

Interested in Jesus

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn to that passage that we read, and especially to verses 26 and 27. Jesus answered, I tell you the truth.

You are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. It is possible for us to be interested in Jesus for the wrong reasons.

You may say, what does it matter as long as people are interested in Jesus? Well, it matters absolutely. Jesus says so.

He says here that there were people who were interested in him for the wrong reasons. And he pointed out to them the right reason for being interested in him.

[1 : 11] I'd like to look with you first at Jesus' analysis of the situation that confronted him there. In verse 26, Jesus answered, I tell you the truth.

You are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. These people were all crowding to see Jesus.

Jesus, they had done so on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. And now they had crossed back over the sea. And again, they were wanting to see him, wanting to be near to him.

And Jesus was here analysing their thinking in doing this. Now, perhaps we today might be slow to do any such thing.

If the church here were even more crowded than what it is, we would all be very pleased. And perhaps we wouldn't stop to think why people were there.

[2 : 21] But Jesus always examines the motives of the heart. And so today, it doesn't really matter how many people are here or how few. It doesn't really matter that you may be here today simply sitting here in church.

What really matters is why you are here. What matters is the motives of the heart. Well, here we have people who were looking for Jesus.

They were, as it's put in the authorised version, they were seeking him. And they had done so at considerable trouble to themselves. In verse 24, once the crowd realised that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus, or to seek Jesus.

Now, as I mentioned already, that's after they had done the other trip, going over to the other side, whether round the Sea of Galilee or across by boat, to that place where Jesus fed the 5,000.

So they had spent the considerable time and a great deal of trouble in seeking Jesus. Now, perhaps you are here today as a result of some considerable trouble.

[3 : 51] After all, not everyone in our community gets up as early as you do on a Sunday morning to come to church. Not everyone in our community gets their children up and giving them breakfast of some sort and get them dressed and get them out to church.

You've gone to some considerable trouble to be here today to be in church. To, putting it in the terms of our text, to seek Jesus, to look for Jesus.

But just going to considerable trouble is not in itself enough. We still have to ask the question, what is our motive?

What is our reason in being here? These people, we know, were interested in Jesus. They were looking for him.

They were searching for him. They were seeking him. Now, the fact that you are here this morning in church demonstrates, surely, to one degree or another, that you, too, are interested in Jesus.

[5 : 03] For after all, the message that you hear from this pulpit is concerning Jesus Christ. Yes, there may be, at times, stimulation to your mind, or at times, your emotions may be moved, but supremely, you are hearing concerning Jesus Christ.

This is the message of the gospel that is here being proclaimed. So, you must, in some sense or another, be interested in Jesus, to be here, to go to the trouble that you have gone, to be here. But Jesus here analyzes the motives for people being interested in him, and following him, and seeking him out, and searching for him.

He analyzes their thinking. What does he say about the reason for these people searching for Jesus and seeking him out?

Well, he puts it negatively, first of all. He says that you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs. Now, we might think, well, that sounds quite good.

[6 : 20] It sounds as if Jesus is going to say, well, you weren't just interested in seeing miracles, you were interested in something better. But it's not that at all. Jesus is here saying, they are looking for him, not because you saw miraculous signs, and he is disapproving of that fact.

In other words, he is saying, that if they really had concentrated on the miraculous sign, on the miracles that Jesus did, then they would have been in a better position than they actually were. What does he mean? Well, he means this. A sign, which is the word that is actually used here for a miracle, is something that points away from itself.

You know, any signpost does that. You don't look at a signpost to see, what a marvelous signpost this is, you look at a signpost to see where it's pointing you, to get direction.

Now, this is the word that is used here of the miracle of Jesus, particularly this miracle of feeding the 5,000. It was a sign. It signified something.

[7 : 35] It meant something. And Jesus is saying, they were following him, they were looking for him, not because of the miraculous sign. In other words, if they had really concentrated on what took place there, as a sign, then they would have been a lot nearer to Jesus, and to understanding him, who he is, and what he came to do.

Because they would have asked the kind of questions, what kind of person is this, who can do this miracle, and what is he teaching us by doing this miracle?

And once you start asking those sort of questions, then you're on the road to beginning to understand who Jesus is, and what he came to do. If we just look at this miracle of feeding the 5,000, who could do such a miracle?

