

True and False Disciples, Part 1

Scripture: John 6:16-21

Code: 43-33

And speaking of the Strange Fire Conference, one of the constant criticism that comes against the speakers and against me, and it has for many, many, many years, is the comments that were repeatedly made about the majority of the people in that Movement that we know as the Charismatic Movement, not being true believers, not being true Christians. All the evidences and indicators would say that they fall short of understanding and believing the true gospel. We stand by that, that is a valid criticism of the Movement that it confuses people about the issue of true salvation. And that is the most disastrous thing that anybody can do is to cause people for any moment to think they might be true followers of Jesus Christ when the truth is they're not. That should never be the stock and trade of anyone who calls himself a minister. We must go back to the words of Jesus and the first sermon I ever preached at Grace Church way back in February of 1969, Matthew 7, "Many will say unto Me, 'Lord, Lord, we cast out demons in Your name, we prophesied in Your name. We did many wonderful deeds in Your name.'" To whom He replies, "Depart from Me, I never knew you, you workers of iniquity."

So, from the beginning of ministry anywhere, whether it's here or anywhere else, we have to take into account that it's critical for people to do a heart examination, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:5, to see if you're in the faith, because clearly our Lord made an issue out of this. There are people who attach themselves to Jesus and to the gospel to one degree or another, to Christianity, to the church, and then defect, desert. They do not last, they do not persevere. It was Jesus Himself who said that whoever perseveres to the end, Mark 13:13, shall be saved. There are plenty of defectors, that's obvious to all of us, and we've all had that experience. Those of us who have been Christians for any length of time, we know about people who made a profession of faith in Christ and then walked away from the gospel and walked away from the church, and walked away from any interest in Christ or the Word of God. We understand that. A defector is a traitor and that's a strong word. A defector is an apostate, and that's even a stronger word.

But all of us have had people like that in our lives. I've known many people like that in whom I've invested an awful lot of personal time and effort, and maybe thought the best about them only to find out that they were not real followers of Jesus Christ. The Apostles certainly experienced that, the blessed Apostle Paul, so faithful, so sacrificial, and so beloved, and really the spiritual father of so many in the Gentile world during the time of the founding of the church, looked back over his life in 2 Timothy and said, "All who are in Asia have forsaken me," and then in the fourth chapter, "Demas has forsaken me, yet at my first defense no one stood by me." He recognized defectors. He recognized that there would be traitors in the church. And we all understand that. It gets painful when it happens in our own circle of friends, when we know people who once professed an interest in Christ and no longer do that, it gets really painful when it turns out to be children in our families that walk away from Christ. Is equally painful when it's a spouse who once was involved in the church and professed an interest in Christ and no longer does. We feel the pain of that. But it's a reality and that's why 1 John 2:19 is in the Bible, "They went out from us because they were not of us," it says. "If they had been of us, they would have continued with us but they went out from us that I might be made manifest they never were of us." There will be defectors. We don't want to aid

and abet that. We don't want to make it comfortable for hypocrites. We don't want to make it easy for false followers of Jesus Christ. We want to make sure we're crystal-clear about a true Christian and a false Christian, a true disciple, and a false disciple.

The Bible makes a huge issue out of spiritual defection, about having the revelation of God, understanding the revelation of God, and then turning your back and walking away from it. And it's not just the New Testament. That kind of issue is all over the Old Testament. In fact, that was painfully the agony of the prophets who were crying out to unfaithful Israel, and unfaithful Judah repeatedly saying to them, "You have back slidden," as Jeremiah puts it, or as Isaiah puts it, "You have forsaken the Lord your God, you have walked away." That is a repeated issue in the Old Testament to which the prophets spoke. In fact, it wasn't just Israel. For example, in Isaiah 16:9, God says to Moab, "I will water you with My tears, My heart will sound like a harp." That is God weeping over the dis-interest of Moab in the truth concerning him to which they had been exposed. The sadness of God is played out in the melancholy plucking of a harp and God weeps through Isaiah over Moab and Moab's defection.

