

Guest Preacher - Rev. John Lachie Macleod

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Preacher: Rev. John Lachie Macleod

[0:00] I thank you previously for the welcome you gave to Manuel and Eva, who have travelled up with me for this communion season. And with her permission, I'm going to share something that she shared one night in our Bible study in our own church when we were studying the 23rd Psalm.

And Eva, if you haven't met her already, is from China. Her husband is from Spain and English is their second language. I told them they'd be at home in Lewis. There'd be a lot of people for whom English is the second language.

But when Eva came to know Christ in Wales, she was in Swansea in Wales and was going through the process of not just learning about the Lord, but learning the language. The first time she ever heard the metrical version of Psalm 23, it kind of startled her because as she read it, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. And her immediate thought is, Why would you not want the Lord to be your shepherd?

Why would you not want to know God's grace? Why would you not want to know all that the psalm promises regarding God's leading, God's guiding, God's providing, God's blessing, God's helping, God's anointing?

All the things that that psalm conveys to us convey is such a powerful trust that we can have in God's desire to shepherd our lives as he leads us eventually to his eternal home.

[1:29] And for someone working out the nuances of English language, it sounded as if the psalmist was saying, The Lord is my shepherd. I don't want that. Now we know that, and she knows, that once you understand the language, the psalmist is saying to us, Well, actually the Lord is my shepherd.

I'm never going to lack anything in life. If I can say with assurance tonight that the Lord, that is God of the scriptures, God of creation, God of redemption, the God of the Bible, He is the one who is truly shepherding my life, then I can live my life in an assurance that whatever awaits me, whatever dark valleys I have to walk through, that whatever experiences I go through that necessitate the use of the Lord's rod to direct me and his staff to pull me back, whatever it is, I'm not going to lack anything as long as the Lord is my shepherd.

And we may well think to ourselves, Why would you not want the Lord to be our shepherd? But the truth is that for many of us, there is a resistance to our lives being in submission to following Jesus Christ.

There are things that hinder our belief and that hinder our conviction and that hinder our surrender. And it's interesting to note that even in Jesus' day, amongst people who had listened intently to him and people who had been with him faithfully, we discover that there were people there who had major hindrances regarding their beliefs about Jesus Christ.

And there were people even in that day, despite the first-hand encounter with Jesus of Nazareth, who were reluctant to follow, who were reluctant to surrender, who did not want the Lord to be their shepherd.

[3:24] And so tonight, as we look at the passage that we read in John chapter 6, I want us to think about some of the hindrances that Jesus challenged, and then we recognize some of the helps and assurances that he promises.

Jesus had performed one of his greatest miracles in terms of the feeding of the 5,000. He had then witnessed to his own disciples his complete command and authority over creation as he walked on the water towards them in the midst of the storm.

And we find that when John tells the story of how the crowds came to Jesus, they seem to come with this great intent of finding him.

They came seeking Jesus. That sounds wonderful. We'd love to see more people coming to seek Jesus in our own day and in our own time.

But what we discover is that when they come to seek Jesus, they encounter the truth of Jesus, and rather than find themselves in glad and full surrender, they find themselves wrestling with the reality of spiritual truth and finding reasons not to believe, rather than succumbing to the reasons why they should believe.

[4:48] Jesus directed them in their thinking and challenged them as to why they were really seeking him. And here, I think, is one of the major hindrances that holds us back, young and old, whatever stage and part of life we are at, and even in terms of when we're serving God within the church.

Here, I think, is a principle that reveals to us one of the major hindrances we have in believing in Christ and trusting Jesus. And it's the fact that we find it impossible to give priority to thinking of eternity over time.

We find it hard to think of eternal life and eternal judgment when we are so immersed in the things of this life.

We are, after all, flesh and blood. We are appointed a day to be born, and we're appointed a day to die. And we so often become consumed with the matters of this life.

You've got to remember that these were a people that some time earlier had been so consumed with Jesus that they were ready to make him king in verses 14 and 15.

