

True and False Disciples, Part 3

John 6:28-34

43-35

Well, as you know, if you've been a part of Grace Church, we're studying the Gospel of John, and we find ourselves in the sixth chapter, the sixth chapter this morning. And this is so good and so on point for where we are, that we're going to continue in this sixth chapter next Sunday, next Sunday. We're going to be right back here. And we're going to be looking at the bread that has come down from heaven, a statement regarding the incarnation. So we'll be looking at that next Sunday, but I do need to sort of give you the overview a little bit. I don't know that you all need this, but I always feel like some of you do because you may not have been with us in the past.

It's always important for us to understand the context in which we're dealing in the Word of God, and that is particularly true in the sixth chapter of John. It's a very long chapter, 71 verses. Lots of things are going on in this chapter; various different events, conversations, a sermon by Jesus, all kinds of reactions to that sermon. One could get a little bit lost in all of that and kind of find oneself kind of meandering through and trying to find if there's some kind of cohesive thread that ties it together. So let me help you to see it in the way that I think the Holy Spirit has intended for us to see it. It is a solo chapter. It is a stand-alone chapter. It is clearly divided out in chapter 6, verse 1. You have the little phrase, "After these things," which is a time break. And then in chapter 7, verse 1, "After these things," another time break.

So this sixth chapter is kind of isolated. It's an island in terms of grasping its significance. There's a message coming through this chapter that transcends the events, and it shows up at the end. It's pretty clear by the time you get to the end of the chapter what this chapter is really all about. Now, for those who have been with us, you know that this is about true and false discipleship. In the chapter, the word "disciple" is used. It is a very generic word. It can mean nothing more than a student or a learner or a follower. And that's exactly the way we want to approach it in this chapter because some of the disciples of Jesus turned out to be false disciples. And some of them true disciples. They were all learners; they all had some kind of a prolonged interest in Jesus. They all were following Him for some prolonged period of time. But by the time you come to the end of this chapter, it is clear that some of them were false. In fact, most of them appear to be false and only a few of them true disciples.

This reminds us of how important it is to understand that the Kingdom of God is going to have many false followers of Jesus. This is clear from numerous passages in the New Testament and from the teaching of our Lord Himself as well, and we've been looking at that. So as we look at John, chapter 6, and we're going to pick it up in verse 28 in a few minutes. But I want to kind of give you the overview.

Eternal judgment is a frightening thing for anyone. Eternal hell, horrifying reality for anyone to think about. But eternal judgment is most severe, and hell is most severe for those who know the truth and

reject it. It is less severe for those who never heard the truth. It is most severe for those who know the truth, know the truth concerning Christ and reject Him. Those who then claim to follow Christ, and actually in some measure to some degree do follow Christ and then turn their back to walk away, will find that their eternal judgment will be the severest of all.

Scripture consequently is loaded with warnings about that, warnings to defectors or would-be defectors. Those who turn out to be rebellious, walk away from Christ. The New Testament book of Hebrews particularly focuses on the deadly consequences of spiritual defection in the case of people who have known the truth concerning Christ. Still, such rebellion and apostasy goes on all the time. We all know that. We all see that. I received a letter from a heartbroken gentleman just a couple of days ago telling me about someone in his family who had come to the Master Seminary. And after a number of years and coming near graduation, had turned his back on his family and his children and his wife and walked away from all of it. This is a tragic, heartbreaking, crushing reality, but it is reality.

There are people who are building their religious house on sand, and the houses collapse even before the judgment storm comes. Defectors are false disciples. I John 2:19, "They went out from us because they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have continued with us." True believers endure to the end. "They continue in My Word," Jesus says. So we all have those kinds of heart-breaking experiences. I know parents sometimes see their children raised in the church walk away, and that's the most crushing thing a parent can deal with.

One of the most touching accounts in Scripture on this subject is this sixth chapter of John. The pathos here is palpable. The sadness is gripping. And the one who strikes me as in the middle of that sadness is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And you see that sadness at the end of the chapter in verse 67. Verse 66 says, "As a result [of what Jesus had said] many of his disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." There's a finality to that. They turned and went away. We might use the word apostate to describe them.

The sorrow is recognizable because Jesus then says to the Twelve, "You do not want to go away also do you?" That's a very human response. That's a very sad response. And, in fact, what really is amazing in this chapter is that the sadness is so profound to Jesus. The disappointment is so painful that He leans hard on the same thing we lean hard on. He leans hard on divine sovereignty in this chapter. This is a great chapter about divine sovereignty. "All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me." "No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him."

