

Hard Bread

John 6:60-69 (NIV)

⁶⁰ On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" ⁶¹ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. ⁶⁴ 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. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them." ⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. ⁶⁷ "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

"I am the Bread come down from heaven. I give my flesh and blood so that you have eternal life. Whoever feeds on me, on my flesh and blood, will live forever, and I will raise them up on the Last Day. Everything else spoils, perishes, goes away. I do not. Consume me. Stop thinking with your stomachs. Think about the forever perspective, the eternal perspective. Consume me. Believe in me as the true Bread of Life." With that, Jesus' Bread of Life sermon was over.

When you hear a sermon here, there's an "amen" at the end - an emphatic statement that this is most certainly true, that what you just heard is nothing less than the eternal life-giving Word of God. I can't recall a single Sunday when I said "Amen" at the end of a sermon, and I heard commotion, grumbling, discontent. Maybe you are all just too polite and you save the grumbling until you get out to your cars. But when Jesus finished his Bread of Life sermon, there was murmuring, grumbling. "On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'" (verse 60)

You are disciples of Jesus, followers of him, students of him. What does Jesus teach that makes you say, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" I think we have one here today. How about what happened to Declan and Jayden just a few minutes ago? Declan is just over four months old today. Have you ever seen him do anything wrong? If not, then just ask Doug and Erica, his Mom and Dad. Declan has already proven himself to be a little sinner. He's selfish. He doesn't care what else is going on; when he is upset, he lets you know about it. You want sleep so that you are well rested for an upcoming long day of work, Declan doesn't care. Entertain me. Hold me right now! Do what I want when I demand it. Mom, you're uncomfortable and in some pain as your body has completely reshaped and reformed to provide a place for me to grow? I don't care. Carry me. Suck it up, and deal with it because you are taking care of me even though I have not done anything for you.

That's right. Declan has not done anything to make Doug or Erica love him. He has not washed Mom's car. He has not made dinner for Dad. Jayden has done nice things for Doug and Erica, but Declan spits up, messes his diaper and then screams at Mom and Dad until they change him. Yet, Doug and Erica love Declan. You could say that they love him because he's so cute. Except he's not cute when he is screaming at 2:00 am after they have fed him, changed him, burped him, held him, rocked him, and they still have to get up in a couple of hours to put in a full day of work. Doug and Erica love Declan because they have chosen to do so. They have chosen to care for him. They have chosen to tend to his needs no matter how selfish he is or how loud and long his cries get. This is love. And this is the same love with which they have loved Jayden. Love not based on merit but on a choice. Love is so much more than an emotion. Love acts. Love is them going without sleep to tend to their children's needs. Love is them continuing to give so much of themselves without an expectation of being repaid with work or favors.

Where did Doug and Erica learn this love? They learned it from God. God chose to love Declan. He, in fact, chose to love Declan before he was ever a thought, before his life began at conception. He did the same for Jayden. God chose to love Declan and Jayden by giving his Son, the true Bread of Life, to them. Jesus, as both true God and true Man at the same time, gave himself to a life of perfect obedience, living every single moment of every single day of his life here on earth doing everything right and nothing wrong. He did this thinking of Declan and Jayden. When people grumbled against him and what he was preaching, he did not lash out. He instead continued. He continued to give himself by teaching, preaching, healing, and performing other miracles so that people would know that he really is God come down from heaven. He continued on to the cross. Even as he was unjustly condemned for proclaiming truthfully who he was - the Son of God and God himself - he willingly endured it. As people mocked him, spit on him, struck him with their fists, whipped him, nailed him to the cross, he did not give up. He took all of that because he thought of Declan and Jayden and you and me. He knew every single one of your days before a single one of them came into being. He stayed on the cross, suffering for your sins, my sins, Declan's sins, Jayden's sin. This is how he loved us: he gave his flesh and his blood in payment for our sins so that you and I would have eternal life with him.