Surely this is the power of God. Who could multiply the fish and bread, these few small fishes and loaves, to feed this vast assembly of people?

It was the power of God. Yet people didn't see this as a sign. They saw it as something else, that we'll notice in a moment. They didn't see it as a sign pointing and saying, pay attention, look and see what's going on here.

[9 : 01] Who is this person who is doing this? This can only be the Son of God. And equally, this sign was showing to them that this one, sent by God into the world, God's eternal Son, this one had come indeed to give them something, to feed them.

But it was indicating, it was pointing their minds to higher things than merely earthly things. But all of these things, they did not appreciate.

And even when Jesus went on, as he does, as it's recorded in the rest of this chapter, to speak of those things, to show what was indicated here, that he was the bread of heaven and they had to feed on him.

They couldn't accept it. They couldn't understand it. They didn't know what he was talking about. They didn't want to know what he was talking about. So Jesus, in analyzing their motives, he says, you've missed the point.

If you were seeking me here because you saw the miracle, in the sense of it being a sign, then you would be on the right path.

[10 : 16] But you didn't do that. That's not the reason why you're seeking me here, he says. Now, we also have to apply this to ourselves today.

Now we can apply it in the sense of, again, what do we make of these things recorded in the scriptures that Jesus actually did? They're pointing us to a conclusion. Are we allowing ourselves to be led to that conclusion by the force of the evidence before us, or are we just refusing to think about it?

But let me apply it in another way. We come here together in church today because in some sense or another, surely, we are interested in Jesus, interested in Christ, interested in Christianity, and Christianity concerns Christ.

But what is our motive for coming here? We come here and we hear God's word. We sing the psalms from God's word. And we hear a sermon which is expounding God's word and pointing us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do we see those things as indeed pointers, as signs pointing us to the Lord Jesus? Or if we think about them at all, do we just think of them as things in themselves, or as things that we can get something out of for ourselves without reference to the Lord Jesus?

[11:43] You see what I'm meaning? All that we do here today really should be pointing us to Christ. All that we do here, all that should be done in a Christian church, should be really a fulfillment of the words of John the Baptist.

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Look unto me, all ends of the earth, and be saved. All the words of Scripture that tell us to look to Jesus, pointing us to him.

But if we have not grasped that, we have not grasped the whole point of what the church, of what Christianity is all about. And Jesus says to these people, you're looking for me.

Yes, he recognizes that. They're looking for him, they're seeking him, but it's for the wrong reason. It's not for what would have been a good reason that they saw the miraculous sign.

They saw it as a sign, as pointing to something beyond itself. Okay, so that's the negative. He says, they're not looking for me for the right reason.

[12:51] But then he goes on to speak of the positive reason they actually had for seeking him. You are looking for me because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

Now, of course, this has got a specific historical reference. Jesus is speaking here to those people who literally did follow him there, up to the mountain where he had fed the multitude.

They had actually eaten that bread and that fish that had miraculously by God's power been transformed so that it was able to feed all this multitude of people.

They had actually eaten it. And he's saying the reason that they are now seeking him is because they ate that bread. What does he mean? Well, if we look back to verse 15, we get some indication of what Jesus meant.

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. What was going on here?

[14:04] It's a very revealing statement, that. It tells us that there were those in the country at that time, many of them, who were not looking for a spiritual solution to their troubles.

They were looking for a political solution, like so many people today. They were saying, if only we could restore the kingdom of David, if only we could throw out these Romans, if only this, if only that, if only the next thing.

And here, they see this marvelous person who has such charisma, who has such power over the multitudes, and who has this supernatural power to feed multitudes.

Well, these people who thought in that way, they were onto a winner. We can't lose, they say. With this man, we're going to win. And they were going to make him king by force.

In other words, their minds were set on earthly things. Not on the spiritual things, not on the heavenly things concerning which Jesus was speaking.

[15:15] So Jesus withdrew from that situation. And when they catch up with him again, Jesus says, you're looking for me. Yes, you're seeking me. But it's for the wrong reason.

Because you ate the loaves and had your fill. In other words, they were interested in Jesus for what they could get out of it carnally, we may say, to use the old word.

for what they could get out of it to do with the thinking of this world, to do with man's wisdom. Here was someone who could feed their bellies. Here was someone who had the charisma to be king. Here was someone who could perhaps restore the kingdom of David in an earthly, physical, political sense. So, here was the man for them. But they were missing the whole point of Jesus' kingdom. They were missing the greater kingdom, the greater truth that Jesus was talking about. Now, in that specific sense, of course, this doesn't apply to ourselves today.

