

“The Shortsighted” // John 6:14–65 // Can’t Believe #3

Announcement: *See script at end*

We are in the middle of a series called *Can’t Believe* in which we are looking through the *Gospel of John* at **7 kinds of people who couldn’t believe** and how Jesus addressed each of them.

(Now, I know that many of you in this series might say, “*Well, I’m not sure how this series applies to me because I already believe in Jesus.*” But you have got to understand that all of Christian growth is essentially learning to believe the gospel—to really believe, in the biblical sense, which means to lean all your weight upon Jesus, which is what scholars say the word “believe” really means in John.¹ (the difference in believing that a parachute would actually carry you down safely and actually jumping out of the plane—the latter is biblical ‘belief’).)

Whether you are already a believer or not, I think there is a lot in here for you.

John 6:14–65

In John 6 we will encounter a group who can’t believe for two reasons. First, because they don’t understand their real problem, they are so focused on quick fixes that they miss the real Jesus and the real gospel.

- Do you remember the first week of this series I referenced a quote by Francis Schaeffer that if he had an hour to explain the gospel to someone he would *spend 45–50 minutes on the negative, to really try to get that person to feel their dilemma—that they really are spiritually dead and hopeless in their sin—*

and then the last 10–15 minutes to preach the (good news of the) gospel. He said that much of our evangelistic work today is not clear simply because we are too anxious to get to the answer without people ever realizing the problem.

- This group doesn’t understand the problem, so they are blind to the real solution.
 - This group includes a lot of Republicans (who believe that if societies were just free and democratically governed and the government would just get out of the way then everybody could thrive)...
 - ...and Democrats (who believe that the rich would pay their share and help the poor then there would be enough prosperity to go around).
 - This group includes a lot of well-intentioned social activists; educational reformers; public school teachers and college professors; those who work to end world hunger and stop the sex slave trade.
 - Good people, many of them even thinking of themselves as “Christians,” but the mission of message of Jesus is secondary to them because they don’t understand the real problem.
 - Here’s how you know you’re in this group: you’re kind of bored with Jesus. You don’t hate him, but you’re also not filled with love and passion for him.
 - The sign that you’ve encountered the real Jesus is that you are consumed with one of those 2 emotions: fierce hatred or consuming love. Lukewarm feelings just show you’ve never encountered the real guy.

This same group of people in John 6 stumbles over some of Jesus’ hard teachings. He’s going to say some things that really offend them.

But because they are only looking for a prophet who teaches a new philosophy of life or a life coach who give them better tips for living they are not prepared for a gospel that rocks their world and a glorious Savior who will blow their minds.

¹ Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 34

- And they are going to say, “We don’t really like that part of you.”

Today, we see a lot of people who like to appropriate various parts of Jesus’ message into their ; the parts that work with their pre-existing worldviews.

- I’ve told you before about watching a couple of pastors... “*My Jesus.*”
- Jesus would make it very clear to these people that they either believed him or they didn’t. They either had to accept all of what he taught or reject him altogether.
- He’s not a salad bar where you take the parts of him you like and leave those you don’t.

I’m going to call this group ‘the shortsighted,’ because they don’t understand the real problem or recognize the real Jesus.

So let’s get into it.

- John 6 opens up with a problem: **People are hungry.**
 - Jesus had a lot of things to say so his sermons could be pretty long, and in this case he started after breakfast and taught straight through lunch and dinner. People sat mesmerized, though, but when he took a break around dinner
- He asked his disciples, “*The people are starting to look pretty hungry and cranky. What should we do?*”
- Vs. 6 tells you this was a test question because he already knew what he was going to do.
- **So, pop faith quiz, and the disciples start giving their answers.**
- One of them says, “Uhh... I don’t think we have an option here, Jesus. There’s like 20,000 people here (In those days you only counted heads of household, so 5,000 men equals about 20,000 with women and children). So, you can’t feed them. Send them home.” FAIL.
- Another disciple, Philip, (vs. 7) says, “200 denarii is not enough to go buy food for these people even for each of them to have just a little.” You have to read the sarcasm in that. “*200 denarii*”

was about 8 months wages, so he’s saying, “Sure, Jesus. Why don’t we all go get jobs, work for 8 months, pool our money, and then we could buy **everybody a snow cone**. That’s a great idea, Jesus.” FAIL.

