

Will You Also Go Away?

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Date: 10 May 2009

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[0 : 0 0] John chapter 6 and verse 66, towards the end of the chapter. John chapter 6 and verse 66.

After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, Do you want to go away as well?

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

Amen. Amen. Amen. I want tonight to go back into this conversation and to try and examine what it was that gave rise to a crisis moment in which some of those who up until that moment in time had been following Jesus, listening to him, witnessing all his miracles, and generally accompanying Jesus, they left him and abandoned him and never came back anymore.

And why it was at that very same moment, that very same point, meant that the 12 disciples were left with Jesus and they put their trust and their faith was strengthened in him, the faith by which they had come to believe that Jesus was who he says he was, the Son of God.

[1 : 5 4] This was a crisis moment, a critical moment. There were many of these moments. In fact, there were many challenging moments. Jesus never allowed his disciples to rest for too long.

He never allowed his disciples simply to be spectators, just like a Christian is not a spectator. It's not someone who just sits and watches as the world goes by or sits and has some kind of mystical belief in Jesus.

A person who's a Christian is a person whose life has been transformed and changed by a personal encounter with Jesus.

And a person who Jesus has met with that person is a changed person. That's why the Bible says, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature.

The old has gone and the new has come. But sometimes it's hard to know when that point occurs, when a person's life is changed, everybody's story is different.

[3 : 0 0] If I was to ask you this evening, those of you who know the Lord, how the Lord came into your life, everyone would have a slightly different story. Some people would have a very different story. But we're all able to say the same thing, that once I was lost, but now I'm found.

I was blind, but now I see. Everyone's testimony is slightly different. And for most people, their testimony involves a growing realization of who Jesus is and who they are and how much they need God, how much they need to be saved, and how much that God has done in sending his own son.

And that's something that grows. That's a knowledge that grows. And it's a relationship that grows. And it was the same with the disciples. It's very difficult to determine when exactly.

Was there any one particular point at which the disciples, and I mean the 12 disciples, actually came to know. Well, we know, of course, that one of those 12 disciples never actually came, although he spent his whole life.

And that's quite a scary thought, isn't it? That Judas Iscariot spent three years with Jesus, watching him, accompanying him, being with the rest of the disciples, to all intents and purposes, involved in everything that they were doing, and yet he ended up betraying him.

[4 : 18] That's a very solemn and a very horrific thought. But as far as the rest of the disciples are concerned, it's very difficult. Because there are times when you would be forgiven for wondering whether they were disciples at all.

When Jesus, for example, turned around to Peter and said, get behind me, Satan. Because you mind not the things of God, but you're interested in the things of men.

Get behind me, Satan. Well, you listen to that conversation, you think, well, Peter can't possibly be a Christian. How in the world can Jesus say to anyone who's a true disciple, get behind me, Satan?

You would think there was no hope for a person like that. And all because he had acted in a foolish manner and he had said something which was completely wrong and sinful, in a complete misunderstanding of Jesus, and he had to be corrected.

And the fact is that if you compare the disciples, the way they were when they were with Jesus, to what they were when they were older, there's a massive difference.

[5 : 21] And the difference is because God has so worked and so changed these people's lives and they've grown and matured in their lives, in their understanding and in their faith and in their trusting in Jesus that their lives are no longer recognizable.

And that's why we must never pass judgment on people who are at the very beginning. We must never look down on them and just because they happen to act in a particular way or because they happen to say something or do something which we believe is wrong.

We can't write them off and we can't say, well, that person can't be a Christian. Anybody who saw Peter denying Jesus the night he was put on trial, you would write him off right away.

You would say, this man can't possibly be a Christian. He can't. He's denying the Lord. And yet here was a man who truly loved the Lord and God was going to work in his life and he was going to bring him on from day to day and he was going to restore him to himself and he was going to be built up and he was going to train him and he was going to become one of the greatest, most powerful preachers that the world has ever experienced.

