

# BELPRES CHURCH

## Sermon Title: Audience of One

Dr. Scott Dudley

Disclaimer: *This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.*

---

**Scripture:** John 6:35, 53-60, 66-68

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty

<sup>53</sup> Jesus said to them, "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. <sup>54</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. <sup>56</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup> Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." <sup>59</sup> He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

<sup>60</sup> On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

<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.

---

### Transcript:

Scripture today comes from the book of John, chapter 6. It goes like this: "Jesus said to them, '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.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day, for my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them.' On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?' From this time, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. 'You don't want to leave too, do you?' Jesus asked the 12. Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'"

Holy spirit, this is a hard teaching. Help us understand it. Help us live out of it. Lord, help us to know the greater things that can come out of it when we live it. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen. Well, last week, we started a sermon series called Greater Things. Last week, I said that a better world and a better life for us... Greater things are possible if, if we are all-in following Jesus. I think one of the biggest things that keeps us from being all-in following Jesus is concern about what other people will think of us, right? What will they think if I talk about Jesus? Will they think I'm some kind of religious fruit cake? Or what will they think in my office if I say something like, "I don't think this is ethical. We can do better." What will they think? What will my friends think if I don't join in with the crowd and in gossiping about someone, or drinking too much, or whatever it is? What will they think if I don't look a certain way, dress the right way, get certain grades?

Now there are people who are a little less concerned with what others think than other people. My youngest daughter is one of those. When she was really little, I remember this one time she was misbehaving in some way. My wife said, "Stop it." Lucy said, "I don't want to stop." Christina said, "Don't be naughty." Then Lucy said, "I don't care if you think I'm naughty." What do you mean you don't care? You have to care. This is one of the essential parenting tools here, my opinion of you. Some folks are like that, a little less concerned with what others think. Even those people, even those people, at least occasionally, worry about what their boss, or friends, or peers, or whatever other people think.

We all want to be part of the cool crowd. We all want to fit in. We all want to have the impressive job. We all want people to admire us. We all want our lives to look a certain way on Instagram, so we make sure that we have these perfect social media lives. We all want to be part of the cool crowd. This was everywhere in my former career as an instructor in English literature. Everyone on that campus was trying to prove how smart they were to everyone else. Let me read you a sentence that kind of captures that quote, "Aesthetically speaking, nostalgia functions as a reactionary discourse that marks the distance between the dominant and residuals cultures, exposes lacuni within the dominant culture, and resist the epistemological privileging of the Cartesian subject."

Guess who wrote that? I did, in my dissertation. Plenty of that, plenty more where that came from, right? I wrote that. You know what it means? I can't remember. I don't know. I wrote it, but I don't know what it means anymore. Boy, that sentence just screams, "I am compensating for my insecurities." One of the gifts that COVID is giving us is there's just a little less pressure these days to impress other people, right, because we can. Wear pajama bottoms all day because there's nothing but Zoom meetings anyways and all they're going to see is your shirt. Just a little less pressure to impress others.

I believe God would want to turn that into a new normal. I believe God would want to expand that and turn that into a new normal where we get free of the people-pleasing prison. It is a prison. It causes stress and anxiety. We're trying to please everyone. It causes us to sin or at least fail to do God's will because we so badly want to fit in that we don't say anything when someone's being treated unfairly in school or the workplace, or we join in the crowd, drinking too much, or whatever it is because we want to fit in. Third, we miss God's purpose for our life. We're so busy doing what everyone else thinks we should do. We don't do what God is asking us to do. Greater things are possible. Greater things are possible. I think God would want to free us from that prison. Greater things are possible if we follow Jesus, not the crowd.

Now before I talk about what that is and what that looks like, let me talk about what I don't mean, what it's not, okay? Getting free of people pleasing is not a matter of just saying, just be true to yourself, or to thy own self be true, because quite frankly, sometimes thy own self can be a big jerk, right? A lot of

times, you'll see people... Christians do this a lot. They'll take what they claim to be a bold stand on something, usually a trivial issue, and say, "I don't care what other people think. I'm just doing what's right. I don't care what people think," but there's this belligerence in the tone. It's judgmental towards other people and it feels more like it's their agenda rather than God's kingdom.

If you look in scripture where people follow God, not the crowd, it is usually marked with courage, to be sure, and strength, to be sure, but also, humility, grace, self-sacrifice rather than self aggrandizement. In the story I just read, Jesus gives us a great example of what it looks like to be free of people-pleasing and follow God, not the crowd. The context is, He's just fed 5,000 people with a few loaves of bread and some fish. Everyone likes that, right? They're really pleased. They want to make him king, in fact. He has thousands of Instagram followers. Everything he says gets reposted. He's an influencer. Then he goes, and he blows it all by doing, and saying some stuff that did not please people.

Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, you are looking for me because you ate the loaves and had your fill." In other words, as long as I do what you want, you're going to applaud me. Then He says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." That did not please the people. It says, "At this, the crowd began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'" Uh-oh, they grumbled. Send some emails. Jesus, I did not like the bread of life sermon. Please don't preach that again. It did not please me, right? Does that stop Jesus? No. He just doubles down. They said, "Stop grumbling among yourselves." Then the crowds began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Okay. Now they're grumbling as a group, okay? They basically call the congregational meeting, right? We did not like the bread of life sermon. When we emailed Jesus about it, He told us to stop complaining. This is why no church would ever hire Jesus because he's too controversial to be a pastor in a church in America. Then Jesus says, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, for my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them."

Okay. Notice how often he repeats the phrase, "Eat my flesh, drink my blood." Four uncomfortable times in just two verses. In the original Greek, it's even worse because the word he uses means to chomp on like a cow chewing cud. It's a very graphic image. Now He means it as a spiritual metaphor, and it points to communion, but the crowd takes it literally, which just enrages them, right? Eat flesh, drink blood. Jesus, that's gross. You did not please me with that gross analogy in your sermon. Then it says, "From this time, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed Him. Out of all of those crowds, only the original 12 remain. Only the original 12 disciples remain." At this point, you are probably going, "Geez, why'd you do that, Jesus? It was all going so well. You have thousands of Instagram followers. Your tweets were being retweeted, but then you go and blow it all with that stupid bread of life sermon. Worst sermon ever, Jesus."

It doesn't bother Jesus. Their opinion of him doesn't bother him. He doesn't do what I would do, which is to lay in bed awake all night and go, "Oh man, why did I use that flesh and blood imagery? My sermon review team told me not to use it, but I did anyway." No. Jesus is blissfully, wonderfully free of what other people think of him. Wouldn't that be nice? Wouldn't it be nice to have that kind of freedom? Think of the greater things that could happen in you if you had that kind of freedom. Think of the greater things God could do through you where you live, work, play, or learn if we follow Jesus more than the crowd. Jesus gives us four steps to kind of get us there. I'm going to list them in reverse order. The last one's the most important.

First, to find freedom from people pleasing, do the next right thing. I said, "Next right thing," because sometimes we kind of want to solve some big whole problem all at once, but that's overwhelming. Just do the next right thing. Jesus says, "I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of Him who sent me." In other words, the question Jesus is asking is not, what do people think, right? How will this play in Peoria? He doesn't take a poll. He asked, "What's the next right thing to do." There are two times in the Bible where leaders led by taking a poll. The first time, they got a golden calf. The second time, they got a crucifixion. Now that doesn't mean we don't listen to input. Feedback is part of how we grow. It's part of making good decisions, but ultimately, our goal is to submit it to God and do what He says, is the next right thing.

I am a huge people pleaser. It is painful for me to say, "Do or decide something," that people don't like, that people are going to be upset about, which causes all kinds of stress, because the thing about this job is no matter what we do or say, there's always some group of you that are mad about something. It doesn't matter what we do or say. You never agree. I have literally had back-to-back emails where the first email says, "I hate that thing that you just did. Don't ever do that again." Three minutes later, the very next email says, "I love that thing, right? Please keep doing that." What's a poor people-pleasing pastor like me to do? Go sell insurance. It's my only option, is to sell insurance. No, I'm not leaving. I'm not leaving. Here's what I've learned to do. Here's what I've learned that gives me some peace: to still my anxious thoughts, and focus on God and prayer, and say, "Lord, what do you say? What is the next right thing to do?" It focuses me in ways that give me peace.

I have a friend who recently noticed that because of a complicated set of rules about how his company handled contractors, it sometimes ended up that people of color got paid less for the exact same work. He brought that to his boss, which was a bit of a risk because to fix it, it would involve a lot of work. He didn't know how his boss would respond. Now fortunately, his boss responded great, and they're working on finding some solutions. My friend... Because he didn't let fear of what his boss might think stop him, contributed to greater things, better things happening in his office. It was a risk. His boss might not have liked it. Who knows, right? Now in his case, it turned out great, but there will be times when we do the next right thing, and people will not like it. I'll talk about that in a minute. Even in the middle of that, we will still have peace.

Now in order to do the next right thing, we also need to, second, be becoming the right people. I said, "Be becoming," because this is a process, okay? The goal is not perfection. The goal is progress in the right direction. It's a process. If you squeeze a tube of toothpaste, you find out what's on the inside. Our decisions, our actions, our words are the overflow of what's in our heart. My friend noticed that there was a problem in his company because he spends time in prayer, and Scripture, and seeking God's heart for justice. Because he does that, he is becoming the kind of person who notices when people aren't being treated fairly, which brings me to the third point.

