

## **TO QUIT ON JESUS IS TO QUIT ON LIFE!**

**Today's Text: Jn 6: 22-71**

### **Extracts:**

**Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" ... *From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* [Jn 6: 60, 66-69]**

*Newt Gingrich, a former Speaker of the US House of Representatives (1995-99), is one of the candidates seeking the Republican Party's nomination for the 2012 Presidential Elections.<sup>1</sup> He prides himself as the candidate committed to running "the substantive solutions-oriented campaign." He would rather concentrate on developing or opposing ideas and issues than attacking his opponents personally. On Thursday, 9 June 2011, his presidential campaign team imploded, following the resignations of his top campaign staff. Among their grievances was the fact that Gingrich went abroad on a two-week vacation with his wife instead of committing more time to winning grassroots support for his candidacy at home.*

*Gingrich's campaign may or may not survive the departure of his top staff but it creates for him either a major setback or an opportunity for renewed impetus. We all face similar situations in different spheres of our lives. For example, you or your spouse may be about to walk away from over twenty years of what looks like a dream marriage. Your most trusted subordinates may resign when you least expect it. Your congregation may leave you with an empty church and huge bills over a seemingly harmless leadership disagreement. In each case, you are left with a void. What has gone wrong? Who is to blame when such break-ups occur? Who will lose the most?*

*In this week's Bible story, many disciples walked away from following Jesus. Concerned, Jesus asked if the twelve apostles also wanted to go. Peter gave Him an answer that speaks to all of us. Let us find out more from this week's challenging study.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story is based on the following source: Chris Cillizza and Karen Tumulty, "Gingrich presidential campaign implodes," *Washington Post*, Thurs., June 9, 2011; [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/gingrich-senior-aides-resign/2011/06/09/AGN77VNH\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/gingrich-senior-aides-resign/2011/06/09/AGN77VNH_blog.html)

## 1. Background: Some disciples walk away from Jesus

When you have been in a relationship for some time, certain expectations become settled issues. Whether at home or school or in the office or ministry, you come to be able to predict how your spouses and wards or bosses, colleagues or subordinates would behave under given circumstances. However, one day, something happens and everything changes. It could be a word or some action that the other party has read differently.

In this week's Bible text, we find Jesus in a heavy doctrinal dispute with the Jews in the presence of His disciples. We do not know for sure how long into His three-year earthly ministry that the event reported there occurred. However, we know that it was not long after He had miraculously fed five thousand men (besides women and children) with five barley loaves and two small fish. After seeing that sign, the people said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." When He perceived that they were about to take Him and forcefully make Him king, He departed alone up into the mountain. Later in the evening, He walked on the water to rejoin His disciples who had gone down to Capernaum on the other side of the sea [**Jn 6: 1-21**].

The following day, the people that had been looking for Jesus found Him in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum [**v. 59**]. They came to Him and asked, "Rabbi, when did You come here?" [**vv. 22-25**]. His response triggered the discussion that ultimately led some of His disciples to walk away from Him. Let us develop the story as follows:

### a) *His insistence that His disciples look beyond material benefits*

When the people milled around Jesus, the Lord knew what they had on their minds. He answered them, saying, "***You seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled***" [**v. 26**]. The day before, He had provided them dinner. The following morning, they showed up for breakfast! The day before, they had tried to make Him king. Why? Take your mind back to the days of judges, when the children of Israel cried on to the prophet Samuel to get them a king. Even when it was against God's plan, they cried out all the more, saying, "We will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" [**1 Sam. 8: 1-20**]. Clearly, ***the people's determination to find Jesus was driven by lust for material benefits*** for themselves (and family, hopefully!).

But that was not the Lord's plan or purpose on earth. He told them not to labour for food that perishes but "for the food that endures to everlasting life" which only the Son of Man could give them [**Jn 6: 27**]. For some of His disciples who were following Him for material benefits, that was not good news!

b) *The disciples' inability to comprehend the concept of the bread of life*

Jesus used the opportunity to introduce His listeners to the concept of the bread of life. They had asked Him for signs to make them believe Him, citing the example of their fathers who ate manna in the desert for forty years in the wilderness on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. Jesus reminded them that manna did not come from Moses but from heaven “for ***the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world***” He added, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” [vv. 30-35].

The people (as well as some of His disciples) became more confused and complained, saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, “I have come down from heaven?” [vv. 41-42]. Here, we see ***familiarity constituting a major obstacle to His listeners' ability to comprehend what He was saying***. They refused to think outside the box for a change. We play the same fool-sometimes! If we cannot understand or explain something, then we cannot accept it. To His listeners, the son of an ordinary carpenter cannot be the bread of life! ***What you know too well can be an obstacle or a threat to your faith***.

c) *Some of His disciples walked away!*

At that stage, many of His disciples had had enough and complained, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?” So, from that time on, many of them left “and walked with Him no more” [vv. 60, 66]. Jesus turned to the twelve apostles and asked them, “Do you also want to go away?” Simon Peter responded, “Lord, to whom shall we go? ***You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God***” [vv. 67-69].

