

Sunday, May 6, 2018

“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. Jesus answered them, 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.”

(John 6:66-71)

In John 6, we find ourselves near the end of the Galilean ministry of Christ, about one year before His crucifixion. It is a great chapter with many precious truths in it about the sovereign election of God, perseverance of the saints, Christ being the bread of life, etc. But the overarching framework of the chapter teaches us an important lesson about false disciples (that is, superficial believers, apostates, defectors, traitors). It begins with one of the greatest and most massive miracles that Christ ever performed. The next day, He preaches one of His greatest sermons in the synagogue of Capernaum. And it ends with many of His disciples leaving Him.

At the end of His ministry up in Galilee, after having done such great miracles and preached such glorious truths there, it ended with very few people actually believing and following Him:

“Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.” (Matthew 11:20-26)

And in fact, the end of His entire ministry was met with relatively few people continuing with Him. After His resurrection, you’ll recall He only appeared to 500 or so people. That may sound like a lot, but it’s nothing compared to the great, massive crowds that followed Him during His ministry. Most of them forsook Him.

This is not a unique thing, having a false, superficial believer forsaking Christ. I'm not talking about one of His loved ones falling into sin from time to time, or even backsliding into a grievous sin. Think David. Or Peter. This happens to all His people to one degree or another. We will always have the old man to contend with. Though sin will not have dominion over us, we will still think, do or say sinful things. There will always be the fight between the flesh and the spirit.

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” (Romans 7:18-19)

I'm not talking about one of God's elect - I'm talking about someone who never truly and fully believed in the first place, and who rejected Him with finality. The ministry of Christ on earth was marked by these kinds of people. Looking through the book of John:

“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast *day*, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.” (John 2:23-25)

“As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:30-32)

“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” (John 12:42-43)

And of course, there is Judas:

“And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, to betray him.” (John 13:2)

These false disciples all believed **something** about Christ. But none of them had saving faith – they didn't cling to Christ alone as their only hope for salvation. They had a faith like the devils in James 2:19. We are talking about people who beheld Christ, experienced His glory and power to some measure, understood that He is the Son of God and the Messiah, and then turned their backs on Him. If this is a thing that marked the ministry of Christ, when they had the very Son of God on earth in their presence, we shouldn't be surprised when we see it now.

And of course, He taught us this very thing in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. There are people who have some superficial attraction to Christ, some interest in Him that may go on for many years, some empty profession of faith; they may like the Bible, they may like some of the doctrines, they may like some of the morality that it teaches, etc. But they don't persevere. They don't continue in His word. They turn on Him when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, or when the care of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word. Whatever the particulars, Christ and His words become offensive to them. It all comes down to His words, His doctrines, His standards, His attributes. Something there becomes a stumbling block to them, and they betray the God that they professed to love. It appears that some of these people will not be exposed until the judgment day:

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matthew 7:21-23)

But many openly forsake God in this life. Every one in this room has experienced somebody making a profession of faith in Christ, and then turning their backs on Him. Some have grown up in the church and then apostatized. Some have come to the church later in life and showed great promise, and then forsook Him. This isn't some new thing. This isn't some unique thing. This isn't some rare thing. It happened to Christ. It happened to Paul (“Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” – 2 Timothy 4:10). So we have to expect that it will happen to us. Nevertheless, whenever it does happen, it's still quite heartbreaking and troubling to our spirits. It's a sad day when someone turns their back on the only Savior of the world.

For this sermon, I would like to go over some of the characteristics of false disciples, some of the ways that Jesus reacted to false disciples, and then end with a sampling of the scriptural warnings against apostasy and encouragements for abiding in Christ.

In reading John 6, we can glean some characteristics of those false disciples who “walked no more with him.” The purpose of this is not to make some formula or checklist to be used to eye one another with suspicion. Many of these sins, we could easily fall into. Rather, the point is to “examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2 Corinthians 13:5) and to help “exhort one another daily” (Hebrews 3:13).

False disciples are primarily interested in temporal benefits

You will find in John 6 that these false disciples were looking for an earthly king, and were looking to fill their bellies with food.

“Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.” (John 6:14-15)

“Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed... Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.” (John 6:26-27, 34)

Remember, they were under the thumb of the Romans. Food was no easy thing to come by – it required labor. This may be hard for us to conceive of because of the fast-food culture that we live in, but that’s the world they lived in. They were looking for someone to defeat the Romans, set up some earthly kingdom, provide them all the food they could ever eat, and heal all their diseases. They were selfish, covetous, lazy, and entitled. They followed Him not because they repented and believed in Him as the savior of their eternal souls, but because their bellies were filled, because they saw an opportunity to have all of their earthly comforts and desires fulfilled.

False disciples don’t seek the glory of God

Related to the previous point, these people in John 6 didn’t follow God to praise and glorify Him. Rather, they followed Him for their own selfish hopes and desires. To put it another way, they didn’t want to serve God; they wanted Him to serve them. They didn’t seek Him; they only sought those things that perish. And they wanted it on their timeline, which was “right now.” For a true disciple, it should never again be what WE want, but what GOD wants.

