

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part twenty-nine

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Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

YOU CAN'T BELIEVE IN JESUS UNTIL YOU'VE REJECTED THE ALTERNATIVES

John 6:66-69 - "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. [67] So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" [68] Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, [69] and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

I wanted so much to finish up John six last Sunday. It's a wonderful but very intensive passage to preach through in a local church. Seminaries debate this chapter and scholars write about it. We've done well to get through it in four weeks.

But we can't leave this chapter without one more teaching time. There are two thoughts I want to explore in these verses. **First**, there is the way Peter demonstrates what abiding faith in Jesus is really all about. I like the way, when pressed by Jesus about perseverance, Peter **compares** following Jesus with turning to anything or anyone else. Real faith has already **considered** and **eliminated** other options. This is the final and absolute difference between placing **trust** in Jesus and **knowing about** Jesus or even **considering** Jesus.

And **second**, there is the way Peter's answer sets up the order of spiritual knowing and understanding. It's the opposite of what you'd expect. He says, in **verse 69**, that he (and the rest of the disciples - "**we**") have **believed** and then **come to know** who Jesus really is. This seems to be the opposite of a good academic approach.

Those are the targets for today's teaching:

1) **PEOPLE WHO DON'T LIVE FOR CHRIST WILL INEVITABLY LIVE FOR SOMETHING LESS**

John 6:67-68 - "So Jesus said to the Twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?' [68] Simon Peter answered him, **Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life....**"

Everyone lives for some ultimate end or goal. In **not** following Christ Jesus as Lord we don't live without a master. No one roams life with no dominating leader. If not Christ, then something and someone else will be the object of our devotion. The only question is "**...to whom shall we go?**", not **whether or not** we will go. **Everyone follows something or someone.** **Bob Dylan's** words are still true. "**It may be the Devil and it may be the Lord - but you gotta serve somebody.**"

The idea here is there is always **something other than ourselves shaping our lives**. That's the key principle. Our lives **take the shape of something**. We all **attach ourselves** to something or someone for better or for worse. There really are no "**self-made**" individuals. We all end up in one **mold** or the another. We all **take the shape of something or someone else**:

Romans 12:1-2 - "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] **Do not be conformed to this world**, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

2) **DYNAMIC FAITH IN CHRIST IS ONE THAT ACCURATELY CALCULATES THE EMPTINESS OF ALL OTHER OPTIONS**

There is a spiritual power in Peter's question to Jesus - **John 6:68** - "Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life....'" What I want you to see is Peter's question **defines** genuine faith. Peter recognizes the power of faith in Christ to transform and satisfy the whole life rests on a foundation that has already considered the futility of all other options.

The point of John's account is worth noting. By the time Jesus asks whether or not the disciples will also leave Peter had **already calculated the emptiness of leaving**. Those who **left** Jesus only calculated the cost of **following**. Peter says he calculated the higher cost of **leaving**.

This is how Peter and the disciples **started** following Jesus. They had already considered other options and found them wanting. All those other bridges were already burned. And John's point is **that's what it means to say you believe in Jesus**. You believe in Him **more** than you would commit to anything else.

There's a life lesson here. Peter is showing us we should never sing *"I Have Decided To Follow Jesus"* until we are also prepared to sing, *"I Have Decided To Follow Jesus Instead Of...."* The power of faith is in the ruling out of other options, not just in professing love to Jesus. The worship expression of the church needs to ponder this.

When you grasp this principle you will see it reinforced all over the New Testament. Here's the most prominent example of all:

Luke 18:18-23 - "And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" [19] And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. [20] You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" [21] And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." [22] When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." [23] But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich."

The way to approach this account is to ask the question, *"Is Jesus being aggressive or gracious in His conversation with this rich young ruler?"* Are these *abrasive* words or *loving* words. And I'm going to argue, in just a minute that they are *very* loving words.

The other issue with the rich young ruler account is whether Jesus asked this same requirement of *all* who followed Him. And clearly He did not. So *why* does Luke (and the Holy Spirit) feel it's important that we have this account recorded for our consideration when *we* follow Jesus? What is the point of this record?

First, the words of Jesus are *loving words* because in them Jesus forces this ruler to consider all the other options of devotion at the very *beginning* of His decision regarding following Jesus as Lord. In other words, the Peter issue of *"to whom else can we go"* is put front and center right out of the gate.

