

Letton Hall - The D Factor - Talk 1 - Who Do You Follow?

I'm really excited to be back at Letton, I've been coming to Letton probably since I was about 14...I first came with my parents church and then during my time as a youth worker for Park Road Baptist in Peterborough I came with CROPS several times and for me I know Letton has been a place where God has really spoken to me and challenged me in the past because it's a place where we have more time than we usually would in the busyness of everyday life to actually focus on Him and so I hope that this week God is going to speak to you guys.

how many of you have ever watched the X-Factor?

Now I'm sure some of you have followed it more closely than others, perhaps some of you watch it right from the start until the end of the series and even buy the single...perhaps some of you feel like even though you don't watch it you're still subjected to it through what other people say about it on Facebook!

I want you to imagine that you are auditioning for the next series of X-Factor...it doesn't really matter if you can sing, anyone can give it a go...perhaps you've got more chance of being featured on TV in the auditions if you really can't sing!

You fill in the online application and a couple of months later you get a letter from ITV telling you they'd like you to audition.

The day of the auditions arrive.

You get up early one morning and head down to London....the letter said you needed to be at the O2 Arena before 9am so you allow plenty of time.

You arrive in London and catch the underground across to the O2 Arena where you see 10,000 other people...all of whom have also been asked to audition.

You join the queue...you see all sorts of cameramen around, some of the other people auditioning are warming up, others doing strange things or dressed in bizarre clothing so they get spotted by the cameras.

Maybe you're one of them

One of 10,000 people waiting to see if they will be chosen to be on the next X-Factor series.

We'll come back to that later.

Matt phoned me up in December and asked me if I could speak at Letton with the theme 'The D Factor' and if you haven't worked it out the 'D' is for discipleship and over the next 4 days, a little bit like if you were going on the X Factor we're going on a bit of journey and we're going to think about what it really means to be a true follower of Jesus.

And so if we're talking about this word 'discipleship' it's probably a good start for us to have a vague idea what it means...just for a minute or so just turn to the person next to you and discuss what you think disciple means.

Get some answers/ideas

The dictionary definition of disciple gives us lots of ideas...most of them focused around a disciple being someone who follows Jesus....the vaguest definition is '*a person who is a pupil or an adherent of the doctrines of another*'

So someone whose aim is to learn to become like someone else.

Video Clip - Friends S06 E17 - Joey's Twin

In those clips Joey is training Karl to be like him because he needs money and can make that by taking part in a twin study...so Joey hires Karl to be his twin and teaches Karl his catch-phrase 'How, you doing?', teaches him some of the ways of Joey...like taking a drink from Monica & Chandler's fridge and dresses him like him too with the hope that Karl will be enough like Joey for them to pass as twins.

And if you don't like dictionary definitions then think of that Friends clip when it comes to discipleship and Joey training Karl to be like him because all we mean by disciple is someone who is learning to be like someone else.

So let's have a look at Jesus calling His first disciples in the bible.

If you have bibles with you turn to Mark 1: 14-20 (NCV)

At this point Jesus has just started His ministry. John has baptised him, Jesus has gone out into the desert and been tempted by the devil and this passage is just after he has come back.

"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, preaching the Good News from God. He said, "The right time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Change your hearts and lives and believe the Good News!"

When Jesus was walking by Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the lake because they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come follow me, and I will make you fish for people." So Simon and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed him.

Going a little farther down, Jesus saw two more brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebadee. They were in a boat, mending their nets. Jesus immediately called them, and they left their father in the boat with the hired workers and followed Jesus"

So Jesus invites these men to follow Him

And as I've been thinking about this idea of following Jesus...this image keeps popping into my mind.

Jesus - Twitter photo

Now that probably means I've spent too much time on Twitter but actually it makes an interesting point because all of us follow a huge variety of things.

Just quickly turn to the person on the other side of you this time and just share some of the different things you follow...it might be people on Twitter, it might be a football team or something completely different!

Couple of minutes discussion

Get some ideas fed-back

In our world there are lots of things we follow. When I was thinking about this talk, off the top of my head I came up with a few things that I follow:

I follow variety of people on Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr.

I follow different bands & musicians.

I click news websites a couple of times a day and follow the news.

I follow a few TV series.

Just like the things that you follow my life is full of things I follow and there's nothing wrong with following these things except that often what it means to follow these things is very different to what Jesus means when He calls His disciples to follow Him.

I can follow someone on Twitter but it doesn't require a lot of commitment...I might read half of the things they tweet...and even some of those I won't be reading properly, they'll be skim-read.

I can dip in and out of following that person...I can even 'unfollow' if they tweet so much I simply can't keep up or I lose interest and there is no real consequence of unfollowing them.

And actually a lot of the time the people or things we 'follow' don't have a massive impact on our lives.

If anything we're more fans of these things than followers.

But Jesus in this passage, when He calls His first disciples...the first people Jesus chooses to follow Him requires something much more of them.

Jesus required Simon, Andrew, James & John to completely change the focus of their lives in order to focus on following Jesus and the bible says that when Jesus asked them to 'follow Him' they immediately left what they were doing and followed Him.

If we go back to our X-Factor scene from the beginning you'll remember that we are queued up outside the O2 arena with 10,000 other hopefuls.

After a while you're ushered into the arena itself. The production team and camera crew make you scream, shout and wave....some of it will go into the final cut of that episode.

Eventually the process is explained to you.

You will start by auditioning for one of the crew in the hundreds of make-shift booths set out in the arena.

