

July 20, 2008

“What It Means to Be Jesus’ Disciple” John 1:35-51

FCF: Uncertainty about following Jesus

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus is beyond our expectations – so much more.

(magnet) So too is the response that is due Him, what it means to believe in Him.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

There are few things more distressing than not knowing where you’re going. I got a call last week from my wife as she and the kids were traveling to Virginia. There was an accident on I-81 and she had to take a detour to an area she’d never seen before. I could hear the concern in her voice as I guided her through. There are few things more distressing than not knowing where you’re going. We want to know where we’ll end up.

John has relayed some astonishing things about Jesus of Nazareth. But, here’s the thing. If we heed his counsel, where will it take us? Where will we end up?

SCRIPTURE READING: [John 1:35-51](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

True funeral story. An old war veteran’s friends wished to have a part in the service at the funeral home, so they requested the pastor to lead them down to the casket, stand with them for a solemn moment of remembrance, and then lead them out through the side door. This he did, but unfortunately the effect was marred when he picked the wrong door. The result was that they marched with military precision into a broom closet, in full view of the mourners, and then had to make a hasty retreat. The lessons? First, if you’re going to lead, make sure you know where you’re going. Second, if you’re going to follow, make sure you’re following someone who knows where he’s going.

Does Jesus know where He’s going? Where would He take us? Some reminders. John is writing out of a sense of being overwhelmed by Jesus – His person, His work, and the reality of the gospel. He is fully God and fully man. He knows us fully and, despite that, has loved us and given Himself fully for our sake. He is the One we’re looking for. He is the One we need. This Jesus is beyond our expectations. So much more. And, with that, so too is the response that is due to Him, what it means to believe in Him.

To be Jesus’ disciple. This is what we see unfolding in our text. The disciples of John the Baptist were not abandoning him but were being true to what he had told them. Jesus is the Coming One. John’s task had been fulfilled ([READ John 1:35-37](#)). John’s task was this very thing, to hand his followers off to the One he himself was waiting for that they might follow Him, enter a discipling relationship similar to but yet so much more than anything they had known. But this is what it is to truly believe in Jesus.

What does it mean to be Jesus’ disciple? These four things – to be loved, to be changed, to be led, and be brought to God as no other can. As no other can.

I. TO LOVE US AS NO OTHER CAN

First, to be Jesus’ disciple is to be loved as no other can ([READ John 1:38-39](#)).

A) An Honest Request

They make of Jesus what could really be called an honest request.

1. Jesus’ question

Jesus’ asks, “*What’s on your mind?*” He knew what they wanted. But He wanted to draw them out, to declare their intentions. Not for His sake but for theirs.

2. Their response

And their response? Some have said it's but a comical hesitation. But that's not it at all. They wanted to know Him. And so out of respect and fearing presumptuousness, they asked another question hoping to get a chance for a more private leisurely conversation.

B) A Gracious Invitation

He then responds to their honest request with a gracious invitation.

1. Recognized where they were

And notice this. Jesus recognized where they were on the spiritual continuum and did not push before they were ready. All of which harmonizes with the other gospel accounts that speak of an instant abandoning of their nets. This account here in John seems then to be the record of an earlier dialogue that then later led to their leaving all to follow Him.

2. Brought them along

Jesus recognized where they were and then brought them along from there. We see His condescension all the more. The God-man waited for them and yet worked within them.

Jesus loves as no other can. He treats us with both dignity and kindness.

Application:

Which is still how He deals with people today. Followers of Christ sharing the gospel of Christ need to understand that an immediate conversion is not the only possible response. There is a parallel with physical birth. You don't force a birth prematurely. It may have repercussions as disastrous in the spiritual realm as in the physical realm.

Being patient with people, treating them as people, is to love them. Just as Jesus did here – recognizing where they were and bringing them along. Which means we are to wait and let Him do His work. And this is part of what it means to be His disciples.

II. TO CHANGE US AS NO OTHER CAN

It means to love and be loved and to be changed as no other can (**READ John 1:40-42**). We don't know what Andrew heard – likely the Old Testament anticipation of the Messiah. In any case, it moved Andrew to action, to seek out his brother, Simon.

A) A Limited Prospect

Now we would have to say Simon, at this point, was a limited prospect.

1. Simon described

We know from the New Testament record that he could be hot tempered and vindictive, volatile and violent. This was Simon. This was who he was as Jesus found him that day.

2. John's (hypothetical) relief

And one can imagine the hypothetical relief of John the Baptist if Simon was one of his followers. *“Jesus, I'm so glad you're here. Simon? Please. You can have him.”*

B) An Astonishing Future

Simon was a limited prospect. But, with Jesus, he had an astonishing future.

1. The implications of renaming

Jesus renames him. But note this new name wasn't characteristic of Simon at that point. And the renaming seems to have more behind it – a reclaiming of this man and his life.

2. The implications of this name

Simon will be called “Cephas,” “Rock.” Why? This is what Jesus was going to make of him. A radical declaration. His friends likely asking, *“You sure you have the right guy?”*

Illustration:

Note this declaration is not like the positive thinking of a fortune cookie. It's not barely predictive with what might be but boldly declarative with what will surely be.

Jesus makes clear with His renaming Simon of His great plans for Simon.

Application:

Now, the question is, is this how we see others? According to their potential? According to what Jesus Christ would do in and through them? Yes, we are crooked deep down, finite and fallen. But that said, our sober-sightedness regarding the depravity of man must never be allowed to eclipse the possibilities of grace. Not with Jesus.