Peter's answer reveals the difference between those who left and those who stayed. Peter is telling us to ***focus on the person of Jesus and His Messianic ministry. Once you believe that, what He tells you must be true***. Jesus was discussing deep spiritual matters that could only be understood by faith, as Peter's words confirm. In the Lord's words, “It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” [v. 63]. From that perspective, here are the key points to take away from the Lord's discourse:

- ***It is the will of God the Father that of all He has given Jesus, He should lose nothing but raise all up at the last day*** [v. 39];

- *Everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life and He will raise him up at the last day [v. 40];*
- *The living bread from heaven that Jesus shall give is His flesh. Whoever eats the flesh of the Son of Man and drinks His blood will have eternal life and He shall abide in him and he in Him [vv. 51-58].*

Did some disciples walk away from Jesus because of those words or they had ulterior motives? To quit on Him on the basis of those promises is to quit on life that leads to salvation. Unfortunately, many believers (knowingly or unknowingly) are drifting away from Jesus. You may know one of them!

## 2. What can make us walk away from Jesus

Without realizing it, some of us may look like good followers of Jesus but have actually drifted far away from Him. Are you one of them? The following factors can make you walk away from Jesus if you are not careful:

### a) *Shallow doctrine*

The disciples in this week's story left Jesus because they found His sayings too hard to understand. Some believers of today are in a similar situation because of their shallow knowledge of the Christian faith. For example, many believers are still wrestling with the doctrine of the Trinity or of Jesus as the only way to God. While some believers are apologetic about the biblical account of the origin of man, scientists are passionate about an unprovable Big Bang Theory! Shallow doctrine is dangerous to your faith!

The word of God says, "He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" [2 Jn 9]. The best source of such doctrine is the *Scripture* (as assembled in the Holy Bible), given by God's inspiration and it is *profitable "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction [and] for instruction in righteousness"* [2 Tim. 3: 16]. Faith comes by hearing the word of God [Rom. 10: 17]. Therefore, the more you study the Bible and practise what it says, the stronger your faith. As new born babes in faith, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby [1 Pet. 2: 2]. *However, "everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe, but solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* [Heb. 5: 13-14].

### b) *Sectarianism*

There may be billions of believers throughout the world but they worship in thousands of denominations and churches. Each may claim superiority over others and emphasize different rituals. Some even condemn others

and warn their members not to fellowship with believers from other denominations. In the end, you may wonder whether people are in the church to follow Christ or their pastor's agenda.

Such sectarianism was already in the early church. For example, writing to the Corinthian church, Apostle Paul felt deep pain to learn of contentions among believers, with each one saying, "I am of Paul" or "I am of Apollos" or "I am of Cephas" or "I am of Christ." Paul questioned, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" [1 Cor. 1: 10-13]. Even in the time of Jesus on earth, one of His disciples, John, came to Him and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us." Jesus replied, "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side" [Lk 9: 49-50].

Therefore, be careful that your church leaders are not indirectly making you walk away from Jesus. ***The church of Christ is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father [Eph. 4: 4-6].***

c) *Trials and tribulations*

Persecution has become more widespread than ever before because it is now both open and subtle. For example, in predominantly Muslim societies, it is life-threatening for Christians to publicly profess their faith in Jesus. Those who do not want to be martyrs may find themselves drifting into practices that deny Christ, such as openly renouncing Jesus for economic advantages. In the name of ecumenism, they may worship in mosques or temples one day and go to the church the following day. The only problem with such a drift is that you cannot serve God and mammon at the same time [Matt. 6: 24].

There are subtle forms of persecution that may also make believers drift away from Jesus. For example, in Western societies, sin (such as abortion and same-sex marriage) has been legalized as a civil right. Even if you do not believe in or practise it, you cannot openly condemn it. In fact, you may be forced by political expediency to cast your votes in favour of such practices. In public prayers, you may find yourself undermining the person and divinity of Jesus in order to be politically correct. So, without realizing it, you may find yourself walking away from Jesus! Well, you have to choose this day which God you want to serve [Josh. 24: 15].

d) *Cares of this world*

Many of us no longer have time for themselves, not to talk of God! It may not be of their own making. For example, some people may have to do

two or more jobs to barely survive. Some people are self-employed and cannot hire others to help them because of the high wage rates. Some people study and work at the same time. Some pastors are so busy “doing God’s work” that they have no time to pray or communicate with God. Some people who are already rich are so involved in the pursuit of more material wealth that they have no time for God or Jesus.

Sooner than later, cares of this world could make you drift away from your relationship with Jesus. He has said, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” [Lk 9: 62]. The Lord will keep in perfect peace the person whose mind is stayed on Him because he trusts in Him [Is. 26: 3].

Clearly, *complacency is the greatest threat to your walk with Jesus. The day you think you know enough to take Him for granted is the day He will allow Satan to shake you out of it* [Lk 22: 31-34]. Therefore, watch and pray!

### **3. Conclusion: You have everything to lose if you walk away!**

Multitudes and disciples followed Jesus while He walked this earth. He fed thousands miraculously and healed several hundred others of every kind of diseases. Yet, at the time of His ascension into heaven, only about 172 disciples were gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem [Acts 1: 15]. The rest had walked away!

The *work of God* is that you believe in Him whom He sent, that is, Jesus the Christ [Jn 6: 29]. The *will of God* is that no one of all that He has given to Jesus be lost but instead should have everlasting life [vv. 39-40]. If you walk away from Him, you have everything to lose – in hell. But if you walk with Him, that is, remain faithful to Him until the end, you are assured of eternity with Him in heaven.

The tortoise says, “It is a good thing that I walk slowly because I could be going in the wrong direction!” Perhaps you have not yet gone too far. Come back!

To quit on Jesus is to quit on eternal life!