Why does divine sovereignty pop up in this chapter? And we will see it, but why here? Because Jesus, like us, in the midst of profound disappointment and the most horrendous of all human circumstances – someone walking away from Him, turning his back or her back and abandoning Christ – turns to lean hard on divine sovereignty to catch His balance, to hold Him up. It's the same place you go when a child defects. Where do you go? You lean on the sovereignty of God. It's the same when a spouse abandons you or family and Christ, and you lean hard on divine sovereignty. That's what our Lord does here. That's where He turned in this melancholy disappointment.

On the other hand, there are some true disciples here. Verse 68, Simon Peter speaking for the true disciples in the plural says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God." So, over against those false disciples who went away, there are those true disciples who refused to walk away. Of course, the prototype of a false disciple is Judas. Back in verse 64 it says, "There are some of you who do not

believe.” That would be the false disciples.

“For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe and who it was that would betray Him.” And there we’re introduced to the prototypical defector, Judas, who is further pointed out in verse 70 when Jesus says, “Did I myself, not choose you, the Twelve? And one of you is a devil.” Now he meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve was going to betray Him. The way this chapter ends tells us its point. It is to demonstrate the character of false disciples as over against true disciples.

Now, when you go back to the beginning of the chapter and you view it that way, you begin to see what unfolds here as a kind of pathology describing false disciples. It’s kind of a character analysis. It’s a bit of the psychology of defectors. I admit the chapter is full of familiar miracles that we love and know very well; the feeding of the thousands of people in excess of 20,000. Very familiar, feeding them by creating crackers and fish. We’re very familiar with the incredible miracle of Jesus on the water and the whole encounter with Peter and all of that. Those are the familiar parts of the chapter.

Those miracles are crucial to John’s purpose because John’s purpose is to write these things, “That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God.” So, the miracles John includes that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God; that there’s no other explanation for his power than that He is who He claimed to be. And, by the way, John only gives us a few examples. In chapter 20, verse 30, John writes, “There are many more.” And in chapter 21, verse 25 he says that, “All the books of the world couldn’t contain all of the details about all the wonders that Jesus did.” So John is being selective, but he’s giving us evidence to fulfill his purpose that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

But nobody is saved by simply believing His works. You must believe His works. You must believe that He is who His works declare Him to be, but that’s not enough. And so in this sixth chapter you not only have miracles to demonstrate who he is, but you have words. You have this great sermon that starts in verse 32, runs all the way to verse 59, on the bread of life, on what it means to appropriate Christ, to believe in Christ.

All the details of believing in Christ that are laid out in that message are necessary for salvation. Believing in the miracles of Jesus doesn’t save anybody. One must believe in the words of Jesus. What He did validates who He is. What He says is the means of salvation. People can’t be saved by believing in the miracles. They can’t even be saved by experiencing the miracles, being healed by Him, being delivered by Him, or being fed by Him. So in this chapter, it is the words of Jesus that really are preeminent. Everybody believes in the miracles. Nobody denies them. True disciples believe them. False disciples believe them. Everybody believed them. Everybody did not believe the words, and that’s what separated the false from the true.

So in the end, it’s the words of Jesus that are the demarcation between the true and the false. Now, starting at the beginning of the chapter, we begin to look at the characteristics of false disciples. How did these people end up the way they ended up? And I think that’s really rich revelation from the Holy Spirit in this chapter. I don’t think you can miss this once you begin to really look at it this way.

So we’ve been piling up some characteristics of false disciples. Number one, remember the false disciples are attracted by the crowd. This is true then. This is true now. False disciples today are

attracted to Christianity, superficially to Christ by the crowd. Wherever the crowd goes, the very energy of the crowd draws them. And that was true then and that is true now. There are massive crowds of people surrounding the name of Jesus all over the world. False disciples are attracted by the crowd.

Secondly, they are fascinated by the promise of the supernatural. If you add the component that something supernatural is going to happen, whether it's a physical healing or whether it's some kind of miracle of deliverance, or whether it's some kind of ascent to a higher level of satisfaction or fulfillment or prosperity in life. The possibility that you could be engaging with the supernatural is another attraction to false disciples.

Thirdly, false disciples think only of earthly benefits. We saw that. They tried to force Jesus to become their king so He could feed them permanently. False disciples, fourthly, have no desire for true worship. True worship is not on their agenda. They'll come for what is called worship. They'll take the entertainment; they'll enjoy the entertainment. They like the light show; they like the music, et cetera, et cetera, but it's not true worship from the heart through the mind according to scripture directed at the glory of God.

