

## Chapter 15: The Preservation of Jesus

*John 6:60–71*

Although both John 5 and John 6 narrate the rejection of Jesus, these two chapters give us very different kinds of rejection. Among the Judeans in John 5, we see Jesus against the world, so that not even the man whom Jesus heals seems that interested in following Jesus. In John 6, however, the rejection of Jesus comes not from hostile enemies, but from people who have eagerly followed and sought out Jesus (John 6:2, 24). The narrative of John 6, then, does not primarily offer a judgment against the most outwardly rebellious, but a warning to those who are *following* Jesus, urging us to *continue* following Jesus, even when following him becomes hard. Instead of reading any longer about the rapid expansion of Jesus followers, we see here the pruning and sifting out of those who discover that Jesus is not who they thought he was.<sup>1</sup>

Still, this passage does not drive us to despair, wondering if we are strong enough to resist the temptation of walking away from Jesus. In the final analysis, this is a passage about the way in which *Jesus* preserves his people rather than how *we* muster up the strength to drag ourselves across the finish line. To those who do not genuinely believe, Jesus' words are scandalous and offensive, but that is not the case for Jesus' own. For those who believe, Jesus' words are spirit and life, assuring us of the reality of our faith, and driving us away from the possibility of apostasy. The message of John 6:60–71 is this: *Jesus graciously preserves his people by promises, assurances, and warnings.*

### The Promises of Jesus (John 6:60–65)

Up to this point, John called the Galileans with whom Jesus is speaking “the crowd” (John 6:2, 5, 22, 24) and “the Jews” (John 6:41, 52), but in this final section of the chapter, John begins to call them Jesus’ “disciples.” (John 6:60, 61, 66). Now, John carefully distinguishes this larger group of Jesus’ disciples from the Twelve whom Jesus himself chose (John 6:67, 70). Nevertheless, we should not overlook the fact that John considers these people to be followers of Jesus in some sense, even though they will not continue to follow him. From one perspective, waiting to call them his disciples until the moment when they fall away from Jesus illustrates the severity of their apostasy—it would be disingenuous to continue classifying them simply as “the crowd” after they have crossed over land and sea to find Jesus. From another angle, though, John calls these people “disciples” in order to demonstrate the stark difference between *these* disciples and the *Twelve* disciples (John 6:3, 8, 12, 16, 22, 24, 67, 70, 71) who remain with him.

### The Scandal of Jesus

The false disciples say among themselves, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” (John 6:60). By “hard,” they mean to say that they perceive Jesus’ teaching to be “stiff,” dried out and hard, like a twig that has become brittle. The word does not here mean dark and difficult to understand

but objectionable, offensive, impossible to accept and to believe.”<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, Jesus forces them to come to terms with the fact that he is not merely a great teacher or a magician. He is the Word who became flesh in order to give his flesh and blood for the life of the world. What he offers is all or nothing, so that those who will not come to him and eat by faith have no life in them (John 6:53), even if they are willing to eat the bread he miraculously produces (John 6:10–11), hail him as the Prophet (John 6:14), or seek to make him king (John 6:15). To some degree, they struggle to understand how Jesus could possibly give them his flesh to eat (John 6:52), but their struggle runs much deeper than that. Their biggest objections come not because of what they fail to understand, but because of what they *do* understand. They clearly recognize that Jesus is making exclusive claims to be the source of life, and *that* is what they reject. If they genuinely believed, they would not necessarily have understood the meaning of Jesus’ teaching, but they wouldn’t reject it as “hard” and unworthy of their hearing. As John Calvin writes, “On the contrary, it was in their hearts, and not in the *saying*, that the *harshness* lay.”<sup>3</sup> Because their hearts do not actually want Jesus, they reject him when he offers himself to them.

