questioning God’s justice?
3. As you consider your spiritual journey, what have you had to lay down that felt like death? How did God enable you to lay it down? Why was it so painful? What work did God accomplish in you as a result?