



# Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 28

Will Ye Also Go Away?

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,  
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,  
on Lord's day morning, 8th November, 1987**

**Text:** *“From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. 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. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6. 66-69).*

There came a time when the ministry of the Lord Jesus changed somewhat. It became more close, more solemn, more personal, and many of the Lord's hearers were offended by it. Looking back over two thousand years, it fills us with surprise. After all, these wonderful sayings of John 6 are some of the most sacred, some of the most precious in the whole of Scripture. But that was not the way in which they were received by the immediate hearers. The greater part was offended. And when He had finished, many of His disciples – *His disciples* – when they heard it, said, “This is an hard saying.” The word really means *harsh*. This is a *harsh* saying. “Who can hear it?” Jesus knew in Himself that they murmured at it, and He said, “Doth this offend you?” They were offended by the truth when the Lord Jesus began to bring it home, very close and very personal.

“From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.” The implication is that this was the occasion of it: from that time when the Lord Jesus had preached that sermon, when He had begun to speak in that way, following this sermon, “from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.” So they proved that they never were true disciples. It seems that there was a large gathering of those who were with the Lord Jesus wherever He went, and they had all the appearance of being true disciples, just as much as Peter and James and John, so that they were known as “His disciples.” But many of them went back and walked no more with Him.

Now it seems that this had a twofold effect. First of all, it was a most bitter grief to the Lord Jesus Himself. Never forget that He was a real Man, and He was grieved to His very heart when He found that so

many who formerly had clung so closely to Him and professed such love and loyalty to Him now walked no more with Him. It grieved the Lord Jesus just as at Calvary it grieved Him that “they all forsook Him and fled.” “Then said Jesus unto the twelve” – His immediate twelve – “Will ye also go away?” Of course, the Lord Jesus did not ask this question because He did not know the answer. He put it to them on the one hand to search them and on the other hand as a loving, tender appeal. “Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?” The real meaning of it is: Do you also want to go away? Is it your wish, is it your desire, to go away too?

And then, secondly, there was the effect on His immediate disciples. As the wind severely blew and separated the chaff from the wheat, and blew the chaff away so that it was seen again no more for ever, so also it severely shook the wheat. It is obvious from the context that His immediate disciples were severely shaken. Should they go away also? Had they been mistaken after all? Were these who were going away right, and were these who were still with the Lord Jesus wrong? It was the greater part of them that went away, even under the sacred ministry of the Lord of life and glory, even when He preached, He who spake as man never spake.

“Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?” The Lord Jesus still says that to you and me today. “Will ye also go away?” The Lord Jesus was always faithful. As if He would say, “If you go away, if you leave Me, then you will have a much happier life here on earth. You will be able to enjoy the pleasures of this life. You will be able to escape the reproach of the gospel. That weighty cross that every believer is called to take up and carry, you will be able to lay it down. You will be able to go back to the world and have a life of ease. ‘Will ye also go away?’ If you go away, there will be so many of these things in the life of faith, these hard things, these cutting things, these separating things, which you will lose and you will lose them for ever. The world is there before you, and every form of philosophy and teaching. It is a much easier way. It will be much more pleasing to your flesh. Now, ‘will ye also go away?’”

So you see, the Lord Jesus is always faithful, just as Naomi was faithful to Ruth and just as King David was so faithful to Ittai the Gittite. We are warned to count the cost, that the life of faith will never be an easy

life. It will be a life of separation. It will be a going forth unto Him without the camp bearing His reproach. It must be a denying of ourselves daily, to take up the cross and follow Him. Now if the way of faith, if the cross of Christ is too hard, “will ye also go away?”

But it is as if the Lord Jesus also says, “If ye go away, ye shall know no more the sorrow of the Christian way, its hardship, its ruggedness; ye shall know no more of the cross. But there will be an eternal reckoning. Now, ‘will ye also go away?’” It is as if He would say, “If you stay with Me, there will be the sorrows and the hardships to endure – it must be so. It is through much tribulation that you must enter the kingdom. But there is heaven at last to make amends for all. Then, ‘will ye also go away?’” It is as if the Lord Jesus would say, “Will ye go away from the only One who can give you forgiveness, the only One who can wash you from your sins, the only One who can really help you in the time of need, the only One who can give you true, lasting peace, the only One who can ever take you to glory at last? Now ‘will ye also go away?’ These others have gone away. You know them. You have seen their profession. You know what kind of people they are. ‘Will ye also go away?’ Are they right? Am I wrong? Are you going to follow them or abide with Me?”

“Will ye also go away?” So you see this appeal, this solemn, heart-searching appeal in the light of eternity. “Will ye also go away?” And this noble answer of Peter, constrained by love, realising what the Lord Jesus meant to him. “Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” Let everyone else on earth deny Thee and forsake Thee, then whatever be the cost, we must cling and cleave to Thee. “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” So Ruth the Moabitess, when Naomi put her religion to the test, bade her count the cost, that it would not be an easy way; there would be the sorrows, the separation of the way: “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.” Now have you got a religion like that? “Will ye also go away?” “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

And so David with Ittai the Gittite. He said, "Ittai, you have but recently come to us. Most of my friends and followers have gone, they have forsaken me. Look at my own son Absalom, look at my beloved friend Ahithophel; go ye back and follow him." And Ittai's noble answer: "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be."

