



The First Disciples

John 1:35-51

- 1. Andrew and John found the Messiah (verses 35-40).**
- 2. Simon had his name changed (verses 41-42).**
- 3. Philip found the Promised One (verses 43-44).**
- 4. Nathanael believed Jesus to be the Son of God and King of Israel (verses 45-51).**

Every one of us has a story to tell, and all of our stories are unique. We can tell of where we were born, where we grew up, where we went to school, and why we have come to live in the Rockford area. We can tell the story of our parents, and the home in which we grew up. We can tell the story of our siblings or influential friends. We can tell of the pets we had growing up, or the places we went on vacation, or our fondest family memories. We can tell of how we celebrated the holidays and birthdays. We can tell the stories of the things that have occupied our time. Our youth sports teams, our theatre performances, or the instruments we played.

Perhaps our time was filled with work on the farm, or working at a fast-food place. If you are married, you can tell the story of meeting your spouse, and when and where you were married, and how you make ends meet today. Beyond all of that, we can tell of our favorite books or movies or sports teams. We can tell of our interests and hobbies. We can tell the story of our proudest achievements and our biggest failures. We can tell of our dreams and future plans. Every one of us has a story to tell. And all of our stories are unique.

Now, for those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus, we can tell that story as well. How did we hear of Jesus? Perhaps a parent told us, or a pastor or a friend. How did we come to believe in Jesus? Perhaps as a child you have been so surrounded by church life that you can hardly remember a time when you didn't believe in Jesus. Perhaps you had loving Christian parents, but strayed like the Prodigal son, only to return later in life. Perhaps you came from a rough

background, and found yourself in some sort of trouble, so you turned to Jesus and found life. Perhaps there was some traumatic event that led you to Jesus, a death of a loved one, or a close call with death yourself. Perhaps you saw the end of the philosophies of the world, and began to check out Christianity. Perhaps you simply read a Bible in the library, and came to believe in Jesus. Perhaps for you, you haven't come to that place yet in your life. You have come to church, but you haven't yet come to Jesus. That's all part of your story as well.

When it comes to our testimony of faith in Jesus, every one of us has a story to tell. All of our stories are unique. Well, as we open our Bibles today and look to the Scriptures, in our text we will see five men come to Jesus. These five men were the first disciples of Jesus. The title of my message this morning is "The First Disciples"

Each of these disciples have a story to tell. All of their stories are unique. So, if you haven't done so already, I invite you to open in your Bibles to John, chapter 1. We will begin in verse 35, and finish in verse 51. Let me read the passage for you, that we might have the whole text in our minds. As I read, I want for you to listen for the names of the five men we encounter in our text.

John 1:35-51

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!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 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. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). 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).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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 said to him, "Can anything good

come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” 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.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 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.”

As is our custom, let us quote together the reason why these words were written. “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

Our passage this morning begins with a time reference. In verse 35, we read

John 1:35

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples

In fact, the first two chapters of John are filled with such time references. The first day comes in chapter 1 and verse 18 with John’s testimony to Jesus. In verse 29, we read “the next day.” In verse 35, we read, “the next day.” In verse 43, we read, “the next day.” In chapter 2, verse 1, we read, “on the third day.”

Some have tried to draw an allusion to the days of creation in Genesis 1 with these days. I think that any such allusion is a stretch. But what is true of these days is that the ministry of Jesus was real. Jesus existed in space, time and history. The word became flesh (verse 14) and really dwelt among us, as a man who walked on our planet.

So, again we read in verse 35,

John 1:35

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples,

This is John the Baptist, with two of his followers, who were standing together, perhaps during a break in John’s preaching and baptizing ministry. Verse 36 says that John

John 1:36

looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!”

This should sound familiar. We looked at this last time we were in the gospel of John. Back in verse 29,

John 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

This is the great reality of Jesus. He is the sacrificial Lamb of God, who has come into this world to take away the sin of the world. Jesus doesn't merely cover up sin. Jesus doesn't merely overlook sin. He takes it away, by dying, and by bearing the penalty of sin through his death. John points this out again to his two disciples who were with him.

John 1:36

“Behold, the Lamb of God!”

Now, in verse 36, John didn't include the part of taking away the sin of the world. He simply says, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” It's not that “taking away the sin of the world” isn't important. In fact, “the Lamb of God” means that he will be sacrificed for our sins. John simply chose not to repeat it for this disciple who heard it already.

The contrast between John and Jesus is striking. When the delegation came from Jerusalem to ask John who he was, John said, “I'm not the Christ” (John 1:20). “I'm not Elijah” (John 1:21). “I'm not the Prophet” (John 1:21). “I'm a voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’” (John 1:23).

