

Exalting Jesus, The Son of God

"Five Who Followed in Faith"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. For centuries, religious art has depicted the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ as flawless, almost un-earthly men – often with halos floating over their heads.
 - A. However, they were nothing like that.
 1. The twelve men whom Jesus chose to be His apostles were ordinary human beings – complete with flaws and faults – just like the rest of us.
 2. But what made these men exceptional was that they were willing to leave the known comforts of their daily world, the security of their jobs, and in some cases temporarily leave behind their families, to follow Jesus.
 - B. As we continue our series of lessons from the Gospel of John we've entitled "Exalting Jesus, the Son of God," I want us to take a closer look at five of those men – "Five Who Followed in Faith."

1. Before launching into this study let's take a broader view of the last half of John chapter 1 – verses 35 through 51 – before we look at each verse individually.
 - a. First, notice these verses describe the events that took place over a three-day period. This becomes obvious by the words "*next day*" in verses 29, 35, and 43.
 - b. The passage is simple and straightforward in structure as John describes each of these five men.
 - (1). He first describes each man learning something about Jesus that creates curiosity and interest in them.
 - (2). He then tells us about the conversation Jesus had with these men.
 - (3). And then he describes the life-changing decisions they each made to follow Jesus.
 - c. We also see that four of these men are actually named: Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel. The fifth man, however, is cloaked in anonymity – but we later learn he is John, the writer of this gospel which bears his name.
 - d. And finally, we see that all five are just ordinary working men – sort of T-shirt-and-blue-jeans men who lives are about to be changed in ways they could have never imagined.

2. As we look at what happened to each of these men, we can see some similarities as well as some differences in the way they came to follow Jesus.
3. So, let's begin.

Body:

- I. The first men to follow Jesus were Andrew and John.
 - A. They were both disciples of John the Baptist.
 1. And yet, as we read further we find these two men are about to change from following their old mentor, John the Baptist, to their new master, Jesus the Messiah.
 - a. **John 1:35-37** – *Again, the next day, John [the Baptist] stood with two of his disciples. 36 And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*
 2. Notice the structure of this account.
 - a. First, they heard the message as John the Baptist drew their attention to Jesus and said, *"Behold the Lamb of God."*
 - b. And second, they responded to the message and began to follow Jesus with interest, and perhaps just a little curiosity.
 - B. Every true disciples of Jesus Christ came to follow the Lord the same way.

1. First came the message about Jesus Christ. We learned who He is, and what He did for us in dying for our sins on a cross so that we could be free from the guilt of those sins.
 2. And second, we were drawn to Jesus with the same interest, and perhaps curiosity, as did Andrew and John.
 3. Do you remember that time?
 - a. Do you remember when you first realized that Jesus was the sacrificial lamb who died in your place?
 - b. Do you remember when you came to Him in faith and obedience, and He embraced you with forgiveness?
 - c. The angels of heaven rejoiced on that day as you were given a new life – a second chance, a fresh start for all eternity.
 - d. It may have been years ago, but you can probably still remember every detail of that day.
 4. The next time the pressures of this world closing in on you; the next time you begin to doubt the love of God; pause and reflect on that hallowed moment in your life when you took your first steps to follow Jesus.
- C. Let's read a little further and see how the scene involving these two men unfolds.
1. **John 1:38-39** – *Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi"*

(which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).

2. They may not have realized it at the moment, but their whole world was about to be turned upside-down.
 - a. The question Jesus asked was designed to probe their motives: *"What do you seek?"*
 - b. At this point I'm not sure they really understood what they were seeking, but they knew Jesus had the answers.
 - c. And so, Jesus graciously invites them to spend some time with Him in more intimate surroundings where their questions could be answered.

- D. Being a disciple of Christ is much more than simply following Jesus.
 1. Being a disciple of Christ requires spending time alone with the Savior, growing deeper in our understanding Who He is, and what He has done – and what He can still do – in our lives.
 2. The only way we can do this is to accept the invitation of the Lord to *"Come and see"* – to come before His throne in heaven in prayer, and see all the blessings He has in store for us.

II. The next man in these verses who followed Jesus in faith is Simon Peter.

A. What words come to mind when you think of Simon Peter?

1. Impulsive? Vocal? Intolerant? Perhaps all of these.
2. And yet, when Jesus met Simon, the word that came to the mind of the Lord conveyed the image of one who was both solid and stable – Cephas, the word for stone.

a. **John 1:40-42** – *One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).*

B. Notice the sequence of events here – they carry a very strong message to us.

1. The message "*We have found the Messiah*" was taken by Andrew to his brother, Simon Peter.

a. For the benefit of his non-Jewish readers, the apostle John translates the Hebrew term Messiah with the Greek Christos (from the root "chrio," meaning "to anoint." It simply means "the anointed One."

b. During Bible times only three kinds of persons were anointed:

- (1). Prophets were anointed with oil when they were commissioned by God to prophesy to the people of Israel.
- (2). The High Priest was anointed with oil as a means of consecrating and sanctifying them to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people.
- (3). And finally, kings were anointed with oil at their coronation.

c. As we will later learn, Jesus Christ – the "Messiah;" the "anointed One" – is the Christian's Prophet, Priest and King.

