

## January 14 Lesson

Today we read about the first disciples of Jesus (John 1:35–51). Yesterday, John the Baptist saw Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! I myself have seen, and have testified that [Jesus] is the Son of God” (John 1:29, 34). Today, two of John the Baptist’s disciples were with him, and again he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” And those disciples left John and followed Jesus (this is the last recorded time that John the Baptist sees Jesus).

Now, before we talk about who John’s disciples were, I want to spend some time talking about the word “disciple.” This is, chronologically, the first occurrence of the word in the NT. The word “disciple” (*mathētēs*) means “learner, pupil, follower.” Throughout the Gospels and Acts, it refers to those who followed after a rabbi or teacher (John the Baptist had disciples (e.g., Matt 9:14), Jesus had disciples (e.g., Matt 5:1; 8:23; 11:1), and even the Pharisees had disciples (Mark 2:18)).

Being a disciple means entering into a relationship with the one you are following. You commit to follow them, learn from them, and obey them. When we’re saved, we enter into a master-disciple relationship with Jesus. Baptism is our first act of obedience and a public testimony that we have decided to become a follower of Christ. Our calling as Jesus’ disciple is to follow Him, learn from Him, and obey Him.

The master-disciple relationship sounds a little strange today. Perhaps a modern equivalent we can identify with is the coach-player relationship. When you join a sports team, you become a “disciple” of your coach. You place yourself under his authority and agree to do whatever he tells you. Your goal is to learn to think about the game like your coach. You are subject to his correction and discipline, and you work hard to earn his praise and respect.

<If you’d like to spend more time on the topic of discipleship, I encourage you to check out the Discipleship page on the website for a series of lessons on this important subject!>

One more thing before we leave John the Baptist—I want you to notice that John points his own disciples to Jesus. That’s very much the opposite from the usual tendency to be an empire builder, right? Our tendency is to make a name for ourselves and to attach our names to buildings and institutions so that people will remember us. But John doesn’t do that; he encourages those following him to follow Jesus, and in that way, he provides a genuine model of what it means to be a minister or servant of God. He minimized himself (“to decrease”) in order for Jesus to become the focus of attention (“to increase”) (John 3:30). It’s the same for us today, we minimize ourselves and point others to Jesus.

OK, so who were the two disciples who left John and followed Jesus? Well, one of them was Andrew. Andrew was from Bethsaida of Galilee (that’s a small fishing village on the northern shore of Galilee, actually the word means “Fisherman’s House”). His father was John the fisherman (there are a lot of Johns and I’ll try to keep them straight for you) and his brother was Simon (who was renamed Cephas which means Peter, we’ll get to that in just a moment). OK, so Andrew’s father was a fisherman, and it’s no surprise that Andrew grew up to be a fisherman as well. So, why was Andrew with John the Baptist? Well, you recall that Jerusalem and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan was going out to John to be baptized. Evidently word spread to Galilee, and both Andrew and Peter decided to leave their nets and follow John the Baptist.

OK, so one of the two disciples who left John the Baptist to follow Jesus was Andrew, but who was the other disciple? Well, this is where it gets interesting, because if you noticed in the reading, it never says who the other disciple was! What’s going on here? Well, the traditional understanding is that the other disciple was John, the author of this gospel. If you remember from our discussion on the authorship of

John, you know that John never mentions himself by name. So it makes sense that this unnamed disciple is actually the author himself.

Well, Andrew and John follow Jesus to where he's staying, and the first thing Andrew does is to find his brother, Simon. Now, Simon is not explicitly said to be a disciple of John the Baptist; but he was with Andrew and John and the other disciples; he wasn't at home in Bethsaida helping his father with the fishing, so it looks like Simon was also a disciple of John the Baptist, or at the least, he was there to learn more about him. And Andrew tells Simon, "We have found the Messiah!" (which means Christ).

OK, let's pause here for a minute to talk about this word Messiah. Who or what is the Messiah? The word itself is a transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning "the Anointed One." (that's where the sounds or letters of one language are moved to another language; for example, Allah is a transliteration of the Arabic word for God). And since John's readers were more comfortable and familiar with Greek, John gives them an equivalent Greek expression, which was *Christos* or Christ (*christos* means 'anointed').

