

From Simon to Peter #10 - Forward With Christ Without the Crowd

by J. Glyn Owen

Jesus' uncompromising demands and teaching led to the multitudes turning away from him, but he remained resolute and certain of his authority and deity.

Duration: 27:55

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 5:1-3, John 6:60, John 6:66-70

Topics: "Simon to Peter"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the retreating multitudes, the resolute Lord, and the remnant few left. He describes how many of Jesus' disciples turned away from him because they were more interested in what they could gain from him rather than truly seeking him. Jesus stands resolute and asks the twelve if they will also go away. Peter responds by acknowledging that Jesus has the words of eternal life and that they believe he is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Transcript

And we continue this morning with our advertised theme, From Simon to Peter. And our subject this morning has been billed as Forward with Christ, without the crowds. Forward with Christ, without the crowds.

You will find our morning's message based particularly on verses 66 to 69 in that sixth chapter of John's Gospel from which our reading was earlier taken. And it might be advantageous if we read again at this point the verses to which we have referred. 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 have believed and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Or as another translation puts it, the Holy One of God. And probably that is the better, comes from the better manuscripts.

Now the last few days and indeed the last few weeks preceding this episode have been packed with excitement for the followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. And especially I suppose for a man like Simon whom we are particularly focusing attention upon. Gradually the implications of our Lord's signs or miracles are

dawning upon people.

At any rate they are certainly dawning upon a little nucleus among the twelve, if not upon the twelve as a whole. And they are beginning to formulate new convictions. Not just ideas, not just notions, but convictions.

They are beginning to see that he is requiring of them an ever new and increasing dedication of themselves. Its significance, of course, was not appreciated by all of them to the same extent. I suppose you will notice from Mark chapter 6 and verse 52 that the incident that we were considering in part or which was a background to our message last Lord's Day morning.

The incident of the feeding of the five thousand people beside women and children. This had not been appreciated at first by hardly any of them. Their hearts were hardened, Mark tells us in chapter 6 and verse 52.

And they didn't appreciate the significance of it. But in retrospect, that episode particularly seems to have been a watershed. And something seems to have clicked.

A crowd multiplied and wherever he goes the crowd seemed to be right at his heel following, waiting, listening, expecting something new all along the time, all along the way. And so it's been happening. But now something quite different appears before us.

Something quite different, something which was a blow and a challenge to the twelve disciples especially. We see that the multitudes are turning heel and breaking rank and going back. Back wherever they came from and leaving but the handful of the twelve, just a little handful to listen to his teaching and to accompany him wherever he is planning to go.

Now I want to look at this episode this morning focusing attention upon three main facets in the record. We're going to look first of all at the retreating multitudes then at the resolute Lord and finally at the remnant few that are left. First of all, the retreating multitudes.

John describes the scene before us with a kind of solemn brevity if you note his words. In verse 66, after this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. That's the RSV translation and it's very accurate.

They drew back and they no longer went about with him. In other words they severed connection. May I remind you therefore before we come to look at this how very eager the multitudes have been to follow Jesus up to this point.

Some of you will remember when we began this series we saw how in Jerusalem, in Judea, in the south of the country on the occasion of the first Passover attended by our Lord as scripture records a whole vast multitude professed to believe in him. Of course we're told he did not believe in them but they believed in him apparently. A whole multitude of them.

It seems to have been a very popular movement. Then at the beginning of John chapter 4 we are told that the multitude of our Lord's disciples and the number of people that were baptized as followers and disciples of Jesus had become an embarrassment to him. Now we didn't dwell upon this but you read back and you will see how true it is.

They'd become a positive embarrassment to him. An embarrassment of course for this reason. If the converts are going to grow to such a multitude then the authorities are likewise going to unleash a backlash.

And Jesus can't allow that to happen at this stage because he has not taught the people what he's come to taught. And before his prophetic ministry of teaching is concluded he cannot entertain his priestly ministry upon the cross of Calvary. So you see he leaves Judea in the south John chapter 1 verses 1 to 3 chapter 4 verses 1 to 3 he leaves Judea because they're causing a little bit of a problem.

The multitudes. Now we have seen what happened when he arrived in the north in Galilee. Do you remember that first Sabbath in Capernaum? It had been busy throughout the day but at the end of the day whilst Jesus was in Simon Peter's house in Capernaum do you remember how when the stroke of the Sabbath is over the multitudes come.

Our hymn is based on this episode I believe that even there the sun was set the sick old Lord around thee lay. The multitudes came. They were carried, they were conveyed one way or another and there they were and he touched them or uttered the word of healing and they were healed.

The multitudes. We saw another incident. Do you remember how walking by the seaside the multitudes were such as to squeeze the Savior first of all onto the shore Luke chapter 5 and then from the shore into Simon Peter's boat.

And this was all because of the press of the multitudes. They were squeezing him and he had to go onto the boat for a vantage point from which to proclaim the message of the kingdom that he had come to declare. Then again after that just imagine five thousand men besides women and children five thousand men besides women and children are at his heels all waiting to hear what he's got to say all watching to see what he's going to do.

