

John 6:56 & 60-69

<sup>56</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. <sup>60</sup> On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” <sup>61</sup> Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? <sup>62</sup> Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! <sup>63</sup> The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. <sup>64</sup> Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. <sup>65</sup> He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.” <sup>66</sup> From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. <sup>67</sup> “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

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LAST SUNDAY AFTERNOON I SAT DOWN TO RELAX BY WATCHING A MOVIE I HAD SEEN BEFORE.

THE STORY WAS ABOUT BASEBALL, AND WHILE I DID NOT REALIZE AT THE TIME, THE MOVIE BECAME BACKGROUND RESEARCH FOR TODAY’S SERMON.

THE SERMON TITLE IS: “JESUS AND BASEBALL”, WHICH MAY SOUND STRANGE SINCE WE KNOW HE NEVER PLAYED THE GAME, BECAUSE IT DID NOT EXIST BACK THEN

HOWEVER, IF WE STRETCH OUR IMAGINATION SOME, WE WILL FIND A NEW PERSPECTIVE FROM WHICH TO VIEW THE SECOND HALF OF CHAPTER SIX OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

IN THAT PART OF THE GOSPEL JESUS CHALLENGES THE CROWD OF DISCIPLES AND OTHERS TO FOLLOW HIM.

FOR PEOPLE TODAY HIS WORDS CONCERN WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN. BEING A CHRISTIAN INVOLVES LIVING IN JESUS AND HIM LIVING IN US, IN A WAY THAT OTHERS CAN SEE.

THIS INCLUDES THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHO IS THE ONE WHO IMPLANTS WITHIN US OUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

THE SECULAR DICTIONARY DEFINES A CHRISTIAN AS SOMEONE WHO FOLLOWS THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS.

BUT A BIBLICAL DICTIONARY OFFERS A MORE ACCURATE DEFINITION, ONE THAT IS CLOSER TO THE SAVIOR’S MESSAGE. IT SAYS A CHRISTIAN IS SOMEONE WHO “ADHERES TO JESUS CHRIST”.

THIS WAS THE MESSAGE OF LAST WEEK’S SERMON, BECAUSE JESUS SAID HE LIVES IN US AND WE LIVE IN HIM

THIS WEEK WE ADD TO THAT THE FACT - BEING A CHRISTIAN INCLUDES A FAITH THAT LEADS US TO JOIN OUR LIVES WITH CHRIST, EVEN WHEN WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND HIS VISION.

IT COULD BE SAID, WE BECOME MEMBERS OF JESUS’ TEAM, AND BONDED TO HIM IN A WAY THAT GOES BEYOND JUST PURSUING THE SAME GOAL. SO LET’S LOOK AT THE STORY:

IT IS AT JOHN 6:25, WE LEARN THAT THE CROWD, WHOM JESUS HAD FED MIRACULOUSLY THE DAY BEFORE, SOUGHT HIM OUT ONCE MORE.

WITH THEIR ARRIVAL HE WAS BEGINS A VERBAL EXCHANGE WHICH, IF WE USE OUR IMAGINATION, CAN BE DESCRIBED IN BASEBALL TERMS.

NOW IMAGINE JESUS STEPS UP TO THE PLATE, BAT IN HAND. THE FIRST PITCH COMES IN THE FORM THE CROWD ASKING “WHAT MUST WE DO TO PERFORM THE WORK OF GOD?”

JESUS SWINGS IN RESPONSE, SAYING IN VS, 33 AND 35, “FOR THE BREAD OF GOD COMES DOWN FROM HEAVEN... I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE. WHOEVER COMES TO ME WILL NEVER BE HUNGRY AND WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME WILL NEVER BE THIRSTY.”

THE OPPOSING TEAM'S REACTION IS FOUND IN VS 41. THEY BEGIN TO COMPLAIN TO ONE ANOTHER BECAUSE HE SAID HE WAS THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN. --- THIS WAS STRIKE ONE!

THE SECOND PITCH OCCURRED IN THE FORM OF COMPLAINTS ABOUT JESUS' FAMILY BACKGROUND, LEADING THEM TO QUESTION HIS AUTHORITY.

JESUS SWINGS BY SAYING IN VS. 51 "I AM THE LIVING BREAD THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, WHOEVER EATS OF THIS BREAD WILL LIVE FOREVER. THE BREAD THAT I GIVE FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD IS MY FLESH."

THE RESPONSE WAS NOT FAVORABLE, THEY EXCLAIMED, "HOW CAN THIS MAN GIVE US HIS FLESH TO EAT?" --- THIS WAS STRIKE TWO!

