

Do You Also Want to Go Away?

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the importance of commitment to God and the consequences of leaving Jesus, using examples from the Bible to illustrate the choice to serve God.

Duration: 36:45

Topics: "Following Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of focusing on the words of Jesus rather than seeking entertainment or performance in worship. He highlights that Jesus repeatedly emphasized the power and life-giving nature of his words. The speaker also addresses the issue of finding a good church, discussing the response to his previous bulletin articles on the topic. He mentions the story of a young man who chose material possessions over following Jesus, and compares it to the shallow commitment of some people who initially rejoice in hearing the word but do not have depth in their faith. The sermon concludes by cautioning against false preachers who promote a gospel based on meeting felt needs rather than true spiritual transformation.

Transcript

John chapter six, John chapter six. I'm interrupting the brief series that we began on why I should go to church for various reasons. We'll get back to it maybe in a couple of weeks' time.

And you'll also notice in the bulletin article that I've addressed a related issue, simply because the series of bulletin articles have elicited a huge response from people from all over the world. And one of the questions that has risen as a result of these articles is the same old question, people saying they can't find a good church. And so I've examined that in the bulletin article, and that's why we're taking a slightly different, because I could not reply to each one of those people individually, so I decided to write an article on that.

So I'm gonna speak on something slightly different this morning, but related, and that's from John chapter six. And Jesus had just spoken these very strong words that except you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no part in me. And then in chapter six, verse 60, it says, therefore, many of his disciples, when they heard this said, this is a hard saying, who can understand it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples complained about this, he said to them, does this offend you? What then, if you should see the Son of Man ascend where he was before? It is the spirit who gives life.

The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. And there are some of you who do not believe.

For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray him. And he said, therefore, I have said to you that no one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by my Father. From that time, many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more.

Then Jesus said to the 12, do you also want to go away? But Simon Peter answered, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also, we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered them, I did not choose you, the 12, and did I not choose you, the 12, and one of you is a devil? He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray him, being one of the 12.

And I want to speak with you from verse 66. From that time, many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more. Then Jesus said to the 12, do you also want to go away? But Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

I think that this is one of the most striking pictures in the life and the ministry of the Lord Jesus, and I can just imagine the scene as this large crowd were following Jesus. And Jesus speaks these words, and the people find them very hard, mainly because they didn't understand them. What did Jesus mean by eating his flesh and drinking his blood? And of course, we know that the Jews accused the church of being cannibals because they drank the blood and ate the body of Christ.

And of course, we know that that didn't mean that they literally did that. And we also know that the bread of the Lord's Supper and the wine or the juice does not literally turn into his body or into his blood. They are representative, they are symbols, they are pictures that represent his broken body and his shed blood.

And yet, there is a spiritual truth behind what Jesus said. And Jesus was saying, unless you eat of me, unless you partake of me, of who I am, unless you drink of my blood, unless you partake of the forgiveness and the grace and the atonement that comes by the shedding of my blood, you have no part in me. But obviously, the people didn't understand because in a sense, he was speaking in a parable.

And so many were offended as a result of this. And as Jesus is speaking, the people begin to leave. And I suppose that, and I can very well understand what he must have felt like.

There is nothing more disconcerting for a preacher to see people leave while he is still preaching. Now, we understand sometimes people have to attend to personal stuff, and there are sometimes good reasons. But sometimes people leave to make a point.

Sometimes people leave as a statement of protest against what is being said. And that is very hard for a preacher to deal with. And Jesus found not just one or two leaving, but it says many.

And not only did they walk out on him while he was speaking, but it says that they stopped following him. They no longer recognized him as their rabbi, as their teacher. They no longer recognized him as this one that they had hoped for as the Messiah and as the Christ.

And so not only did they walk out on him during his message, but they left him altogether. And that must have been, for Jesus as a man, that must have been a very disheartening and discouraging experience. And so Jesus turns to his disciples, and it seems to me that the only ones that were really left were the 12.

And he says, are you gonna leave also? Are you gonna go away as well? And Peter says those words, where do we go? Where do we go? And you know, as I look at that, it just seems to be such a poignant picture, and yet it establishes or it conveys some very important truths. And they are not just truths that were true of what happened with Jesus, but they are true throughout the scriptures. Throughout the scriptures we find that there are those who turn away from God, and there are those who cling to him.

And obviously the question today is, will you go away also? Or will you be like those who say, I have nowhere else to go. You alone have the words of eternal life. And you know, when one goes through the scriptures, and I just went through the New Testament, there are many examples in the Old Testament, but you remember Jesus spoke about the seed that fell on the stony places.

