

February 6, 2011

Living Out The Gospel In Real Life

Come and See

John 1:35 – 51

John the Baptists' ministry was always to point to Jesus. We saw that as we looked at the previous verses here in chapter one; and we see that in verses 35 – 36: *Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God !"* John 1:35 – 36 Essentially he was saying, 'There's the one I have been talking about – there is the Lamb of God – there is the one who takes away the sin of the world – He's the one to follow now'. When Jesus arrives on the scene, John's ministry is over. John recognized Jesus as the Son of God – he had been teaching and preaching that He would come – he had been baptizing for repentance in view of His coming – now he was here and John's part on the stage of history was over. It wasn't a very long part as parts go. He had basically one scene. That was the purpose for which God had created him, given him life and breath and strength. His whole existence was all about being a forerunner for Christ.

We all have a part to play in the great drama of redemption – some parts are bit pieces, some are one or two acts long, but they all serve the purpose of God in redemptive history. I think of men like George Mueller who ministered for forty years in England with the orphanages and schools he raised up, and then at age 70 embarked on a second career as a missionary all over the world. He had a long part. But then I think of James Harris and John Williams who first took the gospel to the cannibals of Erromanga and within minutes of their landing were killed and later eaten by the people to whom they wanted to give the good news of Jesus Christ. Theirs was a very short part. But the impact of their death spurred many others to give their lives for these people eaters until the glory of the gospel light shone all over that island.

So John the Baptist's part was over – however we'll see in chapter 3 that John didn't exit stage right as he should have, but that is later. But here he makes this announcement and we read that at least two of his disciples got it: *The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek ?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated 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.* John 1:3 – 39 John had done his work well. When these two disciples of his heard that this was the Lamb of God, they left John's ministry and began following Jesus. He had impressed upon them that he was not the Christ, but Christ was coming and when He came, they should follow Him. And so they did. In verse 36 where it says that John was looking at Jesus as He walked, the implication is that Jesus was not coming to John but rather walking by, and if the two disciples were going to meet Him they'd better get going.

As Jesus saw they were following Him, He turns around and says, 'What are you looking for?' Christ always gets to the heart of our motives. They had spent some time with John, seeing the crowds, hearing the message, having the spotlight of fame shine on them for a bit. Perhaps they had been caught up in the heady excitement of it all, being somewhat famous in the shadow of John's notoriety – and Jesus says, 'What are you looking for?' Are you looking for Me? Have you ever asked yourself, '**What am I seeking?**' 'What do I want from Christ?' Are you thinking that following Christ will bring prestige, or power, or prosperity? A better life, a happier existence, freedom from pain and suffering? Did these disciples of John see Jesus as the next step up so to speak? Or did they want Jesus? This text tells us nothing of their motives here, we can only speculate, knowing our own mixed bag of motives only too well.

What they say is 'Teacher, where are you staying'? That was like saying, 'You know, we don't really want to bother you, but if you could tell us where you live, we'd like to stop by for a visit'. Can we get an appointment maybe? But Jesus doesn't put them off by having them call His appointment secretary, or saying, 'Why don't y'all stop by sometime for coffee and we'll chat'? What He says to them, He says to all of us, '**Come, and you will see**'. Jesus is not put off by our mixed motivations in coming to Him. He knows better than us that we are not pure. What He says, is 'Come and see'. And He spends the next three and a half years exposing their hearts and dealing with their impure motivations. You can spend a lot of time theorizing about who Jesus is, but the way to know is to come and see. Jesus says, '*Behold, I stand at the door and knock ; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.*' Revelation 3:20

You want to get to know Him? **Come and see.** So these two disciples went and saw and stayed. And the apostle John gets very specific at that point - *for it was about the tenth hour.* In some of your Bibles the margin says that it was about four-o'clock in the afternoon. And that would be right if John were reckoning time by the Jewish calendar. But this gospel was written mainly for Gentile believers because of all the explanatory notes given to acquaint his readers with Jewish terms and customs. And John typically uses the Roman reckoning of time which would mean this was about ten-o'clock in the morning. But whether it was ten am or four pm is not as important as the fact that John makes note of a specific time – *it was about the tenth hour.*

Why was it important to John to tell us what time it was that these two disciples began to follow Jesus? It was important because John was one of the disciples. One of them is named, that is Andrew, but other is not. And throughout this gospel, John never names himself but talks about himself in the third person. And the tenth hour one January Galilean day, John met Jesus, and that was a watershed day in his life. John is writing this some sixty years later, and he still looks back on that day and says, 'Ten-o'clock in the morning – that's when I met Jesus'. For me it was nine-o'clock one summer night at Green Lake up in Seattle that I met the Son of God. And I won't forget that ever. Just like all of those my age and older who can remember exactly where they were and what time of day it was that some momentous event occurred, like the day Kennedy was shot, or we landed the first man on the moon. Those were big events and the time and circumstances are seared into our memories. I'm sure if you think on it, you can remember the day when you first met Jesus and understood the reality of the Son of God.