Jesus, therefore, asks, “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” (John 6:61–62). The word for “offense” is the Greek word from which we get our word, “scandalize”—*Does this scandalize you?* Jesus does not back away from what he has said, but he instead leans into the scandal by asking, “Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” Now, this question is difficult to interpret for two reasons. First, Jesus’ language of “ascending” might refer to his being “lifted up” on the cross (John 12:32–33), or to his ascension back to his Father after his death and resurrection (John 20:17). Which aspect(s) of Jesus’ redemptive work does he address in his question? Second, Jesus does not spell out what the result will be when they see him ascended to where he was before—will the scandal increase for them at that time, or will the scandal be removed?<sup>4</sup>

To answer these questions, we must acknowledge that Jesus must be speaking about his crucifixion at some level, for the cross stands at the heart of his scandalous mission on earth. Jesus has not come in glory to conquer and reign over his enemies as he establishes an earthly kingdom (John 6:15). Rather, he has come in humility to be lifted up on the cross for the glorious work of redemption that his Father has sent him to accomplish. The cross is not the shameful defeat of Jesus, but his mighty victory over sin, death, and the devil. As D. A. Carson writes, “The moment of Jesus’ greatest degradation and shame is the moment of his glorification, the path of his return to the glory he had with the Father before the world began (17:5).”<sup>5</sup> We cannot separate the message of Jesus from the message of the cross, so, to some degree, Jesus is forcing these disciples to come to terms with the coming scandal of the cross.

Yet, as Herman Ridderbos points out, the word “ascend” cannot mean “ascend to the cross” in the way that “lift up” can, since “ascend” refers exclusively in the Gospel of John to his eventual ascension back to his Father in glory *after* he completes his mission to the cross: “The entire focus in Jesus’ question is the future glory of the Son of man, with an implied reference to the glory with which he, precisely as the Son of man, was clothed ‘before’ as the one sealed by the Father (cf. vs. 27; 17:5, 24) and thus to the unity of ‘descending’ and ‘ascending’ as the great mystery of the gospel.”<sup>6</sup> In the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of the angels ascending and descending on the Son of man (John 1:51) and of the fact that no one has ascended to heaven except the one who has descended from heaven (John 3:13). Later, after Jesus is resurrected from the dead, he tells Mary Magdalene not to

cling to him because he has not yet ascended to his Father (John 20:17). In John, Jesus' ascension refers to his glorification *after* the cross. He cannot achieve that glorification *apart* from the cross, but the cross by itself is not what the word "ascend" refers to here.

Therefore, Jesus speaks primarily of the moment when his glory will be revealed to *remove* the scandal of his humiliation in the form of a servant from them. Right now, while Jesus remains in a "mean and despicable condition...clothed with flesh...not at all different from other men," the Galileans feel justified in rejecting Jesus;<sup>7</sup> however, the day will come when Jesus will be exalted and given the Name above every other name, so that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:11–12). This manifestation of Jesus' glory happens first at his resurrection, when he is "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4), but the ultimate manifestation of Jesus' glory will take place when he returns again: "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen" (Rev. 1:7). Make no mistake—to worship Jesus remains a scandal today, for we cannot see his glory with our own eyes. Jesus will not always be hidden from us, though. The day is coming when we will all behold him, either to shrink from him in shame at his coming (1 John 2:28), or to be transformed with joy to be like him by seeing him as he is (1 John 3:2).

### The Life-Giving Trinity

Still, Jesus is not surprised to find these false disciples stumbling over the scandal of him. After leaning into the scandal by foreshadowing the day of his ascension and the revelation of his glory, he now steps back from the conversation to give the reasons for their disbelief:

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." (John 6:63–65)

In Jesus' previous conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus stated that no one can be born again apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3–8), and Jesus makes the same point here when he insists that it is the Spirit who gives life.<sup>8</sup> The flesh, on its own apart from the regeneration of the Spirit, cannot penetrate into the glory of Jesus at all, since "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). These Galilean disciples fail to perceive his glory because they are judging him according to the flesh, and not according to the life of the Spirit.

