

Message #6

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John

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JOHN , JESUS AND THE PATTERN OF DISCIPLESHIP

JOHN 1:35-51

I.

In 1768, a 45-year-old Scottish preacher was put in charge of a small, poor, rural school in New Jersey established for the training of young men. The Scottish preacher was also a scholar. His name was John Witherspoon. (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN WITHERSPOON) The students were primarily being trained to become pastors. But Witherspoon found them to be an unruly lot who were hardly prepared for serious study. The lone school building was also in desperate need of repair.

Witherspoon set about his work. Initially he had to do all of the teaching himself. Gradually he took on additional tutors. Eventually the building was put in a better condition. Witherspoon's primary focus was discipling these young men to become committed followers of Jesus and educated leaders. The school was called the College of New Jersey. Today we know it as Princeton University. (PRINCETON UNIVERSITY)

During the 26 years in which Witherspoon was president of the school, he had a remarkable influence upon a considerable number of men who later became leaders in the new country. The alumni who studied under him included 114 ministers, 49 congressmen, 28 US senators, 26 state judges, 5 delegates to the Constitutional Convention, 12 members of the Continental Congress, 3 US Supreme Court justices, 1 Secretary of State, 1 Vice President and 1 President of the United States, who was James Madison. (PROJECTOR OFF)

John Witherspoon followed a pattern and example of pointing people to Jesus Christ which goes back to the beginnings of the establishment of our faith. This morning we are going to look at that pattern that was established in the time of Jesus to see what we can learn from it.

We are making our way through John's Gospel. We have seen that the Apostle John was writing several decades after the other three Gospels were written. So much of his material about Jesus is unique to his book. He gives his specific purpose in writing it in Chapter 20. He says that he included several signs, or miracles, to show his readers that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God so that they may have eternal life by believing in Him. John also describes a variety of witnesses who point to that same conclusion. Here in Chapter 1 the Apostle John has been focusing on John the Baptist.

(PROJECTOR ON--- JUDEA MAP) We have seen that he has been baptizing on the east side of the Jordan River, perhaps in Perea in the territory controlled by Herod Antipas. On one day representatives from the Sanhedrin showed up, trying to figure out who John was and what he was doing. On the next day Jesus showed up, and John told the people around him that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now we will find out what happens on the third day.

II.

So in vv. 35-44 we find that THE FIRST CHRISTIANS ESTABLISH A PATTERN FOR DISCIPLESHIP. (II. THE FIRST CHRISTIANS ESTABLISH A...) In vv. 35 & 36 we read, "**The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!'**" In v. 40 we are told that one of the two disciples is Andrew, the brother of Peter. Many students of the New Testament suspect that the other one is John the Apostle, though he is not specifically identified. The details given in this chapter support the notion that the author of this Gospel may well have been an eyewitness to the events which are being described.

It is clear also in these verses that John the Baptist had his own disciples. In that cultural setting he was regarded as a Jewish rabbi who had a certain group of students who studied under him. Some of the twelve Apostles were included in that group.

We explored implications of John's description of Jesus as the Lamb of God last week. Again on this day he applies that title to Jesus. The prophetic nature of this description of Jesus in his sacrificial role in dealing with sin cannot be forgotten. But it will take years for the disciples of Jesus to grasp this. It seems doubtful to me that even John the Baptist understood it at this point.

According to v. 37, "**The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.**" Many terms in John's Gospel can be understood on two levels. Such is the case here with the verb "followed." The two disciples do physically follow Jesus to the place where He is staying. But they also begin to follow Jesus as their leader. At this point they are not giving up everything to follow Him. They have not yet been appointed to be part of the twelve Apostles. They are probably not full-time students of either John or Jesus. For we see later in the accounts of the other Gospel writers that they are still spending part of their time working as fishermen in the Sea of Galilee.

We also see here something of the quality of John the Baptist in that he points his disciples toward Jesus. They may not be totally switching rabbis at this point. But John is directing them toward the conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah and that He should be followed.

