

READING

John 12:37-50

SERMON

**Going God's Way** (John 12:37-50)

George would come to church regularly. He was there regularly once a year, on Christmas Day. 'It was to keep the wife happy.' George though would look at his feet when stood up to sing, and when he sat down, you could see him looking around. He was probably looking for cobwebs or some such things. But George was there every Christmas Day without fail – it had become part of the family ritual. But for George ChristGeorgeity was a

**Failure** – he did not want to know. What was it we read earlier? Verse 37 of the passage we read earlier from John 12. If you have a Bible near, you might like to turn to it, on page 1080

**“Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.”** (John 12:37 NIV)

George had been coming for years, but it had made no impression on him. He could even see the good effect it had on his wife – she was a nicer person he said when she had been to church.

Maybe this morning you are like George. You have been to church regularly, even more so than George, but it really has had little effect on you. Maybe you like the club that you are in, you like the other people, but as to having a real effect on your life, it just passes over the top of the head. Yes, I've listened to all the sermons, but I couldn't really tell you what they are about, apart from Jesus being there quite often.

For many church is a failure – even when it does great things, they are quickly forgotten, or ignored.

**Fear** – but then we read that

**“Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue;”** (John 12:42 NIV)

They believed, but were afraid to tell anyone because of fear of their reaction. Back to George. George and I began to meet – it usually meant going to a pub and having a couple of pints, neither of us being shorts drinking when in pubs. We began to talk about his work and my work and of course the subject of ChristGeorgeity came up. He asked if I had any books on the matter, on ChristGeorgeity. So I lent him a book which had the thoughts that Jesus was either a deluded human being, or a con artist or the Son of God – the claim he made!

He could have been a deluded human being who went around saying mad things because he had a mental health problem, he was a mad man. But when you examine what he said, you have to marvel at its correctness and at how if we were to all live by what Jesus taught, this world would be a better place.

As a con artist, he was not much use, because he knew he was going to die and con artists generally take the money and run. But Jesus lived very simply, he did not demand money and he did die and he willingly went to his death because he knew that he had to die for sin, the bad things we all do.

So maybe, just maybe he is the Son of God who came and die for each one of us and then rose again from the dead, just as Charlie symbolised by being baptised. He went under the water, the dying and then he rose up – the resurrection.

But George never told anyone about his reading – he was afraid, he had fear that people would mock him and he did not want that. In fact George did not want to **offend** – I know it is not an 'F' but I could not think of another one. Jesus put it this way

**“for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.”** (John 12:43 NIV)

George liked being popular and it his work colleagues knew what he was reading about and that he had been talking to the 'vicar' to 'Ric the Vic', then his popularity might have waned. Even in the pub his reputation might have gone downhill if they knew that he was looking into ChristGeorgeity. It was OK for me to be there because he could say that he was trying to convert me to pub life, to enjoying a drink. With George you could not be a whim – he wanted to mix with real men as he saw it!

Maybe you are afraid of what others might say, or think of you if they know you are here. Will you tell folks tomorrow at work that you saw this man being plunged under water and then lifted up again? Will you tell you neighbours about what Charlie said? Do you worry what people may think of you and does this induce fear in you?

**Faith** - So we have **Failure, Fear and offend**. But the journey did not end there with George. George attended an Alpha course and it was the first time we had run an Alpha course at the church. We began with a meal and then we went on the video, as it was then, now it is DVD and afterwards we broke up into smaller groups all over the church building. Most of the people there were ChristGeorges as they were church people checking out the course, to see if they wanted to invite other along. I don't blame them for doing that. But we did have some non-ChristGeorges there – David and George! You have to realise as well that this was around two years of going to the pub, drinking pints of beer and talking with George – it was a hard job, but someone had to do it!

In George's group there was one strident lady who on about week three asked George outright why he wasn't a ChristGeorge. Many others in the group then froze and cringed at the question, so early in the ten week course. They knew George and thought it would make him leave, but it seemed to go over his head.

