

TO WHOM CAN WE GO?

"Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." John 6:67-68.

This text is related to an experience which followed immediately a period in the life of our Lord when He had become exceedingly popular. For approximately a year Christ had pursued His work in Galilee with growing popularity and increasing fame. For a while it looked like all of the Galileans were going to follow Him. He gave Himself in unstinted service to the people and they gave Him their admiration and following. However, Christ was not flattered by the popularity which He had achieved because He knew that it was superficial and shallow.

When Christ performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand from five barley loaves and two fishes, the people were simply amazed. They had never seen anything like that. The wisdom of His words and the beauty of His deeds had not impressed them greatly, but a miracle that supplied food for them, without any effort on their part, met their wants precisely. Instantly they assumed that it would be a great advantage to them if He could be established on a throne and be their ruler. They thought that their problem of food supply would thereby be solved perfectly and permanently. Convinced that Christ was the one for them, they resolved that they would make Him king. Their enthusiasm with reference to this matter was very unwelcome to Christ, so He determined that He would thwart their purposes by withdrawing from them and going to Capernaum.

On the next day a vast multitude flocked into His presence and hung with eager interest on His words, waiting and expecting to see Him work some new and extraordinary miracle. Christ knew that they utterly misconstrued the nature of His mission. So, He proceeded to give them some plain instructions concerning His ministry and His ultimate departure. He tried to impress them with the fact that food for the soul was vastly more important than food for the body. He was eager to lead them to realize their need of a spiritual life. Some who had followed Him were mere curiosity seekers, whereas others wanted more free food, thinking that if they followed Him they would get something for nothing. So long as He was feeding the crowd, requiring nothing of them, all was well. Thinking that if they could be near His side they would have plenty to eat whenever they needed food, they were willing to follow Him anywhere He was going. So long as He did not expect anything from them they were right there at His heels.

In substance Christ said to them, "You seek me because you want something to eat; you want a bread-king, not a Saviour of your souls. I am not an earthly king, merely to supply the wants of your bodies, but I am a spiritual and heavenly King; I am the Bread of Life." Alarmed by the realization that discipleship demanded more of them than they were prepared to give, and irritated by His teachings, His superficial and materialistic admirers began to leave Him. They were far more interested in the loaves and the fishes which He had dispensed than they were in the Bread of Life. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

Christ stood there that evening and watched the receding forms as they were going away with different feelings and objectives, but all having this in common - they had turned their backs on the Lord Jesus. This episode is certainly one of the most pathetic in all of the earthly ministry of our Saviour.

Christ then turned to the Twelve and affectionately and solicitously asked, "Will ye also go away?" Thus He brought the issue squarely to those who were nearest to Him. It was not a complaint or a whine, but rather the searching inquiry of One Who had a right to know. His question was personal, pointed and piercing. "You are not going to leave Me also are you?" The very question implied that such desertion was incredible, and yet to be feared.

In many ways this same inquiry of our Lord is brought home to us. As we study His searching question, let us do so from three viewpoints.

I. Why Do So Many Go Away From Christ?

What are some of the things which cause many to turn away from Christ today?

1. A dislike of His teachings.

Discerning what was in their hearts, Christ expounded the spiritual nature of His mission. He told them that He had not come to give them material bread. He exhorted them not to labor for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth. "He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). From our text we learn that the fickle crowd turned away from Christ in disgust because of His teaching. They said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" They murmured about the Preacher and said that they did not like this strange note in His preaching. They were frank to say that He asked too much of them. There are various teachings in the Word of God that are offensive to human nature and revolting to human pride. So, don't blame a preacher for losing some of his congregation. That is frequently a tribute to his faithfulness. Many cannot stand sound doctrine.

To the crowds Christ preached repentance for sin, faith in Himself, the new birth and outward reformation. In contrast with their selfishness, He exemplified love and self-sacrifice. He taught that all secular concerns are subservient to the salvation of the soul. Of course, this teaching offended their avarice. He asserted that they could not come to God except by and through Him, and that was contrary to their preconceived ideas, so it wounded their self-righteous pride.