- Finally, one of the disciples, Andrew, says, “Well, I found a little boy whose momma packed him a lunch, and he says he’s willing to share it with you if *you* want to grab something to eat real quick. You could duck backstage real quick... One of us could lead everyone in a song—‘Jesus Loves Me’ or something—while *you* eat.” Ohh... STARTED off well... but FAIL.

So, Jesus takes the little boy’s lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fish, prays over it, and starts to distribute it. While it’s in the disciples’ hands, it starts multiplying. They can’t give it away fast enough, and so after everybody has eaten all they can eat they take up what’s left of this little boy’s 5 loaves and 2 fish, his Hebrew Happy Meal, and the leftovers fill 12 bushel-baskets.

Verse 14: [14] When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” [15] Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king,

- *They’re excited.* Look at what this guy just did. And they’re thinking, “Imagine if this guy was head of our nation?”
- Talk about a chicken in every pot and a car in every driveway. If he can do this with 5 loaves and 2 fish, imagine what he could do with the stock market! This guy could end world hunger. Talk about healing the planet? This guy walks on top of storms. He wouldn’t just fix Medicare; he could remove the need for it.

But... **Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.**

- Now, Jesus’ reaction is kind of strange, isn’t it? Usually preachers like crowds. That lets you know you’re your message is connecting.
- But just when the crowd is really getting into Jesus, he takes off.

- This is not shyness on Jesus' part. No, he's avoiding disaster. You see, they're missing the point.
- He didn't come to end world hunger, at least not at first, as important as that is. He's got something even more important than that, and they are getting it wrong.

So he goes up and hides in the mountain until nightfall, and after that he takes an evening stroll on the sea (not, by the sea, mind you, but on the sea) and walks over to the other side.

Well, someone over there tweeted about seeing him so when this crowd [25] ~~When they~~ (finally) found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

[26] Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, (Remember, when he drops the "truly, truly," in the Gospel of John that's when you know things are getting serious) I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

[27] Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.

- He's got a different kind of bread he's offering.
- He knows that he *could* end world hunger and restore world peace and ensure life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all and *still* not have dealt with the real problem.

Jump down to vs. [34] They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

- Remember how the woman last week in John 4 thinks Jesus was talking about physical water when he was talking about something much deeper? Same thing happening here. They don't get that physical bread is just a picture of real bread for the soul.

[35] Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

The bread that he is offering is reunion with God because that's what the human soul is missing.

- Blaise Pascal called it a God-shaped void...

Jesus didn't show up with merely external fixes, because there was nothing external anyone could give us (not even him) that could satisfy us. It was God that we were missing; it was God that his gospel would restore to us.

Our soul craving is not for something, you see, but for *Someone*. And until we've been re-united to that *Someone*, our souls will always be famished and corrupted.

- **There is a recurring theme in literature/movies:** somebody discovers some secret to living forever... how to avoid death, but they end up being miserable.
 - And that's because we know there is a difference in mere existence and really living. If we live forever without life, we are miserable!
- When the Bible talks about eternal life, it's not just talking about existing forever.
 - That's actually the definition of hell. In hell you go on existing forever, just apart from God. You could say that you have two options for eternity—a *place of eternal existence and a place of eternal life*.² God offers eternal *life*, not just eternity of existence. "Eternal life" is not a quantity of time but a quality of existence."
- **Ray Kurzweil**, a futurist who predicts things based on technological trends, says that he thinks the time will soon come when we'll have small nano-computers that can run in our blood that can spot disease and fix it and cause us to live for 1000 years, maybe even forever. Will our problem be fixed then? No, we'd still be missing the one thing we were created for, fellowship with the living God.

So they say,

[28] ~~Then they said to him,~~ "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" What should we be doing to fix the problem, what do we do to obtain this "bread of God"?

² From an insight by Tim Keller in a sermon on John 6. www.redeemer.com

[29] Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

- It's not something you can do.
- This is a bread that is given to you, as a gift. You were powerless to restore what was lost. So God himself did the work of restoring your salvation.
- **The bread here is a great picture of the gospel:** In order for bread to do your body any good, it has to be broken. (Your teeth have to break it in pieces and chew it up). Jesus would be broken for us so that he could feed us.
- **In order for water to do you any good it has to be poured out.** Jesus' blood would be poured out so that it could become the water of life to us.
- The meal for our starving souls would be provided, entirely, by him.
- Our part is simply to take and eat, to come and drink, to look and live!

What Jesus has done in these few verses is distinguished the one true gospel from every other false gospel ever given.

Two words that characterize the real gospel. **Remember these:**

God: The true gospel's primary focus is reconciliation with god.

