

Doug Serven, RUF Campus Minister<sup>1</sup>  
RUF Bible Study – The Gospel According to Peter  
Sept. 20, 2006  
In Despair – John 6

53-58 *But Jesus didn't give an inch. "Only insofar as you eat and drink flesh and blood, the flesh and blood of the Son of Man, do you have life within you. The one who brings a hearty appetite to this eating and drinking has eternal life and will be fit and ready for the Final Day. My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. By eating my flesh and drinking my blood you enter into me and I into you. In the same way that the fully alive Father sent me here and I live because of him, so the one who makes a meal of me lives because of me. This is the Bread from heaven. Your ancestors ate bread and later died. Whoever eats this Bread will live always."*

59 *He said these things while teaching in the meeting place in Capernaum.*

60 *Many among his disciples heard this and said, "This is tough teaching, too tough to swallow."*

61-65 *Jesus sensed that his disciples were having a hard time with this and said, "Does this throw you completely? What would happen if you saw the Son of Man ascending to where he came from? The Spirit can make life. Sheer muscle and willpower don't make anything happen. Every word I've spoken to you is a Spirit-word, and so it is life-making. But some of you are resisting, refusing to have any part in this." (Jesus knew from the start that some weren't going to risk themselves with him. He knew also who would betray him.) He went on to say, "This is why I told you earlier that no one is capable of coming to me on his own. You get to me only as a gift from the Father."*

66-67 *After this a lot of his disciples left. They no longer wanted to be associated with him. Then Jesus gave the Twelve their chance: "Do you also want to leave?"*

68-69 *Peter replied, "Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We've already committed ourselves, confident that you are the Holy One of God."*

70-71 *Jesus responded, "Haven't I handpicked you, the Twelve? Still, one of you is a devil!" He was referring to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. This man—one from the Twelve!—was even then getting ready to betray him.*

We all have expectations all the time. You have expectations of college. You have expectations of me and RUF. You can't help it. It's okay.

I do a lot of premarital counseling, which is a fun and exhausting thing about being a college minister. I harp on expectations during our sessions, trying to pound it into the couple that much, if not practically all, of their conflict will deal with unmet and perhaps unstated expectations.

Some of them we can uncover through talking. The man may have an expectation of sex twice a day. The woman may think that by age 30, she'll be driving a mid-range SUV. The man may expect dinner every day at 6 o'clock. The woman may expect to never do a lick of laundry. One may expect to have four kids and the other to have none. And they can be small things that you'd never think about talking about. Where the shampoo goes in the bathroom. How much a haircut costs. How many iTunes downloads are permissible a month. Where we put our dirty clothes.

These are things of which arguments are made of. There are only about a gazillion of them. The wise person considers that a part of his or her conflict is to a large degree unmet and unstated expectations. What are your expectations? Or let me ask my real question – do you expect suffering in your life? And do you expect God to use suffering for good?

### ***Jesus as Welfare King***

We'll look at the different expectations people had on Jesus in this passage, but we're really pulling from all of chapter 6 in John. In the first part of the chapter, we read about Jesus feeding 5000 people with just a few measly supplies. He involves the disciples in this, so they can see first-hand how he creates something out of nothing, and how he can use them in his work. Peter is front stage for this miracle and watches his friend do yet another incredible thing. Just imagine if I were to be able to stand up here and make Jimmy John's bread out of thin air. You'd be impressed, eh?

Now, here's a question about expectations – what are these people, including the disciples thinking?

They're thinking two things, I think. The first is this: Hey, let's keep hanging out with this guy. I'm hungry and I don't want to work, and he makes bread out of nothing and hands it out for free. Awesome! Both the practical and theological issues come up the next day, shown in John 6:25-34, ending with "*Sir, give us this bread always.*"

Sure, there are some theological musings that go along with this; they realize that this is like Moses and manna from God, but that was a long time ago. This is now, this is filling their hungry stomachs and they like it. Hanging out with Jesus will get you fed. Yes.

