

"Do you want to go away as well?"

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] A very warm welcome to you all for the service here from Stornoway this evening. We're grateful to have your company and we trust that together as we turn to worship the Lord, that we'll know the Lord's blessing.

Now I have one intimation before we begin the worship, and it's regarding Wednesday evening, this next Wednesday evening, God willing, when we will be over Zoom as usual, that's 7.30, but it will be in the form of a farewell service for Muriel.

Muriel received word yesterday, confirmation that she could leave and apply for her visa to go back to Cambodia. So she's leaving on the 8th of September, which means we've just got this week to get her farewell together.

So we want to actually have that as a farewell service for Muriel. Martin Patterson from OMF, the Scottish Director, will also be joining us over Zoom for that service.

So if you wish to have access to the service and you don't already have the login details for Zoom, if you've either emailed myself or Marianne at Stornoway Free Church, then we can actually send that to anybody interested in joining us for that service.

[1 : 13] It's important that we actually send Muriel off with our prayerful good wishes, and she will be presenting at the over Zoom, she'll be presenting some details about the work that she's going to be doing in Cambodia as she returns soon.

So I commend that to you and please just inform others if you want them to actually join us as well. They're very welcome. Now we're going to begin the worship this evening with praise. One of the things we've missed is being able to sing together, and although singing over livestream is not exactly the same, it's still something that's very important for us.

So we're going to sing in Psalm 95 in the Sing Psalms, and this is also in the form of our call to worship, when we're invited and called here by God to, by the psalms to come and worship the Lord.

So Psalm 95, if you're using the usual psalm books, that's on page 1 to 6. We'll sing verses marked 1 to 7, first three stanzas.

O come, let us joyfully sing to the Lord. To the rock of salvation let us raise our voice. Let us come before him expressing our thanks. Let us with loud singing praise him and rejoice.

[2 : 27] The Lord is the great God, king over all gods, the earth's deepest places he holds in his hand. The height of the mountains belong to the Lord, the oceans are his, and he formed the dry land.

Come, let us bow humbly and worship the Lord. Let us kneel before him, our maker in prayer. For we are his people, and he is our God. He shepherds and feeds us in his loving care.

We'll sing these verses. O come, let us joyfully sing to the Lord, to the tune of St. Daniel. O come, let us joyfully sing to the Lord, to the rock of salvation.

Let us hear our voice. Let us come before him expressing our thanks.

Let us with loud singing praise him and rejoice. The Lord is the great God, king over all gods.

[3 : 39] The earth's deepest places he holds in his hand. The heights of the mountains belong to the Lord.

The oceans are his, and he forms the dry land. Come, let us bow humbly and worship the Lord.

Let us kneel before him, our maker in prayer. For we are his people, and he is our God.

He shepherds and feeds us in his loving care. We're going to read God's word now from the Gospel of John, and from chapter 6.

And we begin our reading this evening at verse 47. This is breaking into the narrative, of course. It's a long chapter. And here Jesus, as he has been expressing who he is, and himself especially as the bread of life, we find that here at verse 47, Jesus continued to speak as follows.

[5 : 03] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? So Jesus said to them, 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, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father has sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.

[6 : 14] This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever. Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, Do you take offence at this?

Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him. And he said this, This is why I told you, that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.

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?

[7 : 29] You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. Jesus answered them, Did I not choose you, the twelve?

And yet one of you is a devil. He spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

And we pray that God will bless to us this passage of his word. We'll come back to look at a couple of verses from it later on.

Let's meantime engage in prayer. Let's join together in prayer. Lord, our gracious God, we come before you as one of whom we have been reading in your word, the bread of life that came down from heaven to give life to the world.

And we thank you, O Lord, that you have made it clear in the teaching of your word. As we come to partake of you spiritually, so we come into the possession of eternal life.

[8 : 34] Lord, we recall the words of Moses when he sought that God would show him his glory. I beseech you, show me your glory.

We pray, Lord, that that will be so for us tonight. We know that the Lord's answer to him was in terms of not something spectacular, something of a blinding light, but you showed him your glory when you mentioned your goodness and emphasised your forgiveness, your long-suffering, your patience.

We bless you tonight, Lord, that your glory is in these things. We thank you that as we come to know you and come to know your forgiveness of our sins and come to know your spirit working in our lives.

Lord, we give thanks that you reveal your glory to us in these things. Help us, we pray, to see them as such, things which belong to heavenly realities, things which have not created for ourselves, things which belong to the provision of God and redemption for his people.

