

CAN JESUS TRUST YOU?

John 2:23-25

The year was A.D. 155. The persecution against the Christians had swept across the Roman Empire. It had come to the city of Smyrna. The Pro-Consul of Smyrna, swept up into this persecution, put out the order to arrest the Bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp. Polycarp was to be arrested and brought to the local Coliseum, for execution.

Polycarp had been warned to flee, but he had decided not to. When the Romans found Polycarp, they asked: *“Does Polycarp live here?”* He said, *“Yes, I am he.”*

Facing Persecution

He invited his captors in, treated them as friends, prepared them food, and served them a meal. Polycarp had just one request. He asked for one hour to pray before they took him away. The Roman officers overheard his prayers which actually went on for two hours. They probably began to have second thoughts: *“What are we doing arresting an old man like this?”* A man well advanced in his eighties.

The crowd screamed when they saw this famous Christian leader come forward. They wanted his blood. The Pro-Consul, however, offered him a way of reprieve. He said: *“Pity your grey hairs. Just curse Christ and I will release you.”*

Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, responded: *“Eighty-six years I have served Christ and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?”*

The Pro-Consul reached for a compromise: *“Then just do this old man. Swear by the genius of the Emperor and that will be sufficient.”* The genius was *“the spirit”* of the Emperor. To do this would have been to recognize the pagan gods and the pagan religion of Rome.

At that point, Polycarp responded, *“If you imagine for a moment that I would do that, then I think you pretend that you don’t know who I am. Hear it plainly: **I am a Christian!**”*

There were more entreaties. At one point the Pro-Consul commanded him to say, *“Away with the atheists!”* referring to the Christians who were considered atheists because they didn’t worship the Roman gods. Polycarp pointed at the jeering mob in the stands and cried out, *“Away with the atheists!”*

Then Polycarp was threatened that he would be eaten by the wild beasts. *“Bring them forth,”* said Polycarp. *“I would change my mind if it meant going from the worse to the better, but not to change from the right to the wrong.”*

The Pro-Consul’s patience was finally exhausted: *“I will have you burned alive,”* he warned.

Polycarp responded: *“You threaten me with a fire that burns for an hour and then is extinguished. But you know nothing about the fire of eternal judgment that will burn forever and ever. **Bring what you will!**”*

The fire was prepared. Polycarp was burned to death and he died praying, praising God and singing. As the fire engulfed him, people were converted to Christ in the stands. That was February 22, and the year 155.

What is it about a man in those worst of circumstances that enabled him to behave in such an extraordinary way and make it his greatest moment? **He trusted Christ.**

There are significant, spiritual, supernatural explanations for Polycarp's unique courage. But I think there's something of a human explanation for it as well. Polycarp was mentored by a man who knew Jesus Christ in the most unusual way. Polycarp's mentor was the Apostle John.

Mentored by the Apostle John

Thousands thronged around Jesus, hundreds followed Him, but a dozen became His disciples. And of that Twelve, three were in the inner circle - Peter, James and John. And John was described as *"the disciple whom Jesus loved"*. The relationship of the Lord Jesus with John was unique. John must have passed on something of that unique relationship to Polycarp and to others of his disciples. I think it can be summed up in these words: **John trusted Jesus.**

True Discipleship

Let us look at some words that the Apostle John was inspired to write in the Gospel of John 2:23: ***"While He (Jesus) was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs He was doing and believed in His Name. But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men. He did not need men's testimony about a man, for He knew what was in a man."*** This is the Word of God.

In Jerusalem, many people believed in Jesus. But He did not believe in them. They trusted in Jesus, but He did not trust in them. Jesus knew their hearts. He knew all men. He didn't need men's testimony about a man - He knew their heart motivations. They believed when they saw **the miraculous signs** He was doing.

It's an interesting point that when you look at church history, you see that **as the cost of discipleship increases, the numbers decrease.** We shouldn't be surprised at this.

At the first church picnic, over 5 000 people turned out. It is well known in church circles that if you want a larger attendance, throw in a meal. If there's food, then the Christians gather in far greater numbers. So there were 5 000 at the first church picnic, but at the first church sermon - the Sermon on the Mount - there were several hundred.