And so it was throughout those three years of preparation that the Lord is not going to allow the disciples just to sit back and to enjoy watching the miracles.

[6 : 39] That's what everybody else was doing. But every so often, the Lord put them on trial. There were various ways in which he did this. For example, when he sent Peter to go fishing, you remember for the temple tax, the two drachma tax that was required to pay the temple Jews.

And Jesus sent Peter fishing. He sent the disciples fishing and in the mouth of the fish they were to find the two drachma coin and they were to take it and they were to pay the temple Jews. Now that was an act of faith in which Peter was challenged as to whether or not he was prepared to actually act on what he believed Jesus to be or who he believed Jesus to be.

And that's what faith is. Brings us always to a crisis point at which God challenges us. And he says, do you really believe? Do you really believe?

Not just with your head, not just saying it, but do you actually truly believe in me? Now this was one of those crisis points at which the disciples, the true disciples of Jesus were forced as it were, and I don't mean that in a bad sense, but they were forced to state their commitment to Jesus Christ.

I don't believe it was an easy thing for them. It required much wrestling in their own minds. It was no easier for them to get their minds around what Jesus was saying than it was for these others.

[8 : 03] But you'll notice that there were other people who from the outside appeared to be following Jesus. But when it came to the bit, these very people who started off the chapter looking for Jesus in verse 25, Rabbi, when did you get here?

It sounds, it looks from the outside, doesn't it? As if they've got such an interest in Jesus. And yet right from the, from the very beginning, Jesus shows that their motives are wrong ones.

And if your motives are wrong ones, or in my motives are wrong ones, we will never find salvation in Jesus. You'll never find him as he really is if you're looking for things that belong to your enjoyment and your pleasure and life as you know it in this world.

Being right with God is about the life that God gives you. And that's a life that surrounds and which we're restored back to him and in which we're made to gaze on his glory and his greatness and his majesty and in which our lives are oriented around God.

And these people, although they made out as if they were followers of Jesus, disciples, and of course, we have to remember what a disciple was. A disciple was simply a student.

[9 : 25] For example, Saul of Tarshish was a disciple of Gamaliel. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel. And a disciple was just that. Someone who was a learner.

A pupil, we would call it. Someone who learned. And up until that point, these people had been learners. They had been listening to Jesus and learning all the time.

So we shouldn't be too surprised that at the end of the chapter that some of them decide to forsake Jesus. They weren't true disciples. Whilst they were happy to listen to Jesus, while the going was good, when things got really tough, and when he said things, when he began to say things that went completely against their expectations.

You see, God doesn't work to our agenda. You can't negotiate with God. God doesn't bend and shift and shape himself like a piece of blue tack towards what we want in life.

You have to listen to God and you have to accept what he says about yourself and when he says that there is only one way to be right with him and that is by believing and trusting and surrendering to Jesus Christ as his son and his death on the cross.

[10 : 45] So what then can we learn from this crisis moment? Well, we can learn this. that the same words which appear to drive away the false disciples were the very same words that drew Jesus' true disciples to that point of 100% commitment in which Peter says most famously, Lord, to whom shall we go?

you have the words of eternal life. What a testimony came from Peter that day and how many people have been blessed by hearing Peter's clear and committed testimony as he came to commit himself to Jesus.

Well, what were the words then that Jesus spoke? What are the words that Peter describes as the words of everlasting life? What did they mean to those who eventually left Jesus never to return again?

And what did they mean to Peter? And they meant such a different message to Peter as they meant to the other disciples. Well, you find those words as Jesus explains the X as he expounds what he has just done.

This is the only chapter whilst other gospels tell us about the feeding of the 5,000. this is the only chapter which explains the significance of what Jesus did in feeding all of those people because it wasn't just something that provided for their immediate needs.

[12 : 35] It was that. But the miracle takes us much deeper than that. It takes us into the mind and the purpose of God as does every miracle. Every time we come across one of the miracles of Jesus you have to ask not just what it did immediately providing for the blind man making him see or the deaf man making that person hear but you have to ask also what's God saying to us in this?