And it grew, it sprang up. But there was no depth of soil, and so when the sun came up, and the sun representing persecution and difficulty, when that came, the seed or the growth withered up, and it died. It was there, there was hope, there was life.

There seemed to be some great anticipation or expectation of a crop or a harvest. And yet it didn't last. And remember Jesus gives the interpretation to the parable, and he speaks about people who have no depth within themselves.

They are shallow in their commitment. They are shallow in their decisions. They are shallow in their experience of God and in their knowledge of the word.

And so there's great rejoicing when they hear the word. They say, this is it. And yet it doesn't last.

Just like these people who were following Jesus because he was feeding them with bread, because he was meeting their needs. And unfortunately today, there are too many people who come to Christ in the hope that he will meet their needs. And unfortunately, there are many false preachers today who are preaching a gospel based on felt needs.

Come to Jesus and he will fix all your problems. Come to Jesus, he'll make you happy. He'll solve your financial problems.

He'll make you rich. He'll make you healthy. He'll do all of these things for you.

And yet when Jesus began to say to them, it's not about the physical bread, but it's about the bread of life. It's a bread from heaven. When he began to apply it in a spiritual way, and he said, your fathers ate manna in the wilderness and they still died.

It's not about the physical manna. It's not about the bread that I broke and fed you with, but it's about eating of me. And many people, when Jesus no longer meets their physical need, but says, I want you to have a spiritual relationship with me.

Turn away from him and find that they are disappointed and discouraged in their service of him. You remember the rich young ruler who came to Jesus? And obviously this was an intelligent young man. He was a teacher himself.

He was a leader amongst the Jews. And he had examined Jesus. He had heard the discussions about who Jesus was.

The Pharisees were talking about Jesus. Oh, he's a false prophet. Oh, maybe he is the son of God.

And he had examined Jesus and he had come to the conclusion that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. He was indeed the Christ. And so he comes to Jesus and he says, what must I do? You remember what Jesus told him? Go and sell everything.

Take up your cross. And he says, he turned away from Jesus and he was sorrowful. You know, when I read that he turned away and he was sorrowful, I wonder whether that statement that the rich young ruler was sorrowful because he had many riches.

I wonder whether that statement applied to Jesus also. And that Jesus was not maybe more sorrowful than the rich young man. I'm sure I would have been if I saw this young man come and he had all the potential.

A man with zeal, a man who was gifted, who had an ability to mean something in the kingdom of God, a man who could be used by God in some way or the other. And yet he chooses his material possessions over the things of God. I'm sure Jesus was sorrowful as that young man turned his back and walked out.

I don't know whether he came back again, but at that moment, he'd walked away from Jesus, just like the people that day when he was speaking about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. I suppose the most dramatic illustration of this is what happened during the last week of the earthly ministry, or the last week before the death of Jesus. You remember on Palm Sunday, there was that crowd.

Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. This is the Messiah. This is the one that we're looking for.

And all the crowd was there, and I don't know how many people, but thousands of people, it seems, were lining the streets and bringing Jesus into Jerusalem. And yet within a week, the same crowd cried, crucify him. One day, he was everything.

The next day, he was nothing. One day, he was their Messiah. The next day, he was a rogue and a scoundrel that had to be nailed to a cross.

It's amazing how fickle people are, how easily people change their feelings about God, how they've changed their commitment to the Lord. You know, it goes on. You go right through the letters of Paul, and you find the same thing.

In 2 Timothy 1, verse 15, Paul says, all those in Asia have turned away from me. And that was not just a personal thing. It wasn't that they just turned away from Paul.

Paul had not departed from the faith. Paul had not changed what he believed. Paul had not changed the message that he had been preaching.

So clearly, something had happened in those people that caused them to turn away from him. And John writes in 1 John 2, verse 19, this man of love, and he says, they went out from us. But he says, they were never of us.

They were never part with us. And so clearly, John had that experience of people leaving, people just going their own way and saying, we're no longer going down this road. But you know, when we look, and I've looked at the New Testament at these examples, and we could have found examples in the Old Testament, but I want to show you some examples in the Old Testament, because our impression is

always that the Old Testament was bad and the New Testament was good, and that everybody in the New Testament was great and everybody in the Old Testament, well, they were not so great.

And yet there are some wonderful examples in the Old Testament of people who did the opposite, who in spite of difficulty and in spite of everyone else turning away, clung to God. And the first man, and he wasn't necessarily the first, I've just chosen a few examples, but the one, the first one I want to look at is Joshua. And remember, he brings the people of Israel to a point of decision.

And he says, you need to choose who you're going to serve. But as for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord. What a statement.