The message of Jesus, then, is not at fault in their unbelief, for "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus has preached to them words from the life-giving Spirit about the life-giving nature of *his* flesh and blood, but yet they still do not believe.<sup>9</sup> Their hearts are hard and dead, blind to the realities of the glory of Christ apart from the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Then, Jesus reminds them of what he preached in John 6:44–45, "that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (John 6:65). Notice that every Person of the Trinity is involved in bringing sinners to life through faith in Jesus: the Father grants

faith, the Son speaks words of spirit and life and gives his flesh and blood, and the Holy Spirit gives life. Apart from this extraordinary work of the Triune God, sinners will never turn to Jesus in faith. Leon Morris writes, “Unbelief is to be expected apart from a divine miracle. It is impossible for anyone to come to Christ unless the Father gives the grace to do so. Left to themselves, sinners prefer their sin. Conversion is always a work of grace.”<sup>10</sup>

### Jesus Knew from the Beginning

Finally, John tells us that “Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him” (John 6:64). We must recognize that Jesus’ knowledge of people’s hearts arises from his divine nature: “Like his omnipotence in the miracles, so he uses his omniscience again and again in dealing with men to the extent that this was necessary in his mission.”<sup>11</sup> This observation is important for two reasons. First, John mentions without any further elaboration here that Jesus knew “who it was who would betray him.” At the end of this passage, though, John will return to this theme to identify Judas Iscariot as the betrayer. In the context of the apostasy of the Galileans, John begins to put forth Judas as the ultimate example of betrayal, while also establishing that Judas’s betrayal did not catch Jesus off guard. Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him; we will explore that thought more when we deal with the final verses of this passage.

Second, it is important to recognize that this perception arises from the omniscience of Jesus’ divine nature so that we do not think too highly of our own ability to judge hearts. It is not the job of the church to make definitive pronouncements about the faith of people, whether positively or negatively. We cannot know whether the person struggling with the same besetting sin possesses, in fact, the smallest mustard seed of faith, and we cannot know whether the person who appears to have their life put together lives, in fact, as a hypocritical, whitewashed tomb. *Jesus* knows those who believe in him and who do not because he possesses the omniscience of God. We, on the other hand, are called to continue bearing witness to the gospel of Jesus to all, praying that the Father will grant repentance through the power of the Holy Spirit. When someone gives a credible profession of faith, we should joyfully receive that person into our fellowship—until they prove that they do not actually believe by persistent, willful, unrepentant disobedience, at which time we may have to remove that person from fellowship through the processes of church discipline.<sup>12</sup> But even then, our job is not to write off such people forever, but to continue bearing witness to the gospel with them to whatever degree we can, praying that God might still grant them repentance. Our ministry is external; only God can change hearts.

### The Promises of Jesus

But notice also that Jesus clarifies again the means by which we feed on his flesh and blood by faith. As we talked about in the discussion of the previous passage, Jesus does not speak directly about the mere reception of the Lord’s Supper, for eating and drinking refer to coming to him by faith (John 6:35, 40)—and specifically, it means feeding on the sacrifice of Jesus by faith (John 6:53–58). Still, we cannot feed by faith on the death of Jesus in an uninformed way, for what good does it do for us to know that some man was crucified two thousand years ago? Beyond the brute fact that Jesus was crucified, we must know *why* Jesus was crucified. We must understand that Jesus came down from heaven to do the will of his Father, to manifest God’s love toward his people, to bear the

judgment of God against our sin, and to give his flesh and blood for the life of those who look upon the Son in faith. We need more than raw, historical data—we need the right *interpretation* of those events in order to believe in the Son for salvation.

Toward this end, Jesus tells us that it is his *words* that are spirit and life, for by his words we understand the meaning of his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and eventual return. Jesus himself resisted Satan's temptation to turn stones into bread after his forty days of fasting by quoting a part of Deuteronomy 8:3: "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (cf. Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4). This idea stands behind the message of John 6, for Jesus has sought to teach that the Jews do not need just a little more manna, for they need every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord—specifically, they need to feed on the Word of God who has been made flesh for them, and on every word that proceeds from *his* mouth, for he is the Son who reveals the Father by the life-giving Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

This is the first means by which Jesus preserves his people: his *promises*. The words that are spirit and life are the promises that whoever comes to Jesus in faith will neither hunger nor thirst (John 6:35); that all who look upon the Son in faith will have eternal life and be raised upon the last day (John 6:40); that whoever believes in him will have eternal life (John 6:47); that anyone who eats from him will live forever (John 6:51); that anyone who feeds on his flesh and drinks his blood will have eternal life (John 6:54). To those whom the Father has given to the Son, these words are not objectionable and scandalous, even though we may not understand them fully. To the elect, these words are promises that we cling to as a life preserver when we are tossed about on the stormy seas of life. We feed on Jesus' words, meditate on his promises, hold fast to what he has spoken, and live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Son. Jesus preserves his people by his promises.