Verse 38: **"Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, 'What are you seeking?' And they said to him, 'Rabbi' (which means Teacher)---** Notice again that the author John is aware that many of his readers are Gentiles. So he explains the meaning of a Hebrew term. ---**'where are you staying?'"**

Jesus, like John, is regarded as a rabbi. Later in the first century the Jewish religious leadership established official criteria whereby one could be recognized as a rabbi. To be recognized as such, one had to have completed a course of study under a recognized rabbi. At the time of our story there was no such official designation. Apparently Jesus was beginning to collect some students, and He was acting like a religious teacher.

The two disciples of John ask Jesus where He is staying. Most rabbis had a schoolhouse of some kind that was used as their place of teaching. Sometimes they used their own homes. Only a minority of rabbis traveled around the country, like Jesus ended up doing. At this point probably Jesus was staying in the home of one of His students. Later He was going to use Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee as His home base.

Verse 39 tells us, **"He said to them, 'Come and you will see.' So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour."** There is a bit of a problem in John's Gospel in determining how John calculated time. Some have suggested that he was using Roman calculations, numbering hours from midnight to noon and noon to midnight. That helps to solve a problem that we will encounter in #19. But it seems that most Romans, like the Jews and other people in the Ancient Near East, calculated hours from the time of sunrise. A number of ancient Roman sundials have been discovered, and they list the middle of the day as the sixth hour. So if the author John is indeed following that method, it was about 4:00 in the afternoon when Jesus gave the invitation to stay with him the rest of the day.

Verse 40: **"One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother."** So Andrew was originally a disciple of John the Baptist. Perhaps his brother Peter was as well.

Verse 41: **"He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ)."** Notice another explanation from John for his Gentile readers. This appears to be the fourth day, beginning with the day that the representatives of the Sanhedrin showed up. It would appear to me that it is after spending the night with Jesus in the place that he was staying that Andrew found his brother Simon. He announced to him that he and the other disciple had found the Messiah.

Andrew first found Simon. The implication could be that he went to tell others about the Messiah after that. In the two other times that Andrew appears in John's Gospel (6:8; 12:22), he is bringing other people to Jesus. Perhaps the most significant thing that Andrew ever did in his life was to bring Peter to

Jesus. For Peter will become the leader among the Apostles, and we will see that early in Acts he is the primary spokesman for the new Christian movement.

According to v. 42, "**He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter).**" Cephas is an Aramaic word, which translates into Greek as *petros*, or Peter. Both names mean "rock."

This is a pretty nervy thing to do. Upon his first introduction to Simon, this rabbi changes his name. Naming in the Old Testament was a right given to people in positions of authority. It was given to Adam in the Garden of Eden. It was given to parents, usually to the father. It was a right that God also claimed. Jesus claims that right in regard to Peter.

The particular name given to Simon hardly seems to fit his character during the public ministry of Jesus. Simon was frequently putting his foot into his mouth. He said inappropriate things. He denied that he knew Jesus during the hearing before the Sanhedrin. Yet because of what Jesus did in his life, and because of the power that the Holy Spirit brought to him, he became a rock in the early church.

In v. 43 we read, "**The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.'**" So another day passes. The original text literally says that "he" decided to go to Galilee. The "he" could be Andrew, but most interpreters think that the reference is to Jesus.

This band of followers of Jesus appears to be heading toward Galilee. (GALILEE MAP) It is on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus will establish His base of operations during his three year public ministry.

Now we see another disciple added to the group of Jesus followers. "Philip" literally means "lover of horses." Other Jews in Galilee had Greek names, reflecting the influence of Greek culture in this area over the course of several centuries. Philip is to become one of the twelve Apostles. It is only in John's Gospel that we have any specific description of his activities. In these references he seems to be slow to catch on to the program. He doesn't demonstrate any qualities that would suggest to us that he has great leadership abilities. But such is the material that Jesus used, and still uses today. Most of the twelve Apostles were pretty ordinary people, in terms of their resumes before their Jesus days: fishermen, Galileans, a tax collector. That is the kind of people whom He still chooses today.

