

'THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP' – 2010 LENT NOTES FROM THE LEPROSY MISSION

WEEK TWO – BEING DIFFERENT

NOTES:

There are issues in this section that could be both challenging and sensitive. The intention is to promote healthy and honest discussion about issues that are current in modern day society.

Being a follower of Christ has always involved a 'cost'. Christian values and beliefs are sometimes in conflict with worldly views. It is not easy to go against current views and stand out (or be different) whether it be in the family, at work or amongst friends. Very few like to be ridiculed, made fun of or simply ignored. Perhaps sometimes we may feel it is best to maintain a low profile or keep our beliefs to ourselves.

Society today is becoming increasingly pluralistic comprising people from different ethnicity, backgrounds and beliefs.

Bible passages: Romans 12: 2, Matthew 16: 26, Luke 14: 26



DISCUSS:

How far should the beliefs of one particular group – be it religious, political etc – influence the whole of society?

Traditionally in the UK, Christian beliefs and values have influenced many aspects of society. That is being questioned today. It is estimated that only 66% of the population of the UK would consider themselves to be Christian (this figure of course covers a very wide spectrum of what people consider "being Christian" means).

This is a huge area and one where people have differing views, even within the Christian church. Here are some ideas you may wish to discuss.



DISCUSS:

The contrast between the Christian ideal and the mainstream secular views in today's society in relation to the following topics: marriage (divorce, sex before marriage, living together, same sex partnerships and civil partnerships); abortion; genetic engineering and stem cell research.



DISCUSS:

Are there issues that we should look at in the context of modern living, perhaps recognising that times have changed since the days of the Old and New Testaments, or are there some Biblical principles that are valid for all times and all situations?

The group may wish to make a shortlist of Biblical principles that it thinks are valid for all times.

If we follow Jesus then His values should impact on every area of our lives. This can create challenges in the modern world.



DISCUSS:

How do we keep the Sabbath Day holy in this day and age? Is it okay to shop on a Sunday, go to a football match, etc? Some people have to work on a Sunday so how do they have fellowship and worship?

Do we ignore racist comments, foul language and smutty jokes or say something about this at the risk of being ridiculed or called old-fashioned? Does it matter anyway?

Should we speak out when Christian festivals, (e.g. Christmas) seem to be marginalised or renamed in deference to so-called “political correctness?”

Being different can also cost someone their life. Persecution of Christians in various forms still takes place around the world.



DISCUSS:

What is persecution? Release International (www.releaseinternational.org.uk) says this about persecution:

“Persecution: A situation where people are repetitively, persistently and systematically inflicted with grave or serious suffering or harm and deprived of (or significantly threatened with deprivation of) their basic human rights because of a difference (race, religion, nationality, political opinion, membership in a particular social group) that the persecutor will not tolerate.”

In the context of the Christian faith, what does Christian persecution mean? Again, quoting from Release International:

“A situation where Christians are repetitively, persistently and systematically inflicted with grave or serious suffering or harm and deprived of (or significantly threatened with deprivation of) their basic human rights because of a difference that comes from being a Christian that the persecutor will not tolerate. To distinguish religious persecution from other types, it is helpful to ask, ‘If a person had other religious beliefs or would change their religion to the majority religion of the country, would things get better for them?’ If the answer is ‘yes’ then it seems that the persecution is on religious grounds.”

When speaking of persecution, people often think of martyrs. But what is a martyr? The word comes from the Greek word ‘martus’ meaning a witness. There is a wide range of meanings in the New Testament:

Matthew 18: 16, 26: 65, Acts 6 :13 Bearing witness in a court of justice.

Luke 24: 48, Acts 1: 8 & 22. Romans 1:9 Someone bearing testimony to the truth of what they have seen or known.

Acts 22: 20, Revelation 2: 13 One who bears witness of the truth and suffers even to the point of death.

The term ‘martyr’ gradually evolved to mean those who choose to suffer death or endure great suffering rather than deny Christ or who sacrifice something of importance to further the Kingdom of God.