False disciples, number five, seek personal prosperity or personal fulfillment. We saw that because the whole crowd followed Jesus to get the next meal. It's the temporal appeal that attracts the false disciples. Attracted by the crowd, fascinated by the promise of the supernatural, thinking only of earthly benefits. No real desire for true worship and seeking personal fulfillment and prosperity.

That's where we left the passage at verse 27 with these words from Jesus indicating that they were only seeking personal prosperity, personal satisfaction on a worldly level. "Do not work for the food which perishes." You're spending all your energy for something that's going to burn up with this earth, that's going to perish when your life ends. Stop doing that.

The false disciples want Jesus to give them what they already want. They know their agenda. They know their list. They've got their demands in tow, and they want Jesus to fulfill their desires. And we've looked through all of that. Now, let's come to verse 28, and let me play on just what I said to you. They are so bold that false disciples actually make demands on God. They actually make demands on God.

Let me read verses 28 to 34. "Therefore, they said to Him, 'What shall we do so that we may work the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.' So they said to Him, 'What then do You do for a sign so that we may see and believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.' Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, It is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is my father who gives you the true bread out of heaven for the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him, 'Lord or sir, always give us this bread.'"

What is going on here? Now, admittedly, this is cryptic in the sense that we don't have the full dialogue, but I think we have enough of a representation of this element of the conversation to grasp the notion that false disciples, remember, who are drawn by superficial things for personal fulfillment will go to the point where they will make demands on God. They will make demands on God.

That, I have to tell you, that is largely what you see in the health, wealth, prosperity, name-it-and-claim-it, positive confession gospel. You now have the right to make demands on God. You command God. You don't say, "Your will be done. No, no, no." We've quoted those leaders who say that. "Don't ever say that. Don't ever say that. It's not about His will. It's about your will. God will respond to your will if you don't have any doubt. You literally speak your own reality into existence. You create your own life, your own world."

This is where false discipleship goes. They make demands on God. Let's look at the first demand that these people made, verse 28. "Therefore they said to Him, 'What shall we do so that we may work the works of God?'" Now, he had just said, "Don't work for what perishes." So they said, "Okay, what do we do to get something that's permanent? What do we do? How do we get the power?" That is, I think, essentially what they're saying. I don't think this is a discussion about works salvation. I think they pretty well had their formula for that.

I don't think they're asking Jesus, "What works do we need to do that we aren't doing?" although that could be a possibility. I think it's a more remote possibility. I think in the context and getting into the minds of these people, they are simply saying, "We want the power that You've got." Way back in chapter 3 – well, in chapter 2, first of all and then into chapter 3. Chapter 2 it says, "Many believed in His name. He didn't commit Himself to them." What did they believe? Nicodemus articulates what they believed in chapter 3, "We know that You have come from God because no one can do what You do unless God is with Him." Do you remember that? John 3.

So what did they believe? They believed He came from God and they believed He had divine power. And I think here they've gotten a taste of the greatest meal they ever had the day before. They have been exposed, because all of this his happening in the Capernaum synagogue. They've been exposed to His headquarters at Capernaum where He's been doing miracles day after day after day after day. Some of those that add up to the total that John says can't be counted. They see His power. There's never been anything like it. And I think what they're saying is, "We want that power. We want that power."

They're asking not for information about works they can do to please God. That is pretty well cast in concrete in their minds. They have a system that's highly developed. They want Jesus to transfer His ability to them. You hear this all the time in the health, wealth environment. "You are little gods. You have all divine power. You can do what Jesus did. You can create your own world the way you want it." They're not asking what spiritual works, what righteous deeds they can do. They want power.

This is very much like Simon. Turn to Acts 8, Acts 8. Philip is in Samaria, and he's preaching, and he's doing miracles, signs, performing signs by the power of the Spirit. Verse 7, "Many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice. Many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. There was much rejoicing in that city." Obviously, this power had been delegated from Christ through the apostles and those who represented Him had His power. They knew that. Even the people in John 6 probably were aware of the fact that the apostles, the true followers of Jesus had demonstrated this kind of power.

Now, there was a man named Simon who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria claiming to be someone great. And they all from smallest to greatest were

giving attention to him saying, "This man is what is called the great power of God." Now, you can see by the fact that they gave him that title and they made some kind of hero out of him, some kind of icon that they were all captivated by this notion that somebody could possess the power of God. This guy was a deceiver and a magician.

