

Guest Preacher - Rev. Donald A Macdonald

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Preacher: Rev. Donald A. Macdonald

- [0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage that we read. The Gospel according to John, chapter 6.
- And we may read again at verse 66. After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.
- So Jesus said to the twelve, Do you want to go away as well? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go?
- You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.
- And I'd like just to raise two thoughts from our text this morning. First of all, the reaction of the nominal follower.
- [1 : 12] Many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. And then the response of the true disciple.
- Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. So these two thoughts. First, the reaction of the nominal follower.
- This is a chapter that begins with the miraculous feeding of 5,000. That is, 5,000 men, women and children were in addition to that.
- And of all the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus, the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels.
- It is a miracle that vividly proves Jesus' claim to deity. Who else could multiply nature's tiny provision but the one who is the Lord of nature, the Creator himself, God incarnate.
- [2 : 38] Through the miracle, Jesus shows himself to be greater than all those who were venerated by his Jewish audience.
- Jesus' miracle was performed by one who is a person of the Godhead and by the power of his own command.
- And whoever else one might view this display of his power, remember it shows us what God is like.
- Many people ask, what is God like? Jesus himself, later on in this Gospel, reminds his disciples, whoever has seen me has seen the Father.
- And in this miracle he displays several facets of God's character. For example, the compassion of God in his care for the needs and troubles of this large group of people.
- [3 : 48] There is also his zeal for ministry. And I think the miracle also shows God's attitude about the world.
- You do not find, for example, Jesus mingling with the rich and famous, but frequently among the poor.
- God loves to dwell with the lowly and the meek. And from that one can make the deduction, if that is how it was then, that is how God is now, since God does not and cannot change.

He is not far off, aloof, or unwilling to help. But he is now just as Jesus was then, compassionate and ready to help.

That is the God that Jesus reveals to the world. And through the miracle, Jesus seeks to divert the attention of his audience from earthly provision to spiritual provision as he develops his theme of the bread of life.

[5 : 11] He draws attention to the significant difference between the bread he gives and the manna their forefathers received in the days of Moses.

He says, The manna sustained physical life for but a day at a time. But the bread that Jesus offers gives so much more.

I am the bread of life. He says, Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die.

They were reminded that the Israelites of the Exodus complained about their manna and rebelled against Moses, rebelling against God himself.

As a result of their sin, the Exodus generation were judged by God so that very few of the original Exodus ever entered the land of promise.

[6 : 26] They perished in the desert. And the reminder that Jesus gives is reinforced by the fact that the events recorded in this chapter take place during the Passover feast that commemorated the Exodus deliverance.

Jesus is stating that although they too have been fed by the miracle of Jesus, the result of their unbelief would be the same judgment and death experienced by the generation so long before them.

So Jesus draws a contrast between the bread he gives and the manna. His bread communicates life not just to the body but to the soul.

His bread overcomes the deadly curse of sin and gives eternal life. If anyone, he says, eats of this bread, he will live forever.

And as Jesus presses home his teaching, he states what must have been startling and shocking language to the audience, the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

[7 : 58] His language upset and even offended his listeners. They were arguing among themselves. John records, the Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, how can this man give us his flesh to eat?

They found the teaching revolting, especially in the light of their food regulations. And then Jesus went on to say, truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

And that statement just caused even more consternation. The law expressly forbade the drinking of blood.

The Jews could not even eat meat with the blood still in it. Yet Jesus was speaking to them of eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

Was Jesus advocating they become cannibalistic in their eating habits? By no means. But what is evident from the context is how they misunderstood his teaching?

[9 : 24] They understood it from a literal, physical point of view. There was a lack of spiritual understanding on their part.

And so you have to ask yourself, what did Jesus mean by that statement? And you will find various interpretations, for example, that he was speaking of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

But the statement has nothing to do with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which would not be instituted for at least another year.

It couldn't be that. For no one is saved by merely partaking of the Lord's Supper. That would be a direct contradiction of the teaching of salvation through faith in Christ alone.

It would also rule out, for example, the salvation of the thief on the cross who believed in Christ. It would also rule out the salvation of either elect infants or others brought to faith, but who never publicly professed faith by sitting at the Lord's table.

[10 : 50] There is also the fact that Jesus did not use the word flesh when speaking of the Lord's Supper. He uses the word body.

Now as they were eating, you remember how he instituted the supper. He took bread and after blessing it, broke it, gave it to the disciples and said, take, eat, this is my body.

