
The Followers Called

John 1:35-51

Pastor Russ Kennedy

What does it mean to be a follower?

It can be evil, the followers of Charles Manson...

It can be frivolous, the followers of pop artists...

It can be thoughtful, the followers of Hayek and Mises⁶...

It can be saving, the followers of Jesus Christ...

This is a record of the initial contact with six of Jesus' disciples. The writer of this book, John the Apostle, relates what we will read this morning on purpose. He is presenting disciples of Jesus who begin to follow Him. In doing so, in the material he selects to write, he is framing in two great issues for those who want to follow Jesus.

We get introduced to the humor of Jesus. In both of these, he is personal, real, engaging and a bit humorous. Jesus is not the solemn, sad, dark, soulful person of some of religious movies. Neither is he the flippant, funny and foolishly happy jester he is occasionally portrayed as. He is a real person. He is at times, sad and at times happy. He can be winsome and concerned with people. Sometimes he is acerbic and penetrating. And sometimes he is smilingly droll. If God does not have a sense of humor, then humor is of the devil.

As we work through our text today, listen for the “the next day”. Beginning with the opening of the book we have the Word creating, entering and being rejected by those He came to live among. Reflecting the days of creation in Genesis 1-2, this quick succession of days reaches a highlight in the newness of John 2.

So what about these disciples? What about their being called to follow Jesus?

Disciples will be Changed

(v.35-42)

Following Jesus is going to bring change. It did so in the lives of the people in this text. It will do so in your life if you believe and become a follower of Jesus.

A Change in Loyalty

(v.35-39)

³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ 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.

There is a change in loyalty from a Servant. Two disciples are introduced who have been following John. They were his disciples. This is what is meant by this word, "disciple". A disciple is someone who is learning from another and follows them. It is a kind of learning in the midst of living. It was common for traveling teachers in that day to be called Rabbi and to have learners who went around with them. This is the picture we have here of John.

John is a servant. He has just asserted this about himself. He has just said that he is here to serve someone much more important. Now, he points to that person. On this day, when Jesus walked by, John took the opportunity to point once again to Jesus as "the Lamb of God." This is not a chance or casual meeting. This "passing by" was the ordained providence of God. John spoke up in order that these two disciples might begin to follow the Lord.

These two men are being truest to the teaching of their first mentor, John the Baptist. It is to be expected that John's ministry would have disciples leaving him and following Jesus.

There is now a loyalty to the Savior. They heard what John said. They looked to Jesus. They understood what John meant and at some level, who Jesus is. So they begin to walk behind him, to follow him. Jesus responds with a very important question for all those who want to believe and become His disciples: "What are you seeking?"

I want to chew on this question a moment. From their answer, they understand that they are making an important commitment. They are seeking to reside with, to live with, to dwell with this One who is God dwelling in the flesh. They may partially just be respectful. But there is more here for us. Why even put the question and answer down? Why does John even record their question? Because he wants you to see that believing in and following Jesus is a lifelong commitment. It is a serious thing. Do not treat it lightly.

Second, I think there is something here about what a person is expecting when they set out to follow Jesus. Too many people are following Jesus for all the wrong reasons. They want the power the church grants them, the healing, wealth, position the pastor promises them, the standing the church may give them (though not so much in our culture now). They may just want to be sure they don't go to hell. So you have to be honest with people about what following Jesus entails. It will have its joys and its companions. It will also have its hardness:

trials, testing, setbacks, disappointments, opposition, divisions, temptations, persecution and maybe even death because you are a follower. Is this what you want?

What does Jesus take them to when he says, “Come and see?” I am not sure. But if you want to follow Jesus today, come and see holy men and women serving, suffering, singing and living holy, consumable lives. Come and see pain and trouble. Come and see eternal joys, pleasures at God’s right hand, and saintly people as friends. Come and see sorrows, sadness and swords. But most of all come and see Jesus who has pioneered the way: Who for the joy set before Him, endured the hostility of sinners that sent Him to a Roman execution as a criminal; that is, to the cross.

Do you want to believe? Do you want to follow Jesus? Come and see...

What these two disciples do is not just a personal decision. The Apostle John brings this in this way to show that true followers of Jesus will see Him as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. While this is not so much an issue in our day, it was huge in John’s. True followers of Jesus will have a change in loyalties from primarily living in the Old Testament to primarily living by the New Testament.

Following Jesus will demand that you be willing to set aside present or former loyalties. This will begin with your present religion, whether it is a sacred or a secular religion. You will have to be willing to follow Jesus even if it means friends or family. You will have to begin to be a learner. You may need to learn to read or learn to like reading. You will have to be willing to change your politics, your vocation, your lifestyle. In other words, you will have to make Jesus Lord and set aside all other idols. You may not know what all the ramifications may be – but you will have to be willing to follow Him regardless. Do you want to believe this way?