In order to be becoming the right person so that we can do the next right thing, so that we can follow Jesus, not the crowd, third, we need to find the right community because other people help us grow, people who will help us to become the right people. That's why I am encouraging all of us to sign up for an eight-week, online, all-in group. The content is going to be based on these sermons, and it's a great way to grow in our faith and also feel disconnected in a pandemic that has... or feel connected in a pandemic that has disconnected us and to feel like we're more of a community. Our hope is that everyone who calls BelPres home would sign up for one of these groups because other people can help us grow, especially people who give you affirmation and critique, not flattery and complaint.

Let me say what I mean by that. Most of what we get from other people is flattery or complaint, right? Way to score the game winning goal, Sally. Great job on the presentation at work, Fred. Good job. Or wow, way to blow the game, Sally. Or whoa, Fred, you suck. That presentation was terrible, okay? That's complaint. The other was flattery. Now it's fine to say, "Good job." It's fine to say, "Well done." That's fine. That's fine, all right? We can't let that be what makes us feel good about ourselves because, what about if you don't do a good job the next time? See, flattery's like perfume. It smells nice, but you don't want to drink it. Most people give us flattery and complaint instead of affirmation and critique. Flattery and complaint are a phony version of love because love gives affirmation and critique. After affirmation doesn't say, "Good job," that's flattery. Good job. It says, "What I love about you is you are the kind of person who." "Good job scoring that goal." That's flattery, and it's fine.

To hear you're the kind of person who prefers to encourage their teammates more than you care to get the limelight yourself, that's about your character. It's who you are. It's not what you do. Critique is the same as opposed to complaint, right, which critique is also about your character. It says, "I know you have it in you, Scott, to be a better man than this. I've seen it before. I love you. How can I help you get there?" Find people who give you affirmation and critique, not flattery and complaint. You do the same for them because other people can help us grow because, see, Christian community should not just be one more group of people that we have to please. Christian communities should not just be one more group of people with all these expectations. That's not what it should be. The goal here is growth. It's meant to be a place where God can help us grow. We need to find the right community who help us become the right person so we can do the next right thing so that we can follow Jesus, not the crowd.

Finally, the thing all of this rests on and the most important is to do all of that, we've got to follow the right Lord because we follow all kinds of other lords, don't we, right? Friends, parents, bosses, culture, right? Jesus said, "I only do what I see my Father doing." In other words, instead of living life for a stadium of people whose approval we're craving and whose disapproval we dread, instead it's living life to an audience of one. The one is God. The reason Jesus is so wonderfully free from what other people think of Him is he is laser focused on the Father and feels the Father's love and approval for him. When you feel the Father's love and approval just as you are, not as you should be, even when you screw up, right, then it frees you from needing that from other people. The God of the universe loves me. I don't need to earn yours. That frees you.

It's like when the little kids' choir sing in church, right? The little kids come out, and they're scanning the crowd. They're only looking for one thing. What is it? Their parents. That's all they're looking for out of that crowd, right? What are the parents doing, right? The parents sitting there, the arms folded, going, "You better sing right, kid, or no cookie for you." No, right, they're smiling. They're encouraging. Ignore the crowd. Find God's face and experience His love for you that sets you free from needing to earn the approval of other people. At the very end of this story that we read, after everyone leaves and only the original 12 disciples are left, Jesus says, "What about you? You don't want to leave, too, do you?" Simon Peter says, "To whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life." We go to so many people for approval, but only Jesus has the words of eternal life.

One of my first failures as a leader was at the time considered by everyone to be a raging success, but I knew it was a failure. This was back when I was doing college ministry. We would often use video clips to illustrate points and talks as we do here. I was talking once one day on how we tame Jesus and turn him into kind of this wimpy little figure. One of my interns said, "Oh, there's this great scene in South Park that illustrates your point. We should use that." Now for those of you who don't know, South Park was a cartoon that was on TV, satirical cartoon, little rough around the edges sometimes, but often very, very funny and often very smart satire, right?

The particular clip they were talking about from South Park was this scene where Jesus and the devil are boxing, and Jesus loses. They showed it to me. I was like, "Ah, I don't know, guys. It doesn't feel right." They said, "No, no, no. It's perfect. It's perfect, right? This illustrates the fake Jesus, the wimpy Jesus, but you're going to talk about the real Jesus who's strong, right? It's great. It's funny. Everyone will like it." I caved in. I wanted students to laugh. I wanted students to like the ministry so that they would bring their friends, so that the ministry would grow and that would make me look good in front of my bosses, and I would win their approval, right? We showed it, and everyone laughed. In that moment, as we were showing it in the group, it felt like we were laughing at Jesus.