Today, God gave himself as the true Bread of Life to Declan and Jayden through baptism. God used water combined with his Word to wrap Declan and Jayden in his robes of righteousness, cleansing them of every single one of their sins that they have ever committed as well as every single one they will ever commit, and now they are forever perfect in God's eyes. If there was any doubt as to whether or not Declan and Jayden belonged to the family of God, we now know with certainty that God has adopted them both into his family and gave them the inheritance of eternal life. Through simple water and simple words, God created in them new hearts, clean hearts, pure hearts. Declan and Jayden are not a part of God's family because they are cute, because they desired to be with God, because they had pure hearts, or they did good things and made good choices. It was, in fact, the exact opposite. God did all the work today. As Jesus said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them." (verse 65)

Is that hard to swallow? Is that a hard teaching – that Declan & Jayden did absolutely nothing to be purified from everything they ever did wrong and everything they will do wrong? Is it hard to accept that they are perfect in God's eyes right here and right now? For some people, this is very hard to swallow. This is hard, tough bread, the kind you feel like you are going to break your teeth on. This is just as tough as hearing that you are to consume Jesus, his flesh and his blood, that without him you will not have eternal life with God, that he is the only way. This is what Jesus' followers had a hard time swallowing 2000 years ago. It's no easier for us today.

But where else will you get this kind of a message, a message that says everything has been done for you that you are now perfect in God's eyes, that he will take you to heaven, that it all rests on what God does for you, not what you have done for God? Every other faith or religion will tell you that you have to do something to get to their end goal, their heaven, their happier life. But not God. He tells us that it's all about what he did for us. As he said to his disciples that day, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life." (verse 63) Who you are, what you have done – the flesh - they don't count for anything before God. What matters is what God has done for you. What matters is that God has given you his flesh, his blood to take away your sins and that he has drawn you to him through his Word to make you who you are.

Sadly, many didn't believe Jesus. "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." (verse 66) To date (and maybe today will be different), I have not had someone walk out after a sermon and never come back. Of course, there are plenty of other ways that people leave church and don't return, even if they aren't grumbling right after a sermon. I preach to you something that is hard to swallow. I give hard bread when I proclaim to you and Declan and Jayden did nothing to have God take away their sins and make them perfect.

Today, God is offering himself to you, that he is the bread of your life, that he wants you to take in this message, no matter how tough it is, to push aside your thoughts of what you need to do to be right with God, to push aside what you think God should do that would make you believe him. Instead, take it in. Consume what Jesus is offering to you today: full and free forgiveness, complete perfection before God – not something you earn, but what God gives you, what God clothes you with by baptism.

Why chew through this tough bread, this tough teaching? Peter tells us why it's worth it. When Jesus asked if his Twelve chosen disciples wanted to leave, Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (verse 68) No one else gives us this, Jesus. No one else gives us eternal life. No one else can give their life, their total perfect life, to be our perfection. No one else can be our substitute. We don't care if it's tough, Lord; you are the only way. "We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." (verse 69) The Father had drawn them in. They believed, even though it was hard to accept.

God is drawing you in right now with the same message. Yes, it's tough, but only Jesus has the words of eternal life. Only Jesus gave his flesh and his blood to make use pure and holy in his sight. Only Jesus could do this for us and be our substitute because only Jesus is the Holy One of God, God himself. Only he can be our perfection.

This is tough to swallow, this teaching that I play no part in being loved by God, in being forgiven by him, in being clothed with perfection by him. I want control. I want to contribute something: a choice, a good work, being a little better than the other guy. But this is all on God. He holds out to you the Bread of Life as your perfection. It may be tough, but this is real bread and real food for eternal life.

God has filled up Declan and Jayden today for eternal life with him through his gift of baptism. He has filled us up in the same way through his Word, through his baptism done to us. Where else can we go to get this kind of meal? Only Jesus offers us the Bread of Life. Lord, you have drawn us to you. Keep us feasting on your Word because only you have the words of eternal life. Amen.