His call to them, and to us is: Follow Me. The call is not simply to a philosophy or a religion. It is to a person, to the Messiah, to the God-man Jesus.

Verse 44: "**Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.**" There is a bit of a technical difficulty here. Later in the ministry of Jesus we are told in the other three Gospels that Andrew and Peter live in Capernaum, which is several miles to the west of Bethsaida. It could be that the brothers had homes in both places. I suspect that they both were born and raised in Bethsaida, but moved to Capernaum later in life. In a similar way Jesus will continue to be called the Nazarene, or Jesus of Nazareth. But in His adult life, Jesus bases His ministry in Capernaum.

A.

There are three lessons in regard to discipleship that I see coming out of this part of our passage. The first is that THE BEST TARGET IS FAMILY AND FRIENDS. (II. THE FIRST... A. THE BEST TARGET IS...) When these guys became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, they went and told their relatives and friends. John the Baptist told his students. Andrew got Peter. In the next section we will find that Philip went and told his friend Nathanael.

In the early church there were occasional situations, such as on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, when the Christians had opportunities to address large crowds. But for the most part, Christianity in the early centuries grew as a result of Christians telling friends and relatives about Jesus. That continues to be the best approach today. That might mean inviting people to church, even as early followers of Jesus invited people to hear Jesus in the local synagogue. It may mean simply telling our experience with Jesus directly to friends and relatives.

B.

The second lesson is that THE BEST FOCUS IS JESUS. (II. THE FIRST... A. B. THE BEST FOCUS...) These first disciples did not get into big discussions or arguments about Jesus. They simply brought their friends and relatives to see Him. We can't quite do that in the same way today. But we can try to keep our focus on Jesus. The primary issue is not evolution, or the right political party, or our view of the environment, or moral issues. It is Jesus. Who is Jesus?

C. S. Lewis argued that there are only three reasonable conclusions that we can arrive at in regard to Jesus. They involve three "L's." One possibility is that Jesus was a liar. He was a big deceiver. Perhaps He was just out for power. But then we have to explain the high standards of morality that He promoted. We also have to deal with the crucifixion and resurrection. Was it just a big scam? But how could that have happened? The Romans knew how to kill people. If He really did not die, what happened to Him? No one has ever produced a body.

The second possibility is that Jesus was a lunatic. We can't just write Him off as a great teacher, or religious leader. People who think that they are God are mentally unbalanced. Those who deal with mental illness encounter people who think that they are God, or are some kind of great person. But does

the historical record show that Jesus was crazy? He seemed to handle pressure in disciplined way. He had an amazing impact upon a lot of people. And what happened to His body?

So the third possibility is that Jesus is Lord. He is who He said He was. He is God who became a human being. He was the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. He was crucified and rose from the dead on the third day. He then ascended into heaven in front of many of His followers.

C.

The third lesson that I find here is that THE BEST MOTIVATION IS THAT JESUS CAN CHANGE LIVES. (II. A. B. C. THE BEST MOTIVATION IS...) These first disciples were pretty ordinary people. Two of the Gospel accounts were written by disciples of Jesus. They portray themselves and their fellow disciples as slow to catch on to Jesus and His program. They abandoned and denied Jesus at the time of His arrest and trial. Yet after His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit into their lives, they turned the world upside down.

Such is the hope and confidence that we can have about ourselves. We may be ordinary people, but the God-man Jesus can change our lives. By the power of the Holy Spirit, He can accomplish great things with us, if we will determine to follow Him.

III.

In the remainder of our passage we find that THE FIRST CHRISTIANS FOCUS UPON THE WONDERFUL PROMISE OF A GREAT ADVENTURE. (III. THE FIRST CHRISTIANS FOCUS UPON...) According to v. 45, **"Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'"**

Nathanael is another product of friends reaching out to friends. In #21 v. 2 we are told that Nathanael was from Cana in Galilee. (GALILEE MAP) Cana was not far from Nazareth in Galilee. We know little else about Nathanael. Some suspect that he is the same person as Bartholomew, who is listed among the twelve Apostles. But it could be that he was just one of the extended group of followers of Jesus. We will see that he did have spiritual depth.