So in that statement that he makes of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, it should be evident that Jesus was referring to his substitutionary offering of himself on the cross.

Remember, this chapter takes place against the backdrop of the Jewish Passover. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

And as we know, that was a feast that commemorated Israel's marvelous deliverance from Egypt through the slaying of the Paschal Lamb.

[11 : 57] The blood placed on the lintels and on the doorposts. They ate the lamb and in doing so, they identified with the sacrifice for sin offered by the lamb, pointing forward to the sacrifice of the lamb of God.

Jesus wanted his hearers to make the connection between the Passover lamb and his own sacrificial death. The bread that I will give you, will I will give for, or on behalf of, or in place of, the life of the world is my flesh.

That reminds me of a question a certain theologian was once asked. The question was, what is the most important word in the Bible?

Well, I suppose there are, one could give various answers to the question, but this theologian replied, the Greek word *huper*. The very word that is used in the verse that I just quoted, for, or on behalf of, or in place of, and it's a very significant word, very small, but very significant in the Greek text.

You might say it is one of the keys to understanding the gospel message. Jesus died for sinners, that is, on their behalf and in their place.

[13 : 42] And then, I don't know if you noticed in the reading, but in verse 59 of the chapter, Jesus said these things in the synagogue as he talked at Capernaum.

At some point, that is not altogether obvious. Ah, from the chapter, Jesus and the congregation had moved indoors as he developed this sermon.

Now, how many were able to get into the synagogue, I don't know. Why does John give us that snippet of information? Could it be that John wants us to understand that it is possible to be in a place of worship, which the synagogue was, in a place where the scriptures are expounded on a daily basis and yet not to understand anything at all about Jesus?

Person, for example, can be very religious. Person can be a church attender, hearing the gospel preached, still be unconverted, and still not understand what it means to feed upon Christ for eternal life.

And given the reaction of the audience, it is very obvious that Jesus did not preach what people wanted to hear or even those things that they thought they needed.

[15 : 25] Jesus preached what he knew they needed, whether they wanted to hear it or not. Above all, he preached the message of the cross, death because of sin, and eternal life through his atoning blood where the chief themes of Jesus' preaching.

And so John tells of the reaction of many. It's in verse 60. This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?

Now, that does not mean that it was hard in the sense of difficult to understand, but hard in the sense that it was difficult for them to accept.

It was so at variance with their own views of what the gospel should be. and you notice they never asked for clarification on anything he said.

They were just unwilling to receive the teaching he taught. And if you read your Bible on a regular basis, you will discover that the Bible confronts the errors of our thinking about God, the errors of our thinking about ourselves, the errors of our thinking about life, and about salvation.

[17 : 08] And so these people took offense. Literally, it is, they were scandalized. That's the, well, we get the word scandalized from the Greek word that is used there.

Do you take offense at this? Are you scandalized at this? And you have to ask yourself, what was it that caused so much offense? You might argue the insinuation that Jesus was greater than Moses and so on.

I don't believe. That is what caused their sense of offense. But this, the teaching of the cross, of the death of Christ, leaves no room for men, women, boys or girls, to save themselves.

The cross condemns every kind of work salvation. You know, there is something innate within us that wants to contribute something to our own salvation.

Perhaps one good illustration of that is from the Old Testament of Naaman, the Syrian general. Remember, he was a great man with his master and high favor, a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.

[18 : 30] Remember how he went to visit Elisha, the man of God, and he took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, ten changes of clothing.

What does this tell us? He was ready to pay for healing, only to discover that the prophet did not even come out to see him, but sent a message saying, go and wash in the Jordan seven times your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.

How absolutely infuriating and demeaning are so Naaman thought. He was livid. His pride took a hit, and he had to learn to put pride under foot.

He had to forget about his own ideas and terms of healing and accept God's way as communicated by the prophet. So with the terms of salvation, we must accept God's terms.

Salvation is not just through Christ, but it is only through Christ. And so you find that the teaching was totally unacceptable to most of those who heard him.

[19 : 52] It became a watershed moment, a defining moment, and so we read, after this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

As my first heading indicates, I understand the word disciples there, to be the equivalent of nominal followers. Among the many were those whose hunger had been satiated through the miracle.

They had followed Jesus out of a purely materialistic purpose. Among the many were those who had seen the display of his power.

They saw the signs that he was doing on the sick, John tells us. They were attracted by his miraculous power of healing, but they did not consider their own need of spiritual healing.

Among the many were also the curious and the critics, those willing to debate for the sake of debate, but no interest in salvation through faith in Christ alone.