Further in Isaiah 22, a little section in verses 12 to 14 where again God is weeping through the prophet. And it says, "The Lord God calls for weeping and mourning and baldness and sackcloth which were physical symbols of a broken heart." It isn't just the theology of defection, it's the pain of defection that grips God. It's not just the defection itself for its own sake, it's the pain that God feels over that defection.

In Isaiah 59:13, the people are indicted by the prophet because they have departed from our God...departed from our God." That is the God who belongs to us, the God who has revealed Himself to us, the God we know about. And Jeremiah perhaps leads in providing for us the insight into this kind of defection, Jeremiah who spoke the Word of God repeatedly to Judah. He says in chapter 2 verse 13, this is God speaking through the prophet, "For My people have committed two evils, they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hue for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." Substituting something for God, the very God they know, the very God who has revealed Himself to them repeatedly.

Later in that chapter in verse 19, "Your own wickedness will correct you. Your apostasies will reprove you. Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord, your God. And the dread of Me, or the worship or fear of Me is not in you, declares the Lord God of hosts, for long ago I broke your yoke and tore off your bonds, freed you from bondage in Egypt, but you said, 'I will not serve, for on every high hill and under every green tree, you have lain down as a harlot.'" That refers to creating idols in groves and worshiping those idols, a kind of spiritual adultery, spiritual harlotry. "And though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, the stain of your iniquity is before Me, declares the Lord God."

Again, the dire circumstances and results pronounced upon a people who defect from the God who has revealed Himself to them. In chapter 3 verse 20, the prophet writes, "The words of God surely as a woman treacherously departs from her lover, so...or her companion, her husband...so you have dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord. A voice is heard on the bare heights, the weeping and the supplications of the sons of Israel because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the Lord their God."

The agony of all of this reaches the heart of God Himself. And His tears are laid out in the book of

Jeremiah. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. Chapter 9 verse 18, “Let them make haste and take up a wailing for us that our eyes may shed tears and our eyelids flow with water, for a voice of wailing is heard from Zion. How are we ruined?” Again you see the tears of God in Jeremiah 14, again in Jeremiah 31, and even in Lamentations, that wonderful little book by Jeremiah, again you see how God weeps over this condition. Lamentations 2:11, “My eyes fail because of tears. My spirit is greatly troubled. My heart is poured out on the earth because of the destruction of the daughter of My people when little ones and infants faint in the streets of the city.” It comes all the way down to the destruction of the little ones when a people defects from God.

And when you see the tears of God over spiritual defection and apostasy and rebellion, you would expect to see that in the case of God incarnate, and indeed you do. When you come into the New Testament, for example, perhaps one of the most familiar is in Luke 19 where we come across the tears of Jesus, Luke 19 verse 41, He approaches Jerusalem, it says, “He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace...if you only knew what you had rejected.’” Better, “Whom you had rejected.” And I want to lay that down in that fashion because I want you to understand that spiritual defection, spiritual apostasy, false discipleship breaks the heart of God and the heart of Christ.

Now I believe one of the most pathetic, one of the most sorrowful, one of the most profoundly touching texts in Scripture on this subject is John 6. So you can go to John 6, that’s where we are in our study of the gospel of John. The pathos in this chapter really is overwhelming. Hopefully you can grow to grasp it in some way, not only intellectually, but even emotionally. The sorrow is so great as you see our Lord Jesus leaning hard all through this chapter on divine sovereignty. You know, we say that to people all the time, that when you can’t understand life, and you can’t understand circumstance, you don’t know why things have gone the way they’ve gone, when our children deeply disappoint you, or your grandchildren disappoint you, or troubles come your way, or disease or the threat of death, or disappointment, you lean hard on the sovereignty of God, right? I mean, we go back to the confidences that God is sovereign, God overrules everything, God is in charge, nothing is outside His purpose and His will. Here in John 6 we find Jesus Himself leaning hard on the sovereignty of God.

