

Desertion and Decision

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 February 2017

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 01] John chapter 6 and at 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. In military terms, there is an important distinction between desertion and absent without leave.

To be absent without leave is to be away from your post without permission, and yet not away permanently. To be a deserter is somebody who has left their post or their duty with no intention of coming back.

And the people you read about here as disciples, so they're called disciples, in verse 66, are not AWOL, they're not absent without leave.

They are actually turning away to desert Jesus, not to walk with him again. They have no intention of coming back.

[1 : 24] They have left him permanently. And it's in relation to that that Jesus then poses the question to the twelve disciples, including, of course, Peter, Do you want to go away as well?

And Peter answers him in these words you find there in verses 68 and 69. And so that's our focus this evening as we continue to look at the life of Simon Peter, looking at it in this particular instance as he answered this question that Jesus put to them.

So our theme tonight really from this passage is desertion and decision. As there is a desertion on the part of these many disciples, so the Lord turns to the twelve and says, It's decision time.

Are you also going to go away? Are you going to join them? Or are you going to stay? Let's look at the desertion first of all. After this, that's after he's been speaking to them and teaching them, all that you read in the previous verses, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

Why did they turn back? What was it that really made them turn back and turn away from Jesus permanently? Well, it's interesting in John's Gospel that we find really near the beginning at chapter 2, in fact, that there's a reference there to Jesus not committing himself to those who began to follow him.

[2 : 50] Verse 23 of chapter 2, where you find now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs, that's the miracles that he was doing.

But Jesus, on his part, did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

And that really takes us to the heart of the issue, because the heart of the issue is our heart or our soul. These disciples, as they're called, disciples, of course, were in the wider sense followers of Jesus, followers of him for various reasons, as we'll see in a moment here, followers mainly because they saw the miracles and, as he said himself, were filled by the loaves and the feeding of the 5,000.

So, in verse 26 of this chapter 6, chapter 6, verse 26, you find the thread of teaching from that time onwards, where Jesus is saying, Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. And then he went on, as we saw, to present himself as the bread of life, the bread which came down from heaven, the one who is, in fact, the fulfillment of the bread in the days of Moses that miraculously, as manna, fed the people.

[4 : 26] That was really a picture or an image of or a type of Jesus as the bread of life which himself came down from heaven. And as he went on to explain further what this meant, he began presenting himself as one in whom alone was salvation, an eternal life situated or deposited by God.

And, in fact, he put it in such a way that they could understand something of what he was saying in relation to the Old Testament sacrifices, where he speaks about his flesh and his blood, and where they would, having known the Old Testament sacrificial system, they would know, in a measure at least, that he was actually saying about himself effectively, I'm actually the one who fulfills that as well.

I'm not just the bread that came down from heaven. I'm the one that you need to eat of. I'm the one that you need to have a participation in. I'm the one that you need to be related to in such a way that you actually draw your spiritual life from me.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, that's essentially what it means to be a participant in the life that is in Christ, to draw life from him, shall have, he said, eternal life.

And they said, this is a hard saying in verse 16. But Jesus said, knowing that they were grumbling, he said, do you take offense at this now?

[5 : 58] I need to really take these two words together quickly. This word offense, and also what they're saying, this is a hard saying. This is an unacceptable saying.

And Jesus says, does this offend you? Are you offended at this? Do you find this as an offense?

And in the New Testament, that word is often used as, it literally means a stumbling block.

Something that you stumble over. Something that causes you to just stop at that point and not go further. And that's really the key to why they turned back and walked no more with him.

They just found his teaching to be too demanding, to be the kind of thing they just could not accept. This was not the kind of savior that they were expecting.

This is not the kind of savior they themselves saw as the best kind of most relevant to their situation. They found it a hard saying. A saying that they couldn't accept.

[7 : 01] That they couldn't respond positively to. In other words, it wasn't from ignorance of what he was saying that they turned away and walked no more with him.

It wasn't because they didn't understand anything of what he was saying. It's because, however much of it they did or didn't understand, they just found it too much. They found it unpalatable.

They found it unacceptable. It wasn't their ignorance that made them turn away. It was their refusal of Christ's claim. And that's really so important for us tonight.

Because when we look into our hearts and ask the question, why do people turn away from Jesus? Why have we not committed our life to Jesus?

It's not because of something we find elsewhere. It's just because we refuse willingly to yield our life to him.