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9-11)

False disciples minimize and are dissatisfied with the work of God

Here in John 6, this amazing miracle of the loaves wasn't enough to satisfy them.

“They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.” (John 6:30-32)

Their point is that in the days of Moses, he (that is, Moses) fed millions of people daily with manna over the course of several decades. Now, He (that is, Christ) only fed 5000 men plus women and children (probably 20,000-25,000 people total). He had only done this once. It was only for a few people, relatively speaking. It's not good enough. It's not as good as the miraculous manna in the Old Testament. Christ isn't as impressive as Moses. They're going to need to see more evidence before they believe in Him. They think they get to make demands on and set standards for God – they are effectively saying, “give us what we want, and then we'll believe you.” They're so blind and unthankful that they didn't even realize that God Himself had descended from heaven and was standing before them.

False disciples aren't satisfied in Christ

They aren't interested in Christ Himself, the bread of life, the only Savior. They were interested in what Christ could provide for them, but not in Christ Himself. Christ was everything to Paul, for example:

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” (Philippians 3:7-11)

They may understand that He's the Son of God, they may see how holy He is, they may like some of His words, they may shed a tear because they feel sorry for how He was treated and killed, but until they see Him as the only way to be forgiven and go to heaven, they will never be true disciples.

False disciples are fickle

They don't have a firm foundation to rest on. They're tossed about like the waves of the sea. One minute they believe that He's the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and want to set Him up as king (v. 14-15). The next morning, they tell Him they're not going to believe unless they see some more impressive signs (v. 30). Then they walk away from Him with finality (v. 66).

False disciples are murmurers and mockers

They are discontented complainers and grumblers, and because they lack the capacity to understand His spiritual words, they heap scorn and ridicule on them.

“The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?... The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us *his* flesh to eat?” (John 6:41-42, 52)

He's telling them that He is the only one who can provide eternal life, and all they can do is murmur and mock and dispute.

False disciples think His word is “hard”

“Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard *this*, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?” (John 6:60-61)

The word “hard” here means “harsh, rough, stiff, dried out, inflexible, offensive, unpleasant, objectionable, intolerable.” It's too difficult for them; it's too rigid. It's not hard to understand; it's just hard to accept. They reject that He came down from heaven; they reject that He's the only way to go to heaven; they reject that they must deny themselves, stop pursuing the things that perish, and embrace Him; and they reject the doctrine that they can't do any of that unless the Father first draws them. They don't have the capacity to truly understand and love the word of God, because these things are spiritually discerned. They have no hunger for His word. They may have some superficial interest and understanding, but it's not in their heart. They may love it because it satisfies some intellectual curiosity, but they never love it because it is the power of God unto salvation.

When Jesus asks them if it offends them, the Greek word for “offend” is “skandalizo,” from which we get the word “scandal.” His Word is scandalous to them. It offends them. It causes them to stumble. And of course, we know why:

“Why do ye not understand my speech? *even* because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” (John 8:43-44)

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27)

False disciples leave because of His words; true disciples stay because of His words:

“Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)

Everyone loves the miracle-performing Jesus who helped the poor and sick and was kind to little children...just don't let Him talk. When He talks, it's scandalous. He's too inflexible. He requires too much.

Next, I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about how Jesus reacted to false disciples. I think this is very rich and instructive to us.

Jesus rested on the sovereignty of God, specifically in election

When you're staring a group of false disciples in the face, there is nothing quite so comforting as to lean on the sovereignty of God in election. And there's nothing quite like this doctrine that will harden them in their unbelief. When faced with these people in John 6, Jesus preached this doctrine repeatedly:

“But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:36-40)

**“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”
(John 6:44-45)**

“And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.” (John 6:65)

“Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70)

Jesus was troubled in His spirit

When the false disciples in John 6 left Jesus, He turned to the twelve and said, “Will ye also go away?” No doubt this was said for their benefit, to cause them to examine themselves and try their faith. But this is also a very human, emotional response. I think we can understand this response. We might have even had a similar response. We see the state of His spirit even stronger in John 13, just as Judas was going to head out to betray Him:

“When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” (John 13:21)

Even while Christ rested in the sovereign will of the Father, He still was troubled in spirit. “Troubled” means “to be agitated, disquieted, restless, anxious, or distressed.” I can’t explain all the nuances of that mystery of the dual nature of Christ. He is fully God and He is fully man. He had emotions and feelings like we do. He wasn’t some stoic, emotionless freak of nature. He felt compassion, anger, grief, displeasure, zeal, sorrow, joy and love. But His emotions were perfect and sinless. They were perfect in degree, in timing, and in appropriateness. And this incident with Judas troubled His spirit. I’d like to go over a couple other passages where Jesus is said to be “troubled,” just to show the serious nature of it. The first is at the death of His friend Lazarus:

“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.” (John 11:33)

This was a very emotional thing. Of course, this same passage is where we find the shortest verse in the English Bible: “Jesus wept” (verse 35). Interestingly, the word here for “groan” means “to snort with anger like a horse, to have indignation.” What was He angry at here? He probably had some indignation at the hypocrisy and insincerity of the Jews who came along weeping with Mary. These same Jews questioned His power over life and death a few verses

later, which He again responded to with “groaning.” Whatever the reason, there are a lot of emotions going on here – anger, grief, sadness, anguish, agitation.