## The Assurances of Jesus (John 6:66–69)

As a confirmation of the unbelief of the false disciples, John now tells us that "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him" (John 6:66). This move is not surprising, but only a finalization of what we have seen all along through the narration of John. The Galileans were among those who were at the Passover Feast to see Jesus' signs (John 4:45), counted among those to whom Jesus did not entrust himself, for he knew the nature of the false faith that was in their hearts (John 2:23–25). While these sign-seeking Galileans eagerly flocked to Jesus to see him perform signs on the sick and to feed them miraculously (John 6:2, 5–14), and while they sought to take him by force to make him king (John 6:15), they did not want the one thing that Jesus most wanted to give to them: *himself*. When Jesus declared that he was the bread of life who has come down from heaven to give life to the world, they refused to believe him (John 6:36, 64). Now, once they realize that Jesus will *only* give him the gift of himself, and that he will *not* give them any further gifts that they desire, they confirm their unbelief by turning back from walking with him any longer.

Note carefully that even Jesus suffers apostasy. We can be discouraged by people we see falling away, wondering if we didn't do enough or perhaps made some catastrophic false step along the way. Jesus, however, did not fail in any aspect of his ministry to these people, and even he

experienced the pain of seeing people walk away from him, the bread of life. Apostasy, then, is not an unfailing sign that the minister has failed in some way, but of the hardness of hearts of those who believe. Certainly, we should do everything we can to mend relationships when they are broken, help people to understand the gospel when it seems offensive, and walk with people through times of crisis, but when we have done all we can, we must prayerfully entrust the results of our ministry to God. Simply put, the gospel *will* offend some people, and not because the gospel is itself offensive, but because their hearts are hard.<sup>14</sup> Still, among all those whom the Father is giving to the Son (John 6:37), none can ultimately fail to come to Jesus. We proclaim the gospel not from an arrogance in our own ability, but in the confidence that God will bring all his sheep into the fold of Christ.

### Apostasy

Once again, we should not overlook the fact that John calls these defectors “disciples.” They walked with Jesus for a time, but they now turn back and do not walk with him further. We should see a clear warning in this: do not take your faith for granted. Yes, the Son will never cast out any whom the Father gives to him (John 6:37), and yes, it is the will of the Father that the Son should lose nothing of all that he has given him, but raise it up on the last day (John 6:39), but that is not an altogether passive experience. Jesus does not teach us to do anything we please with our lives in the sense that nothing really matters, but he instead commands us to come to him in faith: “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40). That’s the promise held out to all those who obey Jesus’ commandment by believing in him, and all those whom the Father is giving to the Son will embrace the Son in faith. Don’t wait for God to zap you to faith—believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

But additionally, we must recognize that Christianity isn’t a one-time decision to believe. As these false disciples illustrate, it is possible to follow Jesus for a time, and yet ultimately fall away. Now, when that kind of apostasy happens, it isn’t because the Son has cast out someone whom the Father has given to him, for the Son can lose *nothing* of what the Father gives to him; there can be no failed hand-off between the Father and the Son because of the perfect power of the Holy Spirit. Instead, just as John earlier distinguished true, saving faith from the kind of faith that draws someone to Jesus because of the signs that he performs (John 2:23–25), so now John demonstrates the way in which some people will follow Jesus for a time, but ultimately fall away—or, to put it another way, “just as there is faith and faith (2:23–25), so are there disciples and disciples.”<sup>15</sup> From our perspective, it can be difficult to tell the difference between the two kinds of discipleship (and the two kinds of faith), since we do not have the insight of Jesus, who “knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him” (John 6:64). A false disciple may look identical to a genuine disciple, and the difference between the two may only become evident over the long term, when we are able to see which one perseveres in following Jesus all the way to the end.