We thank you tonight for the privilege we have of calling upon your name in prayer. We bless you, Lord, as we sang in the psalm, that we can come to you as not only the creator of the whole world and of all the creation, and one who presides over it and upholds it and uses it towards your own furtherance of your own glory and praise.

[10 : 04] We thank you, too, that you are the God of the detail of our lives. And as the one who is so great and awesome that we cannot possibly measure you, no, Lord, we give thanks that, nevertheless, you are the one who is intensely interested and makes provision for all the detail of our human lives.

We thank you that you have provided salvation for us especially. You have done this in the glorious person of your Son, and we bless you tonight that through what he has done, your people have come to know you as their Father in heaven.

And, Lord, we pray that as we deal with your Word tonight that you would impress upon us once again the wonder and the beauty and the glory of these things of your redemption so that we can see how far they surpass the things of this present world, the material things that we are so familiar with that we can see and touch and taste.

We bless you, O Lord, that those spiritual and heavenly realities that you apply to our hearts and to our lives are in a different category to those ordinary, everyday things that we know of.

We thank you for them as well. We bless you for the way that you look after us as we've been singing. As a shepherd looks after his sheep, so the Lord looks after his flock.

[11 : 29] We praise you tonight, Lord, for the way in which you provide for us daily, above what we ourselves call for and ask for. And yet you fill our lives abundantly.

Forgive us for the number of times, Lord, that we fail to appreciate this as we should. Help us especially to appreciate those things of your salvation to the praising of your name, to the committing of ourselves more fully to you and to yourselves.

And we ask, Lord, that through your Word tonight we may receive further instruction and encouragement. And if we require it also, that we may find that which challenges our pride, our sense of self-sufficiency.

Bring us down from these, we pray, so that we may depend upon yourself fully for everything that we require is to be found in you in abundance. Bless, we pray, the world in which we live, our surroundings not only immediately in our own localities, but throughout the world.

Lord, we know that many people tonight are in distress, that many people are caught up in various afflictions and various diseases and ailments, various situations in life that cause them trauma and anguish and anger.

[12 : 50] Lord, our God, we know that we live in a fallen world and the fallenness of that world is all too apparent to your people. We pray that in your great mercy you would extend your kingdom and that even tonight, Lord, you would use your word so that many hearts will be turned to you.

We pray especially that you would bring those who are yet not familiar with you into the ways of the gospel. We pray that when your gospel is proclaimed, when your people live it out in their lives, that it will be blessed by you, that others will come and turn aside and see this great thing that has happened in the lives and experience of your people so that they may be drawn to yourself.

We pray that you bless us, Lord, in this situation with the COVID pandemic that still rages throughout the world. Lord God, we pray again for our governments.

We pray for our leaders. We pray for all who assist them by way of advice, by way of scientific analysis and experimentation in seeking to find an answer, Lord, and a cure for this virus.

We commit ourselves to you, Lord, as a people and pray that you would help us to remain patient and persevering and help us especially to continue to trust in you, to realise that all the things that happen in our experience and in the world's history are part of your great plan, which only you know in its fullness.

[14 : 25] But help us, we pray, to commit ourselves into your mighty hand, that we may humble ourselves continuously before you, that we may be exalted by you, for this is your promise in your word.

We ask your blessing for us as a congregation. We thank you for all who join us online for these services and all others, Lord, who elsewhere are disseminating your truth through online services and also those who have begun to meet in their church buildings.

We pray that you'd bless us as a people. We ask, Lord, that your word will continue to have its work among us, that we may bear fruit to your glory, that we may come as we anticipate, Lord, as we pray it would be shortly.

Whenever it might be, to be together again physically, help us meantime to wait upon yourself and help us to benefit from your word and to benefit even from this providence that has brought us into this situation.

We pray your blessing tonight for Muriel as she prepares once again to return to Cambodia. We thank you for the way that you have opened up for her once again.

[15 : 37] We pray, Lord, that you prepare her for that. We ask that all that she still has to go by way of steps towards leaving the country and going to that work, that you'd be pleased, Lord, to take her through that successfully.

And we ask that you would be with her and keep her and assure her of your presence in everything that yet remains towards her return to Cambodia. We pray, Lord, in your good time that she may know your blessing as she anticipates that work and as she enters on it by your will.

