

Are You A Fan Or A Follower? by Jeff Strite

John 6:28-6:69

(Note, this sermon doesn't follow Idleman's approach. I preach differently than he does and felt I would fail to do justice to his message if I did it his way. I apologize for any frustration this may cause to those who read this sermon)

A man named Charlie Moore moved into a new community with his family. He wanted to make friends, so he joined the local softball league. In the opening game Charlie took his family to the park and he went to join his team.

Charlie got up to bat, set his feet, squared his shoulders... and as the ball came across the plate, he missed it by a mile. The crowd groaned.

But one voice could be heard over the den of people: "You can do it, Mr. Moore!"

The second pitch came and again he swung wildly and missed, and again the voice could be heard. "You can do it Mr. Moore!"

The third pitch – swung again and the voice cried: "That's OK Mr. Moore!"

When the game was over, the family got into their car, and as they made their way down the road, the dad turned to his son and said: "Was that you that yelled out 'You can do it Mr. Moore'?"

When his son admitted that it was indeed his voice the dad said he appreciated his son's encouragement, but he wondered "But, why did you call Mr. Moore?"

"Well," the boy said, "I didn't want anyone to know I was related to you."

For the next few Sundays our sermon series will be based on a very famous study series by Ken Idleman entitled "Not A Fan". In that series, he points out that in any church there are people he'd called "Followers of Christ" and there are others he would call mere "Fans." Fans are the folks who only go to church. They don't really DO much for Jesus because they have other priorities. These people were happy to show up and shout out encouragement at church but they really don't ACT like they were related to Christ. They're willing to shout out "You can do it Jesus"... and that's about it.

That's the difference between a FAN and FOLLOWER.

A Fan just shows up.

They'll stay as long as it benefits them, but if it doesn't benefit them to hang around... they usually don't. As long as they're happy they'll show up.

But they often get easily offended when they can't get their own way.

ILLUS: A popular British preacher (W.E. Sangster), told of a lady he knew about.

It seems that the church choir was scheduled to sing in a town hall, but the platform was not large enough for the whole choir. So a few choir members had to stand at a slightly lower level and apparently this woman had been one of those who was forced to stand on the lower level. Sangster said she "was so offended that she quit the choir and left the church. Perhaps she did not know Him who 'was oppressed and He was afflicted. Yet He did not open His mouth'." (Isaiah 53:7).

This woman was a fan, not a follower.
Fans are those who "walk away."

You've seen them at ball games.

They'll be at a Basketball game or a Football game and their team is getting swamped. Their team gets so far behind in the score that they'll never catch up. It's now 10 minutes before the close of the game... and what do a lot of people do?

They get up to leave don't they?

They want to get to their cars before everyone else so they can head for home.

They're not going to be there to continue to encourage their team.

The team is losing and can no longer meet their expectations for that game.

Things aren't going the Fans' way... so they go away.

That's what happened here in John 6:66

"From this time many of his disciples turned back and NO LONGER followed him."

They no longer followed Him.

But why did they just STOP following Him?

Because Jesus had offended them.

He said something they didn't like.

They were pushed beyond their comfort zone... so they left and they didn't come back.

You see, the crowd wasn't there to FOLLOW Jesus...

In fact, they weren't really there FOR Him at all!

They were there because they expected Jesus to be there FOR them.

Just a day or so before this incident Jesus had been teaching a huge crowd. The text tells us that 5000 MEN had gathered (along with women and children) to hear Christ preach to them. But as the day progressed, Jesus knew the people were getting hungry so He performed a miracle.

Jesus took 5 small loaves of bread and 2 small fish from a little boys lunch, blessed them, broke them and gave them to His disciples to hand out to the crowd to feed them.

... And everybody was fed

Then Jesus sent the disciples amongst the people to collect all the leftovers from this miraculous meal ... and there were 12 baskets full of food left over.

The crowd was impressed.

Some began to talk of Jesus being taken by force and made to be their King.