Philip describes Jesus as the son of Joseph from Nazareth. Jesus was not the biological son of Joseph. (PROJECTOR OFF) But Joseph was his adoptive and legal father. Nazareth was the place where Jesus grew up, though he had been born in Bethlehem. Philip is already convinced that this is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament.

We read in v. 46, "**Nathanael said to him [Philip], 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'**" Again we see the simple challenge to someone to come and check out this Jesus for themselves. As to why Nathanael has a negative view of Nazareth, we do not know. Nazareth was a small village in Galilee. But so was Cana, Nathanael's hometown. Perhaps there was a high school rivalry between the two places. Perhaps also it was difficult to believe that the Messiah would come from a hick town in Galilee. Nazareth was not even mentioned in the Old Testament.

Verse 47: "**Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!'**" The NIV translation is not so good here. The original Greek text has Jesus describing Nathanael as an Israelite in whom there is no guile, or deceit. Jesus does not mean that Nathanael is sinless. But He declares that Nathanael is a person of integrity. He claims knowledge of this person, although Nathanael has never seen Him before. The reason for Jesus' comment will become clear as the story unfolds.

According to v. 48, "**Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.'**" Here is a significantly more impressive claim. Anybody could come up with a flattering statement about someone he had just met. But now Jesus correctly declares that Nathanael had just been hanging out under a fig tree. This may simply have been a place of shade to avoid the hot sun. But in later Judaism it was regarded as an appropriate place for prayer and meditation. There is a hint that this is just the activity in which Nathanael had been involved.

Look at Nathanael's response in v. 49: "**Nathanael answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'**" This is a pretty impressive testimony. Remember, the Apostle John says at the end of the book that his purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of God. Nathanael declares this to be the case about Jesus right here. He recognizes that only supernatural power could be involved in knowing what he was just doing a short time ago.

The terms "Son of God" and "King of Israel" were appropriate ways for describing the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. Nathanael's understanding of the implications of these terms was limited at this point. It is doubtful that he saw Jesus as being God. The term "Son of God" could mean just that an individual so described displayed characteristics of godliness, and perhaps godly power. The Apostle John in quoting Nathanael recognizes that there is more significance to this title than Nathanael perhaps realized at the time.

Then we read in vv. 50-51, "**Jesus answered him, 'Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' And he said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'**"

The last verse may not initially make sense to most of us. But this is a reference to a passage in Genesis. It involves the story of Jacob, the son of Isaac and the brother of Esau. According to Genesis #25, Rebecca, the wife of Isaac, was told by God that there were two nations in her womb and that the older son would serve the younger son. Esau came out of the womb first, but Jacob was holding on to his heel. Thus the younger son was named Jacob, which could be translated as "supplanter," or even "deceiver." Such was to be his character.

The story goes on to tell about how Esau sold his birthright for a pot of stew. Then just before Isaac's death, Jacob tricks his father into giving the blessing promised for the firstborn son. Jacob's mother Rebecca warns Jacob that Esau is planning to kill Jacob after his father dies. So Jacob takes off toward the north to hide out with relatives there.

Along the way in Genesis #28 we encounter this incident. Beginning in v. 11 (PROJECTOR ON--- GENESIS 28:11) we read, **"And he [Jacob] came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. (GENESIS 28:12) And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! (GENESIS 28:13) And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring.'"**

The implication in our text is that Nathanael was meditating on this passage under the fig tree before he went to see Jesus. Jesus knew that. He was omniscient. For He was God. He did not just recognize the character of Nathanael when He met him. He did not just know where Nathanael was before he came to see Jesus. He knew what was going on in his mind. He knew what Nathanael was thinking about. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In v. 51 Jesus says, "Truly, truly." This is the first of 25 times in John where this statement is quoted. In the other Gospels just one "truly" is used. What follows is always intended to be a statement that should be remembered. Here Jesus says that Nathanael will see heaven opened and angels of God ascending and descending on Jesus. If that was intended to be understood literally, it might refer to seeing the angels ministering to Jesus in Gethsemane. It might have reference to the angels who appeared at the time of Christ's ascension.

