

The Mission of the Church

This past month while on vacation we went to three different churches. Each of them was talking about the church's mission. One said the mission was to feed the hungry, another said it was to seek justice, and the third said it was to be a disciple of Jesus. Does the Bible ever tell us what the mission truly is? Indeed, the Bible does tell us what our mission is. John 17:3 tells us that it is of first importance that we know Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Matthew 28:19-20 is Jesus' last earthly command, which is to "go and make disciples" and to be a mature disciple obeying what the Lord commanded us to do. While feeding the hungry and seeking justice are important, they are not the engine that run the mission. If we take care of the hungry and seek justice without knowing Jesus or being his disciple, we are merely secular social workers. When we know Jesus, grow as his disciple and actively make disciples, then feeding the hungry and seeking justice are responses of thankfulness for all that he has done.

What does it mean to know Jesus Christ? To know Jesus personally means that we have repented of sin and received him as our Lord and Savior. It also means that we have decided to love Jesus and desire to be like him above all else in our lives. This is a process that takes the entire lifetime of the individual. The old rock and roll song *To Know Him, Is To Love Him* by The Teddy Bears summarizes this truth very well:

*To know, know, know him is to love, love, love him
Just to see him smile, makes my life worthwhile
To know, know, know him is to love, love, love him
And I do, and I do, and I do.*

Sermons I have heard makes this personal knowing of Jesus sound like one of my old high school buddies. Jesus indeed wants to be personal, close, a friend in the truest sense. However, that does not permit us to act as though he is there to do our will or that we can get special favors from him. We must never forget that Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is our God whom we are called to worship. He is truly our friend, but not our personal "buddy."

What does it mean to be "his disciple"? This is one of the most vital steps in becoming effective for the Kingdom of God! To be Jesus' disciple means that we literally give up our priorities, our attitudes, our behavior, our self-centeredness and become centered on Jesus to be like him and have his mind. When we yield ourselves to the power of the Lord and permit him to change our thoughts, priorities and behavior we become a mighty instrument in his hands. This process is deliberate and

requires the study of his Word, prayer, discipline, service to others, and determination to be like Jesus in all situations. Those who take this path go beyond the security of eternal salvation into risking their lives for the spread of the Gospel.

What does it mean to "make disciples?" The Gospel of the Lord compels us to travel this path of actively seeking to make others mature disciples of Jesus. Our goals in disciple making are to invite others to know Jesus, to train them into the path of discipleship and to love Jesus by reaching out to others who do not know him. Training them in discipleship would include teaching them to understand and apply his Word, personal prayer, public worship, witness, service to others, sacrifice, boldness and loving by choice not by emotion. Making disciples drives us beyond the natural inclination to be self-centered. Making disciples takes time, energy, a plan and commitment. While it can be tiring to disciple another person, it is one of the most rewarding things we can ever do since the outcome has eternal consequences.

Will I lose my salvation if I fail to become a mature disciple? The short answer is NO! Salvation is not dependent on what we do or who we are. Salvation is totally dependant on the grace of God in Jesus Christ, which we receive by faith. Failure to mature as a disciple does not threaten our salvation, but it does affect our usefulness in Jesus' mission. When we fail to mature we do not have the experience, resources, or knowledge to assist others in spiritual matters. It is vital that we make every effort to mature so that we accomplish the purposes for which we were created.

Finally, it means that that we are prepared and take advantage of those opportunities to speak publicly with boldness and courage that Jesus is Savior and Lord. On April 9, 1945, Lutheran pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, at age 39, was hanged at Flossenburg concentration camp by his Nazi captors, 11 days before Allied troops liberated the camp. *"I HAVE HARDLY EVER seen a man die so submissive to the will of God"*, wrote an SS doctor of the last moments of Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, hanged in 1945 for taking part in the bomb plot against Hitler. His last recorded words were for his friend Bishop George Bell of Chichester: *"This is the end . . . but for me the beginning of life."* Bonhoeffer and many others were willing to face death rather than to compromise their faith. Bonhoeffer's witness touched the heart of the SS doctor plus many others in the concentration camp. His boldness and courage is remembered today, over 60 years later, because he knew that standing up for Jesus was truly life eternal.

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