The second example is when He is speaking of His death:

“Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.” (John 12:27)

Later in the Garden of Gethsemane, this language is used:

“And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch.” (Mark 14:33-34)

To be “amazed” here means to be “alarmed, terrified, or astounded.” To be “heavy” means to be “troubled, in great distress or anguish.”

So what difference does this make to us when we’re dealing with false disciples? It makes a huge difference. We have these same emotions and temptations as Christ did, though ours are tainted with sin. He is our High Priest, who sympathizes with what we’re going through – He went through the very same thing! And He doesn’t just sympathize, but He is there to provide help, mercy and grace whenever we need it, and to what degree we need it.

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Jesus continued to preach the truth to them for as long as they were there to listen to it

He continued to tell them what their responsibility was. He did not back down and change or soften the message. In fact, as He goes on in His sermon in John 6, He becomes even MORE demanding about what is required of them. We don’t want to make things easy or comfortable for false disciples.

Jesus reminded His true disciples of their job

In John 13, Jesus is giving His disciples a warning that Judas is about ready to leave and betray Him. In the middle of all of that language is the following:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.” (John 13:20)

Sometimes you come across a verse in the middle of a passage, and at first glance, it seems out of place. This is one of those verses. Why is this verse here? What sense does this verse mean in the context of telling them that Judas is going to betray Him? I believe that the point is to tell them not to lose sight of the big picture. The big picture is, “I’m sending you out to preach in my name. Despite this traitor, remember that some people are going to receive you. If they receive you, they receive me; if they receive me, they receive the Father. This traitor doesn’t change that at all.”

An apostate may cause you to question and reevaluate. It’s one of many tools in Satan’s arsenal to sow confusion. I can understand what the 11 must have been thinking here and in the aftermath of the betrayal: “What’s going on here? Why is this happening? How could we have been so stupid? He was here, right under our noses, and we didn’t have a clue. Nobody’s going to listen to us now. They’ll use this against us – they’ll say, ‘He couldn’t even keep 12 people following Him - one of His own apostles deserted Him!’ Nothing we say now will carry any weight.” But He knows their confused hearts and says just the thing to comfort them - an apostate, while troubling to the spirit, changes absolutely nothing when it comes to your duty to God. An apostate will betray God, but some of His true sheep are still out there waiting to receive you. An apostate will be the enemy of Christ, but your ministry is still divine and whoever receives you, receives me.

I would like to conclude by going over some scriptural warnings against apostasy, and some scriptural benefits of staying with Christ. Before I do that, why would these warnings even be here? Jon has been telling us for his last few sermons about the perseverance and preservation of the saints. If we are going to persevere, what is the point of these warnings? Of course, we all know how useful these warnings are. They cause us to examine our hearts, they cause us to make our calling and election sure, etc. And they let us know what we’re dealing with when we do interact with an apostate. There is no inconsistency between these passages and the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. The answer to that accusation is here:

“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.” (1 John 2:19)

The book of Hebrews addresses this issue more than any other place in the Bible:

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;” (Hebrews 2:3)

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.” (Hebrews 3:12-15)

“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left *us* of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it... Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” (Hebrews 4:1,11)

“For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.” (Hebrews 6:4-6)

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. *It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:26-31)

What do you have to look forward to if you reject and forsake Christ with finality? You will not be able to escape God, you will have hardened hearts, you will not enter into His rest, you will be unable to repent, you will be crucifying Christ afresh, you will be putting Christ to an open shame, you will have no other option for taking your sins away, and you will only have judgment and fiery indignation in your eternal future.

On the positive side, if you continue with Christ, there are certain blessed benefits for you that we can read about in John 15. Remember, Christ said these words to the eleven right after Judas departed from them so he could go complete his treachery, so Judas is on everyone's

mind at this point. I think at least one of the messages here to His disciples was “don’t do what Judas just did. Abide in me, and you will have blessings beyond measure.”

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every [branch] that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye [are] the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast [them] into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and [that] your joy might be full.”

(John 15:1-11)

If you abide in Christ: He will abide in you; you will produce fruit; you will have your prayers answered; you will have assurance that you’re saved; you will be lavished by the love of God; and you will have joy.

If, however, you forsake Him, you have nothing to look forward to but to be cast into the fire.

I love you. Amen.