The second thing that occurs to them is that if Jesus could do stuff like this, than maybe he would make a pretty good king for the Jews. After all, he cares about the poor, and he has what seems like God superpowers. If you add that to what has

---

<sup>1</sup> © Doug Serven, 2006 You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you do not make more than 500 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be explicitly approved by Doug Serven.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2006, website: [www.ouruf.org](http://www.ouruf.org). For this series, I used commentaries all throughout the gospels. I also used as my base text Michael Card's book, *The Fragile Stone*. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

to be a righteous anger toward the king who has killed his cousin John, we have the makings of a coup here that not only might depose the lousy king, but also – could it be! – drive the Romans into the sea and get rid of them forever!!!!

They're serious about this. Jesus knows this and read what happens: *15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

Jesus escapes. This is serious. They are serious. This is the Jews' greatest dream, you have to realize. This is their expectation of the Messiah. The Messiah will overthrow the Romans, will set right the kingdom of God and will make everything run as it should be. And they will be happy.

Now, I know what you're thinking – those crazy Jews, how could they think this? But you really have the same expectations, don't you?

When things go wrong for you what do you do? You get angry or sad or depressed or upset. Why? Because you expect them to be different. I'm not saying that it's wrong necessarily for you to think this, but you need to see that you do. You want and expect things to work out well for you, in your favor, the world to go as you want it to. And when it doesn't, you get angry. Nobody wants suffering of course, but what happens when that is what you get?

You want to be fed. You want Jesus to take care of you. You want what you want when you want it. You think that Jesus is obligated to meet all of your perceived needs. And you think that he has certain obligations as a king. Kings act certain ways in your mind, and you think that he isn't really fulfilling those roles very well. Kings get rid of people in your way. They handle things well. They don't let bad things happen to you.

So you're mad at God. He's letting things happen that he should keep away. He's not providing for you as he should when you know he could but won't.

Have you ever thought about this expectation, this welfare king Jesus that you want and are angry when you don't get?

### ***Jesus as Savior***

Jesus knows this is what they want and he refuses to give it to them because it's not what they need. You see, he himself was tempted with the same things in the wilderness. He could have made bread, and he could have been a real king, but instead he wanted to do what his Father wanted him to do. And his Father wanted him to be the Savior King.

Jesus starts to talk about himself, and tells them that he is the Bread of Life. This is one of the great "I am" statements in the Bible, a place where Jesus reveals himself in metaphor to us. He says that we should feed on him. He says we should eat his flesh and drink his blood.

And the people freak out. They want breakfast and he wants to give them relationship. They want a king and he wants to give them a suffering servant to die. They want the problem of other people to be dealt with. He says the problem is them. They want to be affirmed that change can come from within, but he says that change has to come from the outside, from grace. They want a pain-free life that allows them to fulfill all of their desires, but he says that he wants to deliver them from their desires. They want to be in charge, but he says that God is in charge.

They don't ever ask him what he means by all of this. They don't think that he is talking about spiritual things. They're stuck on the physical, the here and now. But he says, "My flesh cannot benefit you; stop thinking that I was asking you literally to eat my body or literally to drink my blood. It is my spirit, my person, in the act of giving my body to be broken and my blood to be shed, that bestows and sustains life, even everlasting life."<sup>2</sup>

Do you know the Bread of Life? Do you think about spiritual things and see your need? Are you poor in spirit, recognizing your need and inability to fix yourself? Do you mourn over your sinfulness, your lack of goodness, the way you mess things up? Are you meek, able to rightly assess your condition and ask for help? Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? Do you hunger for Jesus? Do you thirst for Jesus?

People who are hungry want bread. People who are thirsty want water. Are you hungry and thirsty for a Savior or do you think you are full?

### ***Response to the Unexpected Jesus***

Now I want you to look at the four different kinds of responses to this unexpected Jesus, to this mismatching of expectations and reality.