[8 : 03] To accept his claim to lordship over our life. To be exclusively the saviour of sinners. This is a hard saying.

In your heart and in my heart, naturally, if we're left to ourselves, if we're left to our own thinking, if we're left to the kind of saviour, as we imagine it, who would suit our condition, we're going to find this Jesus who died on the cross, and this death of Jesus on the cross, and this resurrection of Jesus from the dead, to be a hard saying.

But by the grace of God, we come to yield our heart to him. And to realize, actually, as Peter says, there is no alternative. Or at least, no adequate alternative.

If we really want to be saved. And there are various kinds of desertions today that we can briefly mention.

This is not something confined to the days when Jesus was on earth, and these people who turned away from him, no longer to walk with him. There are still many people who turn away from Jesus with no intention of returning.

[9 : 16] And one of the best ways that you can see that is in the parable that he himself spoke of as the parable of the sower. We usually call it, probably better calling it, the parable of the soils.

In Matthew 13, it's in other gospels as well. And you remember, there are four kinds of soils mentioned, three of them unproductive, and one of them productive of the seed of the word of God. Which is what he's talking about. The seed of the word of God is only productive in one soil, one type of heart, out of four. And that's itself very solemn and very telling for us.

When we look at our own hearts tonight, when we think of the word of God, the seed of the word of God, coming to us from God, through the preaching of the gospel, what kind of a heart does it meet with?

As God sows that seed in our lives tonight. Well, let's just look at these three unproductive soils. Let me turn to Matthew 13 briefly and from verse 18.

[10:18] The first type of soil was the compacted one or the pathway. This, he says, is what was sown on the path. Anyone who hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

This is what was sown along the path. In other words, there are hearers of the gospel who really don't get down to asking themselves, what does this mean? How is this relevant to me? They don't take it into their hearts at all by way of thinking about the implications of it or the teaching of it in terms of their relationship to God, their relationship to eternity.

It just comes to lie on the surface of their heart and it's easy pickings for Satan, the enemy of our souls. And that's one way of turning away from Jesus. You just don't give attention in any meaningful way to the word that he speaks to you.

That's all it takes to really turn away in your mind even if people like that still come to church.

Nevertheless, if the seed of the word is simply lying on the surface of our hearts and it has never penetrated at all and we're not really given to thinking about it and understanding it and taking it into our soul and it affecting our mind and our conscience, it's easy pickings for the enemy of our soul.

And then there's the second one which we can call the shallow root disciples. First one were the surface only disciples. Here is another type, the shallow rooted disciples where he says that which was sown on rocky ground, shallow ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy.

[11:57] Yet he has no root in himself but endures for a while. And when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. That's very similar to what you find in John chapter 6, isn't it?

When Jesus confronted them with that teaching which they just could not accept and they said, this is a hard saying, we can't accept this, so off we go. We'll find someone else, someone else.

There are other rabbis that we can go and be disciples of too. If we find the demands of Jesus too much, then this is the type of soil that's in our hearts.

It lies there for a while, the seed lies there for a while, and then something happens that makes life difficult if we're going to keep following the Lord. The demands just become too much.

And realize that actually this is actually quite a demanding life, as Jesus often said to the disciples. It's not something that you can just spiritually luxuriate in.

[13:04] It's something that makes demands on us. It takes application. It takes perseverance. It takes faith. It takes commitment to Jesus. It takes reliance on Jesus himself.

It is a particular view of God in charge of our circumstances and a commitment of ourselves to him. And of course, this is actually assisted by theological modifications of Jesus himself and who he is and what he's in the world for and how we come to be saved.

When people find that, theologians even, find that the teaching of the word of God is just too demanding. And they say, well, people aren't going to accept that nowadays. You've got to change that. You've got to modify that. There are so many other ways of looking at life.

What's happening with that? What's happening with that is that modification in terms of who Jesus is and his demands, it's just making the way a bit easier, isn't it, to follow him? But that's not going to work.

Because Jesus and his claim cannot just be put aside or modified or changed into something that was never meant to be.

[14:18] And the third one, we could call the worldly disciple. This is the one that was sown among thorns. The seed was sown among thorns. This is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it proves unfruitful.

And we can perhaps associate with that one more than the others. We receive the seed of the word of God. It lodges in our heart. We do begin to think about it.

We actually take steps, perhaps to try and get our life right with God. Then something happens that really takes away our attention and Jesus specifies it as one who knew very well what our heart was like, as we read earlier.