"Will ye also go away?" "Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go?" On many occasions since, I believe on thousands of occasions, it is this very point that has held fast a child of God in the hour of temptation, trial and need. There are so many things that try me, trouble me and perplex me, but if I do go away, wherever else can I flee? Wherever else can I find comfort? Wherever else can I find peace? I cannot go back to the world from whence I came. I cannot go back to any other system of doctrine or theology. I cannot turn aside to any other philosophy, any other religion. There is not anywhere else I can go. So like Peter you are shut up to this, if there is nothing else: to whom else shall we go? And in the end when all is said and done, it comes down to one vital point, and that is the Person of the Son of God. It is not just a teaching or a doctrine or a philosophy or a church or a denomination or anything else. It is a Person, a divine Person, "whom having not seen we love." It is the Person of the dear Lord Jesus. It is He who came from heaven and lived and loved and died on the cross and then rose again and ascended into heaven. It is this glorious Person, *Him*. And you know, dear child of God, if your religion is put to the test, you may give up many things, you may leave many things, but you will have to cling and cleave to Christ.

"Depart from Thee? – 'tis death – 'tis more;  
'Tis endless ruin, deep despair."

"Lord, to whom shall we go?" There is something exclusive here. It is the Lord Jesus, but it is *only* the Lord Jesus. It is none but the Lord Jesus, the only One who can save you, the only One who can truly help you, the only One who can give you the blessing, the only One who can forgive you your sins, the only One who can wash them away in His precious blood, the only One who can keep you and uphold you, the only One who can receive you to glory at last. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" You will have to cling and cleave to the people of God, in days of darkness

as well as when all goes well, when the storm rages as well as when all things are pleasing.

“Jesus Christ, your Father’s Son,  
Bids you undismayed go on.”

You must of necessity cling and cleave to Christ. “Lord, to whom else shall we go?” No other hope, no other Lamb, no other way, no other salvation. “To whom shall we go?”

“To whom, dear Jesus, O to whom  
Shall needy sinners flee  
But to Thyself, who bidst us come?  
Our springs are all in Thee.”

“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.” In all its simplicity that means that the Lord Jesus is the only One who can ever give a guilty, lost, ruined sinner eternal life, the only One who can ever receive you and then take you to glory at last. “To whom shall we go? *Thou*” – you see, it is a Person – “*Thou* hast the words of eternal life.” It is clinging and cleaving to a living Saviour for eternal life.

Also, of course, Peter very deeply realised the opposite, that everything else would end in death, however fair it might seem, however specious it might seem, that it would all end in death. He saw the multitudes going away; there was the temptation of Satan to go with them. But by faith he saw the end of it all, that it would all end in eternal ruin, in eternal death, that there is only life with Christ and with His people. “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

“Depart from Thee? – ’tis death – ’tis more;  
'Tis endless ruin, deep despair.”

Then, “will ye also go away?” What of this appeal of the Lord Jesus? What of this heart-searching word? What is your answer when tempted to go away? “Will ye also go away?” Now are there some of you and you are fastened here, despite all that Satan and sin and unbelief and everything else would say, you are nailed down here, that there is no other way, no other hope, no other heaven? “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou

hast the words of eternal life.” It is in Christ and in Him alone. “Other refuge have I none.” It is Jesus only.

But notice that Peter says, “the *words* of eternal life.” What does he mean? Well, two or three things! That the Lord Jesus is the only One who has the authority to speak concerning eternal life; and then that the Lord Jesus is the only One who has the right to promise eternal life; and then that the Lord Jesus is the only One who is able to give the assurance to any poor, tried, tempted soul that he is the possessor of eternal life. That is why Peter says, “Thou hast the *words* of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” Now what a confession! Here Peter takes his stand and he speaks on behalf of the other disciples. Like Luther at the Diet of Worms, “Here I stand: I can do no other. So help me, God.”