Remember now, while fully God He is fully man. And while fully man, He is tempted at all points like as we are, and if God weeps over spiritual defection, Jesus does as well. And it pains Him profoundly and even He in His incarnation leans on the sovereignty of God to maintain His composure as this thing begins to become clear. And what is it that’s the issue here? The issue here is spiritual defection, spiritual apostasy. It’s noted at the end of the chapter, verse 66, “As a result of this, many of his disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.” And then that sad, melancholy statement of verse 67, “Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘You do not want to go away also, do you?’”

It’s really an agonizing, painful experience for our Lord. So perfect, so compassionate, so powerful, fully God, gracious, merciful, kind, this chapter starts out with Him spending the day healing like every day. And then this massive feeding of twenty to twenty-five thousand people, which demonstrates compassion and power. And it ends in chapter 7 verse 1 with the Jews seeking to kill Him, and just before that, the chapter itself ends with the defection of many of His followers. This is a heart-breaking chapter. It’s a crushing chapter.

At the same time, it leads us to understand that there are going to be many false followers of Jesus.

Look, I'm only a representative of Jesus and can't come close to Him in any sense. You would expect false followers of me or any other pastor. You might expect false followers of you in your ministry to people. But Jesus? Hard to imagine, after having been exposed to His person and His power.

But this is about defective disciples. That's what this chapter's about. Now look, this is 71 verses, that's a long chapter. In a perfect world, I would start now, go through the entire chapter and finish at nine tonight. That would be in a perfect world. Then you would have this experience on one occasion in one day, in one place. It would be powerful. I can't do that. And I could get lost in the details of this chapter because there are many aspects to it. But I think the way to protect against getting lost in the details and somehow simulate the idea that you're getting the big picture, even though we can't go through it all at once, is to tell you this. There's one theme here. And if you can get the one theme that encapsulates the chapter, then it will hold together for you, even though it's strung out over a few weeks. The theme is this. The Characteristics of False Discipleship. This chapter is here to show us the difference between a true and false follower of Jesus. This is a huge issue. That's why there's 71 verses given to this. This is not a minor detail. And if I'm going to be criticized for anything, I would welcome the criticism that I fear that many people who profess Christ don't know Him, that I'm sure that the way is narrow and few there be that find it, and a false way is broad and many there be that go on that road. I will take the criticism that many will say, "Lord, Lord," and Jesus will say, "I don't know you, Never have." That's a welcomed criticism.

It's foolish just to assume that anybody who talks about Christ is a true follower, or anyone who attaches to Him in some way is a true follower. Verse 66 introduces us to just a simple concept. It is possible to be a disciple who walks away from Jesus. That's the word "disciple." Many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. Finally, they left. That's a clear indication that disciple is a generic word. It's the word *mathetes* in Greek, it means a student, a learner. Which doesn't tell you anything about the person other than that they're there, absorbing the experience. Jesus had many followers. Rabbis did, rabbis moved around the countryside, walked and talked and had their little flock following them around, listening to their words. That's pretty common in the ancient world. But nobody ever had the massive crowds that Jesus had. But still you could be a disciple and it could be reality, it could be true, you really were a follower of Christ and a believer in Christ. But it also could mean nothing more than that you were interested superficially. That you were uncommitted, that you were less than genuine. A disciple could be an unsaved person, a false follower of Jesus. A disciple could be stony ground where there's a little interest and what appears to be a little life, but it withers and dies, or weedy soil where there's some indication of response, but it too withers and dies.

This chapter is about disciples, the real and the false. And you've got to start to take this chapter in on the personal level, asking if this is me, where do I fit, before you push it off to somebody else. So what we're going to learn as we move through this chapter is this overarching reality of what characterizes false disciples. And again, this has always been of concern to me and I've told you that before, because I grew up with people in churches when I was a kid who walked away and in my school years, people I knew very well who walked away and turned away from Christ. And I've seen it all the years of pastoral ministry here. This is reality...this is reality.

