

To whom else shall we go

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Preacher: Rev Hector Cameron

[0 : 00] John chapter 6 and verses 66 to 69. John 6, 66 to 69. From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, will he 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. Now there's a great deal surely in this chapter which suits the proceedings of a communion season.

Perhaps we could look first of all at this crucial difficulty which arose and which resulted in many of the Lord's disciples at that time going back and walking no more with him. I'd like to look at the effects of this crucial difficulty. In verse 60 we're told that many of his disciples when they had heard this said, this is a hard saying, who can hear it? And then in 66, from that time, that's to say from the time of the sermon being preached or the address being given, many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. Now it would seem to be the case that when Jesus spoke in the way he did throughout this sermon, and particularly when he came to the end of the sermon, having listened to it, those disciples said it's a hard saying, it wasn't so much with reference to things that were difficult to understand that they were speaking, but to things that were hard to take. things that were harsh to the feelings. You get the same word used, translated hard in the authorized version, in the parable of the talents, where the servant concerned said, thou art a hard man. You get it in the epistle of Jude, where the writer speaks of the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

And it was the hardness in the sense of bluntness to their feelings, the roughness to their feelings that they were referring to.

Now what was the hard saying? You'll find that the commentators divided, some commentators reckon that the whole discourse is included in this reference, hard saying. And certainly it's true that throughout the discourse there were many, many things that were difficult, hard for a typically Jewish audience of the day to take. The typically Jewish audience of the day, if you gathered one anywhere in Palestine, would be thinking of a Messiah who would be a great political deliverer for the people. They wouldn't be thinking of a Messiah who would be a great deliverer from sin.

[3 : 57] And that this was the type of audience Jesus had, and that their notions by and large were very materialistic, you can easily detect from some of their own remarks and some of the things that he said by way of reply.

For example, early in the discourse he says, labour not for the meat that perisheth. And he said that following the attempt that they made to make him king. He would be a particularly useful sort of king because he would be a provider of literal bread.

And Jesus said, I'm telling you, you have sought me, you have searched me out, not because he saw the miracles proving that I'm the Messiah, but because he did eat of the loaves and were filled. And in fact, the whole movement of this discourse was against anybody looking to him to fulfil earthly and materialistic aspirations. And then you find him saying, towards the end of the discourse in verse 62, that it was his intention to return to the Father. Now, that wasn't a very promising thing to hear in view of the prevalent opinion among the Jews that Messiah abideth forever.

In chapter 12, a crowd of Jews came to Jesus one day and they said, we have heard out of the scriptures that Christ abideth forever. And how sayest thou then that the Son of Man must be lifted up?

So that he said a lot of things that were hard to take for a typically Jewish audience. But it's not unlikely that by hard saying, they referred especially to Jesus' statement about eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

[6 : 09] A statement that developed, a statement that became more explicit as the sermon went on, until it came out in the most abrupt and clear terms.

From that moment, they became specially disturbed and eventually disturbed enough for many of them to go back and walk no more with him.

Now, Jesus must have been referring in this expression about his flesh and his blood, my flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed.

He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I and him, to his death for the life of the world. In verse 51, he says that he would give his flesh for the life.

The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Some people have seen here a reference to, not just to the atoning death and acceptance of the atoning death of Christ, but a reference to the Lord's Supper.

[7 : 31] Now, it does seem, if you look at various things that our Lord has said very clearly throughout this address, that the idea that it refers to the Lord's Supper directly, in any direct way, that that doesn't fit in really.

Because our Lord is speaking of something which is absolutely essential for salvation. He says, except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, then ye have no life in you.

And to say that our Lord means to refer to the sacrament here, would make our Lord say that all who do not partake of the Lord's Supper are simply not participants in eternal life.

Then what about people like the penitent thief? Where would he be? And such an idea would place a premium on formal and superstitious Christianity.

Take the sacraments and you'll go to heaven, which the Bible, of course, never says. The Bible never, never places any sacrament or ordinance between a man and salvation.

