

Jesus' First Encounters

John 1:35-51

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? The disciples followed Jesus. They were with Him during most of 3 years 24/7. They learned the ways of Jesus from just being with Him as well as from His teaching and His miracles and His other public acts. Jesus defined the requirements of discipleship with a number of words. He declared, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." He said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." The idea of abiding is that of staying connected to Him all the time regardless of circumstance or emotion. He also said when He gave what we call the Great Commission, "Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..."

So discipleship to Christ involves the ultimate in commitment, a complete integration of our life into His and the discipline required to get to know Him as He has represented Himself to be. The foundation I think is the third element. This is our pursuit as we think about and attempt to master the teachings of Christ. He taught through His encounters along the way, through deliberate and purposeful teaching, through His responses to His opponents and through His instructions to His disciples that were given in anticipation of the ministry they would have after His departure. We want to listen in to these conversations and hear what Jesus was saying to those to whom He spoke and what He was also saying to us since He knew that we would also be listening.

The first glimpse of Jesus as He began His ministry is in John 1. John was baptizing in the wilderness and Jesus was there. The day after he baptized Jesus John directed attention toward Jesus and away from himself. Standing with two of his disciples, He looked at Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The two men heard him and followed Jesus. When Jesus saw them following He asked them

what they were seeking and they asked Jesus, "Where are You staying?" They spent the rest of the day with Jesus and by the time the day was over they were convinced that He was the Messiah. Next, they found Simon, Andrew's brother. They told him, "We have found the Christ." Andrew brought him to Jesus and Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas." The next day Jesus found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found Him of whom the prophets wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael replied, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip

answered, "Come and see." Jesus saw them coming and met them by speaking to Nathanael, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit." Nathanael asked, "How do you know Me?" And Jesus answered, "Before Philip called you, , when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel!" Jesus then answered, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these. 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."

Our Scripture is a story of first impressions. Imagine if you had been one of the first disciples, what would you know and believe about Jesus after being with Him for just a couple days? Notice the sequence of events. John the Baptist gave witness to the Spirit descending upon Jesus at His baptism. He directed the attention of two of his disciples toward Jesus saying, "Behold the Lamb of God." The two disciples, Andrew and we think John, the author of the Gospel and brother of James followed Jesus and spent the day with Him. By the end of their conversation with Jesus they were convinced that Jesus was the Christ. Andrew told his brother, Simon and when Jesus met Simon He called him by his name and gave him a new name, Cephas or Peter meaning rock. The next day, Jesus found Philip and called him with the words, "Follow Me." Philip went after his friend, Nathanael and made the confession, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote. He is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael expressed skepticism but when Jesus saw him coming He described Nathanael's character to a "T". "Behold an Israelite in whom is no deceit." Jesus

used a play on words as Israel means ruled by God and Jacob means trickster. You could restate Jesus' description as "Behold an Israelite in whom is no Jacob." Jesus' words were so insightful that Nathanael asked, "How do You know me? Jesus' answer, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you," was effectively a way of saying, "You think I know you, you have no idea of how well I know you." Instantly, Nathanael confessed his belief that Jesus was the Christ. Jesus commented more or less, "Is that all it takes? Because this is just the beginning of what you are going to see. You will even witness this, "The angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (This was also a reference to Jacob who had a vision of just that as he fled from Esau after he had deceived his father and stolen Esau's blessing.)

What did these men learn from and about Jesus? They had most likely come to the wilderness after hearing about John the Baptist. They came to ascertain whether John was the Messiah. They discovered the Messiah but He was not John. They were convinced by John the Baptist's witness, by Jesus' words and by His presence. They each had unique experiences that demonstrated that Jesus knew them. Jesus knew

what John and Andrew wanted and gave them the time they required. He called Peter by his name. He sought out Philip and knew all about Nathanael. He connected with each of them so that they individually came to a shared conclusion - Jesus was the Christ. He knew them before they met Him and He had a plan for each of them. Jesus was gathering disciples who would follow Him - who would give Him their lives.

Discipleship in the ways and teachings of Jesus begins with a call to commitment. By ones and twos Jesus met with and convinced these first disciples that He was the One who they were waiting for, that He was the Messiah, that He knew them and that He wanted them to come with Him on His journey. The call was simple but there is no doubt that their lives were complicated. Peter, at least, was married. They had jobs and businesses. They were already doing life and Jesus called saying leave all of that and follow Me.

The thing is, how much do you have if what you have does not include God? These men saw this clearly. They were already searching for more or else why

would they have been in the desert to see John? It seems like they had already given thought to what if. What if John is the Christ what will we do? Will we go back to our businesses? Or will we drop everything in order to be with him? If you find God, how can you continue to do business as usual?

We are at the beginning of the experience of being taught by Jesus. Jesus would have much to say to these men but first He convinced them through the witness of the Spirit, the testimony of John, and His own presence and words to believe and to commit. Do you believe in Jesus? that He is the Son of God, the promised Messiah and the Savior of the world? Do you believe in Jesus so that you know that His words come from God and as such His words are good, are true, are authoritative, reveal understanding that only God is capable of, and make possible the realization of your full potential so that you can become what God has always intended you to be?

I am reading a biography of Benjamin Franklin. He was famous for his maxims or wise or common sense sayings. Some of those are: He's a fool that makes his doctor his heir, Eat to live not live to eat, he that lies down with dogs shall rise up with fleas, necessity never made a good bargain, A good example is the best sermon, diligence is the mother of good luck, haste makes waste, no gains without pains, God helps them that help themselves..." Several of these sayings are still common today although we would never know that they could be attributed to Benjamin Franklin. There is a thread of philosophy that holds them together and it has to do with a presumption that diligence and hard work will be rewarded. If you don't accept this premise than the individual maxims will probably not be of much help to you.

We can also apply this to Jesus. His teachings are for disciples. Commit to belief and discipleship and then His teachings will lift you to the satisfaction and fulfillment that you seek.