John was a voice. But Jesus was the Lamb. John's point was strong enough because in verse 37:

John 1:37

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

John lost some disciples that day. But this was perfectly fine with John. John had said that Jesus was so great that John was not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal. John will say in John 3:30, “[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease.” So John was willing to lose these disciples to the greater teacher. In some ways, John

saw these disciples graduate that day. John's training with them was done. Now, they were off to further training with Jesus, as they "followed" him (verse 37).

Physically, they "followed" Jesus. They were walking after him. When Jesus walked to the right, they walked to the right. When Jesus walked to the left, they walked to the left. This led to the strange encounter in verse 38.

John 1:38

Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?"

Perhaps Jesus felt like he was being stalked.

John 1:38

....And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

Now, this was more than a request for his temporary address. They weren't merely looking to know where Jesus lived. They called him "Rabbi," (which means teacher). They wanted to be taught by him. This is how many schools were run in those days. You wouldn't sign up for classes and sit in desks in a classroom. You would literally go and live with your teacher. He would teach you all that he knew, as you followed him around. That's what these disciples were asking of Jesus. They wanted to be taught by the Rabbi. Jesus said:

John 1:39

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.

Just like that, these two disciples were enrolled in the Jesus school of discipleship. John points out that "it was about the tenth hour" that these disciples came and stayed with Jesus. In those days, time began when the sun rose. So, ten hours after sunrise puts this about 4pm. I don't think that there is any significance to this, other than the fact that they remembered when these things took place. We remember significant events in our lives. We remember where we were.

I remember my high school graduation, and being struck how we would never be together again as a class of students. I remember the day I was married. I remember the unique circumstances surrounding the days when each of my

children were born. I remember the first day of employment at Rock Valley Bible Church. I remember where I was when the clock changed from 1999 to 2000, as some waited in fear for the world to shut down. I remember where I was on September 11th, 2001, when I heard that the Trade Center building in New York fell. I remember the day that the world shut down for Covid. It was March 13, 2020.

You have days that you remember as well. But it's rare that I remember exact times of events. I can't remember the time of my high school graduation. I can't remember the exact time of our wedding. But these disciples remembered the day and the hour when they met Jesus. It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon when they went to the home of Jesus. In verse 40, we are given the names of one of these disciples. His name was "Andrew."

John 1:40

One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

Curiously enough, we are never told the name of the other disciple. But most commentators believe that it was John, the author of the gospel. He never names himself. But only he would remember such vivid details like "It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon" when we went to see Jesus. Verse 41 tells us why they remembered the occasion so well.

John 1:41

He [that is, Andrew] first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).

This day, when John and Andrew followed Jesus to his home, was a day to remember. It was the day that they "found the Messiah" and their lives were forever changed! It's at this point in our message that we realize we have been in the first point of our outline.

1. Andrew and John found the Messiah (verses 35-40).

That's how Andrew described the event to his brother. "We have found the Messiah." After one day with Jesus, John and Andrew knew. They knew that something was special about this man. John had told them that Jesus was "The Lamb of God," but now, they understood that Jesus was "the Messiah," the Christ, the Anointed One. the One whom Israel had been waiting for to come and redeem

them! He was the one!

Do you remember the time when you came to this realization? Not merely hearing about Jesus from your parents or a Sunday School teacher or a friend or a family member. But embracing the reality of who Jesus is in your inner being. Do you remember coming to this reality yourself? I know for me, it was in the summer of 1988. I had gone to church my whole life. If you would have asked me about Jesus in 1987, I would have said that he is the Savior of the World. I would have told you that I believed in him, and that I was trusting in him for forgiveness of sins. There was a measure of reality to that confession. I had desires for God. I was pursuing him, even in the midst of a godless college where I was attending.

But during the summer of 1988, when I heard John MacArthur talking about the Lordship of Christ, I have never really contemplated that much before. He spoke on the words of Jesus from Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:21-23

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

I didn't realize that this was the sort of Messiah who had come to die for me on the cross, that he would actually turn people away from the kingdom of heaven at the very entrance gate. I never realized that there will be many who profess to follow Jesus, even performing religious deeds, amazing religious deeds, like casting out demons and prophesying and doing mighty works, who never knew Jesus. People who will be turned away from the kingdom of heaven.

I can take you to the very spot on the planet where I heard these things for the very first time. It was life-transforming. Perhaps a bit like what John and Andrew discovered as they spend the afternoon with Jesus. They remember the time and day they met him. How I would love to have been a fly on the wall to hear what Jesus told these disciples. To become convinced that Jesus is the Messiah.