And the reason Jesus' words are loving is He refuses to let this rich ruler kid himself that he will get *more* serious about following Jesus *exclusively* later on. Jesus knows the rich ruler will *lose* that battle unless he deals with it right up front. These words from Jesus are *loving* words because they help this ruler understand what *believing in Jesus* really means. They keep the rich ruler from being a *fake* follower of Jesus.

As to *why* the Holy Spirit includes this rather unique demand of Jesus to this ruler, the answer is *at least once* we learn the kind of *conscious choosing* faith in Jesus *always* requires. Jesus is forcing the *"to whom shall we go"* issue in clear, obvious terms and this ruler models a *fool's choice*. True, the choice isn't always made as *visible* as Jesus makes it with the rich ruler. But this one account shows us the kind of exclusive attachment following Jesus *always demands* but never *forces*.

Back to Peter. He has chosen to follow Christ, the Messiah. But if he chose *not* to follow Christ he wisely recognizes that he won't live the rest of his life without outside influence. If he were to forsake Christ he would find and follow something or someone else. He would end up giving his life to something much smaller and emptier.

3) **FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS ALWAYS LOOKS FORWARD ENOUGH TO CONSIDER ETERNAL HORIZONS**

John 6:68 - "Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life....'"

For Peter this is what narrowed down the field. To whom else could he go to find *eternal life*? This decided the issue for Peter and the disciples. Judas is just a typical picture of what happens to all who fall in love with the money bag of the disciples rather than the eternal reward of Jesus Christ. Lives will be misspent that look only toward immediate gratification rather than eternal joy.

It was Peter's consideration of eternity that caused Him to rest faith in Christ. If you are blind enough to only consider fleeting tidbits of happiness there are *all sorts* of others to whom you can go. But if you sense the fast passing of your life's days and crave eternal joy and significance there is no one but Christ to follow.

Again, Jesus made this a *base-line test* for all you came to Him - **Matthew 16:24-26** - "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [25] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. [26] For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?'"

This is Jesus' counsel when considering the *"to whom shall we go"* question. Can the object of your life's devotion stand the test of eternity? Will your choice lead to *short-term joy*? Will you regret your choice when you consider it from the other side of the grave? Because Jesus says you can't reverse your choice at that point. Happiness outside of Christ is always *short-lived*.

Something else. Notice the way Jesus introduces this whole conversation with the summons to take up our cross - verses 24-25 - "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [25] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.'"

If we only understood this we wouldn't shy away from Jesus' *"take up your cross"* language. We need to consider what it is that *dies* on that cross we take up. Jesus isn't out to diminish our existence. He's out to put to death the other options for life that we might foolishly choose. What dies on that cross are all the other things to which we might be tempted to cling to for life. The cross we take up is the one on which all the other *"to whom we might go"* options are eliminated. Jesus isn't *mean* in this demand. False hope and false joy are crucified on that cross.

4) THE PRECIOUSNESS OF CHRIST CAN'T BE PERCEIVED BY THE OUTSIDE OBSERVER

John 6:69 - "...and we have *believed*, and have *come to know*, that you are the Holy One of God."

There is a comfort side and a warning side to these words.

There is *comfort* to the *believer* who can't explain the disdain for Christ he or she experiences from a pagan culture. People outside of Christ can never see the beauty of His person. They can't share your devotion and worship of God the Son.

Even if you can argue them into acknowledging certain truths about your beliefs - Christ's existence, miracles, resurrection, etc. - this still won't necessarily cause them to *treasure* Christ as you do. Apologetics can help open a window for faith, but it can never drag people through the doorway. So the *comfort* point is the lack of love for Christ by the world is no reflection on the legitimacy of your faith in Christ.

But there's *warning* as well. There is an emptiness in any attempted religious profession that is merely *inherited* or *mimicked* from Christian parents or church community. Look at Peter's words again and ponder them deeply - "...and we have *believed*, and have *come to know*...."

There is a *kind* of knowing that only comes from personal faith. First you *believe* and then you *know*. You can only experience the *true worth* of Christ from the *inside* of your own relationship with Him. You have to believe for yourself. You have to enter in. You have to unchoose any other devotion.

You may know a little or almost nothing at all of saving life in Christ. Or you may live *close* to the trimmings of religion but don't commit your own love and trust to following Jesus Christ. If you are willing, you can know Jesus at a deeper level than you presently think. You can know *Him* - not just know *about Him* - or listen to what *others* have come to know of Christ. Know for yourself. Believe in Him. Let His Spirit into your heart today.