

## VALUE 1 - BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

### **THE CHARACTER OF A DISCIPLE (Acts 11:19-30)**

#### **Introduction**

What do we picture when we think of discipleship?  
The Latin word *discipulus* simply means learner or pupil.  
We learn from Christ and we also learn from good Christian role models.

#### Background to passage

Initial reluctance to leave Jerusalem was overcome by persecution.  
Gospel was shared with Jews (v19).  
First time the gospel was taken to Gentiles was in Antioch (v20).

#### **The character of a disciple**

Who would you pick to send to Antioch as an example to new gentile converts?

- Enduring envoy (v22)  
Barnabas was open to new challenges.  
We are all envoys or free samples – the only Bible most people have.  
Barnabas remained an ambassador even after painful conflict with Paul (Acts 15:39).
- Enthusiastic encourager (v23)  
He was glad at what God was doing, minimizing the negatives (persecution, hard journey etc).  
He encouraged a wholehearted relationship with Jesus.  
The hardest part of discipleship is endurance (temptations, troubles, trespasses against us).
- Energetic enlister (v24)  
A good man, living the life, not just saying the words.  
His energy derived from the Holy Spirit and faith (*warriors not worriers*).  
A charismatic personality who brought people to the Lord, not himself.
- Enterprising enabler (v25 & 26)  
New growth, so new teachers were needed.  
He finds and envisions a man no-one else would use (also perseveres with Mark in Acts 15:39).  
Results of his ministry – disciples were noticed and first called Christians here.
- Entrusted environmentalist (v27-30)  
Famine was about to strike.  
Note Barnabas' concern for the needs of others (Acts 4:36).  
Barnabas entrusted to help those in back in Jerusalem.

#### **Conclusion – Five qualities of disciples**

- Envoys – are we open to represent the Lord wherever He sends us?
- Encouragers – do we have an attitude of gratitude or a ministry of discouragement?
- Enlisters – do we have attractive, appealing lives that will draw others?
- Enablers – do we help others develop or hog the limelight?  
(Barnabas & Paul become Paul & Barnabas (Acts 13:42).
- Environmentalists – do we respond to the physical as well as the spiritual needs of others?

## VALUE 2 - SPIRITUALLY AUTHENTIC

### **GET REAL (Ecclesiastes 2:1-11; I John 1:1-7)**

#### **Introduction**

There's an upsetting little verse in James 4:14. "*What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*" The word 'unreality' sums it up. No real substance to it. Nothing that seems to be lasting - just the present moment, no future. Solomon expressed the same feeling "*everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;*" (Ecclesiastes 2:11). So dissatisfying, not at all as good as one thinks it should be. "Surely there's something better than this." Is this true of you? "Oh no, I'm a church-goer." OK. But let's be honest. Do you feel rather fed up even with your religion? Rather bored sometimes? All very unreal. Perhaps your need is greater than you know.

#### **Reality in Jesus Christ**

When John wrote his first letter we get the impression that he was so full of his message that he couldn't wait to start. No preliminaries, no greetings. He was excited because he had found that the Lord Jesus Christ was so real to him, and he wanted to tell everyone that. He and his fellow disciples had encountered Him as a real Person, not a story-book Jesus. He piled up phrases like "*we heard Him, we saw Him, we touched Him*". Jesus was the most real thing about their lives.  
It began years previously but they still had that living experience of Him. John starts with "*that*" and quickly moves to "*this*". He changes the tense of his verbs from past to present. And then it's present reality all the way - have a look in his first chapter and see.

#### **Reality for you today**

In Jesus we  
are spiritually alive. This happens when we have contact with Him (v1). Maybe you have touched a bare electric wire (was it alive or dead?) But many people want their religion carefully insulated lest they get a shock. Are you prepared to reach out and touch Him? You'll find that He's real!  
are cleansed from our sin. Great efforts are made to clean up the pollution of our rivers and atmosphere, but our inner lives are being polluted more and more. Is your life being polluted?  
Only Jesus can give us a thorough cleansing (v7). Really clean, however dirty we are.  
have so much to share. Fellowship with other believers as we walk together and good news for everyone else (v3 & 4). That shows how real and joyful it all is - we find that Jesus is as effective for others too.