So what is the...what is the characteristic that we should look for in false disciples to help us so we can help those people understand the deception they're in. We're going to find that out here. As we work through this chapter, we're just going to see one principle after another unfold. And that's going

to be the cord that ties it all together. You could get lot in every little vignette, every little story, every little account because there are many of them going on. And then there's this massive message Jesus gives on the bread of life that is legendary. But even that fits in to the overarching picture of true and false discipleship.

Let's begin then at the beginning. First of all, false disciples are attracted by the crowd. They are attracted by the crowd. I would like to think that you're at Grace Church because you're attracted by the worship. I would like to think you're at Grace Church because you're attracted by the Word of God. You're attracted by the teaching and preaching of the Word of God. You're attracted by the love of believers. The crowd is just here because there are lots of you attracted by the Word of God, attracted by life in the Holy Spirit, attracted by the love of the people of God, and that's why you're here and a crowd results. But you're not attracted by the crowd. In fact, some of you would like to have less people here, it would be more convenient for you.

But false disciples are attracted by the crowd. Well that means that some will show up here, this is where the first contact of the false disciple begins to become apparent. And by the way, they might be indistinguishable from genuine disciple. Now we see that as the chapter begins. So let's go back to where we were last week.

"After these things," that is the incidents in chapter 5, which happened at least six or seven months earlier, maybe as much as a year earlier, if the feast mentioned in the beginning of 5 is a previous Passover because this is also a Passover, verse 4, which would make it a year later. If the chapter 5 feast was the Feast of Tabernacles, it would be six or seven months earlier. So time has passed and in the interval between 5 and 6, you have the Galilean ministry going on and the details of that ministry are laid out in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And by the way, if you get a copy of *One Perfect Life*, you can see the chronology of all of that. "So Jesus, after these things, went away," this is the end of His Galilean ministry. This is the wrap-up, the final exclamation point on the Galilean ministry. "He went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee," or as it is called Tiberias, it had become Tiberias after Caesar Tiberias by the time John wrote late in the first century. "A large crowd followed Him," just grab that. He is accumulating massive crowds of thousands, upon thousands of people and in this case, twenty-to twenty-five thousand would not be an exaggeration. They are following Him. And crowds attract crowds. The widespread healings, the demonic deliverances of Christ have led to massive popularity. There are massive crowds of people. We even read in some accounts that they were stepping on each other, crushing together. Jesus is the most popular person in Galilee, He's the most popular person in Israel. He's the most popular person that has ever lived in that place. He is the event of their lifetimes. Nobody in their family ever knew a miracle worker, nobody ever saw a miracle. None of their grandparents ever saw a miracle. Generations had gone by and no one had seen a miracle. And now this man is doing them on a daily basis. His popularity draws massive crowds of people.

And they're there because the crowd is there. You know how that works. Sometimes you're walking along, you see a small crowd and you wonder what's going on, so you add yourself to the crowd and you become the next layer, then the next layer, and the next layer, and the next layer and eventually you kind of figure out what's going on. It started this thing with the first folks that gathered around. Well it's a pretty powerful kind of thing, a mob kind of mentality and when something dramatic is going on, when demons are being chased out and people are being healed, the crowd swells. It's a big dangerous, I might say, when Jesus gets that popular. It's a big dangerous when somebody quote/unquote who represents Jesus gets that popular and starts drawing crowds, drawing crowds

on the pretense of miracles, on the pretense of supernatural power, or on the pretense of offering help, or on any...by any other means.

Crowds attract crowds. People talk about the mega churches and they get one mega church and pretty soon one mega church isn't enough because what's going on there? What's getting all the crowd, the big crowd there? So we've got to have a satellite over here and a TV over here, and a satellite here, and a satellite there, and we start programming flat screen people all over the place. And what draws those people? What draws those people is the same thing that drew you to the crowd when you didn't know what was going on. There's got to be some energy there, there's got to be something going on there. That is what initially attracts false followers. It may attract true followers. People may get converted, but it's a guarantee to attract false followers.

