

# Before we see Him

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Let us turn to **John 7: 32-36**

## **John 7: 32-36**

32 The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him.

33 Therefore Jesus said, "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me.

34 "You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come."

35 The Jews then said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He?

36 "What is this statement that He said, 'You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come'?"

We have sought to appreciate the way the Lord Jesus responded to the Jews, and in this context what He said helps us to appreciate many important principles and lessons for us.

Why did the Lord Jesus say that the Jews would not find Him and would not be able to go to where He was going? And what would this mean to His disciples?

What would it mean to us?

We have seen that on the one hand, the Lord Jesus told the Jews: "You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am going, you cannot come." Yet we also saw that in **John 12: 26**, the Lord Jesus told those who wanted to follow Him:

**John 12: 26**

"If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him..."

So here, the Lord Jesus was explaining that those who loved Him, who followed Him, they would be able to go to where He was going ("where I am, there My servant will be also").

So those who follow the Lord will go to be with Him where He was going.

Then in **John 14: 19**, we saw that the Lord Jesus said this:

**John 14: 19**

"After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also..."

So after a little while, the world would not see Him at that time because He would no longer be walking on earth as He was. But He said, "...you will see Me". That could refer to the future when they would see Him, but it could also refer to the present. The world would not see Him, but "you see Me": In the spiritual realm, they could continue to see Him, to relate with Him and to know Him. "...because I live, you will live also" – so there would be a continuation in their fellowship with the Lord even though He would depart from this earth.

So those who loved the Lord would see Him though the world would not see Him.

Then in **John 8: 21**, we saw that the Lord Jesus said to the Jews:

**John 8: 21**

Then He said again to them, "I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come."

So here, it is a reference to a group of people who were sinful, who were not repentant, and they would not be able to go where the Lord Jesus would go. "...you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come."

So, those who did not love Him would not be able to go where He was going.

Today, I want to concentrate on another passage that helps us to appreciate another aspect of it that is important for us today.

**John 13: 33-38**

- 33 "Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'
- 34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.
- 35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
- 36 Simon Peter \*said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."
- 37 Peter \*said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You."
- 38 Jesus \*answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.

So here, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples: "You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'"

The words are similar, but the meaning is different.

We saw that when the Lord Jesus spoke to the Jews and He said, "...where I am going, you cannot come", He meant that they were sinful: they would not be with Him; when He left this earth, He would go to heaven and the Jews would not be able to be with Him.

But He told His disciples that they would be with Him: His servants would be with Him. But then He said, "...as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'"

The meaning here is, "Where I am going *now*, you cannot come with Me *now*."

The apostle Peter said to the Lord, "Lord, where are You going?" And He answered him: "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."

So the meaning is: Yes, the disciples would be able to go to where the Lord Jesus was going, but not yet.

Why? Why is this significant?

Peter was very eager. He said to the Lord: "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." Peter was very eager to be with the Lord. He said, "Why can't I follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You. I am prepared to go where You go. I am prepared to follow You to the end. And we know that Peter was sincere. He meant it: In his heart, he loved the Lord; he wanted to be with the Lord.

What was the response of the Lord Jesus? And this is helpful for us to ponder over:

Jesus \*answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.

The Lord Jesus did not really explain why is it Peter could not go with Him.

In a sense, we can say if the Lord really wanted Peter to go with Him right then, it was possible: God could have allowed Peter to be killed and he would go to heaven. The Lord Jesus told the criminal on the cross: "...today you shall be with Me in paradise."

So it is possible for Peter to have gone to be with the Lord immediately or very soon. But the Lord Jesus said: "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."

What the Lord Jesus meant was: God had a purpose for Peter. "There is something that I want you to go through when I am away. There is much to learn and there is much to do. There is a time on earth given to you. You cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."

Peter was confident: "Yes, I can follow You now..." The Lord Jesus \*answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times."

Peter did not understand himself. He was very confident that he would not deny the Lord: he would go through to the end; he would serve the Lord whatever the cost. And he meant it. But in reality, Peter did not understand his own spiritual state. And the Lord told him: "...a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times."

We can say the Lord was telling him: "There is something you need to learn first before you go to be with Me. It is not time yet."

If Peter had left the world at that time, he might not have realized that he would have denied the Lord. He might have felt he had developed very well and he went to be with the Lord victoriously.

The Lord said, "No, you stay. You go through this experience. You understand yourself better. In the midst of your denial of Me, you will see something you have not seen before. You will understand the realities in your heart. You will know what it means to be a true disciple. And when you have learnt it well, then it is time for you to come."

And Peter did learn. Peter went through it: He denied the Lord and he wept bitterly; he realized he was not what he thought he was; he professed but he was not what he professed.

So this is also very often true of believers.

Many believers sincerely love the Lord. They want to follow the Lord. They are prepared to do and to go as the Lord desires of them.

But when it comes to the test, when the situation is difficult enough, when the problems are great enough, then we see many crumble. They compromise, they waver. They are not truly prepared to follow the Lord all the way.

There are many deficiencies in our lives not properly dealt with but we may not quite realize it. We might not know that this is so.