A Change in Name

(v.40-42)

⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

Now we are introduced to one of these followers by name. His name is Andrew. He is the brother of the well-known, Simon Peter. He goes to his brother and tells him who they have found. They have found the Messiah. The Bible will often refer to Jesus as Jesus Christ. The word “Christ” simply means “Messiah” or “the anointed one.” In the Bible, there is only one Messiah. So when you read or hear, Jesus Christ, you are hearing, Jesus, the Messiah.

This is an important part of Jesus’ identity. Because He is the Christ, the Messiah, He is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament’s prophecies and promises about the coming Messiah. When He came, He came to bring about what God had promised and what the Old Testament prophets had foretold. So, Andrew is excited to tell his brother. Wouldn’t you be excited? We have found the one to whom our whole Scriptures and our whole expectations point.

As soon as Peter and Andrew meet up with Jesus, a strange thing happens. Jesus looked at Simon and said, “You will have a new name. Your new name will be Cephas, in Hebrew.” His new name will be Petros, the Rock. This is dramatic. Simon is getting a new name. why? Because New Testament followers will get new identities. Now, I am aware that only Peter is renamed. But why else would John the Apostle put this here? Are we just getting an explanation of why Andrew’s brother is called Peter instead of his given name? Or, has Peter’s coming, believing and following Jesus resulted in a change. I believe that the point here is that He is getting a new identity.

A follower of Jesus will have a new identity. This is all wrapped up in this simple change of name. In world of the Bible, names had meaning. When we were having our children, books with the origin and meaning of names were very popular. Esther and I chose the names for our children based on what they mean. Cheri Noel – one who loves the birthday of the King. Nathan Owen – A warrior from God. Hilary Anne – Full of laughter and grace.

When you become a follower of Jesus, you are given a new identity. You are now a saint, not a sinner. You are now the child of God, You are now a son in the family. You are now... well just everything the Bible says about having a new name. And so, Jesus says to us, “The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 3:12-13) He also says, “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” (Revelation 22:3-4).

May God grant that you will be in that grand company.

Disciples will be Challenged

(v.43-51)

Those who follow Jesus will be challenged. All through the gospels, and all through the New Testament, many who want to believe and follow Jesus are confronted by the Lord. Look at the next day and the next disciples. The disciples will be challenged:

By Jesus' Call

(v.43-44)

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

The disciple is sought by the Lord. Jesus leaves the area of Bethany goes up to the district known as Galilee. This is the northern part of Israel. It includes the Sea of Galilee which is going to figure much in the ministry of Jesus. It is implied that there, he seeks out and finds one particular person. This person is someone called Philip.

It is easy to read this and not think about something. Clearly, this is an intentional decision following a plan to seek out one particular man. The writer is beginning to show us how Jesus interacts with His followers. He is not just randomly ac-

cepting volunteers who sign up. There are those who seek Jesus. We have seen them in the first paragraph. Even they follow Jesus pointed to Him by a witness. But Philip is sought out by Jesus. He goes up to where Philip is looking for him.

The disciple is summoned by Lord. Here is a present active imperative! "Follow me." We don't know anything else about this challenge from the apostle John. Maybe Philip had talked about it over the years. He was well known for his evangelism. We will see that even here. The lack of details that we would certainly love to know means that our attention is being focused on the command itself. This is not an invitation. Here is a sovereign summons. This is the Messiah, the Lord, who is commanding. He is looking at the person and saying, "Follow me." To not do so would be disobedience and rebellion. It would be to deny that Jesus is who He says He is.

This is the challenge to us. We are used to thinking of Jesus as offering us an invitation to follow Him. We can take it or leave it. We tend not to see the great issue that is at stake. Now I am not over reading this text nor over reaching a conclusion. Many times in the New Testament, the preaching of the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection is accompanied by a command to repent. Paul can go so far as to say that his evangelistic preaching of the gospel was to bring about "the obedience of faith..." (Romans 1:1-6)

We are challenged by Jesus' call. He has sought us out. He has summoned us to follow Him. This is a general call to all. And this is a sovereign call to some. The sovereign call comes to those who are chosen by God. Here is the first hint of a truth that will become clearer and clearer through the ministry and teaching of Jesus. Those who seek to follow Jesus have already been sought by the Lord. Those who actually believe and follow have been enabled to do so by the grace of God. As John 1:12-13 teach us: those who believe have been born, not by any human means, but of God.

So this places before you a challenge. Will you obey the call to follow by believing? True belief is a result of obeying the sovereign summons from the Lord of the universe.

By Jesus' Identity

(v.45-51)

But listen to how Philip experiences this being sought and summons by the Lord.

⁴⁵ 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 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered 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, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Do you see it? "We have found..." This is the testimony of disciples. We have found who we were seeking. We have found Him because He was first seeking

us. Followers of Jesus will be happy to make less of themselves and to make more of God.