Maybe say it another way. Where you have a church of 75 people in a little building, people who pray together and love the Lord and worship, and sing hymns and somebody gets up and teaches the Word of God, they're not going to draw that crowd. They're not going to draw that crowd because the only thing that would draw them would be the love of the Lord, the love of the Word, and the love of God's people. But that's not what they're interested in.

So there's a very sort of simple beginning point for false discipleship and that is the popular cause...the popular cause, whatever is popular. So you worry when some preacher gets popular. When he becomes some kind of rock star. When he gets way beyond who he really is and there's an image created about him, because this draws false followers to the crowd, to the energy of the crowd, the expectation of the crowd, the enthusiasm of the crowd, the vitality of the crowd, the electricity of the crowd, it all draws.

Secondly, false followers are fascinated by the supernatural...fascinated by the supernatural. You could draw a crowd at a football game, that's not supernatural. But if you start saying "God is here, God will change your life, this is a supernatural event. God may change you physically, He may heal you, you may see a miracle, He may change your life, He may change your career, He may change your economics. You may get a social miracle. You may get an economic miracle. You...you just don't know, this is a supernatural event." That's very attractive for people who are kind of caught in the mundane. And that, of course, happened this day in a huge way because you remember the story, Jesus creates food, remember. He just created food out of His hands. And we went through that, so I'm not going to go back through it again, but He took two little barley crackers and a couple of pickled fish, cause that was all that was available. He told the disciples, "Go find what you can find," and remember I told you this is the only miracle that Jesus did that is in all four gospels? Massive miracle in which all the people participated because they were there, they received the food they ate. The power display is beyond imagination. It's just beyond imagination.

I'm not much of a scientist but fortunately I have people around here that are. I want to thank Kevin Stolp(?) who is science engineering and who got together with a professor of engineering, Ph.D. at Dort(?) College and came up with a very interesting insight to this.

How much power would it take to create that kind of food? Let's assume a half a pound for everybody because they ate as much as they wanted and it was the best thing they had ever eaten, so they probably ate a half a pound. That's pretty reasonable. So if you were going to create a half a pound of food for twenty to twenty-five thousand people, how much energy would it take to turn that into mass, right? $E=MC^2$ squared, energy is mass times the speed of light square. That's Einstein's

famous equation. So how much would it take?

So they did a scientific study. The formula $E=MC^2$ squared, energy equals mass times the speed of light squared, you're turning energy into mass, how much energy would it take to create this much mass? The formula works out this way, all the electrical power on earth running at a hundred percent output, a hundred percent of the time for four years. That's how much energy it would take to create that meal.

You think that's a lot of energy? That's a lot of energy. Listen to this, this is nothing for Jesus. Try this, the sun and He created the sun, without Him was not anything made that was made, right? The sun consumes approximately six hundred million tons of matter per second, generating enough energy in one second to supply all the U.S. current energy needs for thirteen billion years in one second. That's some power.

I mean, they didn't know the science of that and you probably didn't know it either, but this is beyond comprehension compared to what He has the power to do in just one star, the sun...staggering.

Well they were fascinated by the miracles. That's why they were there. It says repeatedly throughout the New Testament, again and again, and again and again, they were drawn by the signs and the wonders. We went through that last time, remember? They were drawn by the miracles that He did. They followed Him because of the miracles, fascinated by the miracles. Matthew 4 talks about it. Matthew 12, Matthew 14, Matthew 15, Mark and Luke talk about it, and, of course, it's even here in the gospel of John. And you see it show up in John chapter 2 where many people believed on His name because they saw the signs that He did and then Nicodemus comes and says, "We know You're sent from God because nobody can do what You do unless God is with him." And there are many who follow Christ for the supernatural aspect of it.