#### **Application.**

Humbly but clearly share your own experience of Christ. (*It could be something along these lines.*)  
'I have known Jesus personally since .... He is real to me .... All my .... is in Him. I haven't been the marvellous Christian that I should have been but .....I want to tell you .... And persuade you to .....

## VALUE 3 - CLEARLY PROPHETIC

### **THE GOD WHO SPEAKS (2 Corinthians 8:1-9)**

#### **Introduction**

The Christian God, our God, is the God who speaks. This sets Him apart. He spoke in Creation. He spoke to Adam. He spoke at Sinai. And supremely He has spoken in His Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2).

#### **God's Purpose for Israel (Exodus 19:4-6)**

A careful study of the Old Testament reveals that a holy God and a loving God is looking for a holy, loving people. Thus Israel was to be a prophetic people revealing God through the way that they lived. God was about to reveal to Moses the law that would make them a distinctive people. This would set a standard that would hold all the other nations in awe (Deuteronomy 4:6-8). They were to be a distinctive people because God Himself would be with them (Exodus 33:16).

There were two aspects to their distinctiveness that were equally important:

- a prescribed way to worship God. Approach to God was too important to be left to guess work. Everything had to be "...according to the pattern that God showed".
- their care for each other, especially those who were in need. Their concern, which echoed God's, was for those on the margins of human society.

These two aspects of the Law, summarised as love to God and love to one's neighbour were inextricably woven together. Lack of love for one's neighbour impoverished worship, and lack of love for God invalidated service to one's neighbour (Deuteronomy 6:5).

#### **God's Purpose in the Gospels (Matthew 9:35-36)**

Jesus had more to say about the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God than He did about individual salvation. He had come to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God, to show us the Kingdom of God in action and to open the Kingdom for all who in humility would seek to enter (Luke 4:18). The Kingdom He described would be the sort of nation that Israel had been called to be, but had so singularly failed to be, because she had taken the privileges of being "*the people of God*" but rejected the responsibilities that went with it.

#### **God's Purpose for the Church (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35)**

The Day of Pentecost was an astonishing day. Weak, fearful men became bold proclaimers of the resurrection of Jesus. As "*they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship*" they picked up the idea that in the church no-one should be in need. Where did that idea come from? Let me put it in this form: The church is called to be the visible representation of the Kingdom of God (the reign and rule of God) on the earth. The Kingdom that Jesus declared was now to be modelled among His followers who were given the Holy Spirit so that they had the power to become what God intended them to be. We are called to succeed where Israel failed (1 Peter 2:9-12).

#### **Application**

We are to be clearly prophetic (calling the nations of the world back to God's standards):

- by living the truth of the Kingdom of God. This is the calling of every single Christian.
- by being unafraid to say "God says..." (provided we know clearly what He has said) in whatever circle we find ourselves.
- by encouraging and supporting those Christians who have a call from God to speak in the political arena.

**May we be those whose 'lives are like lightning so that our voices may be like thunder'.**

## VALUE 4 – COMMUNITY FOCUSED

### **THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY (Psalm 133)**

#### **Introduction**

Imagine Jerusalem 1000 BC - King David sits on his veranda surveying the dry, barren, dusty hillside of Judea. To his left raised up on a hill is the Tent of Meeting – The Tabernacle – The House of God. Smoke arises from the altar, priests are hard at work preparing for the great Passover week of celebrations. Jews are expected from all the known world. The citizens of this great city await the greatest event of the year. Soon the Mount Zion will be swarming with worshippers clothed in white, singing, and discussing the things of God for the next seven days. In the excitement and expectation of the moment David pens this Psalm.

#### **Community is good and pleasant (v1)**

A family together is good. The church is family. We pray, "*Our Father*". We are Christ's family (Matthew 12: 49-50).