THE NEXT PITCH SAILS TOWARDS THE PLATE BY WAY OF THE CROWD'S EXPRESSIONS OF CONFUSION AND DISMAY.

JESUS SWINGS AGAIN SAYING IN VS. 56, "THOSE WHO EAT MY FLESH AND DRINK MY BLOOD ABIDE IN ME AND I IN THEM."

THEN IN VS. 60, THE CROWD, INCLUDING SOME FOLLOWERS OF JESUS, SAID:

"THIS TEACHING IS DIFFICULT, WHO CAN ACCEPT IT?" THEN WE HEAR MANY TURN AWAY. - THIS WAS STRIKE THREE!

THE GOOD NEWS IS JESUS GETS ANOTHER TURN AT BAT, BECAUSE HIS INNER CORE OF FOLLOWERS, THE TWELVE DISCIPLES, DO NOT LEAVE.

THEIR EXPRESSIONS BECOME THE TWELVES' FIRST PITCH TO HIM.

JESUS SWINGS BY ASKING THEM IF THEY ALSO WISH TO TURN AWAY, PETER RESPONDS: "LORD, TO WHOM CAN WE GO? YOU HAVE THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE."

AND IT IS A HIT, A HIGH BALL SAILS INTO RIGHT FIELD AND HITS THE WALL, THEN IT IS FUMBLER BY THE OUTFIELD PLAYER.

JESUS SAILS OVER FIRST AND TURNS TO SECOND BASE, FLIES PAST IT, AND ROUNDS TO THIRD. AND HE IS SAFE ON THIRD BASE!

NOW FOR THE REPLAY: JESUS SPEAKS THE WORDS OF LIFE, WHICH TAKES HIM TO FIRST BASE.

AND HE IS THE HOLY ONE, IN WHOM THE LORD OF HOSTS DWELT ON EARTH IN HUMAN FLESH- THIS BRINGS HIM TO SECOND BASE.

BY THIS TIME, THE TWELVE DISCIPLES HAVE BEGUN TO GRASP IT IS JESUS WHO PROVIDES THEM WITH A CONNECTION TO THE LORD THEIR GOD THEY CANNOT FIND ANYWHERE ELSE. SO JESUS RESTS AT THIRD BASE.

IN CASE YOU ARE WONDERING WHEN AND HOW HE GETS HOME-IT COULD BE SAID HE CROSSED HOME PLATE AND SCORED, BY HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

BUT LET US RETURN TO PETER'S STATEMENT RIGHT NOW BECAUSE THE MESSAGE THAT JESUS HAS THE WORDS OF LIFE IS IMPORTANT TO US.

TRULY, JESUS' WORDS HAVE THE POWER OF LIFE, THE POWER TO HELP AND HEAL, TO DIRECT, AND TRANSFORM US.

THIS IS GOOD NEWS, AND YET WE MUST ALSO REMEMBER THAT SOMETIMES HEALING OR TRANSFORMATION IS NOT EASY, IT CAN EVEN BE PAINFUL.

THE "HARD" SAYINGS OF JESUS, EVEN WHEN THEY CONTAIN GOD'S WORD OF LIFE, ARE OFTEN NOT EASY TO DIGEST.

THIS MAKES OUR FOLLOWING JESUS MORE CHALLENGING, WHICH SHOWS THAT WE ARE NOT SO DIFFERENT FROM THE FICKLE CROWD.

WE MUST ADMIT, AS LONG AS THE SAVIOR'S MESSAGE IS ONE OF COMFORT AND HOPE, IT IS EASY TO BE A TEAM PLAYER.

BUT THE GAME IS NOT AS MUCH FUN WHEN THE WORDS OF LIFE CHALLENGE OUR CHOICES OR DESIRES, OR EVEN WORSE- OFFEND US IN SOME WAY.

THEN, LIKE THE CROWD IN THE GOSPEL STORY WE CAN BECOME DISMAYED AND CONFUSED BY THE WINNING STRATEGY JESUS INSTRUCTS US TO ENGAGE IN.

IT IS THEN WE MAY BEGIN TO DRIFT AWAY FOR A LITTLE WHILE, NOT SURE WE WISH TO HAVE JESUS COACH US ANYMORE.

BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS- JESUS WAITS TO WELCOME US BACK, WHEN WE ONCE AGAIN REALIZE WE HAVE NO WHERE ELSE TO GO EXCEPT TO HIM.

