

Peter's confession

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[0 : 0 0] Return with me again this evening to the passage that we read together, John's Gospel, chapter 6. And I want to take up the reading from verse 66.

John chapter 6 and from verse 66. From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him.

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.

And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. One of the most intriguing questions that we are faced with as we study the ministry of the Lord Jesus throughout the three years that he was on earth is relate to the disciples.

And we know that the most well-known, the most famous of his disciples were the twelve. And one of the most intriguing questions is when were those disciples converted?

[1 : 3 1] At what point in their lives, throughout the three-year ministry of Jesus, could they say that they belonged undeniably to the Lord Jesus?

Were they converted at different times? How were they converted? At what point were they converted? What were the precise words that Jesus used by which they came to a final knowledge and came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

We simply don't know. What we do know is that all along the way they followed him and they listened to him and they responded in one way or another to his teaching, to the various teachings that he gave.

We also know from this chapter and from other chapters that besides the twelve disciples, there were others who also followed Jesus. Some of them were true followers of Jesus.

We read that he left when he ascended to heaven after the resurrection, but he left 500 people. We know of people like Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus who started following him.

[2 : 3 9] We never hear of them again. And we can only assume that they too were followers of Jesus, that they became disciples of Jesus, and that they belonged to the early church, the church that Jesus left after the ascension.

We must always remember that this is what we call the intertestamental period. In other words, it was the period between the two testaments, the old and the new. It was a bridge between the old and the new.

So we mustn't always try and be as precise as we would otherwise like to be. We must also remember that a disciple meant a learner. We must not assume that because a person was known as a disciple, that that necessarily meant that that person was truly and thoroughly converted.

We know that Judas Iscariot was a disciple. And we also know that Judas Iscariot died outside of Christ. We know that he was not converted. He did not fully and truly belong to Jesus.

So we must remember that a disciple simply meant a learner or a pupil, someone who sat at the feet of someone else for a while. Now throughout the ministry of Jesus, we know that the disciples were faced with questions that were designed not only to test their knowledge about the Lord Jesus, but were also designed to test their commitment to him.

[4 : 02] As they went along with Jesus, they grew in their understanding of him, his person, in their understanding of the kingdom of God, through the parables and everything that was taught to them.

But they also came to realize that they could not do this without a demand being made of them. Who do men say that I am?

Said Jesus to them on one occasion. Some say you are Elias. Some say you are one of the prophets. But who do you say that I am? Said Jesus to the disciples.

Who do you say that I am? This was a time of testing, attesting us to their own knowledge and their own commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then also, they were given assignments. They were given special tasks to do. You remember when he sent them out, two by two, and he said, go into every city and village and preach the good news of the kingdom of heaven.

[5 : 00] And you remember how they were given certain powers. They were able to heal the sick. They were able to cleanse people. They were able to do mighty things in the name and by the power of the Lord Jesus.

So they were given those assignments, this work to do throughout, at various times in his ministry. But then, on the other hand, you come face to face with the fact that if you and I had been listening, if you and I had had the privilege of listening sometimes to the conversations that existed between Jesus and his disciples, we would have concluded that there was a great question mark as to whether those disciples truly were converted.

Say, let me give you some examples. When they argued amongst themselves, you remember in chapter 18 of Matthew, that dispute arose amongst the disciples as to which one of them was going to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Even to the extent where Jesus had to bring a little child and set him in the midst and said, unless you become converted, unless you are converted and become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

And then, when Jesus turned to Peter, you remember, and he said, get thee behind me, Satan, for you do not mind the things of God, but the things of men.

[6 : 18] If we had seen all the disciples after Jesus was arrested, fleeing from him, all of them forsaking him and leaving him on his own, or if you had been parted to where Peter, on the courtyard, when Jesus was being tried by the high priest, where the girl is taunting Peter all the time, and where Peter is replying by cursing and insisting that he never knew who Jesus was, we might have many reasons to suspect as to whether Peter really was converted or not.

