

## CANADIAN PULPIT.

No. 65.

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TEXT:—"Thou Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'"—John vi. 68.



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Jesus after thirty years of communion with His own heart and with God broke the silence and began His ministry of teaching in the synagogues of the places of His abode—Capernaum and Nazareth. He very soon became prominent and popular. Then He extended His work to other villages and cities. Very shortly the synagogues were not sufficient and He took Himself to the streets, the hill-side and the broad seashore.

The ordinary Sabbath services did not suffice to meet the opportunities that came to Him of preaching the Kingdom nor the demands made upon Him, and it is likely that He might be found teaching seven days in the week. His teachings fascinated some of

all classes. The self-sufficient Pharisee and the critical, caviling Scribe sat at His feet. The common people heard Him gladly. The out-cast "publicans and sinners," for whom none other cared, and upon whom temple and synagogue had little hold, drew near with deep interest "to hear Him." Several causes contributed to this popularity. I

There were in that age, as in all ages, those who in the deep recesses of the heart desired authoritative answers to the deep questions which demanded solution. When these burdened souls heard Him they realized that He had the very messages they needed. To their hungering spirits He held up an overflowing vessel of the pure milk of the Word, instead of "an empty Cogie to lick" as their own accredited teachers were wont to do. No wonder they followed and thronged Him.

There were others, not a few, with carnal notions of the Messiah and His Kingdom. They, too, were attracted by Him. The uniqueness of His teachings, His claims, and His works of wonder and power raised their hopes. They thought He would soon set up His Kingdom and reign. So they followed Him wishing, no doubt, to be near the King and on good terms with Him when He would sit on the throne and wield the sceptre of David.

Many were swayed for a time by the charm, the sublimity, the originality and the authority of His teaching, and they swelled the numbers who gave attendance upon His ministry. Thus He was followed by multitudes, surrounded by thronging crowds whose desire to hear Him and to receive some benefit to body or soul left Him at times no leisure to eat. They came to Him from every quarter. A large number of these were so drawn to Him that they acknowledged themselves His "disciples."

But this flowing wave of popularity was followed by an ebb of desertion. As the time went by the conviction was forced upon many who called themselves "disciples" that the Kingdom which He proposed to establish was not the Kingdom of their desire; that to be subjects of His Kingdom meant cross-bearing, self-denial, toil and perhaps death instead of lucrative offices or positions of honor at His right-hand. As the mind and spirit and aim of Him whom they expected to be proclaimed King became more apparent; as the glory of the earthly kingdom of their hopes faded away; and as the spiritual nature of the Kingdom which He meant dawned more and more upon them they began to be offended in Him. The more exalted and spiritual His teaching, the more they doubted the wisdom of their own course in following Him. They regretted having owned themselves disciples of One whose spirit and aims were so different from what they expected and desired. The smouldering discontent found vent in open desertion. So it is written: "Many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him." He held out "the Bread of Life" yea eternal life itself to them; they wanted apples of Sodom and because they could not get their desire they deserted Him. What sadness would fill the compassionate heart of Him who wept such tears over Jerusalem as He saw the retreating figures of the "many" who once walked with Him. It was to Him a sad hour, to them it was a perilous, if not even a fatal, hour.

Turning from the larger to the smaller circle of His disciples He said with great sadness and sorrow: "Will ye also go away?" To this question Peter, speaking for his fellow-disciples as well as

for himself, said, in the words of our text: "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Turning our attention to these words let us note

I. *That it is here implied that in the matter of religion men need a guide and will go to some one.*

Man is a religious being, and as such he needs and seeks light on many important questions. He feels His own dependence and his insufficiency. Hence he will go to some guide; and the strange thing is that many will commit themselves, to the guidance of those who are no more fit or competent than themselves.

This is fully verified by the history of our race. Look almost where we will and we shall find men by nations, or tribes or narrower divisions following the lead of some one—acknowledging some guide in religion.

About 3000 years ago Zoroaster, moved probably by seeing the groping of the people of his time after truth, and touched with their inarticulate cry for guidance, founded that system of Dualism, and conflict between good and evil, with its hope of a resurrection and immortality, which became the religion of one of the most magnificent empires of the earth, and hundreds of thousands acknowledged him as their religious guide. And if his followers are to-day reduced to comparatively few thousands it is not because the descendants of his admirers ceased to look to a guide, but because many of them chose the guidance of the idolatrous Parthian priests, or trembling before the false prophets gleaming sword took Mohammed for their guide.

We find the same true of the millions of China in the past and in the present. Several centuries after the rise of Zoroaster there was born in China one who, when he became man, noticed with sadness the decay and disorder into which his nation had fallen. He set about to remedy the defects. He laid much stress upon the right performance of the duties of the hour, the careful doing of the work that lies at hand leaving mysteries largely to take care of themselves. He taught that the correct performance of these duties, especially the duties of citizenship, constituted the gateway to the Kingdom of Heaven. To this man's standard thousands and millions flocked, and during the scores of centuries that have gone by, unknown millions looked to this man, Confucius, as their guide in matters of religion although he taught little or no religion. The religion of the Chinese Empire to-day with its, perhaps, 500,000,000 of people is little more than personal reverence for the man whose best answer to the question "What must I do to be saved?" was, "Be a good citizen of China." China with a population that constitutes perhaps more than one third of the population of the earth, is no exception to the principle that men will go to some one as a religious guide.

If we turn our eyes to India we find that her multitudinous hosts flock around the standard of religious guides. Millions in the ages that have gone turned, and millions to-day do turn, in the land watered by the Ganges, to Brahm or Guatama (Budda "the Enlightened") as their spiritual guides.

The dwellers on the Nile in the hoary age of antiquity turned with the deep questions of their souls to the priests of Ra and Osiris though their only answers to the enquirers question about God and Truth was "Mystery! Mystery!"

This general principle held true among the chosen people. When they ceased to be guided by Jehovah or His prophets we see them "go away" to the priests of Baal or some other guides. The same is as true to-day as in the past. To millions scattered over the world the voice of the Vatican is as the voice of God.

The Jews of Christ's time were looking to Moses as their guide though with perverted vision. In the case before us the "Many" disciples who "went back and walked no more" with the Christ the same is true. They went to the Scribes and Doctors of the Law

But there were others who had taken Jesus as their guide and Peter's question, which has the force of a strong affirmation, indicates their determination to abide by Him assured He would satisfy their need and prove an all-sufficient Guide. "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Having then considered that man needs a guide, that he will go to some one in the matter of religion let us proceed to notice—

II. *That Jesus Christ is the only true and all-sufficient guide.* This is certainly implied in our text. "To whom can we go?"—clearly setting forth that there is none other; and a sufficient reason is assigned—"Thou hast the words of eternal life"—Thou hast all that we require and Thou alone.

Many problems face man as a religious being; and it is because these cry for solution that he turns as we have noticed to some guide to Moses, to Brahm, to Buddha, to Confucius, to defied ancestors, to priests and popes or to the Christ of God.

Let us notice a few of these problems and see if Christ is the Guide to teach and lead us.

(1) *Look at the universal desire to know about God, yea to know Him.* There is, the world over, a groping after God, an attempt to apprehend God. Ancient Egypt engraved upon the pediment of one of her famous temples this inscription.

"I am that which has been, and which is, and which is to be, And my veil no mortal hath yet drawn aside."

That inscription testified at once to the craving of the human heart after the unknown God, and to the mysterious silence which awaits those who are left to themselves in the search. We meet with this same desire and with the same silence or failure in the inscription which Paul saw on an altar among the hundreds of Athens on which altar was engraved.

"To the Unknown God."

(Concluded next issue.)