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Bridgeway Church  
Gospel of John #22  
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## Sermon Summary #22

### If not to Jesus, to whom will you go? John 6:60-71

I wonder if you've ever given much thought to how much of our lives is spent trying to avoid offending people. I thought about it this week, and I was amazed at the steps we take to be as inoffensive as possible. Most of it goes back to the way our parents raised us.

Chew your food with your mouth closed! Keep your elbows off the table! Wipe your nose! Don't belch in public! Dress modestly. Don't draw unnecessary attention to yourself. Avoid actions or issues that will make other people feel uneasy or threatened. Bathe regularly. Use deodorant every day. Brush your teeth. Behave with dignity in public. Observe proper etiquette.

Notwithstanding our best efforts not to offend other people, there is one issue that is inherently and unavoidably offensive that not all the etiquette in the world can soften or make palatable: Christianity. The Christian faith is offensive, pure and simple. Of course, it goes without saying that it is also the most glorious and beautiful and liberating truth in our world.

But consider just a few of the reasons why people find the Christian faith offensive. Christianity claims a moral certainty on matters of good and evil, right and wrong. This offends those who think that we should be more tolerant and willing to acknowledge that good and evil are whatever the individual thinks they should be. The Christian claim of exclusivity is offensive. By exclusivity I mean the declaration that there is only one way to be reconciled to God and forgiven of one's sins and that is through faith in Jesus Christ.

Then there is our belief in the reality of hell and eternal punishment. Our belief that the Bible clearly affirms that human beings are born wicked and alienated from God turns people off. Our affirmation that the Bible is the final standard for determining truth is off-putting to many, if not most, outside of the church. That we take a firm stand on the issue of homosexuality and abortion, for example, offends many who think that the only relevant factor is what makes a person feel good about himself or herself.

A few years back I read an interview with a California pastor who spoke of his desire to eliminate anything offensive in Christianity. He said that he refuses any longer to refer to people as sinners or to speak of the wrath of God or of the need for repentance. Although advocates of what has come to be known as "Seeker-Sensitive" Christianity would, in private, affirm the basic truths of the Christian faith, they have determined to minimize if not altogether eliminate from their Sunday services the more pointed and potentially offensive elements in the gospel message.

Perhaps the most offensive element in all of Christianity is Jesus Christ himself. From a distance, people admire him and speak highly of him. From a distance, they show their respect. But up close and personal, they are offended. When they actually take the time and make the effort to examine what he said about himself and what he accomplished on the cross, they recoil in horror. No one is offended by the baby Jesus in a manger, especially at Christmas time. No one is offended by the good moral teacher, the wise sage.

But when Jesus repeatedly claims to be God in human flesh, people take offense. When Jesus demands undivided loyalty, love, and allegiance, people take offense. When he insists that in order to come to the Father one must believe in him alone, people take offense. When he displays his holiness and power and authority over all mankind, people take offense.

I suppose the greatest cause of offense, the most severe stone of stumbling when it comes to Jesus, is his death on the cross. As long as his death is viewed as nothing more than an example of self-sacrificial love, people admire him. As long as his death is viewed as a brave and courageous martyr giving his life for some noble social or political cause,

people praise him. But when his death is portrayed in Scripture as a substitutionary sacrifice in which he endures and exhausts in himself the wrath of God that we deserved to suffer, people take offense.

Some of you may wish it otherwise. Perhaps you've been ostracized by friends and family because you have taken a firm stand on the offensive elements in Christianity. You may even have lost a job or a promotion at work because you refused to compromise on what the Bible teaches. You may even be tempted to embrace the ministry philosophy of that California pastor and to suggest to me and the other Elders at Bridgeway that we should soften our tone and pare off the rough edges in our statement of faith. Of course, that is one thing that we will never do.

Let's face this reality head on and be honest: Christianity is offensive, and so is Jesus. There were people in the first century who took offense with Jesus. They followed him as long as he continued to perform miracles and challenged the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. But when he said hard things, offensive things, things that many people consider off-putting, they bailed out on him. We see this quite clearly in our passage for today.

*When professing "disciples" take offense (vv. 60-65)*

It may come as something of a shock to you to hear that the people who took offense at Jesus and eventually walked away from him are called "**his disciples**" (vv. 60-61). But we need to understand how John uses this term. To refer to someone as a "disciple" does not necessarily mean he or she was a true believer.

The term "disciple" was often used of anyone who followed Jesus for any reason. They may have been attracted to him for his teaching or from observing his miraculous works. Virtually anyone who responded to Jesus in a positive fashion could be called a "disciple." For example, later in John 8 we see this confirmed. We are told in John 8:30 that after Jesus spoke, "many believed in him." But in the very next verse we read:

"So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'" (John 8:31-32).

