

John 1: 35-42; “Finding and Following Christ”, Sermon # 6 in the series – “That all may Honor the Son, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 13th, 2013, in the Morning Worship Service.

Some of these early disciples who later came to be among the number chosen to make up the twelve Apostles, were first disciples of John the Baptist. After John baptized Jesus in the Jordan, and it had been confirmed to Him by God the Father’s voice speaking to Him from heaven that Jesus was the Christ, he immediately began to point Him out to them, and to recommend that they follow him. When he saw the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove, he knew that he could say, “Behold the Lamb of God!” And the two disciples, Andrew and John, who heard John the Baptist say this, knew that they should now begin to follow this Jesus, for they perceived that He was their promised Messiah. We must assume that these disciples were already men who had received grace from God, because they had been baptized with John’s baptism. In receiving John’s gospel message, they had justified God’s purpose in sending Christ to save sinners such as themselves. They had heard John preach, they had believed the gospel of the Christ who was near at hand. They had repented of their sins, and He had now been personally and publicly identified to them by John. Now they walked up to Him from behind, and Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, “What do you seek?” This is what Jesus asked those disciples on that day so long ago, but it is also what He asks you who are listening to me now. Let me ask you this: Have you found Christ, and are you now following Him? If you have found Christ, what has your experience been since you have placed your faith in Him? I believe that I can show you from these verses whether you have truly found Him or not, and whether you truly have the heart to be His disciple. There are three questions which I would like to ask you from these verses which will tell you if your experience of becoming a Christian and following Christ is where it should be. 1st – Are you seeking to be taught by Him? 2nd – Are you seeking to tell others about your experience of Him. And 3rd – Has Christ changed your name and shown you what you will become by His grace?

1st of all – You can know that yours is a genuine experience of finding Christ and following Christ if you are seeking to be taught by Him.

When you first begin to seek Jesus by faith, if you are coming to Him for the right reasons, you are coming to Him probably because someone shared the truth with you about Christ’s greatness and His glory. Perhaps you heard someone preach the gospel to you. All that John did on this occasion was to point Jesus out to two of his very interested disciples. Their hearts were already inclined to follow Jesus, if John the Baptist told them that He was the Messiah. They very much respected John, and his teaching and they had become his disciples. A true Christian disciple is a learner. Andrew and John were being led by the Holy Spirit even though they knew next to nothing about the Holy Spirit or His working. But they say to Jesus in verse 38, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” A rabbi is a teacher. They wanted Jesus to become their teacher. A person who would be a true Christian and a faithful follower must want to be taught by Jesus personally. Jesus still teaches, by the power of His Holy Spirit, every person whom He gives eternal life to. Jesus gives that person spiritual life, and they desire to receive everything that He has to say to them, even if it is difficult. A person can be a learner in two senses when they are thinking about coming to Christ for salvation, or intending to follow Him. Either they are a learner with a view of receiving all that is taught to them which is in accordance with the truth of the Scriptures, or they are a learner who will only continue to follow Jesus their teacher as long as what they are being taught does not involve things hard to accept. In this type of learner, they will only receive some spiritual truths, not all the truths of the Bible because it goes against their pre-conceived notions of what they think God should be like, or what Christ would have them to learn and do.

I hope that you can see that it is only the first person which I described to you who is the true disciple. You remember that time when Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes? Many of those people began to follow Jesus because He performed this miracle. He performed it to teach them that He was “the Bread of Life” whom they must spiritually partake of, if they would be saved. But even though they said that they “evermore wanted this bread”, Jesus had to tell them that they were following Him for the wrong reasons. Turn with me over to John 6: 26. Here Jesus says – “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.” They wanted Him to always give them the bread of this life. They did not want to believe that they had to learn spiritually from Him that they needed His death to give them grace so that they could be saved. They were learners, but it did not make logical sense to them when Jesus said to them that “unless they ate His flesh and drank His blood, they could have no life in themselves.” Now look at John 6: 54. Jesus says here – “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” “For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.” “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.” “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of me.” “This is the bread which comes down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead.” “He who eats this bread will live forever.” Verse 60 says, “Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’” This saying made no logical sense to them because they were spiritually blind, and they were prejudiced against their need of Christ’s grace.

Now look at verse 61. “When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, ‘Does this offend you?’” “What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?” “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.” “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” “But there are some of you who do not believe.” “For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him.” “And He said, ‘Therefore I have said you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.’” The next verse says: “From that time many of His disciples went back from following Him and walked with Him no more.” You can see here that not everyone who thinks of himself as a true disciple is a true disciple of Jesus. But every true disciple of Jesus wants Jesus to teach them, even if they cannot understand the doctrines of grace when they first hear them. Nevertheless, they will receive these precious truths for they know that Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. It is so very so very easy to receive Christ and prove to be His true disciple if you will receive His words, even the difficult sayings, from the One who has died for you the sinner.