Well, on that course we had our day away – we went to a another church, not too far away and in the afternoon we had a service and invited those who wanted to make a commitment, to either follow Jesus for the first time, or to go deeper with God to come forward for prayer. Sue and I were up the front with another couple ready to pray for people. Firstly we had a lady named Sue come forward, she went to the other couple and then I looked up, as people were singing songs from the overhead projector at this time, and could not believe my eyes. There coming towards Sue and me was George and his wife – I was gobsmacked, delighted and just wanted to jump up and down, yelp and whoops and go mad. But being British, a minister and being me, I did none of those things, but quietly waited for the couple to arrive, listened to them and then prayed with them. It was a great day – George had come to Faith. As Jesus said

**“...”When a person believes in me, they do not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When they look at me, they see the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no-one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”**  
(John 12:44-46 NIV)

George had come to faith, he had seen the light – the light of the world which is Jesus. If you want to know what God is like, then look at the life of Jesus. Jesus is God and so the way he lived show us God.

Jesus is the light and so shines into people's lives, dispelling the darkness that is there. For George he had come to realise that he needed God, that he was in darkness and that Jesus was the light for him.

But that is not true of everyone. As Jesus continued

**“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.”** (John 12:48 NIV)

Not everyone will accept the Bible, accept that Jesus died for them and then rose again. That is too incredible. So they prefer to dismiss Jesus as never having really come, but even non-ChristGeorge writers at the time record Jesus walking and preaching and teaching. So maybe it is easier to believe that Jesus was a mad man or a con artist that to believe he is the Son of God and the saviour of the world, but that I have to have faith in him for that to happen in my life.

**Follower** – but Jesus also said

**“As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.”** (John 12:47 NIV)

It is not enough to just have faith, one must also be one who hears and does – that is being a follower of Christ, a disciple of Jesus. And this takes a lifetime. How do we know what to do? Firstly we have to hear the words – nowadays we can read them, or hear them on CD, but then we must turn those words into action. When I go to hospital for an operation I do not want a surgeons who knows all the knowledge in all the books about my operation, but I want the surgeon to act, one who can perform the operation and who wants to perform it and who will perform it.

Jesus wants us to do, to live lives as he wants us to, to follow in his footsteps. And the prize is found in verse 50

**“I know that his command leads to eternal life...”** (John 12:50 NIV)

The final part is eternal life which begins now and then carried on – it is not just life after death, but excitement now following Christ – living how God wants us to live.

So where are you?

- **Failure** – if you are here, you will not have heard anything I have said this morning, so you will be in the same place as when you came in. But maybe you realise that you have been there and want to know more – that is great.
- **Fear** – there is fear of rejection by others that is holding you back – but God's love can and will overcome that fear as you stick with it
- **offend** – Others around you may be offended by you wanting to follow Jesus, to at least to look at it further, but the risk is well worth it
- **Faith** – then you may have come through all those route and be at the faith – you believe in Jesus, but is he having an effect on how you live your life
- **Follower** – that is what a follower does – he or she lives their life to the glory of God and it is not boring or being a killjoy, but great and exciting.

You have to decide where you are, but you can do deeper at whatever stage you are, but the choice is yours.

PRAYER of commitment for the 5 stages, Failure, Fear, Offend, Faith, Follower

**HYMN SF 912**

**LORD, YOU HAVE MY HEART,**  
And I will search for Yours;  
Jesus, take my life and lead me on.  
Lord, You have my heart,  
And I will search for Yours;  
Let me be to You a sacrifice.  
And I will praise you, Lord. *(Men)*

**LORD, YOU HAVE MY HEART**

I will praise You, Lord. *(Women)*  
And I will sing of love come down. *(Men)*  
I will sing of love come down. *(Women)*  
And as You show Your face, *(Men)*  
Show Your face, *(Women)*  
We'll see Your glory here. *(All)*

RESPONSE - talk about baptism and forthcoming alpha course. Tell someone

**HYMN SF 877**

Jesus, what a beautiful name.  
Son of God, Son of Man,  
Lamb that was slain.  
Joy and peace, strength and hope,  
Grace that blows all fear away.  
Jesus, what a beautiful name.

**JESUS, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL NAME**

Jesus, what a beautiful name.  
Truth revealed, my future sealed,  
Healed my pain.  
Love and freedom, life and warmth,  
Grace that blows all fear away.  
Jesus, what a beautiful name.

Jesus, what a beautiful name.  
Rescued my soul, my stronghold,  
Lifts me from shame.  
Forgiveness, security, power and  
love,  
Grace that blows all fear away.  
Jesus, what a beautiful name.

**BENEDICTION**