

John 6:66-68 - *After this, many of his disciples **turned back** and were not walking with him anymore. So Jesus asked the twelve, “**You do not want to leave too, do you?**” Simon Peter answered him, “**Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.**”*

In our world today, virtually every day, there are married couples who are getting **divorced**. Why does that happen? Most people remember their wedding day as one of the **happiest** and most **exciting** times of their life - a day when the two of them declared their **love** for each other, and put **rings** on each other's fingers - a day when they made so many **promises** - promises to take **care** of each other when they were **sick**, to stand **together** when they were **poor**, to **comfort** one another when things were **bad**, and to **rejoice** together when things were **good**. They said they would **cherish** each other, and that only **death** would separate them.

So what **happened** between **then** and **now**? Where did those happy days **disappear** to, and where is that awesome **commitment** which they professed to each other in the presence of God? What does it **take** to cause a married couple to **break up**? Would it be **disagreements** and **arguments**? How about **disgust** over **unwise** and **unhealthy** personal **habits** - using too much **alcohol**, having fits of uncontrolled **rage** and **anger** - maybe it's the misuse of **drugs**, or getting trapped by **pornography**, or causing physical or mental **abuse** - or even committing **child** abuse. What causes the **love** which we once had for each other to become **rejection**?

Certainly the answers to those questions are going to be **different** in every individual situation. But the **root cause** of all these **individual problems** remains exactly the **same** - it's **sin**. **Sin** causes **rejection**. So, it seems **strange** that **Jesus** - the **sinless** Son of God - our warrior **against** sin - was **Rejected By Many Followers**.

Our text takes place during the **last year** of Jesus' public ministry. For the past **two** years, **crowds** of people had regularly **followed** Him, eagerly **watching** His every move, and especially **listening** to His every **word**. Shortly after Jesus had fed a crowd of 5,000 **men**, plus women and children with just five loaves of **bread** and two **fish**, the people began to think that they should make Jesus their **king**. They were even going to take Him by **force** if they had to. They wanted to keep him **right there** by the Sea of Galilee, so they could get all kinds of free **food**, and they'd also have someone handy who could heal all their **diseases**. They knew

that God had promised to send a **Savior**, and they were looking at **Jesus** as the one who could **save** them from **illness** and **hunger**.

It's really quite **tragic** that their expectations for a **Savior** were so **low**. But their spiritual **leaders** weren't any **better**. They had **abandoned** the beautiful promises of a Savior from **sin** and a giver of **eternal life**, and had **exchanged** those promises for a king who would throw out the hated **Romans**, and who would establish an **earthly** kingdom. Satan had obviously been at **work** among them. He had **attacked** God's promises in the Bible, and with a **lie**, he had convinced God's own people to **reject** Jesus as their Savior from **sin**.

In addition, **Jesus** resisted **their** efforts to **make** Him an earthly king, and He **withdrew** from them. But the next day, the crowd **found** Jesus, and they had a lot of **questions** for Him - mainly questions about **bread**. That's when Jesus said, "*I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.*"

Now the crowd certainly had **bread** on their minds, but the bread **Jesus** described for them was very **different** from what they expected. Jesus told them that He had come from His Father in **heaven**. Jesus told them that He was the **bread** from heaven, and that all who "**ate**" that bread - those who received **Him** by **faith** - He would **raise** from the dead on the Last Day, and they would live with Him **forever**. But they had **stopped** listening. Many of them turned **away** from Him, and headed for **home**.