- Jesus would not let his ministry become primarily about an 'end-world-hunger' or 'prosperity-for-all' campaign, as important and worthy as those things are. He ran from it!
- Because our problem runs much deeper than anything that could be fixed by food in our stomachs, clothes on our backs, education in our brains or even justice in our governments.
- In the 19th century there was a movement in Britain called "The British socialist movement" which thought that with the spread of education and culture soon the world would progress beyond injustice and savagery. What's fascinating is to compare what many of the leaders in this movement said after WW1 and WW2. For example,

- **Beatrice Webb** wrote in her diary in 1890 – "I stake everything on the essential goodness of human nature." She referenced that statement 35 years later but then said, "I realize now how permanent the evil and instincts and impulses in us that mere social machinery will never change."
- David Cecil, after the Holocaust of World War II, said, "The philosophy of progress had led us to believe that the savage and primitive was behind us, but it turns out that it was within us."³
- The way you can tell a true gospel from a false gospel is that the real gospel has as its primary focus the restoration of God to us.
 - The true gospel is about God. It has as its primary aim reconciliation with God. The locus of its hope is God; the focus of its affections, God. John Piper says, "The gospel is not a way to get people to heaven; it is a way to get people to God... 'Behold your God' is the most gracious command and best gift of the gospel."⁴
 - Can I tell you... **that's why I hate the prosperity gospel.** The prosperity gospel says, "Come to God and get stuff." Come to God and get stuff? What you need is God, not some secondary stuff he can give you. God is not a means to an end. God is the end Himself.

³ Cyril Joad wrote a book in 1952, right after World War II, called *The Recovery of Belief*. Up through WW2 he had been a socialist and an atheist. In this book, *The Recovery of Belief*, he described his journey back to belief in God. He said, "It is because we rejected a doctrine of original sin that we on the left are always being so disillusioned. The behavior of both the people and the leaders were inexplicable to us because we didn't believe in the ancient doctrine of sin." Another guy, the Lord David Cecil, after the Holocaust of World War II, said, "The philosophy of progress had led us to believe that the savage and primitive was behind us, but it turns out that it was within us." Dorothy Sayers in her essay, "Creed or Chaos?," explains: We were given to believe that we are essentially good human beings evolving into higher, better beings; that we were essentially teachable, and so to us "the appalling outbursts of bestial ferocity in the totalitarian states, and the obstinate selfishness and stupid greed of capitalist society, are not merely shocking and alarming. For (us), these things are the utter negation of everything in which (we) have believed."

<http://www.ewtn.com/library/THEOLOGY/FR92401.htm>

⁴ John Piper, *God is the Gospel*, 47.

- He doesn't "give us the bread of life," he is himself the bread of life.
- It's not that God won't give you a better family and greater prosperity. Christianity is always a blessing to society and has led more nations out of poverty than any other ideology. (That's a historical fact—just look at what is happening today as South American countries embrace Christianity.) But the primary gift of the gospel is GOD!
- Indeed, until you feast on the bread of Jesus himself, all the other things you are seeking are going to leave you hungry!
 - **John Piper** again, "... Indeed there are ten thousand gifts that flow from the love of God... But none of these gifts will lead to final joy if they have not first led to God." John Piper⁵
 - **C.S. Lewis** had a great statement on this: "It seems that... our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink, and sex, and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." We think we want this lesser bread.
- That means politics and all of these activist causes are secondary. I'm not saying they are not important—the Bible commands us to love and bless and take care of our neighbors. But they can never displace the centrality of the gospel message in our mission.
 - Our generation is a very "cause-driven" generation. Companies are into giving back now; everybody's got a cause; everybody's got bracelets with different initiatives and a pair of Tom's shoes on their feet
 - And that's all well and good, but we can never lose the focus that Jesus died for Tom's soul.
 - Because people don't just need shoes on their feet, they need forgiveness of their sins, and we don't want well-clothed, well-fed people who die and go to hell.
 - **We want to alleviate suffering, but the most significant suffering is eternal suffering; the suffering of the soul that is starving from being separated from God.** So we want to put bread in their stomachs, but more importantly, we want to point them to the bread given to them from heaven.
 - *What if we achieved every political agenda we'd dreamed of? What if we achieve peace in our time; what if the American dream became a reality for everyone; what if there was peace and justice for all, what if we slow the rise of the oceans and heal the planet, and then our generation dies and goes to hell!*
 - I'm not saying they are not important—when we love our neighbor we will be activists on their behalf, but I'm saying that these secondary kinds of bread can never eclipse the bread from heaven that Jesus offered. Our mission is not just "random acts of kindness" it's also "bold acts of proclamation."
 - And, BTW, because politics are a secondary matter in the church, there can even be disagreement among Christians because of them.
 - One of the disciples was Simon the Zealot (Jewish nationalist). The other was Matthew the tax collector (Roman rule). This means they were on POLAR opposites of the political spectrum. *You have Matthew the tax collector [far right] and Simon the zealot who fiercely opposes the state [far left].*

⁵ John Piper, *God is the Gospel*, 12.

