

WHITHER? — AWAY FROM JESUS

November 30, 1958

Scripture: John 6:66-69

Text—"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 the Christ, the Son of the Living God"—John 6:68-69.

Never have I asked anyone a more important question than I am asking you right now. Where will you go if you go away from Jesus? Perhaps in reply you say, "Why I have no intention of going away from Him!" Yet repeatedly when His claims upon your soul and life are presented, you refuse to declare yourself for Him. In so doing you are turning away from Him. Every time that you refuse Him it becomes more difficult to do otherwise. One day you will refuse Him for the last time. And when you do, where or to whom will you go? This question is the substance of our message today.

Jesus' popularity reached its zenith at the feeding of the five thousand. Immediately the people wanted to make of Him their political Messiah or King. They were ready to follow Him into battle and to death, if need be, against the Romans. But the next day His popularity plunged to its lowest depth. When Jesus made it plain to them that He would bear spiritual relationship to them, the crowds left Him. It is always thus. If Jesus offered you a million dollars you would accept it. If He offered you the crown of an empire you would gladly and immediately receive it. But He offers you much more. He would give you the eternal riches of Heaven. He offers to make you a king and priest before God. Yet you refuse His offer. Why? Because you are more concerned with earthly things than with heavenly glories.

PURELY MATERIAL

Jesus described the attitude of the crowd that day with a figure of speech which fits you today. The next morning after He had fed them, the people came to Him again. It was breakfast time, and they were hungry. In John 6:26 Jesus said, "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the

loaves and fishes and were filled." He used a word which described a cow eating food placed before her, filling her stomach, yet never saying, "Thanks," or asking for what purpose it was given. Like you, their interest in Jesus was purely material. And because He refused to accommodate Himself to their wishes the crowd forsook Him. Is that why you continue to reject Jesus?

Seeing that only the twelve apostles remained with Him, Jesus asked, "Will ye also go away?" (v.67). They were still with Him, but were restless. Others have left Jesus fully and finally. But you are still standing near Him. You have not made up your mind in the matter. You have not accepted Him, nor have you rejected Him. To get you to declare yourself Jesus is asking you, "Will you also go away?"

If you examine this question in the original language of John's Gospel you will discover that Jesus is not inviting them to leave. Else He would have said, "Will you not go away?" Instead he said, "You surely will not go away." He invites a negative answer. Thus there is the note of an invitation to remain with Him. At the same time He leaves the way open for them to leave if they so choose. It is so with you. Jesus does not want you to reject Him. But He recognizes your right to do so if you wish. God is like that. He offers salvation to you, but He will not force it on you. In Genesis 1:27 the Bible tells us that "God created man in his own image." He made you a personality with the capacity for God, but with the power of choice whereby you can receive Him nor reject Him. To force Himself upon you would make you nothing more than a puppet on a string. Thus Jesus respects your right to choose for yourself. He does all that He can to win your faith and love, but He will not force Himself upon you. The decision is yours!

— " . . . TO WHOM "

In reply to Jesus' question Simon Peter asked another question. "Lord, to whom shall we go . . . ?" This is also your problem. Suppose that you go away from

Jesus. Where will you go? Several possibilities are suggested as we follow the crowd that did go away from Jesus.

First, they went after food and drink. That was their immediate need. Jesus Himself said that they were more interested in that than in anything else. This quest is suggestive of the primary goal of their lives. At heart they were materialists. Their souls could wait, but their physical needs must be met.

Is this not a fair description of yourself? The world is ever with you. The insistent demands of your natural body drown out the plaintive cry of your soul. There is work to be done; there are mouths to feed and bills to pay. You are caught up in the vicious cycle of economic endeavor so that you always seem to have "time for your body, but none for your soul."

To you now, as to the multitude then, Jesus says in John 6:47-51, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread that cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever, and the bread which I give is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world." Furthermore, Jesus, in Matthew 6:31-33, says to you, "Therefore take no thought (be not overly anxious), saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

GREED BRINGS MISERY

All the misery of this world can be bound up in one package—that of man's greed after material things, to the neglect of the spiritual. But that misery is as nothing compared to the agony which will be yours in eternity if in your quest after such things you go away from Jesus.

