

## A QUEST FOR SOULS

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### WHY DO SOULS GO AWAY FROM JESUS?

NOON SERVICE, JUNE 14, 1917

Text: "**Then said Jesus unto the twelve: Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life**" (John 6:67, 68).

In a very frank way, and with a deep desire to help you, I should like to ask you, one by one, the personal question, What are your relations to JESUS, the Saviour and Master? Everyone must have personal relations with Him. We must be His friends or His foes. We must be for Him or against Him. What are your personal relations to the Lord JESUS CHRIST? Are you for Him or against Him?

Once when He was here among men in the flesh, and the multitudes were following Him, and He was teaching them pungently what following Him meant, the crowds were depleted, and grew less and less before His searching teaching, and finally He turned to the twelve apostles, who were following Him, and put to them this plaintive question: "**Will ye also go away?**" Then Simon Peter answered Him, "**Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.**"

Our text this morning is that searching question JESUS asked the twelve: "**Will ye also go away?**"

The text suggests two burning questions for us this morning.

Why do people go away from JESUS? Where do they go? GOD give us to face faithfully for a little while at this midday service these two weighty questions.

Why do people go away from JESUS? The fundamental reason is want of grace in the heart, the lack of true faith, the absence of vital Godliness. The Apostle John tells us:

**"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no**

**doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."**

But we are back to that searching question, Why do people go away from JESUS? Many do go away from Him. Why? Now, the outward reasons for their going reveal what is in their hearts, and we may glance this morning at some of these outward reasons why people go away from JESUS.

Here, on the occasion of our text, they went away from Him because they objected to His teaching. Through the long centuries, again and again, many have manifestly gone away from JESUS because they objected to His teaching. Read the context here in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, and you will hear the multitudes as they cry out under His teaching: "**This is an hard saying; who can hear it?**"

And so they turned away from Him because they objected to His teaching.

The Gospel of JESUS CHRIST, my friends, is very humbling to poor human nature. Pride revolts at the Gospel of CHRIST. And yet such Gospel is not designed to please man, but rather to save him. JESUS comes in His appeal to men, and puts before them the clear demand: "If you would have me for your Saviour, I must come first, before father or mother or children or dearest loved ones, or your own property or your own life. I must come first."

That is not easy. That is death to self. That is self-crucifixion. And yet you would not have it any other way. Let us make religion easy and we will play it out. Let us make religion hard, even with the hardness of the terms of discipleship laid down by JESUS, and it will be triumphant anywhere in the world.

Why do people go away from JESUS? Full many a time they go away from Him because of the fear of man. That is indeed a biting saying in the Bible, where it is declared: "**The fear of man bringeth a snare.**"

Pilate was not the only man who betrayed JESUS, and in that same act betrayed himself through the fear of man. All about us the fear of man plays the most desperate havoc in human life. All through the social order, in the world intellectual, and the world of business, and the world political, and the world social, the highest interests are betrayed, and the supreme call of CHRIST set aside, through the fear of men.

There comes in the tragic power and peril of influence. What can some men mean, and women, by the tragical misuse, the desperate waste, of their highest influence? One waits for another, and one acts because of another, or one does not act because another does not, and all through the social order the fear of man is one of the ravaging wastes of the highest influence that comes to human life.

They tell us that in the capital city of one of the older States, in the long ago, a marvelous meeting was led by that eminent American evangelist, Charles G. Finney, probably the ablest evangelist that America ever saw. He preached there some three months, and thousands came to CHRIST. When he was preaching there one night, the story goes that there slipped into the great

audience to hear him the Chief Justice of the highest court of New York State. The learned Justice came out of sheer curiosity to hear a plain, pungent, powerful speaker. It was not his custom to go to church. Not for years had he been at any public service religious, and yet this evening the preacher brought his message to bear on the conscience of this man, taking for his text: "**None of us liveth to himself**," and when the minister had finished his message, he said:

"Now, I ask, appealing to your judgment and your conscience" - that is CHRIST's appeal always - to men's judgments and to men's consciences - His religion does not need any other kind of appeal - when the minister had finished his appeal, he said: "Now, is some man's judgment convinced, and is his conscience searched by the truth spoken to-night, and will he, for his own sake, and for the sake of everybody else whom he may influence, make his public surrender to CHRIST?" And down the long aisle came the Chief Justice, to make his confession of CHRIST.