2. But notice something important in this encounter with Simon Peter. We're told Andrew not only told his brother about Jesus, "*He brought him to Jesus.*"
 3. The response was Peter's face-to-face encounter with Jesus, which gave him the encouragement he needed to follow Christ.
- C. What special message does this encounter have for us?
1. As far as I can tell, Andrew was the first "soul-winner for Jesus." He was the first to actually bring someone to Christ.
 - a. That's the message for us – the need to bring others to Jesus.
 2. What would have become of Peter if Andrew had not taken such special interest in introducing his brother to Jesus?
 - a. Can you imagine the sermon on Pentecost without Peter?

- b. Can you imagine having a New Testament that doesn't include the books of 1st and 2nd Peter – and perhaps the gospel of Mark, which is believed to be Mark's transcription of Peter's words?
 - 3. None of these men had any idea what was waiting for them in the future.
 - a. And yet, they would become five of the twelve most important men in the history of the world.
 - 4. What about someone you know who you could bring to Christ, but haven't?
 - a. What greatness for the kingdom of Christ could they be waiting to do if someone – if YOU – would only bring them to Christ?
- D. By the way, Peter was far from a perfect stone – he had a lot of rough edges, according to the Scriptures.
 - 1. At times he is hardheaded, even abrasive.
 - 2. But Jesus was able to see beyond all that – beyond all the rough edges – to the precious stone that lay beneath.
 - a. Jesus saw beyond the stubbornness and abrasiveness of the man, to one who would exhibit great stability and courage – a man whom many would call "a pillar" in the church.
 - 3. Can you see the potential in others?

- a. Can you see beneath all the rough edges to the precious stone hidden within others?
- b. Can you spot that special jewel-in-the-making in the lives of your family and friends?
- c. Sometimes that's all the encouragement people like Peter need – the encouragement of someone like you to see in them what they don't see in themselves.

III. Next in the story is the man known as Philip.

- A. If it weren't for John's gospel, Philip might have been one of those disciples we meet briefly, only to never hear of them again.
 1. Matthew and Mark mention Philip only once in their gospel records. Luke only mentions him twice.
 2. But John mentions Philip on four distinct occasions. And even though they are brief, they reveal a great deal about the character of this man.
 - a. Philip seems to be a very logical man who closely scrutinizes every situation, with a little bit of pessimism, making it difficult for him to step out in faith.
 - b. We'll learn more about Philip's personality in future lessons.
 3. But in these verses in John chapter 1, we're briefly introduced to this man with these words:

- a. **John 1:43-44** – *The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." 44*
Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.
- B. Christ's approach with Philip is what some have called "cold-calling evangelism" – inviting a total stranger to follow Him.
 1. There's nothing to indicate that Jesus and Philip had ever met before this moment.
 - a. Although he was from Bethsaida, the same city where Andrew and Philip lived, there is nothing to indicate Jesus had met him before now.
 - b. Jesus appears to have simply approached Philip directly – right on the street, so to speak.
 2. And, the Lord's message was both simple and straightforward – "Follow Me!"
 - a. There was no high-pressure sales pitch. No smooth, polished rhetoric. No cleverly designed appeal.
 - b. Just, "Follow Me!"
- C. Sometimes that's all people need to hear – just the simple plea of Jesus, *"Follow Me!"*
 1. They don't need a 6-lesson series on becoming a disciple of the Lord.

- a. They don't need a slick, polished presentation that appeals to their emotions.
2. They just need some to tell them Jesus is still looking for those who are willing to commit their lives to Him, and follow Him.
 - a. They just need to know that Jesus sees something in them that they may not see in themselves – and He is simply asking them, *"Follow Me!"*
- D. The response of Philip, although implied, was that he did follow Jesus.
 1. We know this from what we read in the next few verses, and from the fact that Philip is later named as one of the twelve disciples of the Lord – one of the twelve apostles.

IV. And finally, we come to Nathanael.

- A. Immediately, with what seems to be great enthusiasm, Philip searched for Nathanael to tell him the good news about Jesus.
 1. This makes Philip the second recorded "soul-winner for Jesus."
 2. However, Nathanael appears to be a man who is not only skeptical, but also a little prejudiced – not the kind of person we would normally think would be a good candidate for an apostle.
 - a. **John 1:45-46** – *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."* 46

And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

2. Did you notice Nathanael's response? *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"*
 - a. The city of Nazareth had a less-than-desirable reputation among many Jews in the days of Jesus.
 - b. Part of this is because the people of Galilee were often thought of as being a crude, less cultivated class of people, who had been largely influenced by the Gentiles who mingled with them.
 - c. And part of this is also because the people of Galilee, and especially those who lived in Nazareth, were thought to lack moral and religious character.
 - d. The Jews believed that, according to **Micah 5:2**, the birth of the Messiah would take place at Bethlehem.
 - e. But many could not imagine anything good coming out of Bethlehem – including Nathanael.
3. Even though Nathanael is skeptical and somewhat prejudiced, that doesn't deter Philip. He simply asks skeptical, critical, prejudiced Nathanael to *"Come and see"* – to come see for yourself.

