

Hey everybody. I want to welcome all of you to Christ Fellowship. If you are a guest with us today for the first time, I'm so glad that you are here. My name is Rick, and I serve as Lead Pastor here. We believe that God brought you here, not by accident but by His own providence, because God wants to speak into our lives. God always does that through the power of His word. For the past nineteen years, we have been committed to teaching only God's word. For nineteen years we have been going through the books of the Bible, and we have for the last year been moving almost verse by verse through the gospel of John. We're in John, chapter six, at this point. We started a series in John, chapter six, last week that we entitled, "When God Doesn't Make Sense". Mind you, God always makes sense, but sometimes He doesn't make sense to us; and that is what we are talking about. So if you have your Bibles, open them to John, chapter six. If you don't have a Bible, don't worry about it. All of the text will come up on the screen and you can track along with us that way.

I want to set this up by sharing this with you. One afternoon when I was about twelve years old, a friend of mine, Billy, and I, walked to the downtown area of Rock Hill, South Carolina, a little town in which I grew up. By the way, Rock Hill is one of those towns where downtown is just lined with these old buildings that just butt right up against each other. You have seen downtowns like that. Most of those buildings are about three or four stories high. At any rate, Billy and I decide we are going to climb on top of those buildings, and then walk from one roof top to the next roof top so that we could see the skyline of Charlotte. Folks, because the buildings are butted up right against each other, we were able to move from one rooftop to the next rooftop pretty much unimpeded. But check this out, because we came to this one place where the rooftops were actually separated from each other. Oh yeah! There was an alley way below that separated the two buildings, and the drop from above was about thirty feet down. However, somebody had laid a two -- by - ten board across that divide. The board was about eight feet long and it spanned that ravine. So Billy says to me, "Let's just use the board to cross over to the other side." But folks, as I looked down at this thirty foot drop, all of a sudden I wasn't so sure about that board. I wasn't sure it would hold me for the crossing. In fact, I said to Billy, I said: "I'm not about to cross over to the other side unless I know for sure that board is solid. Who knows, it might have been rotten. Or worse yet, it might have been a fake board, you know, made out of that manufactured stuff that might have cracked if I had put my weight on it. So here is what we did: Before we attempted to cross over to the other side, we pulled that two-by-ten board over to our side, and then we examined that board carefully. Everybody say "examined". To make sure it was solid, and sure enough, it was. But

folks, just to be sure, we tested it. We laid that board across some bricks that were up there on the roof, and then I put my full weight on that board, about sixty pounds. Now, then Billy gets on it with me. He puts his weight on that board. Then we give it the old stress test. We start jumping up and down on that two-by-ten to see if it can hold up under that stress. And sure enough, it did. And now we knew for sure, we had an authentic two-by-ten board that would hold up in the crossing. Then and only then did we lay that board across that divide, put our full weight on it, and cross over to the other side.

Now, let me turn a corner and draw a sobering analogy to that, because you and I are hastening toward a moment when we are going to face a crossing from one side to the other, and we are going to cross from earth to heaven. We are going to want to cross from this life over to the other side; over to eternal life. Folks, in a sense, we are going to have to cross over eternal death. So, here is my proposition today. This is what I want you to get. Only those people who have an authentic faith in Christ are going to survive that crossing. Let me say that again. Only those who have a real saving faith in Christ are going to be able to survive that crossing from one side to the other. Now, you might be saying, "Rick, How do I know if I have authentic faith in Christ? How do I know if I've got the kind of faith in Christ that is going to get me across that divide?" Well, we are going to find out today as we go back to John, chapter six.

Before we dive into this narrative, I want you to listen to 2nd Corinthians 13:5. Here is what it says: *"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ is in you, unless of course you fail the test."* With all of that in mind, I want to give you two thoughts today. Number one: Our faith needs to be tested. Let me say that again. Our faith in Christ, this is what we are counting on to get us across the divide, It needs to be tested. Here is what we need to know.

Sometimes God will test our faith for us. Now, with that in mind, let's back up in John, 6:5. Listen to what it says. *"When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward Him"*. Stop right there. At this point, in John 6, Jesus is into his second year of ministry. He has done miracle after miracle, after miracle, to the point that He has nearly banished disease from Palestine, and to the point that wherever He goes, these massive crowds of people are following Him. Look at verse five again: *"When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip: "Where shall we buy bread for all of these people to eat?"* Verse 6: *He asked this only to test him."* Stop right there.

