QUESTIONS JESUS WAS ASKED

Lord, To Whom Shall We Go?
BAM Study Booklets  
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This is the second in a series of three booklets under the title  
“Questions Jesus Was Asked”  
The first title is “Are Only A Few People Going To Be Saved?”

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“Lord, to whom shall we go?”  John 6: 68

Peter asked this question because Jesus had asked the twelve disciples a question. That question was “Will you also go away?” something that Jesus said because many of His disciples had turned back and stopped following Him. These exchanges between Jesus and His disciples happened in Capernaum, a town which Jesus often visited and where a number of His miracles as well as His teaching had taken place. Capernaum was the town beside the Lake Galilee which could be described as the central point in His ministry. Peter and Andrew lived in Capernaum and it was the town to which Jesus went after He left Nazareth.¹ Matthew in his Gospel describes Capernaum as Jesus’ own town.²

MIRACLES AT CAPERNAUM

Miracles performed there included healing Peter’s mother-in-law when she was stricken with a fever, casting an unclean spirit out of a man³ and healing a paralytic. It was from the receipt of custom in Capernaum that Jesus called Matthew to be a disciple.⁴ So we might say that the discourse that is described in John chapter six took place on home ground.

Jesus had entered into Capernaum after walking on the water to His disciples when they were toiling in their storm-tossed boat. And the crowd had come from the other side of the lake looking for Him. Jesus chided the crowd when they arrived telling them they only came scampering after Him because Jesus had fed the five thousand and they had their fill of the miraculous loaves He provided.

He said “Do not work for the food that spoils but for the food that endures to eternal life”.⁵ Then they asked Him what were the works that God required and He began teaching them about the bread that came down from heaven. At the end of this the crowd said they found this a hard subject and in the sixty-sixth verse we read that from this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.
Jesus then asked His disciples if they wanted to leave Him as though saying “Have my words made you question whether you can stay with me? And it was in response to this that Peter asked “Lord, to whom shall we go?” and added “You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” It makes us wonder if those who turned back did not have this revelation about who Jesus was!

So we use Peter’s question to ask “Where else can the disciples turn if they go away from Jesus?” We need therefore to see just what Jesus said, try and understand how they misinterpreted His words or refused to accept His teachings.

**AN EASY WAY TO GET BREAD**

The crowd had come hurrying around the lake and were anxious to make the most of this opportunity to get bread and provisions without effort. Bread for their stomachs was all they were interested in. This is obvious again in the question they asked Jesus “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

Feeding five thousand with a few loaves and fish had opened for them a door of access to unlimited food supply. Jesus had told them that they should work for food that endures to eternal life and that this was something that the Son of Man would give them.

Jesus reply to them was very profound. “The work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.” They then asked for another sign or miracle. They were fascinated by the miracles but did not recognise or interpret the sign, though they said that a miracle or sign would make them believe in Him. In their quest for a sign they turned their conversation to the way that God gave them bread from heaven on the journey from Egypt to Canaan! They obviously saw a resemblance between that and the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 that
they had just witnessed. And this turned the dialogue to bread and Jesus saying to them “I am the bread of life”.

Jesus told His hearers that it is His Father who gives the true bread from heaven; this compares with the manna that God gave them daily and which if kept more than 24 hours on six week days, went bad and stank. Jesus said that the true Bread of God from heaven gives life to the world.

In their continuing desire to take full advantage of the provision made in feeding 5000, though not understanding the real meaning of the Bread of Life, the crowd said “from now on give us this bread!”

JESUS THE BREAD OF LIFE

The remainder of the chapter is taken up with the subject of Jesus the Bread of Life and it was the development of His teaching on these lines that made many in the crowd say “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

Aware that His disciples were grumbling, Jesus gave a little more teaching ending in telling them that no one could come to Him unless the Father draw Him. We read then that many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him and this made Jesus ask them “You do not want to leave too, do you?”

The crowd did not really appreciate what they were losing if they went away. They did not understand the spiritual import of the word that Jesus was the Bread of Life – eternal life and more important that physical bread.