2. The fear of man.

This plays the most desperate havoc in human life. "The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe" (Proverbs 29:25). What is the fear of man? It is a reverence of human authority and customs, and a dread of the censure and reproaches of our fellow-creatures. The fear of man ensnares Christians into a guilty silence, into a sinful inactivity, into a guilty compromise with the world, into not going on and conforming to the will of Christ because somebody spoke a discouraging word, and even sometimes into a denial of the Lord. The fear of man encourages those who are not Christians to continue to reject Christ, which leads them into eternal ruin.

3. The influence of others.

One person often waits for another. One takes a step because another sets the example and leads the way. Just here comes in the measure-

less power and peril of influence. "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Romans 14:7). How can any rational person be careless about his influence? No one has any right to mislead others into the perilous and downward way.

From the context, it is evident that Christ did not send the crowds away. After they had attended His ministry, heard His gracious words and seen His mighty deeds, they left Him. The fact that He had healed their sick, alleviated their miseries and satisfied their hunger should have stimulated an unswerving loyalty on their part, but they went away and left Him.

II. Where Do Those Go Who Leave Him?

1. If they are Christians, they go into backsliding. This sort of conduct dishonors the Lord, disappoints others and deprives the backslider of happiness. Backsliding injures all. It grieves the Lord greatly. If you, as a Christian, have gone away from the Lord, hasten back to Him.
2. If they are unsaved, they continue in sin and go into hell. To all such, the Saviour says, "Ye shall die in your sins and whither I go ye cannot come."

Basically, all people need three things, namely, forgiveness for the past, guidance for the present and hope for the future. These basic essentials for our lives are available to all who come to Christ, but those who go away from Him cannot receive them.

III. To Whom Will You Go?

"Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go?" Peter implies here that there must be someone to whom man can go. Man cannot live without a master, a guide and a comforter.

Apart from Christ humanity is hopeless. Distracted by many perplexities, bleeding from many wounds, weeping over many griefs, poor humanity must go to somebody, somewhere. She cannot continue to eat out her own heart with grief and consume her life with sighing.

Christ asked the question, "Will ye also go away?", in such a way as to show that He expected a negative answer. The word "will" in this text is not a future, but a present. "You, too, don't will to go away, do you?" "You don't mean to turn back, do you?" The expressed answer was a negative one also. "We'll not go away." "No, we'll not go." "To whom shall we go?" In other words, Where could we go? We have nowhere to go. No other preacher would satisfy. We believe in Thee, Thy deity and Thy mission.

To whom will you go:

1. To be saved from sin?
Sin is an established fact, regardless of how you may disguise it, extenuate it or explain it. Christ's mission was to teach us the nature and guilt of sin, and to save us from it. He is the guiltless One Who came into the world to save sinners. The voice of the centuries tells us that there is no other Saviour. When we accept Him we receive eternal life.

2. For an impulse to a better life?

Man needs and wants someone who can raise him above circumstances and inspire him to a higher and better life. None can ever compare with the Christ when it comes to doing this.

3. When temptation comes?

When you go out of this building, whether you turn your back upon Christ or your face toward Him, you will find yourself on the battlefield of life. You will discover that you need a power to enable you to fight the battle bravely and to win it victoriously. If you stand on the battlefield of life, after having turned your back to Christ, tell me, how can you ever hope to win the victor's crown? As the hymn writer expressed his need, you will find yours to be:

"I need Thee every hour;
Stay Thou near by;
Temptations lose their power
When Thou art nigh."

4. When sorrow comes?

When the hopes of your youth have made themselves wings and flown away, or when familiar voices you delighted to hear are hushed in death, to whom will you go? When the heart aches, and human sympathy, though sweet, is helpless, how comforting the assurance that

"My father knows;
And tempers every wind that blows."

Thank God, many of us can say with the song writer:

"When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea-billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say;
'It is well, it is well with my soul.'"

5. When death overtakes you?

Sooner or later you will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death, and for that reason you should accept the Saviour and let Him go with you all the way.

If you go away from Christ now, you will be left baffled and broken in the presence of the three greatest mysteries--sin, sorrow and death. You will not have a Saviour from sin if you reject Christ. You will not have any hope in the presence of death if you reject Christ. Do not dare to live without Christ, or dare to die without Him.