[21 : 01] And so the test in question was then put to the small minority group, do you want to go away as well?

It is a question that is just as relevant now as it was then. Let me ask, are you content with your own life to pay mere lip service without obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ?

are you merely content just to be present once on the Lord's day or even attend sporadically? Does that help to silence your conscience and keep it from becoming too hot to handle?

And that brings me to my second point, the response of the true disciple. We have recorded for us by John this highly significant reply from Peter.

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Twenty-nine years ago, twenty-nine years last October, October 1995, I attended the funeral as possibly did some of you of the late Reverend Mordoway MacLeod, who had been minister of Stornoway Congregation.

[22 : 38] His death was totally unexpected and left many in shock. What I remember most from the worship on the day of the funeral were the opening words in the prayer of the late principal Clement Graham.

He was asked to offer the second prayer after the Bible readings and before the final singing. I do not remember anything of his prayer but just his opening words, for I was transported by them.

I found them so meaningful in the situation, in the midst of such deep sadness and mourning. He quoted these words, Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life. And that for me summarized the whole situation that day.

Lord, to whom shall we go? There is no one else to whom we can go at such times.

[23 : 54] and here the question has been asked, of the twelve, do you wish to go with the crowd? The majority apparently had enough.

It was not the kind of teaching they wanted to hear. And Peter blurts out these words, oh, aren't you glad that there is a Peter amongst the disciples?

Lord, to whom shall we go? It was a declaration on a par with the acknowledgement made by Peter, which is recorded for us in Matthew's Gospel.

You remember in that incident, Jesus had been asking the disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is? And there were various responses given to that question.

Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. And then Jesus directs the question to themselves, but who do you say that I am?

[25 : 04] And you remember the response of Peter, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answers them, blessed are you, Simon, Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father is in heaven.

in this context, when Peter spoke these words, Lord, to whom shall we go? I do not think that we are to understand that Peter and the disciples were not struggling with the teaching they had just been given.

Nor do I think we are to understand that they understood at that moment everything that was being taught. it is obvious that they did not without the light of the resurrection.

But I do think it does mean that he recognized he had no alternative for salvation than to turn to Jesus.

You have the words of eternal life. And notice Peter begins his reply, Lord. You know, sometimes the word is used as a polite form of address.

[26 : 20] But given the context here and what Peter goes on to say, seems to me that Peter is given the same respect and recognition as the Old Testament does in paying tribute to the Terum Lord.

Implied in the Terum is the authority of ownership combined with paternal love. As Peter was saying, where else or to whom else can we go but the one who is the sovereign Lord in control of the whole world.

The one able to multiply such a tiny source of food and feed 5,000 men along with women and children and have 12 baskets of fragments left over.

God, how else can Peter address this person but as Lord? The same Lord who had given manna to the people of Israel of old had come to earth as a real man.

And so Peter says, to whom else can we go? You are the great teacher. You are the Lord. You are the great provider, the great compassionate provider.

[27 : 38] You alone are the Savior of sinners. There is no one like you. No one else can do what you do. No one else can deal with us so compassionately with such depth of understanding.

Above all, no one else is able to save. He is the true Savior. As one who can say of himself, I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.

Lord, to whom shall we go? And it's almost as if you can hear Peter saying, Lord, we've considered it.

We've allowed ourselves to ponder what it might be like to turn away. But Lord, wherever we look for another Lord, another way, another friend, another philosophy, another view of God, another salvation, another meaning, they all come so short.

we can't walk away. You have the words of life. Lord, where shall we go? If he were alive today, might Peter not say, shall we go to those who deny your deity, claim that sinners can raise themselves from the dead, give themselves spiritual life?

[29 : 01] And Peter would say, no. only God and Christ can do that. Only he was able to quicken me to newness of life. Peter could say, amen, to what the apostle Paul wrote, dead in the trespasses and sins, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

To whom then shall we go? Shall we go to those who deny that sin is an enslaving and blinding power?

Those who say that sin may be a bad influence but it's not bondage, it's not slavery or death, yes, who acknowledge that we are stained by sin but not helpless, shall we go to them?

And Peter would say, no. No. Because that is an unbiblical view of human nature. Perhaps others might ask, shall we go to those who say that sin is not really a serious problem because God is all merciful.

He will in the end forgive everyone. There is no wrath and no final judgment on any person. shall we find our place in that rose-tinted world? And Peter says, no.

[30 : 38] Because as pleasant as it sounds, it's not the teaching of the Word of God. Just one example to highlight that.