For the first church prayer meeting - the prayer meeting in the upper room, when our Lord commanded them to pray day and night until the power from above came down upon them - there were 120 who gathered for the first prayer meeting. The Pentecost prayer meeting.

When it came to the first mid-week outreach, the first door-to-door street evangelism, there were 70 who went out, two by two, to evangelize, in the highways and the byways.

When it came for daily discipleship, when the Lord wanted men and women to be with Him day and night to follow Him and to be where He was, there were 12 men, and about 4 women.

The Apostle John Trusted Jesus

Of those 12 men, only one went all the way to the Cross. One betrayed Him, one denied Him, one doubted Him, and they all forsook Him. **Only John went all the way to the Cross** and stood, with the women disciples, underneath the Cross and identified with the sufferings of Christ.

As the cost of discipleship increases, the numbers decrease. When we look at John's life, we see that **John trusted Jesus.**

John trusted Jesus enough to forsake prosperity. Now we may not think of the followers of Jesus being prosperous people, but John was prosperous. If you read the Gospels carefully, you can see that he was a man who worked in a family business owned by his father, Zebedee. Zebedee's family had their business in their home in northern Galilee. They had a second home in Jerusalem, a most unusual thing in first century Palestine, John would sometimes stay at his home in Jerusalem. We're told that John had ready access to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest. So his family had servants, they had a family business, access to famous and important people. John's family was actually quite well off.

But one day, John was captivated by a Man who spoke like no other man had even spoken before. John was drawn to Jesus. While he didn't have a complete understanding of all that Jesus was or all that He taught, yet John knew that Jesus was different. He sensed the Person and the power of God in this Man.

When Jesus said, ***"Follow Me and I will make you a fisher of men,"*** John decided that this Teacher from Nazareth, was worth trusting. Even if it meant giving up everything he owned, he trusted Jesus enough to forsake prosperity.

He also trusted Jesus enough to risk his life for Him. At the Mount of Crucifixion, at Golgotha, other than John, only the women disciples showed up. All the men had fled. They had abandoned Him in fear that their fate would be the same as that of Jesus. John was the only man to show up at the Cross. He stood there at the risk of his own life. There was every probability that he could be arrested and crucified as Jesus had been.

John had followed Jesus when thousands applauded Him and when miracles were performed. When the Lord was multiplying the loaves and the fishes. When Jesus came in triumph into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowds waved palm branches and took off their cloaks to pave the road, crying out: *"Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Highest!"*

It was quite another thing, however, to trust Jesus when He was stripped, whipped, bleeding, dying and "powerless". Dying a disgraceful death and humbled on the Cross. John trusted Jesus enough to risk his life.

One missionary to Uganda, Alexander McKay, said, *"I want to remind the Missionary Committee that within six months they will probably hear that one of us is dead. But when that news comes, do not be downcast, but send someone else immediately to take the vacant place."* In fact within a few months, several of the mission team had died of disease, or been murdered.

Roland Bingham, a missionary to Nigeria vowed: *"I will open Africa to the Gospel or die trying."*

This kind of single-minded determination and devotion to duty can also be seen in the example of Nate Saint, one of the five missionary martyrs amongst the Auca Indians in South America. He said: *"The way I see it, we ought to be willing to die. In the military we were taught that to obtain our objective, we had to be willing to be expendable. Missionaries must face that same expendability..., and people who do not know the Lord, they ask why in the world we waste our lives as missionaries. They forget that they too are expending their lives. When the bubble is burst, they will have nothing of eternal significance to show for the years that they have wasted."*

Several years ago a denomination in Zaire (the present Democratic Republic of Congo), had their 100th Anniversary of the coming of Christian missionaries to that part of Zaire. There were long speeches, there was music, and there were all sorts of feasting and celebrations. One event overshadowed it all. An old man - a very old man - over 100 years old, came before the crowd at the

end of the day. He insisted that he be allowed to speak. He said that he soon would die. There was some information that he alone had. If he did not speak, it would go with him to his grave.

