

# Lord, to whom shall we go?

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[ 0 : 00 ] A few very simple points to follow this evening in this straightforward address, the deserter, the disciple and the declaration.

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And it's whether in these days of physically distant services, whether, of course, even in the days when the Lord Jesus walked on earth, will be now as there was then.

Will be those who will not persevere in following Jesus. Will be those now as there were then.

Those who will be offended at the words of Jesus.

Will be those now as there were then. Those who resisted the demands of Jesus. Lured by the world, the world that wants nothing to do with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it will ever, and it shall ever be so until the Lord returns again. And so the question arises from even what we've been reading this evening. The question arises, what about you?

[ 1 : 14 ] What of your desire to follow Jesus? What of your commitment to leave all and to follow the Saviour? And even in our present context, in these days of lockdown, well, these days are certainly brought to the fore the whole matter of perseverance.

The whole matter of persevering in the faith. And not simply in the X number of services that you attend and attend in online services. But how deep is your discipleship?

How deep is your love for the Saviour? How strong is your forsaking all else to walk with the Lord?

And as you contemplate your discipleship, and for some even, you may well be at a crossroads.

You may well be limping between two opinions, whether to pursue faith in the Lord Jesus, or whether just to walk away from him. But the Word of God directs you, directs each one of us, to consider whose we are, who you are, and who you are to follow now and eternally.

And so this evening, we're going to turn to this passage and realise that this is truly a challenging passage. It's an uplifting passage, and yet at the same time, it's a passage that gives us a warning against turning away from the one true Saviour, the Lord Jesus.

[ 2 : 44 ] So, as we said at the beginning, three simple headings, three to direct us, to direct our hearts, where we truly are in relation to Jesus. Are you a deserter?

Are you a disciple? Are you a disciple? And will you make that declaration that Peter made when he said, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

So let's think, first of all, then, of the deserter. Jesus has been teaching crowds of people about himself. He's been telling them that he is the bread of life.

He is the bread that truly satisfies. And he brings out this comment in many ways, a startling comment, that unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

Of course, Jesus was speaking spiritually. He was speaking about himself, the spiritual application of following Jesus. That spiritual feeding on Christ.

[ 3 : 48 ] That's feeding alone that gives true life, life in all its fullness. Now, Jesus' listeners, his Jewish listeners, they couldn't fathom that teaching.

And neither could the many who up to this point had been following Jesus, called disciples, in other words, those who were following him, but following him up to a point. Neither could these people take in what Jesus was saying.

These people who traveled with Jesus as he taught, as he preached, as he performed miracles, and yet would not continue to follow the Savior.

Now, many of these people, many of these, as they're called here, many of these disciples, while they were finding Jesus' words about himself difficult to take in, they said they're hard words, hard teaching.

And as we read there, as a result, many fell away from Jesus. Many deserted him, abandoned him, and they went elsewhere.

[ 4 : 52 ] They were offended by Jesus' teaching about himself, and they wanted nothing more to do with Jesus. Now, no doubt, some of those who deserted Jesus, they simply couldn't count the cost of true discipleship.

They just weren't prepared to deny themselves and instead followed their desire to return to the world and where they perceived was their security.

But in fact, a world that has no eternal security at all. But as we read there in the passage, most of those people who deserted Jesus, they deserted him because they couldn't accept Jesus' teaching about himself.

They couldn't accept what Jesus was saying about himself as the bread of life, the bread of life to be eaten. Eaten, of course, spiritually. They couldn't accept that Jesus wanted to be drunk and, of course, drunk spiritually.

They were offended by the words of Jesus, really concerning eternal life in him and in him alone. And still sticking to the passage for the moment, I mean, Jesus had been speaking of himself as the living bread and, of course, referring to his flesh as the living bread, his flesh, his body that he'd give for the life of the world.

[ 6 : 18 ] And so, of course, Jesus was alluding. He was alluding to his sacrifice on the cross, where his body was broken for sinners, where his blood was shed for sinners.

Now, here he's speaking of himself as flesh and blood, flesh and blood to be taken, flesh and blood to be received by faith. Of course, Jesus wasn't speaking literally what he was saying of himself.