A family that shares life together is pleasant. Families stick, eat, play, feel hurt, pray, argue, fall out and make up together. They work, support and love each other. Jesus' disciples did all these, especially eating. A family that is united is good and pleasant. What unites the churches in our town or village today? Why do people travel so far these days to get to "their" church? What would you do if your church building had to shut? The true Church is united to God through Christ and has one Father in Heaven.

#### **Community that has God at the centre (v2)**

The way to initiate a man into the priesthood was to anoint him with oil. A priest was someone who entered the presence of God on behalf of the people. Perhaps David wanted to be a priest more than the King. (see Psalm 27:4-5).

In Christ we are royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:4-5). When we gather in His name, He is in the midst (Matthew 18:20).

Fellowship reveals God at work in us. When Christians meet together and are open with one another our fellowship reveals God's work. How do we relate to other Christians?

Fellowship becomes evangelism. If all our fellowship happens on Sunday morning at services, then only Christians get to see us live as Christians. *We have* to engage with people outside church. Where do you meet with non believers? They need to see our love for each other and for them. (see John 13:35; Acts 2: 46-47; 1 Peter 2:12).

#### **Community brings blessing (v3)**

Mount Hermon was lush and fruitful. In contrast Mount Zion was dry and arid. This is a picture of God's blessing reaching the needy. Remember the promise to Abram (Genesis 12:2-3). How do we bless others?

- Showing love in action (Acts 9:36)
- Meeting their needs (Acts 2:45)
- Witnessing to them (1 Peter: 3:15)
- Bringing people into eternal life (John 5:24).

#### **Conclusion**

Christians can fall into two wrong beliefs.

- Community action is a distraction to the gospel
- We live the gospel and prefer not to preach it.

A community like this can be the answer to a society in disintegration, if we walk the walk and talk the talk!

## VALUE 5 – CULTURALLY RELEVANT

### RELEVANT AND RESPECTED (Acts 5:12-16)

#### Introduction

The early church had explosive growth, which indicates the relevance of the message. 3000 believed (Acts 2:41), people were added daily (2:47) and, “*the number of men grew to about five thousand*” (4:4). Something real was happening. The miracles performed by Jesus through the Apostles filled the opposition with fear and kept them, at this time, at a distance and aloof. “*No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people*” (v13). At the same time more and more of the ordinary people were joining the church, “*more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number*” (v14). There is a marked contrast between the awestruck reserve of some people and the great missionary success as many turned to the Lord.

#### The gospel is relevant, even though in our present age, people are rejecting the church,

More and more people believed as needs were met (v14).

- The sick were healed
- The tormented in spirit were set free
- Sinners were saved by believing in Jesus.

The gospel will meet every need of man, whatever the age or culture, because it addresses the fallen human condition. It was relevant to Jews in Solomon’s Colonnade, to Jews in the streets of Jerusalem. Later to dispersed Jews around the Mediterranean and to all the world. It is relevant now, the evidence of believers in every nation today confirms this truth.

In contrast in the UK, in 2000, 66% of people believed in God but only 7.5% attended church regularly. While a majority of the population have an interest in God, the church in our present age, is not seen as a place to go to for answers about God; it does not hold the people outside the Church in awe. The gospel is relevant and powerful, it is “*the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*” (Romans 1:16). The church by comparison, where the gospel presently resides, is seen as boring, irrelevant, and untrue.

#### The church and its people have to become culturally relevant again

It has been said, ‘The challenge for the church now is to stop thinking merely about methods to reverse decline but to reconsider the basic purpose and call of the church.’ Martin Robinson & Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space*. Paul said his purpose was “*to win as many as possible*” (1 Corinthians 9: 19-23). This is both our call as individuals and the call of the church. How can we live up to this call when no one listens to us because we live and speak in ways no one understands!