Reconciliation was a product of Jesus' work."⁶ Yet they are brothers in Jesus' band of disciples.

- It's not they lost their opinions; they were united by a larger agenda!

2nd word to characterize the gospel: **Grace: The true gospel centers on what God has done for us, not what we should do for him.** (vs. 47: what should we be doing, that we should receive this bread? Nothing. You believe.)

- D.A. Carson points out that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Gospels are about 1 week of Jesus' life. Essentially, the Gospels are stories of Jesus' death with a preamble.
- Now, that death, that gospel, leads to profound change, but it is always in response to what God has done. Those things are done because you have been reconciled to God, not in order to be reconciled to God.
- A lot of false gospels are cloaked in Christian-sounding agendas. We've got to "live out the new realities of the kingdom" or "reform our lives on Christian principles," or "pursue justice for all peoples," or "be holy," and we do all these things... but that's not the core of the gospel! The core of the gospel is what Jesus did.
- Now, please don't hear me wrongly. Believing the gospel leads to greater social activism and greater social transformation than any other factor.
 - The slave trade was brought to an end in Europe by one factor: evangelical Christians like William Wilberforce and John Wesley got involved.
 - I heard a historian recently point out that up until *very* recently *every* hospital built in Sub-Saharan Africa was built by Christian missionaries.⁷ *Every single one!*

⁶ Bock, D. L. (1994). *Luke Volume 1: 1:1–9:50*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (545–546). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

⁷ D.A. Carson, chapel sermon on the Parable of the Good Samaritan given at SEBTS chapel, February 2012, reporting the words of Jim Plueddemann, director of SIM who lived in Africa for years. <http://apps.sebts.edu/multimedia/?p=2841>

- College students: your generation is not the first one to be interested in bringing healing to the broken places in our world. Every Christian who has truly believed the gospel has cared about that and worked for it.
- But when the Apostle Paul talked about the gospel, he said the matters of first importance where "Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 15:3). *The true gospel centers on what God has done for us, not what we should do for him.*

Jesus goes on in this chapter to explain what he means by this.

[51] I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh... [53] Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

- And they were like, "What does *that* mean?" Kind of creepy if you were hearing it for the first time. Imagine if I said that to you—"Eat my flesh and drink my blood."

[66] After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

- We know now that what he meant by that was that this eating of him was metaphorical. When Jesus was crucified his body would be broken, like bread, and his blood poured out, like water. Believing in him is like eating his flesh and drinking his blood. We get that... now.
- But here's what I want you to see. At this point, they didn't get that yet.
- So they were offended and confused. And many of them said, "That's it! I don't get this guy. It insults my intelligence and offends my sensibilities. I am out of here."
- But Peter, and many of the other disciples are like, "Well, we don't get that either. And for the record, Jesus, you had a big crowd. And if you want to keep that crowd you can't go around telling them to eat your flesh and drink your blood. That doesn't poll well, Jesus."

[67] So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” (In other words, “Are you going to leave, too?”)

And Peter says what is one of the most important declarations of faith, to me, in all the Bible: [68] Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, [69] and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

One of the major themes of the Gospel of John is that God’s truth comes *down* from heaven (John 6:38, 42, 61–62; cf. 3:12–13). It’s not figured out from below. Think of science and philosophy as man building his knowledge *upward*: increasing his knowledge and stretching upward into heaven. And that’s well and good. There’s a lot of benefit and it’s what God wants to do.

But Jesus makes clear that God himself will never be known that way. We are too sinful. So God has to *reveal* eternal truth from heaven.