Sometimes God will test our faith in order to stretch it, in order to make our faith stronger. But listen, sometimes God will test our faith on this side of death to be sure

that our faith is authentic; to be sure that we have a real faith in Christ; to make sure that you have the kind of faith that is going to get you across that divide, so that you know that before you face the crossing. In other words, wouldn't it be comforting if you could test your faith on this side of death, on this side of the crossing, sort of like we did with the board, so you would know for certain before that moment comes that you've got a faith that is going to get you to the other side? Wouldn't that be great? Folks God does that for us, but here is how He tests our faith.

God uses stress, the stresses of life, to test the authenticity of our faith. With that in mind, let's move ahead now to John 6:53. Jesus said to them, talking to this massive crowd of people. *"Very truly I tell you, 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you."* Now, if you were not here last week, I want to encourage you to go online and listen to that, because we unpacked the meaning of that last time, and you need to know what that means. But here is what I want you to get today. On the surface, that statement made no sense to the people. Eat your flesh; drink your blood, made no sense to them, and listen: Jesus knew it didn't make any sense to them. You see, Jesus said this to put pressure on their faith; to put tension on their faith; to test it to see if they would continue to follow Him even though what He said to them made no sense to them. It was a test of their faith, to see if they would continue to follow Him. As you are going to see in a moment, many of them, their faith failed the test.

Look at verse 60. *"On hearing it – Eat my flesh, drink my blood – many of his followers said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'"* Stop right there, because this hard teaching of Jesus was hard for them to understand. It was hard for them to believe, and this hard teaching of Jesus put pressure, put stress on their faith in Him. But folks, here is what I want you to understand. God often uses hard teaching and hard circumstances in our lives, and hard times in our lives to put stress on our faith. It's like Billy and I jumping up and down on that board to put stress on it to see if it would hold up. God puts stress on your faith on this side of the grave to see if your faith is going to hold up.

Here is what you need to know. An inauthentic faith (apostate faith) turns back when tested, You say, "What do you mean by that?" Watch this: *"Upon hearing it, many of his followers said 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'"* Verse 66: *"From this time many of his followers turned back and no longer followed him."* Stop right there, because that act of turning back was tantamount to their faith breaking. Let me say that again: That act of them turning back was tantamount to their faith breaking. It would be like Billy and I putting that board across that span and it breaks. But folks, it

is better to know that the board is going to break on this side of the crossing than to have it break - to find out it's going to break, in the crossing. Right? Now folks, that is exactly what Jesus did in this scene. Jesus put pressure on their faith, because he wanted some of them to realize their faith isn't real. Your faith is not going to hold up in that divide. But folks, better to find out before death that your faith is not going to hold up, than to find out in death that your faith is not going to hold up, but go down. If my faith is not kept in order on this side of the grave, and it breaks,, at least I can do something about it. At least I can go to Christ and make my faith real on this side of the grave. You can't do that after death. That's too late.

I want you to stay with me because this act of these people turning back from Jesus is called apostasy. Now, put your thinking caps on for a moment, because an apostate is someone who makes a profession of faith in Christ and they begin to follow him, but then something hard comes into their life and they turn back and no longer follow Him. They defect from the faith. They reject the faith. Folks, when that happens, it is not that they got saved and then lost it when they turned back. It's that they never got saved to begin with. They never had authentic faith to begin with. That is why they turned back. In other words, turning back only exposes the fact they never really got saved.

1st John 2 puts it this way: *"they went out from us, but they did not really belong to us, for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But their going shows that none of them belonged to us."* They were not real believers. We see that from time to time, don't we? Occasionally? Somebody will come forward and make a profession of faith in Christ. They begin to walk with Him, but then something hard comes into their life and they turn back from following Christ. They go back to their old world. The evidence is, they are apostates, and again, it is not that that person got saved and then lost it when they turned back. It's that they never really got saved in the first place. Their faith was inauthentic. It never was real. That is why they turned back. You see, an apostate, when times get hard, will always defect from the faith. They reject it.