As I said, one of the disciples was John, the other was Andrew. *One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.* John 1:40 And the first thing Andrew did was go look for his brother. Andrew, like all of John the Baptist's disciples, had been anticipating the arrival of the Messiah, and the first thing he does is to go get Peter. *He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah " (which translated means Christ).* John 1:41 What this says is that our personal responsibility with regard to the gospel begins with those closest to us – our family. **Our witness of Christ needs to begin at home.** By the way, the construction of this sentence lends itself to the idea that the other disciple, who is John, went and later found his brother James, who also became a follower of Christ. John simply doesn't record that, because the coming of Peter to Christ was a more momentous event.

Andrew didn't just find Peter and tell him, he brought him to Jesus. It is interesting that every time we meet Andrew in the Bible he is bringing someone to Jesus. In John chapter 6 he brings the little boy with the loaves and fishes to Jesus, and then in chapter 12 he gets some Gentiles and brings them to Jesus. I believe Andrew spent his life bringing people to Christ. He doesn't get the headlines like Peter, he's not a great theologian like Paul, he didn't write any Scripture like other disciples – he simply brought people to Christ. **The best work you can do is bring others to Christ.**

I would be willing to wager that most, if not all you, have never heard of John Broger. Among other things, John Broger was a godly man who founded the Biblical Counseling Foundation, was in the navy in WWII, was a missionary in China, head of the communications for the Pentagon and once was asked to be a member of Reagan's cabinet. But Hudson Taylor III, the great grandson of the Hudson Taylor of China once said, *'In my opinion, [John Broger] has done more for the cause of Christ in the 20th century than any other man.'* Broger was responsible for setting up the Far East Broadcasting stations that broadcast the gospel through the bamboo curtain of China after the Communists took control. According to Taylor, **millions** of Chinese became believers in Jesus Christ because of the pioneer work of Broger. All he did was bring them to Jesus.

So Andrew brought Peter to Jesus. *He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John ; you shall be called Cephas " (which is translated Peter).* John 1:42 This just illustrates the fact that Jesus knows who we are. He knew John and Andrew, He knows Simon – He knows he is a rash, unstable vacillating guy – a man who acts first and thinks about it later. A man who does something even if it's wrong because to do nothing is unthinkable. He can't help breaking into a holy moment on the Mount of Transfiguration because somebody had to say something. He takes it upon himself to tell Jesus that he won't let him die on the cross. He's the guy with the sword in the Garden who whacks off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's slave. He's rash, he's impulsive, and probably had something of a reputation already.

But Jesus says, 'I know you Simon, unstable son of John, and I'm going to change your identity to Peter – a stable, solid, rock. That is what petros means – that is what Cephas means. Jesus tells him in Aramaic, **cephas**, and then in Greek, **petros**, that when He got done with him, Simon would be a rock. Throughout the gospels we see this weak, unstable Simon, who, when the chips were down, ran away. But when we get to the Acts of the Apostles, we see a solid Peter – a rock, who becomes one of the foundations stones of the church.

It didn't happen overnight – it took some time, but eventually the transforming work of the Holy Spirit made the declaration of Christ that morning, a reality in Peter's life. And the Bible tells us that the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer is to conform us to the image of Christ and that is a life-long process of transformation.

The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me. Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter." John 1:43-44 In Andrew and John and Peter's case, they found the Messiah. Here we are told the Jesus found Philip. What this illustrates is the divine side of salvation. Andrew and John and Peter would never have found Christ had He not found them first. Jesus further reminded his disciples in John 15 that: *'You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit...'* John 15:16 His choosing us never negates the fact that we must choose Him, but it speaks to the sovereignty of God in salvation.

And notice here the first thing Philip does is find his friend Nathanael: *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."* John 1:45 But Nathanael is skeptical: *Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."* John 1:46 Nazareth was an insignificant village of Galilee and never mentioned in any of the Old Testament prophecies or any of the religious Jewish literature of the time. His answer indicated that anyone coming from that place was probably more of a hick than anything. And his answer also points up the fact that very often our witness of Christ will run into skeptical antagonism. When you preach the gospel, be prepared for skepticism and objections, founded either in ignorance or prejudice.