But Jesus' attitude to his disciples was one of persistent loyalty and persistent acceptance. He persistently received his disciples and loved them.

Even in their failures, even in their times of sinfulness and selfishness and pride, even at the times when you and I might have given up on them altogether, Jesus persisted with them, as he does, with his people who fail him.

And which one of us this evening does not fail the Lord Jesus Christ continually? Our Lord, even the most experienced of us, even the oldest Christian here, I'm quite sure you would agree, when I say that we fail him daily in thoughts and in actions.

Nevertheless, what I want to come to this evening are the points in the experience of the disciples where they are brought to an understanding, where they are placed upon a point where they discover where they stand in relation to God.

[8 : 06] Not simply in terms of how long they have been following him or whether they have been following him, but they are brought to a point where they determine by giving expression to their own faith as to where they stand in relation to God.

Let me put this in a slightly different way. If you look at the passage in front of us, what we find is this. We find a conversation that takes place between Jesus and a whole crowd of would-be followers of him.

All of those people were called disciples and they all said that they followed Jesus. They came to where he was. But by the end of this conversation, what Jesus had said had done two things.

It had exposed the false disciples for what they were and it had exposed the true disciples for what they were.

Now look at this passage. It begins with all the wrong motives. If we begin, I don't want to spend too much time on this. I want to come straight to the point, but just one or two moments on just the background to the passage.

[9 : 14] You remember how the people had followed him. He had fed the 5,000 and he had gone to the other side of the lake and the people had seen him and they had said, Rabbi, whence camest thou hither?

And Jesus detected the true motives of their pursuit of him. Jesus said, I tell you, you seek me not because you saw the miracles, but because you did eat the loaves and were filled.

Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life which the Son of Man shall give you. Now, I want you to notice that all through this conversation, Jesus is attempting to direct and to move the course of the conversation towards himself.

Because he recognizes the wrong motives in the false disciples. They only want to find him because of the miracle that they've seen him doing. All the motives are wrong.

They want him because of the bread, because of the fish. Now, it all stemmed back to this, the popular Jewish notion at that time as to what the Messiah was expected to be.

[10 : 19] He was expected to be an earthly ruler. He was expected to be a king, to set up his throne in Jerusalem and to establish Israel as a nation again, to expel the Romans and to establish once again the pride of the independent Israel.

religion, or true religion, was not their motive. True faith in Christ was not their motive. They did not want to find him for his sake.

They wanted to find him for their own sakes. So their motives were all wrong. So he directs the conversation and he points it towards himself.

Then they said to him verse 28, and they're still wrong, what then shall we do that we might work the works of God? You see, they're living in the past. They're living with, again, their own mistaken Jewish notion that to be right with God was a matter of what you did.

What shall we do? And Jesus turns the conversation again. He says, this is the work of God that you believe on him whom he hath sent. And you'll notice that as we go down the page, you'll find that Jesus again and again directs the conversation to himself.

[11 : 34] To the point where he begins to talk about the manna which came down from heaven, the true bread from heaven, which is the son of man that gives his life for the world.

Now, the killing block in this entire conversation was Jesus himself. They did not want Jesus for his own sake.

They were not prepared to recognize him for what he was and in himself. They were interested only in what they could make him to be. They wanted to make him a king. We read this in the previous chapter.

They wanted to make him a king. They wanted to buy force. Set him on a throne seeing all the things that he was capable of doing. And so that by the end of the conversation, many of his disciples gave up altogether.

They turned their backs on Christ and they forsook him altogether because of the words that he spoke to them. But then, we notice one more thing.

[12 : 34] by the end of the conversation, as far as the twelve were concerned, they, what had resulted in the rest of them having turned their backs on Christ, resulted in the twelve being confirmed beyond question as to their own love and their commitment towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. And that is what I want to examine for the rest of the time this evening. I want to ask the question this evening, as we look forward to another communion season and as we take seriously the command that is given to us by the Apostle Paul to examine ourselves, I want to ask the question this evening, in the light of this passage, do we follow Jesus Christ?