Now don't get me wrong. I told you before, when you tell a believer "You will struggle with sin, and there will be times when you sin against God, maybe even a grievous sin. That is not apostasy. When you fall into sin, I say, "Don't run from God. Run to God, because you will always be met with open arms. Not only that, there may be times in your walk with God when you get disappointed with God; maybe even be angry with God. You may even pout at God. Has anybody ever pouted at God? I think I have. You know, "I don't even want to talk to you about it." You may even put distance between

you and God for awhile. That is not apostasy. Apostasy is a wholesale rejection of God, and a wholesale defection from God. That is apostasy.

Now, I want you to understand that Jesus was not testing these people so He would know who was really a believer and who wasn't. He is God, right? He already knew who was real and who wasn't. In fact, look at verse 64. Listen to this: Jesus says, *"Yet there are some of you in the crowd who do not believe. For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him."* In other words, Jesus knew from the beginning of this crowd who was real and who wasn't. By the way, this crowd following Jesus in John, chapter six, began to follow Him in John, chapter two, after Jesus turned the water to wine. It was Passover season. In fact, listen to chapter two, verse twenty-three. *"Now when he, that is Jesus, was in Jerusalem at the Passover."* So, it was Passover. Many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did. They were like, "Yeah! They're getting saved. They are really believing. They are real followers." But look at the next verse. *"But Jesus did not commit himself to them because he knew all men.* Why? Because He knew all of this.

Jesus did not commit himself to many of the people in this town because He knew they were not committed to him. You see, a lot of these people were following Jesus not because they were committed to Him, but they were following Jesus because Jesus was popular; because Jesus was doing all of these tricks. They were like, "Do another trick. Jesus, do another show! Put on another act!" So, Jesus was very popular. He was the hot thing in Palestine. By the way, let me tell you. I'm always leery of those kinds. But Jesus was popular. Because they are not committed, when the pressure is put on, they defect. Now, with that in mind from chapter two, let's fast forward to chapter six.

Verse 4: *"The Jewish Passover festival was near.* Stop there, because from the Passover in John two, to the Passover in John 6, is a year. So these people have been trailing Jesus, following him around for a full year. Verse 5: *"Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him."* So, here come the groupies. Here come the fair-weather fans. But all of a sudden Jesus puts pressure on their faith.

Many of them would defect from the faith. They would reject Him. But authentic faith continues to bother you. Apostolic faith will walk away in hard times, but authentic faith continues to follow no matter what may come.

Listen to verse 66 again. *"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."* They defect. They reject. Verse 67: *"You don't want to leave me to, do you, Jesus asked the twelve."* He's talking to the disciples. *Simon Peter answered Him. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.* Translation: Peter was

saying, "Lord, we are not leaving you. Lord, we will continue to follow you even though we don't know what that meant. Even though we don't understand that, we will continue to follow you. And Christ fellowship, here is what I want you to understand. That is the mark of authentic faith. That is the mark of genuine, saving faith. If your faith is authentic, you will continue to follow Jesus no matter what comes down the pike.

Now mind you, the twelve disciples did not understand what he meant. He put pressure on their faith as well, just like it did everybody else. Their faith didn't break. They continued to walk with Him. And, I'm telling you: When hard times come into your life, when hard circumstances come into your world, even though you don't like it, you continue to hold onto God, you continue to hold on to your faith; you continue to walk with Him, even though you are confused. I tell you, that is the sign that your faith is authentic; that you've got a faith that is going to get you across that divide. Let me show you some more verses on this. Listen to John 8:31: *"Then Jesus said to those Jews which believed on him, if you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed. Then are you my disciples for real."* In other words, how do you know if your faith is real? Simple! You will continue in God's word. You will continue to follow Him, no matter what. Listen to Colossians 1:22. Listen to this: *"But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death; to present you holy in his sight, without blemish, and free from accusation."* I love that. That verse is saying as you stand before God, Christ is going to present you before God as holy. I don't know about you but I am not holy. But that is how Christ is going to present me. And he is going to present me without blemish, and he is going to present me free from accusation. Isn't that great? Look at the next verse. What is the first word? *"If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel."* Now mind you folks; that is not saying we need to hold on to our faith so that we will stay saved. It is simply saying, if you really are saved, you will hold on to the faith. You may waver; you may stray, but inexorably you will hold on to God. Let me say it again: There are going to be times when you sin. I sin. That is not apostasy. There are going to be times when you get mad at God; you may even pout and keep your distance from God for awhile, but true faith will always come back. By the way, the fact that you are here today is an indication that your faith is real.