But, knowing that, Jesus slipped away from the crowds, and later that night he walks on the water and joins His disciples in their boat as the cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

John 6:24 tells us that "Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum IN SEARCH OF JESUS."

They went searching for Jesus.

Why?

Because He fed them. He'd given them a free lunch.
You offer me a free lunch and I'll show up every time!

They'd come back for more food.
But He didn't come to earth to offer a luncheon buffet.
Jesus has no intention of feeding them this time.

And they're not happy about that.
They want Him to do another miracle... but He's not going to do it.
Why isn't Jesus going to do another miracle for them?
Because Jesus doesn't want FANS.
He wants followers.

Well, what's a FOLLOWER look like?
The difference comes down to a difference of motivation and priorities.

A follower is the type that means it when they sing that old gospel song entitled "Where He Leads Me." Sing it with me:

Where he leads me I will follow,
Where he leads me I will follow,
Where he leads me I will follow,
I'll go with him, with him all the way.

Where will you go? Where He leads me.
How far will you go? All the way.

Now FANS don't actually sing it that way.
They change the chorus so it sounds like this:

(Sing) I'll go with You 'til the summer,
(Speak) and the baseball games and my vacations and the camp-outs get in the way.
(Sing) I'll go with You 'til the winter
(Speak) and I have to spend my 3 months in Florida or Texas or wherever and I really don't want to get involved in serving Him.
(Sing) I'll go with You 'til life's a bummer
(Speak) and I don't feel like getting out of bed, or people have mistreated me, or I don't feel God has answered my prayers the way I want.
(Sing) If not, I'll say so long, so long all the way.

FANS give up... and walk away
Or worse, they'll stay and damage the church (more about that later)

But FOLLOWERS?
Followers... follow Jesus no matter where He leads them.

You can see the difference between FANS and FOLLOWERS in how they worship

FANS go to church to experience the rituals.

The rituals make them FEEL religious... but those rituals don't make any difference in how they live.

FOLLOWERS go to church to experience Jesus and that experience of touching Jesus during worship changes them. That experience shapes them and molds them into a different kind of person. And the worship with the full expectation that this experience WILL change them.

For FANS, the spiritual connotations of worship are hard to grasp.

Jesus told the FAN filled crowds:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, 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 him up at 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 him. 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."

Even we hear THIS and think: this sounds a bit bizarre.

Doesn't that sound a bit bizarre to you?

It does to me!

I mean - eating His flesh and drink His blood?

Something's not quite right there

And if you think of Jesus words "LITERALLY" you'd be right.

But Jesus isn't talking about this literally.

He's speaking spiritual words filled with spiritual truths.

Jesus taught this way many times in His ministry.

You remember what he said we should do when our "eye causes you to sin?"

Pluck it out.

And what are we supposed to do if our hand causes us to sin?

Cut it off.

If Jesus was speaking literally in that... you and I could be in a world of hurt.

But everybody know Jesus wasn't talking about literally plucking out your eyes or cutting off hands.

In the same way, Jesus isn't talking here about LITERALLY eating of His flesh and drinking

His blood. He's referring to the fact that He will soon die on the cross and when that happens, His flesh will be torn and His blood will be shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

This isn't about taking communion.

It's about us HAVING LIFE because Jesus did what He did and we find our nourishment as Christians because we FEED on His sacrifice.

We're not here to go through a ritualistic ceremony

We're not here to fulfill our quota of religious activities.

We're not here to punch our time clock.

We are here to FEED on Jesus.

A Jesus who died for us, was buried, and rose from the grave.

That is why Communion is placed right in the middle of our worship service.

And that is why we take of the Lord's Supper each Sunday.

Not because it is a ritualistic requirement but because we need to REMEMBER why we're here.

Everything we do here should be centered on this table.

Our songs should remind of us Christ's sacrifice.

Our prayers should be based on Christ's sacrifice.

The sermon should find its power in Christ's sacrifice.

Without the sacrifice of Christ on the cross nothing else we do here has any worth.