The Apostle John makes a similar point in his First Letter, where he writes again of another group of apostates who recently stopped following Christ within the church: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us” (1 John 2:19). These people followed Jesus for a time, despite the fact that they were never “of us.” Nevertheless, just as Jesus’ eleven

disciples cannot discern the false faith of Judas Iscariot until he actually betrays Jesus (John 7:71), so also the church cannot discern false disciples until they go out from us, “that it might become plain that they all are not of us.” Again, the church does not have infallible knowledge of the genuineness of anyone’s faith, so we can only judge based on whether someone’s profession of faith is *credible*—and when someone stops following Jesus (whether by persistently neglecting to assemble with the saints for worship, or by unrepentantly pursuing sin in rebellion against Jesus), a disciple’s profession is no longer credible.

### The Assurances of Jesus

Jesus wastes no more words on the apostates. Instead, he turns to speak to the Twelve disciples who remain with him. But when he speaks to the Twelve, Jesus very clearly offers a word of assurance to them: “Do you want to go away as well?” Although difficult to bring out in English translation, the Greek question uses the interrogative particle *mē*, a construction that assumes the Twelve will give him a negative answer to his question.<sup>16</sup> That is, Jesus is saying something more like, “You don’t want to go away as well, do you?” But *why* does Jesus expect a negative answer to his question? This question, phrased in this way, could suggest a variety of emotions involved: “protest, indignation, scorn, excitement, sympathy, etc....Here the feeling of assurance prevails.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, Jesus is pointing out to the Twelve the nature of the difference between them and the world: *they aren’t going anywhere*. Jesus knows that he has preached a difficult sermon, and he knows that he appears scandalously offensive in the eyes of the world. But, rather than leaving his Twelve to wonder whether they too might fall away, Jesus illustrates to them that they do not *want* to go anywhere else, and by observing the fact that they remain with him, “he likewise exhorts them not to become the companions of the apostates.”<sup>18</sup>

This is the second means by which Jesus preserves his people: *assurances*. Our lives are filled with discouragements and reasons to doubt, from the doom and gloom on the news every day to the persistent nagging of our consciences when we know that we have done something wrong. Left to ourselves, the life-raft of Jesus’ promises might begin to feel more like the debris of a shipwreck, so that we are lost without any hope that a rescuer will eventually come to save us. But not only does Jesus speak promises to us, he speaks assurances by which he communicates that these promises genuinely belong to *us* if we look on Jesus in faith. There is no great work we must perform in order to earn his salvation, and God does not engage in a lengthy game of bait-and-switch. All those who look to Christ in faith will be saved without exception. Therefore, if we continue looking to him, trusting in him, and waiting on him, it is because the Triune God is at work in us, faithfully bringing that work all the way to its completion on the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). Are you still following Jesus? Take heart—Jesus will save you to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25)!

### Faith

Still, we need to wrestle with this idea of assurance more by examining the response of the disciples to Jesus’ question. Peter, speaking for the Twelve, replies, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God?” (John 6:68–69). Whatever Peter may or may not understand at this point about the flesh and blood of his Master (and, judging by Matt. 16:21–23, he does not understand much of what the flesh and blood of his Master must eventually endure), Peter knows that Jesus *has* the words of

eternal life and that Jesus *is* the Holy One of God. Even though the Twelve lack knowledge about so many key details about Jesus, they nevertheless share a “firmness of conviction” about the teaching and identity of Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

Our salvation is not on probation until we reach some advanced level of theological competency. Peter doesn’t know much, but he knows that he cannot stand by himself and must go to someone—and there is no one else like Jesus “who satisfies the yearning of the heart.”<sup>20</sup> In times of confusion, doubt, and even sin, we draw our assurance of salvation not by trying to gauge our sin levels at any point in time. Instead, we find “an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidences of those graces unto which these promises are made, [and] the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.”<sup>21</sup> That is, are we *still* drawn unavoidably to the promises of Jesus in the gospel, or do we want to go away as well? Our feelings may ebb and flow, so that we sense greater or lesser degrees of assurance, but if we cling to the gospel of Jesus in true faith, then we will never be “utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived; and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.”<sup>22</sup>