Secondly, this multitude went away from Jesus to pursue military and political means of deliverance. Through many years of political bondage the Jews had built up a false picture of the Messiah as a great military hero who would lead them to victory over their oppressors.

Following the miraculous feeding of the multitude they, at the instigation of the Apostles, sought to force Jesus to proclaim Himself as such. When He refused they left Him to seek a deliverer in line with their own thinking. History records that they pursued that course to their utter destruction as a nation.

The world has never learned. Walk down the highway of time. You will find it littered with the debris of nations and lives which have sought to live by the sword, and have perished thereby. Look into your own heart. In your desire for security you are trusting more in the sword than in the Spirit, more in military gadgets than in God, more in missiles than in the Messiah, more in the United Nations than in a personal union with the Saviour, more in political conferences than in the Christ, more in the gods of war than in the Prince of Peace.

REFUSED JESUS

Seeing the darkening clouds of war Jesus, in Matthew 23:37, cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." He is saying the same thing to you. With all the threatened destruction in today's world, it is all the more important that you do not go away from Jesus.

While world destruction would be terrible beyond your comprehension, a far greater question for you is found in Mark 8:36, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" For reasons of eternal import the suicidal course of nations will matter nothing to you personally and spiritually, if your soul is secure in the arms of Jesus. Trust in the Saviour today. Then for the remainder of your days you can apply yourself not simply to the maintenance of a nation geared to the existence of time, but to bringing the Kingdom of God into the hearts of men—a Kingdom that passes not away.

Thirdly, these people went away from Jesus to follow a religion bereft of power. While not specifically stated we may be sure that this crowd included Pharisees and those of the priestly group. With them the worship of Jehovah had become

largely a system of rites and ceremonies void of a spiritual dynamic. Their emphasis was placed largely upon observing a multiplicity of rote rules of outward conduct rather than upon an inward spiritual experience with God. Of them in Matthew 23 Jesus said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment (justice), mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone . . . ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess . . . ye are like whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." (vv. 23, 25, 27).

FALSE RELIGIONS

That is an apt description of how you appear to God if you are forsaking a vital experience with Jesus for a religion of empty ritual and rigid rules of self-righteousness. Without an inner spiritual power your life is an empty house susceptible to every kind of evil. And again in Matthew 23 Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte (convert to their religion), and when he is made, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves" (v.15). In short, if you are following such a religion you are twice worse off than if you had no religion at all. For your faith in an empty externalism lulls you into a false sense of security, thus preventing you from coming to Jesus in confession of your sins and faith in Him as your Saviour.

Of those of you who even study the Bible with your only purpose that of acquiring knowledge, Jesus says in John 5:39-40, "(Ye) search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." Unless you look beyond the printed word to faith in Christ, the living Word of God, your searching is in vain. Study the Bible, pray that God's Holy Spirit will reveal its mysteries to you. But do so that you may come to know Him whom to know aright is life eternal.

Fourthly, some went away from Jesus to enter a devil's hell. This we know to be true of Judas. Doubtless it was true of the others, unless later they turned to Jesus in faith. For this is the ultimate fate of all who completely and finally reject Jesus. A further warning is involved in the case of Judas. True, he did not at this time leave Jesus physically. He continued to associate with Him and His followers. But spiritually he was never one of His. Of Judas Jesus said in John 6:70-71, "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*" (author's italics).

OUTWARDLY OR INWARDLY

Herein is a dire warning to you. You may reject Jesus openly, or you may pretend to be one of His, but unless you fully and completely give your heart to Him, you have rejected Him nevertheless. To do so is to seal your own doom to an eternal hell.

Briefly let us look once again at Peter's words, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The crowd had an immature knowledge of Jesus. But the Twelve, except Judas, knowing beyond a shadow of doubt that Jesus was the Christ and that in Him alone they had found eternal life, really had no choice. They were sealed to Jesus by the Holy Spirit. You, on the other hand, if you are not His, must make a choice. If you go away—where will you go? This may be your one chance to receive Jesus. Shakespeare had the word for you.

There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to
fortune;

Omitted, all the voyage of their life
(and beyond)

Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

We must take the current when it
serves,

Or lose our ventures.

The Bible in Psalm 95:7-8 expresses it far better. "Today if ye hear his voice, harden not your heart." Write to me, and tell me that you have trusted in Jesus as your Saviour—And God bless you!