In other words, I don't care what the rest of you do. Why did he make that statement? I'm sure he made that statement because he remembered what had happened 40 years before. What happened 40 years before? 40 years before, all of Israel turned against God and said, we will not enter into the land.

And two men, Joshua and Caleb, said, we trust God. We're on the Lord's side. We believe that he will see us through.

We believe that he will give us this land. And so Joshua now taking the leadership of Israel 40 years later, remembered and he said, he says, even if the whole of the nation, if the rest of you Israelites, if you're not going to trust God, if you're not going to serve him, me and my house, we will serve the Lord. What a declaration in the face of an apostate nation.

In fact, there needs to be that kind of declaration in our own hearts, that even if the whole world falls away, even if the whole church becomes apostate, me and my house, maybe we should insert, by the grace of God, we will serve the Lord. We will serve the Lord. It doesn't matter what everybody else does.

It doesn't matter how much opposition there may be. It doesn't matter how many problems may come our way. It doesn't matter how many people will stand with us, but we will serve the Lord.

And then there was Ruth. And you remember, she was not a Jewess. She was a Moabite woman.

And her sister-in-law and Ruth come with their mother, Naomi, some part of the way, moving from Moab back to Israel. And along the way, Naomi says to Ruth's sister and to Ruth, you need to go back to your own people. And Ruth's sister-in-law says, well, I'm going back.

And she turned her back on Ruth and Naomi, and she went back to her people, back to the nation that really had the judgment of God upon it, turned away from the blessing of God, turned away from the covenant and everything else that Israel represented. And yet Ruth says, I'm gonna stick with you. A few times Naomi said, no, you need to go back.

You need to go back, you need to go back. And every time Ruth says, no, I'm sticking with you. I'm not gonna leave you.

Your God is my God. Your people will be my people. What a declaration of commitment in spite of every attempt of Naomi to discourage her.

And I don't know that Naomi really wanted to discourage her. I'm sure Naomi wanted her to be with her, but she wanted to make sure that she was going to be committed to her new people, to her new nation, to her new God. And you know, it's the same thing that Jesus did with that rich young ruler.

He was testing him. And the rich young ruler failed the test, and he went back. But Ruth did not go back.

And she says, it doesn't matter what you say. I'm going with you. And I'm going to serve this God who is the true God, the God of Israel.

And again, you folk, there are times that God may test us. There are times that God may say, I want to see what's in your heart, whether you really mean business with me. And so difficulties may come.

Opposition may come. Discouragement will come. All of these things come against us.

But in spite of all of those things, there needs to be a determination to say, I'm not gonna look back. I'm not going to be like Lot's wife who kept looking back. But I'm going to put my hand to the plow.

Remember, Jesus said, no man who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom. And so there needs to be a determination. Let me be like Joshua.

Me and my house, we will serve God. Let me be like Ruth. Your God will be my God.

Your people will be my people. And then there's another man that maybe you have forgotten about. Maybe you've never heard of him.

His name was Ittai. Ittai. Anybody know who Ittai was? Well, he was not the first Italian.

He was a man who lived in the time of David, king of Israel. And this was a very dark time in the history of Israel, in the history of David. Because David's own son had incited a coup, a rebellion against David, Absalom.

And so all of Israel turned against David. And David fled for his life. And as David flees, with all of Israel now behind this rebellious son of his, this man Ittai comes.

And he says, I'm with you, David. And David says, no, you have no future with me. David seems that David felt that he was gonna go back to where he had always been, living in the caves, fleeing for his life as a vagabond.

And so he says, you have no future with me. But Ittai says, no, I'm gonna stick with you. And even though David tried to discourage him, Ittai was absolutely committed to stick with David.

Because he recognized in David the anointed of God. He recognized that David was the true king. And that God would honor and that God would restore David to his position again.

And folk, that takes spiritual insight. That when everyone else is leaving for the false leaders, when everybody else is following the false prophets and the false apostles, that there are those who would say, we recognize the true men of God. We recognize the true teaching of the word of God.

And we will stick with that which is the true. We will stick with that which has God's blessing and God's anointing, in spite of the appearances and in spite of the fact that it looks like everybody, all the world is going down this road. But we're gonna stick with that which we believe is what God is doing and with what God is calling us to do.

And so here's this man, Ittai. And then the last example I wanna show you from the Old Testament is Elisha. Now remember, Elisha was a apprentice prophet, a learner prophet, under the great prophet

Elijah.

And the time comes that Elijah now has to depart. And so Elijah goes on this journey and Elisha now goes with Elijah. And obviously that was what he'd always done.

