

“When the Going Gets Tough . . .”—John 6:66-69

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “When the Going Gets Tough . . .”, is John 6:66-69 → *After this many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him. So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered Him, “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.”*

This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“When the going gets tough . . . the tough get going.” This age-old cliché is meant to motivate a person into action when a circumstance or activity proves to be an “obstacle” or challenge to him. Depending upon the individual, a task which proves to be “tough” could include anything from getting out of the house to physical paralysis as a result of illness or injury. For you, it may be any number of tasks in between those two extremes. While one person may try to “encourage” a person to move forward and meet his obstacle “head on” with the phrase “when the going gets tough, the tough get going,” it may actually drive that person to further despair and “shut down” in his “tough” situation. Besides . . . it’s easier said than done.

What if the going gets “tough” because of the teaching of God’s Word, specifically as it applies to the Person & Work of Jesus? The disciples listening to Jesus’ teaching found His Words to be very “tough,” that is, difficult to hear and understand. (cf. John 6:60) His words were “tough” for the people to hear because they wondered how Jesus, Whose parents they knew, could make such claims about Himself having *come down from heaven*. (cf. John 6:41-42) I wonder how many of us would have reacted the same way if someone with whom we were acquainted would make the claims Jesus made throughout His discussion in John 6. Listen to some of these claims: *I am the living bread that came down from heaven*. (cf. John 6:51) *Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life?* (cf. John 6:54) *My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink?* (cf. John 6:55) *Whoever feeds on Me, he also will live because of Me?* (cf. John 6:57)

For most people such words would be very “tough” to hear coming from a fellow human being claiming to give people eternal life! Actually the reason for their offense was they viewed Jesus only according to “the flesh” (i.e. a relationship with God based upon Jewish nationality) rather than viewing Him by faith (i.e. a trust in Jesus as the Messiah sent from God **based upon the written Old Testament Scriptures**). Romans 9:31-33 says *that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they*

*did not pursue it by faith . . . They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; **and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.**”*

The real issue at stake in their offense of Jesus was how they dealt with God’s Word since Jesus came in accord with that Word. As with many church members today it is safe to say that they knew little about God’s written Word while feeling secure in their relationship with God based upon their “religious” ideas and practices. It is true that they did not own a “Bible” which they could open everyday (let alone pull up anywhere on their smart phone). We have no excuse for not reading God’s Word. The Jews with whom Jesus was discoursing heard the Scriptures read every Sabbath in synagogue and received teaching based upon that Word, that is, unless they skipped church. Once Jesus was asked to read the Scriptures in synagogue worship in His hometown. According to Luke 4:17-21 *He unrolled the scroll . . . of the prophet Isaiah, read from it, rolled it back up, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him* (probably expecting Him to give some teaching on what He has just read), and He said *to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”* Since Jesus came in accord with the written Scriptures you must view Him in faith on the basis of those Scriptures—not on the

basis of your own ideas and desires.

Choosing to view God and Jesus from your own perceptions buffers the words of God which are tough to hear. God's Word tells you that you are a sinner, eternally lost without faith in Jesus Who gave His flesh as a sacrifice to atone for your sin. That's a tough word because people generally do not want to have their sin pointed out to them, confess their sins to God and submit to Him in repentance and faith in Jesus. Thus Jesus' words to His disciples in Luke 10:16 → *The one who rejects Me rejects Him Who sent Me*. If someone is offended by the Word of Jesus it is a sign of unbelief and can only be remedied by coming to Jesus in repentance and faith.

Unfortunately, according to verse 66 of our text, when the going got tough, many of the tough "shut down." It says: *After this many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him*. How sad. Hearing Jesus' teaching only from a human perspective caused "spiritual shut down." Instead of simply trusting Jesus at His Word they "ran away" in unbelief, taking offense at Him.

This happens all too often today as well. Unless one can be convinced somehow that Jesus is really Who He claimed to be he will take offense at Him and live in basic unbelief no matter how "religious" or "believing" he claims to be. Being convinced that Jesus is the Christ usually is a cognitive process by which you grasp on to something which

satisfies your mind so that you can assent to the validity of Jesus' Person & Work. This is not faith. God's Word doesn't simply convince you that Jesus is the Christ. Through His Word the Holy Spirit convicts you to see that He is the Christ Who has lived, died and rose **for the forgiveness of your sins**. (cf. John 16:7-11) This is why Jesus said in John 6:63 → *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.*

It was not the purpose of Jesus to simply offend people with His words. Rather, He desires all to experience the Holy Spirit's work in their lives so that they can receive His blessings through faith in Himself. Jesus confronted the Twelve disciples in verse 67 of our text by asking: *Do you want to go away as well?* It was a question forcing them to "count the cost" of their commitment to Him. This is very important since Jesus was clear that believing in and openly following Him would involve "tough going." He says in Luke 21:12 that people *will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for My name's sake*. He constantly reminds us that *we will be hated by all for His name's sake*. (cf. Matthew 10:22)

However, in the same breath Jesus promised: *But the one who endures to the end will be saved*. (cf. Matthew 10:22) Faith looks beyond physical existence in this world to a physical existence in the world to

come eternally! Such a response of faith was expressed by the Twelve's answer to Jesus in verses 68-69 of our text: *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.* They responded by recognizing Who Jesus was by faith and their dependence upon His Word for eternal life!

Instead of "shut down" at the sound of Jesus' teaching, His Words are a means through which the Holy Spirit creates faith and empowers us for obedient living. When someone places God's Word before us we do not get defensive and "shut down" conversation because it feels like "tough going." Rather, we're willing to open our Bible and share that Word with each other. When someone criticizes or attacks us because we think and act according to God's Word we don't "shut down" because the "going is tough." We will continue in humility to bring God's Word to bear on the situation as we go on living for Jesus. You see, "when the going gets tough, the tough go to Jesus" as revealed in the written Word of God (i.e. Bible).

Yes, much of the time we don't feel all that "tough" spiritually. In fact, we may feel weak, more like that man who said to Jesus, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!" (cf. Mark 9:24) Still, you have received the Holy Spirit so that you can recognize that you're not as "tough" as you think, and embrace your weaknesses, depending upon Him for *life* eternal and

temporal. Like the apostle Paul, Jesus also says to you in 2 Corinthians 12:9 → *My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.* Thus, along with Paul, you can *boast all the more gladly of your weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon you.* When the going gets tough, God's people go to Christ and His Word and then go into their daily vocations of life to serve Him as they serve others, empowered by the Holy Spirit working through the written Word of God. Amen.

*God gave us a spirit not of fear
but of power and love and self-control.*

(2 Timothy 1:7)

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