[6:08] We didn't read the whole chapter, but if you go back to verses 14 and 15, when Jesus had fed the crowd so miraculously and so powerfully, they were exclaiming, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.

And they were about to come and take him by force to make him king. They had most of the answer of a catechism question by recognizing Jesus as prophet and king.

But they hadn't reckoned on his priesthood. And they hadn't reckoned on what it meant for the Son of God to minister God's purposes for them.

As they come to speak to Jesus, it can appear so positive that they were seeking him. But as he addresses them, he tells them, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

And in there, we recognize that Jesus is exposing the fact that whilst they seem intrigued by him, while they seem enthralled by his power and to an extent his personality, certainly his ability to perform miracles was enchanting on a natural level.

[7:21] But as they come to Jesus, appearing as if they're keen, appearing as if they're ready, Jesus exposes the reality of their thinking. You're actually only here because I helped you.

You're actually only here because you had a great meal. You're not here because that great meal was actually a sign to you that Jesus Christ is the one who will satisfy your soul, the one who will feed you spiritually forever.

They were still being governed by the physical and by the temporary. And friends, that's the reality for many of us. That's the reality for many of us that we are caught up so much in the temporary nature of this life that we don't even consider it as temporary.

We're so caught up in the short-term vision of this world and the things that seem to matter in this world. And even more so with the bombardment we get with media and all the directives about what matters in this world and what you want to do with your life and how you can make an impression and how you can do this and how you can do that, it's almost as if we feel that we don't have enough time to do everything we want to do with this life.

And the Word of God would say to us, the only one thing you need to do with this life is to surrender it to Jesus. And if only you thought eternally rather than temporarily.

[8:57] It was a blessing to be renewed in fellowship with Myrtle Smith tonight. And I'm sharing this because I remember many a Sunday night going home to my bed in Harris consumed with the thought of eternity.

and thinking, what's going to happen if I die tonight? But I spoke to someone recently and they were sharing they had a similar experience. It was their daughter and she said, my daughter used to say, I'm definitely going to die on a Monday.

Because the reality of the gospel, and yet for months before it became a reality to me, that impending sense of eternity, it soon disappeared when you were on the bus going back to school

and all the chat came out and the smokes came out and everything else came out. And all of a sudden, all that mattered was to be with the friends, to be in the company. In these moments, the temporary had become preeminent rather than the eternal. What had gripped my soul the night before, the fact that I must one day stand before God, stand at the judgment seat and give account for my life, that had spoken to me, but it hadn't controlled me. Because the minute I was back in the company of the world, I wanted the things of the world. [10 : 15] And friends, Jesus is counseling these people here to think about eternity and to value the eternal things. Don't work, he says, for the food that perishes.

Don't use religion and faith just to kind of get yourself a little bit along in this life. If you watch many of the false teachers, that's what they offer people. You know, if you believe and if you trust and if you give, God might bless you with a better car, a better house, a better wife, a better husband, a better whatever. And Jesus is saying to you that the things of the kingdom of God are here not just to bring prosperity, they sometimes do, but for many of God's people tonight, the kingdom of God has brought them severity, not prosperity, but the reality is they're living for the kingdom to come. And they're living for eternity, not for the short-term measure of life in this world. Don't work, he says, for the food that perishes, but work for the food that endures to eternal life. And I hope that someone here might, like the Pharisees who spoke with Jesus, say, well, what are the works of God? If you're telling me not to work for things that perish, what are the works of God? [11 : 33] this is the work of God, that you believe in him whom God has sent, that you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the one that God sent as the saviour of your soul.

I think one of the greatest hindrances to our faith at times is that we are too focused on this world rather than on the world to come. You know, there used to be a saying that some people were too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly use. I think that's a terrible saying. I think what was meant that some people maybe spoke too much about spiritual things rather than doing practical things when practical things needed to be done.

But a person who is truly heavenly-minded will do the practical stuff that needs to be done. Because a person who is heavenly-minded is thinking of the use of their life in this world solely as preparation for the world to come.