He would go with Elijah and he would help Elijah with his chores and serve him and carry his bags and so on. And all the while he was learning from Elijah what it meant to be a man of God. But at this occasion, Elijah says, you can't go with me, you need to stay behind.

And Elisha says, no, I'm going with you. Doesn't matter what the cost, doesn't matter where you're going, I'm going with you. And three times in the passage of Samuel, it says that Elijah said to him, turn back.

And every time Elisha said, no, I'm not turning back. I'm going to go with you. Not only did Elijah tell Elisha to turn back, but the other student prophets, on two occasions they said to Elisha, you're foolish, you should not follow Elijah.

Turn away and come back, stay with us. I think it's amazing how even others who seem to be people of God will sometimes try to draw us away. And yet Elisha said and understood that this was the way that God had called him to walk.

And he committed himself to Elijah and he stuck with Elijah and we know the end of the story. A little while later, Elijah was caught up into heaven and his mantle fell on Elisha and Elisha became the great prophet who took over the role and the function of Elijah. What would have happened if Elisha had turned away and said, well, I need the support of my other student prophets.

Elijah's old, he's off the scene, let's forget about Elijah. I need to get the favor and I need to get the support of all the other guys. Well, he would not have had God's blessing.

He would not have had a double portion of God's blessing, which he had in the end, because he stuck to the man of God. And so we have those choices. Are we gonna be like those many that we looked at in the New Testament who changed their minds, who changed their affections, who were fickle in their relationship with the Lord? Or are we gonna be like these men in the Old Testament and the many great men in the New Testament who are absolutely committed to serving God with all of their heart, with all of their mind and with all of their strengths.

And no matter what the opposition, no matter what the discouragement, no matter what the majority were doing, they said, we're gonna go God's way. Now, here was Peter. Now, and we understand that Peter's statement was really also quite superficial, because you know, the time would come when he would deny the Lord.

But for this moment, Peter understood the issues. And Peter's response is, Jesus said, well, everybody else is going, you better leave too. Peter says, I'm not going.

And he's not speaking for himself, but he's speaking for all 12. He says, we can't go, because you alone, you alone have the words of eternal life. And I believe it's important for us to come to that same point that Peter came to.

And that is to understand that we really have no options. Many times I'm tempted to turn aside, not necessarily from the Lord, but from the Lord's work. And when I sit down and I say, well, what will I do?

Where will I go? I realize I have no options, that I am a bondservant, that I really have no choice but to serve Him.

And the problem is that we seem to have too many choices today. And it's not that we have many choices, it's just that we think we have many choices. I don't know if I can do this, I can go here, I can... But in fact, the reality is there is only one way.

Jesus says, I am that way. There are not many ways to serve God. There are not many truths.

And in fact, we have so many choices today, you can switch on the television and get, on a Sunday, I don't know, 20 different stations with 20 different messages. And we say, well, let me see which one I'll choose. And unfortunately, many people are choosing on the wrong basis, because the message is pleasant, or because the message is exciting, or because the message promises certain, whatever it is, whatever basis.

But in fact, there is only one truth. There is only one truth. There is only one right way.

I know people have a problem with that, because that makes it exclusive, that makes it narrow. But Jesus made it exclusive. He says, I am the way.

I am the truth. Not I am a truth. I'm one of many versions of Christianity.

I'm one of many versions of religions that will ultimately lead to God. No, Jesus says, I am the only truth. And Peter understood that.

And he said, Lord, there is no one else. The Jews don't have it. The Sadducees don't have it.

The Pharisees don't have it. The Gentiles and the pagans, they don't have it. You alone have the words of eternal life.

And in a sense, he has his back against the wall. He says, I have nowhere else to turn. And I think that if we really think about it, and we really look at it carefully, we have to come to the same conclusion, and that is that there is no other alternative but to serve God.

There is no other alternative but to follow Jesus, because he is the only way. There is no other truth. There is no other way.

There is no other life. But unfortunately, we think that we can have life in this world, a soulish, carnal, fleshly form of life. And that was one of the reasons why they were following Jesus, because he was meeting their carnal needs, their soulish needs, their fleshly needs.

And when Jesus made it clear that it was not about that kind of life, but that it was about eternal life, at that point, they turned away from him. And so Peter says, you alone have the words of eternal life. Now, Jesus said, the words that I speak to you, they are spirit, and they are life.

Spirit and life. What did he mean by they are spirit and they are life? Well, first of all, he says, I'm speaking in the spiritual realm, in the spiritual domain. They were used to, their teachers, the Pharisees, they were talking about earthly things.

Everything was related to keeping the law, as we were reading through Matthew, the tithing of the herbs, doing this little law, keeping that little command, all of the musts and the dos and the don'ts, it had very little to do with a real relationship with God. It had very little to do with spirituality. It was all about laws and rules and earthly things.