We ask now that you bless us here as we continue in your presence. We pray that you bless us in our families, in our homes, in our communities, in our children.

Bless them, we pray, and keep them safe at this time and be with them as they return to school and as they continue to learn these things in their daily education.

We pray that you would bless that to them and bless them too as they learn the things of the Gospel. Hear us, we pray, and pardon our sin. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[16 : 41] Now tonight, children, I'm going to speak to you about another of the animals from the Bible and that's going to be the serpent or the snake. A serpent, snake, really describe the same creature.

And very near the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis chapter 3, we read about the serpent for the first time and we know that the serpent there, elsewhere through the Bible, represents or can be used by or is indeed a picture of Satan.

The book of Revelation mentions Satan as that great serpent. So the serpent is one we always associate with Satan as representing Satan and the powers of Satan.

The serpent we read in Genesis 3 was more subtle, more crafty than the other animals of the field. I don't know about you, but I don't like snakes.

I've never been near snakes very often, but whenever I have, they really give me the shivers. They're very, there's something about them that just makes you a bit afraid and when you look into their eyes and when you see them slithering around, they just really give you the creeps, don't they?

[17 : 53] Maybe some of you are not like that, but most people don't really like snakes at all. And in the Bible, as the snake represents the devil, so the devil is presented to us as one who is very crafty, very cunning.

He came to Eve, first of all, before he then approached Adam through Eve and he suggested to Eve that God had not quite been fully apprising them of the truth, that he had left some things out and he questioned, has God indeed said this?

That's always Satan's way. He'll always try and deceive you. He'll always try and put on an appearance of truth. He might do that, not just, he doesn't do that, of course, by just jumping out in front of you so that you can see him just as he is.

Very often he uses people. He uses other means by which to come and tempt us away from obedience to Jesus and to God, as in Genesis 3 we read.

And he can disguise himself like that in somebody that comes to you and suggests that you do something wrong or that you don't remain true to Jesus or to God.

[19 : 06] Behind all of these suggestions, always, is the devil's craftiness and his attempt to take you away from obeying Christ and following Christ. We're going to look in the sermon tonight at people who stopped following Christ.

And one of these people at one time was actually Peter. Peter is in this passage tonight that we read and we'll look at that in a moment. But in Matthew chapter 16, when Jesus had started teaching his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem, that he would be mistreated there, that he would eventually be put to death there.

Peter took him aside. Just took him aside and said, no, no, this is not going to happen to you, Lord. This can't happen to you. And you remember how Jesus replied, get behind me, Satan.

You see, Satan was trying to use Peter in order to take Jesus away from the work he had to do. And he did that with Jesus himself. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil, the devil came to him and said, when he looked at all the kingdoms of the world, he said, all of these will I give you if you just fall down and worship me.

What was the devil saying? He was saying, you don't have to go through with the cross and with the suffering of the cross and with the death of the cross. I'll give you all these and I'll give you a bypass around the cross and you can still come into the possession of all of these kingdoms and the glory of them.

[20 : 39] Of course, Jesus didn't fall for that. He knew who he was dealing with. I saw a video recently. I think I may have used this in illustration. I've said one before, but a video of a snake, a serpent, in a certain part of Iran, a rocky part of Iran and a mountainous part and this snake looks exactly like the rocks.

Its skin is the same colouring as the rocks and it even has lumps and horns that give you the appearance of stones. This snake is known as the spider-tailed viper.

The reason it's known as that is on its tail, the very tip of its tail, it has a thing that looks like a large spider. And what the snake does, it curls up in a little hole in the rocks and its head is there, but you think it's a stone.

Beside that, its tail goes around like this over the rock and for any bird looking on, that looks like a really juicy spider. And of course, there are lots of nesting birds around there at certain times of the year.

So in this video, here was this bird and it flew in thinking this was actually a spider. It would have taken it back to the nest to feed its young and as soon as it came to try and pick it up, the snake just pounced, grabbed it, killed it, and ate it.

[22 : 05] That's how the devil operates. You don't really see him as he is. He'll disguise himself. Of course, that bird probably had a nest, so it meant that one of the parent birds of that nest of little birds is no longer living.

And that's what Satan wants to do. He doesn't just want to spoil your life and my life. He wants to spoil other people's lives through us as well.

That's what he was trying to do with Peter and Jesus and the disciples. But thankfully, tonight, we know that Jesus came into the world to destroy the works of the devil.