The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word. That itself is a very solemn statement because these are things we're confronted with every day.

The cares of this world, the things we meet with in daily life, the testings of God's providence, the deceitfulness of riches, not just having riches, not just being in possession of riches.

[15 : 39] There's nothing wrong with that in itself. The Bible does not denounce the possession of riches, but it does say that it is exceedingly difficult to have much rich in the way of riches and not come to trust in them and not be diverted from that which is spiritually essential to actually see Christ himself and faith in Christ and commitment to Christ as the way to salvation.

So there are desertions today and incidentally, you could say that that's really one of the big dangers of what goes by the prosperity gospel that you find on your God channels and in some books as well where those usually very, very rich TV evangelists will say to you, well, this is something God wants you to be.

God wants you to be a millionaire. God wants you to really flourish in material ways. Yeah, they want that so that they can have their private jets and yachts and large mansions.

And they leave a lot of poor people bewildered as to how on earth that fits into the teaching of Christ. Well, it doesn't. And don't be taken in by it. What Jesus said was, blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are the poor, not blessed are the super rich. So there are various ways that you find today that people desert Christ.

[17 : 13] That they actually turn back and no longer walk with them or at least in terms of his teaching accepted for themselves. Which is why in John chapter 8 you find Jesus saying words which are really just rounding off this point for us.

In chapter 8, Jesus again is speaking to the Jews. And in chapter 8, verse 31 and 32, this is what he says. Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

See, what Jesus is saying is discipleship must go deeper than the surface of our hearts, than the surface of our lives. Discipleship is not a veneer that you add on to life leaving everything else as it was.

discipleship begins in the heart. It begins with a change in the heart. It begins with something deep in yourself. And that's the difference between these disciples who turned back and no longer walked with him and the disciple who says, I believe that you are the Christ, that you are indeed the Holy One of God.

And I believe that if I cling to you, come what may, that's the way of salvation. The desertion of many disciples.

[18 : 44] Look into your heart tonight, friend, as I must look into mine. What is it that makes you a disciple? Why are you here following Christ outwardly?

What is it that brings us to church? Incidentally, it's wonderful to see all of you here this evening and the numbers that are coming to attend services here.

It's very encouraging. It's wonderful to see people coming under the gospel and we pray for more. But it is my duty under God as a minister of the gospel to say, look into your heart and see what is it makes you a disciple?

What is it makes me a disciple? Not because I stand in a pulpit. Not because God has given me some ability to open up His Word and try and explain it. That's not what makes me a disciple.

And what makes you a disciple is not that you're following Christ formally or outwardly in terms of giving an outward place to His Word and to the worship services of His church. What makes me a disciple is that I believe in my heart that Jesus is the Savior and that He's my Savior.

[19 : 52] and that's what you and I must have to truly be disciples as Jesus Himself put it to the Jews. You will be truly, you will be my disciples indeed and you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

So let's look at the decision time secondly as we find Peter responding to a question to the Lord. Seeing all these disciples going away from Him, Jesus turned and said to the twelve, Do you want to go away as well?

Now the question literally as it's put to them would be something like you're not wanting to go away as well are you? Because Jesus is expecting the answer no to the question the way it's put in the Greek text of the New Testament.

So you could say this is really the essence of the question. You're not going to go away surely as well are you? And before we look at Peter's answer, the very fact that they are questioned is important because we have to analyze our lives and questions in John are very important and there are four especially that you find there are others as well but you can detect at least four major questions in chapter one two disciples that left John the Baptist realizing Jesus was actually the Messiah.

Jesus turned around as soon as he saw them following him and he put this question to him. What are you seeking? Why are you doing this? That's the question he put to them.

[21 : 24] You can see the answer yourself if you go to it later on. Chapter six you have this question do you want to go away as well? Chapter 13 where he washed the disciples feet having humbled himself and given an illustration of really what he was in the world to do and his position as a servant of God taking the lowest place washing the feet of the disciples and then he put this question to them do you know what I have done to you?

Do you realize something of the meaning of this? Do you understand anything of the fact that here I am your Lord and Master the Son of God on my knees washing your feet?

What is this? Do you understand what I have done to you? And then of course in chapter 21 you have Peter again as we will see God willing in the future where he is questioned by Jesus three times do you love me?