And they recognise the value of serving God as we serve one another. Don't cease labour for what you're going to lose anyway. Do we store up treasures for heaven?

[12 : 47] Jesus is directing them to think about eternal satisfaction rather than the temporary satisfaction in this world. we struggle to believe when we give preeminence to this world rather than the next.

When we want acceptance with our peers and our society more than we want to know that we are accepted in the beloved in God's presence. We fear being seen as judgmental by the world rather than facing our own righteous judgment from God.

But as well as the hindrance when we think of time more than eternity we see that there's a hindrance when we struggle to surrender the sovereignty of our lives.

Verses 41 to 46 they were grumbling about Jesus because he had said that he had come down from heaven. And there was a sense in which they were doing that thing which I guess in some ways we can understand.

Some of them would have known his family they would have known his background and say is this not the carpenter's son? We know his mother and father how can he say he has come down from heaven? And Jesus challenged and he challenged them to recognise the fact that for them to experience the reality of the kingdom of God and to truly know the power of the kingdom of God to truly know that the Lord is your shepherd you need to surrender the sovereignty of your life to him. [14 : 17] At one stage they had wanted to make Jesus king but as this man starts unpacking to them the challenge and the call of his kingdom we see that they quickly shirk from the implications of him.

They think they know who he is and they think that he's disrespecting their heritage and he's not acknowledging their religious pride. Who is this carpenter's son to tell us spiritual things? Who is this nobody to tell us we need to believe in the son of God and eat the bread of heaven? Who is he to tell me how to live my life?

Isn't that one of the greatest challenges we have in the world today? That people who want to hold on to some sense of righteousness and guidance and the right to do what they want with their own lives when they hear the gospel there's a struggle to accept it because they know that it means surrendering their sovereignty.

You are no longer the ruler of your own heart. You are no longer the master of your own destiny. You are handing your life over to the sovereign care, sovereign leadership, the sovereign guidance and the sovereign purposes of a sovereign God.

[15:32] But many of us don't like that. One of my favourite there's always little boy stories from school. This one definitely wasn't me and it wasn't anyone I know but it could have been.

The time there was a boy standing up and a teacher was determined that he would sit down and it became a real standoff. Sit down. And he refused and refused. Eventually with threat and terror the teacher got the little boy to sit down and as he sat down the teacher rather triumphantly went see to which the little boy said on the inside I'm still standing up.

But friends I fear that there's too many people who want to live their Christian lives like that. Too many people want to live their Christian lives still them standing up rather than kneeling and bending and yielding to the will of God.

I want Jesus because he promises me heaven when I die. But I don't want to pursue the power of heaven while I live. I want Jesus because of the good things that I hear about him just as the Pharisees wanted him because of the good things that he brought to them but I don't want to be that person that has to give up anything or have my life directed go places I don't want to go to do things I don't want to do.

No I want to live my own life and I'll just tick the Christian box in terms of personal identity and hopefully at the end of the day I'll get into the kingdom when it's all over.

[17:07] And God is saying no I want you to feed on the bread of heaven. I want you to know the soul satisfying love of Jesus Christ I want you to know that when Christ comes in he comes to rule and he comes to reign he doesn't get locked away in some wee room in the back like you would do with an embarrassing relative no he comes in and he rules the whole of the household the whole of the domain all to Jesus I surrender all to him I freely give and for many people who have stuttered and stammered their way in the Christian life it may be that it's a time to consider who is really ruling who is really guiding who is really sovereign over who you are.

So the second hindrance that we notice this struggle we have to surrender the sovereignty of our lives there's a third thing and it's this that we often get offended by the demands of faith.

The reality of faith demands that we trust and depend in Christ completely and Jesus used language that was obviously difficult for them to fully understand and even us reading it tonight we can think and it's worth if you have the time go and study and look the commentaries and work it all out I'm not going to go into every detail of why the way Jesus spoke could almost sound like a form of cannibalism when we know it isn't.