[8 : 53] That's not to say, of course, that the sacraments are not very important. They're very important indeed in their place. And it would be sinful for a believer to neglect them.

But they don't have that sort of importance, that if you don't have the sacrament, you don't go to heaven. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.

So Jesus means here, when he says, he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, he means something spiritual.

He means an experience of faith in relation to him. He says, the words that I say unto you are spirit and life. So rather, is it Christ in his person and work, as the Lamb of God who beareth away the sin of the world, the Lamb of God who is to be received by faith as our exclusive saviour from sin, that our Lord is referring to.

Well then, these somewhat loosely attached disciples, they were attached to him for the wrong reasons, they were attached to him for earthly, political, materialistic reasons, they found this to be a hard saying.

[10 : 28] They found it to conflict with what they themselves believed about Christ. And the upshot was that they declined to receive Christ on his own terms as the saviour sent from God.

And they went back and they walked no more with him. Now one point that, just before we move on from these background thoughts, one point that this raises for us is that our Lord doesn't wish to have disciples on the wrong terms.

And coming to him, receiving him, offering to be one of his disciples on any other terms than having him as a saviour from sin, wouldn't do anybody any good anyway.

And it is the outstanding mark of the true disciple that although he may find some things in the discourses of Christ difficult to understand, and not even Calvin or Augustine understood everything that Jesus said by the time they died.

Although there are things in the discourses of Jesus that they find hard to understand, it is the outstanding mark of true disciples that they receive Christ as the saviour from sin, through his death and then his resurrection and then his presence at God's right hand where he said he was going.

[12 : 17] Now could we look a little further at this second thought which I have just introduced, the essence of a true Christian position.

These men went back and they went back because they found certain parts of Jesus' teaching to be in strict conflict with what they themselves had learned to believe about Jesus.

Then Jesus said 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. Now as we said, you never find our Lord pressuring people or even allowing people to be his disciples on a mistaken understanding.

and he says, in accordance with that, he says, Will ye also go away? They were free to do so. They could go there and then.

[13 : 34] They could follow the men who had just taken their departure. They were free to do so and they must make up their own minds. Will ye also go away? Well, it was at this point that Peter, Peter of course, first, as always, in his loyalty to Christ in doing anything that might seem to be a loyal gesture to Christ.

Unfortunately, it came from a sincere heart. Peter came in with this glorious confession of faith. Lord, to whom shall we go?

Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and assure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. I want to underline the point again that Peter and the other men who stood with Jesus at this time after the others had gone, the other believing disciples, Peter and his friends were a long, long way from being clear as to the full purpose of our Lord's coming into the world. See, if they had been clear about it, then surely they wouldn't have been taken by surprise when Jesus died.

You remember the sentiments of the two men on the road to Emmaus really put into words what they were all thinking and feeling, whether they said it outwardly or not. We thought, and it was a sad and puzzle reflection.

[15 : 15] We thought that it had been he which should redeem Israel. Well, things were a bit better after the resurrection, but they weren't all that good.

A great deal of their vision was clarified through our Lord's frequent meetings with them after the resurrection. resurrection. But in spite of that, there was still a lingering expectation that somehow Jesus would, before he tied things up on earth, produce a bonus for the Jewish people along nationalistic lines and virtually the last snatch of conversation that they had when they stood on the slopes of the Mount of Olives near Bethany, virtually the last snatch of conversation they had included these words, Lord, you're about to go away, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom again unto Israel?

Still looking for something, even those men so near to them, those true believers, still looking for something in nationalistic and earthly and materialistic terms.

So that we have to keep in mind that these men were a long way from being quite clear as to the full purpose of the coming of Christ into the world.

And that means that we should be very careful about dismissing professing Christians as not being Christians at all just because their theology is not quite squared.

[16 : 58] But although we have that to say, it is very clear that even this early, I mean as early as Peter's confession at this time, it's quite clear that even this early they saw the central function of Jesus Christ as being a saviour from sin, as being the sole supplier of eternal life.