What message is there in this miracle? What and in this chapter what message is there in Jesus taking those five loaves and those two fish and feeding all of those people?

It tells us something of why it was that Jesus came into the world. It tells us something of what it means to be saved. It tells us something of what we need of how much we need just as the people as he explains to us the people of Israel in the Old Testament needed the manna to come all the way down from heaven.

You remember how God fed them with that peculiar extraordinary substance that they knew as manna the bread from heaven that came down every day and with it the people of Israel were fed.

Well Jesus said Jesus is telling us in this chapter that in like manna he is the bread of God the bread of God I am the bread of life he says whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

[14 : 06] But he didn't just leave at that because he said at first the first problem that they had with him was how can he tell us that he came down from heaven and gave his life to the world.

We know this man we know when he was brought up we know is it not this Jesus the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know immediately his words are a challenge to them are they going to accept that he is none other than God himself having come down in the flesh that was the first challenge which they were all forced in which they were all forced to accept or reject and they had great difficulty how can how can he say to us that he is the bread from heaven we know this man he's the son of Joseph and his father and mother we know but it got worse than that because then he as he went as he further opened up the message which was grounded on the five loaves and the two fishes the message centered on himself you see Jesus is always the sticking point if it had stopped with the feeding of the five thousand they would all have been happy they would all have gone home quite happy because their their desires and their aspirations and their expectations would be they were quite happy to have an earthly worldly political leader who would give them what they wanted just the same way as perhaps there are some here tonight and what you want in religion is something that you want and anything that goes against what you want you're not going to accept and that's why when you come to the claims of Christ they stick in your throat well carry on just carry on with this chapter and let's see what else

Jesus has to say he says some things which are already outrageous that he has come down from heaven to give his life for the world he's going to go even further than that and tell them that unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you now I don't know about you but certainly that is probably the most repulsive statement in the whole bible it is the most horrific statement in the whole bible on a human earthly level and if it's repulsive to you and I in the 21st century it certainly was repulsive to these Jews of course the Jews who were religious people they were taught in the old testament that blood they were never to drink blood they were not even cooked not even cooked blood was acceptable to them the blood must not remain in the animal so all of these people had grown up to be repulsed by the idea of eating raw flesh and drinking blood but you don't need to live in the first century

AD to be repulsed by this statement anyone is as soon as you come across it it arrests you right away and you think what does this mean the problem with these false disciples was that instead of stopping to ask what does this mean they concluded right away they made up their own minds they came to their own conclusion that they had heard enough and they were going to decide there and then on the basis of what Jesus had said and there again because they were so repulsed by what Jesus had said they departed and decided no longer to listen to any more that Jesus was going to tell them so that was what sent the false disciples away but doesn't it strike you that the very words that are so repulsive to those who left Jesus were the very words that meant everything to

Peter Jesus seems to act like a plough doesn't he he divides all of those disciples and you don't know where they stand you don't know who's sincere and who's not you don't know who's trusting and following Jesus in their heart they're all around him they're all saying nice things about him they're all looking for him rabbi when did you come here they're all asking those important questions and you don't know where they stand really but by the end of this chapter most most of them have gone because they can't stomach his message but some of them have come to the point where they can't go they can't live without this message whatever it means they know that it is the most precious the most crucial the most essential message in all the world and the more they hear of it the more they want the more they're attracted and the more they're drawn to this man to the saviour they're already drawn to him they already realise who he is and the more they discover of him the more they want to discover of him and it's the same today maybe I'm talking to somebody tonight and you've and for a while now it's a while now since you've started becoming interested in the gospel and in the bible and I don't know how it started it maybe started off with a word it maybe started off with the death of a friend it may perhaps some other incident happened in your life and you become more and more concerned and you're beginning to see that the superficiality of this world and you're beginning to see there's got to be more to life than what