#### Culturally relevant individuals

A culturally relevant fellowship has members who:

- have been transformed - There are five measures of personal transformation: reading the scriptures, listening to the guidance of God, fellowship, being able to deal with conflict, using the gifts God has given us
- are willing to speak up - It has been said that when the people of God speak about God receptivity to the gospel rises.
- spend time being friends - Jesus was incarnational, he created growing, multiplying communities of faith.
- allow belonging before they expect believing - Jesus did not set standards that created obstacles to belief. He welcomed everyone, ate with everyone and cut across cultural taboos in order to say something about the kingdom of God.

When Hudson Taylor was called to China he became as Chinese as he could, even wearing Chinese clothes. Christians have to be able to identify with people, to love them, to listen to them, and to talk in words they understand eg. Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4), Paul on Mars Hill (Acts 17), being “*all things to all men*” (1 Corinthians 9:22).

#### A culturally relevant church

It has been said of the church that its problem is not that it is irrelevant to those outside its community, but that it is not an actual expression of the culture of the people that are in it. That we do not sing songs with tunes that most of our people like, that we do not use the language that most people use and that we do not address the issues that most people want addressed.

The disciples were “*highly regarded*” (v13). How can our churches become highly regarded again?

- By scratching society’s itches. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century revival, even though the revivalists were wild and eccentric and their evangelical message was ridiculed, the church grew because they took up the cause of the poor and disadvantaged and, as a result, society changed its view of the value of the church.
- By concentrating on community. In Acts 2, the New Testament does not talk of ‘services’. The early church was involved in the apostle’s doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, evangelism and sharing material possessions. Most of this would have been done in informal groups, not services. When people become believers in countries where there is no church they meet together frequently, arriving during an afternoon or in the evening over a period of an hour or so. While together they will have a meal, read the scriptures together, discuss an issue that some are struggling with, pray for each other, give testimony to the Lord’s goodness, break bread together and someone will usually share some teaching they have prepared. They will leave at different times depending on when they have had enough or when another responsibility demands their attention. They are being a church community and not just going through the motions of being church.
- By going out more than welcoming in. Jesus told us to “*go into all the world*” (Matthew 28:19). Repentance, belief and even miracles came “*in the streets*” (v15). Evangelism in church buildings will attract only a few, because it is unfamiliar territory, possibly intimidating and seemingly irrelevant to most people’s lives.
  - How should our church reach out to meet people where they are?
  - How would we make new Christians, especially those with no church or religious background, welcome?
  - How would we disciple them?
- By making the effort. Everyone will have friends and family, colleagues and neighbours. If we are able to share our faith honestly it will have an impact; “*they took note that they had been with Jesus*” (4:13). We have to start where we are and not just build bridges to where others are, but go and ‘camp out’ with them, showing respect and concern. That will mean self-giving, sacrifice and real effort. It will mean getting out there, getting ‘stuck into’ new situations and sometimes being out of our depth in a ‘post-modern’ world. But if Jesus is the answer it will be seen in our lives and that will be contagious.

#### Conclusion

We discovered in Acts 5, that the presence of Jesus is alarming to some and appealing to others. The gospel of Good News never changes. It is appealing because, unlike any other form of religion, it can actually change lives for the better. We may be alarmed when we realise how much we and our churches need to change in order to convey this gospel to those it is meant for. It may be that some churches are so far from fulfilment of this purpose that they will never be able to change enough. Some churches may close so that more effective ones can open. It has been said that Churches must cease to see themselves as an end in themselves. Do we see our church in this way?

We must realise that an approach at mission that thinks that we can bring people back to the church is doomed to failure. For most people in the UK today ‘church’ is either a completely foreign culture, or one that they have decided to reject. This must lead us to repentance and a renewed, culturally relevant, missionary drive. It has been said that in the UK of the 21st century everything we face in mission is now a cross-cultural task.

Re-arranging the ‘deck chairs’ of worship, songs and even preaching style, will no longer make enough difference to the church, what is needed is a thoroughly radical response. Culture is changing fast and the church must not fall any further behind.