Messiah means, “Anointed one”, the One whom God sent into this world and anointed with all the fullness of the Holy Spirit for the accomplishing His task of accomplishing redemption. Andrew and John knew nothing of this. They knew practically nothing of the great theology that they would come to know later on, by following Jesus. All that John said to them was, “Behold the Lamb of God.” In those five words was the truth of the whole gospel in a nutshell. I hope that you understand that it does not always take your hearing many words to be saved. Perhaps you heard it at your mother’s knee. Perhaps you heard it from a close friend. It did not take many words; it did take someone pointing out to you the truth about Jesus, which let you see something of His righteous character, and something of His dying work. I would like to read to you a short excerpt from the Autobiography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher. He says – “During the time of our sojourn at the Surrey Gardens, it was my privilege to conduct one service which deserves special mention, for it was the occasion on which I addressed the largest congregation to which I ever preached in any building. This was on Wednesday, October 7, 1857, when 23,654 persons assembled in the Crystal Palace to join in the

observance of the day appointed by proclamation “for a solemn fast, humiliation, and prayer before Almighty God: in order to obtain pardon of our sins, and for imploring His blessing and assistance on our arms for the restoration of tranquility in India.” About a month previously, in my sermon at the Music Hall on “India’s Ills and England’s Sorrows,” I had referred at length to the Mutiny, and its terrible consequences to our fellow-countrymen and women in the East. The Fast-day had not then been proclaimed; but when it was announced, I was glad to accept the offer of the Crystal Palace directors to hold a service in the center transept of the building, and to make a collection on behalf of the national fund for the sufferers through the Mutiny.” “The Lord set His seal upon the effort even before the great crowd gathered, though I did not know of that instance of blessing until long afterwards.” “It was arranged that I should use the Surrey Gardens pulpit, so, a day or two before preaching at the Palace, I went to decide where it should be fixed; and, in order to test the acoustic properties of the building, I cried out in a loud voice, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” “In one of the galleries, a workman, who knew nothing of what was being done, heard the words, and they came like a message from Heaven to his soul.” “He was smitten with conviction on account of sin, put down his tools, went home, and there, after a season of spiritual struggling, found peace and life by beholding the Lamb of God.” “Years after, he told this story to one who visited him on his death-bed.”

I read this to you to show you that it does not take many words to be saved. It takes a few right words, spoken by a mere man, and leaped upon by the Holy Spirit, who rides them into the person’s soul whom the Lord intends to save. “Behold the Lamb”. The Lord saves people with words of reason, and yet the doctrines of the grace which flow from the mighty sacrifice of the Lamb of God, suffering at Calvary, are truths which go beyond our reason to comprehend them. This “Lamb” of God was the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of all the people, all over the world, in every generation, who would trust in Him. Even the helpless, even the unworthy, even those who never had the capacity to understand the gospel, even for these Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice. The reasonable question which Jesus asked these men was, “What do you seek?” The disciples were so overwhelmed that all that they could say was: “Where are you staying?” And He says to them, “Come and see”. Just three simple words of invitation. Come and see where I live; the simple dwelling where I stay. See how I live, and how simply I eat, how humbly I go about to live My life, and listen to my words; the words of eternal life. Listen to the words of wisdom and truth, and see that I am He who fulfills the law. I am He who keeps all the commandments of God from a pure heart and true. And yet, as you watch me, I will not tell you that I am doing these things so that you will think me great; but that you will see that I am obedient to My Father in heaven. This is what they saw, and yet they could not understand how He could be so uniquely different. But He was, and they would have to look at Him and listen to Him for three and a half years before they could really begin to understand what He had come to do.

What about you my friends? I hope that you realize that Jesus is asking you, when you come to Him by faith, “What do you seek? Your answer is that you are seeking grace. You are seeking the forgiveness of your sins and a new heart. You are first of all seeking the One who is the fulfillment of all of the promises of God in regard to salvation. You are seeking Christ Himself; to live by His Spirit and dwell in His presence; “to taste and see that the Lord is good.” “How blessed is the person who trusts in Him.” And after you have found him you seek to follow Him; to learn of Him. People who preached to you, and people who shared with you, they told you that you needed to learn some very important things from Him. They told you that you have a need to behold His glory and receive His grace. They told you that you have a need to be taught by Him. This is what it means to follow Him. You are seeking something from Him that you cannot find in yourself, in your own wisdom or strength of understanding. You are seeking to

find salvation, and the strength and grace to walk upon the path of righteousness all the way to heaven. You want to be taught by Him as your ultimate teacher.