And he's done that. The devil's not in control, not even of the evil that exists in the world. He is part of a whole world of evil and yet Jesus has already defeated him.

His death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead has defeated the devil. That's why you can resist the devil depending on the strength of Jesus.

[23 : 11] That's why James says in the epistle of James chapter 4 verse 7 where it says, Resist the devil and he will flee from you. But you know, before that, it's important we notice the words before that because it says, Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.

The more you humble yourself and give yourself to God, the more defended you are against the devil. And that's where the serpent in the Bible teaches us how important it is to have Jesus as our friend.

To have the power of Jesus in our life. To resist the craftiness, the subtlety, the evil ways of the devil.

Now we're going to say the Lord's Prayer together and in that as well there is, as you know, a reference in the Lord's Prayer to temptation and to praying to the Lord to keep us from temptation.

Lead us not into temptation. Let's say the Lord's Prayer together. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[24 : 29] Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. So let's turn back now to John chapter 6.

We're going to look at another of the questions that come from God to us. We've been following a series of those for the last number of weeks. Here we find in verses 66 to 69 another question that comes from the mouth of the Lord himself so it's a question from God to us.

Let's read from verse 66. After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve disciples, 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.

[25 : 36] Well, it's always really sad and very, very much a thing that is hard to accept when you find people choosing to leave the church.

I don't mean by that people going from one congregation to another, transferring from one to another, that always happens. Oh, I don't even mean going from one denomination to another church.

What I mean is a total defection. Now, sometimes happens when people say, well, that's it, I'm not really keen on remaining with the church at all. I want to just break from the church altogether.

That's always a tragedy because very often it indicates that those people have decided not to follow the Lord anymore. Following the Lord here, because he's talking here about disciples, going back and no longer walking with him or following him, disciples is used here in the wider sense.

A disciple really is actually somebody who is being taught by Jesus or by the rabbis at the time, but a disciple was someone being taught, you might say, a student.

[26 : 46] And in that sense, we are all disciples of Jesus because tonight we're all disciples of Jesus. We're following Jesus to the extent that we're under his teaching.

We're coming to his word and he's speaking to us through his word and he's addressing this question to us through his word as well. We're not told here how Jesus felt at this moment when he saw all of these people deciding no longer to follow him, to be his disciples in that sense, but he used this as an occasion to plant a really important question in the mind of the twelve disciples, the likes of Peter and James and John and the others.

And the question was, and just think of the background to this, all of those other disciples, many disciples, there weren't just a small number of them turned back, no longer walked with them.

You can just picture the scene, there is Jesus having taught them all this and there they are, they're just going away, crowds of them just leaving. And then he turns to the twelve and says, do you want to go away as well?

And that's a question probing allegiance to Jesus. A question probing allegiance to Jesus. We'll take it like that.

[28 : 05] And the answer that Peter gives is an answer professing acceptance of Jesus. These are our two main points tonight. A question probing allegiance to Jesus and an answer professing acceptance to Jesus.

Now why did these many disciples turn back at this stage and no longer walk with him? What was it that caused them to come to that decision to no longer follow Jesus, to continue to be his disciples, to be taught by him?

Well if you look at verse 60, many of his disciples heard this, what Jesus had been saying as we read down from verse 47, but it goes back further into the chapter of course.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, this is a hard saying, who can listen to it? Or really it's literally saying, who can accept it? And then verse 63, you go on reading through and you come to verse 63 where Jesus is saying, having said do you take offence at this?

Do you find this a cause of offence? It is the spirit who gives life, the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you, they are spirit and they are life.

[29 : 17] Why did they turn back? It wasn't because they didn't understand what he was saying. It wasn't because they said, we can't possibly follow what this man is saying. It's just a conundrum to us. What does he mean?

We can't follow in any way what he's saying. It's not clear to us. That's not why they stopped following. It's because they did understand, but they wouldn't accept. You see, Jesus from all the way from verse 25 really, the thing is building up from verse 25 where they came to him there and Jesus immediately said, you are seeking me not because you saw the signs of miracles, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

Don't labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life. And of course, they went on to speak about himself as the bread of life, which came down from heaven, surpassing that manna that really was an image of Jesus as the manna of God, the bread of life.

And the Jews in verse 41, you see the things building up. They grumbled about him because he said, I am the bread that came down from heaven. They said, is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?

How does he now say, I have come down from heaven? And as you trace this passage all the way through to this question that he put to the twelve and these disciples leaving him, what you're finding is that they're actually looking at things not at all in a spiritual way.