This man explained that when the Christian missionaries first came 100 years before to that part of Africa, when it had been controlled by Belgium, his people didn't know what to think of the missionaries. His people thought the missionaries strange and their Message unusual. The tribal leaders decided to test the missionaries by slowly poisoning them to death. Over a period of months and years, the missionary children and then their parents died one by one. The old man said, *"It was as we watched how they died that we decided we wanted to live as Christians."*

It was incredible that this story had not been told for 100 years. Those people had died painful, strange deaths. They never knew why they were dying, or what the impact of their lives and deaths would be. Yet through it all, they did not leave. They stayed. They ministered. They planted the Gospel year by year. There are churches in that very area to this day - because these missionaries, like John, trusted Jesus Christ. Even at the risk of their lives. Even to martyrdom.

John trusted Jesus. He trusted Jesus enough to forsake prosperity. He trusted Jesus enough to risk his life for Him. And **John trusted Jesus enough to remain anonymous**. This may seem to be a strange thing to incorporate in a list like this. But it is a fascinating fact, that in John's Gospel, he never mentions himself, by name. He refers to most of the other disciples. He refers to Peter, to Andrew, to James and to Judas, but he never writes his own name. He refers to himself most often as *"the other disciple"* or as *"the disciple whom Jesus loved."* In John's relationship with Jesus, John concluded that he could trust Jesus either to make Him famous, or to leave Him anonymous and lost in obscurity. John did not need to promote himself. The sufficiency of Jesus Christ in his life was an expression of his trust. He trusted Jesus enough to remain anonymous.

The Lord Jesus Trusted John

There's another side to this relationship that's quite different. John trusted Jesus, yes, and **Jesus trusted John**.

Jesus trusted John to write one of His Gospels. The first three Gospels of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels. They cover much the same content. Many of the same stories, many of the same teachings, many of the same incidences, are related in different words and sometimes word for word. Most of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are similar.

In the later Gospel of John, we read a tremendous amount of new information that we wouldn't have otherwise had. Apparently the Lord Jesus wanted more of His story told. He wanted different miracles mentioned. He wanted a new perspective that had not yet been incorporated by the earlier Gospel authors. He chose someone He could trust to do that job. The final lines of John's Gospel say that there were many other things that Jesus did, and that the world itself could not contain all the books that could be written if you put all the things Jesus had done as the God of the universe into it.

John had an infinite editing job. He had to edit down enough volumes to fill all the library shelves of the world, to just twenty short chapters. He had to leave out far more than he actually included. He had to get it right. John, in the inner circle of three, had been on the Mount of Transfiguration. He had sat next to Jesus at the Last Supper. He had heard that whisper about Judas. He had information that no one else could give. Jesus chose someone He could trust to get the story straight. To communicate what was most important.

Because John was trustworthy, we have some of the most beloved and familiar words in all the Bible:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

“Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of Heaven. Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”

“God is Spirit and His worshipers must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth.”

“Open your eyes and look on the fields, for they are ripe for harvest.”

“Those who have done good will rise to live and those who have done evil, will rise to be condemned.”

“How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, but make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the one and only God?”

“I am the Bread of Life.”

“All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me.”

“And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I will lose none of them that He has given Me, but raise them up on the Last Day.”

“If any man is thirsty, let Him come to Me and drink.”

“Whoever believes in Me as Scripture says, streams of life-giving water will flow from within him.”

“Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.”

“I am the Light of the world, whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness.”

“You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”

“I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

“He who believes in Me will live even though he dies.”

“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by Me.”

“Greater love has no one than this, than that he lay down his life for his friends.”

These and many other passages were first written in the Gospel according to St. John.

John trusted Jesus and Jesus trusted John. Jesus trusted John not only to write His Gospel, **He also trusted John with His love.** That is a most extraordinary thing to be described as, *“the one whom Jesus loved.”* To be Jesus’ best friend - it seems inappropriate. It doesn’t seem right that the Lord Jesus could have a best friend. But the fact is, that is what the relationship was.

We read that Enoch walked with God and that Enoch pleased God. We read that Enoch was taken up to be with God. That's about all we know about Enoch. What an incredible epitaph! He walked with God and he pleased God.

Abraham was called God's friend.

Moses spoke with God and God spoke to him face-to-face.

David was described as, "*A man after My own heart*" by God. Imagine being described by God as: a man after God's own heart!