What's he trying to say to us? What he was saying what he is saying to us is what he was saying to them unless your life is completely dependent on Jesus you have no life and whoever he says it negatively and positively and whoever feeds on me and drinks of what I do and who I am will they have life eternally because they will be raised on the last day for my flesh is through food and my blood is through drink and we know that when many heard it even some of his disciples they're saying who can follow this how can we listen to this this is too hard for us too hard to accept when the challenge comes that all we ever need is secured in one person and what he did in Calvary it's sometimes just too hard to accept or too hard to believe and yet this is what God sets before the people decided that this was too much for them and they left there was a huge issue for them trying to wrestle they had a pride because they had a history where their forefathers had been fed bread from heaven and now

Jesus is saying no you need to eat bread from heaven but that bread from heaven is not the normal food of everyday life it is the spiritual substance of what I'm going to accomplish for you what I'm going to give to you that's why Jesus would to these very disciples who remained faithful said take and eat this is my body take and drink this is the new covenant in my blood Jesus is pointing us to realize that there is in the cross of Calvary a power to live life daily to live life powerfully to live life faithfully and to live life eternally and yet people listen and say oh that's too hard to take in and just as Jesus himself had taught as the seed of the word of God was set forth in this place some people say no that's just too hard we don't want to follow this we don't want to be part of this when the

challenge came they would rather leave

[21:00] Jesus and walk away from him rather than succumb and say okay Lord help us with this just as Peter did when Jesus turned to the twelve I find it interesting that Jesus made no effort to chase all these people who were leaving him one of the biggest errors the church has ever done is that when people start abandoning faith we try to accommodate Jesus was willing to leave them to the mercy of God and pray that one day they would come back again one day they might come and once they realized the power of the cross and all that had happened there they might see that the reality of what Jesus was talking about in this moment they can't take it but here's the thing when they couldn't take it Jesus didn't compromise his position and sadly the church often does we compromise because we're so desperate for people to come we want churches filled with

God first then the people will come there was a church one of the early church fathers said of Jesus in this engagement with the people what they wanted he would not give and what he offered they would not receive and Jesus turned and said to even his closest twelve do you want to go away as well you see Jesus is showing us we recognize that there are hindrances in terms of our thinking eternally versus time in terms of our surrender with the rule of our life in terms of the offensiveness of the demands of faith and faith can be demanded and it is challenging again if I can share a word of testimony I remember leaving Mr. Smith's months the night I knew I'd become a Christian and the following day was one of the worst days of my life one of the hardest days of my life as if the devil decided we'll see if he's really a

Christian but what Jesus does here as he challenges these disciples he challenges them in such a way that he's showing that while there are natural and spiritual hindrances there is greater help in the mind and heart and vision of God to keep his people even the little bit we have at the end where such focus is given to Judas Iscariot we might think you know that's a fearful thing to read that Jesus said I chose you yet one of you is a devil and we might think why on earth is he saying that but in a sense he's saying it because it's an assurance that in terms of the things of salvation that the Lord is in total control you see if Jesus didn't know that Judas was going to fail him how would he know that who else was going to fail him if

Jesus didn't know which one of the twelve was going to fail him how could he ever speak to you and me with conviction that he has the power to keep us that Judas falling away wasn't some kind of anomaly it was something the Lord knew it was something the Lord tolerated it was something that was prophesied it was something that Judas in his own will fulfilled!

You know Peter's words are amazing for us when the Lord said to them all so do you want to go away as well I know this is hard I know this is challenging are you going to leave as well and Peter's words are such an encouragement to us to whom shall we go where are you going to find eternal life tonight where are you going to find your happiness tonight where are you going to find soul satisfaction tonight where are you going to find peace tonight where are you going to find joy tonight where are you going to find the eternal love of God tonight you've got the words of eternal life Jesus you are the!

[25:35] Jesus teaches us that whilst there is much that hinders us, in him there is all the power to help us. He is the source of eternal life.

That's why he speaks about eating and drinking. I'd be surprised if there is anyone in here tonight who hasn't eaten and drunken today.