When he took the minister's hand, the Justice said: "If you will allow me, I should like even now to turn and speak some words to this waiting audience." And facing them, the dignified Justice said: "If I have any influence over anybody, I beg him to do as I have done, to yield life and all, utterly and now, to CHRIST." And he called for GOD's forgiving mercy, that he himself had so long delayed to make that great surrender. It is said that many lawyers at the bar, there assembled in that vast audience, came down very aisle, and stood around the great minister and Chief Justice, and said to the Judge: "O sir, because you have come, and because of your appeal, we, too, will make our surrender to CHRIST."

What if the great Judge had not come to my soul? I know the man, and you know him, who has not come, and yet, because he has not, there shelter behind him others, who perhaps will continue thus to hide behind him as long as he shall stay away from CHRIST.

Why do people go away from JESUS? Full many a time they go away from Him through captious doubts and questions concerning religion. Many people ask:

- What if this and that be not so?
- What if the Bible be not trustworthy?
- What if CHRIST be not divine?
- What if there be no immortality for the soul?
- What if there be no Heaven for CHRIST's friend, and no hell for those who will not have CHRIST?
- What if those things be not so?

And with question marks like that, they turn away from the vital verities of faith, and miss the way of life. Do I speak this midday hour to some man or woman who is in the grip of some serious religious doubt?

Then I call to you, do not trifle with that doubt. Probe that doubt, I pray you, to its very depth.

Superficial dealing with doubts in the realm of religion is utterly inexcusable. Well has some one said that "Doubt is the agony of some earnest soul, or the trifling of some superficial fool." Do not trifle with your doubts. You have too much at stake, if you have doubts, in this lofty realm of religion, to go along carelessly with such doubts. Doubt is caused in various ways and comes

from various sources. There is the doubt of the head.

Nathanael had such doubt. "**Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?**" he asked, and the answer was given him: "**Come and see,**" and he came and saw.

There is the doubt of the heart.

Some disappointment comes, beating us into the dust. Some poignant sorrow comes to blind us and to smite us and to check us. John the Baptist had such doubt.

Those fine plans and hopes that swept through his mind and heart seemed all crushed as he lay there in the jail, and he sent some of his men to ask the pitiful question of JESUS: "**Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?**" Be patient with somebody in doubt, when the dark and cloudy day is on, when the black Friday presses down upon the spirit with its fearful pressure. But I have come to believe, my fellow-men, that doubt is caused by a wrong life more than anything else in all the world. Time and again when I have come into close quarters with the man who spoke out his doubts and paraded them and defended them, I have found on careful inquiry, full many a time, that underneath and behind that doubt, and evidently occasioning that doubt, was some wrong life. If a man will come with right attitude in the sight of GOD, he shall be delivered from every doubt, which leads me to call your attention to that great challenge JESUS has given.

Notice it: "**If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.**" That is as broad as the race. That is as comprehensive as humanity.

Let any human being, no matter what the question, what the fear, what the doubt, what the difficulty, assume a perfectly honest attitude toward GOD, saying: "I want light, and if Thou wilt give it, no matter how, I will follow it," such person surely shall be brought into the light.

Time and again you have seen, as I have seen, that challenge of JESUS frankly accepted and frankly proved, and men have been brought out of the darkness into the glorious liberty and light of the children of GOD.

I was in an Eastern city, some years ago, for some two weeks in a daily mission, and every evening when I would finish my message, I said, as was their custom: "If there are interested men and women, who would tarry behind for personal dealings touching personal religion, they will pass through this door into the smaller auditorium, and the rest may go while we are singing the last hymn." I stood there at the door, to greet the people as they passed into the smaller auditorium for more careful and for closer personal dealings, and along with the men who came this particular evening, there came an attractive looking man some thirty-six or thirty-eight years of age, and he tarried at the door to speak with me, fairly trembling as he did so, and yet putting on a brave face. He said to me as he tarried there at the door: "Well, sir, I do not believe a word you said to-night."

I replied: "Then, pray, why do you tarry? My invitation was for serious people. My invitation was for men and women in earnest, for those with a desire deep and true to find light and to get

help. Why do you tarry?" "Oh," he said, "I thought I would like to see you at close range, and to hear what you said to these men in this room, and therefore I have come along."