Remember what the Bible tells us of Paul's visit to Athens. And how in that sermon Paul stated, God commands all people everywhere to repent?

Why does he command people everywhere to repent? Because he has fixed a day which he will judge the world and righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

And so the list of alternatives to Jesus goes on and on. Is there anyone here this morning in that position as I speak?

You are deeply troubled by what you read in the Bible. And perhaps you are asking, can I go somewhere else? Is there another view of sin?

[31 : 44] Another view of God? Another view of salvation? Is there a place to go to rescue me from the sovereignty of God? But as Peter discovered, Lord, and everyone who subscribes to his view, Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life. In other words, we may not have all the problems solved. The problems are following the Lord Jesus Christ, saying yes to his teaching and his lordship and to saving work.

there may be much that we do not understand of the unfolding providences in our world. For example, the recent aircraft crashes in America with the total loss of life in Washington and Philadelphia.

That's just one example. Yet we still say with Peter, to whom shall we go. Why? Because no one ever spoke like Jesus.

No one ever acted like Jesus. No one was ever so strong and meek as Jesus, so authoritative and gentle, so profound and simple, so powerful and so willing to be put to death, so just and so willing to be treated unjustly, so worthy of honor, and so willing to be dishonored, so deserving of immediate obedience, and so patient and long suffering with people like you and me, so able to answer every question, so willing to remain silent under abuse, so capable of coming down from the cross and judgment, and so committed in the work entrusted to him by the Father not to use that power.

[34 : 01] Where shall we go? There has never been anyone like Jesus. No one ever taught like he taught, no one ever loved like he loves.

Yes, many people come to Christ with and they have tremendous struggles, but they come back like the prodigal son and they say to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal, how do they come back? How do they come to that point in their lives? How do they come to that decisive point of surrender? How do they cease to wonder?

How do they stop fighting against the truth that puts them into a corner? How do they stop sitting on the fence looking frantically for another God, another worldview, another philosophy of life, a better Savior, a better Lord, a better friend?

and they discover there is not any better. How does that happen? Well, I think the key is in verse 63.

[35 : 24] It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Note the connection between the Spirit of God and the words of Jesus. the Spirit gives life. It is through the gospel being applied by the Holy Spirit.

I take that to mean that's what brings you to a final decisive commitment to Jesus. What brings you there is the work of the Spirit of God and the instrument that he uses are the words of truth.

that's why people come to say Lord to whom shall we go? Peter had seen the glory of the only son from the father full of grace and truth.

He had seen the glory of his birth, the glory of his death for his sins. And so have those who have submitted to the headship and lordship of Christ as their God and saviour.

[36 : 50] He will keep you. You will not go away from him and he will not go away from you. That's what it means to have eternal life.

And so we come back to where he started and I'm going to ask the question and you know what I'm going to ask. Which group are you in this morning among the nominal followers?

Those who find the teaching of Christ offensive and walk away because it jars with them, cuts across their thinking and their thought process?

Or are you among those who love the teaching of the Lord but more who have come to love the teacher and to say to whom else can we go?

Let us pray. Eternal and ever blessed one, we thank thee today that there are those who can say with Peter Lord to whom else can we go?

[38 : 16] Who have learned through your dealings with them, who have learned to trust in Christ, who have learned to appreciate the comfort of his ministry, the depth of his love, the height of his compassion, and to truly find themselves today putting there amen to the words of the apostle of old.

May we find ourselves among them, and the glory shall be thine. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Our concluding praise is from the Scottish Psalter.

Psalms 119 at verse 59. Page 405 of the Psalter.

Psalms 119 page 405 of the Psalter. There was a problem with the Psalms version. So, Psalms 119 verse 59 page 405.

I thought upon my former ways and did my life well try. To thy testimony is pure. My feet then turned dying.

[39 : 51] I did not stay nor linger long as those that slothful are. But hastily thy laws to keep myself I did prepare.

Let us sing to the end of the section. I thought upon my former ways. I thought upon my former ways and in my life will try and do thy testimony!

All is pure. My feet then turned and I I did not stay nor linger long as those that!

love who are! But hastily I lost to keep myself I did prepare!

And so filled men be robbed yet !!

[41 : 38] Thy precepts in no spite! I rise and bid night thee to praise in for thy judgment right!

I am companion to all those who fear and thee obey!

O Lord, thy mercy fills the Teach me thy laws I pray!

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, rest on and abide with you all, now and forever.

Amen.