What about you? Can you remember such a time? Oh, maybe you don't quite know any exact date. Perhaps you can't remember any exact time. But you remember some conversations. You remember clarity in your thinking. You

remember when Jesus became real to you. Perhaps you don't have such a day. Perhaps today will be such a day. A day you come to grips with the reality that Jesus really is the Messiah! He is the Christ! He is the Anointed One! You must follow him, as John and Andrew did on that day.

Andrew did what anybody would do, he left to get his brother, Simon Peter. When you have a good thing, you want your loved ones to join in with you in the good things. This is what Andrew did with his brother.

John 1:41-42

He [that is, Andrew] first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).

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).

2. Simon had his name changed (verses 41-42).

Of all the things that John could say about the moment that Peter met Jesus, this is the one that he records. He records Jesus meeting Peter, and changing his name. "You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). "Cephas" is Aramaic for "rock." "Peter" is Greek for "rock." There are several in our culture who identify themselves as "The Rock." Dwayne Johnson is "the Rock." Sylvester Stallone is "Rocky." Both of these men are the strong, and macho type of men. "Rock" means strong and secure and dependable.

I doubt that it's because of the bulging muscles of Peter, that Jesus calls him "the Rock." But there is something about Peter's character that was "strong." He became the leader of the disciples. He was often the chief spokesman of the disciples (John 6:68). He was the one ready to fight! He cut off the servant's ear when the crowd came to arrest Jesus (John 18:10, 26). After the resurrection of Jesus, they ran to the tomb to see if it was empty. John sort of stood there, but Peter charged on ahead, being the first to enter the empty tomb (John 20:2-4). That was Peter, bold and ready to face the challenges. Jesus discerned this about Peter and called him "the Rock." That's not to say that Peter was perfect. He failed on many occasions. At the time of Jesus' trial, Peter would deny him out by that charcoal fire (John 18:17-18, 25-27).

Now, why John, of all the details of that day when the disciples first came to meet Jesus, did he include this one aspect of Peter's encounter with Jesus, we don't

know. Perhaps it made a big impression upon them all. Perhaps it's a bit of foreshadowing in the gospel of John. But it was unique. It shows the discernment of Jesus, that he saw immediately the powerful personality of Peter. It shows the authority of Jesus, that he was able to give Peter this name.

Well, the text moves on in verse 43, when we encounter Philip.

John 1:43

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

This appears to be quite random. However, verse 44 tells us that Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. It's right to assume here that there's more going on behind the scenes. Andrew and Peter knew Philip, they were from the same hometown. As Jesus entered the Bethsaida, one of the towns in Galilee, he was introduced to Philip by Andrew and Peter. Perhaps they told the story of what happened on the previous day. How they left John to follow Jesus. How they spent some time with him. How they believe that he's the Messiah.

Jesus says to Philip, "Follow me" (verse 43). "Your friends have become enrolled in my school of discipleship. Come and join them. Follow me. Come and be a student with them." How simple and yet profound. This is the essence of Christianity. That we are followers of Jesus. Oh, we don't follow as the early disciples did. They walked the dusty roads of Israel with them. They saw with their eyes. They heard with their ears. They touched Jesus with their hands (1 John 1:1), the word of life who came into their midst. Yet, we follow Jesus today. We learn what he did for us. We learn what he taught. We follow him in obedience.

Philip does what all of the disciples do. When they have an encounter with Jesus, they go and tell their friends. Andrew goes to tell his brother Simon Peter. Andrew and Peter direct Jesus to Philip. And now, Philip goes and tells Nathanael.

John 1:45

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."

Now, it's in this verse that we get the point about Philip.

3. Philip found the Promised One (verses 43-44).

This is how Philip describes Jesus to Nathanael. Jesus is the one about whom Moses wrote in the law. Jesus is the one about whom the prophets wrote. Moses promised that a prophet like him would arise. Deuteronomy 18 is the key text of this promise. The Prophets pointed to one who would come and redeem Israel. He would be of the offspring of David (2 Samuel 7). He would be Immanuel, “God with us,” born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). He would come as a ruler from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). He would come and take the government upon his shoulders (Isaiah 9:6-7). He would bring in the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

All John tells us about Philip’s encounter with Jesus is that Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” Yet, by the way that he speaks with Nathanael, we see the depth of what this meant for Philip. he was following the Promised One. Then, we get to the fifth disciples. His name is Nathanael. He is a friend of Philip. Philip told him,

John 1:45

“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

Nathanael responded, not by focusing upon Philip’s claim of the Jesus being the Promised One, but upon Philip’s mentioning that Jesus was from Nazareth.