## VALUE 6 – MUTUALLY COMMITTED

### UNITED WE STAND (1 Corinthians 1:10-18; 3:4-9)

#### Introduction

The church in Corinth was rich in spiritual gifts, but marred by in-fighting and diversity. Diversity has been a recurring weakness of Christians down the centuries.

Discuss

- how factions/divisions affect not only churches but families, political parties, clubs etc.
- the factions/divisions that your congregations may have experienced or know.

#### The cause

They were no longer of one mind because they had begun to align themselves behind four individuals (v12).

- **Paul.** He may have suggested that he was an example to follow (Philippians 3:17) but he was really saying, ‘imitate Christ. That is what I seek to do’. Perhaps some in Corinth were attracted to Paul because of his intellect, his logical presentation of this new Christian teaching or his theology. In our churches today there are those for whom theology (teaching) is perhaps too important. They align themselves behind people (for example Calvin, Wesley, Martyn Lloyd-Jones) or behind the teaching of a particular denomination. Such attitudes can cause real division and difficulty, and may result in lasting damage. Do you agree?  
Other might have aligned themselves behind Paul because he played a significant role in shaping their early Christian life, for he called them “*my dear children*” (1Cor 4:14). Perhaps there is an individual or an organisation that helped shape your early Christian life and in some way that is still influencing your attitude towards other Christians or Christian groups. Has this always been helpful, or are there dangers here?
- **Apollos.** Little is known about him other than he appears to have been a cultured and eloquent preacher and forceful debater (Acts 18:24-28). If some in Corinth found Paul a bit hard going (2 Corinthians 10:10) perhaps Apollos was more attractive. Like those who admired the eloquence of the preacher but failed to grasp the thrust of his message (Ezekiel 33:32). For them Apollos may have been, “*nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well*”. They heard his words but did not put them into practice.
- **Peter.** He was the one the traditionalists could hold up as their champion. We know he struggled with Jewish traditions (Galatians 2:11-13). How far do we struggle with ‘traditionalist’ views ourselves? What should be our attitudes, do you think?
- **Christ.** The context suggests that Paul did not see this group as one to be followed. Were these the super-spiritual who despised human leaders, because they had a hot-line to God? There can be nothing so divisive (and dangerous) as to have one group claiming to be superior, and going their own way.

#### The consequence (v10-11)

- Disagreement. The prayer was, “*you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*” They clearly were not!
- Division. “*that there be no divisions among you*”. There clearly were!
- Discord. “*there are quarrels among you.*”  
This resulted in:
- Weakness. Any group is weakened by in-fighting and dilution of resources.
- Waste of time. Trying to bring healing and reconciliation takes time and effort
- Weariness. Spiritual, emotional and possibly physical.

#### The cure

Paul poses three questions (v13).

- “*Is Christ divided?*” There is one Christ who cannot be divided. He is the **one** head of **all** local churches and of **the Church**.

- “*Was I crucified for you?*” Christ is the only saviour. Paul, Apollos and Peter are at best only servants, sinners saved by grace. The death of Christ is the means of peace, reconciliation and unity. Why then did they (and why do we) allow such things as theology, personality, tradition and supposed spirituality to take the place of the crucified Christ.
- “*Were you baptised into me?*” In their baptism they had given their lives over to Christ. They had acknowledged Christ to be their Lord and Master; not Paul, not Apollos not Peter. Why then were they allowing mere human beings, even if apostles or charismatic leaders, to take the place of Christ?

Paul wanted to see mutually committed Christians and Churches who could acknowledge their differences, but work together, as Paul and Apollos actually did (1 Corinthians 3:4-9). He believed that united together they would be better equipped to make the gospel known and be better examples of what the gospel could do. In Christ the biggest difference of their time, between Jewish and Gentile traditions, had been abolished, bringing a unity through the cross (Ephesians 2:14-18).

#### Application

- Is the proclamation of the gospel top of your church’s agenda. If not, why not?
- Is your church doing all it can to maintain the unity of the Spirit (within and without) (Ephesians 4:3)? If so, what are you doing? If not, what can you do?