I felt that I could see underneath all that brave exterior an interest deeper than he was willing at all for me to know, and I said: "You tarry, and when the others are gone, then I should like to have some words with you alone." And so he did, and when the other service was finished, I had him alone, and as I sat beside him I asked him: "What brought you into this place? What gave you these doubts? Whence came all this uncertainty in your spirit concerning religion?"

He told me a story that I have neither the time nor the inclination here to repeat.

He was the son of a minister in old Virginia. He was reared like a boy ought to be reared, and yet he had got far away from all that rearing, having been absent from home some fifteen years. Then I said to him: "If these things I preach to you tonight are true, wouldn't you like to know the truth of it all?" He made quick response: "Certainly, I should like to know the truth of it all." Then I said: "You can know it. Here is the challenge of JESUS: **'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.'**" I said: "Now as I bow my head, I will speak to your father's GOD and to my GOD, and I will ask Him just to lead you on, and to fill you with desire and purpose to follow His leading."

And when I had finished the prayer I said, as we were bowed there at our chairs: "Let us remain bowed, and you try for a moment to pray." He started back and said: "Why, man, I would not know how to begin. I have not tried even in a dozen years."

Think of a man's going a dozen years without calling on GOD! It seems impossible. "I would not know how to begin," he said. I answered: "Then I will frame a sentence for you, like I would frame it for my little child, and you say it after me." And so I did, and he repeated it, and I framed a second sentence, and he repeated that, and a third sentence, and he repeated that, and then I paused and said: "***Prayer, sir, is the sanest thing in the world. Prayer is the outcry of a little, needy, finite, mortal being, to a great infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, all powerful, all merciful Being. Tell Him what you would like. Tell Him like you would tell a man something you should hasten to tell him, without any reserve.***" And then, timidly and tremblingly and haltingly he began his prayer. In a moment or two his words came faster.

In a moment or two his sentences rushed like a torrent. He was confessing his sins. He was bewailing his dreadful decline, and memory was burning like fire, and it blazed and burned, as he recalled the old home, with the family prayer, and the father as a preacher, and the mother singing the simple songs of faith. And then he went on and said: "I remember, Lord, the last sermon I heard good father preach. He preached from that text, the cry of the publican: **'God be merciful to me a sinner.'**" He said: "That is my prayer. Be merciful to me, a sinner. I give up to thee. Help thou a helpless sinner!" And then he was still, and then in a moment more he was on his feet, and I looked up at him and waited for him to make his pronouncement, and then he looked down earnestly at me, with his outstretched hand, and said: "I have found the light!" Of course he had found the light.

Any man on the earth who will assume the right attitude toward JESUS shall be brought into the light. My indictment against the skeptic who prates against the things of GOD is that he will not

be candid about it and go deep enough. Any man in the world, doubter, skeptic, atheist, materialist, whoever he is, who will assume a perfectly candid and obedient attitude toward GOD, shall surely be brought into the light.

Why do people go away from JESUS? Full many a time they go away from Him through the power of sensual enjoyments.

There are two Scriptures that set forth that truth. Here they are: "**The pleasures of sin for a season,**" and this other: "**Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of GOD.**" Through the power of sensual enjoyment, full many a time men and women miss the upward way and go the downward way to doom and death. And yet this world has in it nothing that can really satisfy the ache of the human heart. That brilliant Frenchman, Sabitier, was right, when he said: "Man is incurably religious." And then the Bible comes on, with its revealing statement, telling us that GOD hath set eternity in the human heart, and therefore nothing less than the eternal can satisfy the human heart. Temporal things, no matter how many, cannot satisfy the human heart.

This world can never give  
The bliss for which men sigh.  
'Tis not the whole of life to live,  
Nor all of death to die.

Beyond this vale of tears  
There is a life above,  
Unmeasured by the flight of years,  
And all that life is love.

Nothing short of the infinite and the eternal can satisfy any human heart.

Why do people go away from CHRIST? Full many a time they go away from Him through the simple fearful, fateful power of procrastination. They tell us that procrastination is the thief of time, and so it is, but, oh, it is so much more than that. Procrastination is the thief of souls!

All about us are men and women who intend somewhere, sometime, to focus their thoughts on the things of GOD, and to say "yes" to the call of CHRIST, and yet through the power of procrastination they are hurried on and daily lulled the more deeply to sleep, and the conscience is deadened, and the days go by and the highest things are lost.

