

We Aspire To Be A Disciple-Making Church – Luke 9:23-27

One of the last things Jesus said to His disciples before He ascended to Heaven, was that they should go into all the world making disciples and baptising them. Two thousand years later the Church retains this Christ given responsibility to 'make disciples'. But in a day and age where 'nominal' (Christian in name only) and 'social' (in church only for friendships) Christianity is rife there is no better place for us to turn when asking the question 'what is a disciple' than the words of Jesus himself. **Read Luke 9:23-27.**

Polycarp was a bishop who lived AD 70–156 during a time of great persecution of Christians. He was arrested at 86 for being a Christian, all he had to do to avoid torture and death was to proclaim, 'Caesar is Lord'. Polycarp responded, 'Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?' Polycarp refused to compromise his beliefs and was burnt alive at the stake on 22 February AD 156 – He was a Martyr for Christ, for grace, for love not hatred – couldn't be more opposed to the so called martyrdom of suicide bombers who die to kill, in hatred – Polycarp gave his life to protect the gospel.

Q. What do you think it is that compels a person not to deny Christ even when facing torture and execution for their beliefs?

Q. Men and women around the world are making the ultimate sacrifice for their faith all the time, do you think we would be ready for such persecution if it came here?

- **Disciples Are Called To Follow Christ**

Jesus calls His disciples to follow Him because there is a place He desires to take us. Faith then is very much like a journey, which begins with our being rescued from the dominion of darkness (Col 1:13) and culminates in our arrival in a perfect land, living in perfect bodies, free from all pain and hurt, to enjoy God forever; what a wonderful destination! However, the path that Jesus calls us to follow Him on doesn't sound so great... *let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.* We can be certain then that the life of a Christian will be difficult and at times excruciating (taking up a cross), however the path is one lit up by Christ; *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

Q. Why do you think Jesus more often than not emphasised the cost of following him as opposed to the gains?

Q. When you think about the incredible adventure the disciples had following Jesus, the miracles, the healing, the great displays of power at what point do you think they realised the true 'cost' of being His disciples?

Q. Do you think the 'cost' of being a disciple of Christ is emphasised much in the church today?

- **Disciples Are Called To Suffer With Christ**

Jesus said here that we are to 'deny' ourselves and then 'to carry our cross daily'.

Q. In what ways do we 'deny' ourselves as Christians?

Q. Why is this denial really a great gain for us? Think about the loss incurred through indulging sin and the peace that comes when we 'say no to ungodliness'

Wesley, commenting on this passage, said that 'taking up our cross goes a little farther than denying ourselves...it being more easy to forego pleasure, than to endure pain'. To put it starkly, if we are unable to say no to the temptations of sin why would we expect to say no when ordered to deny Christ by a terrorist?! It is a challenge enough in our context for Christians to be convinced they should give their money let alone their lives!

Q. We are not living with an ever-present threat of persecution in this country, unlike Christians living in particularly Islamic nations, so what does a 'radical' Christian look like here?

James 1:2-3 *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness*

Q. What might 'various trials' include? What does it mean to suffer with Christ during these times?

- **Disciples Are Called To The Glory Of Christ**

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison – 2 Corinthians 4:17

The promise of glory is given to help us persevere when working through trials in our lives. We need to be those who often meditate on what Christ's work has saved us from (eternal punishment) and for (eternal glory).

Q. How can we support one another when we face great challenges in life?

Q. How does our perseverance point those who don't know Christ to His glory? Earthly treasure doesn't compare with the riches of heaven, even if all our worldly comforts leave us the glory of Christ never will and that is compelling!