Verse 11 says, "They were giving him this attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magical arts." This is slight of hand stuff. This is the kind of thing that we have today with very astute and very clever magicians. There's nothing supernatural about it unless it may be demonic, but he is just a very clever magician. When the people believed Philip preaching the good news, verse 12, about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. Even Simon himself believed. Okay, Simon believed. He's a believer like the people in chapter 2. It's the superficial kind of belief. He's attaching himself and he even is baptized and he even continues with Philip. So he's kind of a disciple here.

What's drawing him? As he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. Why? Because he knows the difference between supernatural power and deception. He knows that. The apostles come, lay hands on them, pray for them. They receive the Holy Spirit. We can assume that the phenomenon of Pentecost was repeated, and they spoke in language. Verse 18, "When Simon saw the Spirit was bestowed to the laying on the apostle's hands." "When he saw" – listen. When he saw that the apostles delegated apparently power to these other people, and it was manifested in their ability to speak languages they didn't know, he saw a transfer of power. He saw that power that belonged to the apostles, being Peter and John, transferred to other people.

So he said, "Well, if it can be transferred to other people, maybe I can get it." So when he saw this he offered them money. Now, that tells you the world that he worked in, right? He wanted to buy into it. It wasn't a spiritual world. It was a very carnal world. He says, "Give this power to me as well so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit," not the invisible part, but the visible phenomenon that occurred. Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter. Your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

Simon withering under that said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." It scared him. Why? Because he knew they had the power of God. All of that simply to say, when the power of God was on display, Simon wanted to buy it. He wanted to appropriate it. And when he saw that it could be transferred to some others, at least in that initial moment so that they would have the same experience that was occurring in Acts 2, so that they would in Samaria be included in the one body; he thought this is a transferable commodity. I've got to get this, whatever the price. I think that's what was in the minds of these people.

Back in John 6 now. I think they wanted the power. Give us the power. Give us the power that we may work the works of God the way you do. Well, the answer was no. Interesting response, verse 29, "Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God that you believe in Him who He has sent.'" You know what that means? He's saying this; the only miracle power you will experience is faith. The only miracle power you will experience is to believe. That's the only work of God you will know. This is the work of God, that you believe. Faith is the only miracle you will participate in, and even that is a work of God.

Verse 44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” You can’t come to Me and believe in Me unless the Father draws you. The only miracle you can do or participate in is to believe. Now, remind you that that is a miracle, right? Faith is a miracle. Regeneration is the miracle that precedes faith. Believe, the only work of God that you must do. By the way, that becomes a theme all through John. Believe, believe, believe, believe, believe, again and again and again.

Here is a demand for power. They want power. They want power that they control. They want power that they can put into action wherever they want. Very popular offering today. Jesus wants to give you power to fulfill all your desires, all your ambitions, all your dreams, to control your future, create your own destiny. The truth of the matter is the only miracle power that you can experience is to believe, and that’s a miracle from God.

So, the answer is no. The answer is no, so they make a second demand. That’s in verse 30. So they said to Him, “What then do You do for a sign?” If you’re not going to let us do it, what then do You do? What are you going to do? If you’re not going to delegate the power to us so that we can create our own world, so that we can create food and healing and et cetera; if you’re not going to delegate the power to us, then what are You going to do for a sign so that we may see and believe You? What work do you perform? Literally, what work will You continually perform?

You say, well wait a minute. They were just a part of Him feeding them, creating food. Did they forget that? Well, we know it didn’t make them believe. It proved that He was divine, but it didn’t make them believe. And even the disciples did make the connection until they saw Him walk on water later that night. But what they’re saying is, “Okay, if you won’t give us the power, then give us the miracles. And what we’re asking is a whole lot more than you’ve done up to now. Whole lot more.” You say, well, how do you know they wanted a whole lot more than what they’d seen? Well, they had showed up the next morning for breakfast, right? On the other side of the lake by Capernaum.

But notice verse 31. This is what they say, “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.’” They say that for one simple reason. They’re minimizing what Jesus did the night before. You gave us one meal. You gave us one meal. Moses fed millions for years in the wilderness. What You did is not really that impressive. “As it is written.” We have the record of scripture. Exodus 16 says that, Nehemiah 9, Psalm 78, Psalm 105. Now, the record of God providing manna for millions for years is in the Old Testament in Exodus, of course.