- Plato had a famous analogy in which he described trying to figure out eternal truth like being chained up in a cave all of your life staring at the back wall. You’re trying to figure out what’s out there, but you’ve never been outside the cave or seen sunlight or any of those objects directly. All you’ve seen are shadows against the wall. Even the greatest philosophers and scientists have never seen ultimate truth; no one has known all the truth there is to know in the universe; no one has been to the grave and back; no one has ever been able to get behind the physical universe to see if there’s something behind it. Science can tell you the “what” but not the “why.”
- **Now, to use Plato’s analogy**, Jesus walks into the cave and says, “I’m from out there. I can tell you what’s there.” You might think he’s making stuff up, but that’s the question. Is he who says he is, and is he telling you the truth?
- **Why is why Jesus said his truth was accessible even by children.**
 - I’ve always thought that was a flaw of both Western and Eastern philosophy: both Western and Eastern

approaches to truth teach that they teach that truth and wisdom and divinity—are obtainable to the intelligent—the scientist, the philosopher, the mystic with great control over his emotions and body—so if you’re not smart, you are out of luck. You’ll never really know God.

- Children can’t master philosophy or tap into ideals, but they can meet and trust a person.

Let me share with you two verses that are absolutely key to my faith:

Deuteronomy 29:29: “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*”

- What that means is that there are things that God has revealed to us about himself which we are to hold on to and to *obey*; and then there are *secret* things God hasn’t enabled us, for whatever reason, to see at this point. And while we are free to ask questions about God, we should never let those questions make us doubt or disobey the things that God has revealed clearly.

Psalm 131: ¹ *O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.* ² *But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother. O Israel! Hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore!*”

- In some ways I am, in relation to God, like a child... There are many things that I tell my kids they can’t understand. Daddy, can Allie and I take the jet-ski out by ourselves? Why can’t I play with the hair dryer in the tub? Sometimes I have to say, “Sweetheart, there’s just some things you can’t grasp yet, and for now I need you just to trust your daddy.”
 - I often ask you: “What do you think is greater... the gap between my 4 year old’s understanding of reality and mine, or my understanding of reality and God’s?”

- Some of the greatest blessings come from knowing when and how to question and when simply to rest and to trust.

So, here's the question: Do you believe that Jesus is the Holy One of God and that he has the words of eternal life?

- Then where else are you going to go? I know there are things you don't understand.
- **Jesus basically says here that will be a lifelong reality: times** where you don't understand; times where your soul feels like it is in turmoil. In those times you say, "I don't know all the answers, but I know you! You are the holy one of God! You were God; you died for me; you rose again for me! I'm sticking with you."

He is the bread of life. You were created not for something, but *Someone*.

Your soul craves his glory. You were made for it. It's what your soul hungers for. "Glory" is what takes your breath away in the beauty of the sunset or blows your mind in the majesty of the universe. It's what you marvel at in the complexity of the atom or the human cell. It's that hunger you can't really describe but makes you long to be united with something that you see in those things.

John Piper says that we look around and we see the evidences of God's glory all around us. Psalm 19 tells us that the heavens "declare" the glory of God! *"He shouts with clouds. He shouts with blue expanse. He shouts with gold on the horizons. He shouts with galaxies and stars. He's shouting, 'I AM GLORIOUS!'"* Open your eyes! *Do you see it? Do you love it? You were made for this. This is why (we) exist: to see that. Everything is pointing to that. All the glory that I thought was so attractive (in the world) is going there. This [empty world] is all husks and ashes.*

That's the bread your soul craves. To know that God and to know that he loves you, with the caring love of a Father. To know that love is eternal life itself.

The alternative is to have a starving soul... to enter into an eternal existence, hell, with your soul still famished and starving. Hell, a place of nothingness and fire but worst of all, with all traces of the glorious love of God removed. Like C.S. Lewis said, "God threatens terrible things for those who refuse to be infinitely satisfied in him."

Conclusion:

Many people can't believe in Jesus because they've never recognized they were made for this glory or known that they are missing it. They are so fixated on quick fixes, physical bread, that they've never understood what they are missing—God, and that the only way He could be restored to them was for God himself to have his body broken like bread and his blood poured out like water.

You're so consumed with small things—wonderful things, but lesser things—like marriage and boats and cars and politics and world peace—that you miss the true bread from heaven, the God behind it all! **The glory of Jesus that outshines the sun and bursts through every beautiful thing in the universe.**

My invitation to you is to come and feast upon the glory of Jesus.

- ***If you've never believed, to take and eat right now.***
- ***If you have received him, to keep believing, keep feasting upon him:***
 - To renew it each morning (why we set aside daily time to meditate on God's word and pray)
 - To help one another do it (by being in small groups).

The message of Week 1 in the Gospel of John: look and live. Week 2: come and drink. Week 3: take and eat!