If they think you're good enough you'll be given a golden ticket and be asked to come back later to audition for a more senior production member.

If that goes well you'll get your chance to sing for Simon and the judges and maybe even make it onto TV and through to the next round!

[PAUSE]

And the reason I keep coming back to this is because the traditional route people took to being a disciple wasn't too dissimilar to the X-Factor.

But for us to understand the significance of Jesus asking his disciples to follow him we have to dive into a little bit of Jewish history and the journey that traditionally people went on to become a disciple of a Rabbi (like Jesus) .

The bible doesn't tell us that much about the childhood of Jesus but Luke does tell us about a time when Mary & Joseph went to Jerusalem for the passover feast when Jesus was 12 and when all the feast days were over they started heading back home...but Jesus stayed in Jerusalem.

Now a few days later, having not seen Jesus for a few days Mary and Joseph wondered where he was and I always read that and think 'how did you not know you're son was missing until a few days later?' but they were travelling in a big group and so they would have assumed that Jesus was among their family and friends.

So they start looking for Him and they can't find him. He isn't with their friends or family...so they go back to Jerusalem and there they find Jesus sitting in the temple with the teachers...and Jesus is asking them questions and the teachers are giving answers and Jesus understands them...and everyone is amazed at the level of understanding that Jesus has at just 12!

Now I don't know if you've ever stayed in a church for 6 days asking your vicar questions, I'd be surprised if you have but at the time it wasn't such an unusual thing....although probably 6 days was pretty intense!

(I'm assuming it took Mary & Joseph 3 to travel back)

Back in those days every six year old Jewish boy would go to a local synagogue school...and they'd attend something called Bet Safer which means 'house of the book' and they would

attend this between being the ages of 6 and 10 and do this 5 days a week...Monday to Friday.

It would start with the rabbi taking honey and covering a child's slate, he would invite them to lick the honey off the slate (bit of a strange first day of school!) and quote Psalm 119, saying "May the words of God be sweet to your taste, sweeter than honey to your mouth".

Then over the next 4 years you would be taught to memorise 'The Torah'...which is the 1st 5 books of our Old Testament - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers & Deuteronomy.

Next, those that were good enough and got through the first D-Factor stage would continue on to Bet Talmud which means 'House of learning' and so between the ages of 10-14 you would memorise the rest of the Hebrew scriptures all the way up to Malachi and so at the age of 13 or 14 you would have memorised 20 books of the bible...in Jewish seminaries this still happens today!

The other thing they would do is teach them to answer questions...but not in the same way as our schools do...they be taught to answer with a question (which is exactly what Jesus is doing in the temple when Mary & Joseph find Him!).

So for example if your maths teacher said to you 'What is 2 add 2?' you could reply with 'What is 16 divided by 4?' and that would be the answer! (I'll give you some time to do the maths!).

So they were taught to answer a question with a question...something Jesus does quite a lot in his teaching!

Finally if you got through the second round of the D-Factor you would go onto Bet Midrash when you were 13-14.

This was for the best of best and at this point you would go and present yourself to a well-known, respected, powerful rabbi and say "Rabbi, I want to become your disciple, your student. Please let me be in your Bet Midrash, your house of study".

And the rabbi would ask lots of questions to find out if you really were the best of the best...after-all a rabbi would teach their thinking, their interpretation of the Scripture and so they would want to find out if you were able to become their student.

If the rabbi believed you were the best of the best, someone who would become like him then he would say 'Come, follow me'.

And with those words you would leave your family, your village and the local synagogue where you had been studying and you would follow that rabbi. You would become their disciple. You would follow him everywhere!

[Pause]

And so the biblical idea of 'following' was very different to ours. If a teacher asked you to follow Him, it was a great honour. You would drop everything, leave your surroundings and family and commit to following and learning from that teacher.

But this is where what Jesus does with his disciples is very different.

The disciples we've read about were fishing because at some point it had been decided by a rabbi that they weren't 'disciple material'.

If a Jewish boy went to a rabbi and the rabbi didn't think he was quite right to be his disciple he would say "You do know Torah and you know Torah well. But you are not able to become my disciple. Go, home to your village. Make babies. Pray that they become rabbis. Go home and learn the family business - fishing, farming, carpentry. Because you won't be studying to be a rabbi. You won't be a disciple. You don't have the D-Factor"

So the Simon, Andrew, James and John had all been through this D-Factor process and at some point not been disciple material and so had gone to learn their family business but Jesus looks at them and decides that even though they're not the best of the best...on paper they might not make ideal discipleship material...if it was the X-Factor perhaps it wasn't the best audition ever but Jesus sees something in them.

Jesus believes that they could become like Him.

And in dropping everything to follow Jesus...to become His disciples. Simon, Andrew, James & John's lives are all transformed.

That's where discipleship starts & that's where our journey this week starts.

It starts with Jesus seeing something in us.

It's not about how much of the bible we memorise.

it's not about how much we know

It's not about how many Letton hall house parties we've been to

but it's about who we follow?

Jesus says to us, the same thing He says to those disciples.

'Come, follow me'

And he says that because Jesus believes that each of us have the potential to become like Him.

So do you follow Jesus?

And I don't mean like following someone on Facebook. I don't mean a 'follow' where you occasionally check up on them, see what they have to say, maybe even have a non-internet based conversation at some point.

I mean the focus of your life being on them.

Jesus says to each of us 'Come, follow me'