What is important, however, is the way Philip answered him. He didn't sit down and discuss the merits of the Messiah, or try to give reasons why this one was the promised one. All he said was 'Come and see'. That is the most profound defense of Christianity there is – Come and see. If you are honest and want to know if Jesus is the Son of God – 'Come and see'. You can talk about the claims of Christ, preach the good news of the gospel, prove the scientific and historical accuracy of the Bible, **but no one will be saved until they come and see.**

So Nathanael comes. *Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"* John 1:47 This was not a random choice of words for Jesus. **'Israelite'** directed Nathanael's mind back to the first Israelite – Jacob, who was, in contrast to Nathanael, full of deceit. In fact his name is synonymous with deceit. He was a deceiver from the start. He deceived his father and his brother and his father-in-law and nearly everyone he met, until the day he wrestled with God and God changed his name to Israel. And in contrast, Nathanael was an honest man, skeptical but honest. Jesus knew Nathanael was skeptical – He knew what he had told Philip. And He knew it was honest skepticism. And the fact that Jesus knew this about Nathanael was not lost on him. *Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."* John 1:48

Now there might have been a fig tree somewhere that Nathanael was under, and this may refer to something that happened while Nathanael was there, the significance of which only he would know. But more likely, because of what follows, what Jesus was referring to was the fact that Nathanael was meditating on Scripture. **'Under the fig tree' was a phrase that Rabbis used to describe meditating on Scripture.** So what Jesus was saying was this: Here is a man of prayer; a man who has waited and looked for the consolation of Israel; a man who has studied the prophecies, and the Old Testament scriptures, with a loving and earnest heart; a man who has, without guile, sought out every avenue of light that opened to him; a man, though he was prejudiced against Nazareth, yet when his friend Philip said, 'Come and see,' overcame his prejudice and came with all his heart seeking the truth. And he, like Jacob, has wrestled through to the truth.

And that prompted Nathanael's declaration: *Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God ; You are the King of Israel."* John 1:49 This confession clearly shows that Nathanael had been under the fig tree. He knew the Scripture and from his words we can see that he must have known several Old Testament references, particularly Psalm 2 where the writer puts all this together – the anointed One, the Messiah is the King and the Son. *Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!" He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying, "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain." "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD : He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.* Psalm 2:1-7

Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." John 1:50 The greater things do not refer to mere miracles – or the omniscience that Jesus demonstrated to Nathaneal – the greater things are what Jesus talks about in the very next verse. *And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."* John 1:51 It is altogether possible, and I believe, probable, that Nathaneal had been meditating on just these Scriptures in Genesis. Why else would Jesus have greeted him with the reference to Jacob? Jesus never did anything randomly, especially referencing Scripture so we should not suppose He chose this passage out of thin air.

If you turn back to Genesis 28, you can read about the dream that Jacob had where there was a great staircase stretching from earth to heaven and had the angels of God ascending and descending on it. So now Jesus tells Nathaneal not only what he had been meditating on, but what the real meaning of that passage was. And it was all about Jesus. If you want to understand the Old Testament – you need to look to Jesus. And Jesus was telling Nathaneal, and all the rest of us, that when you come to Christ, the heavens are opened because the Son of Man has made the way to return to God. Jesus pointed to Himself as the reality to which the staircase pointed. He is the mediator between earth and heaven, between God and man. It is that revelation that is greater than all the miracles He ever did, because it is that revelation that saves.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, Alexander Whyte pastored a large church in Edinburgh. During that time, a salesman by the name of Rigby would travel to Edinburgh regularly just to hear him preach. He would often invite other businessmen to accompany him to the services. One Sunday morning he asked a fellow traveler to go to church with him. Reluctantly, the man said yes. When he heard Whyte's message, he was so impressed that he returned with Rigby to the evening meeting. As the preacher spoke, the man trusted Christ as his Savior. The next morning, as Rigby walked by the home of Pastor Whyte, he felt impressed to stop and tell him how his message had affected the other man's life. When Whyte learned that his caller's name was Rigby, he exclaimed, **"You're the man I've wanted to see for years!" He went to his study and returned with a bundle of letters. Alexander Whyte read Rigby some excerpts—all telling of changed lives. they were men Rigby had brought to hear the gospel.** Like Peter who was brought to Christ by Andrew, these men were brought to Jesus because of Rigby. Come and see.

Our gracious God and Father,

We praise You this morning that You have opened the heavens to us. You have loved us everlastingly and unchangeably; may we love You as we are loved. You gave Your only Son for us, may we give ourselves to You. You O Christ died for us, may we live for You – in every moment of our time, in every thought of our minds, in every pulse of our hearts. Grant saving faith to come and see for those who have not trusted in You. Break through sin-hardened hearts and sweep aside all resistance to the glorious good news of the gospel. Thank you for the testimony of men like Rigby, and John Broger and Andrew and Philip, whose delight it was to bring men to Christ. May we be those who so delight in You that every effort of our work be to spread that joy through the gospel to all people we pray in the precious and powerful name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.