That's all. Are we true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ? I want to examine it in the light of Peter's statement here, in answer to Jesus' question, verse 67, will ye also go away?

That was the question that was put to the twelve. Will ye also go away? The scene is set before them of all those would-be disciples turning their backs on Christ. After all they had said about him, after all they had seen, after all they had learned, they decided that he was not for them.

They were not going to have any more to do with them. Forever they were going to turn their backs on him. But then he turned to the twelve and he said, will you also go away? Will you also go away?

[14 : 06] And I want to put that question to each one of us this evening. Will you also go away? Because we can only be in one place or another.

Even if, even if, on the outside, on the outside, even if there is a kind, there is an outward following of Christ, the question is still put to us this evening.

Will you also go away? Now I want to answer, I want to look at Peter's answer then. And I want to suggest to you that there are three things in Peter's answer that form the marks of the true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That give to us the marks of the true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ as we examine ourselves this evening. First of all, there is the mark of reason.

And then secondly, there is the mark of recognition. And then thirdly, there is the mark of faith. First of all, there is the mark of reason.

[15 : 09] Lord, he said, to whom else shall we go? To whom else shall we go? Now look first of all at how Jesus frames this question.

He doesn't say, will you also follow me? But will you also go? Will you also go away? In other words, what he's doing is this. He's putting the question to them.

He frames his question so as to put the alternative before the disciples. To put the alternative before the disciples.

And that is the question that brings out Peter at his most earnest. Lord, he said. Lord, he responds indignantly. Where else can we go?

There was for Peter simply no alternative. The prospect of a life without Christ as the alternative to following Christ was simply unthinkable.

[16 : 13] He could not bear to imagine. After all he had experienced of the company of the Son of God. After all the effect that that had had on his life.

His life had been totally transformed. His life I'm sure even then was not what it ought to have been. We read even after that that Peter fails the Lord on several occasions.

But then he knew that his life the Lord had had influence to such an extent that he came to the conclusion that life without him was simply impossible. To whom else shall we go?

Now this is where it was with Peter. How was it? How was it that he came to this conclusion? Well it began like this. Peter as you know was a Jewish man. He grew up as a Jew.

He grew up with the Old Testament. He grew up to know the Old Testament. And you could not grow up with the Old Testament to know it without knowing the demands of God's holy and righteous and just law.

[17:13] The demands that it made of him. Peter knew from his very young days that God demanded perfect obedience to it. He could not turn to the law in other words.

The law did not have the answer because as he examined his own standing with God his own his own knew that he had sinned and come short of that law.

And then there were the Pharisees the ones who pretended to obey the law. They made such a show of them pretending outwardly to keep the law. But he knew within himself he knew having watched those Pharisees he wasn't stupid he knew that their life was a sham.

It was all hypocrisy. especially in the light of what Jesus had shown him of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. So he couldn't turn to them even although they pretended and they gave every appearance of keeping God's law to the last jot.

