

26-0329a Transcript

26-0329a - To Whom Shall We Go? Tom Freed

Bible Readers: Mike Mathis and Roger Raines

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To Whom Shall We Go?

Scripture Readings

1st Reading (0:04 - 0:59): Mike Mathis

1 Corinthians 1:26-29: (0:04) The scripture is taken from John 6, verses 66 through 69. (0:13) From that time, many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more. (0:23) Then Jesus said to the twelve, (0:26) Do you also want to go away? But Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? (0:41) You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, (0:54) the Son of the Living God. That completes the reading. (0:59)

2nd Reading (1:04 - 1:51): Roger Raines

Philippians 2:5-8: (1:04) Good morning. I'll be reading from the first book, John, chapter 2, 15 through 17. (1:13) Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, (1:20) the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, (1:28) and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, and not from the Father, (1:36) but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also is lust. But the one who does the will (1:46) of God lives forever. This concludes this reading. (1:51)

Transcript (0:04 - 23:20), Preacher: Tom Freed

(1:56) Good morning. Good to see everybody.

(2:00) My turn in the rotation once again. So maybe we got, what, like six guys? So if you don't like how I (2:06) preach, come back next week. I'd like somebody else better.

So my sermon is, To Whom Shall We Go? (2:19) I know it's early, at least for me, but I want you to imagine something. (2:25) Picture a Sunday morning where you are excited for worship. (2:30) You pile the kids into the car and head to the church building.

(2:36) When you arrive, you're a bit frustrated because the parking lot is completely full. (2:42) You have to drive two or three blocks away just to find the spot. (2:49) As you walk toward the building, a school bus pulls in, packed with kids who are already (2:55) singing worship songs at the top of their lungs.

You join in the song as they exit the bus. (3:03) Inside, you head upstairs to drop off your children, and every classroom is overflowing. (3:09) You make your way back down, come into the auditorium, (3:14) and you realize that there's not an empty pew in sight.

It's standing room only. (3:22) You turn and whisper to your spouse, I told you we should have left earlier. (3:28) As you stand in the back, you look out to see friends, family, elders, deacons, and visitors.

(3:36) Around 250 to 300 people packed shoulder to shoulder. While standing in the back, (3:44) you glance at the bulletin and see classes for men and women, studies on marriage and family, (3:51) biblical finances, and Christian living. The whole building is buzzing with energy.

(4:00) What I just described to you wasn't a megachurch scene from a movie or novel. (4:07) In fact, many of you can picture that exact scene because you lived it not too long ago. (4:14) Believe it or not, the church I'm describing is a very congregation, this very congregation, (4:21) the one you're sitting in today.

So just 25 or 30 years ago, this church was thriving (4:31) in ways you could hardly believe. And many of you were here to witness it. Probably, (4:38) you know, maybe half the congregation was.

I know a lot of people were. (4:46) So it wasn't that long ago. The crowd was so large, they were talking about knocking out the back (4:53) wall to add more pews.

Well, it's a far cry from the smaller gathering we have today, (5:02) and we're only talking about a few generations. You might ask yourself, what in the world happened (5:12) where did everybody go? I'm sure if you've been here that long, you've probably asked yourself (5:19) that. Where has everybody gone? People left for various reasons.

There were painful seasons of (5:30) leadership struggles and failures that caused deep risks in the congregation. (5:36) Many went to other churches of Christ or the different denominations. (5:42) The pandemic also hit us hard, and we had to say goodbye to dear brothers and sisters who passed (5:48) away.

But if we're honest, a good number aren't with us today because they turned away from the (5:55) Lord and walked back into the world. It breaks our hearts, but nothing is new under the sun. (6:05) Thousands of years ago, many of Jesus' own disciples did the very same thing.

(6:12) But today we'll look at why they left and hear the same question Peter asked. (6:20) Lord, to whom shall we go? Just as this church once stood on top of the world, (6:30) excited about growth and expansion, we see a similar moment in Jesus' ministry. (6:36) In John chapter six, the scene is electric.

Just 24 hours earlier, Jesus had fed more than 5,000 (6:45) people, plus women and children with barely five loaves and two fish. So that's a huge crowd. (6:55) The people had witnessed him walk on water.

They were ready to crown him king by force, (7:05) but their tone quickly changed. Jesus moved from free bread to hard truth. (7:12) In John six, he declared, I am the bread of life.

He went even further and said, (7:19) whoever feeds on my flesh and drink my blood abides in me and I in him. (7:27) So we know what he was talking about, but at the time, (7:30) they had no idea. They thought, what is this guy? This is cannibalism.

