

"WILL YE ALSO GO AWAY"

"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.

When Jesus Christ was here in the flesh, He began His public ministry in Judea, and His success there seemed to be all that could be desired. So great was the charm of His personality and the attractiveness of His teaching that the multitudes thronged Him. However, it soon became apparent that the crowds wilfully ignored or terribly misunderstood His purpose. They resorted to Him for material advantages and political ends. Consequently, in a short while He went to Galilee.

For approximately a year Christ had pursued His work in Galilee with growing popularity and increasing fame. For a while it looked like all Galilee would follow Him. He gave Himself in unstinted service to the people, and they gave Him their admiration and following. Great numbers followed Him, some out of curiosity, some in order to be healed of their physical maladies and others for the loaves and fishes. The latter wanted more of that free food, thinking that if they followed Him they would get something for nothing.

Near the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, the Lord Jesus preached to the people. Since it was near the time of the Passover, many pilgrims were on their way to Jerusalem. Great numbers turned aside to hear the matchless Preacher. As the day was drawing to a close, the Saviour was moved to satisfy the hunger of the great throng, so He performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand from the five barley loaves and two fishes. The people were simply amazed. They had never seen anything like that. They became wild with enthusiasm and determined to proclaim Him their King. The wisdom of His words and the beauty of His deeds had not impressed them greatly, but a miracle that supplied food met their wants precisely. They thought that their problem of food supply was solved perfectly and permanently. Convinced that He was the Man for them, they proposed to make Him a king.

Because their enthusiasm was so unwelcome to Him, He determined to thwart their purposes. To do so, He withdrew from them and went to Capernaum.

On the next day a vast multitude following Him, flocked into His presence and hung with eager interest on His words, waiting and expecting to see Him work some new and extraordinary miracle. He knew that they utterly misconstrued the nature of His mission. Consequently, 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 feel their need of a spiritual life. They had come that morning from the other side of the lake, seeking Jesus, but there was something sensual in their searching. Some sought Him because He had fed them on the previous day with bread that perisheth, and the thought that if they could be near His side, they would have plenty to eat whenever they needed food. Others sought Him because they saw in Him a Messiah Who could bring prosperity to their country. All of them were seeking a material good, but Christ wanted them to have and to enjoy spiritual food. In substance He said to them, "You seek Me because you want something to eat; you want a bread-king, not a Saviour and King 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." His emphasis of the spiritual caused a commotion and brought a break in the ranks. Irritated by His teachings, the superficial and materialistic throng began to leave Him. They had discovered quickly that they had nothing in common with the heroic which actuated Him. They were far more interested in the loaves and the fishes which He had dispensed than they were in the Bread of Life.

To the casual observer things had seemed so hopeful in the morning. The Lord Jesus was thronged by eager followers. It seemed that they thought no distance too long, nor no toil too great if they might see Him and be near Him. However, the same day saw Him deserted by many of those who followed Him. We are told that "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him."

As the shadows of the evening all gathered around, the Lord Jesus stood and watched the receding forms as they were going away, going away with different feelings and objectives, but all having this in common--they had turned their backs on Jesus. Surely, this episode is one of the most disappointing and pathetic in all of the earthly ministry of our Saviour. Then He 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 the searching inquiry of one who had a right to know. His question was prompt, personal, piercing and pointed. "You are not going to leave me also are you?" The very question implied that such desertion is incredible, and yet to be feared.

In many ways this same inquiry of the Master is brought home to us in this service. As we study this searching question, let us do so from three viewpoints.

I. Why Do So Many Go Away From Christ?

After the Saviour's remarkable discourse, which did not contain a single word of clever adulation, but many heart-searching truths instead, they went away from Him. In doing so they relinquished all attendance upon His ministry, threw off His authority, disowned all attachment to His person, and repudiated all sympathy with His designs.

Likewise, many are going away from Christ today. Why are they going away? What are some of the things which cause many to turn away from Christ today?

1. A dislike of His teachings.

"And 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. They said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" You ask too much of us. This is too much for our humanity. We simply can't stand it. There are various teachings in the Word of God that are offensive to human nature and revolting to human pride.

Christ told the crowds that they were miserably wanting in sincerity and earnestness; that they were worldly, carnal, selfish, self-righteous and self-seeking unbelievers. To them He 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 called for genuine and practical faith which opposed their indifference and unbelief. He taught that He must come first in everything, and 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.

The fear of man plays the most desperate havoc in human life. "The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whose 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 measureless 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 answering loyalty on their part, but they went away and left Him.

II. Where Do Those Go Who Leave Him?

1. If 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 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."

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.

What is eternal life? Surely, it is something more than immortality and everlastingness. It is a life of everlasting blessedness, free not only from the limitations of time, but also from every other limitation that otherwise would mar the supreme sweetness of its existence.

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 even 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.

"'Tis religion that can give
Sweetest pleasures while we live,
'Tis religion must supply
Solid comfort when we die.

After death its joys will be
Lasting as eternity.
Be the living God my friend,
Then my joys will never end."