Look at Hebrews 10:38. Watch this. It says: *"The just – those that are really justified – shall live by faith."* Watch this God says *"But if any man fall back, defects from the faith, God says, 'My soul shall have no pleasure in him. (39) 'But we, those who are truly saved, we are not of them who draw back and are destroyed. But of those who*

*believe and are saved.*" Apostate faith draws back when life gets hard. Transverse, \: We. on the other hand, don't draw back because our faith is real. You see folks, even though we don't like hard times, hard times do test our faith, don't they? As you continue to walk with God through that test that validates you your faith is real. Your faith is authentic. You may not like it, I don't like it in the hard times, but it validates you that your faith is real. Listen to Hebrews 3:12: The Bible says, "*See to it brothers and sisters that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.*" Folks, this is pretty straight forward. If you turn away from God, if you defect from the faith, that is a strong sign that you still have an unbelieving heart. But when hard times come, you can continue to walk with God. That tells you that you have a truly believing heart and you are saved. Listen to it: "See to it brothers and sisters that none of you has a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away."

You know, from time to time I have what is called a stress test on my heart. How many of you know what a stress test is? My physician put me on this treadmill. It's called a stress test, and the test is designed to put stress on my heart as I am running. Get it, if my heart can endure the stress, and I keep on running, I don't stop, I keep going, that tells me I've got a healthy heart, and there is still a lot of life left in me. On the other hand, if the stress that is put on my heart causes my heart to start hurting, and all of a sudden I say to the doctor, "I can't do any more", that tells me my heart is diseased, and that death is looming over me. Folks, just like that, God puts stress on your heart to test your heart, your spiritual heart, and the harder the stress, the harder the time that you are going through, the more accurate the reading is. So, when hard times come, you keep going with God; you keep walking with Him. That tells you, your heart is a strong heart and it is going to get you across that divide, but when hard times come, when people defect from the faith, that is an indication that your heart is still unbelieving. But that is okay if the person finds that out now, because they can always this side of the crossing come to Christ and make their faith real.

Listen to James 1:12. "*Blessed or happy is the one who perseveres, keeps going under trials, under hard times. Why? Because having stood the test, that person might receive the crown of life.*" Is that what it says? No, God is saying that person *will receive the crown of life*" In other words, when you go through a hard time, the harder the trial you are going through, the more accurate the test. When you go through a hard trial and you persevere, maybe you are hanging on by a thread, you are hanging on to God, and you stay in the faith, I'm telling you, God says, you will receive the crown of life. You have been tested and your faith is real. You know you are going to make it across the divide.

Last week I talked about the little girl, Kelsey, ten years old, who died last year. When Kelsey died, let me tell you what happened. When she died - instant heaven. People ask me, "What happens to little children when they die? Let me tell you: Instant heaven! But folks, not only that, as hard as that trial was on that family, mom, dad and brother, they set right over there last week and cried through the service - as hard as that trial was, they have persevered through it. They have held on to God and they have kept walking. Do you know what that tells them? That tells them that their faith is real and that when they die, instant heaven. It also tells them they may have a broken circle now, for now that little girl is out of the circle, but it tells them for sure they will have an unbroken circle in heaven. Whatever hard time you are going through today, God does not waste it. It is not wasted. You might think it is meaningless, it is not wasted. It authenticates your faith so that you know you will receive the crown of life. Let me close with this. As I said earlier, we are all hastening to a moment when we are going to face a crossing from one side to the other side. You're going to want to cross over from this world to heaven. You are going to want to cross over from this life to eternal life, and in a sense, you will have to cross over eternal death. Only those who have an authentic faith in God, only those who have real saving faith in Christ are going to survive tht crossing. So, here is the question: Do you have authentic, saving faith, because the eternal destiny of your soul rests on whether your faith is real, or not.