The crowd began to murmur. (7:39) This is a hard thing. Who can listen to it? Verse 60.

(7:45) Many who called him rabbi just a day before, turned their backs and walked away. It's the (7:53) same pattern we see here and in many churches. When the church is thriving, when the seats are packed, (8:02) and the excitement is high, everything feels wonderful.

But when a hard truth is spoken or (8:08) difficult times hit, many people walk away. As Christians, we all experience seasons when things (8:17) go smoothly. But sooner or later, trials come to test us.

The apostle Peter warned us about this (8:27) when he wrote, beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you. (8:34) As though something strange were happening to you. First Peter 4.12. We shouldn't be surprised (8:42) when we have hard times.

We shouldn't be surprised when we're tested. Hard times will come. Struggles (8:52) with sin, broken relationships, serious illness, the loss of a loved one, or even more failure in (9:01) the church or in our own lives.

The real question is, when the hard times hit and the road gets (9:10) difficult, what will we do? Will we walk away like so many others have done? Or will we stay and (9:19) remain faithful to Christ? Let's look at how Jesus's closest followers responded when he spoke (9:28) a very hard truth. Jesus turned to the 12, his inner circle, and asked one of the most piercing (9:38) questions in the gospel. Do you want to go away as well? Notice what he did not do.

He did not (9:47) soften the message or make it more comfortable. He simply asked, will you stay? Diamond Peter's (9:56) answer in verse 68 is raw, honest, and powerful. It's a cry of a man who had looked at every other (10:04) option and found them empty.

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (10:14) John 6.68. You could not ask for a better response. And that answer is just as true today as it was (10:23) thousands of years ago.

There is truly nowhere else worth going. Think about it. Where else can (10:31) you go? Who can offer you what Christianity can? If there's truly nowhere better to go, (10:40) why do so many people walk away from Christ and his church? Some leave because they want (10:48) to chase the pleasures of the world without guilt or accountability.

Like Demas, Paul's former (10:54) co-worker. They love this present world and deserted the faith. 2 Timothy 4.10. A lot of (11:02) people don't want to be told what to do.

They want to experience the pleasures of this world. (11:09) They want to sin without consequence. They don't want to feel guilty about it.

(11:17) Others leave because they have been deeply wounded in the church by hypocrisy, (11:24) harsh legalism, broken relationships, or failures among leaders. A lot of the issues we had with (11:33) certain preachers and sins they committed or how (11:38) they had treated people. Well, that definitely can cause a rift in the congregation.

(11:47) We've felt some of that pain here. When Christians fail to live what they preach, (11:54) it creates deep rifts and drives people away. Still others walk away when they encounter hard (12:02) sayings.

Teachings on suffering, sexuality, hell, or the problem of evil, personal tragedy, (12:11) prolonged illness, and also having somebody cry out, if God is so good, why this? (12:20) Why is this happening to me? A lot of people have had cancer, heart issues, (12:28) personal problems, and a lot of times we look and blame God. (12:34) If things get bad enough, sometimes we leave the church. Our connected age, cultural pressure, (12:41) new ideas from college, the internet, or friends can make alternative worldviews feel more appealing (12:50) than the narrow way of Christ.

In schools and everywhere else, they mock Christianity. (12:59) They try to put you down or make you feel less than them in their worldview. (13:08) But the root of many departures is this.

Some simply fall in love with the world. (13:14) The apostle John warns us plainly in 1 John 2, 15-17. (13:20) Do not love the world or the things in the world.

For all that is in the world, (13:26) the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life, (13:31) is not from the Father but is from this world. And the world is passing away with its desires (13:38) but whoever does the will of God abides forever. John is describing exactly what pulls so many (13:46) away.

The desire for pleasure, self-fulfillment, and comfort on our own terms. These things feel (13:55) good for a season but they are temporary. They cannot satisfy the soul.

There are many reasons (14:04) people leave but none of them challenge the fundamental question Peter asked. Lord, (14:11) to whom shall we go? Peter wasn't primarily asking what to do. He was asking who could (14:21) possibly replace Jesus.

He had surveyed the religious options of the day. Pharisees with (14:30) their rules, Sadducees with their skepticism, Athenians with their isolation, (14:38) Zealots with their violence, and found everyone bankrupt. In our day the marketplace of ideas (14:46) is even louder and more appealing.

Some say go to science but science explains how the universe (14:54) works, not why we exist or what happens after death. Some say go to self-help (15:03) yet every self-help system eventually admits you cannot truly fix yourself. (15:10) Some say go to pleasure but the party always ends, the high fades, and the emptiness returns.