[30 : 42] They're not looking at Jesus in a way that accepts his claim. They just can't accept that he is this Messiah, this bread of life, this one who's come down from heaven, this agent of the father of God that's come to redeem his people in this world.

They understand very well what he's saying, but they're not prepared to accept it. They're looking at it on the level of the material. He's just an ordinary human being, even if he's got remarkable teaching.

And it's really their own preference more than anything else that they're looking at, their own choice, their own idea of what a saviour should look like, and it's not this man. And that's why they actually continue to reject his claims to be who he is, and his teaching as the bread of life, to give life to the world.

And he certainly, they certainly were offended by the fact that he said, unless you partake of me, he spoke there about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. He didn't mean that of course literally, and they wouldn't have understood that literally either.

They weren't as silly and stupid as that. They understand he meant that figuratively, that he meant partaking of his ability to be their saviour.

[32 : 01] that's what he was not prepared, they were not prepared to accept. In other words, Jesus refused to give them what they wanted, and they refused to accept what he offered.

That's why they turned back and they left him. And you know, sadly, that's repeated or replicated throughout the world, right up to our own day as well. There are many people that have their own idea as to what salvation should consist of, as to the kind of person Jesus should be, however he's described in the Bible.

And when it doesn't fit with what they themselves see, either they adjust the teaching of the Bible to suit their own mindset, or else they just say, well, this is not for me.

And then Jesus, in that context, turns and puts this testing question, question probing allegiance to Jesus to the twelve. So Jesus said to the twelve, do you want to go away as well?

And that's, that kind of question we've seen already is a feature of John's Gospel. We looked at the question in chapter one, where Jesus turned to disciples who were newly following him, who had been following John the Baptist.

[33 : 19] What are you seeking? We've seen the importance of that, of analysing what are we actually seeking in being disciples of Jesus? We've looked at chapter 13 last time, where he had washed their feet, the feet of the twelve disciples this is, in the upper room, and he said, do you know what I have done to you?

Follow that by saying, I have given you an example that you should wash one another's feet. We went into that to some extent. You find the same in chapter 21, where he interviews Peter, after Peter has denied him these three times, and there he comes again to meet with Jesus, and Jesus questions him, and his question is, do you love me more than these?

And then twice again, do you love me? We'll probably look at that question, God willing, as part of the series of questions as well. But here we have the fourth one, and these are distinct points in the gospel of John and in his teaching, chapter 1, chapter 6, chapter 13, chapter 21.

And one of the things you have to notice there is that these questions are all addressed to disciples. They're all addressed to disciples.

That's what we must reckon with tonight, that we have to analyse, all the time go on analysing, what is it that underlies our following of Jesus?

[34 : 47] Why is it that in this lockdown situation, we've decided, instead of saying, well that's fine, I quite enjoyed going to church while I went to church, but that's no longer possible, so I'll just leave things, and if the church goes back to meeting in their own buildings again, in the buildings, then maybe go back then, I'll probably go back then.

Why is it that we haven't done that? Why is it that we've insisted on actually providing the gospel through online services? Why is it that people join these services, not only just from Stornoway and from around this locality, but from far-flung places in the world, and we're delighted to see that, from USA, from Athens, from New Zealand, from various parts of Europe, even from England and from Scotland.

Why is that? Because people, as they analyse this question and what underlies their following of Jesus, they actually come to the conclusion that Peter came to hear.

Well, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Lockdown is not going to stop that. Lockdown is not going to change my mind about you, Jesus, and what you mean to me, and who you are for me.

And this lockdown has provided a context in God's providence where we can analyse this matter for ourselves along with many other things. Even if we don't understand much of why this has happened, and even if we accept it's under God's authority and under God's sovereignty, one of the things we can say is, well, it's given me the opportunity of just looking at myself, looking at myself closely in my relationship with Jesus, looking at myself as a follower of Jesus, and asking myself the question, what is it that makes me think?

[36 : 42] What makes me want to do that and keep on doing that? Isn't it because there is no one else like him? Isn't it because I love him more than anyone else? Isn't it because he alone has the words of eternal life?

There's the question, and it addresses tonight our allegiance as well, a question probing our allegiance to Jesus. How was that then answered? Well, Simon Peter answered, and this is an answer professing acceptance of Jesus.