Now, later in the Last Supper, I remember the night before Jesus was crucified, Jesus would take the bread of the supper and he'd tell those remaining disciples who were there, he was telling them, this is my body, which is broken for you.

Then, of course, he took the cup of wine, the cup that spoke of his blood to be shed for many.

Remember when he said, this is my blood, which is the new covenant, that new commitment of God, as it were, and the new covenant in Christ, that is yours by faith.

It's Jesus' life shed, his giving of his life for the remission of our sins. And so now, here's Jesus challenging those who are claiming to be his disciples.

[ 7 : 32 ] He's claiming, he's challenging them to show really what their true response is to him. Are they going to feed on Christ? Are they going to receive him fully?

Are they going to be satisfied in him alone? Just as physical food satisfies, satisfies the body. Just as these people, just a little while earlier, they'd fed physically, they'd been fed on the bread that Jesus shared in the miracle of the feeding of the thousands.

Well, these same people who'd been fed physically, physically, they had claimed that they wanted to follow Jesus. But now, there's a change.

Are they going to receive him fully? Are they going to be fully satisfied in their souls? And the answer is no. They will not, and they would not.

Instead, what we find is that they're offended by Jesus' words. And they're responding now to Jesus, not in faith, but in rejection.

[ 8 : 40 ] And they're claiming now that what Jesus is teaching about himself is just too harsh for them, and they're not going to accept his words. And they're not accepting his words, not accepting him as the promised saviour.

Remember, these are people who'd been called disciples, followers of Jesus. But by the response to the teaching of Jesus about himself, the teaching of Jesus about himself as the sacrificial lamb, the lamb of God.

Jesus, when he speaks of himself as the one who alone is to be offered for the sins of his people, well, that teaching is just a step too far for those who'd follow Jesus up to a point, but no further.

Yes, follow him while they could be physically satisfying. Follow him when their senses were delighted by his miracles.

Follow Jesus for what they could get out of him, as it were, but then no further. Because when a fence arrives, when their preconceived ideas of Jesus are challenged, they won't follow him any further.

[ 9 : 53 ] Of course, we see that even today. The deserter will follow Jesus to a point, but no further.

It's the tragedy of the almost Christian, the halfway, but no further disciple. In other words, the deserter. You know, think of the imagery of the soldier who deserts from his post because he can't stomach the conditions.

He no longer wants to serve. He no longer wants to obey what he's been commissioned to do to serve queen and country or king and country. When his heart isn't fully in that call to serve in conflict.

We'll bring that even to the tragic desertions that, yes, we see happening in the church today. Desertion from the gospel, desertion from the Savior.

The wasted opportunities to persevere with Christ, putting Christ the world. And if there is anyone for whom even watching or worshipping with us this evening and beyond, if that's your position, seeking not the things of God, but the things of man, will stop.

[11:18] Stop right there and do as God's word tells you. Ask for the old paths. Walk in the ways of God. Ask for the old paths that follow the way to the cross.

Walk in the way of the Lord Jesus. Walk on these paths that lead to glory. Because the greatest offence to man is the cross of Jesus.

That cross where Jesus gave his body to be broken for you and where Jesus shed his blood for you. Because it's the cross. It's the message of the cross that declares that salvation is only possible through the death of the Lord Jesus for us.

It's that message that's rejected by so many, rejected by the pride of man, the man who won't accept that he's a sinner, the man who won't accept that he needs the Lord Jesus to die for him, to save him, the man who will take pride in himself and not humility before the cross of Christ and the Christ on the cross.

you see, the cross of Jesus says that no one can save himself, that no one by his own works can cause salvation to happen in his life.

[12:38] And remember this, that adhering to even certain forms of worship, that won't save you. Reciting large parts of scripture or reciting the whole of the shorter catechism won't save you.

good works won't bring salvation to your heart. It's nothing but the blood of Jesus shed on the cross and nothing but the broken body of the Savior, nothing but nothing but the Savior can rescue a sinner from eternal loss, eternal damnation.

And you know that offends. It's that human pride in man's efforts that keeps many a person from falling at the foot of the cross and declaring before the Savior, I surrender.