If Jesus intended His statement to be understood in a more figurative sense, he could be referring to the miracles that Nathanael will see accomplished through Jesus. These could include the seven signs around which the Apostle John organizes his Gospel.

At the same time, Jesus is claiming that in some sense that He is the ladder upon which Jacob saw the angels ascending and descending. In other words, He is the bridge between heaven and earth. He is the intermediary between God and man.

Verse 51 is also the first occurrence in this Gospel of the term "Son of Man." Jesus often uses that term of Himself in the Gospels. It has an ambiguous meaning. It could be describing someone who is just a man. It was an expedient term to use. For the religious and political leaders cannot use it to say that He is claiming to be God. He is not claiming at this point to be a king. So political authorities cannot charge him with treason or sedition. At the same time in Daniel #7 the term is used to describe the coming Messiah. So there is the possibility that Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah by His use of the term.

Notice also the last clause in v. 50: **"You will see greater things than these."** The "you" in the Greek text is plural. Jesus is not just speaking to Nathanael. He is speaking to all of the people around Him who are expressing in interest in Him and His claims. There are amazing experiences that are yet to come. Jesus is promising His followers a great adventure.

A.

There are at least two implications coming out of this passage that have relevance to us. The first is that JESUS IS PRESENT IN OUR PERSONAL DEVOTIONS. (III. A. JESUS IS PRESENT IN...) Jesus is both omniscient and omnipresent. He is all knowing, and He is present everywhere. In the situation before us we are reminded of that in a vivid way. It appears that Nathanael was engaged in what we might describe as a devotional time. Jesus indicates that He was completely aware of what was going on in Nathanael's mind at that time, and apparently He was pleased by that.

That should be a reminder to us of the value of that personal time with God. Do we take it for granted? Does it seem like we have unanswered prayer? We can be reminded that Jesus is there with us when we are setting aside time for Him. Perhaps we should make it a priority. Perhaps we need a plan.

What I do in my devotional time is go through a prayer list, memorize Scripture and read the Bible. I read through the Bible once a year. My Bible is getting worn out. My father-in-law gave me a new one that has the same translation. So this year I am transferring my notes that I have made in my old Bible, which I have had for 44 years, and transferring them into my new one. My plan does not need to be the one that you have. But my encouragement to you is to figure out a plan of regular devotions that will work for you. It means something to our Savior.

B.

The second thing that I find coming out of this part of our passage is that THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A GREAT ADVENTURE. (III. A. B. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A GREAT ADVENTURE.) The Christian life is not always easy. Sometimes it is hard. Some of the hard things are just part of life on this earth. Some of them have to do with our role as a disciple of Jesus. But life is a great adventure if we walk by faith in Him. Along the way we will sense His presence.

This Monday I had lunch with someone from the congregation. He had recently been forced out of his home by a major water leak. So he was sharing with me the difficulty that he was having in finding a contractor who can do the repairs at a reasonable price. He asked me if I knew anyone in the church who specialized in that kind of thing. Someone came to mind, and I began telling him about this person. About sixty seconds later this person came walking up to us in the restaurant. Just a coincidence? I don't think so. He sat down and the two of them talked about how the work might be done.

Life is a great adventure for us who have chosen to follow Jesus. It is a great adventure that does not even end in this life. C. S. Lewis captures something of the essence of it at the end of the last book of his Chronicles of Narnia series. At the end of *The Last Battle* (C S LEWIS QUOTATION) he says this about the main characters: **"All their life in this world and all their adventures had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."**

Such is the great adventure that Jesus promised His disciples. Such is the adventure that He promises us who decide to follow Him.