NATHANIEL IS CHALLENGED BY A SERVANT OF GOD. Part of Philip's being a follower is that he is also a finder. He has been sought, so now he goes to seek others. He finds Nathaniel and tells him what has happened. Notice the plural, "we". Philip, Andrew and Peter are all from the same home town on the Sea of Galilee. From this "we" it is obvious that they have connected and talked. So now he tells Nathaniel. Notice too how Philip's statement of who Jesus is moves the writer's purpose forward. Here is this real person who is living among us whose earthly father (step-father, actually) is known to us is the Messiah. He is the one who fulfills the Law and the Prophets. This was the common Jewish way of referring to the whole of the Old Testament. The expectations of the Messiah were through promises and prophecies. Philip is happy to report that Jesus is the fulfiller of their expectations.

Well, we get a somewhat skeptical if not sarcastic response. O, come one. The whole Messianic expectations of the Scriptures cannot possibly be coming out of a backwater place like Nazareth. Nathaniel initially blows off Philip with a sarcastic quip from his own day and culture. "Sure Philip. How can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

I love Philip's response. "OK, come and see..." Sometimes followers who have gone and told simply have to invite people to come and see. To his credit, he does go to see Jesus, to see this no good thing out of dumpy old Nazareth.

NATHANIEL IS CHALLENGED BY THE SON OF GOD. Jesus sees him coming and even as he is still approaching, flings out His arm and with a wry smile on his face says, "There he is – a truly honest Jew." But more is being said here. Notice exactly what Jesus says: "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Ah, here is a real Israelite. He is pure in heart. Why say this? Jesus is alluding to Psalm 73:1, "¹ Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart." Through it, Jesus is pointing to the second stanza of Psalm 24(:3-6).

³ Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. ⁵ He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. ⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. *Selah*

So Jesus has challenged Nathaniel. He has challenged him to think about who he is. Nathaniel gets it. See his response? "How do you know me?" How do you know this is true? I have never met you. You have not talked to me. How do you know that I am a genuine Israel of the pure heart and clean hands?

Jesus responds with words of omniscience. I saw you, before Philip called you, sitting under the fig tree. I am who I say I am. I am who Philip says I am. Know this because I see you with penetrating insight.

Nathaniel now recognizes His sovereign Lord and bows. Here is any disciple's confession of saving belief. "You are the Son of God. You are the King!" I don't

know if he dropped to his knees. But it would have been appropriate. Through the witness of Philip and the words of Jesus, a disciple is born.

NATHANIEL IS CHALLENGED BY THE WORD OF GOD. Listen once more to what Jesus says in response: (v. 50-51)

⁵⁰ Jesus answered 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, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Jesus now challenges Nathaniel's profession of faith. He is not skeptical of it; He wants it grounded in more than the miraculous. He wants it grounded in the Word of God. What is the "greater thing than these" that Jesus is alluding to? Why does He talk about the angels of God going up and down between heaven and earth on Jesus? Why does the writer here bring in that Jesus identifies Himself as the "son of man"? What does that mean? Well, I'm glad you asked.

There are greater things than Jesus' immediate miracles. People who believe just because of miracles don't necessarily have saving faith. This is going to be a constant challenge through the book of John and to you. But saving belief sees the greater things, that is, the fulfillment of Scripture in Jesus Christ.

They will see that Jesus is the connection between heaven and earth. No, he is not some ladder or some elevator. This is an allusion to the story of Jacob. This slippery, sneaky son of Isaac, had slicked the inheritance from his older brother and had run for his life. While on the run, he stopped to sleep. This is recorded in these words from Genesis 28:10-19:

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." ¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

¹⁸ So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹ He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

Do you see it? True followers of Jesus will believe that Jesus is way to heaven because He is the dwelling place of God. He is, if you will, the tent of God. He is the house of God. All that God has promised will come through Jesus. He is the one who connects heaven and earth, not just as some ladder, but also as one who

is both heaven stuff and earth stuff. Since He is the fulfillment of that vision, then He is the one and only gate to heaven. He is the Savior. Will you believe in Him?

The Son of Man is taken from Daniel 7:13-14 as well as many other similar texts. Jesus clearly is identifying Himself as this great, glorious and fearsome majesty.

¹³ "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Jesus is the Sovereign. He is the One and only One to whom is given the dominion, glory and a kingdom in which all the people groups will serve Him forever. Will you bow to Him?

Reflect and Respond

Do you want to believe? Do you claim to believe? Here are the issues for you then:

1. Will you follow Jesus even if you have to leave mentors you love?
2. Will you follow Jesus even in the practical, day-to-day realities it means?
3. Will you follow Jesus even when it means a radical change in who you are?
4. Will you follow Jesus because He is who the Bible says He is?
5. Will you follow Jesus even if you cannot fully understand all that He and His followers teach?
6. Will you follow Jesus even if some of what you expect you may have to wait to receive?

If you are going to follow Jesus, you have to understand:

- That you are going to be radically changed...
- That you are going to be really challenged...

So, follow Jesus. Believe in Him as your Savior and bow to Him as your Sovereign.

⁶ Two of the most influential free market economists of all time...