You know, those who have given their lives to Jesus will know that you have come before the Savior. You've said to him, you've called upon him, take my life, take my sin, receive me as a lost, hopeless sinner apart from you, a sinner who needs your grace.

And the call even from sinners this evening, may that call be heard even in the very throne room of heaven itself, save me, save me by your life-giving death on the cross.

[14:04] Are you offended by the cross? Are you offended at the cross of Jesus? Does the message that Jesus has been teaching of himself as the bread of life to be nourished, does that offend you?

Well, if it does, pray that God will remove from you that sin, that pride in your heart, that pride that won't allow you to admit that you're a sinner in need of salvation, that you'll come to the Savior, that you'll submit to him, you'll submit to the one who left the glory of heaven and came down to this earth to live among sinners.

the Lord Jesus, who obeyed his father fully, obeyed his father even unto death, and who came for sinners such as me and such as you.

He came to save you so that you might know eternal life. He's the one to whom you should go. He's the one to go to for the sake of your eternal soul.

Just as Peter, the disciple, here, just as Peter recognized, just as this true disciple of Jesus recognized in contrast to the deserters who abandoned Jesus.

[15:19] So we come to our second point then, the disciple. And all most others had deserted Jesus. Peter remained with Jesus.

Now yes, of course we know there would be that time of his tragic departure, for a short time anyway, that departure from Jesus when in Peter's sinful weakness, he deserted Jesus.

Remember when he denied Jesus three times when Jesus was in trial, only for Jesus to restore Peter to himself after Jesus' resurrection.

But all along, of course, Peter's heart was true. Yes, he fell in sin. He was raised again by the loving grace of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus.

Jesus. It's that grace that saved Peter and it's that grace that kept Peter close to Jesus. Even as we see here, Peter uttering words of faith when Jesus asked his immediate twelve disciples, do you want to go away as well?

[16:25] Peter expresses words of faith. Lord, to whom shall we go? Well, to whom could he go? To whom could Jesus' disciples go?

Well, there was no other and there is no other and not for Peter the wisdom of the age found in the philosophers of Greece and not for Peter the pagan religions of the Roman Empire and not for Peter the legalism of the Jewish leaders.

Greek philosophy wouldn't save Peter. The many Roman religions wouldn't save Peter. the legalism of the Pharisees couldn't give Peter true satisfaction.

Only Jesus. And the question that Peter asked, Lord, to whom shall we go? And with all the implications that that question involves, well, it's still a question that is asked today.

To whom shall we go? And not for you, the philosophy of the age which reduces the Christian faith to one of many faiths considered equally valid.

[17:42] And not for you, the pagan religions, even the pagan religions of modern man that's so covered in secular humanism that demands absolutely no challenge to its world order.

The self-obsessed beliefs that malign anyone that questions their perception of man centred focus. And not for you who love the Lord Jesus, the legalism of a mindset that produces faith to a set of rules without love for God or your neighbour.

And yet the tragedy is that the lure of philosophies that are counter to Christianity and pagan ideas that are countered to the one true faith and legalistic thinking that denies the love of God and Christ, these things do continue to tempt Christians, especially in times of trouble.

There's the lure of man's godless thinking that denies sin and that tells you, well, it's just okay, do your own thing, go your own way, live the way you want to, irrespective of what God informs you in his word.

Indeed, there's the lure of false religions. I can tempt the Lord's people to go down roads that God's word expressly forbids. It happens. The lure of practices from Eastern religions that sound so inoffensive in themselves, but actually exclude the peace of God and Christ.

[19:21] Or else the lure of legalism that, well, their peers to conform to God's word, but in fact denies the love of God and Christ to our neighbour. So to whom else can you go?

You're a Christian. You know that in your heart there's no one else to whom you can go and must go. What if you're a Christian? What if you're watching on this evening and you know that you're not a Christian?

Well, where do you go to whom else? Do you go for the answers to life's deepest questions? Well, for many it's the relentless quest for material possessions.

For some it's just an association with a political party in which you find meaning and purpose. For some it's the gods of sport and you hear the refrain, sport is my religion and the stadium is my church.

You see it said. Of course, possessions in and of themselves, there's nothing sinful in and of themselves. Of course, we make these possessions our gods.