[19 : 58] I see and what I hear and what I feel around me there's got to be more to it than that and you're right there is perhaps you've started reading your bible perhaps secretly perhaps nobody knows that you're reading your bible perhaps you've got some friend a christian friend and you're meeting with that person every time you're talking to that person about the lord and you're becoming more and more concerned and more and more interested well that's how our understanding grows and it was the same with peter and don't be put off when you make mistakes and when you fall and when you you go astray and when you you you realize that you're not what you hoped you hoped you would be but keep coming back peter did if god if the lord can forgive peter the number of times that he forgave him he'll forgive you as you come back to him as you come in and as you confess that your understanding is not what you thought it was this is a growing it's a growing discovery of jesus and what he is and what he came to do now then what was it about the words that that meant so much to peter well i'll tell you what it was pete and i'll tell you what made the difference that whereas the substance the content of the message was so repulsive to the other disciples the disciples who gave up at that moment in time peter was prepared to put a put aside the explanation of jesus message and to grasp the significance of the message now let me explain what i mean by that let me explain what i mean what had jesus said he said first of all i am the bread of life whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst but i said to you that you have seen me and yet you do not believe i have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me and this is the will of him who sent me that i should lose nothing for this is the will that everyone listen to this everyone who looks on the son and believes in him should have eternal life and i will raise him up at the last day now i'll tell you what these words meant to peter peter was a jewish young man who had grown up presumably in a devout jewish home he knew his old testament very well these these people were very serious about the old testament and if you grew up in the synagogue you were taught from a very early age especially the boys you were taught the history of the jews abraham isaac jacob mooses the journey through the wilderness the passover every single detail i grew up in the sunday school where you were where you were expected to recite passages of scripture and catechisms and psalms and nowadays of course children are not encouraged to do that as much as they were in my day but if my day was bad then even though it was even worse than peter's day because he would hours and hours and hours he would have to spend reciting and learning he would know passages so in other words in other words they took the lord absolutely seriously there was nothing as serious and as solemn in the jewish mind as god's law because god's law reflected the holiness and the majesty of god and they would know passages where god in his majesty and his holiness was revealed like for example the burning bush they would know it backwards they would know how mooses had come to encounter god in the burning bush and if there's one thing that would be impressed on the mind of a young person it was the holiness and the righteousness the burning holiness of god he would have known also in isaiah

chapter 6 how isaiah was confronted by the vision in which he saw the lord high and lifted up what else is there there but the holiness the holiness of god peter would also have known that contrary to that was his own life was in terms of what god demanded he would know the ten commandments he would know everything that the ten commandments implied he would know the ten commandments off by heart you shall not have any other gods except me you shall not make unto you any graven image or likeness of anything that is heaven above you shall not take the name of the lord your god in vain you shall remember the sabbath day honor your father and your mother there was nothing as important in the life of a young jewish boy as the law of god and that was drummed into him i guess like today there were some who took it more seriously than others but peter i would guess took it very seriously and in his mind as a young boy growing up and that's why we must never write off our young people and not take them to church you wouldn't believe how seriously a young child can understand and can think about the really essential issues of life and death and where he stands before god that's how peter grew up and as peter tried to reconcile what he knew the whole about the holiness of god and what he knew about his own life he knew how utterly impossible it was to keep god's law as god demanded he knew that god was perfect and so if he failed in any way he had failed completely and if he failed in any way he was condemned because there was no forgiveness god was ultimately and utterly and completely holy and he knew that if he was to die that day he would have to stand before god and he would be guilty of all the failures and the sins that he had committed even in his young life he knew that and as he looked to the religious teachers of the day he saw nothing but hypocrisy the pharisees everyone knew that the pharisees were only out for themselves so were the sadducees the sadducees denied more than they believed the religious leaders of that time were nothing more than a hierarchy there were some kind of there was a pecking order a kind of a royalty if you like of people who were in the right places but everyone knew that it was all a show and a sham that there was nothing serious and nothing that very few of them very few of them i shouldn't say none of them because there were some who were very serious about what they did but for the most part it was something on the outside so when it came to to his standing before god he knew he couldn't trust and he couldn't look to the religious teachers of the day neither could he look to the romans who were occupying palestine at that day what they believed in was quite impossible they believed in many gods they believed that god for war and a god for peace and a god for love and all of these things he knew that that wasn't possible that there was only one god and he stood accountable before the living and the true god but what he saw in himself the failure that he saw in his own life he saw in the lives of others there was nobody his his boyhood friends his brothers his sisters everyone at some point in time they would come out with something they shouldn't they would lose their temper they would be tempted to steal and as he went through his adolescence he knew the unclean thoughts that were coming coming into his head about girls and all the rest of it he knew the pride that was coming into his own heart the anger that he felt for something the covetousness every one of them he knew that he had fallen out with his his parents from time to time and with the

