

## 10. Discipleship Under Pressure (1Q Discipleship 2008)

**Biblical material:** 1 Kings 18; Matt. 26:56; Luke 9:51-56; John 6:1-15, 12:1-6, 18:1-11, 21:15-19.

### Quotes

- Those who doubt most, and yet strive to overcome their doubts, turn out to be some of Christ's strongest disciples. *Selwyn Hughes*
- The most tragic thing in the suffering of Christ was not the cross but the sleeping disciples. *Erkki Melartin*
- ... I gave as an offering my all to Him Who had won me and saved me, my property, my fame, my health, my very words... In considering all these things, I preferred Christ. And the words of God were made sweet as honeycombs to me, and I cried after knowledge and lifted up my voice for wisdom. There was moreover the moderation of anger, the curbing of the tongue, the restraint of the eyes, the discipline of the belly, and the trampling under foot of the glory which clings to the earth. *Gregory of Nazianzus*
- The Christ is a myth.... the soldiers of Reason have crucified the illegitimate impostor, he is dead; and the ignorant disciples and hysterical women who still linger about the cross should take his body down and bury it. *John E. Remsberg*

### Questions

How do we as disciples relate to problems that come, especially those that attack our fundamental values as disciples? To what degree are such experiences "tests"? How do we see God's role in all of this? In what way do we see Jesus asking us, as he did Peter, "Do you love me?" Is our answer through words or demonstration, and how?

### Discussion/ Comment

The lesson references "Murphy's Law": "Whatever can go wrong will go wrong." Is this valid—or simply a general description of things in a fallen world?

The showdown on Mt Carmel (1 Kings 18) demonstrates the potential of just one faithful disciple. Elijah confronted false worship and all the powers of the corrupt political state to reveal the power of God. The people were convinced. Yet the demonstration of power did not convince for long before they lapsed back into apostasy. That's why power is not God's way—because it does not bring him what he really wants (Micah 3:8). In addition, Elijah's trust broke when confronted with the hate of Jezebel—disciples have limits, especially under extreme pressure.

Just like the disciples after the arrest of Jesus. Despite Peter's sincere promise, he did deny Jesus. Under pressure, it's easy enough to want to run away.

Then there's the temptation to misuse power (Luke 9:51ff). This is especially displeasing to God because it misrepresents him so badly. Such a spirit of vengeance is completely contrary to the character of God.

You wonder what Philip the disciple thought when Jesus suggested he feed the five thousand! It was beyond the disciples' comprehension to think this way. And while Jesus did not normally operate this way, it's still part of the divine aspect. God isn't limited in the way that we often think, and without becoming presumptuous we need to see things from a larger perspective.

Again the anointing by Mary followed by the triumphal entry into Jerusalem must have challenged the disciples. What was going on? And then the terrible disappointment after the great joy...

Jesus' challenge to Peter "Do you love me?" repeated three times indicates the kind of commitment Jesus is looking for, especially in the light of past experience. Most of all it reveals in most intimate detail what God really wants—something that cannot be achieved by any other way than truth-filled evidence of his own loving trustworthiness—"he first loved us." (1 John 4:19).

God is not the one who puts his disciples under pressure. The "accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10) is Satan himself (his name means "accuser"). He is the one slandering God and making all kinds of charges against him as part of the great controversy. Should we expect anything different ourselves? To be falsely accused, to have your character maligned, to be "set up" is all part of the disciples' experience. The saddest aspect of this is when the "pressure on disciples" is caused by those who claim to be God's disciples, yet do the Devil's work for him. We can all testify to the experience of suffering at the hands of those who thought they were pleasing God. We need to be especially careful to make sure we're not doing the same thing.

"Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction." *Blaise Pascal*.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Those who have accepted unpopular truth have always been obliged to make great sacrifices. Persecution has fallen heavily upon some. We have the lives of the apostles as our ensamples; but above all we have the life of Christ our great Exemplar presented before us. The beloved disciple tells us he was banished to the isle of Patmos, "For the word of God, for the testimony of Jesus Christ." While on that desolate island, to his unspeakable joy, his dear Master and Lord stood before him, the very one with whom he had walked and talked when they were together in the world, upon whose bosom he had learned, whose great heart of love had beat beneath the pressure of his head, whose sufferings he had witnessed, and whose visage had been marred more than the sons of men. {ST, February 28, 1878 par. 17}

There are men who are ever talking and gossiping and bearing false witness, who sow the seeds of discord and engender strife. Heaven looks upon this class as Satan's most efficient servants. But the man who is injured is in a far less dangerous position than when fawned upon and extolled for a few of his efforts which appear successful. The commendation of apparent friends is more dangerous than reproach.

Every man who praises himself brushes the luster from his best efforts. A truly noble character will not stoop to resent the false accusations of enemies; every word spoken falls harmless, for it strengthens that which it cannot overthrow

How careful we should be, that our words and actions are all in harmony with the sacred truth that God has committed to us! . . . When you are associated together, be guarded in your words. Let your conversation be of such a nature that you will have no need of repentance. . . . If the love of the truth is in your heart, you will talk of the truth. You will talk of the blessed hope that you have in Jesus. If you have love in your heart, you will seek to establish and build up your brother in the most holy faith. If a word is dropped that is detrimental to the character of your friend or brother, do not encourage this evilspeaking. It is the work of the enemy. Kindly remind the speaker that the Word of God forbids that kind of conversation. {VSS 153-4}

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