The bread and the cup are only reminders of that truth.

Unless we "feed" on the sacrifice of Christ in our daily lives, our faith is little more than ritual.

And this tendency toward ritualism can hit any one of us.

ILLUS: I once talked to a couple of preachers about how they did things in their church and one of men mentioned that their congregation had two contemporary worship teams. One worship team would lead singing on one Sunday, and the other on another Sunday. And in the weeks before they led worship, they'd spend time practicing the songs.

But their practice experiences were different from each other.

The first team would work on precision and perfection. They wanted to make sure they got every chord, word, beat perfect. And when they got up in front to lead the singing on Sunday their songs were technically correct... but they weren't especially inspiring.

But when the 2nd team led singing it felt like they were worshiping as they led and the preacher said it seemed the audience responded better to them.

What had the 2nd team done differently?

They didn't just practice throughout the week... they worshiped as they practiced.

They sang the songs not so much out of precision as out of love for what the words said.

One more thing:

When Jesus didn't do what the crowd wanted Him to do the FANS got offended and then

they insulted Him in front of everybody else.

In John 6 we're told that "the Jews began to grumble about him... and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven?'" John 6:42

The crowd is upset with Jesus.
They begin to grumble about Him.
And then they say something nasty to those around them

You know what they were saying?
They were saying that Jesus was a liar!
He couldn't POSSIBLY have come down out of heaven because we know who His folks are.

These guys are FANS.
They were not committed to Jesus.
So they didn't care that they've insulted Him by what they're saying.
They didn't care that they spread discontent amongst those who MIGHT follow Him
All they care is that they JUSTIFY themselves.
They're willing to damage Jesus so that they can "look good" in their own eyes.

And FANS do that in church.
They'll say nasty things about Elders and preachers and committees who make decisions they're unhappy with. They'll spread rumors and discontent so that they can justify their decisions.

But FOLLOWERS wouldn't think of hurting Jesus.
Jesus is what they're there for.
After the crowds leave Jesus - after they all walk away to never return "...Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" John 6:67

Peter's answer is interesting.
He replies: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." John 6:68-69

Did you catch what Peter was saying?
We don't want to leave you.
Where else would we go?
You have what we NEED in our lives.
And we believe IN you and KNOW WHO you are.
We don't want anyone else.
We will FOLLOW you wherever you lead us.

(SING)
Where He leads me I will follow
Where He leads me I will follow

Where He leads me I will follow
I'll go with Him, with Him all the way

Jesus had said "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me".

CLOSE: One Chicago youth minister planned a Spring Break MISSION trip for his youth group. But he was afraid they might become distracted Florida's balmy beaches. So, he fashioned a cross from 2 pieces of lumber and just before they climbed on the bus, he showed it to the group.

"I want all of you to remember the whole purpose of our going is to glorify the name of Christ, to lift up the Cross - the message of the cross, the emphasis of the Cross, the Christ of the Cross. So, we're going to take this cross wherever we go."

The teenagers looked uneasily at one another, but they liked and respected this man and so agreed to do it and promptly dragged the cross on the bus.

It banged back and forth in the aisle all the way to Florida.

It went with them into restaurants.

It stayed overnight where they stayed overnight.

It stood in the sand while the ministered on the beach.

At first, lugging the cross around embarrassed the kids. But later, it became a point of identification. That cross was a constant, silent reminder of who they were and why they had come. They eventually regarded carrying it as an honor and privilege.

The night before they went home, the youth leader handed out two nails to each of the kids. He told them that if they wanted to commit themselves to what the cross stood for, they could hammer one nail into it, and keep the other with them. One by one, the teens drove their nail into the cross.

About 15 years later, one of the youth that had gone on that trip - now a stockbroker - called the youth leader. He told him that he still keeps the nail with him in his desk drawer. Whenever he loses his sense of focus, he looks at the nail and remembers the cross on that beach in Florida. It reminds him of what is at the core of his life - he's been called to be a FOLLOWER of Jesus Christ.