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and so on. Now, the question can be put in words just rearranged a little bit, because literally, if you follow the language of the text there, we could say that in order to get the full force of what Peter was saying, we could put the word something like this.

What Jesus was actually asking was, do you want to go away as well? The words really that Jesus literally were saying to him is, surely you're not going to go back to, are you?

So when you look at the question that way, do you also want to go away? This is what Jesus really was forcibly saying to them. Surely you're not going to go away too, are you?

[38 : 09] You 12. And you see, putting the question that way, it does make a difference. Because there's something there of an emotional challenge, isn't there? When you ask somebody, are you going to do this?

It's quite different than asking them, surely you're not going to do that as well. Because it adds a punch to it, doesn't it? It really puts a strong emotional challenge into the question.

And that applies to us too tonight. Under the gospel, as we said, as followers of Jesus, we are as followers, we are following, we see a lot going on in the world around us. We're aware of people maybe at times leaving the church and saying they don't want to be followers of Jesus anymore.

And what Jesus is saying as he turns around to you and to me tonight is, surely you're not going to go away as well. And what does that emphasize? Well, it emphasizes we're the people of the advantages.

We're the people who have the privileges. Most, if not all of us, have been baptized into that membership of the church outwardly and visibly. We have been taught much by Jesus, just like those 12 disciples were up to this point in their experience.

[39 : 18] And in the context of seeing all of these people disappear and leaving Jesus, that's why Jesus is saying to them, surely you're not going to go back. Are you?

And surely that's what you're aware of tonight too. And the force of this question addressing you as somebody who is a disciple, who knows the privileges Jesus has given you, who knows the advantage you have under the gospel itself, who knows the benefit of being with other followers of Jesus in the church, who knows his teaching through the gospel.

To you and to me too, he's saying, surely you're not going to go back, whoever else goes back, are you? And then Jesus, Peter rather, answers Jesus and saying, Lord, to whom shall we go?

Here's the question, surely you're not going to go back as well? And here's Peter instantly answering, as Peter often did, Lord, to whom shall we go? In other words, the words really mean, to whom else shall we go?

We have no one like you. There is nobody else that can do for us and provide for us what you're doing for us, what you provide for us. There's nobody else that we know like you.

[40 : 42] There's nobody else in existence like you. And you see, he's not saying, Lord, to what shall we go? He's saying, to whom shall we go? Where are we going to find another person like you?

You see, our salvation is in that person, isn't it? It's not in our religion, not even in the Christian religion itself. Because we can know the Christian religion inside out.

I could be what I'm not tonight, the greatest theologian in the world and nothing like it. But even if I were, that's itself not going to save me. It's not going to be the basis of my acceptance with God.

Jesus is. And by coming to trust in him and receive him and accept him, and I take him as God's provision for me, God's saviour, God-provided saviour, that's what gives me the ground on which to stand in the presence of God.

To whom else can we go? Is what Peter is saying. Lord, to whom shall we go? Very good. Verse 68 here as well saying, you have the words of eternal life.

[41 : 45] And again, what Peter means is, you alone have the words of eternal life. And what he means by that really is, when you think of the words of Jesus, and how Jesus is presented in the Bible as one whose words are so effective, so powerful, so creative.

Because they're the words of the creator. And so John begins his gospel. Without this Jesus, nothing was made that was made. Everything was made through him and for him. These are the very things you find in the Bible, like Genesis 1, God spoke the creation into being.

God said, let there be light. And there was light. That's God's powerful words. That's God's powerful, the word powerfully of Jesus himself. And John chapter 7, here in the next chapter, when the authorities, the religious authorities, sent people out to try and bring Christ into custody, they came back without him.

The officers came back, verse 45, came back to the chief priests and Pharisees, and who said to them, why did you not bring him? They were angry that Jesus was not brought by them into their custody, and so that they could question him.

Why did you not bring him? the officers answered, no one ever spoke. Like this man, isn't that an amazing answer to the question? Why did they not bring him?

[43 : 14] Well, they said, pretty much saying something that amounts to saying, there's no way we could bring him into custody. How do you expect us to bring a man who speaks like that into custody? A man whose words are so powerful, a man whose words are so influential, we couldn't possibly bring him into custody, we couldn't possibly arrest him.

No one ever spoke like this man. And that's how it is with Jesus elsewhere too. 11, chapter 11, isn't it?

And verse 43 there, where Jesus comes to Lazarus, the body of Lazarus, lying in the two dead body of Lazarus.