Maybe they want another level of life. I think that's a huge reality. I mean, life is painfully mundane, going nowhere, relationships are tough, families are a mess, disappointments abound. Somebody comes along in the name of Jesus, offers health, wealth, prosperity, happiness, satisfaction, fulfillment. You can even speak your own world into existence. They don't have to do a healing miracle, just hang that carrot out is going to attract a crowd, even though none of it is true.

You know, it was Simon Magus in the eighth chapter of Acts who tried to buy that power, didn't he? He tried to buy that power. He tried to literally take money and buy the power, the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. And Peter said, "Your money perish with you." People want to buy into the supernatural, there's no question about that, absolutely no question. That's why...that's why religion flourishes the way it does all over the planet and it will continue to flourish. With the exception of a few atheists, the world is inveterately religious because people are desperate to be elevated above the mundane. That's a perfect environment to attract false disciples, drawn by the crowd, to start with, and then fascinated with the thought of supernatural power, maybe in a healing sense, maybe in a social sense, maybe in an economic sense, whatever.

And that leads to a third characteristic of these disciples who are false, they think only of earthly benefits...they think only of earthly benefits. You know, in verse 14 what happened, the people said, "This is truly the prophet who was to come into the world," that's from Deuteronomy 18. The prophet that Moses said would come would be like Moses, only greater, the messianic prophecy He's here,

this is the prophet who is to come into the world. So wow, that's great...we say that's great, they now are beginning to connect Jesus with Old Testament messianic prophecy, they're beginning to see Jesus as their Messiah. This is great. And what's He been talking to them about all day? What was He telling them all day? He was preaching what? According to the other gospel writers, preaching the Kingdom, preaching the Kingdom. What's the Kingdom? Well I'll tell you what it's not, according to John 18:36 and 37...My Kingdom is not...what?...of this world." Well when He was preaching the Kingdom, He wasn't talking about temporal life. He wasn't talking about the here and now. He wasn't talking about the land under their feet and the political issues that they were facing. That was not what He was talking about. When He was talking about the Kingdom, He's talking about the eternal Kingdom of God over which God rules in the lives of those who are redeemed, those who repent and believe and are saved. So He had been all day long since early in the day, when the little bit of rest that He had with His disciples was broken up in the hill, He came down, the crowd comes to Him, they meet and He spends the rest of the day doing what? He spends the rest of the day healing their diseases and their illnesses and teaching them the Kingdom principles, the principles of salvation. So they come to this conclusion because of the miracles, this is the prophet who is to come and what do they want to do? And Jesus reads their minds, by the way, in verse 15, which is no problem for Him. John 2, "He knew what was in man, nobody needed to tell Him anything." He reads their minds, they are collectively intending to come and take Him by force to make Him their savior. Is that right?

No...no. It doesn't say they fell down and honored Him. They repented and believed in Him. No, they wanted to make Him a King because all they could think about was the earthly benefits to make Him a King. They had one thing in mind, we want our independence from Rome, we want the Romans out of here. And we want food. This is really good food and we would like it all the time. And they knew this kind of power could be repeated. In fact, they wanted it so strongly, they wanted to take Him by force. Usually someone is kidnapped to be hauled off to a cell. They wanted to kidnap Jesus to make Him a King. I mean, there had never been anyone like Him...never. Their only response, the only response possible, really, was we can't let this guy out of our hands. He can create the perfect living conditions, Wow! This kind of power, He feeds us all the time, vanquishes all our enemies, heals all our diseases, chases the demons away.

But, you see, this is the characteristic of false disciples. They think only of earthly benefits. And if that's what you offer, you play into their hands. If that's what the preacher talks about, that Jesus wants to give you everything you want in this life, you're literally going to amass false followers.

They're already drawn by the supernatural. They're already attracted by the crowd. That's why when you turn on your TV you say, "How does that guy get that many people there? How does he fill that thing?" You've got to understand, the crowd draws a crowd. The promise of the supernatural draws a crowd. And then the desire for earthly, temporal satisfaction and fulfillment adds power to the attraction.

