

Keynotes from Steve Driver's am Sermon on 24/1/2021

Mark 9; v 42-50 "Radical Discipleship"

Steve Driver is from Poole Christian Fellowship

Mark 9:42-50 ⁴² "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' ⁴⁹ For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

When we come to know Jesus, we start full of excitement, but despite years of going to church, many people do not mature in their faith in any meaningful way. Churches that are filled with these people stagnate and quickly become places of good community and friendship, but not places where Christ is glorified. Rather than just acquiring more knowledge, we need to grow in our relationship with Christ, to glorify him more in our lives, and make him known more, celebrating and living out the beautiful freedom he has won for us by his death and resurrection.

We need to ask ourselves the question:

How can we grow and move forward in our discipleship, both as individuals and as a church?

In the passage from Mark, Jesus challenges us on this. He calls for a radical approach to following him – an extreme change to transform our relationship with him in our everyday lives. What does it mean to be a radical disciple?

1. A radical disciple radically loves - Mark 9:42

This verse is a threat, so how can it be connected with radical love? Looking at the context, we can see that earlier the disciples were debating who was the greatest amongst them, and in v **37** Jesus says to them: "Whoever receives one such child in

my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

He reminds us that we are **all** God’s image bearers, reflecting the wonder and splendour of our creator. Consistently through the Bible, we see that God loves and protects his creation and even threatens those who cause any of his chosen people to stumble into sin.

- We need to consider how we act and talk with the people in our lives.
- Because Christ now lives in every believer, through his radical love shown in his death and resurrection, how you treat a believer is how you treat Christ, and how you treat Christ is how you treat God.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (see p 4 for text) spells out for us what radical love means. A radical disciple would never seek to cause a fellow believer to sin directly or even indirectly. We should seek to do the opposite – to lead them from temptation and to provide a way out. The letter to **Philemon** (see p4 for text) tells us how Paul showed radical love to Onesimus, a runaway, by treating him well and discipling him. Paul describes him as ‘his very heart’, and lays his reputation on the line by recommending him to Philemon. Equally, he knows Philemon so well that he can be sure that he will do as Paul has asked – a radical relationship! This is how we should be to one another.

We need to show radical love to one another, not just by NOT causing one another to stumble, but by building one another up in radical love.

2. A radical disciple radically obeys - Mark 9: 43-47

When you obey out of fear or for religious observance, all that produces is either a very religious person like the Pharisees, or, as happens so often today, someone who just gives up because it seems too hard.

We are called to obey out of love and not out of fear

Jesus is not suggesting that our hands, feet or eyes force us to sin and telling us to cut off our limbs. We can see this from what he says in **Mark 7:20-23**:

²⁰ And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him.²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder,

adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”.

Sin comes from within and Jesus is calling us to kill off **any** potential to sin in our lives

- In whatever we do (our hands)
- In wherever we go (our feet)
- In whatever we see (our eyes)

This is a call to take action in our own discipleship and to do whatever is necessary so that we move forward and grow in our relationship with Jesus, becoming more like him. It is a call to remove stumbling blocks before they appear. We are not to create a Christian bubble around ourselves for we are called to be in the world and engaging with people.

Rather, in all we do, in everywhere we go and in all we see, we are to guard our hearts against the powers of the world, and the evil one. Jesus wants us to do all we can to rid our lives of sin, having shown radical love to us by defeating the punishment of sin so we can live in glory with him. We can live out this radical obedience motivated by radical love, knowing that on a daily basis we will fall short – but we should never stop fighting.

We are called to fight sin as if to win, but knowing we have already won

In talking about hell, Jesus points to the terrible fate he is saving us from as he prepares to make the ultimate sacrifice for sin. He is not trying to scare us into obedience.

Instead, as we put our trust in him, becoming true disciples of Jesus, we find ourselves captivated by Jesus’ radical love. Radical obedience comes out of this as we eagerly desire to bring Jesus glory.

If you are not yet trusting Jesus in this way, then even today you can make the choice to do that.

3. A radical disciple becomes a radical witness – Mark 9:49-50

Salt was used as part of a grain offering sacrifice. It had special ceremonial significance, representing the covenant promises of God as the people remembered God's unfailing faithfulness to them, and their faithfulness to God.

Throughout this passage, Jesus has been challenging us to radical love and obedience, out of the radical love we first received from him. The result of this is that we are being refined so that we become more and more like the pure salt used as an expression of holy devotion and faithfulness from God and to God. This first happens when we accept Jesus as our Saviour, and receive a different fire, the Holy Spirit, as opposed to the fire of hell from which Jesus has saved us.

The Holy Spirit, the presence of God in us, begins the work of making us holy and then empowers us, helping us to become purer salt throughout our lives until he completes his work in us. To our great relief, we are not doing any of this in our own strength, but all in God's strength through his Spirit.

Because we are being refined in this way, we live out the covenant in our very being. We become salt and as Paul puts it in **Romans 12:1** a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. He goes on to say that this is our true and proper worship, because we will be worshipping with everything we do (our hands), everywhere we go (our feet) and everything we see (our eyes). What a radical witness this would be to anyone we meet, living worship to the Almighty God in front of their eyes and a true reflection of the glory of God.

This passage should not leave us feeling restricted and joyless. Rather it should leave us excited at the ongoing journey that is happening to us and in us as God challenges us and transforms us. The call to all radically love one another and to radically obey Jesus reminds us that we are all in the same place before God, and that we all need to be refined by the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. None of us can boast. Instead, we can humbly help and serve one another, rebuke and challenge one another and move forward together.

That is a radical witness both to each other and to the world, showing the church to be a people together who give glory to God.

Back to the question we started with – **how can we move forward in our discipleship?**

We need a radical approach to our own personal faith development so that we are radically loving one another as church and being radically obedient to and through Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus calls us to put him first. This raises questions about how we lead our lives as we seek to:

Put Jesus first in everything we do:

- What are we personally doing to help ourselves grow?
- What do we need to cut off or out?
- Would it help to have a mentor?

Are we doing the work and spending time in prayer, speaking to God and being guided by him in these areas?

Put Jesus first in everywhere we go:

- Are there places you go to where it is harder to live out your faith? You may need to cut these out.
- Are you making going to church and home group a priority?
- Do you meet with other Christians?

It is in these places that you will be built up, helped, matured and challenged on sin. You too can help others.

Put Jesus first in everything we see:

- What are you watching?
- What are you allowing to enter your thoughts by what you are reading or viewing?

This is particularly important during lockdown, because we are all at home more and watching more online or on TV.

- We need to be on our guard and asking is this good for me?
- Ask yourself what is the first thing you think about in the day and the last thing at night?

- Most importantly, are you reading God’s living word, and letting it enter not just your mind but also your heart, so that you are directly transformed as you come back to the living truth of the gospel?

Ask these questions regularly, seriously and honestly.

Pray about them and ask God to guide you, to lead you out of temptation and also to prepare you for temptation.

**Then we can all grow into being more like the people we were designed to be –
radical disciples**

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Philemon: ¹ Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ² and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.^[a] ⁷ For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

Paul's Plea for Onesimus ⁸ Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, ⁹ yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus,^[b] whose father I became in my imprisonment. ¹¹ (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹² I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³ I would have been glad to keep him with me,

in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. ¹⁵ For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a bondservant^[c] but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. ¹⁸ If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. ²⁰ Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. ²² At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴ and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.