And what does Jesus say? Jesus says, Lazarus, come out. Lazarus, come forth. What happens?

The person who was dead and wrapped round with the grave clothes comes out of the tomb. And Jesus gives another authoritative word. Release him and let him go.

[44 : 19] This is the Jesus that Peter is actually addressing here. This is the Jesus that's brought before us in the Bible, in the Gospels. This wonderful life creating Jesus, life giving Jesus.

Lord, to whom shall we go? What's the most important thing in your life? Isn't it to have eternal life? What is the most important thing you can possess? It is eternal life.

Where do you find it? Where is this eternal life situated? It is only in God and Christ, as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. And you find this eternal life fully in Jesus, fully in God in Christ. That's why John records Jesus' prayer in John 17, where you remember Jesus in addressing the Father says, and this is eternal life, that they might know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

That's why the devil we mentioned to the children is so active in trying to deflect you from placing all your trust in this Jesus. That's why this devil has been active all the way throughout history in the heresies that the church has had to face and overcome, respecting the person of Jesus, respecting the Trinity, respecting justification by faith in Christ, all of these great doctrines that are foundational to our salvation.

[45 : 56] That's why there's been so many repeated attempts at deflecting you from that, at diverting you from having these things as essential in your experience.

and the same as through here too. Lord, to whom shall we go? Where are you going to find tonight anyone like him?

Where are you going to find eternal life but in him? That's why Peter's answer is so vehement, so definite, so positive.

Lord, to whom shall we go? if an angel from heaven came down tonight and stood in front of you, not that he would say this, but if he came down, if you imagine it and said to you, look, I'm going to offer you something but you don't need to have Jesus in order to actually enter heaven.

You do it some other way. You would say, no, I can't accept that because there is no one like this Jesus and there is salvation in no other except in him and God through him and the cross and the resurrection and all that's foundational in his life.

[47 : 18] So here is Peter saying, Lord, to whom shall we go? Isn't that your own conviction tonight now? Isn't that what you're saying in response to this question of Jesus as he's addressing you and addressing me tonight?

Do you, surely you're also not going to go back, are you? Are you not going to answer that question the way Peter did here when he is saying, Lord, to whom? Who else is there apart from you that can do what you're able to do for me?

Can provide what you have provided? There is your salvation. There is your saviour. There is the one in whom the words of eternal life are situated and he goes on though, he says, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

Now that's interesting too because this is something to do part of the identity of Jesus really as to who he is and this title, this description, the Holy One of God, which is the correct reading here, only occurs three times in the New Testament.

The other two passages are Mark chapter 1 verse 24 Luke chapter 4 and verse 34 and in those two instances this title was uttered by a demon, by a devil who recognised Jesus as to who he was and although it's Peter that's saying it here, as we'll see in a minute, there's a devilish reference by Jesus too as he speaks of Judas and we can just leave that for a moment but this title really seems to be one that we can save from these usages of it in the New Testament, these three instances, are a title that's given to Jesus as God's agent in the cosmic battle between good and evil, between the devil and his angels and between God and his angels and God's people on his side.

[49 : 19] There's that cosmic battle and it has been won by Jesus already in principle but it's still going on and it's not just going on in the principalities and powers in the heavenly heights that you cannot see and I cannot see.

It's also going on, it has its counterpart in this world. That's why Peter was a little bit too confident in embracing all of the twelve in his answer.

We have come to know and we have believed. Jesus said, did I not choose you, the twelve, yet one of you is a devil. The devil has his agent.

against Jesus, God's agent. And the devil has his agent even among the twelve disciples, followers of Christ.

It's a very solemn thing and again it gives us cause to analyse ourselves, not to despair, not to cast us down, but to analyse to make sure that we know why it is we're followers of Jesus.

[50 : 24] And so this is what Peter is now saying, we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God, the Holy One, the agent in the cosmic battle with evil, you are God's agent, you're the one who has that position and that power and that capacity.

And he's saying we have believed and have come to know, and they're really very close together in John's gospel, they're used frequently together, believing in Jesus and coming to know Jesus.

We have believed means we have come to trust, we have come to dependence upon you. And to know is both knowing about you and also knowing you.

That's another important distinction, knowing about someone and knowing them personally. And both are included in what Peter is saying here about Jesus.

And you could say tonight and I could say tonight, well I could certainly say tonight, I know about Boris Johnson, but I don't know him. I know much about him from what I hear, from the news, all the rest of it, but I don't know him personally.