Maybe you're not well and you haven't eaten drunken much. Maybe you're fasting and you haven't. There will be very few of you who were fed as well as I was today, but you'll have been fed and you eat.

It sustains its life. And Jesus is speaking and using this figurative language because he's teaching them, just as you have a daily dependence on eating and drinking to bring you life, to sustain you, to strengthen you, in your younger years to grow you, and then to keep you and to give you the ability to walk and talk and do whatever you are blessed and enabled to do.

As these things have a genuine, real impact on how you live, so do I. As you believe in the bread of heaven and as you feed on this bread and as you come to know that you will live forever because of what I've accomplished.

[26:56] My flesh is through food. He gave his body, this body that we commemorated today, his earthly life given in our service, given for our salvation, given to sacrifice.

And the blood that was shed, the blood of a new covenant, what was the glory of the new covenant? That the word of God would come and dwell in people's hearts, that it would come and a

heart of stone would be taken away and a heart of flesh would be given.

And everyone who listened and who believed would know that there is life within them because of Jesus. Jesus is the source of life.

Jesus is the strength of life. It's no coincidence that the way that John's gospel is put together, we have this great conversation about the bread of life.

Just a couple of chapters after we have Jesus engaged with a woman in Samaria and revealing to her that he is the water that satisfies and slakes the thirst of the human soul.

[28:05] A woman in her brokenness. And it's quite interesting when we hold these two conversations together, that here we have this woman in her brokenness and in her barrenness and in her potential immorality, a person who is scandalized and avoids her community and yet she discovers who Jesus truly is.

And we have a people full of pomp and religion, full of self-righteousness and the trust in their heritage. And yet to both these areas of human life, Jesus says, no, you need to eat and drink what I give you.

You need to find your life in me. Human love and human relationship is not going to be enough for you. Religion is not going to be enough for you. What you need is to eat and to drink in living faith of Jesus Christ and the sacrifice he made for us.

You know, many a person wrestles with what is the will of God for my life. But whatever else it is, it's this, friend. This is the will of the Heavenly Father that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day.

This is God's will that you would know salvation, that you would know the strength of and the security of all source through his Son, Jesus Christ.

[29:31] And so, as we come to a close, we ask the question again. Why would you not want this Lord to be your shepherd? Why would you not want to be able to walk out of here tonight knowing that your life is entirely in God's care, that you're not living in rebellion, that you're not living in rejection, you're not living for this world, you're living for this world to come?

Peter says, who else can we go to? Jesus will keep you. Jesus will help you be preserved and he will persevere with you.

He will feed you and sustain you. He will strengthen you. He will guide you. When life bruises you, he will heal you. He will be patient with you. And then when you leave this world, he will welcome you.

And at the end of the days, he will raise you up to be with the Lord forever, to be in the Father's presence, knowing that the satisfaction of which you had a foretaste in this life is going to be the blessed experience you enjoy for all eternity.

who else are you going to go to? To whom else could you ever go that would bring such assurance and such peace that you know it is within his shepherd heart to lead you to an eternal home.

[31:15] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life.

Jesus told us that this is the will of God. It's not for you or me to say who looks. It's the will of God that whoever looks and believes in Jesus should have eternal life.

Father, we thank you that you are an eternal God. And we thank you that our Savior Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So we thank you that anything we ever read of him then is through of him now.

And so we thank you that he came to fulfill the Father's will that he would go to the cross and therefore in that act of surrender, in that act of sacrifice, in that process of substituting himself for us, he would grant to his church in the power of the Spirit and in the authority of his name that we can proclaim tonight with assurance if anyone looks to Jesus, they will receive eternal life.

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord, shall be saved. O Lord, how we long to believe and to trust and to know that salvation would visit this house.

[33:15] And we pray that we would all know the blessedness of the Savior and the joy of the Lord being our shepherd.

Amen. I'm going to sing some verses from Psalm 61.

Again, in the Psalter, it's on page 293. We'll sing verses, Psalm 61, verses 1 to 4, and then singing verses 7 to 8.