These who "believed" him are the very ones who Jesus said are seeking "to kill" him (John 8:37). Jesus went so far as to refer to them as children of the devil (John 8:44).

The point is that **not all so-called "belief" is saving faith**. Not all so-called "disciples" truly love and trust Jesus and fully embrace his message.

These "disciples" in John 6 reacted strongly to the words of Jesus when he spoke of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. When Jesus declared that only by coming to him and believing him would they inherit eternal life, they said: "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (v. 60). The word translated "hard" is the Greek term *skleros*, from which we get our word "sclerosis" or hardening of the arteries. "Hard" doesn't mean intellectually difficult, too deep, too complex, or hard to understand. It means harsh, offensive, intolerable, distasteful. It isn't that they couldn't comprehend the meaning of what he said. They understood all too well. They simply didn't like it. They despised his words and took offense at what he said.

Simply put, their response wasn't, "Huh?" Their response was, "Ouch!"

Why? What offended them? What is the antecedent of the word "it" in v. 60, which, when they heard "it" caused them to react so negatively?

We know that many who observed the feeding of the 5,000 were solely interested in food. They followed Jesus because he was their meal ticket, literally speaking. Others followed him because they thought he was the prophesied leader who would become their king and overthrow Rome and deliver them from subservience to their conquerors (John 6:14-15). They failed to see the spiritual reality to which the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 pointed.

They were not prepared or willing to relinquish sovereignty over their own lives and give themselves wholly to him. To call Jesus "sir" is one thing. To call him "Lord" is entirely something else.

They were probably offended by his claim to be greater than Moses who only provided physical manna in the wilderness. Here Jesus is claiming that the manna in the OT was a symbol or prophecy of himself and the eternal life that would come to those who ate of the living bread he provided. This was simply more than they could stomach (spiritually speaking!).

They were undoubtedly offended by his demand that they eat his flesh and drink his blood as the only hope for forgiveness and eternal life and true satisfaction. They didn't like what he said about his coming down from heaven. This implicit claim to being God in human flesh struck them as ludicrous, indeed, as blasphemous.

They didn't like the fact that following him meant death to self, death to pride and position and their feelings of self-importance. They probably bristled at what John the Baptist said of him: "He must increase, but I must decrease." Simply put, they were offended by Jesus. So they walked away.

Jesus was clearly aware that other of his "disciples" were "grumbling" about the reaction of the unbelievers (v. 61). So he asks them: "Do you take offense at this?" (v. 61). That question is also intended for us today.

The word translated "take offense" is *skandalizō*, from which we get our term to "scandalize." It was often used in the days of Jesus to describe a trap set for birds and other animals. It was applied to a stone or obstacle against which one might stump his toe or one that might cause a person to trip and fall. Jesus is asking them, and us:

"Are you embarrassed by me and what I am saying? Does it cause you to want to turn away because of your fear that if other people see you with me they will laugh or make fun of you, or perhaps reject you and cut you off or ignore you? Do the things I say and claim make you feel uncomfortable? Do you wish that I would whisper in private so that others wouldn't hear me?"

It's at this point that Jesus says, in effect, "if you guys are put off by what I've said thus far, try this on for size! What will be your response if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" Now, what does he mean by this?

I think this reference to "ascending" is his way of summarizing the manner in which Jesus will save us, namely, by being lifted up on the cross, rising from the dead, and ascending to the right hand of God on high. The Jewish leaders were offended when Jesus claimed to have come down from heaven (vv. 41-42). So will those who are still with him be offended when they see the way that he will go back, that is, by way of the cross?

***If there ever was anything genuinely offensive in Christianity, it is the cross.*** Listen yet again to Paul's explanation of this in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

The cross was one of the most infamous and offensive realities in the ancient world. Death on a cross was reserved for slaves and outcasts. By law, no Roman citizen could ever be crucified. It was too shameful and degrading for a citizen of Rome. Death by crucifixion was designed not simply to kill the body but to humiliate the soul. It was deliberately crafted to heap shame and reproach on the victim. Scholars have marveled at how infrequently crucifixion is mentioned in the great literary works of ancient times. We now know that it was because no self-respecting author or literary artist wanted to defile his work by mentioning something so blasphemous and hideous as death on a cross.

Crucifixion wasn't regarded as "folly" (to use Paul's word) because it was difficult to understand. The objection to crucifixion wasn't due to any intellectual problems it created. Rather, it was regarded as aesthetically repugnant. It was truly an obscenity in the ancient world.

Therefore, one may have a Messiah, and one may have a crucifixion, but to speak of a *crucified Messiah* was absurd. It was the height of folly. And to go one step further and suggest that faith in a crucified Messiah was the way to salvation and forgiveness was something that simply would not register in their thinking.

