

Be a Follower

January 14, 2024

Today's assigned message is a familiar one involving the calling of two disciples by Jesus. Let's read the passage:

John 1:43-51(NIV)

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

⁴⁸ "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe^[a] because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." ⁵¹ He then added, "Very truly I tell you,^[b] you^[c] will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on'^[d] the Son of Man."

Both men agreed to follow Jesus upon their first meeting him, WHY?

We really aren't given any specific clue why Philip agreed other than what he said to Nathanael, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Why he had come to believe this is not disclosed; however,

Some scholars speculate that Philip may have also been a disciple of John the Baptist, since:

- Two of John's disciples followed Jesus (John 1:35–37)
- The Bible only tells us that one was Andrew (John 1:40)
- The accounts appear side-by-side
- The encounters seem to happen in the same location

If these are true Philip probably would have heard John the Baptist teachings about the coming Messiah and John's baptism of Jesus with God declaring Jesus is His son (see Matt 3) declare Jesus was the Lamb of God and the Son of God (see John 1:29-34). We also learn two disciples heard the proclamation Jesus is the Lamb of God they followed Jesus. (John 1:35) One is specifically identified as Andrew in John 1:40 but the other is never specifically identified. However, shortly after this note we see at verse 43 "The next day ... Finding Philip, he said to "Follow me" and Philip did.

Nathanael learned what his friend Philip told him but questioned until Jesus said he saw Philip under a fig tree. This somehow prompted Nathanael

Jesus attracted people to him? Perhaps it was the miracles, but that clearly was not Jesus' purpose with miracles because he often admonished people not to tell. See Luke 9: 21; Matt. 7:36; Matt. 12:15-16; Matt. 16:20; Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 1:43-44; Mark 3: 11-12; Mark 7:35-36; Mark 8:22-26; Mark 8:29-30;

Read the Gospels and note the profound effect Jesus has when he meets people, not just the disciples: the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28), the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26), the Roman centurion (Luke 7:1-10), the woman at the Pharisee's home (Luke 7:36-50), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), the woman at the well (John 4), the sick man at the Bethesda pool (John 5:1-9), the thief crucified next to Jesus (Luke 23:40-43), and the centurion at the foot of the cross (Mark 15:39, Luke 23:47) — to name only a few.

People meet Jesus, and they are impacted and changed. Then they tell others what happened. A person-to-person progression.

The reality of Jesus impacting people should be freeing to us as we consider our role. Our task as Christians is not to "prove" the truth of the Christian faith, we are

to study and seek to learn all we can and we can read scholars who may have written attempting to prove the truth of Christianity. But our task is not to prove the truth through scholarly arguments or even to persuade others to become Christian. Thinking this is the process often creates fear and prevents people from fulfilling their true role in God's plan. Our task is really simply to share what we personally have experienced with Jesus and to say, "Come and see." Although Philip did share what he had come to believe about Jesus, he did not attempt to provide proof. When Nathanael expressed concern about "anything good coming out of Nazareth," Philip might have attempted to detail what he may have heard from John the Baptist; what he saw at Jesus' baptism; perhaps referred to Old Testament support.

But, Philip simply said, "Come and see," come and see for yourself.

That is our only role, to tell people what we have come to know about Jesus, and invite them to "Come and see." At first this may lead them to simply watch you to see what Jesus has done and is doing for you! This is a reality, it is harder to share Jesus with the world when our lives do not reflect evidence of any impact our profession of knowing Jesus has had upon our life. If we behave and act just like everyone else in the world what is there to 'come and see'.

The mission Jesus gave to his followers, including us, is to "*be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). After receiving this mission statement they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. Which Jesus had previously told them would happen when he promised he would not leave them alone. (John 14: 23-29)

Now, I do want to let you off the hook a little. God really doesn't **need** us to reach people **and we cannot defeat God's plan** by failing to do what we are supposed to do. God can work around us, even without us, all while he continues to work on us. **But we are called/invited to participate with God!**

Here I want to go back to a portion of Ben's message two weeks ago on New Year's Eve, Ben affirmed salvation is not based upon theological knowledge but in placing our trust and faith in the plan of God. The same is true regarding being good followers of Jesus; being a good follower is not based upon theological knowledge and being able to prove to others our knowledge, but in placing our trust and faith in the plan of God and trusting God to be at work as we do His will.

Ben used a picture of Simion holding the baby Jesus with pure joy on his face knowing he was holding the promised savior of the world. Simion believed and

trusted. He wasn't holding the resurrected Jesus after his mission had been completed, he was holding a baby; however, he believed and trusted in God's plan. As a follower of Christ we are called to do the same. We are not entitled to see the finished product, we are called to live our lives as Jesus taught and modeled for us and trust God in producing the result.

I have shared before a turning point in my faith. I went to college initially to become a minister but I wasn't quite ready and altered the path for a time. However, during that time I was trying to do what I felt called to do and was trying to convince a fellow student about the truth of Christianity but that student was asking questions that I could not convincingly answer. I went back to my dorm room and literally fell on my knees praying God, if you want me to do this you need to give me the answers. I then went to the student commons and a man who was out witnessing came up to me and said, 'You look like someone who is looking for answers'. That person may never know why they used those words, or perhaps they had learned them as an effective starting phrase when doing evangelism, but I know they were God's words letting me know He was listening and active.

As a result of that encounter I proceeded to live a perfect life and did everything right in the eyes of God!

That statement was certainly meant as sarcasm. I am living proof God gives us more than one chance to listen and act. He doesn't quit on us because we stumble and fall. He remains faithful even when we stumble in our faith. He holds true to His plan, even when we go our own way. **AND, He never gives up on us!**

How should we carry out our mission to "*be Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*"? We should live our lives as best we can as taught by Jesus and modeled by him as he walked this earth. We need to live different from the world teachings and be prepared to share with others why we live as we do. We need to actively listen to the Holy Spirit when prompted to speak or act. Again, the man who approached me in the student commons may not have known why he used the words he did and I have not seen that individual since 1973 so he does not know its lasting impact upon my life and faith, but I know God was working through him.

Likewise, we do not often know why we are prompted to talk with someone and we may not know what words to say but **what we do know with certainty, God KNOWS!** Our job is to live as led by Jesus, listen as best we can to the Holy Spirit

prompting us to speak or act and trust God with the finished product. That is being a Follower of Christ.