They just wanted Jesus to give them what they want...give them what they wanted. But no one really uses God for his own ends. It reminds me of 1 Samuel 4 where the children of Israel were confronted by the Philistines and they were afraid that the Philistines were going to defeat them. And they got together and said, "What are we going to do?" And somebody said, "Well the Ark of God is at Shiloh, go get the Ark of God, the little box with the cherubim, that was the symbol of the presence of God, we need God." They had become so twisted in their thinking that they were almost worshipping God as if He was an idol, the box. So though they had been unfaithful to God all along, and were deserving of the punishment that God would inflict on them through the Philistines, they

thought the cure was to go get God. So they sent some people to Shiloh to bring the box, they brought the box, the Philistines heard that God the box had arrived and they panicked because they knew the story of what had happened in Egypt when God delivered them. And they went to battle anyway and you know what happened. It says in Samuel 4:10, "Israel was defeated." Thirty thousand soldiers massacred. You don't use God. You don't use God. But that's what's so much offered to people today. God is your genie, He'll show up and fix everything. That's a formula for attracting false disciples.

And that gets us to the text where we're supposed to be this morning. So, but you've enjoyed the trip, haven't you? Okay. So we get to verses 16 to 21 and there's a fourth characteristic and this is kind of coming in the backside of this, the false disciple has no desire for worship. A false disciple has no desire for worship. This comes out in this little story which is really amazing. And by the way, to get the whole story, you need Mark's account, Mark 6, Matthew's account, Matthew 14. But here's what John says. "Evening came," this would be in the twilight, "His disciples went down to the sea." Why? Jesus sent them there, right?

Remember I told you last week He sent them away. He went into a mountain alone. He sent His disciples away. They went back, it's literally THE boat, the boat that they had come in belonged to one of them probably, seven of them, at least, or maybe even of them were fishermen on that lake, very familiar with it. So they had the boat, He sends them away. Disperses the crowd, sends the disciples down to the sea, or down to the lake, to get into the boat and they're supposed to, verse 17, start to cross the sea to Capernaum. Actually the other writers tell us they were going a little ways to Bethsaida, which was just on the north shore. They'd go a little ways to Bethsaida and wait there for a little while. They stayed there for a little while, probably thinking Jesus is going to come, He's going to come, maybe He's going to walk here and meet us here, we'll get in the boat and go to Capernaum which was on the northwest shore across the lake. Jesus doesn't come. He doesn't come.

So they wait for a while there, according to Mark 6. And then they leave. They start to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already now become dark. And Jesus said, "Not yet, come to them, they've been waiting. And then the sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing."

That sea, that lake is about 700 feet below sea level and it's ringed on three sides by mountains that rise several thousand feet into the air. It could be like a whirlpool. When winds that we would be familiar to us like Santa Ana winds is Sorroco(?) winds from the east come pouring down those mountains, hitting that cool water turns it into a caldron. Winds from the north, the cedars of Lebanon rise many thousands of feet into the north, cold winds come down. The collision of winds in the ravines and the valleys and the crevices and the deep and narrow gorges between those hills literally turned that thing into a boiling pot. And I've been on, Patricia and I have been on it when it was nothing but whitecaps everywhere. It can be very dangerous and it was dangerous at this point. And remember now, as many as seven of these guys fished that lake as a routine daily. They're panicked. They're afraid. This isn't the first time this has happened. They had already had this experience once before in Galilee and the waves were so bad they were crashing over the boat and Jesus was sleeping, remember that? And He got up and stilled the storm and stilled the wind and stilled the water.

And what did they say? They said, "What kind of person is this? What kind of man is this that even the winds and the waves obey His voice?" They're still in process that time, that's recorded in

Matthew 8, they're still in process, who is this? Who is this? Who is this?

So here they come again and the familiar storm starts. Then they had rode about three or four miles. You say, "That's pretty good." No, it's not because it's fourth watch of the night, Matthew says. That's three to six A.M. They've been doing this since dark. They have been going all night and they have made no progress. They've only gone three or four miles in the fourth watch of the night. You can read more about it in Mark's gospel as well.

