

“Words of Life” – Pr Jim Sprenkle – Pentecost 13 August 18, 2024

- I. **John 6:68-69** – ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹and we have believed, and have come to know, that You are the Holy One of God.”
- II. **Following Jesus is not about a single event or experience.**
 - a. Yes, we certainly teach that coming to faith is a one-time event as God gives us that gift through His Word and the Holy Spirit.
 - i. However, following Jesus is not about amazing revelations, visions, and over the top spiritual experiences... it’s much more about diving into His Word and allowing it to engage you... change you over a long period of time.
 - b. In her book *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus*, Lois Tverberg retells a story about a famous first century rabbi named Rabbi Akiva:
 - i. One day as Rabbi Akiva was shepherding his flocks, he noticed a tiny stream trickling down a hillside, dripping over a ledge on its way toward the river below. Below was a massive boulder. Surprisingly, the rock bore a deep impression. The drip, drip, drip of water over the centuries had hollowed away the stone. Akiva commented, “If mere water can do this to hard rock, how much more can God’s Word carve a way into my heart of flesh?” Akiva realized that if the water had flowed over the rock all at once, the rock would have been unchanged. It was the slow but steady impact of each small droplet, year after year, that completely reformed the stone.
 - c. The author then comments...
 - i. When I first started studying the Bible’s Hebraic context, I wanted one commentary that would teach me everything, one class that would explain it all. If I could learn all the “right answers” in one marathon event, all the better. I find now that God likes to reveal truth over many years, as I study alongside others. I realize now that big “splashes” aren’t usually God’s way of doing things. Instead, through the slow drip of study and prayer, day after day, year after year, He shapes us into what He wants us to be.¹
 - d. Most of us have had the experience of reading a part of the Bible we’ve read or heard many times, only to see something new or meaningful we didn’t get before.
 - i. It isn’t that the Word has changed... our hearts and minds become more in tune with God’s will and teaching... it is we who change.
 - e. I remember taking my first New Testament class at a community college in my hometown as I was first considering going to the seminary to become a pastor.

- i. A nun named Sister Faith was teaching the course, and after class one day I mentioned that I was considering being a pastor.
- ii. Sister Faith had spent her whole life studying Scripture and praying, along with teaching others about the Bible, and she could tell that I had a lot to learn.
- iii. She said, “It’s wonderful that you plan to serve the Lord, but hang on tight, because this will be the ride of your life... and it won’t end until you go home to Jesus.”
 - 1. What she was trying to tell me is I will never stop learning and growing as follower of Jesus, and God will constantly reveal more and more to me through His Word... until I die.

III. **We like splashy things... or powerful experiences... or miracles.**

- a. Very few people have an overwhelming urge to sit down and study the Scriptures for hours a day, and then pray for several hours more.
- b. We love to read the stories about people who had these amazing conversion experiences, but for most of us, we’ve just always been Christians... slowly but surely plodding along.
- c. How many of us try to shortcut the system?
 - i. We buy the latest app, or the newest Bible, or a video series so we can learn God’s Word...
 - ii. It’s kind of like buying the newest exercise equipment – it’s super exciting... for a while... then we start to realize that we actually need to use it... to do the work over a long period of time.
- d. During the same time I was taking Sister Faith’s class, I wanted to learn all about the Bible fast... so I bought a Cliff Notes version of the Old Testament... See, I just wanted the main points, right now.
 - i. Let’s just say it doesn’t work that way – and there are no shortcuts to following Jesus throughout our lives.
 - ii. We are steeping ourselves in the Word, and it takes many years for God to mold and shape us.

IV. **Today’s teaching from Jesus is advanced for many Christians.**

- a. He tells His followers that they need to feed on His flesh for eternal life.
- b. People are chasing Jesus around trying to get a miracle of healing or maybe another meal... and He tells them He is the meal.
 - i. You can just imagine their faces... “What in the world is this guy saying?” “Is He serious? We need to consume Him?” “Ok, I’ve heard enough... I was just looking for another lunch with fish and bread like the other day...”
 - ii. At that time, many of those who were following Jesus decided to leave... and not just the crowd... but people who had been with Jesus for a while.
 - iii. What Jesus said was hard to understand, and certainly required faith to keep going with Him.

- c. Now, some would say that Jesus only meant something spiritual in nature, but from the text, it seems more likely He is pointing to the Lord's Supper.
 - i. Difficult to understand for sure, but Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, as John the Baptist calls out in John 1:29.
 - 1. The Lamb of God is the Paschal lamb, or the lamb the Hebrews ate at the Passover meal in Egypt, whose blood was put on their doorposts and lintels to save their firstborn from death before they were freed from slavery.
 - 2. Jesus then teaches the 12 apostles during the Passover meal they were celebrating right before He was arrested and crucified, that the bread and wine are at the same time His body and blood to be eaten and drunk often.
 - ii. True body and true blood – mysteriously at the same time true bread and true wine.
 - iii. I always say that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man at the same time... so if we believe that... it's certainly possible to believe that the bread and wine can also be Christ's body and blood at the same time.
 - d. These are the difficult teachings that often require time to work their way into our hearts and minds as God challenges us... molds us...and loves us.
- V. **In many ways God** is a mystery and difficult to understand... but not His love.
- a. Out of His great love for us, He has the patience to support our faith... and even keep us in the faith by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - i. He gets how badly we want to know everything... to take shortcuts and seek the easy way.
 - ii. He knows how we commit to reading His Word of life and within a few days or weeks we have set it aside for more "important" things.
 - iii. He understands the depth of His great wisdom is far beyond us, but He grants us a faith to open our hearts and minds to the mysteries we could never fathom without Him.
 - b. Jesus spoke these words to His followers... and to us as He points to the great sacrifice of His body on the cross – the purest act of love ever...
 - i. A purity of love that went to the cross – suffered immeasurably – in order to reclaim the lost... to pay for our sins so that we don't have to.
 - ii. To me, this is more difficult to understand than how God can be present in the bread and wine... because Jesus died for us knowing that we are sinful and could never return the kind of love He showed us... but He did it anyway.
 - c. Peter makes one of the great statements of faith today – where else can we go Jesus? You have the words of eternal life... and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God. (Jn. 6:68-69)

- i. The promise of Jesus is sure... and the words of life He speaks are absolute truth... and He truly is God in the flesh.
- ii. Following Jesus is not a sprint... but a marathon... a slow and steady transformation that begins and ends with His words of life.
- iii. God has given us all we need by grace through faith to follow Him, and reminds us that even when we don't understand, we are His.

¹ Source: Lois Tverberg, *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus* (Zondervan, 2012)