Now it's fine to watch South Park. That's not the issue. South Park is fine. I watch South Park. As I said, it could be smart. It could be smart satire. That particular clip in that particular context was wrong because it felt like a room full of people laughing at Jesus. I thought, "I just dishonored my Lord," but everyone else loved it, right? Students were saying, "Oh, that was so funny. I'm going to tell my friends about my college group. It's so cool. The pastor even shows video clips from South Park." As I listened to them laughing, I just felt Jesus next to me. He said, "Scott, is this the kind of leader you want to be? because I can make you more. I can do greater things. I can free you from your need to have their approval."

In that moment, all of the students' praise and flattery felt hollow compared to how loving Jesus critique felt. I want to say that again and underscore that. I felt more loved and accepted in Jesus critique than I did by the students' applause because He didn't shame me. He didn't even do the I'm not mad, I'm-just-disappointed thing, passive-aggressive Jesus. He didn't do that. He said, "You're capable of more. I believe in you. I can do greater things. I can free you from the need to win their applause." For me, it was kind of a to-whom-else-shall-I-go moment, right? Pleasing people, making everyone like me... Jesus, only you have the words of eternal life. Help me follow you, not the crowd.

The next day, I apologized to my staff for showing the clip. They said, "What do you mean? It was great. It was funny. It was awesome. Everyone loved it." I said, "No, I did not lead you well. I let you down. Here's why." Then a couple of weeks later, I apologized to the entire college ministry for showing that clip. I said, "It's fine that you laugh. It was funny. I get it. That's fine, but here's why in this context, I shouldn't have shown it. I didn't lead you well. I apologize." Afterwards, so many students came up to me and said, "Thank you. Thank you for that example of humble leadership that you just gave to us," said not one of those students at all. They were mad that I'd apologized. They're like, "Oh man, I knew it. You're just as uptight as everyone else," right, but it didn't bother me that they're mad because I felt close to Jesus and discovered that doing the right thing is its own reward.

Now that's just a little thing, right? You might even go, "What's the big deal. Dudley, small thing... Why do you even remember it all these years later," right? Well, here's why it's a big deal: because it was about my character. See, how you do little things is how you do everything. We love the idea of taking a brave stand on some big issue, right? If you can't resist peer pressure about what video clip to show, you'll never be able to go against the crowd on the really big things. You'll be toast. How you do little things is how you do everything. Our character is just the accumulation of a million little moments just like that.

In that moment, I found some freedom after I'd screwed up because Jesus is full of love and grace. What would happen? What would happen if we all got that free of having to win the approval of others, of having to play to the crowd? What could Jesus do? What greater things could Jesus do in you if you were free to follow him, not the crowd? What greater things could Jesus do through us, all 4,000 of us, all over King County? What greater things could Jesus do if we followed him, not the crowd, and didn't

worry what others would think? In workplaces all over King County saying, "I don't think this is ethical for us to do. I think we can do better as a company." Imagine how that would change workplaces. Imagine how that would change things. Or like a woman I know who is in college and started a program called Up All Night. It was a program that gave all these other things that students could do rather than drink all night. She also started a prayer wall in her sorority where people could post their prayers and she would pray for them.

Okay. When you're in college, that's hard to do. That's going against the crowd. That's not succumbing to peer pressure. She did it in a grace-filled way: courageous, strong, but also humble and full of grace. It freed her from people pleasing. It did greater things in her sorority and made her sorority better, right? How many people could find the life-giving love of Jesus and His joy, even in hard times, if we just weren't afraid to talk about Jesus in front of other people for fear of what they might think? What greater things could Jesus do in you and through you if you follow Him, not the crowd, and same for me?

This week, laser focus on Jesus and ask Him, "What do you want me to do, Jesus?" Because if our country needs anything right now, it is people who sit at the feet of Jesus in courage and humility and say, "Jesus, what is the next right thing to do to bring your healing everywhere I go?" Not, what do my friends tell me? Not, what does my politics tell me? Not, what does my tribe tell me to do? What do you say, Jesus? What do you say is the right thing to do? Then give me the strength to follow you and not the crowd. When you do that, then you will be free, and your name will no longer be performed to be accepted. Your name is beloved daughter, much loved son of God in whom He is well-pleased. You are a child of God, born again, free to live life for him.

Jesus, to whom else shall we go? Oh, we go to a lot of other places for approval, for applause, for our sense of significance. Jesus, only you have the words of eternal life. Lord, help us to follow you, not the crowd. Help us to be laser focused. Help us to experience your love in a way that frees us from the need that we have to win other people's approval so that we can follow you and you alone, and will give you the glory. In your name, Jesus. Amen.

---

**Discussion Questions:** Please read John 6:25-68

---

1. Why are the crowds still searching for Jesus (see also John 6:1-14)? How does Jesus' response to them show the difference between his interests and theirs?
2. What claims does Jesus make in verses 35-40? What do these claims emphasize about his being the bread of life?
3. How do the crowds respond in verses 41-42? Why do they respond this way?
4. What is Jesus' main point in this passage?
5. What does this passage tell us about Jesus? About ourselves?