Jesus gave them no way around the matter. Because they did not understand, eating His flesh and drinking His blood sounded to them like cannibalism. As it is, and for centuries and without interruption since Jesus initiated the Breaking of Bread and Drinking the Cup in the Eucharist, believers in all generations have drawn strength and fellowship from a regular observance of the feast Jesus made for them.
Anyone is likely to be drawn away by misunderstanding, that is why Jesus asked this question “Will you also go away?” Are we in this incident to recognise that even the most ardent followers can become disillusioned? If so, this gives us extra incentive to consider Peter’s question. If we turn away, to whom can we go?

We shall look in vain for a positive answer to Peter’s question for all who have turned back from true discipleship have found that problems do not disappear or rough pathways become smooth. Turning from Christ becomes a foolish and hasty decision from which there is no escape. Two places in the New Testament teach this to us. Both passages show the utter folly of those who having come to Christ, decide to turn and go away.

THE FOLLY OF GOING AWAY

“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace.”

These verses show the impossibility of those who have been enlightened and who turn away to repent and return since they would be crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace. All who follow should be looking to go forward and attain maturity, not looking back and stagnating.

WORSE OFF THAN AT THE BEGINNING

“If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and
then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.”

This passage tells us that the end of those who, having followed, subsequently turn away will be worse off than they were at the beginning! The picture we see here is of many disciples who had rushed around the lake to see Jesus now walking away and going back and all because they found the sayings of Jesus hard to understand.

Following Jesus demands trust in Him and faith in His teaching even when, as sometimes happens, we do not understand. If you are a follower of Christ you have made the wisest decision but you cannot contemplate ever changing your allegiance to someone or somewhere else.

Peter’s question by way of answer to Jesus raises two things. First, if we leave you (Jesus) to whom shall we go? and second, what we have when we belong to you, when we are your disciples?

This second what you have given us, may again be divided into two (i) Eternal Life. (ii) Faith and trust in the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

**ETERNAL LIFE**

The cloud that hangs over us all is death, the fact that we have to die. There is some evidence that God never intended this and that death is the result of the Fall as described in the Book of Genesis. There was one tree in the Garden of Eden that man was forbidden to eat. It was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and Adam was warned “when you eat of it you will surely die”.  

As we all know, Adam and his wife ate of it and they were introduced to death, something they had not known before. And everyone since has known that death was then waiting for them at the end of the way.

The writer of the Hebrews describes the prospect of death as something that enslaves us or puts us in bondage. “those who all their lives are held in slavery by the fear of death”.  

We may
make our plans and follow a course through life but it may be cut short anytime by the Angel of Death and we have no means of altering this. Most do not bother about this, but putting it out of our mind does not remove the prospect.

**CREATION LONGING TO BE FREE**

In his letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul describes the way in which the whole of creation longs to be free from this bondage of death. We long to be rid of it. The multitudes of religions on the earth are striving to mitigate its influence and fear upon us. He writes “the whole creation groans and travails in pain”\(^{17}\) and when dismayed at the nature of his life the Apostle asks “Wretched man that I am. Who will save me from this body of death?”\(^{18}\) And he hastens to answer with “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Jesus sets the prisoner free and Peter recognised this freedom came from Jesus. In Him he had eternal life: In His intercessory prayer Jesus prayed “this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”.\(^{19}\)

In this discourse Jesus had with Peter and the other disciples Jesus said that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life.\(^{20}\) On the subject of Jesus the Bread of Life, Jesus said that he who believes has everlasting life. Jesus is that bread of life and that he who feeds on the Bread of Life will live for ever.\(^{21}\) Jesus had a lot to teach this crowd who had scampered from one side of the lake to the other but they turned away and would not receive it.

**WORDS OF SPIRIT AND LIFE**

Peter recognised that the words that Jesus spoke were spirit and life. Hearing and receiving them was like feeding on Bread of Life, eternal life. This was something Peter would forfeit if he went away. To turn away from Jesus was to lose all the gift of blessing and life His words had brought. It was more than saying those who went away received nothing more, it was that they lost contact with the very life about which He spoke.
Peter saw the extent of the sacrifice that he would make if he went away as they had seen many doing when Jesus spoke about the Bread of Life and that eating His flesh and drinking His blood were an extension of this figure. Bread is to be eaten, not admired.

Peter had listened to and received the Word and so said “We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” His faith in the word of Jesus had given him an assurance. This was more than reaching out to accept and believe, it was knowing within who Jesus was.