And Jesus says, no, I've come to speak to you spirit. And folks, that's where we struggle. Because as long as the message contains information about how I can live my life, how I can have a good marriage, how I can have a blessing in my finances, how I can have a good relationship with the government, who I should vote for, all of these things, people are very happy.

But when we begin to speak spiritual things, people struggle with those things. Because we're only interested in what I can get out of it here and now, today, in this life. And Jesus says, I haven't come to give you life in this life, really.

He says more abundantly, but it's not really about this life. It's about eternal life. And so the words I speak to you, they are spirit.

They are spiritual, and they are life. They give life. They are life imparting, life giving.

Jeremiah says in Jeremiah chapter 15, verse 16, he says, your words were found, and I ate them. And your word was to me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart. Your words were the joy and the rejoicing of my heart.

Your joy, your words give us life. There is life in nothing else. The word of God is life giving.

Unfortunately, somehow, in these last 20 years or 30 years of Christianity, the majority of people seem to have got the impression that spiritual life is in wonderful worship and in exciting preaching and in stories and in stirring up people's emotions and motivational preaching. But the life is not in those things. The life is in the word of God.

It's in the words that Jesus speaks. And not just in the hearing of those words, but in the living and the doing of those words. And so Jesus says, my words are spirit.

And maybe the word says and, but let me just change it for a minute. They are spirit, but they are life. We don't like the spiritual dimension.

We don't like the fact that they are spiritual, and we don't like the spiritual aspect. But they are life. But they are life.

You know, there is no life in motivational speaking. There is no life in feel-good messages. But there is life in the word of God.

And so we need his words. We need the words of Jesus. And so Peter says, you have the words.

You have the words. You know, that is such a powerful statement that Peter made, and it's powerful for us today. Because what they are telling us, what the seminaries are telling preachers today, what the books are telling us, is that people are not interested in words.

People don't want to hear preaching like you're hearing this morning. Because we live in a different time and a different generation. When people are into YouTube and they're into sound bites and into video clips

and into all of these sorts of things, the message has to be made visual.

But you know, Jesus didn't say, my performance. Jesus did not say, my entertainment. Jesus did not say, my worship.

But he says, my words are spirit and they are life. Jesus did not even say, my deeds are spirit and life. Now we know that the work that he did on the cross brought us eternal life.

But over and over, Jesus says, it's my words, it's my words, it's my words. And folks, still today, where are we going to find life? The life is not in the worship. We praise God for worship.

We praise God for the experiences that we may have. But at the end of the day, we're going to find life in the word. Jesus said to the Pharisees, he says you search the scriptures because you think in them you have eternal life.

So they at least understood that life came through the word. But in their searching, they've missed the point. Jesus says, they speak of me.

And so when we find Jesus, the true Jesus in the word, that gives us and imparts to us eternal life. Have you come to a point where you recognize that there is only one way? There is only one truth. There is only one life.

The life that Hollywood advertises is not life. The life of the prosperity message is not life. There is only one life and that is eternal life.

Everything else is incidental to that. Lord, where do we go? Where do we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. Father, as we look at your word, we pray that you would do a work in our hearts.

Lord, that we may not be into our relationship with you in a superficial way like those Jews and those people who follow Jesus and one day hailed him as the Messiah and the very week later called for him to be crucified. Like the rich young ruler Lord who recognized Jesus as a true teacher and yet turned away from him. But Lord, that we may be like Joshua.

As for me and my house, we will follow and serve the Lord. Lord, that we may be like Ruth who did not turn back but set her face as it were towards Bethlehem, the house of bread. Lord, that we may be like Ittai who recognized the true anointed of God Lord, help us to serve you with all of our hearts.

Above all, Lord, help us to come to that point of evaluating the options and coming to that conclusion. Lord, where do we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. And Lord, when you speak to us those words which are not always pleasant but that impart to us life, help us to treasure them also and not to discard them because they don't speak the things that we want to hear.

And Lord, when you no longer turn stones into bread and when you no longer feed our carnal earthly desires, help us to continue to serve you and follow you and not just to be in it for what we can get out of it. And so we thank you, Jesus, that you did give us life. Not just through your word but through your death and your resurrection.

Make these things real to us, Lord. Help us to come to a point of decision. Help us to come to a point of commitment.

And help us, Lord, to come to a point of no turning back. We ask it in Jesus' name. We pray that you would part us with your blessing now, Lord.

Go with us. Grant that your spirit would continue to teach these things and make them real to us. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Bring us together again safely this evening as we continue to study your word. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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