best will in the world he had a bad attitude towards them he may may even have had a bad had a had a blasphemous thought in his mind from one from one time to another that's the kind of person he was an ordinary jewish boy an ordinary jewish young man and the more he lived the more he discovered his own sinfulness and his own darkness and his own guilt was there any hope whatsoever for a young man like this from the day that he met Jesus of Nazareth he met someone who was different from every other person in the world he had never in all his life come across someone like Jesus of Nazareth because as he followed him and as he witnessed him he not only saw the most extraordinary power able to turn water into wine able to walk on the water able to touch someone and who was deaf and they would begin to hear eyes of someone who was blind begin to see the loaves and the fishes five loaves and two fish creating them blessing them and able to provide for five thousand people that was only part of it as Peter sat and listened to this extraordinary man he spoke with an authority that he had never heard from the very best of the

Pharisees from the very best and the most noble of the religious leaders but more than that here was a person even that wasn't as wasn't the end here was a person and the more he saw he never saw any single sin in this person he watched him from one end of the day to the other he never lost his temper he never got weary of of of people he never said the wrong thing he never displayed a wrong attitude he had never ever come into contact with anyone like that and you know the disciples they they they were with the Lord all the time they were with Jesus all the time so that they would it wouldn't take long you try being with somebody from one end of the day to the to the next you try living in the same in the same location as somebody the closer you are to that person the quicker you're going to discover their defects and their faults and the quicker that person is going to discover your faults as well and yet none not a single defect or sin in this Jesus the answer is going to be right with God and Peter worked out by his logic by his correct right logic that if it is possible at all to be right with God then the answer has to be in this man and you know what the same is true today if it is possible to be right with God the answer absolutely and can only lie in Jesus of Nazareth that's what he discovered as he watched

Jesus and as he grew in his understanding Jesus explaining to him and the rest of the disciples and all those who were willing to hear how he had come into the world and explaining things that were things that were the questions the kind of questions that any seriously minded person would be thinking about God and about life and about death Jesus answered them and was explaining each part logically sensibly biblically with a thorough knowledge and with a life to match so Peter worked out that if God was going to be reconciled to anyone it had to be this person but there was more to it than that because as Jesus spoke Peter began to hear something that was music to his ears up until that point he still even although he recognized the extraordinary uniqueness of Jesus there was still no link it's one thing for Jesus to live a perfect life but how could he become like Jesus because there was one thing that was absolutely clear was that