All about us there are men and women who, when we approach them concerning personal religion, will tell us that they intend to say yes to CHRIST, that they desire to be saved, that they fully expect this important matter of personal salvation to be settled a little later. But it is a little later that they say. It is to-morrow. It is by and by.

Down yonder on the Mexican border, where I have often and joyfully preached to the cattlemen through the passing years, I have heard one cry escape the Mexicans' lips which is revelatory to a remarkable degree of the Mexican character.

It would explain why Mexico is so belated in the development of her civilization. That little word that the Mexican uses so frequently is this: "manana!" "To-morrow!" You may crowd upon

him this duty, or that, or the other, and he will consent to what you are saying, but in an undertone he will say: "Manana! Manana! Manana!" To-morrow! To-morrow! To-morrow! And so it is Satan's supreme cry to the human soul concerning religion - "Manana! Manana!" To-morrow! To-morrow! And as he cries it, men and women are beguiled and cajoled and deceived, and thus the battle is forever lost for the human soul.

May GOD now arouse this audience from the awful peril of procrastination, that you may turn to GOD and be saved!

I am coming to our second question briefly. I have asked you, Why do people go away from JESUS? Now to the second question more briefly, Where do they go? Echo answers, Where? Where do they go? Well, if they are Christians and go away from JESUS, as many of them, alas, do, they go into backslidings.

Oh, what stories could be told in this fair city about us, and in any other, of drifting Christians, if only hearts were revealed, and we could read all that in them is. Backslidden Christians!

- David went away from his Lord, and, oh, the hurt of it!
- Samson went away from his Lord. Oh, the hurt of it!
- Simon Peter denied the Lord. Oh, the shame of it and the hurt of it!

And through the long years the friends of JESUS have listened to siren voices and have gone away from the right path into backsliding. How they have harmed religion! How they have harmed souls for whom the Saviour died! How they have harmed themselves! How they have grieved JESUS! Do I speak to somebody here today who is a backslidden Christian? Oh, I exhort you, I summon you, I beseech you, for your own sake and for the sake of everybody else, hasten back to CHRIST.

I ask you this other question: Where do people go when they go away from JESUS, those that are not saved at all, those that are not born again, where do they go when they go away from JESUS? JESUS tells us in language unmistakable. "**Ye shall die in your sins,**" He said to some who caviled at His teachings, "**whither I go, ye cannot come.**" You ask me if I believe in the fact of hell. I believe in the fact of hell as much as I believe in the fact of Heaven, and I believe in the fact of the one for the same reason that I believe in the fact of the other. The one clear Teacher concerning destiny, concerning the hereafter, was CHRIST JESUS the Lord, and, He teaches that every man dying shall "**go to his own place.**" Moral gravity is as real in the world of morals as physical gravity is real in the world natural and physical about us. Every man shall go to his own place when he leaves this world.

If a man says to JESUS: "I will go on without you," where JESUS is, such man shall not come. If a man says to JESUS:

"I disdain all else, frail as I am and sinful, and I believe on CHRIST, I can do nothing else, GOD help me," when such man goes hence, he will go to be with CHRIST.

Now, if you go away from CHRIST, pray look at what you give up. If you go away from JESUS you must give up this Book. CHRIST and the Bible are indissolubly linked together. If you can

get rid of the Bible, you can get rid of CHRIST. If you can get rid of CHRIST, you can get rid of the Bible. The one is the complement and counterpart of the other. CHRIST and the Bible are the binomial Word of GOD. If you get rid of CHRIST you get rid of the Bible, and if you propose to get rid of the Bible, sing no more by the open grave that shepherd's psalm, the twenty-third. Sing no more by the open grave, when you hide your loved ones from your sight, the glorious fourteenth chapter of John: "**Let not your heart be troubled.**" You are done with CHRIST, if you are done with the Bible, and if done with CHRIST, you are done with the Bible.

What else do you get rid of when you get rid of CHRIST?

You discredit the testimony of every friend that JESUS has ever had in all the world, and He has had friends many, both great and small. Many of the world's most capable minds have been the devoutest friends and followers of JESUS. Gladstone said he knew sixty of the greatest minds of his century, and that fifty-four of them - scientists, statesmen, mighty men in all callings - were the devoutest friends of JESUS that he ever saw.

