

## Many Went Back

HN/SS 6/02/05 am

Reading: Genesis 19:12f, Matthew 19:13f

Study Text: John 6:64-66

Psalms: 146:1-6, 89:13-16, 89:26-34, 89:47, 48, 51, 52

I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back no turning back.  
Though all may leave me still I will follow,  
The Cross before me the world behind me...

*Remember Lot's wife.* That was the solemn reminder Jesus gave to his disciples as he spoke to them about the Last days, the days of the Son of man (Luke 17). God sent two of his angels to Sodom to warn Lot that the wicked city would be destroyed, and urge him to run for his life. He was fleeing with his wife when she looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. She rejected the way of life urged upon her.

Calvin wrote of our text in John 6 'It is a dreadful and monstrous thing that kind and gracious an invitation of Christ could have alienated the minds of many...especially his disciples. But this example is held to us for a mirror, as it were, in which we may perceive how great is the wickedness and ingratitude of men who turn a plain road into an occasion of stumbling to them that they may not come to Christ'.

In this passage we come to the end of Jesus' discourse and see the outcome of his teaching. Jesus proclaimed 'I am the bread of life sent down from heaven. Come to me, believe in me and you will live, you will have eternal life'. The Jews thought his claims were preposterous – 'is this not the son of Joseph' they grumbled. But he continued to make such claims and call upon them to believe.

Sure Jesus made great claims about himself- he claimed to be greater than Moses. Sure his teaching was different to other rabbis – he spoke the very words of God. He is unique because he is the only begotten son of God; he is the greatest teacher of all time because he was sent by the Father from heaven. They stumbled because they could see Jesus only as a man.

His disciples could not see beyond what they saw Jesus do. They saw the miracles, and wanted more of the same. But they could not see to the truth that in Jesus *the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in bodily form*. When Jesus spoke, albeit in metaphorical terms, about eating his flesh and drinking his blood they were lost, they were offended and they stumbled.

*From that time many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more (6:66).* The word *time* is not in the Greek – it simply reads 'from this'. It may well be translated 'for this reason' or 'as a result of this'. For this reason they went back, they went back to their former way of life, to the things they formerly believed. What a tragic day it was in their

'life', what a disastrous decision to turn away from the Son of the living God. They may have been the first to do so but were certainly not the last.

Why? Why did they turn away? Why do people turn away from the truth? Why do people reject Jesus? Hundreds and thousands in our own society have rejected Him, the bread of life sent down from heaven. Just ask those around you and they will say yes, we went to Sunday School, we used to go to church but...but this, but that. You will be hit with a barrage of reasons why they no longer walk with the Lord (we are not of course talking about the regenerate just as these disciples were not regenerate).

### **Hard ground**

*When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside (Matthew 13:19). Do you think the hearts of these people were like that hard road where the seed fell? Who can hear it they said, who can accept this word that Jesus is speaking.*

It was not that they could not, they would not. They willed not to believe. Their hearts were hardened by sin and worldly thinking. They would not examine their hearts. Had they done so they would have found it full of pride and full of self. They were intent on earning their salvation by good works. Believing in Jesus, having faith in God the Son was not necessary as far they were concerned. They would not understand that without faith, faith in Jesus Christ, *it is impossible to please God* (Hebrews 11:6).

Paul encountered the same sort of hearts at Galatia. He wrote – *I marvel that so many of you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel*, meaning a gospel of works (Galatians 1:6). The gospel of grace alone, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, they turned away from. They went back to trusting in themselves and their own works.

The same sort of hearts can readily be found today. People will not listen to sound teaching; they will not listen to the whole counsel of God. They have their own ideas and so they will drift from church to church until they find someone who agrees with them. Often there is no one and so in their ignorance they piously sit at home following their own way.

### **Rocky ground**

Some receive the word with joy yet they have no root and do not last long. When trouble comes they stumble. Do you think this applies to these people who walked with Jesus no more? They certainly stumbled as we saw back in 6:61. And they were following Jesus with joy and expectation.

If they had any roots at all they were not deep that is for sure. But they were not encountering any trouble or persecution that we are told of. In Judea the Jews were ready to grab anyone who followed Jesus but not here in Galilee.

### **Weedy ground**

These are those who hear the word, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word. What about this ground? Do these disciples fit this picture? We have someone in the following verses that did. Judas Iscariot.

Jesus knew that Judas would betray him. Even one from his own inner circle, one of those he chose to follow him, would turn against him. Judas kept the money bag and often helped himself to the funds. Judas went to the chief priest and asked ‘how much will you give me if I give you Jesus?’ (Matthew 26:14). Judas was seriously choked by a lust for riches and power.

And these disciples were also seeking after things of the world. They hungered for physical bread (6:26, 34), they thirsted for worldly things. But Jesus was not promising them such things. Jesus miraculously gave them bread but this was as a sign of the true bread, the bread of life sent down from heaven.

As it is written, *man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God* (Deuteronomy 8:3). Jesus was proclaiming words from the mouth of God but they would not believe him. They were being ruled by their belly, their *god was their belly, and their glory their shame, and their end destruction* as Paul would say (Philippians 3:19).

In summary then ‘What they wanted he (Jesus) would not give and what he offered they did not want’ (Bruce). And so they went back. They failed to pass the test of unqualified allegiance and perseverance grounded in grace-prompted faith (Carson).

### **Jesus watched**

How did Jesus respond to this mass exodus, this turning away of his disciples? Being God the Son he knew who would not believe him (6:64 cf. 6:36). He knew from the beginning. He sees and knows my heart, your heart and the heart of everyone.

The fact that many walked away was no reflection upon his ministry. How better could it get than to have the Son of God ministering the word! Those whom the Father called – they would come and they would believe.

It is a great mistake to measure the success of a ministry by the number of people who attend. It was probably thousands who were following Jesus at this time – he had fed 5000 at Bethsaida. He had a massive following. If he were a politician, a movie star, a businessman, or a church leader he would have done all he could to keep these people happy. He would have been delighted in his popularity.

But for Jesus the truth came before popularity. And so it must be in any true Christian ministry. It is not always the case of course. We see many places where the crowd gets what they want. Paul warned Timothy against preaching what itching ears want to hear. The time will come he said when *they will not endure sound doctrine* (II Timothy 4:3). *They will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables or myths.*

Jesus was not preaching to entertain the crowd. He was not proclaiming some new scientific theory or new philosophy. He was proclaiming the truth, the truth that he is the bread of life sent down from heaven.

Many went back – more than stayed it would seem. These disciples *walked with him no more*. Jesus knew this would happen, but still it must have been a very sad day for him. He must have been very disappointed. God does *not desire that any should perish but that all should come to repentance* (II Peter 3:9). With great patience and clarity the master teacher sought to get them to listen and to believe him, but they would not.

And you, *do you also want to go away?* Jesus asked the twelve and asks you.

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