[32 : 26] Jesus was the opposite to him that where Jesus lived a perfect life it showed Peter up even more for his own defects and for his own sinfulness and that's the fallacy by the way of thinking that the sermon on the mount can save us many conversations have you been in with somebody who says well what we need today is the teaching of Jesus what we need today is to put into practice the sermon on the mount blessed are the poor in spirit blessed are those who mourn and so on and what we need today is for the world to adopt these as a kind of manifesto and to go back to Jesus and to listen to him not to don't worry too much about the death the death was some kind of unfortunate incident at the end of the life of Jesus what we need today is the teaching of Jesus and if only our society would adopt that teaching then we would be so different and that would that would make such a difference well doubtless it would make such a difference there's no question at all but the world would be a totally different place if we adopted the teaching but that's not going to make us right with God the more we listen in fact to the teaching of Jesus the more we discover how impossible it is to keep the sermon on the mount how often have you gone the second mile you haven't how often have you turned the other cheek you haven't how often have I turned the other cheek no way it's so opposite to what we actually do and who's going to forgive me for not turning the other cheek for spending 52 years of my life not turning the other cheek what's going to happen to all my guilt and my failure for not doing and not living the way that God has expected me to live and that Jesus has explained that I should live that's the question and that's the first question that has to precede everything else how can I be right with

God there still was no link in the mind of Peter as he watched Jesus it probably made his own life even worse until he began to hear the message of the gospel and the message was this I am the bread of life whoever comes to me shall not hunger if ever there was a hungry man it was Peter and Peter knew exactly what he talked about he's not talking about this the filling of your stomach he's talking about that longing that Peter had to be right with God that longing that Peter had to be forgiven I am the bread of life whoever comes to me shall not hunger then he says whoever looks to the son shall have everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last day and even although Peter even although Jesus went on at that moment to say things that were so peculiar and on the outside so utterly repulsive Peter knew that whatever those things meant he wanted them because they were going to get he wouldn't have listened to anyone else but he knew he had to listen to this man because he knew that this man had what he needed most desperately in all the world and what he didn't have and he knew then that if this man was going to extend the bridge between him and God he had to listen and he was happy to listen and he was longing to listen because he knew that this man could totally transform his life and change him and bring him back to God by forgiving his sin we must always put the significance of Jesus before the explanation it was only afterwards that Peter realized the explanation of so much of what Jesus even beginning with the resurrection the disciples didn't expect

Jesus to rise from the dead even although he had explained that he would rise from the dead it took a while before the the disciples actually got their minds around the fact that he was actually risen it was the same with us what Peter heard in those words was the message of the gospel even although not even Peter himself would have been able to explain what Jesus meant by those awful words and yet the most precious words that you could ever hear what were those words truly truly I say to you unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life in Peter's mind that's what he needed whatever eating the flesh of Jesus meant and drinking his blood he knew that by so doing he would be reconciled to God and his sins would be forgiven what did those words mean of course they weren't to be taken literally they meant the flesh that was broken when Jesus was put to death at Calvary they meant the blood that was shed as Jesus laid down his life as the sin offering the sacrifice by which our sin could be forgiven and would be forgiven and by which we would be cleansed from our sin and they mean the same today as they mean as they meant in those early days when Peter listened to them it is only by the blood of Jesus Christ the death of Jesus Christ the sacrifice of Jesus Christ it is only by coming to Calvary personally and by discovering that was the point at which God in the flesh paid the penalty for our sin and suffered the anger of God instead of us so that by trusting in him and by accepting his death on our behalf we would have everlasting life and the message that was so precious to Peter on that day is still the most precious most wonderful most essential message in all the world today 2000 years later the question is what will you do with that message are these the words tonight that will draw you to say Lord to whom else shall we go you have the words of everlasting life or like the other so-called disciples to say this is a hard saying and to leave him never to return which is it to be sometimes it takes the challenge to be put to us in the opposite sense not will you follow Jesus but will you also leave because there can only be one or the other that we can't pick and choose

we can't have half of Jesus we can't have a blend of Jesus it has to be all of Jesus or none of him which is it to be will you also go away let's pray our father in heaven once again we pray for your power to apply your word to our hearts we pray that you will bring us to see the majesty and the greatness of Jesus bring us to see our own lostness our own need our own bankruptcy failure to keep your word and to live as you demand us to live give us to see that there is not a single person here who deserves your grace and deserves to be part of your kingdom but give us to see that Jesus and by trusting in him that our lives can be changed and we too can have everlasting life from the forgiveness of all our sin these things we ask in Jesus name

Amen