

Pastor Graham Pfeffer Sermon for 25th August 2024

Text John 6:56-69 ⁶⁸ *Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."*

During the week I was sent a photo by friends from Biloela of a sign at the entrance of Horn Island, telling of The Legend of King Kebisu.

Before Christianity arrived in the Torres Strait, the islanders were warriors, killing and head-hunting other islanders, Australian aborigines, and Papua New Guineans. Then on July 1st, 1871, missionaries from the London Missionary society arrived at Darnley Island proclaiming Christianity to the Torres Strait people. That event is now remembered as the "coming of the light". King Kebisu, the king of warrior Island "Tutu". Was a furious fighter and a great warrior who owned the most war canoes in the Torres Strait. Following God's advice, he ordered the fleet of canoes and garrisons of warriors to refrain from head hunting and turn to Christianity. The people followed their great leader and there was peace and Harmony in Torres Strait.

Pastor Len Scharke was a missionary Pastor to Asaroka and Lalibu in the Southern highlands of Papua New Guinea. In his book entitled the dawning of a new day, he tells where he bought the word of God to tribes where his wife Claire was the first white woman they saw and he the second white male, the first being the appointed policeman. He writes also that if you want to evangelise a village, you need go through the chief.

So, how do you present the gospel to tribes where war and killing between tribes is part of the culture. How do you get to that point where the battle is no longer against flesh and blood but against Satan and his evil power and forces. Where you change from armour to protect against spears and clubs, to putting on the armour of God.

How do you even bring the gospel to a culture that kills and maims, where power is in having the most war canoes and garrisons. Well, you connect with the spirituality they already have.

In Acts 17:22- 25 we hear how Paul connected with the spirituality of the people of Athens. *"People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship, and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. ²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.*

We heard in Joshua 24 however, a different approach. Because these people already know of God and have turned to idols, when Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, he summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and he says to the people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ¹⁴ "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. Joshua then declares, but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

For five Sundays, the gospel reading has been a portion of John 6. This chapter begins with the feeding off the 5000, where stomachs are satisfied, and the people start thinking, we will make this great teacher our king. Throughout the chapter Jesus is asking the people to transform their minds from seeing him as a source of physical bread that perishes, to the bread of life that when eaten you will live forever.

Jesus' words have been greeted with misunderstanding, confusion, and objection from the crowd. Even today, when Jesus declares in verse 56, Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them, the disciples respond, this is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

Jesus declared, "Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you, they are full of the Spirit and life. ⁶⁴ Yet there are some of you who do not believe.

Many people in the crowd take offence at his words and walk away. Now we might not find these words offensive because we believe Jesus does come give his body and blood to us in the bread and wine of Holy communion.

But how do you handle other offensive words of Jesus in the bible, that you might find a hard teaching? Take Jesus sermon on the mount for example.

Matthew 5:21-22 ²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

Matthew 5:27-30 ²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery. ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Matthew 5:43-44 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you".

Do you know why these words of Jesus are meant to be offensive. Do you know why Jesus speaks so strongly? Jesus is not concerned about offending the sinful nature in you, because his mission is to save you. He can't save you unless he reveals to you, your sins are like filthy rags.

But Jesus doesn't want to leave you offended. When Jesus says unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you, he also proclaims to you that he is the source of forgiveness and the source of eternal life.

When Jesus turned to the 12 disciples and said, do you want to leave too, Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

Are you here today because you know there is nowhere else in this world, apart from other Christian churches, where you will hear the words of eternal life? How can God use you to talk about your God who gives life and breath and everything else. Where people of all cultures say to Jesus, where else can we go, you have the words of eternal life.

The words of Jesus which may cause offence are words that call for a new life as you abide in Jesus to be blessed with gifts of grace and mercy. May you know how rich your life is by knowing Jesus and his words of eternal life. Amen