

The Good Confession

HN/SS 13/02/05 am

Reading: Joshua 24:1-25, Romans 10

Study Text: John 6:67-69

Psalms: 63:1-5, 63:6-11, 62:5-8, 56:9-13

Some years ago I went on a trek in the Himalayas with my son and his friends. School was over so off we went in a taxi up the river valley as far as the road went. Each one strapped on his backpack ready to set out along the path. Into our backpacks we had carefully loaded supplies for five days. We carried tents and cooking utensils, kerosene stove, food and clothes. Our packs were quite heavy. Up we went through the forest and then onto the grassy slopes above the tree line.

The views were awesome – the deep valley below and the snow capped mountains up ahead. The path got steeper and steeper and then there was no path at all. We found ourselves scrambling up a very steep slope. My hands were reaching ahead for a clump of grass or a rock that was solid. My feet searched for a firm place from which I could lift myself and my heavy pack a little higher up. Only once did I glance back, being careful not to overbalance. Below was a drop of more than a hundred metres into the valley below.

We reached the top and found a flat area on which to pitch our tents – we had reached the start of the snow. I was tired but did not sleep to well that night. The thought of going back the way we had just come haunted me. How very dangerous it would be going down that cliff. We must press on to the summit.

Many of the disciples following Jesus *went back and walked with him no more*. They turned away from the one who could give them life, the one who called them to come to him and believe in him and receive eternal life. They went back along the path they came on. They went back along the path of certain disaster.

Do you also want to go away? Jesus asked as he turned to the twelve, the twelve men he had chosen and called to follow him. The literal reading is ‘No also you wish to go?’ The question was probably asked more for their sake than his. They needed to articulate a response more than he needed to hear it. They had to choose where they would go. Would they go back with the ‘many’, or would they go on with Jesus.

Jesus had proclaimed to all of them who he was, and why his Father sent him down from heaven. He offered them life, eternal life. Most would not accept what he said and would not believe in him. Would these twelve men from his inner circle follow the crowd and leave him. They had to decide. Who shall we follow – the crowd or Jesus?

The question elicits a most profound confession, the ‘good confession’ from the mouth of Peter. This confession is a high point in this gospel – following on immediately the very low point. Remember the aim John had in writing this gospel – 20:31 – *that you may*

believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing you may have life in his name.

Peter spoke for the group – *we have come to believe*. Or so he thought. Judas was one of the group in body but not in spirit. He was a deceiver, he would betray Jesus. Jesus said he *is a devil*; he is the adversary, the one doing the will of his father the devil rather than the will of God the Father in heaven.

The Alternative

Before he made the good confession Peter considered the alternatives. What would turning away from Jesus mean? It was of course obvious to Peter that he could not go in two directions at the same time. He could not follow two masters at the same time. Seems obvious, yet so many today think they can call Jesus Lord and still follow the world. But *no one can serve two masters* said Jesus (Matthew 6:24). You cannot serve God and riches.

Lord to whom shall we go said Peter. Maybe he thought about where he had come from. He may well have been a follower of John the Baptist like his brother – but John was now dead. Would he go off and join the Pharisees or the Sadducees – but they did not speak with authority like Jesus. They did not offer life like Jesus. They simply kept putting more and more burdens on people.

Jesus said come follow me and I will make you fishers of men. The Pharisees said come we need you to condemn all who break the law. That was the way Saul was walking before he met Jesus; throwing men into prison. But as a follower of Jesus he sought the salvation of men.

Going back would make Peter **popular** with the crowd. Maybe some of his friends were in the crowd that walked away. But with wisdom from above, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter was able to see clearly. He asked the right question – to whom shall we go? Who would offer what Jesus was offering? He was not offering riches or power or the honour of men. He was offering life, new life, eternal life.

David was another man who walked wholeheartedly with the Lord, refusing turn aside to trust in men or even in his own power and might. When in dire circumstances he trusted in the Lord, in the most tempting situations he trusted in the Lord. He knew that God alone could deliver him and he trusted that God would do so.

Peter himself had recently experienced the danger of turning away from Jesus. He turned to look at the wind and became afraid (Matthew 14:30). He began to sink and would have drowned except Jesus reached out and caught him. Peter did not want to face death. He was going to cling to the one who gives life.

What do you desire in your life? *My soul thirsts for you* said David (Psalm 60). *For me to live is Christ* said Paul. *You have the words of eternal life* said Peter. Is it your earnest

desire to live for God? Do you seek him early in the morning? Do you meditate on his word day and night? Do you delight in coming to his house to worship him?

I remember in India they had to change the time of church because of a popular TV show. The other day I was talking to a minister who said they were finishing the service early so they could all watch the tennis together. Do such people really believe that Jesus alone has the words of eternal life? To whom shall we go? There are lots of places beckoning you to come but stop and consider what will be the outcome for your soul.

The Good Confession

After briefly considering the alternatives, Peter turned to Jesus and confessed – *you are the Christ, the Son of the living God* (6:69). Peter heard the same words as those who went back, but unlike them he heard and believed. He mixed the words with faith. *We have come to believe and know that you are the Christ.*

Many manuscripts have the words ‘we believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’ This is true of course but not a title used elsewhere in the New Testament, at least not by men. In John 1:41 Andrew told Peter we have found the Messiah. The Jews were looking for Messiah or the Christ.

Peter believed that Jesus was the Christ and that he was sent from heaven by the Father. This was what Jesus was claiming and urging his followers to believe. 6:57 – *as the living Father sent me..Peter did believe. He confessed – You are the Son of the living God.*

At Caesarea Philippi Peter confessed to Jesus – you are the Christ the Son of the living God. Jesus told him blessed are you...for flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my father who is in heaven (Matthew 16:17). It was because God the Holy Spirit touched Peter’s heart that he believed. As Jesus said, unless the Father draws you, you cannot come.

So Peter was blessed with a knowledge of Jesus as the Son of God and believed that Jesus gave him life. He did not at this stage understand that Jesus had to die but he was following Jesus knowing that he was the truth and the only way of salvation.

Joshua spoke to Israel – *choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house we will serve the Lord* (Joshua 24:15). After many had turned back, Jesus called upon the twelve to choose whom they would follow. And you are called by Jesus to choose whom you will serve. Choose this day if you have not done so. Confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Confess him before the people as did Peter.

And if you have done so remember whose you are and whom you serve. You were bought with a price. You believed but it was God who first set his love upon you and called you out of darkness into the glorious light of the gospel.

There are many so called gods calling to you, offering you all sorts of treasures and pleasures in this world. But only one, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of the living God, offers you life, eternal life. *Confess with your mouth Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead and you will be saved* (Romans 10:9). And let each one of us hold fast to our confession in hope, the hope of his glorious return.

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