- a. It was Philip's way of saying, "Just come and examine the evidence, and decide for yourself whether or not this is really the one of whom Moses and the Prophets wrote."
- B. Look at what happens next.
1. Beneath all the skepticism, criticism and prejudice was an honest man.
 - a. **John 1:47** – *Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"*
 2. The Hebrew word for "deceit" (or "guile") originally referred to the bait used to catch fish.
 - a. In time the word came to denote any cunning device or deceptive ploy.
 - b. The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses "deceit" or "guile" to describe the character of Jacob who deceived his father Isaac into giving him Esau's birthright (**Genesis 27:35**).
 3. But when Jesus saw Nathanael, He saw a man in whom there was no deceit.
 - a. This surprised Nathanael. He had never seen Jesus before, and was quite sure Jesus had never seen him.

- b And so: **John 1:48** – *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."*
- 4. There are differing opinions among commentators as to what this meant.
 - a. Some have suggested that Nathanael had been sitting under a fig tree far away from where Jesus was, and yet the Lord told Nathanael that he had seen him sitting there – obviously a miracle.
 - b. Others have suggested that Nathanael was doing what the Jewish Talmud encouraged sincere Jews to do – namely, seek out places of solitude where they could pray, meditate, and search the Scriptures.
 - c. And others have suggested that Jesus saw both. In other words, Jesus had seen Nathanael in a miraculous way sitting under a fig tree pouring through the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.
- C. While we can only speculate the meaning of Jesus' statement, the impact it had on Nathanael was overwhelming.
 - 1. **John 1:49-51** – *Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under*

the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51 And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

a. The message that had captured the attention of Nathanael was *"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)

b. And the response of Nathanael was an unqualified statement of faith: *"Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"* **(John 1:49)**

2. All Nathanael needed to be convinced that Jesus was the Messiah was evidence from the miracles of Jesus, and from the Scriptures themselves.
3. Sometimes we meet people like Nathanael who are honestly skeptical about the claims of Jesus until they see the evidence that proves beyond any doubt that He truly is the Son of God.
4. Although they may begin as a skeptic, when they are eventually won to Christ by the evidence from Scripture of His deity, they become some of the most dedicated disciples of the Lord – people just like Nathanael.

- D. But to cement in the mind of Nathanael that Jesus truly was the Son of God, the King of Israel, Jesus used a familiar story from the Old Testament to describe Himself as the One who had come to provide the only way to heaven.
1. The story is found in Genesis chapter 28, where we find Jacob dreaming about a ladder that reached from earth up into heaven, and angels were ascending and descending upon that ladder.
 2. Jesus made a personal application of this story, describing Himself as *"the Son of Man"* upon whom the angels of heaven will ascend and descend.
 - a. This was Jesus' way of saying He is truly the Messiah – the Son of God – and He alone is the only way to heaven.
 - b. Jesus will later tell His disciples: **John 14:6** – *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

CONCLUSION:

- I. Five who followed Jesus in faith – Andrew, John, Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael.
 - A. Five ordinary men whose lives were dramatically changed over the course of three days as they came face-to-face with Jesus.

1. The effect of meeting Jesus, and seeing for themselves, turned these ordinary men into extraordinary disciples.
 - a. They will remain faithful to the Lord through good times and bad; when throngs of people followed the Lord, and when many of those same people turned away.
 - b. And even though their faith will be tested during the trials and crucifixion of Jesus, they will be eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, and will carry the message of Jesus into the world.
- B. If you will simply come to Jesus in faith and follow Him – as these men did – you will find the same thing they did.
 1. The apostle Paul tells us the message of the gospel doesn't always appeal to "*the wise of this world,*" nor to "*the mighty,*" nor to "*the noble*" – because the message of the gospel is so simple and down-to-earth.
 2. But if you will come to Jesus in faith and be determined to follow Him – as these men did – your life will be changed forever.
 3. You will not only find a Redeemer who came to free you from the bondage of sin, you will also find a Savior who provides you the only way to heaven.

- II. Perhaps there are some here today who need to *"Come and see"* – who need to see for yourselves what wonderful things await those who come to Jesus in faith and follow Him.
 - A. You can do that this morning.
 - 1. You can come to Him in faith, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Him before others, and be baptized into Christ so that your past sins can be completely washed away.
 - B. And for those who have perhaps given up following the Lord, you can come back and start following Him again this morning.
 - 1. You can make a renewed commitment to faithfully follow Jesus from this moment on by simply coming to Jesus in repentance, confessing your sins to God, and once again take your rightful place as a faithful disciple of the Lord.
 - C. Whoever you are, whatever your need may be, Jesus stands ready to meet you.
 - 1. All I ask is, *"Come and see."*
 - 2. And all He asks is, *"Follow Me!"*