

Studies from the Book of John

Difficult Words and a Pivotal Point – Chapter 6:26-69

Within the life of each of us there are points in time that are pivotal. What I mean is that everything from that point on depends on the path we choose to take at that moment. I know we have free will and life may give us an opportunity to go back and make things right if we make a mistake - to undo what we have done. But you know it is always difficult to undo the consequences of our actions. Most of the things we do and the decisions we make live with us at some level, forever. What we do and how we live each moment affects our eternity and often, the eternity of others.

Most of us will encounter multiple pivotal points during our lives. The decisions we make at these times can affect us for years after we make them. They determine where we go from there and how successful we will be. As I said, they can also affect others.

Many people are able to point to single events that established the direction of the rest of their lives. All of us who claim salvation can remember that point in time when we knew, and acted on that knowledge, but there are often other spiritually important events of eternal importance. This has certainly been true in my life. The greatest non-salvation pivotal event in my life occurred on the front lawn of the science building at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi about 7:00 pm one Friday night in April when I was 15 years old. A second significant event occurred in the fall of 2000 on a Tuesday night at about 8:00 pm.

Let me share what I think was the principal pivotal event in Simon Peter's life (aside from that day when he lay aside his fishing nets to walk away with Jesus). The event, which is recorded in the sixth chapter of John, affected Simon Peter and all of us who have come along after him. The impact of this event will ring loudly into eternity.

In John's record, Jesus was at the temple in Capernaum toward the end of a difficult two-day stretch. He had been ministering to the crowds all of the previous day. He had performed the miraculous act of feeding the masses with the fishes and loaves and had shared the good news of God's love with the Jews who had gathered to witness his actions. He then attempted to get away by crossing the Lake of Galilee to Capernaum, only to have the crowd follow him, even into the temple there the next day. There was a problem, though. Those who were there in the temple in Capernaum only wanted to see miracles. They wanted more fish and loaves. They had no desire to hear the message, only to witness the show. By this time, Jesus had become so frustrated with us.

Us? Shouldn't I use the word them? No, I think the word "us" is a better word to use here. Jesus was frustrated with us - because we are so much like they were. If we look at other occurrences in the Gospels, Jesus was frustrated with our worship attitudes - how we act in God's house the morning he turned over the moneychanger's tables in the temple courtyard in Jerusalem. He was frustrated with us when the rich young ruler came and asked about following Jesus and then turned away when he found the price was too high. He was frustrated with us when Nicodemus came to him in the darkness and asked how a man can be born again and exited back out into the darkness.

He was frustrated (with the Jews-then and us-now) that day at the temple in Capernaum. The people had heard him share the word time after time and were still so wrapped up in

themselves that they (and we) were clueless (totally without understanding) to what he was saying. All of the frustration came to a climax and a pivotal point for Simon Peter when Jesus shared his knowledge of body and blood with the crowd of disciples in the temple. You will note that a crowd was there - many more than the twelve.

Beginning with verse 60 of chapter 6, John tells us:

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." (John 6:61-64 NIV)

For many of the followers who thought they were disciples of Jesus, a sad pivotal point occurred at this point, because in verse 66, John records,

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.
(John 6:66 NIV)

They turned away, perhaps for eternity. As sad as this statement is, it is followed by a wonderful occurrence. Let me use John's words when Jesus turned to the twelve:

"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."
(John 6: 67-69 NIV)

Simon Peter experienced the pivotal point in his life, here. It happened in the temple in Capernaum when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

I have trouble thinking of six more meaningful words that Simon Peter ever said or wrote. To me, these words benchmark what may be the principal pivotal point in the fisherman's life.

We know that there were many other events in Simon's life after this point. He certainly had to endure low places (he denied Jesus three times the morning of the crucifixion) and he experienced high places (He preached the message after Pentecost, as recorded in Acts). He confronted Nero in Rome. But what greater words could a person have chosen to say than the words that came to Simon at this pivotal point in his life?

"Lord, to whom shall we go?"

Pivotal points may or may not involve a direct spiritual encounter. We know that pivotal points occur in the lives of the ungodly, the lost and the wicked just as they do in the lives of those who are close to God or those who are on a path that will bring them to such a condition. However, there is something important that we need to realize here. Simon Peter was with Jesus when he had this most pivotal experience and he was with him when it was over. Happenings of eternal significance only occur if a person is with

Jesus (like Simon Peter was) when they have their pivotal experience and with him when it is over!

So, how can you impact the significance of the pivotal experiences you will have during your life?

Stay close to Jesus! If you are close to Jesus when a pivotal event occurs, and you stay close to him throughout the event, it will be a positive event of eternal significance. To have events in your life with eternal significance - what more could a person want?

Let me end with one more thing. A friend of mine is a minister from El Paso, Texas. His name is Mike Moore. Mike said something the other day I think is profound. It has to do with the choices of direction we make as we walk through life. Mike said,

**"When you come to a fork in the road,
always take the branch upon which the shadow of the cross falls."**

Take Mike's thought and store it in your heart. You will need it some day.