He had a popular following at this point. Then not only did they go to that place where they were miraculously fed you notice that the day after they discover that Jesus has suddenly vanished. They don't know where he's gone to and there's quite a commotion.

And suddenly they find that he's gone to the other side of the lake and they get on a little boat and they go in a direct line to catch up with him. In other words they will not let him go. It was a popular movement in Galilee as in the south.

The incident now before us however points to a most significant change. Men who but yesterday ate out of his hand the miraculous food men who but yesterday to quote John were prepared spontaneously to say I quote chapter 6 and verse 14 this is that prophet that should come into the world namely the Messiah and who according to the verse following verse 15 were planning secretly to take him by force and make him king they're now turning heel and they're scattering each to his own place to abandon the one whom they believed to have been worthy to be king and lord and all vanishing in mid air. Now John very helpfully tells us why.

He explains the sudden change. He reports that many of those who were tentatively appear to be his disciples were offended at his teaching. Ah whilst he was largely working miracles it wasn't all that bad they could see it all even if they did not always benefit.

And just to see the miracles performed there was something of excitement about it. There was a thrill about it. It was something out of the ordinary.

But when their own kith and kin benefited well now that was so much the better and when they themselves were fed out of his hand well that's better still. But now they go. Despite the significant testimony of his signs pointing so conclusively to the fact here was a greater than the prophets and greater than the Pharisees greater than men here was none other than the Son of God incarnate.

They said John 6 and verse 60 this is a hard saying who can take this? We can't take this and because they could not take it they left it and they left him. Now the question that comes to us is this what was that hard saying? What was it that made them turn back? This morning I can only spell it out in brevity in shorthand. Is that the right way? In just a few lines here and there.

John speaks of a hard saying but probably the hard saying as the commentators will tell you refers not just to one statement but to the whole teaching that precedes verse 66 and this chapter is a fairly long chapter. The reason probably why the commentators say this is that John chapter 6 is like a woven bit of tapestry it's all one. And you can't unravel one thread and say this is one saying separated from the rest of the chapter.

The chapter is one, it's one whole. Therefore it is more than probable that when they say this is a hard saying they're referring to the largely, if not entirely what we have recorded as having preceded this particular point. Now what has been said? Can I refer to three of the main thrusts of this remarkable passage? I suppose the first difficulty and the first thing that hurt was this.

Jesus turned to them and uncovered their crude materialism their crude materialism and false motives. Recognizing the actual cause of their frenzied following of him across the lake he felt constrained to tear away the mask of pretense and show them exactly their own hearts. And you see men in ancient times did not like that any more than men like it today.

Jesus said to them in verse 26 Truly, truly I say to you you seek me not because you saw the signs Now notice, not just saw miracles but saw the signs that he was the Son of God. You're not seeking me because you saw the signs pointing to one who was more than men who was the incarnate Word of God. That's not why you seek me but you seek me because you ate your fill of the loaves.

Now here is a very, very daring statement but it's so true of our Lord. You imagine it. He's looking into the face of 5,000 men beside women and children and he's looking them straight in the face as you can look a crowd like that in the face if you can anyway and he's telling them quite straightly he says look, you are seeking me and you're making all this fuss to follow me and to find me out not because you want me but because you want what I can give you.

It's not the truth that I preach it's not the person that I am but it's the fact that I can turn stones into bread or I can multiply your few loaves and fishes and satisfy your material needs. You're after me for what you can get out of me not for what I am. Your motives are false your materialism is crass and I know it, he says.

He put it earlier on by saying this don't go on laboring, he says using your energy for the meat that perishes but rather use your strength and your intellectual energy and your moral powers use all that you are to labor for the meat that does not perish. You're using your strength in the wrong way and they didn't

like that. A hard saying.

It's so much easier, isn't it to have a Jesus who always pours platitudes upon people but he can never be the saviour of lost sinners without telling them the truth about themselves. My friends, this is true in the spiritual as it is in the medical realm. The doctor has to know what's wrong and put his finger on it and diagnose and sometimes tell an unwilling patient look, you've got to get it done.

So does Jesus. And he does it. And does it still.

Another facet of the hard saying, I suppose was his emphasis upon the sovereignty of God here and particularly the other side of that same truth that men are impotent to come to Jesus Christ unless God helps them. You know, we like these ancient people unfortunately in our fallen condition like to feel that we can opt for Christ or against Christ just as we please. You know, I can vote him in or I can vote him out.

I can bring about the success of the kingdom or I can frustrate it. Now, the lesson of the New Testament is this. You can crucify him but God will not allow the crucifixion of his son to spell disaster for the cause.

He will raise him from the dead. A vote against Jesus is a vote against yourself not against him. So that when God is drawing men into him and women it is a most significant moment or a significant season when he is inviting us even by our thoughts and our follies and the memory of our sins or by his infinite grace and promises he's inviting us.