Questions put to disciples specifically to get them to think about what they are like themselves in relation to Jesus why they are following him what it means to them to be disciples so tonight you have to analyze and I have to analyze why am I following Jesus?

What is this about? Is it just about my own expectations? Is it just for my own satisfaction? Or am I doing it because along with that or even above that I want to glorify God I want to give myself to him so that he will have the honor and he will have the glory from a life that is dedicated to him as a disciple and so if we are indeed staying with Jesus I hope we all are of course staying with Jesus as he turns to ask this question do you want to go away as well?

[23 : 18] He is saying to us by this I want you to examine your life what does it mean to stay with Jesus? Why am I staying on in the course of discipleship following Jesus? What does it mean to me?

What are the alternatives? alternatives? Why is it important to me? Where is it leading to? What's it about? And Peter of course then comes to this famous confession really it is in his answer 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 Now you see he is not saying to what shall we go? He is saying Lord to whom shall we go?

In other words he is dealing with the person of Jesus as he is there before him and for Peter this is where his salvation is this is where he has found eternal life this is really where everything that he needs spiritually in his relationship to God is situated in this Jesus Lord to whom shall we go?

We are saved tonight by a person our saviour is the person of the son of God it's not an ism we're not saved by churchism we're not saved by free churchism we're not saved by Calvinism we're not saved by Protestantism we're saved by Jesus Christ this person and throughout the Bible you have this emphasis that it's our relationship our living relationship with God himself with Jesus himself that really stands critically important in each of our lives and what is it makes Jesus different?

[25 : 10] Well you have the words of eternal life to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life going back almost to the kind of language used in the creation in Genesis where God spoke into being the whole creation God said let there be light and there was light and these words of Jesus the words that he himself said the words that I have spoken to you they are spirit and they are life and Peter has latched on to that and he's now saying where else can I find this Lord what if I do turn away from you you have the words of eternal life to whom else shall we go?

Where are you going to find someone who will deal with absolutely all your needs the way Jesus does? Where are you going to go tonight with your burden the burden of your sin the burden of your daily needs the burden of your sorrows the burden of your questions the burden of your perplexities the things that you confront day by day as challenges to your life challenges to your thinking the things that you meet with that make life so very difficult at times where are you going to go to where are you going to find someone to help you where are you going to find an answer to the needs of your soul and all of these issues particularly spiritual ones the guilt of your sin the stain of your sin

Lord where else shall we go you have the words you alone have the words is what he means of eternal life will you find secularism doing that for you will you find Islam doing that for you will you find liberal theology doing that for you no you alone have the words of eternal life are we convinced about that tonight are we so convinced that we can indeed say with conviction these words of Peter Lord to whom shall we go where will I go what is the alternative Lord to you there is no adequate no relevant alternative you alone have the words of eternal life in you alone this eternal life and you're the answer to all my needs that's really what he's getting at and so for you and for me tonight too surely that's our conviction as we find Jesus himself in John 17 that great prayer just before he went out to the cross father the hour has come glorify your son that your son also may glorify you as you have given him authority over all flesh that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him and this is eternal life he then said to know you the only true

God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent Lord to whom shall we go have you been looking for a long time for an answer to your need have you been waiting a long time and not yet come to Christ are you not yet convinced that there's nothing better for you to do that there is no alternative to Jesus to the needs of your souls Lord to whom shall we go and then he went on to say and we have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God that's a title to do with the identity of Jesus and to who he is we have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God and you don't find that title very often elsewhere in the Bible but one place you do find it more than once is in the speech of demons and that's very interesting because devils know who Jesus is they know his identity they accept his identity far more readily than human beings do and indeed you find in Mark chapter 1 and verse 24 very interestingly the order there if you just bear with me a moment Mark chapter 1 and verse 24 where this man that in Capernaum Jesus entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath and they were astonished at his teaching you see there's again the words of Jesus for he taught them as one who has authority not as the scribes and immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit and he cried out what have we to do with what have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth have you come to destroy us I know who you are the holy one of God but Jesus rebuked him saying be silent and come out of him and the unclean spirit convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice came out of him and they were all amazed so they questioned among themselves what is this a new teaching with authority he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him and you see first of all before that in the passage before that in the arrangement that