And it wasn't just the crowd of thousands on **that day** who walked away from Jesus. Jesus had **many** followers - people whom He was training to reach out with the Gospel to the huge mission field in **Galilee** and **beyond**. But some of the things which Jesus taught - things like **bread** from **heaven**, and being **raised** from the **dead** - were difficult to **understand**. So, because they didn't **understand**, many of them **turned away** and **rejected** Him. We're told, "*When they heard it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching! Who can listen to it?' After this, many of his disciples turned back and were not walking with him anymore.*"

It's hard for us to understand that people who had previously **followed** Jesus would later **reject** Him. They were people who had **walked** with Him, who had **talked** with Him, who had **eaten** with him, who had witnessed His **miracles**. We look **back** at those experiences, and think how **wonderful** it must have been to be **with Jesus**. He is the most **fascinating** person who ever walked on the face of the earth, and He spoke with **authority** that no one had ever **heard** before. Jesus is the

**Savior** of the world - the one who had come to offer His perfect **life** in exchange for **our sins** in the **battle** against sin and Satan. How could they **reject** Him? How could they **desert** Him?

Obviously, the old, evil **foe**, had gotten into the **hearts** and **minds** of the Jewish **leaders**, and many **others** too. Satan had led them to believe the **lie** that Jesus **couldn't** be who He **said** He was - even though Jesus had **proved** it to them with His **words** and with His **actions**. The **leaders** were teaching the people the **lie** that they could get to heaven by being **good people**, and obeying the **law**. **Jesus** was teaching them the **truth** that, "*God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*" Many of the people chose to **believe the lie**, and they **rejected Jesus** and His message.

It still happens **today**. The enemy still **hates** Jesus, and still fights **against** Him. The enemy continues to **encourage** people to **separate** themselves from God, by following **false** religions like Islam, Hinduism, atheism, materialism, and many **others**. All of these religions offer a path which can only lead to **hell**.

The devil has also made inroads into the Christian Church **itself**, by spreading **false** doctrines; by **attacking** the truth of the **Bible**; using critics of Christianity in the **media**, and in **universities**, and in **politics**; all to damage and destroy saving **faith** in Jesus. And unfortunately, many people today still choose to **believe the lie**, and they **reject Jesus** and His message.

Maybe you know someone whose faith is **slipping away**, or perhaps has even **lost** their faith. We all **struggle** at times with personal **doubts** about things we don't fully **understand**, so we can understand why Jesus asked His own **chosen Twelve**, "*You do not want to leave too, do you?*" He gave them the opportunity to **answer** that important question. And it was Simon **Peter** who rose to the occasion. Peter said, "*Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.*"

Many people today are **rejecting** the Lord Jesus, and only **God** knows how many believing Christians are still **left** in the world. But this much we **do** know - every single **one** of them did absolutely **nothing** to create saving **faith** in their hearts. Every believer **became** a believer in only **one way**. It doesn't matter if it's **spoken** or **read**; or if it's received in a **visible** way in Holy **Baptism**. **God's Word** is the single most powerful force for good in our world. **God's Word** brought you and me to trust that the **life**, **death**, and **resurrection** of Jesus has purchased and

won the forgiveness of sins for us. Jesus **did** it all, and Jesus **paid** it all, so we can live with Him **forever**.

Before He returned to His throne in heaven Jesus said, “*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in **sheep’s** clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous **wolves**.*” The forces of evil will continue to **oppose** Jesus, and try to lure us **away** from our Savior. They have a lot of **opinions** and **theories**, but they **don’t** have the words of **eternal life**. Thank God that **Jesus does**. He is the **Way**, the **Truth**, and the **Life**.

We’re just a short time away from **Easter**. Let’s let the remaining time we have in this **Lenten** Season be a time for us to become more firmly **grounded** in God’s Word, and more zealous to **use** that Word in our daily lives. Every day we’re challenged to **hold on** to God’s Word. There is so much **evil** in the **world** around us, our **sinful flesh** never seems to take a break, and then there are all the temptations the **Devil** throws at us too. If we didn’t have our **Savior**, it could be **overwhelming**. But we **do** have Him. Jesus is our great **warrior** in the battle against **sin**. Over the ages, **Jesus Has Been Rejected By Many Followers**. May we never be found **among** them, but rather, may we continue to **cling** to **Jesus** and His **Word**. Amen.