He knew that he couldn't look to them because if that's the kind of life if that's the kind of hypocrisy then he knew that God did not demand that whatsoever. And then there were the Romans could he go to them with their gods a god for this and a god for that a god a multitude and multiplicity of gods the entire opposite to what Peter knew to be the truth that there was only one god the living and the true god he knew that there was no multiplicity of gods a god for the weather a god of love a god of agriculture a god of strength and power and war and you name it there was a god for it he knew that that wasn't the truth could he go to them no there was no one else to turn to but then he examined the life of Jesus Christ and as he came to know Jesus Christ he saw exactly in the person of Jesus Christ what he knew he ought to be in his behavior in his lifestyle in his temperament in his manner everything about Jesus was righteous and good and holy and he knew that as he compared what he knew to be God's holy law with Jesus' righteous life he knew that Christ was the embodiment everything that God demanded was found in the Lord Jesus Christ he saw it didn't take him long to see that this was the man this was a man of God a man who wasn't he couldn't even be called a prophet or some teacher he had to be the son of God himself because of what he was in himself but then Peter also witnessed his miracles he also witnessed the marvelous things he did he stood open mouthed as this man Christ would put his hand out to a man who had been blind all his life and all of a sudden watched his eyes open for the first time in his life he watched as he put his hand out and touched the man who was crippled from birth and watched him getting up on his feet something that was utterly utterly impossible to do he watched him raise the dead he watched him as he walked on the water he watched him change water into not just wine but the best wine that the groom had ever tasted he watched him doing miracle after miracle after miracle as well as his righteous life there was simply no one else to go to because Christ was everything that he knew the Messiah to be so then that is the mark of reason will you also go away he knew that there was no comparison no one could stand anywhere close to the Lord Jesus Christ have you ever sat down and examined where else can you go who else in the entire course of history of this world stands even close to Jesus Christ have you ever asked that question start off there many is a man of God many is a person who was converted starting off at that point by examining the person and the life of Jesus Christ start there and you will find there is simply no alternative to the Lord Jesus Christ that's the first thing then the mark of reason but then we have the mark of recognition he recognized the words of Jesus in other words when Jesus spoke all of a sudden it made sense that's what the multitude said when they came down from the mountain after

[22 : 12] the sermon on the mount because this man they were amazed at him because he spoke as one with authority not as the scribes not as the teachers of the law they all pretended to know the law they knew it as they read it on the page they would memorize it they would try and keep the letter of the law but they had no idea about what God demanded in the heart but here was a man who not only knew what the law was outwardly but who had a knowledge of what it was on the inside here was a man who could perceive what human nature was all about who could get past all the pretenses and all the masks that you and I try and put on all the ways in which we try and kid ourselves on the ways in which we try and pretend to ourselves that we're something better than we are they knew that there was no hiding from Christ there was no hiding from his word he recognised his words what was it then that Peter recognised particularly on this occasion

I want to draw your attention particularly to this occasion what was it the very words you noticed that drove the other disciples away were the words that brought peter to this magnificent statement what were those words that he talked about thou hast the words of eternal life the mark of recognition what was it in those words what were the words that Jesus said well for some who listened they were the most horrendous words they had ever heard they were the most horrific words they were the most obnoxious words that a Jew could ever listen to listen to them I am the living bread which came down from heaven Jesus said if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever and the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world the Jews therefore strove among themselves saying how can this man give us his flesh to eat then Jesus said unto them verily verily

I say unto you unless he says you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood ye have no life in you that is what drove away the other disciples and on first glance if you take those words only at face value if you see nothing behind them if you only take them on their literal value you and I will go out as well and never come back to Christ because those words on the outside are totally absurd what we have to do here is we have to come back to a very very important principle before we look at anything else we have to arrive at a very important principle you see what what Peter recognised was this first and foremost he listened to those same words but what he the way he recognised them was this that the significance of what