[20:32] Politics is necessary in a democratic society, God-given democratic society. Sport in the right context is life-affirming in skill and in fitness.

But when these things become the sanctuary of our souls, when we go to these things to give us true meaning and purpose in our lives, then that's not where we ought to go.

We cannot go. We cannot know salvation and eternal life. You'll suffer if you do go to these places, these things, when you make a god of these things.

Because the god-shaped space in your heart is going to remain empty unless it's filled with the Lord Jesus, unless it's filled with the Saviour who truly satisfies.

Well, Peter recognised that truth as he gave that declaration that we read at the end of the passage. He said to Jesus, you have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God.

[21:45] God, he gave it to the Lord. Now, of course, there's no doubt that Peter didn't fully grasp the meaning of the words that he was speaking there to Jesus. There were still things that Peter

didn't fully understand about Jesus.

He didn't, for example, he didn't fully understand that, as he said, the holy one of God, Jesus, that Jesus must be the suffering saviour in order to give salvation to his own.

Peter did have that faith to believe that Jesus is the promised one, the one promised by the prophets, the one promised from these Old Testament prophets who prophesied of the coming of the Messiah, the Christ.

And Peter did know that Jesus had come to bring eternal life to all who believe in him. He knew that Jesus had come to those who do believe in him.

that they might have life and have it abundantly. I mean, after all he'd heard Jesus say just a little moment quite a while before, the words, as Jesus said, the words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

[ 22 : 55 ] Peter truly did believe that the words that Jesus spoke were words, the words of eternal life. Now that's Peter's testimony.

Even though it's a, we might say, a less than full understanding of what he promises to all who believe in him. Even in your communion with Jesus. Can you echo the words of Paul, Peter rather, and Peter saying, you have the words of eternal life.

I mean, think of all the words that we hear spoken today in the context of the so-called name of progress, of modern thinking, of anti-Christian rhetoric.

All these words are empty words. They don't bring eternal life. But they bring eternal death. But go to Jesus, who has the words of eternal life.

Don't go with the crowd. Don't go with the crowd that's lured by words of empty promises. You know, promising the world, but giving nothing.

[ 24 : 02 ] Instead, words that simply lead to the hell of separation from God. Well, of course, Peter there, as he's standing with Jesus, he witnessed the many who turned away from Jesus.

Peter remained. Peter stayed with Jesus. And that's where your place is with Jesus. You may well see the many turn away from Jesus. You may well see even in this time of pandemic.

Some who have simply turned away from the gospel. You remain with Jesus. We have to say this, yes, as a challenge.

And say it even with sadness. And the deep pain of seeing those who have wandered from the gospel. Even at this time, we continue to pray for their return and pray for their conversion.

You don't be lured into a backsliding that drifts away from the Lord. Stay with him. And watch with him.

[ 25 : 07 ] And pray through Jesus. And commune with him. And delight to follow Jesus. And to follow him fully. Yes, be fully persuaded that the gospel of Christ, that gospel, the one true gospel, is unique.

It's unique in its power. And that Jesus' words are unique in their love for the sinner. So have that resolve of heart. Not to look to anything or anyone else other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

And have that peace with God. Knowing his salvation. That salvation that assures you of eternal life.

Don't be a deserter. Be a disciple of the Lord Jesus. And make that declaration even now in your heart. The Lord Jesus. You have the words of eternal life.

Amen. Amen. Our Heavenly Father, as you have reminded us of the truth of your word.

[ 26 : 17 ] May there not be any, even this night, who is deserting the Savior. Who has wandered away from him. Who is offended by the word of truth.

But rather, may there be those who are true disciples of the Lord Jesus. Who follow him with all their heart. With all their soul. With all their mind.

With all their strength. May there be those, even this night, who have given their lives to the Savior.

To follow him. And to deny self. And to follow the Savior.

To take up their cross. And follow him. And so, Lord, may we truly all be able to say to Jesus, you have the words of eternal life. And may that word of truth be rooted in our hearts.

To continue with him. So help us, Lord, in our weakness when we are tempted to drift away. To backslide. Lord, bring us back to yourself, we pray.

[ 27 : 19 ] So continue with us now, we ask. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.