[30 : 55] Mark has he has called Jesus called his disciples so there's Peter and the disciples have been called by Jesus and there they are confronted with the scene in the synagogue there in Capernaum where Jesus casts out this demon out of this man and that demon actually answered Jesus or addressed Jesus I know we know who you are you are the holy one of God and Peter that stuck in his mind and that was something that he himself thought about obviously on the way to this moment when he's answering the Lord's question we have believed and have come to know who you are that you are the holy one of God that you are God that you are God who has the authority to cast out demons and that's tonight what we also are surely convinced of not only do we have in Jesus Christ the only one who can actually meet our need but he is in fact no less than

God the holy one of God our savior the God man the Messiah we have believed and have come to know this and you know there's something else that just follows on from that this is really saying we have come to know who you are we come to know and we come to believe that this is who you are the holy one of God but you mustn't just leave it at that because a disciple is someone who actually carries that further and says not only do I believe this is who you are but I believe in you and I've come to know you personally that's the essence of discipleship it's one thing to be able to say you know who Jesus is as the son of God as the holy one of God it's a step further though to say I know him personally as my friend as my savior and

I believe in him in the sense of I've come to trust in him and to entrust my life to him is that your discipleship everyone here knows who Jesus is everyone here knows that he's the holy one of God but surely also you want to say even if you cannot yet say it Lord I thank you that I know you personally that I live daily in friendship with you that I believe in you trustingly that I've given my life for you to look after it for me that's really what grows out of this conviction of Peter and that's the critical difference between this and the disciples who turned back and no longer walked with him so the desertion of many disciples and decision time for the twelve and

Jesus as he put the question then had his answer from Peter Lord to whom shall we go you alone have the words of eternal life we have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God and you might expect that Jesus would say well done Peter you've got it right and to a great extent he had everything he said about Jesus was right but he had just gone a bit too far in saying we the twelve and you can just imagine if you will Peter's face when Jesus then said did I not choose you twelve yet one of you is a devil that was a real smack in the eye because Peter had assumed that the twelve that he was part of were all true disciples they weren't in fact Jesus said one of you actually is a devil that's why we were saying earlier you look into your heart you analyze where you are with Jesus you look beyond the surface things you look beyond what's seen on the outside because what's seen on the outside is not necessarily what a person is inside you can have a very Christ like exterior you can have a very Christian shell to your life but it doesn't necessarily mean that your heart is right with God one of these disciples outwardly looked the same as the rest but he was a devil he was in the grip of Satan he would betray Jesus for a few miserable pieces of silver tonight

[36 : 15] I say to myself and say to you make sure you are a disciple indeed that you're following Jesus not just in an outward sense not just to pass off yourself as a Christian not just so that people might say of you well that's a Christian and that's a good person we hope they say all that but what's really important is that we know Jesus for ourselves that we have given our heart to him that we have willingly accepted him as our savior too and that we have this conviction tonight Lord to whom shall we go you alone you alone have the words of eternal life let's pray

Lord our God we thank you tonight that your word reveals to us so clearly what it is that makes us disciples of Christ and that even though we may be such outwardly yet we would have us also Lord to be so in our inner hearts we pray that tonight we each of us may come and analyze where we are in relation to you we thank you for the privilege of doing so in the light of your word of truth and we pray gracious Lord that as we do so we too may come to be convinced that you alone have the words of eternal life and that not only is there no adequate alternative to you but that we are delighted to Lord with all that we find in you hear us now we pray for Jesus sake amen well let's conclude our worship this evening singing in psalm 73 that's 73a on page 95 of the psalm books again it's psalm 96 sorry page 96 that's in your sheet

I think but it's 73a verses 21 to 28 on page 95 and the tune is even tied when in my heart I was consumed with grief when my soul was filled with bitterness then I was like a brute beast in your sight so full of ignorance and foolishness yet I remain with you continually by my right hand you hold me as my guide you lead me with your counsel to the end and take me into glory to abide we'll sing to the end of the psalm 73 a on page 95 let's stand to sing when in my heart I was consumed with thee and when my soul was filled with bitterness then

I was like thou proved peace in your sight so full of ignorance and foolishness yet I remain with you continually by my right hand you hold me as my guide you lead me with your counsel to the end and take me into glory to the time in heaven room have

I but you alone on earth there's no one else whom I adore although my heart may feel and flesh go we God is my strength and fortune ever more Lord Lord who are far from you will be cut down all those who are unfaithful you destroy but are drawn near and shelter in my heart hear thee so

[41 : 57] Lord I will regain with joy I'll go to the main door again this evening just now after the benediction now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more Amen