

John 6:51-69

“I am the living bread... If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever... The bread that I will give..is My flesh... This is the bread that came down from heaven... Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” That’s a lot of bread. But that’s not even the half of it. Twelve times here in John 6 Jesus speaks of bread. That’s a full loaf right there. This could rightly be called His “bread” sermon...Bread of Life.

He preached this sermon in the synagogue at Capernaum. And something strange happened after He preached this sermon. Everyone left. Maybe Jesus made His hearers hungry with all this talk about bread, so they hurried home to eat. But no, it says they left in a huff, so to speak. On the way out, their critique of the preacher was pretty rough. They wrote in the synagogue’s guest book: I will never come back here again, not as long as this Jesus fellow is preaching! Yep, they were upset. *“How can anyone listen to this?”* they were crying, *“This is a hard saying!”* And in the Greek the meaning here is: this is intolerable!

Now here’s a question...why would Jesus preach in such a way that it would completely turn off His hearers? He was pretty popular at this time. Thousands were following Him. He had fed over five thousand of them just the day before. He basically had a mega church here. And who knows how big this following could have become. But He ruined it all with just one sermon. They all left Him. All His disciples, all His followers, except for the Twelve. So much for the mega church. To go from thousands down to twelve in less than an hour. Why would Jesus do this?

We must keep in mind that Jesus knows His sheep. *“My sheep hear My voice,”* He says, *“and they follow Me.”* The goats do not follow Jesus. Oh, they may for a while, but they will not remain faithful. Only Jesus’ sheep follow Jesus no matter what. Jesus can even push one of His sheep away from Himself, and that sheep will, nevertheless, come back and keep following Jesus. Like the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15. Jesus pushed her away...hard...with His harsh words to her. But she kept coming back to Him. She would not let anything or anyone, not even Jesus, keep her away.

So if Jesus’ sheep listen to Him, and keep listening, and keep following Him, but the goats do not...what does this tell us about the thousands who were hearing His sermon there in Capernaum? Yep, most all of them were goats. They became offended, and they went off in search of a different preacher, a different teacher.

Which brings me to this...Why are you still here? Come on, you know that something has been said in the past that offended you. Maybe it was the pastor, or an elder, or a fellow church member. At some time, and likely more than once, somebody said or did something that got under your skin big time. So why didn’t you do what the goats do and leave?

Or how about this... there’s something Jesus has said that bugs you. Maybe it’s His teaching on Baptism, or His teaching on the Lord’s Supper. Maybe it’s something else. But whatever it is, you’re a little offended by it. So why not do what goats do and leave?

The point is not that sheep are never offended; that sheep never question Jesus and even doubt what He says. Sheep are not stellar. They're like goats in every way but one. They keep hearing Jesus' voice and they keep following Him even unto death.

And sometimes sheep fall away from Jesus. I know I have; haven't you? You know, of all the thousands there in Capernaum who left Jesus that day, there surely would have been some of them who were sheep. They fell away at that time. They became offended at Jesus and they left. But in time, because Jesus was patient with them, and because He loved them and showed mercy to them, these precious sheep came back to Jesus by God's grace, and today they are in heaven.

This is why we never want to identify someone as a goat. They may not be coming to hear the voice of Jesus today. They may not be following Him into His house and up to His Communion table. But rather than calling them goats, let's call them wandering sheep; sheep who have lost their way; and also this, precious sheep for whom Christ died.

Such dear ones are sheep even though, right now, they are not feeding upon the Bread of Life. Because down the road, before it's too late, the Father in heaven will draw them back to Jesus. Always remember the thief on the cross. He lived like a goat all his life. But in truth he was a sheep. In his dying hours the Father in heaven drew him to Jesus, and he fed hungrily on the Bread of Life, on the words that Jesus was speaking, and that precious sheep is in heaven today.

Now this does not mean that we can be lax in our spiritual habits because, "Hey, I'll come back later on." We cannot come back. "*No one can come to Me,*" says Jesus. It is the Father in heaven alone who draws sinners to Jesus by the working of the Holy Spirit. We're told all our life not to play with fire. Then why would we play with hell fire by tempting God? That's not how Jesus' sheep behave. The sheep gladly hear the voice of Jesus and follow Him. And when we fall into sin, even into spiritual neglect, we repent and by God's grace are drawn back to Jesus.

Here is how sheep speak. Simon Peter mouths the words for us. "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.*" "Do you also want to leave?" Jesus asks. To go where? No one else is my Lord. No one else hung on the cross for me. How could I leave you, Jesus? How could I walk away from Your baptismal font, from Your holy Supper, from Your church, from You? Offend me, push me away, do whatever You want to me, I ain't leavin'!

That's why you're still here, isn't it? Not because you're an amazing sheep; because you're a sheep. You are the object of God's mercy. You are Jesus' beloved sheep. You are forgiven sheep. No matter how many times you have left Jesus, and no matter how far you have strayed, you are forgiven. And you have a place with Jesus. Your baptism assures you of this.

The Father draws you to Jesus. He draws you to feed upon the Bread of Life. You're hungry for that bread. You desire it. You crave it. And it's here for you. Jesus is here for you. "Do you want to leave?" asks Jesus. And go where? You're a sheep. And your place, therefore, is with Jesus now and forever. Amen.