In our spiritual journey in life it is more than knowing certain facts about Christ. It is knowing Him, the Living Exalted Resurrected Son of God. His was an expression before the Cross of what Paul said was his longing and desire after the Cross “I want to know Christ and the power of the resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death”. Peter is here asking where else or from whom else would he find these things. You could take another line, follow another creed, put your trust in any number who offer to lead to life, but upon what foundation would they do this?

Jesus rather interrupted His words to His disciples by saying some of them did not believe. These are the disciples who turned back when difficulties arose. They were with Jesus but did not belong to Jesus.

THE FATHER ENABLES US

Jesus did put the matter of discipleship on a different footing when He said “no-one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him”. We decide what actions to take and think they are our decisions, and so they are. But the desire to make those decisions is planted within us by the Father. Jesus imparted to those whom He met a consciousness of heavenly things and with all He said and did was linked to His Father. Peter quite rightly would describe himself as following Jesus. But the desire to follow had been placed there by God the Father. It was the Father who had chosen those who should be true disciples. We
must recognise this fact though not knowing the detail. God knows the end of all things and He works along lines He has laid down; no-one has crept in beneath the barrier of God’s all-knowing and permissive will. Peter would not have recognised this. To him, as to us, Peter could and would strive to enter in, strive to believe. He strove to remain faithful at the Cross though all others might deny Him, but he knew only too well that his good intention was not enough.

Yet God did not let Him go. His denial had been foretold by Jesus but the great anchor that he had was Jesus’ words “I have prayed for you that your faith fail not.”

So when Jesus asked “Do you want to leave me” he knew that Peter would stay. The temptation was real but the likelihood non-existent. What Peter needed and what anyone who would remain faithful to the Lord needs is a personal commitment. It is a living loving relationship with Jesus.

The miracles of Jesus aroused wonder and amazement in the hearts of those who beheld them. The teachings of Jesus were captivating to all who thought about them and attracted those who heard His words to want to be disciples.

**JESUS SPOKE DIRECTLY TO PETER**

It was after Calvary and the Resurrection that Jesus spoke directly to Peter asking about the relations that now existed between them – “Do you love me?” Peter’s answers given immediately were “Of course I do.” But Jesus’ persistence in repeating the same question was really examining and strengthening the bond between them. Eventually Peter replied “Lord, you know all things. You know I love you.” Yes, Jesus did know, but He wanted Peter to know. Not just to admire, adhere, follow, but to love Jesus. If Peter loved Jesus that was a bond that would not easily break. It would withstand the battering it was to receive in his life of discipleship; it had forged a bond that was to hold firm whatever was thrown against it.
Now in the question “To whom shall we go?” that we are studying, Peter was made to search the pages of life for another who might do for him what he knew he had in his love relationship with Jesus, the Holy One of God. There are many to whom we might go, but at what cost? The offers and their attractions are many. But at what price when a man gains the whole world and loses his own soul?

To whom shall we go? Many churches, many religions, many other ways and means but only one Saviour.

Elton M. Roth’s hymn:
“I am unworthy to take of His grace, 
   Wonderful grace so free;  
   Yet Jesus suffered and died in my place, 
   E’en for a soul like me. 
   “He is the fairest of thousands to me 
      His love is sweet and true 
      Wonderful beauty in Him I now see, 
      More than I ever knew”.

Chorus:
   How can I help but love Him when He loved me so.  
   How can I help but love Him when He loved me so.” 

He is the Bright and Morning Star, the Lilly of the Valley, the Rose of Sharon, the Living Water, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Star of David, the Balm of Gilead, the Good Shepherd the Way, the Truth the Life.

And E.E. Hewitt wrote:
“There’s no-one like my Saviour No friend can be like Him My never failing sunshine When earthly lights grow dim When summer flowers are blooming the brightness of my joy O may His happy service my heart and life employ”

“There’s no-one like my Saviour in seasons of distress He draws me closer to Him to comfort and to bless He gives me in temptation the strength of his right arm His angels camp around me to keep me from all harm
Chorus:
No-one no-one like my precious Saviour
No-one no-one such a friend can be
Glory glory Jesus cares for me.”

Let us be like the slave under the Old Testament dispensation who, in the Year of Jubilee, said “I love my master, I will not go out free” and who allowed his ear to be pinned to the post.

We all need to recognise we are bound to Him eternally by love’s strong cord.

References