Thou hast, don't know everything, Lord, I don't know everything, but this I do know, thou hast the words of eternal life.

Now it's a wonderful confession this. It's a wonderful confession coming from the centre of a group of men like that.

And it's even more wonderful when you think that here was an ordinary man in a state, Jewish man in a state, an ordinary humble fisherman of Galilee, who was acknowledging this Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah when his own religious leaders had conspired to reject Jesus.

It was no wonder that Jesus said on a similar occasion about Peter and to Peter, Blessed art thou, Simon bar Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.

[18 : 32] Well, the gospel story makes clear that Peter was far from being a perfect man. It's not just that he was pretty ill-taught as far as doctrine was concerned, even at this stage, and even later, to a quite considerable extent, it's that he was a morally imperfect man, a man who was prone to sin, and sometimes to sin that was of a very surprising nature in the close circle of our Lord's disciples, and a man who was full of infirmity, and yet he had the essential thing.

God the Father had revealed Jesus of Nazareth to Peter as being the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.

And in accordance with that experience, you find Peter saying, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. What's to be gained, Lord, by leaving thee?

Which of the Jewish leaders can give us anything like what thou hast given to us? Which of them can give us eternal life? Will the Sadducees, will the Pharisees, will the innermost circle of the zealots be able to provide us with eternal life?

No. However much we have to learn yet, Lord, and however difficult we can see already, it's going to be, if we remain with thee, we can't go anywhere else, and we won't go anywhere else, because we have learned that thou exclusively hast eternal life.

[20 : 30] That, friends, is a position which every true Christian will be found taking up.

if we follow Christ, then of course, we're bound, I mean, if we follow Christ with any degree of consistency at all, we're bound to run up against trial and persecution, difficulties of various kinds. things. And, which of us can avoid confessing, if we're honest, that we have much dimness of understanding?

Which of us can't help seeing in Simon Peter a good bit of ourselves? We have a long way to go, a lot to learn, certain things remain problems to us, certain things in the Bible, certain things about relating our Christian life to the life of the world in general.

All that's true, and it's not going to, we can live till we're as old as Methuselah, it's not going to change substantially, the time will never come when we can say, now I see everything, not in this life, we see to the very end of it, only through a glass darkly.

[21 : 49] But then on the other hand, you've been through the world, you've met a lot of the men of the world, you've read your papers, you've watched your television, you've read your books, you've been to school, which of the philosophies of this world, which of the would-be systems of salvation as they canvass you, would you honestly go to for what Christ professes to give?

You can say like Simon Peter, not one of them, to whom Lord, could I go? I know I'm free to go, I know that I must make up my mind, but I'm in this position, to whom Lord, could I go?

Thou hast the words of eternal life. Jesus said, the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and life.

Now he meant by that, that his words, of course we are living, we are living on the other side of Pentecost, we have got all the benefits of apostolic developed doctrine to help us, and of course we know from school days, from the shorter Catholicism days, that Jesus meant that his words brought into our hearts, brought home to our hearts and consciences by the Holy Spirit, that they are the great means that God uses of bringing spiritual life to man.

The words of Christ, they become the parent of Christian thoughts and Christian convictions in the believer's mind.

[23 : 34] Paul said to Timothy, he didn't just say it, he insisted on it, the scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.

And when he added through faith that is in Christ Jesus, he was underlining the point that the gospel leads men to Christ.

Christ is the exclusive bestower of eternal life. It's not the words themselves, it's not the Bible itself that gives us eternal life, it brings us to Christ.

The scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation by virtue of faith in Christ Jesus. And that is precisely what Peter meant.

Now, as we said, Peter didn't yet, he certainly did not yet, have much of a developed doctrine about the place of gospel truth in the experience which brings a man to Christ and to the enjoyment of peace with God.

[24 : 46] That came later. But Peter did know, and it was a personal experience that nobody could deprive him of, that Christ's teaching had introduced him to eternal life.