I wonder what it would be like to know who was the Lord's best friend on earth today? What do you think would happen? Imagine if we could know: "*This is the person whom God loves the most.*"

Do you know what would happen in 2011 if someone was identified from our country as Jesus' best friend? They would be on the cover of Christian magazines. They would probably write a book, or put out a CD, or go on a **Best Friend of Jesus Seminar** speaking tour. There would be a tremendous potential of ruining that person's life. A real temptation to arrogance. A possibility of treating others in an inappropriate and disparaging way.

Yet, didn't Jesus have as much right to have a best friend as any of us? And if so, wasn't it critically important that He chose someone whom He could trust to be His best friend, with the confidence that that person would never misuse their friendship?

Jesus trusted John with His Gospel. Jesus trusted John with His friendship and Jesus trusted John with His mother. This does seem another strange addition to this list. But in Chapter 19 of John's Gospel, we read about the last gasping breaths of our Lord, whose excruciatingly painful crucifixion allowed very little breath for speaking.

Jesus, in agony, said few words. Seven phrases from the Cross. "*Father forgive them, for they know not what they do. It is finished! Into Thy hands I commend my Spirit.*" From the Cross, as well, He gasped out, "*This is Your Son.*" Then to John he said, "*This is your mother.*"

These are some of the most powerful, personal and private words that our Lord Jesus said. While it is absolutely true that Jesus was, and is, the eternal Son of God, and while it is true that His Mission on earth was the Redemption of His people, yet it is also true that He was a man. As a son of a Hebrew family, when His father died, he was responsible for His mother's care. Now crucified, soon to die, His hands nailed to the Cross, He couldn't (humanly speaking) touch her. He couldn't care for her as He should. So his most important human responsibility on earth, He could not fulfill.

Now Theologians obviously struggle with the idea that God would ever need anything, for our very definition of God is that He is all-sufficient. Perhaps this is what we would call an anthropomorphism. However, the fact is that Jesus needed John to do something that He could not do Himself: take care of His mother. Jesus chose someone He could trust.

The record states how all the followers of Jesus - all the Apostles - left Jerusalem. Thomas went as far as India. Peter ended up in Rome. Matthew went all the way to Ethiopia. Simon the Zealot ended up in the present-day Crimea - in the Ukraine. They spread out all throughout the Mediterranean area and across the Roman Empire to Britain, to Africa and to Asia. They went in the Power of the Spirit of God with the Gospel of Christ. They built the Church of Christ. John

cared for Mary until she died. Then he went to Patmos in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) where he disciplined Polycarp.

Do You Trust Jesus?

I am sure that you have probably been asked many times: *Do you trust Jesus?* I hope your answer has continued to be a resounding: *“Yes I do! I trust Jesus completely. I would trust Him enough to devote my health and to risk my life for Him. I would trust Him that my name is in His hands.”*

Can Jesus Trust You?

Let me ask you: **Does Jesus trust you? Can He trust you? Can He trust you with your family and ministry? With the education of your children? With standing up for the Right-to-Life of pre-born babies? Can He trust you to do His will? To fulfill His Mission? To be faithful in small matters? To be trustworthy in great matters? To care for His creatures? To write what He wants written? To do what He wants done? Can Jesus trust you?**

In our world today, we need people who will live for Christ. What is needed is people whom Jesus can trust.

There's a long list of volunteers who are willing to be “*successes*” for Christ, but there's a very short line of people willing to be “*failures*” for Christ. It's much easier to trust God in health and wealth and success. But we also need people like Joni Eareckson who can trust God in a wheelchair as a paraplegic. We need people who can be trusted by Christ to raise children with medical and educational problems. We need people who can be trusted to show what it is to be a Christian with cancer. We need people who are able to both trust Christ and to be trusted by Christ.

In II Chronicles 16:9 we read: *“For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth to strengthen those whose heart is fully committed to Him.”* His eyes are searching into your church and home, into your heart, looking for hearts that are fully committed to Him.

“I, the Lord, search the heart and examine the mind to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.” Jeremiah 17:10.

God can use suffering to alert us, to direct us, to shape us and to unite us. ***“The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked but the prayer of the upright pleases Him,”*** Proverbs 15:8-9. The Lord's eyes are searching. He's examining your heart now. Are you fully committed to Him?

Do you trust Jesus?

Can Jesus trust you?

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