

Sunday Morning Message

March 13, 2022

The First Five Followers of Christ

The Gospel According to John

Text – John 1:35 - 51

Congregational Reading – John 1:35 - 39

Introduction

The events that we are examining today from the Gospel of John take place chronologically after the baptism of Jesus, and after His return from being tempted in the Wilderness. The scene for our text begins in Bethabara, which is on or very near the Jordan River near where the Sea of Galilee empties into it. It's about a day's journey from Bethsaida, which is at the top of the Sea of Galilee, very near Capernaum, which would become the headquarters of Jesus' public ministry when He was in Galilee. (See Map)



Transition

In today's passage, we will see Jesus beginning to gather His disciples. He will eventually have twelve of them, but here in John 1, we see Him as He meets the first five.

This is a subject that has always fascinated me. The Scripture tells us that Jesus chose His Apostles:

"And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;" (Luke 6:13)

An Apostle was different from a disciple. The word disciple means "disciplined one," and has the idea of someone who is being instructed about Christ and Christianity. All believers are called to be disciples of Christ. There were only twelve Apostles, however, and they were all hand-picked by the Lord. There is a difference between a disciple and an apostle. A disciple (μαθητής – *mathētēs*) is a disciplined one; a pupil; a student. An apostle (ἀπόστολος – *Apostolos*) was a delegate, a messenger, or an ambassador. Wiersbe calls them "chosen messenger[s] sent with a special commission."¹ The term typically refers to these twelve who were chosen by the Lord during His earthly ministry. However, the term is also used to refer to other men in the New Testament who achieved this special designation among the brethren.

Jesus chooses whom He will use to serve Him. In a New Testament church, we are always trying to get people involved in the ministry, but the ones that really stick, the ones that really do some for the Lord, are the ones that God brings in.

Illustrate – Joe Reyes – God told me to come to this church. We didn't recruit Him. He came because the Lord brought him here.

I. Andrew, Peter, and John (vs. 35 – 42)

V. 35 – this was the next day after John's testimony about the Lord (v. 29), the day after Jesus came back from being tempted in the wilderness by the Devil (Matthew 4:1 – 11; Mark 1:12 – 13; Luke 4:1 – 13).

You will notice that these first two disciples were first disciples of John. They already were converted through the ministry of John the Baptist. They had already believed that

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 191). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

the One that John talked about was the true Messiah of Israel. They may not have known much about Jesus, but they were trusting in Him.

V. 36 – John repeats the testimony that he had given the previous day: “Behold the Lamb of God.” His reference is, of course, to the Passover Lamb. Jesus is the Passover Lamb. Paul said: *“for even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us”* (1 Corinthians 5:7).

John is pointing his followers to Christ. John will later state publicly that Jesus must increase, while John must decrease (John 3:30).

Practical Point – As the ministers of Christ, our job is not to draw people after ourselves, but to get them to become followers of Christ.

V. 37 – These two disciples leave John, and begin to follow Jesus. We are told who one of them is, but the other is not named, but we are pretty sure that we know who it is: it is John. John does not refer to himself by name in his gospel account. He calls himself the disciple whom Jesus’ loved (John 13:23; John 19:26; John 20:2; John 21:7; John 21:20).

Vs. 38 – 39 – The word, Rabbi, was used by the Jews to address their teachers. The word “Master” (Διδάσκαλε from διδάσκαλος – *didaskalos*) means teacher, or instructor).

They ask Jesus where he was staying. It was not Jesus’ home. Jesus really did not have a permanent home at this point in his life. He travelled wherever the Spirit moved Him, and He stayed wherever He could. He once told a scribe who claimed that he wanted to follow Jesus:

“And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20)

Practical Point – I thank the Lord that I have a home, but many of the servants of Jesus are called to give up their homes and travel wherever the Lord would send them.

You will notice that John gives us the approximate time – “about the tenth hour.” The day started at six in the morning, so it was approximately four o’clock, toward the end of the day, and that is why these disciples stayed with Jesus that night. There was obviously not a Hampton Inn nearby, so these disciples just camped out wherever they could.

Vs. 40 – 42 – Andrew goes to get his brother and bring him to Jesus.

Practical Note – Our family is a great place to begin our soulwinning efforts.

Andrew's brother Simon Peter would become the most prominent of the twelve. Wherever the Apostles are listed in the Bible, Peter is always mentioned first. Judas is always mentioned last.

Note – the title “Messiah,” is a transliteration from Hebrew and means anointed one. Christ and Messiah are both titles of Jesus. In the Old Testament, the kings of Israel were anointed ones, and so were the priests and prophets. Christ was all three – prophet, priest, and king.

V. 42 – Simon is a common name in the Scriptures – there are nine people in the New Testament with the name – Simon.

The words, “Cephas,” means “stone.” The word “stone,” here is the Greek word, Πέτρος – *petros*, which is where the name Peter came from. Peter wasn't the name given him by his parents, it was sort of the nickname given him by the Lord. Later, Jesus would say about Peter:

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter (Πέτρος – petros), and upon this rock (πέτρα – petra) I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."
(Matthew 16:18)

Note - This is not the time and place where Peter would fully surrender to the Lord.

Turn to Luke 5:1 – 11.

II. Philip and Nathanael (vs. 43 – 51)

It is possible that Jesus travelled back to Bethsaida with Peter and Andrew because that is the place where they were from. It seems that in Bethsaida, Jesus meets Philip. The Lord called Phillip to follow Him.

Phillip finds a friend of his, named Nathanael, and tells him about the Lord.

Who is Nathanael? Interestingly, he is not mentioned again in Scripture until John 21:2, when Peter went back to fishing. We know he was from Cana in Galilee. Some think that he is the Apostle Bartholomew, mentioned with Philip in Matthew 10:3. John's Gospel never mentions Bartholomew, and the synoptic writers never mention Nathanael.

Nathanael has his doubts about Jesus (v. 46). Nazareth was a poor town, apparently with a bad reputation. Nathanael doubted that the Messiah could possibly come from Nazareth, and says so, but not in front of Jesus.

Jesus hears what Nathanael says, however, and indicates to Nathanael that He had miraculously witnessed the whole conversation. This is enough to convince Nathanael.

Jesus very carefully chooses his words to Nathanael (vs. 47 & 50). He tells Nathanael that he is an Israelite in deed, and there is no guile in Him. He also references the angels ascending and descending. This is an allusion to the story found in Genesis when Jacob was fleeing from Esau and on his way to Laban. Later, God changed Jacob's name, which meant "deceiver" to "Israel."

Turn to Genesis 28:10 – 22

"And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." (Genesis 32:27-28)

Jesus told Nathanael, there is no Jacob in you; no deception. And he tells him that he, like Jacob, would someday see angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. You see, Jesus was that ladder that Jacob saw. He is "the way" into Heaven. He came down from Heaven, and He provides a way, a ladder, for us to get in.

Conclusion

Here we have seen the first five followers of Christ. There have been millions and millions more since that time. These were just ordinary men whom God chose to use. These men were just fishermen. They were not theologians; they were not royalty. They were just ordinary men, but God called them into His service.

What is God calling you to do?

God has a purpose and a plan for very one of us. You don't have to have certain abilities. God does not call the qualified, He qualifies the called. God will gift you with what you need to fulfil His purpose for your life.

Is Jesus calling you to follow Him into some area of ministry. You will only find happiness and fulfillment in life if you yield to His calling.