It was as he went about with this man and listened to what he said, that this great change had come over him. And he put it as alone, in the only way he could put it, thou hast the words of eternal life. Well, friends, this is fundamental to all true Christian experience. The words of Christ, the gospel of Christ, maybe you bring to us eternal life.

Maybe you may well be, in I sometimes wish I were myself, such a person, and I'm not, you may well be, and you may thank God for it, may be in the position of knowing clearly.

You can think of the day in the house of God, or somewhere else, when this particular scripture was blessed to you by the Holy Spirit, and you saw in the scriptures Christ, Christ, and you can mention the day, and the place, and the hour.

[26 : 06] That's marvellous, and it's a thing to cherish. Not all God's people have it that way. Probably, the bulk of us who have been brought up from childhood, in a church environment, probably most of us do not have that sort of experience.

But whether the thing, we can, whether it came to us, the vital experience, came to us, in such a way that we can think of one particular place, with one particular text, or section of scripture, or on the other hand, came to us over a period where we can't think of particular scriptures.

The great thing is to be able to see, whichever way we came, that our standpoint now is that Christ has the words of eternal life.

That somewhere under the teaching of the word of God, the gospels and the epistles, the word of God in general, we have found Christ to be the Messiah.

So it doesn't matter whether you can remember the text or the day or even the year or even the decade for that matter. It's whether you can say and mean it, well, thou hast the words of eternal life.

[27 : 22] the God now just in a word the logic of a true Christian position.

You don't get the full logic of a true Christian position developed here. As I said, we live on the, we're favoured to live on the downside of Pentecost and that means on the downside of those great apostolic elaborations of the doctrine of Christ.

Later on, we read that it was to these men that Jesus said as they were gathered in the upper room, ye are they that have continued with me.

You didn't go away, you had the opportunity, you know that I didn't want you to be with me on false terms or on a false understanding, I gave you the opportunity, you had to make up your own mind and now, ye are they who have continued with me in my temptations.

It was these men that our Lord addressed in the upper room and invited to participate in the first Lord's supper, this do in remembrance of me.

[28 : 46] Maybe the sermon is the sort of sermon that if you had an English sermon, I understand you don't, you might have had last night Friday. It is the overtones of a Friday sermon, this, but I think there's no harm in carrying the sentiments of Friday through to the Saturday.

do we, can we confess Jesus as Simon Peter did despite all the likeness that there's in us to Simon Peter in certain less favourable respects, the imperfections of character, the imperfections of understanding.

well, can we confess him like Simon Peter in spite of everything, then we are invited to go the whole way with her confession.

This was a confession, but it was only a partial confession. Peter had to make the confession also in the upper room, he had to make the confession on the day of Pentecost with all the Jews round about and the people that had scared him to death, almost.

He had to make the confession when later on in life he was led where he didn't want to go at the end of life. And we are invited, like Peter, to go the whole way with our confession.

[30 : 11] This do in remembrance of me, as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come, says Paul. There was no halting ground for Simon Peter and there's no halting ground I mean properly there's no halting ground.

For anybody with Peter's confession between that confession and the upper room, the Lord's table, will he also go away?

No Lord, we can't, we can't. Why not? Because thou wast the words of eternal life and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Here they who have continued with me in my temptations, this do in remembrance of me.

Now the Lord's Supper is intended to focus for believers the fundamental gospel truth stated by our Lord here, whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood have eternal life.

The atoning death of Christ and personal receiving and resting on him alone for salvation as the Catholics and puts it. This do in remembrance of me.

[31 : 28] These in a sense are words of life themselves. The sacrament aims at the spiritual nourishment of the Christian.

Perhaps if we're not spiritually prepared sometimes for the communion, let's be honest, sometimes when we're not spiritually prepared, we're up to think of the communion, whatever you say to your neighbour, isn't it grand, the communion is coming round, there's something inside you that may be saying, it's an awful interruption in the ordinary way of things, there are all these services and it's

very inconvenient at this time of year when I want to be out in my garden.