So, for a person like Peter who was straightforward, honest, impulsive, he meant it.

But there are many others who may not be so straightforward, so honest, who may pretend, who may exaggerate, who may emphasize how much they love the Lord, but it is not true. But there may be some degree of sincerity in their love for God.

We need to be tested. We need to go through situations in life that will help us to know the realities in our heart.

Ultimately, what is God concerned about? He is concerned about the quality of our hearts.

So the Lord wanted Peter to learn well: develop his character, develop his life. It is in that context then the Lord would be able to work through him effectively to contribute to His kingdom.

We know Peter failed. He denied the Lord and he wept.

The Lord Jesus asked him, "Do you love Me?" Peter said, "Yes, Lord. I love You. You know that I love You." The Lord Jesus told him, "Tend My lambs... Shepherd My sheep."

So here, we are told that the Lord Jesus did not reject Peter after he failed. The Lord Jesus already knew that there was not sufficient substance in his life, that what he professed was not yet real, but He was going to help him to develop that quality in his being.

It would depend on Peter whether he was willing to learn. It would be a difficult path, but would he be willing to learn from the Lord?

And the records show to us that Peter was willing to learn, as a result of which he grew well so that there could come a time when he could write and say, "Yes, I know that it is time for me to leave as the Lord has indicated to me."

There came a time when he could go to be with the Lord. The time had come. He had learnt sufficiently; he had contributed what the Lord wanted him to do: "Tend my lambs... Shepherd My sheep. There is a work to be done, but that work can be done effectively only when you have properly learnt to develop the substance in your being, to be a true disciple of the Lord."

Peter thought that he could serve, but not yet. So he went through that failure and in the midst of that failure, he must have thought much about his life and there grew within him a greater determination not to fail the Lord. But Peter failed again and he had to be rebuked by Paul because he was afraid of the circumcision party.

Yet, he did not give up. He continued to learn, continued to humble himself before God. He appreciated Paul for what he did to him, to rebuke him.

And because of that spirit – a humble and contrite spirit – Peter grew to be a good apostle; he contributed much to the kingdom of God.

So let us consider. If we love the Lord, genuinely love the Lord, the Lord tells us, yes, we will be with Him in the future, in heaven: Where He has gone, we can be there. We can look forward to the future where we will have our time with Him in eternity. It will be such a wonderful thing. We can look forward to that.

But let us also remember: In the meantime, what are we going to do in our time on earth? This is a very important time. The Lord says, “Not yet. You will come, but not yet.”

And what are we going to do during this time of “not yet”? How are we going to live our lives?

Are we going to follow the world? Are we going to just waste away the opportunities? Are we going to indulge in what we personally prefer and desire?

Or will we learn from the Lord in each situation that we go through, seek Him, deal with whatever areas that are not right?

Yes, God is a God of goodness, of generosity. He has made every provision for our well-being. How do we respond to that? Are we grateful to Him? Will we live for Him?

It is easy for us, in the midst of our consciousness of God’s goodness, to say, “Yes, I love Him. I will live for Him.”



But then, we may have many, many situations in life to go through which may surprise us. We do not expect these things to happen and we may draw back, we may waver, we may falter in such times. What do we do in such times?

Let us learn from Peter: In the midst of his failures, he continued to come to the Lord. He was prepared to learn, and he affirmed his faith in the Lord, and he continued to grow.

So, before we see Him, how will we live on earth?

There is much to learn and there is much to do. But the “much to do” must come after the “much to learn”.

If we do not learn well, then there is nothing much that we can really do for the Lord. Of course, to the degree that we have genuinely believed in the Lord, we can always do something: Every believer can contribute something in the kingdom of God. But the degree, the quality, the intensity, the impact, the ultimate realities will not be the same.

The deeper you go in your spiritual development, in your walk with God, in the transformation of your being, the more will you be able to do – something of true worth and value.

Otherwise, the things that we do may end up like wood, hay and stubble: burnt up. And there is nothing much left in the day of the test of fire.

So God wants us to grow well. He wants us to contribute in His kingdom. He has made every provision for our well-being. What is our response to Him? How will we order our lives? What would we seek? How would we respond?

The Lord Jesus has given us the perfect example. He left heaven to come into this world, knowing that it would be a time of pain and suffering of the greatest intensity.

Do we love Him? Are we identified with Him? Will we follow in the path of the cross?

He said if we want to follow Him, we must deny ourselves, we must take up our cross daily, and then we can properly follow Him.

It is not enough just to be glad that one day, we will be in heaven with the Lord. It is the kind of quality of our union with Him, the quality of our fellowship with Him that is critical. When we go to heaven, what kind of depth of oneness with Him will there be? What kind of quality of union would it be?

We need to prepare ourselves for that.

So let us, as we come before the Lord, ask Him to help us to appreciate His kindness, His goodness to us, and ask Him to help us that whatever we go through, we will learn well and deal with whatever areas that are not right, that we can be transformed to become what we ought to be. And whatever we have professed that is not true, let us discard them and ask Him to cleanse us, help us to change, and to be transformed.