[16:21] We are not present today at the feeding of the 5,000. We are not going to have our bellies filled with bread or fish today here in this service. So, how does this apply to us?

Can this be applied to us? Can we be, perhaps, in this position of these people seeking Jesus for the wrong reasons? I believe we can. and I believe even more that there are those of us here today who are in that position.

We are seeking Jesus for the wrong reason. We are here, perhaps, out of the wrong motive. Let me mention some of the reasons why people may be today interested in Christianity, interested in the church, interested in Jesus for the wrong reasons.

Well, one reason is akin to what the people were interested in here. People may be interested in these things today because of prosperity or an interest in their own prosperity.

Now, that may seem strange. We may think that, well, that may have applied more in the past when it was much more socially acceptable to be a churchman and you would get on in the world if you were seen to be a respectable church person.

[17 : 45] Now, that kind of thing doesn't apply certainly so much today. But still, there may be in our minds the idea that, well, provided we just go along with this respectable church side of things, then certainly things won't go wrong in our lives.

It's almost a kind of superstitious thing. we're not going to kick over the traces. We're not going to sort of throw off all this. We're going to go along with it. Perhaps the thinking is just in case there may be something in it.

But the idea is that in that way, well, things will go well with us in life. If we remember God once in a while, then he'll maybe look after us in material things.

how deceitful the human heart is. When you bring out these things and say them, they sound ridiculous, don't they? But aren't those things in our heart?

And then, perhaps, there are those of us who are here out of psychological or emotional need.

Now, all of us have psychological and emotional needs.

[19 : 01] And also, these psychological and emotional needs can be met in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm not denying either of those things.

But what I'm drawing attention to is the fact that we may be interested in Jesus, we may be interested in the church, we may be here today, simply because by being here, we may feel that we're getting some kind of psychological lift, some kind of emotional kick, thrill even, that will maybe set us up a little bit.

Now, again, how deceitful the human heart is. We might disclaim any such thing, but if we really analysed our thinking, perhaps we would have to recognise that the Lord Jesus Christ's words here apply to us, that our thinking is carnal.

it's concerning this emotional lift, or this psychological lift, that we can perhaps get, even sometimes from singing, sometimes from preaching, and yet all the time, we are not truly seeking the Lord Jesus Christ as he is, we're seeking this experience perhaps for what we can get out of it at our own level.

And then again, it's possible for us to be interested in Jesus, at least outwardly, in that sense, to be interested in the things of Christ, to be interested in the church, because of our friends.

[20 : 49] Because when we come to church, we see people that we know, perhaps they come from the same background as ourselves, gods, and it's a nice experience, and we'll chat to them, and it's good that we should be able to have such contact with people.

But yet, what is the real motive for our coming together in church? What is the real motive for us coming to worship God? Is it that? If it is only that, then we're missing the whole point.

If it is only that, then we're on the same level as these people Jesus is talking to here. They are seeking him not because you saw the sign, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

In other words, you're getting something else out of it. You're taking something for yourself, your own benefit, that you can fit into your own lifestyle, but you're not really going to ask, what are you being pointed to?

You're not really following that pointing finger that directs you to the Lord Jesus Christ. And then again, of course, it is also possible for us to be interested in the things of Christ, to be interested in the church, because of family.

[22 : 07] Now, I think that can work two ways. It can work in the sense of ourselves as children coming to church to please our parents.

parents. Now, that may be the case whether our parents are here in this church or not, or whether they're somewhere else away at home, and we're away here in Aberdeen. But we come to church,

maybe now and again, maybe quite often, but it is to please our parents.

It's to keep the peace. Now, of course, again, it's good to please our parents, but it's not good to just come to church out of that motive.

Because surely the whole point is that we're being directed ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we're only doing it for that facade, keeping up that appearance, then it's hypocrisy.

What you're being urged to do here by the Lord Jesus is to seek for the right reason, and only in that way will you get something real out of it. But it is also, of course, possible the other way around, for parents to attend church and to keep on attending church for the sake of their children.