Oh, this Gospel that we preach, my men and women, is not a collection of cunningly devised fables for people silly and thoughtless. The sanest thing on the face of the earth this Thursday morning is for a man or woman to be pronouncedly the friend of CHRIST - that is the sanest thing of all. JESUS is the needed Saviour for the great as well as the weak.

Will you look over the world's great names? In the list you will find many friends and followers of JESUS. Look yonder at the list of scientists, and in that list you will see Miller and Agassiz and Proctor, bowing obediently at the feet of JESUS. Look at the world's astronomers, and you will see Copernicus and Kepler and Newton showing their devotion to JESUS. Look at the world's first statesmen, and you will see Washington and Gladstone and others like them, showing their devotion to JESUS. And so through the centuries you will see the earth's first minds devotedly following CHRIST.

But I would bring the truth nearer you than that. There in the little circles where you and I live, are some whose names never get into the newspapers at all, but you and I believe in them as we believe in nobody else in the world, and they tell us that they have tried JESUS and found Him true.

Yonder in the United States Senate some time ago, when a group of senators were at a dinner, as the story was told me by one who knew, one senator looked across to the chiefest senator at that time in the Senate, and said to him: "Senator, do you believe in that old doctrine that a man must be born again to get to Heaven?" The senator after a moment's pause made serious reply: "I certainly do. I am grieved to have to tell you that I am not a Christian myself, but I believe in the doctrine of the new birth as preached by CHRIST."

Then the first senator, wincing under the remarkable answer, said to the second, after a moment more: "Pray tell me why you believe in that old exploded doctrine of the new birth?" The senator waited a moment, and his face was serious and a tear was in his eye, as he said: "My mother and my wife have both told me that they surrendered to CHRIST, and have been born again, and they both live like it is so."

You cannot answer that!

I detain you for a final word. If you go away from JESUS you are left baffled and broken in the presence of the three greatest mysteries of all, and I name them, and then we will go.

If you go away from JESUS you are left broken and baffled in the presence of sin. You have no Saviour if you reject JESUS. He is the only Saviour. And the most terrible and obtruding truth on the earth this Thursday morning is the fact of sin in human life. If you get rid of JESUS you have no Saviour from sin.

And if you get rid of JESUS you are left beaten and broken, with all the sorrow that is regnant in human life. Pause anywhere and you will hear the undertone of sorrow - anywhere. If you get rid of JESUS you have no delivering friend from the thralldom of sorrow.

And stilt more, and most of all, if you get rid of JESUS you are left in the presence of death, without light and without hope and without life, broken in the presence of death. When you come to the grave you will need a Saviour. Plato and Socrates merely speculated as they looked into the open grave. So did Caesar when he stood up in the Roman Senate.

Job asked the question: "**If a man die, shall he live again?**"

Only one person has answered that question. Only one can answer it, and His name is JESUS. He came and bowed His head to death, and went into the dark chambers of the grave, and on the third day after they laid Him in Joseph's tomb, He pushed the grave door open and came out, saying: Because I live all who trust me shall live forever. Oh, you must not dare to live or die without JESUS!

'Tis religion that can give  
Sweetest pleasures while we live.

'Tis religion must supply  
Solid comfort when we die.

After death its joys will be  
Lasting as eternity.  
Be the living GOD my friend,  
Then my joys will never end.

Tell me, are you for JESUS? I would be for Him, were I in your place today, if I had to go through flame and flood to follow Him. Be for Him before it is too late! Does He call you today? Follow Him, trust Him, yield yourself to Him whatever your condition or case may be, and His Word for you is sure: "**Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.**"

### **THE CLOSING PRAYER**

How deep is our joy, O, our Father, that we have such a Saviour, even the Lord JESUS CHRIST, to forgive us and guide us and keep us forever. As we stand here to-day may we promise one another, and above all may we promise CHRIST to cleave to Him and to cleave to Him forever. And if one is here to-day in the grip of doubt or sin or difficulty of any kind, lead such to be

candid and whole-hearted, as such one seeks the way of life, and may such one soon tell us that he or she has found, that blessed way and is going with us as we follow CHRIST.

And as you go now, may the grace of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, the love of GOD the Father, and the communion and blessing of the HOLY SPIRIT, be granted you all and each to abide with you to-day and forever. Amen.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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