John 1:46

Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

This give you an idea of the reputation of Nazareth in the minds of some. Nathanael saw the city as a no-good town, from which nothing good comes. Some might say it’s a bit like Gary, Indiana, a once thriving place thatt has faced some significant decline. Some might say it’s a bit like Flint, Michigan, where there’s crime and a water crisis that still hangs over their head. Some might say it’s like Rockford, Illinois, where taxes and crime are high. This was Nazareth, but it was the hometown of Jesus.

Philip didn’t want to get into any arguments. Rather, 46 Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Apparently Philip had learned a thing or two from Jesus. Remember when the two disciples ask Jesus where he was staying? Jesus simply said, “Come and you will see” (John 1:39). That’s all that Philip told Nathanael. “You doubt

that anything good can come from Nazareth? Why don't you come with me? I'll show you Jesus. I'll show you something good that has come from Nazareth." We read of Nathaniel's encounter with Jesus in verse 47.

John 1:47

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

Like the encounter that Jesus had with Peter, Jesus was able to quickly discern the character of Nathaniel, and said that he had no deceit. In other words, Nathaniel told it like it was. He was truthful about his opinions. He didn't beat around the bush. There was nothing subtle in his speech. He was a blunt one, with no filter on his mouth. Nathanael often spoke without thinking about what he would say. Nathanael recognized the truth of what Jesus said.

John 1:48

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."

Now, we don't know what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree, many have surmised that he was praying or meditating on Scripture. Perhaps he was simply resting, taking in a siesta in the shade. But Nathanael knew that what he was doing. The fact that Jesus mentioned this was enough to convince him that he was indeed the King of Israel. Look at verse 49.

John 1:49

Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

It's at this point that we summarize Nathanael's encounter with Jesus.

4. Nathanael believed Jesus to be the Son of God and King of Israel (verses 45-51).

Now, why Nathanael was so convinced about these things about Jesus, we don't know. But somehow, Jesus put on display a knowledge of Nathanael that he couldn't deny. He affirmed that Philip's testimony was true, and became a follower of Jesus.

At this point, I want for you to think about these 5 disciples. The unnamed

disciple, (probably John). Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. They came to Jesus in different ways. Andrew and John came through the testimony of John the Baptist, (their teacher). Peter came through the testimony of his brother, Andrew (a relative). Philip came at the invitation of Jesus himself. Nathanael came through an invitation of a Philip (a friend). All of these men had stories to tell. All of their stories were unique. There is no one way that people come to God!

I know people who have come to Christ through teachers, Sunday school teachers or preachers. I know people who have come to Christ through relatives. Many parents and siblings have been the means of bringing the message of Christ. I know of people who have come to Christ through the Scriptures alone. Simply reading through the Bible, they have come to faith. I know of people who have come to Christ through the invitation of a friend.

You may be the instrument to bring the gospel to others. You may be part of their story they tell. These disciples had to training. They were changed and what they saw in Jesus, and came to others. When you see something magnificent and wonderful, you cannot help but to talk and tell other people. That is fundamental to evangelism. You have something and you want to share it. "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8).

In verse 50, we seem to find that Jesus is surprised at what little Nathanael needed to believe.

John 1:50

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."

Jesus said, "That's just the beginning." That's just the beginning of the gospel of John. We're going to see these greater things!

John 1:51

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."

This is an allusion to Jacob's dream in Genesis 28, in which he saw a ladder stretching from earth to heaven upon which angels of God were ascending and descending. The exact meaning of what Jesus said is difficult to fully grasp, but the idea is clear, of the connection of heaven to earth. The angels giving

confirmation to Jesus and his identity. Essentially, Jesus is telling Nathanael, you were amazed that I saw you under the fig tree? More confirmation of my identity will come.

And as you read through the gospel of John you see this. You see this in the seven signs of Jesus. (1), Water into Wine (2), healing of the official's son (4), healing the lame man (5), feeding 5,000 (6), walking on water (7), giving sight to the blind man (9), raising Lazarus. These things are a testimony to who Jesus is!

You see this is the seven sayings of Jesus. (1), I am the bread of life (2), I am the light of the world (3), I am the door (4), I am the good shepherd (5), I am the resurrection and the life (6), I am the way, the truth and the life, (7), I am the true vine. These things are merely confirming who Jesus is!

This is all to come. I invite you to stay and see the wondrous things we're going to see that Nathaniel got to see.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 28, 2024 by
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For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.