[23 : 28] Now, sometimes that can be quite striking, and sometimes it can have tremendously positive effects through maybe a child, first of all, being interested in Sunday school and so on, and that child bringing his or her parents to church.

And sometimes through that means the parents then truly become interested themselves. But I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the sense that we may be here as parents today because we have this feeling, well, we want to give our children a good upbringing.

We want to give our children the same kind of things as we had in our upbringing. We want them to have this kind of sense of moral standards.

We want to have this identification with the church and all these things. Now, many of these things may be very good in themselves, but they are not really what the Lord Jesus is about.

Because what he is about is us knowing him. And only in that way can our religion cease to be a facade, a front, and to be a reality, a heartfelt reality.

[24 : 44] So you see, it is possible for us in these and no doubt many, many other ways, for us to be interested in Jesus, interested in the outward things of Christ, and yet not seeking him for the right reason.

So Jesus analyzes the situation. But then Jesus has advice. Jesus has advice for these people. He doesn't just come along and say to them, look, this is the thing that you're not doing that's right, and here's the thing that you're doing that's wrong, and leave it at that.

Now, so often, I must confess, as a preacher, that as preachers, so often we leave things like that. We analyze things.

But Jesus never does that. He analyzes, then he gives advice. Then he tells them what to do. He tells them where it is they've gone wrong, and now how they can put it right.

So he says to them, don't waste your life on what won't last. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.

[26 : 01] Don't work for food that spoils. waste your life on things that won't last. You see, these things we've been talking about, all the things we've mentioned and many others, they are things of this life that will not last.

If it's prosperity we're concerned about, material prosperity, well, these things might last throughout our whole lifetime here on earth.

Of course, they might not. They might last throughout the whole of your lifetime here, but then what? As Jesus asked concerning the rich food, then whose will those things be?

All those things that he had stored up for himself, they won't be his. He will have to pass out of this world naked as he came. And whose will all your things be when you pass from this earthly scene? not yours. You won't be able to take any of these things with you. They won't impress God one little bit when you have to appear before him in heaven. When you have to appear before him in judgment, then the question is, what are you spiritually, not physically, not in terms of your prosperity?

[27 : 19] And then, what about things like getting an emotional lift from things? Well, again, how transient these things are. We may get an emotional lift one day, but then we're down in the dumps the next.

And the emotional lift of the day before doesn't help us one little bit then, if we don't have something real, if we don't have someone that we can really talk to and confide in, if we don't have someone whom we know really and truly as our Savior and Lord.

So again, Jesus says, don't waste your life on what won't last. He was speaking there to the people who had eaten the bread that he had miraculously multiplied to feed them all.

And they were so concerned about that and concerned about the things of this world. And he says, don't waste your life on that. Don't work for the food that's sparring. So again, he says these things

to us in terms of the other things we looked at, like being interested in church, being outwardly interested in the things of Christ because of friends, because of the social scene, all these things, these things too will pass.

People who we think we may have a lot in common with, people whom we think may be our friends, people who may indeed be very good friends, they are not able to stand with us forever.

[28 : 47] They're not even able to stand with us throughout the rest of this life. What about the times when you don't have your friends around? What about the times when you're depressed or you're facing up to some difficulty at work or in study or whatever and there's nobody else around?

Jesus says don't waste your life on things that won't last, that won't satisfy, that won't be helpful to you in every situation. Focus on the things that will.

Similarly concerning family, of course it's tremendously important that we should have a right and Christian attitude to the family. But if we make our family relationships and especially a sense of getting on in a this-worldly sense concerning our families, these things too will come to an end.

And above all, the whole idea of keeping up a front of religion for the sake of the family is deceitful and something that cannot give lasting satisfaction.

So Jesus says don't waste your life on what won't last. Don't work for the bread that perishes. But instead he says live for what will last.

[30 : 06] He says work for food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you. now this expression eternal life is one that perhaps we think we know.

It means living forever. It means being in heaven with God. Well it does mean that. But it means so much more than that beginning now.

Because if your idea of eternal life is something way way in the future, nothing very relevant to ourselves just now, you're wrong. because we're told in this very gospel that those who have the Son have eternal life.

It's not those who have the Son, that is Jesus, will have eternal life sometime away in the future.

No, they have eternal life now. In other words, eternal life is not just length of life, it is quality of life here and now.