The first reaction is that of the masses and religious leaders. They rejected the message and belittled the speaker. In 6:42 we read: *They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"*

You can be very religious and belittle Jesus. Many people do, and not only people of other official religions. You can be a Consumerist, or an Intellectualist, or a Postmodernist. And you can think that Jesus was just a man, just a prophet, just an ordinary guy who had a mistaken identity and we shouldn't believe in those fairy tales any longer. This makes sense if you don't believe in miracles, if you don't believe in the supernatural world. Is this your reaction to Jesus as the Bread of Life, to Jesus as Savior?

---

<sup>2</sup> Hendrickson, 247

But look next at another reactions. We also hear from the followers, the ones who identified with him, who liked him., called his disciples. They said *“This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”* Eugene Peterson tries to put this in a common venacular by putting it this way: This is too tough to swallow.

In his commentary, John Calvin points out that the real hardness wasn't in Jesus' teaching, but in their hearts. Their hearts were hard, and they turned away. I think this is an odd thing for the disciples to say, but I think it's because they were still caught by the literalness of what Jesus was saying. If he was telling them that they must practice cannibalism, then they were having none of it. That seems hard to believe, but I think they didn't want to believe anything else. His strange way of talking and his unwillingness to be the kind of king they wanted was enough for them to bail out. Even after he tells them that he will prove to be the Son of Man when he raises unto the clouds (thus, by his analogy, proving that he had come from the clouds), they don't want to hear it.

So Jesus turns to the disciples and we hear a third reaction. *“Do you also want to leave?” Peter replied, “Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We've already committed ourselves, confident that you are the Holy One of God.”*

This is the reaction of trusting despair, and we'll come back to it. It is what we want to focus on.

There is a fourth reaction, however; that of Judas. John, writing years after the fact, clues the reader in with a bit of foreshadowing, telling us that Judas Iscariot will betray Jesus, and for a time will remain in his company as a traitor to the truth. It is a chilling statement.

Back to Peter. Imagine that there are thousands around, all cheering your best friend. Then most of them leave once they're disappointed. Now you look around and there are hundreds. Jesus starts talking, and the more he talks, the less people like him. He's not making friends very well. He is hard to understand. He seems somewhat demanding. And many fall away. Jesus strangely doesn't appear to be overly concerned about this, a fact which does concern you.

Now there are only a few left, and he turns to you. And he wants to know if you're going to leave too.

What would you say? This is a dark moment for Peter. Remember he has left his family behind to follow Jesus. He has left his business in order to be a part of this man's life. He may have thought he was going to be a part of something big, something great. And it doesn't seem to be working out. It's easy to follow Jesus when he's the cool thing, but a totally different story when he's strange and weird.

He is in despair. His friend might be crazy. He is talking about dying on a cross, something that kings don't do. He is talking about people eating his flesh, and that's just creepy.

Things aren't going well.

We started this way, but I've returned to it – what do you do when things don't go well? For some of you, you've already experienced some low, low times. For the rest of you, they are up ahead.

We have to deal with statistics in order to make predictions, and I don't want to scare you and I realize that there is an aspect where we don't have a normal grouping of normal people, but these things are true. One of you women will be raped at some point, and this will most likely be by someone you know. 10% of female college students have an eating disorder.

If you get married, 50% of you will get divorced, and that is sadly no different if you're a Christian or not. That means that 50% of your parents are divorced, and some of your parents may still yet get divorced.

Those are some big ones. You may not be able to get pregnant. You may not get married. You may lose a child. You may get laid off from your job. You may have an accident and get seriously injured. You may have to die to your dream jobs. You may have to move to a city you hate. You may get passed over for a promotion. You may flunk your class. You may have an archnemesi who hates you. You may get depressed and need medication. You may not end up with “him” or “her.”

Terrible things have and will happen to you. I can guarantee that. And you will ask either in your heart or out loud, “Where is God?” And you will cry out, “If you are like this God, I don't want anything to do with you.”