THIS BRINGS US TO WHAT SOME MAY BE WONDERING ABOUT ALL THIS OF TIME, WHICH IS: WHAT MOVIE DID I WATCH, THAT INSPIRED THIS NOVEL APPROACH TO THE GOSPEL STORY?

THE MOVIE IS CALLED "42", AND IT IS ABOUT JACKIE ROBINSON, WHO WORE THAT NUMBER ON HIS UNIFORM WHEN HE PLAYED FOR THE BROOKLYN DODGERS.

THE STORY IS ABOUT THE INTEGRATION OF MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL, WHICH BEGAN WHEN JACKIE ROBINSON JOINED THE DODGERS. THE OTHER PROMINENT FIGURE IN THE STORY IS BRANCH RICKEY, WHO WAS THE HEAD OF THE DODGER FRANCHISE.

AND IN HIS ROLE, IT WAS RICKEY WHO INVITED ROBINSON TO LEAVE WHAT WAS CALLED THE "NEGRO LEAGUE" TO PLAY WITH THE WHITE BOYS.

WHY DID HE DO IT? WELL BRANCH RICKEY WAS A DEVOUT CHRISTIAN, AND IT WAS HIS LOVE FOR JESUS, ALONG WITH HIS LOVE FOR BASEBALL THAT CHANGED THE GAME FOREVER.

WHEN JACKIE ROBINSON ASKED BRANCH RICKEY WHY HE WANTED TO INTEGRATE THE GAME, RICKEY EXPLAINED THAT IN COLLEGE HE PLAYED ON AN INTEGRATED TEAM.

AND WHILE HE STOOD UP FOR THE BLACK PLAYERS AT TIMES, LOOKING BACK AT HIS LIFE, HE WAS CONVICTED BY THE FACT THAT HE HAD NOT DONE AS MUCH AS HE COULD HAVE TO SUPPORT ALL THE MEMBERS OF HIS TEAM.

WE COULD SAY RICKEY REALIZED IT WAS BY THAT FAILURE, HE HAD TURNED AWAY FROM WHAT JESUS WANTED HIM TO DO.

RICKEY DID NOT WANT TO TURN AWAY FROM JESUS A SECOND TIME.

THEREFORE HE DID HIS RESEARCH ON THE PLAYERS IN THE NEGRO LEAGUE SEARCHING FOR THE MAN WITH THE RIGHT CRITERIA TO SUCCEED IN THE ALL WHITE MAJOR LEAGUE.

ONE THING HE LOOKED FOR WAS AN EXCELLENT BASEBALL PLAYER.

HE ALSO WANTED SOMEONE WHO WAS A GENTLEMAN, AS WELL AS A MAN WHO HAD THE COURAGE AND STRENGTH TO STAND UP FOR HIS RIGHTS. BUT SOMETHING ELSE WAS NEEDED AS WELL.

YOU SEE THE ONLY WAY THIS PLAYER COULD FIGHT BACK AGAINST THE VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE HE WOULD SURELY ENCOUNTER, WAS TO PLAY SO WELL NO ONE COULD DENY HIS TALENT.

FOR BRANCH RICKEY, THIS MEANT THE PLAYER HE CHOSE WOULD ALSO NEED SPIRITUAL STRENGTH.

THIS LED HIM TO CHOOSE TO MAKE THE OFFER TO JACKIE ROBINSON, WHO FILLED ALL THE CRITERIA, INCLUDING BEING A DEVOUT CHRISTIAN.

ONE OF THE MANY BOOKS ABOUT ROBINSON SAYS THIS ABOUT HIS FIRST YEAR IN THE MAJOR LEAGUE:

"IT TOOK TWO CHRISTIANS TO PULL THIS OFF. ROBINSON WAS A CHRISTIAN AND BRANCH RICKEY WAS A CHRISTIAN. SOMETIMES WE MISS THIS."

SO, IN THIS STORY WE HAVE AN EXAMPLE OF HOW STICKING WITH JESUS, AND LETTING HIM WORK THROUGH US, CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.

THERE ARE MANY OTHER STORIES OUT THERE ABOUT HOW A CHRISTIAN CAN CHANGE THEIR LITTLE PART OF THE WORLD BY STICKING WITH JESUS.

SOME OF THESE STORIES MAY EVEN BE OUR OWN, OR THAT OF SOMEONE WE KNOW.

TRULY, WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN JESUS' NAME WHEN WE OBEY HIS CALL TO MAKE HIM PART OF OUR LIVES IN A WAY- THAT ALLOWS HIM TO INFLUENCE US, EVEN WHEN HE ASKS US TO MAKE DIFFICULT CHOICES.