(15:19) Some say go to politics but no political movement has ever saved a single soul. (15:28) If you imagine going to politics for salvation today, you'd be doomed for sure. (15:35) Like Solomon in my last sermon who chased every pleasure under the sun (15:40) only to conclude it was all vanity.

Peter looked at everything and said, (15:47) there is nowhere else. The only logical conclusion, the whole duty of man is to (15:55) fear God and keep his commandments. Ecclesiastes 12, 13.

There is no better place to go than (16:03) Jesus Christ. The second part of Peter's answer is even more powerful. You have the words of (16:15) eternal life.

Notice what Peter did not say. He didn't say you give us good feelings or you have (16:24) an inspiring message. He said you have the words of eternal life.

Jesus' words are not mere suggestions (16:34) or inspirational quotes. They are spirit and life, John 6, 63. (16:42) When Jesus speaks, something powerful happens.

What exactly are these words of eternal life? (16:51) Consider what they declare. Words of forgiveness. Your sins are forgiven, Mark 2, 5. (17:00) Words of relationship.

You are my friend, John 15, 15. Words of resurrection and hope. (17:10) I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live, (17:18) John 11, 25. Words of peace in a storm. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

(17:28) Not as the world gives, do I give to you, John 14, 27. Words of mission. Go therefore and make disciples (17:41) of all nations, Matthew 28, 19.

And words of eternal security. I give them eternal life and (17:50) they will never perish. No one shall snatch them out of my hand, John 10, 28.

These words do not (17:59) just describe eternal life, they impart it. When we believe and receive them, they plant something (18:06) inside us that death itself cannot destroy. There's a lot to say about eternal life that (18:14) Jesus offers us.

Compare Peter's confessions with the voices shouting in us today. The world offers (18:24) opinions. Jesus offers truth.

The world offers pleasures. Jesus offers sacrifice that leads to (18:33) joy. The world says rely on yourself.

Jesus calls us to surrender to God. The world promises (18:42) self-actualization. Jesus offers transformation into his image.

The world gives us temporary (18:51) happiness. Jesus gives us eternal joy. The world offers comfort and ease.

Jesus offers the cross (19:01) and then the crown. Peter had walked with Jesus long enough to know the difference. (19:08) He had seen demons flee, the dead rise, and reality bow itself at Jesus' command.

(19:16) When the crowd walked away, Peter stayed. Not because it was easy, (19:22) but because he had nowhere better to go. So what does that mean for us today? First expect desertions.

(19:36) Jesus never promised a crowded road. He warned, the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads (19:43) to life, and those who find it are few. Matthew 7, 14.

When people leave, whether family, friends, (19:53) or public figures, grieve it, but do not lose confidence in Christ. Second, examine your own (20:03) heart. If you're secretly wondering whether to walk away, hear Jesus asking you personally, (20:13) do you want to go away as well? Answer honestly, but first ask Peter's question, to whom shall I go? (20:24) There isn't really any options out there.

That's why it's never been hard for me, (20:31) and I'm sure many of you to say. To me, there's zero other options that make sense. Third, cling (20:41) to the words of Jesus.

When doubt, grief, or cultural pressure hits, return to scripture. (20:49) Read it, memorize it, speak it aloud. These are not dead letters, they are spirit and life.

(20:59) Fourth, become a peer to someone else. When you see friends, family, or co-workers drifting away, (21:06) be the one who gently asks, where else are you going to go? (21:12) And then point them back to Jesus, the only one who has words of eternal life. (21:20) Peter's confession wasn't the end of his story.

He later denied Jesus three times. (21:28) He needed restoration by the sea of Galilee, and eventually he died a martyr's death, (21:37) crucified upside down, feeling unwilling to die like his

Lord. And even a failure, (21:44) Peter never went back to the question, to whom shall we go? He had settled it once and for all.

(21:53) Today, the same Lord who asked the twelve that piercing question is asking each one of us, (21:59) do you want to go away as well? If you have never trusted him, hear his calling. (22:08) I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, (22:13) and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

John 6.35. If you had wandered or drifted, (22:23) here is gentle invitation. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, (22:28) and I will give you rest. Matthew 11.28. If your heart has grown cold, hear him say, (22:36) return to me, for I have redeemed you.

Isaiah 44.22. And if like Peter, you've looked (22:46) everywhere else and found nothing better, then stand with him today and declare with your life, (22:53) Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (22:59) Well, this morning, if you want to respond to Jesus, whether that means becoming a Christian, (23:07) recommitting your life to him, or simply needing the prayers of our church, (23:13) now is the time. As we stand and sing, the front is open.

Come forward as the Lord leads you?