There's something of that in every believer, if only he's honest, that's not what he says to his neighbour, of course, the communion is coming round. But we should think of the communion and bring these thoughts out from scripture that the communion is given us out of the kindness and love of God our Saviour.

There are words of life, this do in remembrance of me. Yes, if we were left to ourselves, we would carry on forever in our gardens and hope that we would get to heaven at the end of the day, but this do in remembrance of me, stop, stop, take communion, take the broken, the emblems of the broken body and the shed blood.

I'm asking you to do it, and it's not a mere commandment, it's a kindness if only you knew it, that you may be spiritually nourished and grow in grace. And it's meant to promote fellowship with like-minded people as well as with the Lord himself.

[33 : 05] Paul calls it the table of the communion. That's what we tend to think of it often in our highland churches, in our Presbyterian churches.

We tend to speak of it that way. You don't normally talk about the Eucharist, although there's that element, the element of thanksgiving, in all the gatherings of the Lord's people at sacramental times.

We tend to speak of the communion. And when you think of it, look back to the Covenanted times, and it's from periods like that, that a lot of our distinctive church terms have gathered their special characteristics.

It must have been communion to those people when they were driven about on the hills and they had an opportunity, maybe half an hour sometimes, to gather together in some little valley and there to have fellowship with the Lord and with one another.

It was communion. That would have been the understanding sentiment. in connection with it. So the Lord promotes communion through our observing the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

[34 : 18] There's one other point I want to emphasize, and very briefly. In John 12, this group of Jews came and said something, they referred to something that was fundamental to all, well, to most Jewish thought of the time, that Christ abideth forever.

they thought of the Messiah coming, and then somehow, probably, their ideas were vague, he would set up a kingdom, and there would be a permanent kingdom on earth.

Well, Jesus soon put an end, well, his words were fitted soon to put an end to such notions when he said again and again and again, I'm going back to the Father.

it. But although the Jews misunderstood the law, because the law did say, in fact, there's no question, Christ abideth forever.

Again and again it says things like of his kingdom and power, there shall be no end. Although they misunderstood it, there is a sense in which it is gloriously true.

[35 : 30] Christ's power to save, that's what the New Testament emphasizes, has no end.

Now you go to the epistle of the Hebrews and you read, he ever lives to make intercession for us. And friends, this should be comforting when we come to the Lord's table.

Think of all the sin of our lives and think of all the sin and unworthiness since last we were at the Lord's table. What a shocking state of affairs for anybody who sincerely sat at the Lord's table in the company of the Lord's people and their Christian ministry and took the emblems of the broken body and shed blood.

What a shocking thing it is that we should have behaved as we have behaved since we last were at the Lord's table. I'm speaking of course in general terms but I know that this is the case, that every true Christian will just say amen.

Well, where is our comfort? Are we coming to the Lord's table? Because we were there last year and in fact we've been coming 20 years and we would never dream of not coming to the Lord's table.

[36 : 47] The occasion is here again. Surely what we want to be looking at for our comfort and also for the propriety of the thing, for the fittingness of the thing, we should get our comfort.

I mean, if we were to go by the way we've often behaved and thought and word and deed since we were last at the Lord's table, we shouldn't be here tomorrow. We shouldn't go back there again. But there's the great comfort.

Messiah abideth forever. He ever lives to make intercession for all who come unto God through him. Yes, it's been shocking. we do not deserve forgiveness but there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared.

Messiah abideth forever. And looking to him, let us come with gratitude and Christian confidence once again to the Lord's table because Messiah abideth forever.

to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. Let us pray. O Lord, we pray thee to see the instruction of thy truth upon our hearts and minds and hearts and consciences and forgive us Lord for anything sinful or unworthy or untoward in holy things.

[38 : 19] We pray thee to give us due preparation of mind and spirit for the Lord's day and give us a living faith in the Messiah who abideth forever. For his name's sake.

Amen.