A HELPFUL REMINDER TO US ALL IS THAT WHEN WE GO TO BAT FOR JESUS, WE DO NOT STAND UP ALONE.

WE HAVE THE GRACE OF GOD, THE PEACE OF CHRIST, AND THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT RIGHT BY OUR SIDE.

WITH THIS IN MIND, I'LL CLOSE WITH A DIFFERENT BASEBALL STORY, THIS TIME A FICTIONAL ONE. IT GOES LIKE THIS:

A MAN STOOD BESIDE THE LORD TO OBSERVE A BASEBALL GAME, IN WHICH THE LORD'S TEAM WAS PLAYING SATAN'S TEAM.

THE LORD'S TEAM WAS AT BAT THE SCORE WAS TIED ZERO TO ZERO AND IT WAS THE BOTTOM OF THE 9TH INNING WITH TWO OUTS.

THEY WATCHED AS A BATTER NAMED LOVE, STEPPED UP TO THE PLATE.

LOVE SWUNG AT THE FIRST PITCH AND HIT A SINGLE BECAUSE LOVE NEVER FAILS.

THE NEXT BATHER WAS NAMED FAITH. FAITH ALSO HIT A SINGLE BECAUSE FAITH WORKS WITH LOVE.

THE THIRD BATTER WAS NAMED GODLY WISDOM. SATAN WOUND UP AND THREW THE FIRST PITCH. GODLY WISDOM LOOKED IT OVER AND LET IT PASS- BALL ONE.

THREE MORE PITCHES AND GODLY WISDOM WALKED BECAUSE GODLY WISDOM NEVER SWINGS AT WHAT SATAN THROWS.

SO THE BASES WERE LOADED, AS THE TEAM'S STAR PLAYER STEPPED UP TO THE PLATE. THE PLAYER'S NAME WAS GRACE.

SATAN WOUND UP AND FIRED HIS FAST BALL, AND TO THE SHOCK OF EVERY ONE, GRACE HIT THE BALL HARDER THAN ANYONE HAD EVER SEEN!!

THE CENTER FIELDER WENT FOR THE BALL, BUT IT FLEW HIGH AND WENT OVER THE CENTER FIELD FENCE IT WAS A HOMERUN, AND THE CROWD WENT WILD.

AFTERWARDS, THE LORD ASKED THE MAN WHY IT WAS ONLY BY GRACE ALONE THEY COULD WIN THE GAME.

THE MAN SAID HE HAD NO IDEA, SO GOD EXPLAINED, SAYING:

“IF YOUR LOVE, FAITH, AND WISDOM HAD WON THE GAME YOU WOULD THINK YOU HAD DONE IT BY YOURSELF. YOU SEE LOVE, FAITH, AND WISDOM WILL GET YOU ON BASE. BUT ONLY MY GRACE CAN GET YOU HOME” !!!

THE GRACE OF GOD BE WITH ALL OF YOU. AMEN

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SO LET’S LOOK AGAIN AT WHAT PETER SAID IN RESPONSE TO JESUS ASKING THE TWELVE IF THEY WISHED TO LEAVE HIM: “LORD, TO WHOM CAN WE GO? YOU HAVE THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE. YOU ARE THE HOLY ONE OF GOD.”

PETER’S STATEMENT IS IMPORTANT TO US. TRULY, JESUS’ WORDS HAVE THE POWER OF LIFE, THE POWER TO HELP AND HEAL, TO DIRECT, AND TRANSFORM US. THIS IS GOOD NEWS, AND YET WE MUST ALSO REMEMBER THAT SOMETIMES HEALING OR TRANSFORMATION IS NOT EASY, IT CAN EVEN BE PAINFUL .THE “HARD” SAYINGS OF JESUS, EVEN WHEN THEY CONTAIN GOD’S WORD OF LIFE, ARE OFTEN NOT EASY TO DIGEST.

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HERE IS A FICTIONAL BASEBALL STORY THAT REMINDS US ABOUT THIS TRUTH. A MAN STOOD BESIDE THE LORD TO OBSERVE A BASEBALL GAME, IN WHICH THE LORD’S TEAM WAS PLAYING SATAN’S TEAM. THE LORD’S TEAM WAS AT BAT THE SCORE WAS TIED ZERO TO ZERO AND IT WAS THE BOTTOM OF THE 9TH INNING WITH TWO OUTS. THEY WATCHED AS A BATTER NAMED LOVE, STEPPED UP TO THE PLATE. LOVE SWUNG AT THE FIRST PITCH AND HIT A SINGLE BECAUSE LOVE NEVER FAILS.

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