Christ said always comes before the explanation in other words Peter is putting aside the explanation he's saying I know I don't know for sure what Christ means I don't understand for sure what Christ means those awful sounding words when he says that whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life I don't understand what these words mean for sure but whatever they mean what Jesus says I'm listening to what Jesus says he says because he's listening to this word unless except except ye eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you that's the significance of them so the Jews said well how can this be in other words they were asking this question they weren't being serious about it they were pouring scorn on this very suggestion they were they felt repulsed by this very suggestion to them it was obnoxious you remember how the whole idea of eating even the flesh of an animal that wasn't cooked that wasn't clean was obnoxious to them nevertheless never mind the flesh of a human being it was something that they couldn't even imagine bringing themselves to do but that wasn't what Peter saw at all he heard those words except you eat the flesh you have no life in you and that's what I place before you this evening because there are those who respond to the gospel in the same way for example if I can give you a few examples one or two examples of similar instances truths that are presented in the bible and people ask exactly the same question about them pouring scorn on them they say this how can the son of god become man how can eternal god from everlasting to everlasting eternal infinite god how can he become man how can he take flesh and blood upon himself how can he suffer weakness how can he suffer tiredness the whole notion is absurd they say and what the gospel tells us is this that unless the son of god becomes man there is no hope for us this evening or else we come to another truth how can how can a man be born john john john three john three unless a man be born again said Jesus he will not enter the kingdom of god nicodemus said to him how can a man be born when he is old and people still they ridicule the whole idea of being born again they say well that's a that's a fanciful notion it's a it's it's ridiculous to to even speak in those terms how can a person be born when he is old Jesus answer is the same unless a man is born of water and the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of god in other words the significance of the statement comes before the explanation and that was the significance that peter saw in the words of Christ thou hast the words of eternal life what was it then what was the significance of what peter saw what was it in this precise statement that peter saw verily verily I say unto you except you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you well it is this that peter saw that this person who he recognized as the very embodiment of all that god demanded

in a person he recognized not only that jesus christ was perfectly righteous perfectly holy but he recognized that there was a way to god through him that's what he recognized and that's what gave him hope you see what would it have been like if peter had been there and he had watched day after day after day this perfectly righteous man who gets up in the morning and he lives his life without spot without blemish without one iota of sin what would it be have been like for the disciples to have stood there and watched this perfectly righteous man bringing to them the demands of the kingdom of god telling them on the sermon on the mount you have said you have heard that it was said of old you shall not do this but i say unto you the other what would it have been like for all those disciples to have just sat by completely helpless whilst every day with jesus was a reminder of what they were not in the sight of god you see do you understand the significance that in the statement that jesus was making on that occasion peter saw not just that jesus was the messiah sent from god but he saw that there was a way for him peter to come to god he saw that there was a way for him peter to have eternal life he saw that there was a way him sinful wicked vile peter who couldn't trust himself who knew his own sinfulness before god he saw that christ was his only hope for him peter and that's what he saw in verse 53 except you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood peter couldn't understand what those words meant peter had less of an idea what those words meant than we have with all the explanation that's given to us in the bible but yet he saw that in them was a way of hope for himself to be forgiven that's the only hope we have this evening whatever it means whatever that means we'll come on to that in a few moments whatever it means our only hope this evening is in the flesh and the blood of jesus christ now what did it mean and that's what we come to the third point the third mark of the apostle that was the mark of faith that was the mark of of reason there was the mark of recognition recognizing in christ that he was the savior but then there was the mark of faith we believe he said and are sure that thou art the christ the son of the living god we believe that thou art the christ of the son the son of the living god what does it mean to eat the flesh and to drink the blood of the lord jesus christ what then does it mean well i want to say in very very in a very short time i want to state very clearly what it does not mean it does not mean taking the bread and drinking the wine at the lord's supper that never saved anyone that never gave anyone eternal life that is not what eating the flesh and drinking the blood of christ means you will