It's right then and there where Jesus will ask a question like, What about you? Are you going to go with them? And you'll have to realize that following Jesus is a crazy thing after all. It really doesn't make complete sense according to everything we've been taught to believe about life. Jesus isn't the Fishmaker, Breakmaker or Moneymaker. He isn't offering you a perfect world where all your expectations are met. In fact, he may smash your expectations. As F.B. Meyer writes, when the people wanted all of those things about Jesus, “He had to undeceive them.”

He has to undeceive you, so that you can have him. Relationship with him is what he is offering. One way he points that out is by suffering.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was hanged by the Nazis, wrote to his sister in 1942: “It is good to learn early enough that suffering and God are not a contradiction but rather a unity, for the idea that God himself is suffering is one that has always been one of the most convincing teachings of Christianity. I think God is nearer to suffering than to happiness, and to find God in this way gives peace and rest and a strong and courageous heart.”<sup>3</sup> Truly we all wish Bonhoeffer were wrong, but it appears to be that the only way to God is through some sort of suffering. After all, he shows us that way.

---

<sup>3</sup> Found in *Death by Suburb*, by David Goetz, p. 95

Goetz writes about this topic: “So much of coveting seems to originate from a deep dissatisfaction with the life I’ve been given. I want my neighbor’s life. It’s strange, really to hate the life I have, since I’ve made sure that every step along the way has been chosen by me. I choose that college, I choose this spouse, I choose my wedding gifts, I choose to go back and get my MBA, I choose when to have kids, I choose to buy in this neighborhood. And yet, in many ways, I will fight the life I’ve chosen... Sooner or later, each person’s life runs out of its ten thousand joys, and then comes the suffering: the expected fourth child with Down syndrome, ten years of either the rent or your daughter’s ballet fees after the divorce, the dive into the lake that causes quadriplegia. And then what?”<sup>4</sup>

Is relationship with Jesus going to work? Do you have hope or will you despair? To rescue them from the emptiness of life. “God does not want anyone to come to the end of his life knowing it has been all futility and mistakes.”<sup>5</sup> He has to show them they are empty and then show them how to receive satisfaction.

Peter answers through clenched teeth. We have no place else to go. He is the Lord. He is the Bread of Life, the true Manna. What is the other option?

We will come to the same moment as Peter did in John. “There will be a time when you will see Jesus in a new, unexpected way, in a light you never dreamed of or wanted to see him in. He will fail to meet your expectations.... You will experience him in a way that has caused countless of his other disciples to say, ‘This is hard; who can accept it?’”

This is where discipleship begins. We can leave or we can stay. Is it too much or do we clutch to Jesus? After all, listen to what he is saying: “I am the Bread of Life!!”

I know it’s hard. If you don’t think it’s hard, you’re probably not being honest with yourself. This world is a crazy place and hurt is all around us.

Listen to how Dostoevsky puts it in *Brothers Karamazov*: “I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage, like the despicable fabrication of the impotent and infinitely small Euclidean mind of man, that in the world’s finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, of the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, of all the blood that they’ve shed; and it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify what has happened.”<sup>6</sup>

Willie Nelson says a similar thing, though not quite as profoundly in his song “My Broken Heart Belongs to You.”

I lost my mind so long ago  
I wanted everyone to know  
I wanted everyone to see  
My broken heart belong to me

I go beyond the thought of you  
And a broken heart was nothing new  
I wanted everyone to see  
My broken heart belong to me

And now as autumn fills the air  
I feel your spirit every where  
Now my fears are coming true  
My broken heart belongs to you

And now as autumn fills the air  
I feel your presence every where  
*Now my fears are coming true*  
*My broken heart belongs to you*

If you are there, or when you get there, just like Peter when your expectations are smashed, then take your broken heart to Jesus. He says that you will be satisfied in him if you do. I don’t totally understand it, but I know it’s true. My broken heart belongs to you.

It seems to me that the answer to despair and suffering is laughter and hope. And sticking with Jesus with our broken hearts.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Death by Suburbs*, Goetz, 96-97

<sup>5</sup> Hughes, *John*, 202

<sup>6</sup> Found from a sermon Rev. Tim Keller gave in regards to 9/11.