

## Disciples

It was a difficult topic to be sure, and Jesus was not doing a particularly good job explaining it. The Greek word *skleros* does not mean **hard to understand**, it means **hard to accept**. The disciples knew very well that Jesus was claiming to be the very essence of God come down from heaven. They also knew that no one could live this life or face eternity without submitting to him. William Barclay writes, “At the heart of all religion there must be mystery, for the simple reason that at that heart there is God. We cannot ever fully understand God. The difficulty of Christianity,” Barclay writes, “is that it demands an act of surrender to Christ, an acceptance of him as the final authority, and (at the same time), it demands a moral standard of the highest level.”

So many generations later, this concept of Jesus as – the son of God, God incarnate, the bread of life, the cup of salvation.....it is still not an easy concept to understand, even for some of us today! His teaching upset the Jews. “He said he came down from heaven! Is this

not the son of Mary and Joseph? How can he now say that he came from heaven?" You can understand their concern and confusion can't you? They were there. They saw Mary pregnant. They knew Joseph.

"The Father has sent me. Whoever believes in me has eternal life. I am the bread of life. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." Eat his flesh.....drink his blood.....

Jesus was only too aware that many of his disciples were struggling to understand this teaching. Some of them grumbled. Others complained.

There were many more disciples, students, followers of Jesus than just the 12 we think about. Jesus confronted all who were gathered, and said, "Some of you do not believe". Many of his disciples turned and went away.

Jesus turned to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"

It was Peter who answered, as it was always Peter who answered, “Where could we go? We have come to believe that you are the Holy One of God “.

“I chose you,” said Jesus, “Yet one of you are going to betray me.”

This was the beginning of the end. It was not long ago that many people traveled in large numbers to see and hear Jesus. Thousands had seen his miracles and believed in his name. Many came to be baptized by his disciples. In Samaria great things happened. In Galilee the crowds flocked after him. But the tone of things was changing. There was growing confusion. Growing frustration. Growing contempt. His overwhelming popularity was a threat to the established church. When push came to shove, people began to show their true colours, as is always the case.

Consider the 3 D’s –

Some of his followers **defected**...they simply turned their back and walked away from him. They saw that it was not possible to challenge the authorities as he was doing and get away with it for long. He was heading for disaster and they wanted out. Fair weather followers. Many of them had come to Jesus to get something from him. When it came to suffering for him and with him, interest quickly waned.

**The second D - Deterioration** - Judas, who might have become the hero, became the villain. He might have become a saint. Instead a sinner. The story is told of a very talented painter who did a marvellous painting of the last supper. When it came to the face of Christ, he called upon a young man with a face of transcendent loveliness and purity. Some years later he was about to paint the face of Judas. He went out and searched in the lowest haunts of the city to find a face so depraved and ravaged that it met his requirements. When the sitting for Judas was complete, the man said to the artist - "You painted me

before. I sat for you a few years ago when you painted the face of Christ. “

The years can be cruel. They can take away our ideals, our enthusiasm and our dreams. They can change us, and leave us with a life that has grown smaller, not bigger. They can leave us with a heart that has shrivelled instead of expanded in the love of Christ.

**And the final “D”- determination** - In Caesarea Philippi when there was wide spread speculation that Jesus might not be who he claimed to be, he asked his disciples who they thought he was. It was, of course Peter who was first to respond, “Lord you are the Messiah”. Peter was far from perfect but he was loyal...at least most of the time. Peter’s loyalty to Christ was based on a personal relationship. There were many things he did not understand. How Jesus could be the Son of god, come from heaven, and also the son of Mary, how he would call them to eat his body, and drink his blood, how people were healed by faith, and many other things that for Peter remained a mystery. Peter

was as bewildered and puzzled as the next person. But there was something about Jesus for which he would willingly die.

It is the allegiance and the love which a person gives because their heart will not allow them to do anything else.

Disciples of Christ. Some don't hang around very long. Some come to get what they need and then they go. Some are quiet. Others are loud and extroverted. Some need to understand with the head. For others, the heart. Some need to have answers to all the questions. Some are ok with mystery, with not knowing, with faith. Some disciples are loyal. Some are not. None are perfect.

I want you to think right now, of yourself as a disciple of Christ. You can imagine yourself as one of Christ's original disciples, or one of his disciples right now. Think about how your heart loves, and how your head loves. Think about your need to know....your need for facts, and logic, and reason. Think about mystery....questions that don't seem to have answers.....are you at ease with that or frustrated. Think

for a moment about your own ministry as a disciple, and how you serve. Think about your own discipleship and how much time you spend with your teacher.

Pause.....

May God bless you on our journey

Amen

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