In other words, Jesus is saying, don't waste your life on the things that won't last. Work for those things that will endure and those things that will help you in every and any situation.

[31 : 21] In other words, he says, come to know me. Come to know that eternal life, that different quality of life, which starts here and now and lasts forever.

Now this eternal life, he says, is a gift, which the Son of Man will give you. And here again is where we so often go wrong, because we go along with the natural thinking of our sinful hearts, we go along with the thinking of the world around us, which says, you must get everything, you must work for things, you must achieve things, you must do this, you must grab that, you must get this.

But the thinking of the kingdom of heaven, the thinking which Jesus represents is the thinking of grace. You see, you cannot grab eternal life, you cannot get it, you cannot achieve it, you can only receive it.

It is a gift. gift. And Jesus has come to give that gift. And that's why supremely we must follow the sign, we must follow the pointing finger, whether of the miracle, or of John the Baptist, or of the preacher, and we must look at Jesus, and we must see there the one who gives eternal life.

And we must come to him for that gift. we must also, Jesus stresses here, put effort into seeking that.

[33 : 05] Do not work for the food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. It's something that is to be worked for.

But what kind of work is this? Because immediately the Jews pick that up, they ask them in verse 28, what must we do to do the works God requires? Now, what does Jesus reply?

This is absolutely essential. What does he reply here? Does he say, well, you've got to try and live a good life. Well, you've got to try and keep the Ten Commandments. Well, you've got to do this, that, or the next thing.

No, he does not. This is the answer. He says, the work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.

That's it. So here there is something very profound about the contrast that is made between the two words to work and to believe in the one that he has sent.

[34 : 10] There's a contrast there, but I think every one of us knows that there is reality in both things, in coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we're told to strive to enter in at the straight day.

So that means that this is something that we have got to put all our heart and soul into. It's not a matter of simply coming here and putting up a facade, having an outward appearance. It's a matter of heart and soul seeking the Lord Jesus for the right reason that we may know him, whom to know is life eternal. It means that we come to that point where we realize that we have nothing to contribute of our own, that we simply accept him, we receive him, we believe in the one whom God has sent into the world as the one who takes away our sin, as the one who gives us eternal life, as the one who feeds us day by day and week by week from his word, who leads us in that eternal life.

Well, what a tragedy it is that those people were so near to the Lord Jesus, yet so far away from him. They were so near, and they seemed to have so much going for them.

They were seeking Jesus. They were doing a lot more than so many people around us today are doing. They were seeking Jesus. They were so near to him, they were so near to a place of blessing, yet what was wrong?

[35 : 48] What was wrong was their motivation. They weren't doing it for the right reason. So you can't pat yourself on the back today and say, well, I'm here in church today, come on, God bless me.

You've got to come with the right attitude, the right frame of mind, that right seeking of the Lord Jesus himself coming in the way that the Lord Jesus has appointed.

to know something of the benefits of being near Jesus and yet not to know Jesus himself.

What a great tragedy that is. To know something of the benefits of the things we've been mentioning, things like getting a psychological or emotional lift, or seeing your friends, and having perhaps friends who are Christians, or being concerned about your family, and so on, all these things.

To be concerned about some of these benefits, these outworkings of what Christianity really is, to be concerned about those things, and yet not to see the Jesus who is the heart and core of everything that really matters.

[36 : 58] How tragic. May that not be our experience today, but may we follow the pointing finger of the sign, the miracle, and of the word of God itself, and of the preaching of his word, and look to the Lord Jesus, and be saved.

Let us pray. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace and kindness to us in every way, granting to us the strength and ability to be here today, to hear your word yet again.

grant us to know that here again we have been given opportunity to respond to your word, that we still have this opportunity of standing on mercy's ground, where you are offering to us salvation, and we pray that we may not go out of this building before we have truly considered these things, and put away from our minds all the things that distract, all the things that would silence that voice that speaks to us, telling us to accept the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that you would remember those who indeed are struggling with these things, and we pray that they might know that experience of your Holy Spirit, turning aside all the distractions and the barriers, and causing them to see the Lord Jesus as he is, and granting them ability to trust in him. we pray for those who know that your word rebukes them. May they not be overwhelmed totally by a sense of their own guilt and inadequacy, but may these things drive them to the Lord Jesus, who has dealt with sin and guilt by his cross.

[38 : 54] We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.