The possibilities of grace for others. And for ourselves. And for ourselves. Again, such is part of what it means to believe in Him, to be His disciple. To be changed.

III. TO LEAD US AS NO OTHER CAN

It means to be loved, to be changed, and then to be led. Again, as no other can (**READ John 1:43**). Philip is called to “follow” Jesus – a word used a few times already.

A) An Intentional Search

Note Jesus’ intentionality in searching for Philip. Few teachers of the time called disciples to them. Usually, it was the student who chose the teacher. Not here.

1. Not seeking

Jesus “decided to go to Galilee.” Philip was not seeking Jesus.

2. But sought out

Jesus was seeking him. And He “found” him – the object of His seeking.

B) A Stirring Command

There is an intentional search here. And then a stirring command. A real authority. And again there is a real difference here that sets Jesus apart from all others.

1. A new way

He called His disciples to a new way. Not just a new source of teaching but a new way of living. Not just listening to Him but traveling with Him. This was something new.

2. Himself

They were to follow Him. They were to listen to and learn from Him, pay heed to His teachings, pursue His purposes, rely on His strength, and go forth in His name.

Illustration:

Charles Sheldon’s In His Steps (1896) tells the story of a self-satisfied church who are challenged by a tramp during a Sunday service to live up to their declaration of faith. The tramp then dies in their midst. So moved are the people that they pledge to live their lives for one year asking themselves, “What would Jesus do?” WWJD.

Application:

“Follow me,” Jesus said. His is a clear authority. Yes, to be His disciple is to be loved. It is to be changed. But it is also to be led. His patience with us should not be confused with softness. And that call to “follow” Him still stands. It is still being issued.

Which is to say His disciples should be asking, “*Where am I resisting? Where am I not trusting? Where is this servant trying to lead the Master? And why?*” To follow Jesus, to be His disciple, is clearly not to lead Him. It is to be led by Him as no other can.

IV. TO BRING US TO GOD LIKE NO OTHER CAN

To be loved, changed, led, and brought to God as no other (**READ John 1:44-51**).

A) A Shocking Greeting

Philip brings Nathanael to Jesus. And Jesus gives Nathanael a shocking greeting.

1. Jesus’ insight

He shows profound insight into his character. Jesus knows him as a man of no deceit – an attribute Jacob clearly lacked. And with that profound insight, Jesus also shows divine sight. He knows where Nathanael has been, likely thinking over a story in Genesis.

2. Nathanael's response

Nathanael's response shows his doubts have vanished. He ascribes messianic titles to Jesus, going far beyond that of any rabbi – the Son of God, the King of Israel.

B) A Greater Promise

Jesus then goes further. After the shocking greeting comes a greater promise.

1. General – greater things (v.50)

In essence “*Nathanael, you haven't seen anything yet.*” And not just “you” singular but the “you” in v.50 shifts to the plural. Something is to be revealed on a grand scale.

2. Specific – the way to God (v.51)

And v.51 then explains what that is with this allusion back to an event recorded in Genesis 28. Jacob was on the run. And he had a dream (**READ Genesis 28:10-17**). Jesus is saying that, with His coming, the imagery of that dream has been fulfilled. Heaven, access to God, has been opened. And that way is Him, the Son of Man.

Application:

Now the tendency is to believe we can chart our own course and can come to God on our own terms. There is a resistance to any restrictions when it comes to spirituality. So much so that there is a real trend away from “traditional boundaries” and towards “multiple citizenships” within a number of faiths. And Jesus warns us here against that.

Illustration:

Think of buffet dining. More and more is being written of the obesity problems in our culture. And one of the chief culprits are dinner buffets. You know the deal. For one price, you can have as much as you want of whatever you want, plates filled to overflowing. Analyze the plates and you'll see preferences and tastes, likes and dislikes. It's easy to find the desserts and the deep fried breading. But try and find leafy greens.

The point? Buffet spirituality is much the same. We take of a few things we like and pass on the things that strike us as too demanding or make us feel uncomfortable. And so we are left with a personalized religion which is little more than a projection of our preferences. Which leads to a lack of spiritual health. And this question – “*Are we even qualified to make those decisions?*” No, we aren't. But there is One who is. His name is Jesus and He brings us, as no other can, into relationship with the living God.

CONCLUSION:

And, with that in mind, He is then worthy of our devotion as no other. Think just in terms of the great mortal leaders – Robert E. Lee, for example. On the eve of his surrender at Appomattox, one of his advisors said the Confederate Army should never give up, take up a guerilla war, and “*scatter like rabbits and partridges into the woods.*” Lee could have done that. And his men would have followed. Even after the news of the surrender, as he was on his way back to the camp, outnumbered and beaten down as they were, some cried out, “*I love you just as well as ever, General Lee!*” “*General, we'll fight 'em yet. Say the word and we'll go in and fight 'em yet.*” And they would have – to the last man. But Lee refused. Note two things – not only his character and willingness to sacrifice his pride and not his men but the devotion of his men to this man.

Now, a from lesser to greater plea. If that was the case with the Army of Northern Virginia and their general, how much more with disciples then and now to their Lord Jesus? All these things – he loves, changes, leads, and brings us to God as no other can. He is so much greater, so far beyond any other. And He calls us to follow Him.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus is beyond our expectations – so much more.

(magnet) So too is the response that is due Him, what it means to believe in Him.