So, Jesus is pushing the point here. It's as if he says, "Listen to me: as offensive as some of my statements may be, as offensive and off-putting as it may be to insist that to receive eternal life you must eat my flesh and drink my blood, nothing you've seen or heard up until now is as offensive and repugnant and aesthetically off-putting as the fact that I will be crucified, nailed to a tree in public, and subjected to public humiliation in every way."

So what then does Jesus mean when he says in v. 63 that "it is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all"? I think there are two things in view here. First, Jesus is saying that to take his words literally, as if he is advocating cannibalism, and failing to discern the spiritual importance of what he's saying, is useless. Physical things such as feeding the multitude and eating his flesh and drinking his blood count for nothing unless one penetrates beyond such symbols to what they really mean. But when a person understands the spiritual significance and importance of what Jesus is saying, and responds in faith, one finds life.

Second, I think he's saying that what brings you or anyone else to the decisive moment when you believe what I say and embrace me as Lord is the Holy Spirit. It isn't the flesh or anything you do. It is the result of what the Spirit does. And the instrument or tool the Spirit uses are the words of Jesus. His words "are spirit and life" (v. 63). The words of Jesus, such as those we've been reading and studying here in John 6, put him on display and are used by the Spirit to illumine our minds and awaken our hearts to who Jesus is.

Jesus knows all too well that not everyone will believe what he is saying. He isn't surprised by the fact that they will press his words and actions in a rigidly literal way and fail to see the spiritual truths to which they point. So he repeats here what he said earlier in John 6:44 – "This is why I told you (earlier in v. 44), that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

If people are to come to Jesus and receive Jesus and believe all he has said and receive eternal life, it isn't because in their "flesh" they are highly intelligent. It is because of God's sovereign grace in granting them faith and opening their eyes and hearts to the truth of who he is.

*Where else shall we go? To whom shall we give our lives? (vv. 66-71)*

As noted earlier, up until now Jesus had a fairly large following. His teaching, his new and challenging ideas about God, his miracles, the authority he displayed when interacting with the religious leaders of Israel, all combined to mobilize large crowds to follow him.

But as soon as they began to realize that he was more than just another rabbi, that he insisted on exclusive devotion to himself, as soon as he claimed that he alone was the way to eternal life, their applause ceased and they simply left.

Consider how this happens all the time in today's world. People walk into our building out of curiosity. They've heard of Bridgeway. They are intrigued and curious. Perhaps a friend has invited them to attend. At first, they like the music and the freedom and passion of our worship. Maybe they enjoy the knowledge that comes from listening to my sermons. Then, suddenly, they truly hear and understand what we're saying, or more accurately, they hear and understand what Jesus is saying. They realize that we really mean what we sing! They are gripped with the realization that what we point out in Scripture is reality, and that eternal life is found only in Jesus, to the exclusion of every other religion and every other leader.

They soon stop coming. When asked why, they may respond by saying, "Well, this isn't at all what I bargained for. You people actually believe what the Bible says. That's more than I can swallow." And they disappear.

It makes one wonder how Jesus felt about so many turning away, so many who before loudly applauded him but now reject him. It's quite clear that he wasn't in the least surprised by it. In fact, he knew from the get-go who didn't truly believe in him. And he actually cites the example of Judas Iscariot. It's as if he says, "even among my closest companions there is one who will take offense at me and eventually betray me."

Was he hurt by it all? Not in the sense in which you and I might be hurt. He was self-confident and secure. He knew who he was and what he had come to do. But he was undoubtedly grieved at the thought that so many who left would never find elsewhere or in anyone else what they most needed.

So, he turns to the twelve and says: "Well, what about you guys? Am I an embarrassment to you too? Make up your mind. Most everyone else has left. Do you want to go with them?" Peter speaks up not only for himself but for the others as well:

"Where would we go? To whom would we turn? You alone have the words that are true and life-giving."

They had been with him long enough to know that to leave him now would be ridiculous and would serve no good purpose. My guess is that Peter and the others reflected on what they had seen and heard:

Here was a man devoid of hypocrisy, unlike the Pharisees and Scribes.

Here as a man whom we also know to be God.

Here is a man who cleansed lepers merely by touching them.

Here is a man who knows the deepest and most secretive thoughts of our hearts.

Here is a man who can walk on water!

Here is a man who would engage a Samaritan woman in conversation and disclose to her the most intimate secrets of her life.

Here is a man who could heal and raise up a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years.

Here is a man of such gentleness, yet unyielding authority; a man of power and compassion; a man of love and justice.

It's as if Peter said to him: "No one ever spoke like you. No one ever acted like you. No one has ever been so strong and yet so meek, so tough and yet so tender, so authoritative and yet so gentle, so profound in his teaching yet so simple in how you say it, so willing to be killed for sins he did not commit, so worthy of honor and yet so willing to be dishonored, so deserving of immediate and unqualified obedience and yet so patient with people like us, so capable of answering all of our questions and yet so willing to remain silent under abuse. There is no one like you, Jesus. Where do you suggest we go? To whom else do you suggest we give our lives?"