This is why we confess our sins and hear the assurance of pardon week by week in worship on the Lord’s Day, and this is why we come back to the Lord’s Table. We need to be reoriented to the gospel each week, reminded that, although we have fallen, we are forgiven according to the gospel of Jesus so that we can eat and drink with God in peace. We need to hear, once again, that these promises are for *me*. This does not mean that we may then sin all the more, that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1–2), but Jesus gives us his assurance with a view toward helping us grow in holiness through sanctification: “And therefore it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance; so far is it from inclining men to looseness.”<sup>23</sup> Don’t wait passively to seek holiness and growth and righteousness through the means of grace that God has given you in his word, sacraments, and prayer—strive to work out your salvation, knowing that it is God working in you by the grace and power of his Holy Spirit. *Keep following Jesus, especially when you don’t feel like it.*

## The Warnings of Jesus (John 6:70–71)

Ultimately, our salvation and assurance falls back not on us or on *our* choices, but on *God’s* choice. Jesus affirms Peter’s answer, saying, “Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil” (John 6:70). Jesus points to his election of the Twelve (or, more precisely, the Eleven) as the grounds of their ongoing faith. They believe because they are those whom the Father has given to him, and therefore Jesus will neither cast them out or lose them (John 6:37, 39). Along these lines, John Piper poignantly asks the question, “Christian, how do you know you will still be a believer when you wake up in the morning? And every morning till you meet Jesus?”<sup>24</sup> You may feel confident right now, but what about tomorrow? Will you wake up and suddenly find that Jesus’ promises ring hollow and his truth seems like a lie? Will you forfeit your salvation at some point



down the road—maybe *decades* from now—on a whim? If everything depends on you and your strength, then you have no guarantees that you will persevere to the end.

Thankfully, everything does *not* depend on you. Peter's confession of faith arises not because Peter is a smarter or better person than the disciples who departed from Jesus; rather, it arises from God's election of Peter. John Piper answers his own question by writing, "The biblical answer is: God will see to it."<sup>25</sup> Your faith *never* arose because of you, but always because of God's gracious election of his people from before the foundations of the earth. So, your faith in the future *also* will not stand because of you, but because of God's gracious work by his Holy Spirit to continue to give you eyes of faith to look upon the Son and be saved (John 6:40). To the children of God, this promise is unspeakably precious, for just as a child expects his parents to feed him his next meal, so also we look expectantly to God to continue feeding our faith by the Holy Spirit on the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.

But notice also that Jesus concludes with a warning: "And yet one of you is a devil." Then, John goes on to explain, "He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him" (John 6:71). As we discussed earlier, part of this statement helps us to recognize that Jesus is not fooled by Judas. He knows exactly who Judas is and what Judas will do to him. Jesus indeed chose Judas to be numbered among the Twelve, but Jesus did not choose Judas for eternal salvation.<sup>26</sup> Certainly, Jesus' choice of the other Eleven was in line with their eternal election, but Jesus chose Judas only to walk with him only for a certain period of time, and for a certain purpose. In this, we find the third means by which Jesus preserves his people: *warnings*.

Jesus is warning Judas, and Judas will do one of two things with the warning. Either he will heed the warning and repent, or he will ignore the warning and continue in his sin. But notice that Jesus does not at this point identify Judas as his betrayer, so all of the disciples heard the warning equally. When Peter, James, John, and all the rest heard Jesus say, "And yet one of you is a devil," they must have asked themselves, "Is it I, Lord?" (cf. Matt. 26:22). For Peter, this statement about a devil in their midst may have especially stung, since Jesus elsewhere tells him, "Get behind me Satan!" (Matt. 16:23). Jesus gives a strong, stern warning, but a warning without the specificity of knowing that Jesus is speaking of Judas. Whatever sins the Eleven may have been pondering, this warning drives them to repent in the fear that Jesus might be speaking about them. Only Judas, to whom the warning was addressed, ignores what Jesus says and continues his duplicitous life.