So, here, we’re getting to the real issue. They’re still trying to get perpetual food, and if He won’t give them the power to create it, then He’s going to have to create it Himself constantly, or they’re just going to keep telling Him they don’t believe it. Moses pulled off something far more powerful than You. And they’re talking about Moses because he says in the next verse, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven.” All they want from Jesus is what they want. All they want is carnal satisfaction. Either He gives them the power to generate it or He’s going to be stuck doing it permanently, and they’re never going to say it’s enough to convince us. Because of Matthew 12:39, Jesus said, “An evil and adulterous generation continues to ask for – ” what? A sign, a sign, a sign.

And then Jesus responds, “Truly, truly,” again that formula that appears so many times in John. Very strong emphasis. This is important. “It is not Moses who has given you the bread of heaven.” It

wasn't Moses. It was not Moses. As long as you're going to quote Exodus 16:4, why don't you quote it correctly. Exodus 16:4 says, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain bread from heaven for you.'" Moses didn't bring the bread. Moses wasn't the source of the bread. The Father was the source of the bread. So let's get that straight.

Hebrews 3:3 says, "Christ is greater than Moses." We know that to be true. They're trying to diminish Christ, make him less than Moses because Moses gave them manna for millions of years. And he's saying, "Moses didn't give you anything." If you read Exodus 16, about verse 15 on, all Moses did was organize the collection. He had nothing to do with creating manna. In fact, in Exodus 16, verse 15 it says, "It is the bread which the Lord has given. The bread which the Lord has given." Moses helped them collect it. So God was the source of that bread, not Moses. And now He says, and back to verse 32, "It is my Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven." It was my Father who gave the physical bread. It is my Father who now offers you the true bread." Who is the true bread? What's the true bread?

He'll go on to say that in verse 35, "I am the bread. I am the bread of life." Verse 48, "I am the bread of life." Verse 51, "I am the living bread." My Father gave that generation the bread from heaven. Guess what? That entire generation died, died. All died in the wilderness, including Moses. So whatever that bread was, it couldn't prevent death, but the bread of God – look at verse 33. "The bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives – " what? Gives what? Life, to the world. "My Father gives you the true bread out of heaven. I am that bread." The bread of God which gives zoe, not bios, not biological life. Zoe, spiritual life, eternal life.

Moses gave you bread for physical nourishment, your forefathers, but they all died. My Father gives you true bread. I am that bread, and you will all live. They all died and never entered the Promised Land. You will enter the Promised Land and live forever when you eat the true bread. Manna couldn't prevent death. Manna was for Israel. The true bread is for the world. Manna was for life here and now. The true bread is for eternal life.

Oh, the words of Jesus are so clear. Now, He's going to expand on that in this great sermon on the bread of life, but they're stuck with their demands. Verse 34, "Then they said to him, 'Lord, always give us this bread.'" What bread are they talking about? The bread they want and they want it all the time. Okay, you won't give us the power? Give us the bread. You won't give us the power to feed ourselves all the time? Give us the bread all the time. We always want the bread. Here, again, we see the superficiality and the shallowness of false followers, the curious self-centered who continue to tell the Lord what they want and when they want it and how they want it. And either they want the power to do it themselves or they want the Lord to deliver. If they're going to believe in Him, He's going to have to operate on their command.

You expect us to believe in You? Then You give us that bread all the time. What bread? The bread we want. The bread we want. Seekers of personal satisfaction who see God as their servant to give them what they want, either the power or the provision. That is the sixth kind of defining characteristic of a false disciple. Let me give you just – I'm going to introduce the seventh. False disciples do not find their satisfaction in the person of Jesus Christ. False disciples do not find their satisfaction in the person of Jesus Christ. And this is going to be our subject next Sunday, but let me introduce it to you. Verse 35, Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe."

What is the interest of a false disciple? It's what Christ can provide, not Christ, not Christ. False disciples do not find their satisfaction in the person of Jesus Christ. True disciples do. "Will you also go away?" "To whom shall we go? You and You alone have the words of eternal life and we believe and are sure that you are the Holy One of God." It was all about Christ, but that's for next time.

Father, we have come to you again this morning with hearts open to praise you and worship you, and we have been instructed by Your Word clearly. We have had the opportunity to sing and fellowship and rejoice together over the incarnation and Lord, now it's time for us to examine our hearts. Are we true disciples? Is it Christ who is all in all to us? Is it Christ whom we love? Is He enough or are we just here thinking we can get what we want? True disciples confess Jesus as Lord, deny themselves, take up their cross, and walk even to death because of love for Him.

When we are lost in wonder, love, and praise, and consumed by the person of Christ, that's the evidence of a true disciple. So, Lord, show us our hearts that we might not be deceived.

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