Of course, this is not the only occasion when Peter spoke this language. There was that other occasion when the Lord Jesus asked them, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” And they gave a lot of answers. “And they said, Some say that Thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.” And let us be clear, they were giving the kindest answers. They did not want to hurt their Lord and Master. Some were saying other things, that He was Beelzebub. Now the Lord Jesus brought it right home to their conscience personally: “But whom say ye that I am?” “And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Now I want to make one thing very clear. The wonderful language that Peter spoke at Caesarea Philippi, the wonderful language that Peter spoke here, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” – to us, steeped in our tradition in the late twentieth century, it does not seem anything very remarkable, but it was at the time. It was an amazing statement. It was a statement that mortal lips had never made before. For a first-century Jew who had been schooled up in the oneness of God, Jehovah in heaven, for that Jew to be the first one to venture with a statement like this, it filled heaven and earth with amazement, and that is why it received from the Lord Jesus such a remarkable answer: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.” O to have a religion of divine revelation! Do you say, “We believe and are sure that Thou art that

Christ” – that is, the Lord’s anointed – “the Son of the living God” – that is, a Person in the Godhead, co-equal and co-eternal? Now can you say it, do you say it? And why do you say it? Just because everyone says it? Just because it is in the Bible and the hymnbook and the Articles of Faith? Just because it is in all the ancient creeds? Or do you say it of sheer necessity, because it has been burnt into your heart, because apart from this you must sink into endless ruin, black despair? “And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”

“Fixed on this ground will I remain,  
Though my heart fail and flesh decay;  
This anchor shall my soul sustain,  
When earth’s foundations melt away.  
Mercy’s full power I then shall prove,  
Loved with an everlasting love.”

This is the ground of a sinner’s hope. This is the foundation on which our everlasting all is built.

“We believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” That is why when Peter made this noble confession at Caesarea Philippi in Matthew 16 the Lord Jesus not only said, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee.” But He also said this: “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter” – that is, a stone in the heavenly building – “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock” – the rock of Peter’s confession, the rock Christ Jesus – “upon this rock” – this unmoveable, unshakeable rock – “upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” These spurious disciples might go away, but not a living stone built upon the eternal rock. “Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Now you see here is the rock foundation and here is Peter’s confession concerning the rock foundation and concerning his hope, his only hope of eternal life, being built on the eternal rock. Now beloved friends, have you and I a religion like this? These are real things. It is a poor, trembling, helpless sinner building on Christ and the atonement and when tempted by Satan, still building on Christ, and when others go away, still building on Christ.

“And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” Now I understand that in the original Greek the *we* is



exceedingly strong, exceedingly emphatic. “And we believe” – whatever these others do, whatever they say, whatever they think, we are different. “And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” There are two sides to that word “*we*,” one of them exceedingly blessed and one exceedingly solemn. We all know what the blessed side was. That Peter felt like this, that if every sinner on earth forsakes the Lord Jesus, forsakes the truth, then let me die alone, clinging and cleaving to Christ. Let the whole world forsake Him, but we will cling and cleave to Christ. So the blessedness of that word is very obvious, very clear, and it is blessed, (isn’t it?) when God’s people re-affirm their allegiance to the Son of God and to His dear people. Whatever may betide, whatever may come, whatever may take place, “fixed on this ground will I remain,” clinging and cleaving to Christ and His people, through ill report as well as good report, when people forsake Him as well as when people are gathered to Him.

“And *we* believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” But then you see the solemn side of that word “*we*.” Peter had a loving spirit and a humble spirit and so he did not just speak for himself. He spoke for all the twelve apostles, the twelve immediate disciples, as if he was going to say, “Lord Jesus, this is a sad day for Thee. Thy tender heart is well-nigh broken. But there are twelve of us here who will still cling to Thee, still follow Thee.” But that sad heart of the Lord Jesus! “Peter, little dost thou know that not only this multitude has now left Me, but even one of you, the immediate twelve, will soon be going the way that they have gone.” But even far worse. “Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” Now that is the most solemn word in all the Bible. He did not even say, “One of you has a devil.” He said, “One of you is a devil.”

This is one of the great mysteries of divine sovereignty that you and I never can, never will understand, that the sovereign Lord with His all-seeing eye, knowing the end from the beginning when He made choice of the twelve apostles, He chose one whom He knew was destitute of grace and at last should prove an apostate and go to his own place. Now these things come very close. If even the Lord Jesus should witness to this, even His sacred, gracious ministry should witness to this, that even among the twelve apostles there should be one of whom He should say, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” “He spake of Judas Iscariot

the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray Him, being one of the twelve.” It is very obvious that not one of the other disciples had the slightest inkling that there was any difference between Judas Iscariot and themselves. O may the Lord ever keep you and me from being Judas Iscariots. May it ever be: Lord, is it I? O to be a Peter! There were many faults, many failures with Peter. But one thing never did fail: his faith in the Lord Jesus, his love to Him. Amidst it all he ever clung and clave to Christ. “And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” O what a foundation! What a mercy to be on it! And that it might be said of us as it was said of the house that the wise man built, when the storm blew vehemently upon it, “it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.”

Now during the night when these words were passing over my spirit, there was one text that seemed to crown it all – as there were these multitudes going away, and the sorrow of His disciples, and their temptation, and the sorrow of His own heart. That word was this: “Jesus said, Come unto Me.” When others go away, when many turn back, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.” Are there any here this morning and you have got so many burdens, so many sorrows without and within? You can truly be described as those that labour and are heavy laden, and Jesus still says, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

“From that time, many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. 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. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”