2ndly – You can tell if your experience of following Christ is where it should be if you can answer this question: Are you seeking to tell others about your experience of Him? (verses 40 and 41)

“One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.” “He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated, the Christ).” “And he brought him to Jesus.” If you have truly found Jesus there will be an excitement in your heart; the realization that in finding Jesus you have found the meaning of life. You have found the One who has given you the grace which has led you to the place where you now know God and are known by God. Your heavy burden of sin is gone, and you have found the One who will help you in every way to become holy and righteous as He is, so that you can bear fruit unto God, and thus glorify God in the way that you live. If this is the case, then you are so excited to have found the One who has given you this grace and truth, that you cannot remain silent about Him. You want to tell everyone around you. You want them to know the truth which will show them the meaning of life; the truth that will set them free from the bondage of sin, and which will give them the right, also, to become the children of God. You want this especially for your closest relatives. Andrew, right away, thought of his brother Simon Peter. He did not hesitate a moment. He right away went to Peter and brought him to Jesus.

Let me ask you this morning whether you have this excitement in your heart, the great desire there, to tell others about your Lord Jesus? This is a sure sign that your experience of Christ is a genuine. You want to tell others. You want to confess Christ before others, and you want to bring others to know Jesus. Jesus is alive from the dead. He was not simply another prophet, another teacher in a long line of Jewish Rabbis, He is the Messiah, the Christ, the Promised One, the One and only One who can save you from your sins and teach you so that you truly change to become a person who is pleasing to God in all of your speech and behavior. He is the only One who can bring you out of spiritual darkness and open heaven’s door to bring you into His eternal kingdom so that you have everlasting life. He has made your relationship with Him a reality to you in your experience which will not be taken away. “We have found the Messiah.” John, who was writing this gospel shared in the excitement of witnessing to Peter. Seeing that these are facts, let me ask you if you at least have the desire to tell others about Christ; the desire to bring others to Christ? That is what should be there in your Christian experience if it is genuine Christian experience. But you say to me, “I thought that God was sovereign in salvation”. “If He is sovereign He will save people and bring them into Christ’s kingdom if He wants to do it, and when He wants to do it.” “He does not need my help”. But according to these verses this is not so. God often uses the means of other people around us telling us about Christ, in order to bring those whom He has chosen for salvation into the kingdom. He often has people introduce other people to Jesus even though those people have no power in themselves to save others around them. They are part of the means God often uses to accomplish His ends in the salvation of sinners. O remember this, dear Christian, and pray and ask Jesus how you could be useful to Him, in both word and deed, to bring others to Him.

Then 3rdly – You can tell if your experience of following Christ is where it should be if you can answer this question: Has Christ changed your name and shown you what you will become by His grace? (verse 42)

“And Andrew brought Simon Peter 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).” Now this truly is a marvelous thing which happened to Peter when he was first introduced to Christ. The Lord Jesus looked at him, and He comprehended in that moment all that He would become and do for Him as His own spiritual child and servant and under-shepherd as an Apostle.

Christ, because He sees all that He intends to do, and because he was given to Him by the Father for this very purpose, finds it important to communicate this to Peter. He says, "You shall be called "Cephas", or a stone. It refers to what Peter would become by His grace. He would become a man who was firm and steady in his character; bold in preaching the word, and solid and constant in his adherence to the truth of Christ and His word. When He says, "You are Simon, the son of Jonah, or John, He is saying, "You now bear a name of timidity and inconstancy as a mere man, in yourself. But by My grace, Jesus is saying to him, you shall eventually leave this behind. It would take Christ's power and grace and the coming of the Holy Spirit to him and to the Church on the Day of Pentecost to bring all this to fulfillment in Peter's life. But Christ, knowing what He would do, could change Simon Peter's name even then, at the beginning of their meeting, because He knew what His grace would accomplish in Peter. Let me ask now in closing this sermon if you know that this is true of you? What would your spiritual name be before you were converted? Would it mean "tricky one" like Jacob's was before the Lord renamed him "Israel" (Prince with God), because he wrestled with Him at the fords of the Jabbok? Think of your weakest area in relation of your obedience before God, and that is what your name is before your conversion to Christ. Is it proud one? After your conversion, Christ's grace will make you into a humble one. Is your name "selfishly ambitious one"? Christ will remake you and rename you "contented one". Is your name "sensual one"? Christ sees everything you once were, and everything that you are now, and yet He by His grace shall make you over in your heart and in your actions so that you are not to be called, "unclean one" but rather your name shall be called the "pure one". "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure..." But Christ knows how to remake sinful hearts and lives so that they become new creatures in Himself. He can change your name so that your reputation in the sight of God, the angels, and men, is established as "righteous one". His grace will make us into the name which we are now called when we first believe – His saints.