[51 : 32] I don't have that knowledge and a personal experience of him. But if I were to say about my wife, I know much about her. I wouldn't quite say I know everything about her.

I'm not quite that clever. But I do know about her. I know her likes, some of her dislikes. I know some features of her life in that way. But I can also go further and I can say I know her.

I'm in a relationship with her. I love her. So there's that knowing the person as well as knowing about the person. And this is what Peter is saying. We have believed, we have come to trust, and we have come to know, not just to know about you, Lord, but to know you.

To know you personally, to know you for ourselves. And both of these verbs are in what grammarians call the perfect tense. That's why they're translated accurately here.

We have believed and we have come to know. And in the Greek of the New Testament, that means something like it's happened in the past, but it continues into the present as well.

[52 : 38] Peter is really saying, we did come to know you, we did believe at a point in the past, we did come to know you at a point in the past, but our believing and our knowing of you continues.

They're ongoing. They have not ended. They're still a central feature of our lives, of our experience. You see, that's what makes the difference between what Peter is saying and what was true of these many disciples who turned back and no longer walked with him.

They didn't have the grace of perseverance. they couldn't say, we have believed and we have come to know and that's what we're still doing. We still want to be with you.

We still want to know you further. That's the crucial difference between what Peter is saying about himself and the others and those who've turned back and are no longer walking with Jesus.

There's the question then. It's probing tonight our allegiance to Jesus in a good way. not in a way that would cause us to be depressed if we can't find many aspects of our Christian life that corresponds to someone else that we know is a prominent Christian.

[53 : 56] But in order to make sure that we're standing on the right foundation. That our relationship with Jesus is the right kind. And there's the answer that Peter gave.

To whom shall we go? that's your conviction tonight isn't it? You maybe haven't quite yet up to now come out in life and shown this openly that this is your view of Jesus but in your heart of hearts is this not what you're saying?

Now you're not saying well once we're back in church and once we're back to be able to take communion and so on this is what I want to show. This is what I want to demonstrate.

It's this conviction that I want people to see in my life. And I have come to believe in him. I've come to know him as the Holy One of God.

God's Saviour. God's Messiah. Your Saviour. Your Lord. Lord of God we give thanks tonight for all that your word contains in respect to that relationship that you have with your people.

[55 : 10] We thank you for the conviction that you plant in the hearts of your people as they have come to know you and come to believe in you. We thank you for the grace of your spirit that enables them to persevere.

Lord we pray that amongst all the challenges that we face in this world and particularly when we find people turning away from you and turning away from following you Lord help us to cling closely to you.

Help us resist the many temptations we face in regard to this. We know in your word and that great letter of the Hebrews that people are described there as having had many opportunities to return yet they did not for they desire a better country even a heavenly one and God is not ashamed to be called their God because he has prepared a city for them.

We pray Lord for any who have gone away from following you outwardly and openly and gone away from services in your church. We pray for the backslidden for those who may have lost the energy and desire that they once had.

Lord we pray that you would recover them too. Speak into their hearts we pray and show them your own uniqueness and your glory and give to them Lord to be convinced that this truly is the way that leads to eternal life to know you and to have their trust in you.

[56 : 41] Receive our thanks we pray now and continue with us for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to sing in conclusion tonight from Psalm 73.

This is in the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 73 and verses 23 to 26. Nevertheless continually O Lord I am with thee.

Thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me. This is in the context of the psalmist having been tempted and really in his mind beginning to give way to the prosperity of the wicked and what he saw as the lack of troubles in their lives until he went back to analyse it properly in the temple of God where he came to realise the truth and where he came then back to this renewed commitment to God as his God and as his Saviour.

Verses 23 to 26 we're going to sing to the tune Kilmarnock Nevertheless Continually O Lord I am with thee Thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me Thou with thy counsel while I live will me conduct and guide and to thy glory afterward receive me to abide whom have I in the heavens high but thee

O Lord alone and in the earth whom I desire besides thee there is none my flesh and heart doth faint and fail but God doth fail me never for of my heart God is the strength and portion forever now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore amen well thank you once again for joining us for this short service

[60 : 07] I trust that it was a time of blessing for you and we do look forward to your company God willing in future as well as we join together in this way in worship just a wee reminder about Wednesday that it's a farewell for Muriel when we'll be delighted if you're able to join us on Zoom and as I said just email if you haven't got the login details already thank you