Now at that point everything is open. Another element here I suppose and this is quite clear because this was the last in the series immediately before our text they were upset by our Lord's reference to himself as the living bread which came down from heaven. Now perhaps this doesn't strike us as it struck them.

You see they had all the Old Testament so familiar in their minds and they remembered the manna. Now the manna was of an extraordinary nature. The ancient people had been able to live and to survive only because of the manna which came down from heaven.

And they were so full of this and the manna of course was God himself come down to provide what was needed in the wilderness. Well now Jesus said I am the bread which has come down from heaven. I am the bread of God.

I am what the manna but faintly symbolized and I've come down to bring life to you in the wilderness and without eating me he explained that eating meant believing, receiving, believing without partaking of me as I've come down you have no life in you. You just haven't begun to live because I am the bread of life. This is a hard saying they said.

You see it made him not just an addition to their present beliefs but it made him essential to life. Essential to life. He is saying you can't begin to live and you can't continue to live when once you've begun apart from me I am the bread who brings life and sustains life.

There is no other. That's the point. This is a hard saying they murmured and began to withdraw.

Now this has been greatly misunderstood and the best commentators will show you and prove to you what I have no time to do this morning. They did not mean, look it's a hard saying we don't understand it. That's not the point at all.

What worried them was not what they could not understand but what they could understand. It was not that they were saying to Jesus, look you're talking things that are so difficult to understand we don't know what you're getting at. What they were saying is this, you're talking so very clearly in a language that we can understand but we don't possibly see how we can follow you this way.

You're making yourself absolutely and exclusively the only Savior. This is a hard saying. It's not the intellectual difficulty of understanding what he's saying, it's the moral difficulty of obeying what he teaches.

The longer I live, the more I am convinced that ultimately this is the cardinal reason why many people do not accept Jesus Christ and walk in his way. It is not the intellectual difficulty of imbibing his teaching but it is the moral difficulty of following in the way and of obeying his precepts. The retreating multitude.

Can you see it with your mind's eye? Can you see it? Leaving just a little band of twelve around the lone Savior all on an anticlimax. You can almost see the funeral of the Christian church announced in the daily press, buried today, 12 noon. Now let's look at the second here very briefly, the resolute Lord.

How does he react? How does Jesus Christ react when he sees them all going? The gospel writer records how as the grim realities of the hour were gradually dawning upon him, Jesus stands resolute and turns calm. Will you also go away? You? Also? Now my friends I have no time to go into all the details and significance of that, but let's just say two or three things about it. Mark the uncompromising demands of Jesus Christ.

Faced with the spectacle of a retreating crowd, faced with the end of his popularity, he does not attempt to strike a compromise even with the twelve. He does not even entertain the possibility of a compromise even to keep the last dozen of those eight or nine thousand people that have been clamoring around in the last few days. On the contrary, he shows the handful still before him the only alternative to the acceptance of his person and of his precepts.

Hard though the saying may be, he cannot compromise. Will you also go away? Underlying this uncompromising attitude, of course, there lies the Savior's absolute certainty of his own authority and of his own deity. Jesus only does this because he is certain of who he is and certain that in declaring these things that have offended people he is declaring the word which the Father has given him.

And therefore, if that is so, he cannot compromise. You can only compromise on things trivial or on things concerning which you are uncertain of their truthfulness. And our Lord was not declaring trivialities.

He was declaring the great eternal verities of salvation. And he was declaring these great eternal verities with a conviction that he had come from God with God's word and doing God's will. Therefore he says, I have come down from heaven not to do my will but the will of him that sent me.

Verse 38, If all this is too hard, it is too hard for you to be redeemed. Will you also go away? Having said that, however, it is evident that Jesus did not expect them to go away. I must say this.

It's necessary to an understanding of the passage. Though he put the question to them, he did not expect them to say, Yes, we will go for the reason. How can I know this? Well, because in Greek you address a question like this in one of two ways.

If you expect the answer to be negative, you address it in a certain way. If you expect the answer to be positive, you put it in a different way. And Jesus so couched the question that he expected a negative

answer.

We're not going away. In other words, he knew that they were different. He knew that though the saying might well have been hard, they had come to understand his person in some measure.

They had come to an appreciation of his word in some measure as well as his words. But they did not want to go away. They could not.

Even so, it certainly taught them how he was incapable of compromising his message to keep the crowds. And when you come to think of it, this was surely a vital message for a would-be apostle. Those of us involved in Christian work in a full-time sense in the ministry, or missionary work, you know, we always have to come back here.

It is so tragically possible to modify the word of the Lord or to mute some of his massive, mighty declarations in order to keep the peace or keep the people. Jesus wouldn't have it. And Simon learned that lesson as early as this.

If the people do not come to the truth which is from God and which is alone saving, then the people cannot come. It is truth unchanged, unchanging. And the Son himself says, I cannot negotiate the terms of the gospel.

This is not negotiable.

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