

31 - HARDER DISCIPLESHIP Luke 9:57-62

If we ever think we have no need to be told how difficult a committed discipleship may be, we need only to read this brief passage. In these three brief anecdotes that Luke told almost in passing, we have the full measure of what a sincere follower of Jesus might face. All three present us with the challenge to our security and individual identity.

First was a man who promised without hesitation that he would follow Jesus wherever he went. Jesus responded with what may have been a proverb. He really did not know whether he would have a place to sleep each night or where it would be.

An article in the *Biblical Archaeology Review* (21:04, Jul/Aug 1995) gave explicit details of a cave not generally shown to pilgrims about the *Cave of Gethsemane*. There Jesus and his disciples are thought to have sheltered on the night when he was betrayed. Known since the 4th century CE, it is now owned by the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. It lies not far from the traditional site of the Garden of Gethsemane pilgrims are usually shown at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Jesus and his disciples could well have stayed in caves like this along their route from Galilee to Jerusalem.

The second man heard a challenge from Jesus to follow him. The man's excuse for not going was that he had to bury his dead father. Jesus' immediately retorted that the dead could bury their own dead. To many it would seem that this man's request was legitimate

enough. He was certainly concerned about his family responsibilities. So why would Jesus be so critical and deny the legitimacy of his very human desire? This can only be interpreted as a challenge to the man's spirituality as well as his depth of commitment. It implies that those who want to delay their commitment may not yet have reached the required sense of vocation to be a disciple, come what may. Many modern Christians can tell of a similar lack of decisive dedication.

The third would-be disciple received the same challenge as the second, but chose instead to go home to say farewell to his family and friends. Even the Hebrew scriptures tell of the prophet Elijah allowing his disciple Elisha to do that before taking up his call as a prophet (1 Kings 19:19-21). That too was not good enough for Jesus. He made it absolutely clear that there were to be no second chances. Only a total commitment would do.

But this was a totally different situation than had pertained previously during Jesus' ministry in Galilee. The whole company of disciples would all be in danger as they reached Jerusalem. In his *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography*, Bruce Chilton suggests that the entry into Jerusalem and the overthrowing of the money-changers' tables was a deliberate riot Jesus planned to occur during the thanksgiving festival of *Sukkoth*, several months prior to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. If so, there was reason to demand that those who were identified as his followers would be in grave danger for some time. Was Judas Iscariot just afraid of this?