It's breathtaking to think that what offended others, attracted Peter. What they hated about Jesus, Peter loved. What they found intolerable, Peter enjoyed. What disgusted them, delighted Peter. "Lord," says Peter, "your words are filled with life! Your heart is filled with mercy! Where else are we going to go to find anyone who can do for us what you can do?"

You know what a Christian is? *A Christian is the person who has nowhere else to go.* Of course, that's not because there aren't other religions and other leaders and teachers. There are countless philosophies and alternative ways of explaining reality. But they all come up short!

#### *Why are you a Christian?*

So, if someone asked you why you are a Christian, why do you follow Jesus and not Muhammad or Buddha or some other religious faith, what would you say? I'm sure there are quite a few intellectual, historical, archaeological, and theological reasons we all could give, but aside from those, why do you give your life, time, money, and efforts to Jesus? If asked, I would respond by saying what Peter did: "To whom shall I go?" . . .

Nobody else will love me the way Jesus does.

Nobody else tells me the truth like Jesus does.

No one else will always be there when I need him most, like Jesus is.

No one else can comfort me in suffering like Jesus can.

Nobody else can reassure my heart when doubts arise, like Jesus does.  
Nobody else can give me peace in the midst of turmoil, like Jesus does.  
Nobody else can teach with the authority that Jesus has.  
Nobody else will accept me as I am, no strings attached, the way Jesus does.  
Nobody else can die for my sins the way Jesus did.  
No one else has ever risen from the dead the way Jesus did.  
No one intercedes for me at the right hand of the Father the way Jesus does.

There is no philosophy, no political party, no power, no amount of money or prestige that can do for me what Jesus does.

The resolve of the disciples to stay with Jesus wasn't because of any high hopes they had for fame and fortune. It wasn't because he promised them power and wealth and comfort. They didn't stay out of ignorance, simply because they didn't know any better. They stayed because they knew who he was: as John 6:69 makes clear: "***You are the Holy One of God!***" You are Messiah, Lord, King, Redeemer, God in human flesh.

Let me ask all of you the same question today. "To whom will you go? What will you believe?" Will you run to a form of spirituality that denies the reality of sin, to those who insist our problem is merely one of bad education or adverse influence? Will you align yourself with those who tell you that personal faith in Jesus is too narrow and exclusive, that God will in the end save all who are sincere? Will you run to another religious system that assures you any sexual expression you desire is entirely permissible? After all, it is only your will that matters, not God's.

Or perhaps you will run to and embrace the ever-increasing number of professing atheists. There simply is no God, and if there is no God, I can live however I choose and believe whatever makes me happy. But, of course, if there is no God and we are all no more than the accidental conglomeration of random molecules, there is no basis for saying one system of belief is true and another false, or that one action is evil and another good.

I do not make my case for Christianity by telling you that I have persuasive answers to every question you may choose to ask. Jesus didn't say this either. But he does assure us that there are answers, and that in the age to come we will sit at his feet and every concern will be addressed.

It would be very easy for us to be discouraged by all the unbelief in this chapter. Thousands of people watched and were blessed as Jesus fed them with only a few loaves of bread and two fish. But the vast majority of them did not believe him for who he was. When we come to the end of the chapter it appears that only eleven are left who truly believe. Does this mean that Satan is winning? No!

In fact, to prove that he isn't winning, ***God puts "a devil" right in the middle of the apostles.*** He's one of the Twelve. And he is there to do precisely what God has ordained and planned for him to do. I see in this an incredibly comforting truth, that God is sovereign even over the most disappointing and confusing of experiences. Jesus chose all twelve of them, knowing full well from the beginning that one of the twelve, Judas, would betray him. Nothing, not even the presence among the twelve of a devil, a betrayer, a liar, can thwart God's purposes. In point of fact, he fulfills God's purposes. And the same is true of you and me. No circumstance, no matter how devastating and disappointing, can thwart or reverse or overcome God's purpose for you.

### *Conclusion*

It is always possible that, notwithstanding all that Jesus has said and done, you may choose to turn and walk away. Judas Iscariot did it. Jesus said it clearly: "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil. He spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him" (John 6:70-71). Judas saw everything Peter saw. He heard everything John heard. He was a witness to the feeding of the 5,000 no less so than was Matthew. He saw Jesus walking on the water just as James did. Yet he did not believe Jesus. Instead, he betrayed Jesus. One said, "I'm offended." The others said, "We're in love."

So let me close with a question to those of you who are not Christians, who have not yet chosen to follow Jesus faithfully: "Where else can you go? To whom can you turn? Whom can you trust? Who can satisfy your deepest longings and bring joy and peace and hope to your heart the way Jesus does?"