[33 : 24] never be saved by sitting at the lord's table it cannot save anyone any more than for anyone to suggest that baptizing a child will save them if they die in infancy it does not mean taking the lord's supper what does it mean then well there are two things very quickly first of all there is the flesh and the blood of jesus christ now what does that mean it means the flesh as it was broken and the blood as it was shed on calvary's cross that's what it meant that is what it meant when jesus said take eat this is my body what was his body it was broken it was given for you then he took the cup and he said drink ye all of it this is the blood of the new testament in my name drink ye all of it this is the blood shed so when he refers to his body and to his blood he is speaking about his broken body on calvary and his shed blood in other words he's pointing forward to the day when he will give his life so that his people will be saved that's what he means when he talks about the flesh and the blood of jesus that's the first thing then but then what does it mean to eat that flesh and to drink that blood well it means simply this if i could put it as simply as possible it means to take that to be your own what is eating eating is taking something into yourself to be your own and that is precisely what peter did when he announced to christ i believe i believe he said i believe we believe he said that thou art the christ the son of the living god we are sure that thou art the christ the son of the living god that is what he meant when he said he was taking christ to be his own in other words when we either partake or or when we witness the lord's supper taking place as we shall do next week god willing what we are witnessing is a symbolic action of a much greater reality that takes place within the believer's heart that he has taken christ to be his own that is it that he has looked to christ alone as his or her saviour that he has trusted in christ alone to be his or her saviour that he has believed and that he has received the person and work of the lord jesus christ by faith that is what faith is all about you notice what peter said he doesn't say lord we have followed you all these years he doesn't say lord to whom else can we go look at the marvellous things that we have done remember when we were sent out two by two seventy of us we are sure that we are followers of christ we are sure that we are now ready we are sure that we are now in the right condition to say that we follow you and that we are your disciples that wasn't what he said at all what did he say thou he said thou art the christ in other words he depended completely

his answer hung it depended completely and absolutely on the person of the lord jesus christ that is the mark of faith in other words when a christian when a person comes to christ and takes him to be his own it becomes a daily walking and living with the lord jesus christ is that true of us this evening have we trusted in him do we continue to trust only in the lord jesus christ even when we fail when we fail when the evil one comes to us as we mentioned this morning when he comes to us and presents our faults and our failures before us and when he presents before us the times when we go wrong in our christian lives and where the word of god bears testimony to where we have gone so far wrong in the christian life and where he tells us that his conclusion is you can't be a christian you can't be a child of god you can't be a follower of god what's your answer to what's your answer to him when he tells you you can't sit at the lord's table next week because of all the things that you've done because of the failure in your life what's your answer lord to whom else shall we go thou hast the words of eternal life we believe and are sure that thou art the christ the son of the living god is that your answer is that your response when you're plagued with all those when you're surrounded by the memories and surrounded by all those reminders of your weaknesses and your failures and your sins and when even the word of god when you compare your life with what the word of god tells you you ought to be do we recognize this evening do we recognize what peter saw that christ it was the only way that in him was his only hope in him was true forgiveness for all his sins well this evening perhaps you have accepted the lord jesus as your own savior you've been drawn to him at some point in the past i don't know when you've come to know him as your savior and the more you go on the more you discover that your life is a life with christ even as we were saying this morning even if it is plagued with difficulty and temptation and trial from one side or another and that spiritual warfare that every one of us has to face with christ but you know that your life in christ is one of steps steps forward and each step heading in the one direction the one direction with christ if this evening you are trusting only in him if you recognize i know that you don't understand everything none of us understands everything none of us which one of us can say that we fully understand even the passage that we read today even the passage which one of us can say that we fully understand the truth that is symbolized at the lord's table which one of us can say that we fully understand it we can't we'll never understand it until that day when it's explained to us by himself by the lord himself the lord is not coming to us this evening and asking us what we understand the lord asks us will you also go away what is your answer to him this evening have you trusted him have you taken him to be your own do you believe

this evening that christ's sacrifice is the only way the only hope of your eternal life have you taken received that sacrifice by faith to be your own do you look to him alone for your salvation and if your answer is with peter lord to whom else shall i go thou hast the words of eternal life and we believe that thou art the christ who have taken thee to be our own then next week god willing your place is at his table may god bless his word let us pray oh lord our god we thank thee for thy goodness to us we bless thee oh lord for all that thou hast done in the person of the lord jesus christ and we ask oh lord that as we come to as we come to the prospect of sitting at thy table next week that thou will prepare us we pray oh lord that thou will help us to examine ourselves and to deal with all this sin in our lives we pray that we might not despair by looking at our own failure but that we might look to christ and that we might return to himself where we have strayed and that we might trust in him for the blood of jesus christ cleanses us from all sin go before us this evening we pray bless us as we sing our closing psalm for we ask in jesus name amen