

## WHY JESUS LEFT

John 6:1-21 Text vs. 14- 15 *“After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, ‘Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.’ Jesus, knowing they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself.”*

This passage has both fear and warning, and it captures an important moment in the life of Jesus. We learned last week Jesus had just performed the miracle of feeding five thousand men, plus women and children, with His disciples’ five loaves of bread and two fish. The crowd who witnessed that extraordinary event had their hearts fill with wonder. *“Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”* And as He taught them, they recognized Jesus was more than a mere teacher or healer. They saw Him fulfilling ancient prophecies. He was the long-awaited Prophet. And the people’s excitement became intense. They saw Jesus as a powerful leader. Even the political Messiah who would overthrow Roman rule and begin an earthly kingdom. And that’s why He left! Their understanding of Him was shallow. They were focused on the here and now—rather than the eternal purpose of Jesus’ mission.

Jesus was fully aware of their plans which had Him retreat to a mountain all by Himself. Why? Because His kingdom was not of this world. His mission was beyond political power. Beyond an earthly state. And we’re getting a huge dose of that right now! The interplay between political power and earthly dominion is fascinating. It has fascinated thinkers, theologians, politicians and historians across the ages.

In the Gospel of Luke, there is an interesting discussion between Jesus and Satan. The devil had tempted Jesus by offering Him all the authority and glory of this world’s kingdoms: *“I will give you all their authority and splendor. It has been given to me. And I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.”* (Luke 4:6-7) The devil claimed that authority had been *given* to him. But from whom did he get it? Scripture doesn’t clearly state God granted Satan authority over all the kingdoms. Instead, God originally gave that authority to Adam and Eve. They had authority over the earth and all its creatures. *“God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”* (Genesis 1:28).

It was in that lush paradise of Eden, where fragrant blossoms danced in the breeze and rivers flowed quietly that the serpent faced Eve—the first woman. And as she stood near The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, a tree whose fruit held mysteries beyond imagination, and for which God had given a clear command *“You may eat from any tree in the garden, but not from this one. For on the day you eat from it, you will surely die.”* (Genesis 2:16-17) The serpent had cleverly coiled itself around the truth, and weaving deception whispered to Eve: *“You won’t surely die. No, my dear. Taste this fruit, and your eyes will open wide. You’ll become like God—knowing good and evil.”*

Eve gazed at the forbidden fruit. Doubt crept in. But what if the serpent spoke the truth? What if this fruit did *not* hold death? She believed the lie! She reached out. Plucked the fruit off The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and took a bite. That’s when the world shifted! Her eyes opened—not to good, but to shame. She realized her nakedness. Her weakness. Adam, also, took a bite of the fruit. And that’s when their innocence ended. Was it a lie? Or did the serpent simply twist the truth?

No, they didn’t drop dead! Physical death didn’t grab them. Instead, it was a spiritual death. A separation from God. Their eyes opened, yes. But not to divine wisdom. They saw the difference between holiness and rebellion. So, the serpent’s lie has echoed down through the ages. And is still heard today. It wasn’t about immediate physical death. It was about being separated spiritually from God. In the end, the serpent’s cleverness led humanity to a broken existence between light and shadow, knowledge and ignorance. But in this, is a thread of hope—a promise of redemption. *“I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”* (Genesis 3:15).

That is the first prophecy of the coming Messiah. He would ultimately defeat Satan. So, what *do* we believe? What forbidden fruits tempt us away from God? Can we, like Adam and Eve, find grace, even in our undoing? That transfer of authority—often referred to as the *“fall”*—caused Satan to rule over fallen humanity. The kingdoms of this world, once under human authority, now had the appearance of sin and brokenness. And the term *“Dominionism”* which gained prominence in the 1990s describes a belief held by some conservative Christians who seek political power based on how they interpret Genesis 1:28. *“God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”*

God’s command to Adam and Eve to have *“dominion”* over the Earth is the thrust of this viewpoint. However, ideas do vary. Some argue *dominion* means *responsible stewardship*. Others say, it’s a more forceful way to rule. So, the solution lies in balancing earthly authority with spiritual awareness. And as Christians, we should wonder about the tension between God’s kingdom and earthly systems, which makes three main ideas arise.

First, opposition to political power. Some think Jesus was opposed to earthly power systems. Monastic movements have historically shown that. Monastic movements are institutionalized religious practices, or movements, where members commit themselves to living an ascetic life—a life apart from the world marked by simplicity, prayer, and meditation. Often

withdrawing from normal society and living by a set of rules that go far beyond what's expected of lay people. Maybe even the spiritual leaders of their own religion. Monks and nuns, tucked away in various corners of monasteries. Some in remote caves. Others are in bustling monastic communities.

Eventually, monasticism didn't stay just in the deserts. In the 4th century AD, it spread like wildfire when John Cassian, a Desert Father and friend of Saint John Chrysostom, founded an Egyptian-style monastery in Gaul, modern-day France. That marked the movement's expansion to Europe. Monastics sought God through silence, contemplation, and harsh spiritual discipline. Their lives were a living prayer. And their influence extended beyond their cloistered walls. Monasteries played crucial roles in shaping medieval Europe—educating, healing. Influencing culture. Monastics drew illustrated manuscripts. Sang Gregorian chants. Followed the quiet wisdom of abbots and abbesses.

But like any human endeavor, monasticism faced challenges. Monasteries soon became centers of learning, fellowship, and artistic creation. They maintained ancient texts. Provided refuge for travelers. At times, arrogance, corruption, and complacency crept in. But then, others believe Christians should be involved with political systems and try to influence them for good. That Christ's lordship extends over all kingdoms. That Christ's work goes beyond politics. His kingdom is not of this world. It transforms hearts and civilizations.

So, Biblical beliefs overlap political theory. That concept of *popular sovereignty*—the idea that political power resides in the people. Popular sovereignty is the idea that government gets its power from its citizens. This belief is based on the concept that the government should exist for the sole purpose of benefiting its citizens, and if the government is not doing everything it can to protect its people, then it should be disbanded. Bellarmine and Suarez, two recognized figures from theological history, argued that God grants earthly dominion to all humanity. Not just to specific individuals or groups. All people rightly hold political power.

And that lines up with the Biblical worldview, that God's creation grants equal and free power to all humanity. So, the relationship between spiritual authority, earthly dominion, and political power is complicated. And as we work with this tension during this political season, let us seek Christ above all earthly powers. His kingdom surpasses any earthly authority. He came to offer us salvation. Not just freedom from oppressive governments. But freedom from sin and separation from God. His kingship is spiritual. His throne is the cross. And the lesson for us as we think on this passage is that Jesus doesn't fit neatly into predetermined boxes. He defies expectations. Are we seeking a Jesus who lines up with our desires? Or are we open to meeting the true Christ—the One who transforms hearts and offers eternal life?

Today, let's remember, Jesus invites us into a deeper relationship. One that goes beyond earthly ambitions. He is the Prophet, the King, and the Savior. We must seek Him with open hearts and be willing to be transformed by His grace and truth. Those who were with Jesus after He fed the 5000 were focused on the here and now—rather than the eternal purpose of Jesus' mission. Jesus was fully aware of their plans. And He retreated to a mountain all by Himself, which highlights Jesus' practice of seeking solitude for prayer and communion with God. It emphasizes the importance of personal reflection and spiritual renewal. The quest for personal reflection and spiritual renewal is a journey that invites you to explore the depths of your soul alone, seek clarity about spiritual things, and reconnect with God. Let's make that a practice for all of us! AMEN