How was Jesus different?

1. His message and view of the Kingdom of God often went against traditional teaching, e.g. His view of Messiahship.
2. His ministry to sinners and outcasts sometimes broke conventional rules, e.g. touching someone who had leprosy.
3. His determination to obey God - even unto death.
4. His refusal to retaliate and show bitterness or anger.

What is the cost of following Jesus?

Bible reading: Luke 14: 25 & 26

This is a verse which some people may find difficult, especially the use of the word 'hate'. 'Hate' here is not a literal 'hate' but it does involve choice. Jesus is using hyperbole (exaggerated language) to make a point – also seen in **Matthew 10: 37**. Following Jesus and being a true disciple can involve difficult choices – choices which many of us do not want to think about and perhaps we pray that we shall never have to make. But what if we do?

Here are some situations to think about.



The verses above seem to suggest that even family comes second to Jesus. But let us think of some situations that people may find themselves in.

- a) Someone in the family is critically ill and needs care and support. Should this be the priority for family members? In caring for that person are they not showing Christ's love and therefore following Him?
- b) You may be the only Christian in a family or have a partner who is not a Christian (or not as committed as you are). This can create tensions. Do you as a Christian completely disregard the needs of your partner/family as you follow Christ, or do you work hard to find a solution?
- c) Are we true disciples if we never meet with other believers for worship? Some people may have to work on a Sunday but there are opportunities for worship and fellowship at other times. Do we actively seek these?
- d) Part of discipleship involves financial giving. Where are our priorities? Can we seriously say we cannot give any more to God yet continue to enjoy the trappings of material life, e.g. – two cars, cable/digital TV, holidays, latest technology and so on?

The high cost of discipleship is being prepared to submit to God's will.

Discipleship means dependence upon God – recognising that we need Him to finish whatever He calls us to do. We need Him to enable us to live the Christian life. As the hymn says, 'Love so amazing so divine, demands my soul, my life my all.'

Bible reading: Luke 14: 34 & 35

Being a disciple means we are to be like salt.

The analogy with salt and the Christian life is often quoted. Salt preserves, adds flavour and cleanses.

As disciples of Jesus, we can be distinctive in our contribution to society by preserving certain values, adding flavour to society and being an antiseptic to some of the ills around us.

PRAY

- For each other, especially those who struggle to profess their faith to family and friends.
- For Christians around the world who suffer persecution and physical threats.
- For people affected by leprosy who are persecuted and denied basic human rights, and for those who stand beside them.

Some useful quotations:

John Baillie: Scottish theologian: 'We may suspect, then, that the real reason why Christians are less distinguishable from the world than they used to be is not that there is more of the quality of holiness in the world, but that there is less of it in the Church'

Billy Graham: 'It is unnatural for Christianity to be popular'

Martin Luther King Jnr: 'The Church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the State, but rather the conscience of the state'

Suggested hymns/songs:

Stand up Stand up for Jesus (George Duffield 1818-1888)

In 1857-58 revival broke out in Philadelphia USA. A young preacher, Dudley Tyng, preached to 5,000 men using **Exodus 10:11** as his text – 'Go now ye that are men and serve the Lord'. About 1,000 responded to his invitation that evening. On the following Wednesday, Dudley was checking out his corn shelling machine when his arm got pulled into the machine and was severed. The doctors did not believe he would live. While Tyng lay in great pain he entreated his doctor to accept Christ. With a room filled with other preachers he asked them to "Sing, sing – can you not sing?" His last request to his friends was to "Tell the people to stand up for Jesus".

George Duffield witnessed his friend's death that day and heard his dying words. That week he wrote the words to the hymn 'Stand up, stand up for Jesus'.

Be bold, be strong (Morris Chapman 1983 Word Music UK)

I'm not ashamed to own my Lord (Isaac Watts 1674-1748)

Soldiers of Christ arise (Charles Wesley 1707-88)