They're dominated by fear. They're terrified that they're not going to survive. They had said that back in Matthew 8. "Don't You care that we perish?" in that previous storm. But just to give you the familiar things that John doesn't record, just quickly, Matthew 14...Matthew 14, verse 24. "But the boat was already a long distance from the land." It had gotten pushed out into the middle of the lake. When they would normally have wanted probably to stay pretty close to the shore. Battered by the waves, the wind was contrary and the fourth watch of the night, that's 3 to 6 A. M., He came to them walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified and said, "It's a ghost," and they screamed in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid."

"Peter said to Him, 'Lord, if it's You, command me to come to You on the water.'" I don't know why Peter did that or asked that. If he was just doing it as a test, it was pretty stupid because if it had been a ghost, but anyway, he did it. He got out of the boat and maybe the word "come" was a familiar enough voice. "He got out of the boat and walked on the water, came toward Jesus." I think he thought he was going to drown anyway and the only hope he had was to trust in what he saw and what he heard when he heard the voice of Jesus. He got out there, and seeing the wind, he became frightened. And beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." So he does know who it is.

"Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand, took hold of him, said to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got in the boat, the wind stopped." Notice the difference. Last time this happened they said, "What manner of man is this?" This time, "Those who were in the boat did...what?...worshiped Him. And they said, 'You're certainly God's Son.'"

Now that's true discipleship...true discipleship. Worship. Go back to John's gospel. So, verse 21, "They willingly received Him into the boat." Now you've got to understand, they've just seen...they've just seen an explosion of miracles. Miracle number one, they're still alive. Miracle number two, Jesus walking on water. Miracle number three, Peter walking on water. Miracle number four, Peter sinks and he's pulled back up to walk on water.

The next miracle is Jesus stops the wind. The next miracle is Jesus stops the water. And the next miracle, the boat is at the land to which they were going. What? The boat went from wherever it was, whist, to the dock at Capernaum. I mean, this is pretty staggering stuff. This is a monumental moment for them because they now know who they're dealing with, this is the Son of God. He's in control of nature. He's in control of His creation. This is what sets the true disciples apart from the false. It was all about worship. It was all about declaring Him to be the Son of God and bowing down in worship to Him. This was a...this was a massively important moment in their lives.

What is it about false followers? Oh, they're drawn by the crowd, fascinated by the supernatural, interested only in earthly benefits and really have no desire for worship, real worship, bowing down

and proclaiming Jesus.

Now that's just a few starting points that mark a false disciple, and we'll pick up some more next time.

Father, we thank You again, as always we do, for the bread of Your Word. We don't live by bread alone, physical bread, but by every word that proceeds out of Your mouth and is inscripturated in the Bible. We live by this, we feed on it, we thank You for it. Every time we come together and open Your Word, it's as if You've prepared a feast for us, to feed our hungry souls. Thank You for what is revealed here about Your glory, Your person, Your power and the very important implications of all of that that we understand that what You're looking for is true worshipers...true worshipers who bow down, who prostrate themselves, that's what the word means, who go low before You in worship, submission, sacrifice and obedience as Lord and God. That's a true disciple.

We would know that true disciples are worshipers of Jesus Christ. False disciples are only interested in themselves. We pray that You'll reveal the true condition of every heart that no one would be deceived.

Lord, again, it's so wonderful to be together, and to celebrate the coming of Christ for this Christmas season. Fill our hearts with joy in faith, joy in believing as the Scripture says. Make this a blessed season for us. Lord, wash our hearts out in this season and renew in us a right spirit, as Scripture says. May this be a sanctifying season and not a corrupting season as it can become so busy, so self-centered, as it can be so wasted. May we find that we invest in this season all that is good and noble and lofty and right and righteous for Your honor and Your glory, and give us opportunity to proclaim the glories of the One whose birth we celebrate. We pray in His name.

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