This is how Jesus uses warnings to preserve his people. To those who do not believe, Jesus' warnings will go in one ear and out the other—just as in the cases of the Galileans and Judas. But for the elect whom the Father is giving to the Son, these warnings instill in us the fear of the Lord as we consider in horror the possibility of being separated from Jesus. Therefore, hear again the warning from this passage: *do not take your faith for granted*. I once spoke with a man who made shipwreck of his life through a series of disobediences that resulted in losing everything he cherished in his life. As he looked back, he realized that he never really took his faith and his obedience seriously. When I asked him what he had learned from this experience, he told me that he used to imagine that his sanctification and growth in Christ would work in the same way that a splinter in your finger is eventually pushed out naturally by your body's healing processes, so that we mainly need to wait passively for our growth to come. But since his fall, he learned that he must do anything and everything necessary to learn to love Jesus more than he loves his sin. If he doesn't, his sin will inevitably win out in his heart and his life. This doesn't mean that any instance of sin can invalidate

the perfect righteousness of Christ that he receives in justification, or that any true believer can ever ultimately fall away. For our sanctification, however, this means that God's gracious work in us takes the form of our own working out of our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12–13). Unless we are actively exercising our faith in reliance upon the Holy Spirit to seek growth in Christ, we will either backslide into places we do not wish to go, or we will ultimately apostatize from Christ and thereby demonstrate that we never really believed in Jesus in the first place.

Still, let's say that we have up to this point ignored Jesus' warnings and continued on in our sin. Are we now condemned forever because we did not heed Jesus' earlier warnings? To answer this question, consider the examples of Judas and Peter who *both* betrayed Jesus. Even when Judas eventually recognizes the horrible thing he has done by betraying his Master, he still does not repent, but instead commits suicide (Matt. 27:3–5). In this way, he forms a stark contrast to Peter, who also betrays Jesus by claiming not to know Jesus (John 18:15–18, 25–27), despite swearing that he would not (John 13:36–38). Peter, however, does not then abandon Jesus altogether or take his own life in despair, but he instead repents of what he has done in his next encounter with Jesus after the resurrection (John 21:15–19). Jesus not only forgives Peter, but he uses Peter extensively as an apostle for the work of building Christ's kingdom on earth.

Hear, then, the promise of the gospel: if you hear the warnings of Jesus in his word, *repent!* You may not receive another opportunity to do so. But, even if you have ignored all of Jesus' warnings up to this point, again: *repent!* In this life, it is never too late to turn from your sin and to look upon Jesus by faith, and all those whom the Father is giving to his Son will indeed repent and look to Jesus in faith. Today, will you believe, or will you walk away from Jesus? And even if you don't formally walk away from Jesus, will you continue (like Judas) to harbor sin in your heart that will ultimately bring about your destruction?

Hear the word of the Lord: repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, for it is the will of the Father that all who look on the Son in faith will have eternal life, and the Son will raise them up on the last day (John 6:40).

## Discussion Questions

1. How is the message of Jesus scandalous in today's context? Where do you find yourself shying away from proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ with your friends, family, co-workers, schoolmates, and neighbors?
2. What does it look like to live by every word that comes from the mouth of Jesus? Describe a time when Jesus' promises to you were precious.
3. Do you have assurance of your salvation? If so, on what grounds? If not, what keeps you from resting in the promises that Jesus makes to all those who look on him in faith?
4. How do Jesus' warnings of apostasy sound to you? Do they drive you to despair? To apathy? To faith?

## Notes

1. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 338.
2. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 504–05.
3. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 270. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xii.x.html>>
4. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 300–01.
5. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 301.
6. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 245–46.
7. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, vol. I, 272–73. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xii.x.html>>
8. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 246.
9. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 301–02.
10. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 342.
11. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 506.
12. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 275. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xii.x.html>>
13. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 302.
14. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 277. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xii.xi.html>>
15. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 300.
16. BDAG, “μή,” 646.
17. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 519.
18. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 278. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xii.xi.html>>
19. Köstenberger, *John*, 221.
20. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 248.
21. *Westminster Confession of Faith* 18.2.
22. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 18.4
23. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 18.3.
24. John Piper, “Will You Be a Believer Tomorrow Morning?” August 20, 2013. Accessed April 26, 2017. <<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/will-you-be-a-believer-tomorrow-morning>>
25. Piper, “Will You Be a Believer Tomorrow Morning?”
26. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 280. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xii.xi.html>>