So, Christ is the Greek equivalent of Messiah, and Messiah means "Anointed One", so who is this Anointed One? Well, later on in Acts 4:26, John and Peter and some other believers are praying, and they quote Psalm 2:1-2 in reference to Jesus and his crucifixion: ""Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'—" So Jesus is the Anointed One, the Messiah spoken of in Psalm 2.

Now, I think that Psalm 2 is the OT backdrop for today's reading. If you read the entire psalm, and I encourage you to stop and do that, you see that Jesus is the Anointed of Yahweh, the King of Zion (the King of Israel), and not only that, Jesus is the Son of God (in v.7 Jesus speaks and says, "Yahweh said to Me, You are my Son, Today I have begotten you"). The psalm ends by telling the other rulers of the earth to humble themselves before the Son just as they would before Yahweh Himself. So when Andrew, who has just been told by John the Baptist that Jesus was the Son of God, tells his brother Simon that he has found the Messiah, the Anointed One, I think he had this psalm in mind, a psalm which connects all these ideas together—Jesus is the Anointed of Yahweh, the King of Israel and the Son of God.

OK, so if you're Simon, you're going to be rushing off to see this Jesus, right? I love that part of this story. John the Baptist tells Andrew and Andrew tells Simon. Later on, Jesus finds Philip, and Philip tells Nathanael. That's the way discipleship is supposed to work, right? Being a disciple of Jesus means persuading others to follow Him. We're supposed to be out there saying, "Come and see!" just like Nathanael, just like Andrew.

So, Simon comes to Jesus and Jesus looks at him and says, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)." And here we have another transliteration: Cephas is the transliteration of the Aramaic word for "rock". And again, John gives his readers an equivalent Greek expression, which is...Peter. So from the very beginning, before Peter has done anything, Jesus tells him that he will be called 'rock', Peter. And that's how the Apostle Peter got his name (almost a nickname really). And we'll talk more in the future about why Jesus called him Peter...

Now, the next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee, and he found Philip and said, "Follow me." So that makes Philip the first disciple who was directly called by Jesus. So who is Philip? Well, Philip was from Bethsaida, just like Andrew and Peter, and it may be that he knew them, and he may also have been a disciple of John the Baptist, we're not sure (I think that Andrew and Peter probably told Jesus about Philip and that's why Jesus went looking for him). And Philip agreed to follow Jesus, and just as Andrew went to find Peter, Philip went to find his friend Nathanael.

Who is Nathanael? Well, Nathanael was from Cana, so we're not sure how they knew each other—maybe Nathanael was also a disciple of John the Baptist? Maybe all these guys knew each other, or had become familiar with each other because of being there together to see John the Baptist. Again, we're not sure.

Now, Nathanael became a disciple of Jesus, but his name is not in the lists of the twelve apostles that are given in Matthew 10 and Luke 6. And this has led many to identify him as Bartholomew (*Bar Talmai* or son of *Talmai*). Interestingly enough, John never mentions a Bartholomew (only Nathanael) and the other gospels never mention a Nathanael, only Bartholomew. Also, in the other gospels, Philip and Bartholomew are always mentioned together, while here in John, Philip and Nathanael are mentioned together. So, personally, I tend to think that Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same person, but we can't say for certain.

OK, so Philip says to Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Now, Moses did indeed write about Jesus, specifically in Deuteronomy 18:15 where he told the Israelites, "'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—'" The prophet that God was going to raise up was Jesus. As far as the other prophets go, Philip may also have had Psalm 2 in mind (remember David was a prophet), and perhaps Isaiah, Micah or Zechariah, all of whom spoke of a coming Davidic king.

And how does Nathanael respond to this exciting news? "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Why did he react like that? Well, we can't be certain, but here are a few reasons why he might have been skeptical: First, Nazareth was insignificant—it was a small town and it wasn't mentioned in the OT directly. Second, people didn't envision the Messiah as coming from Galilee (7:41, 52). As you know, later on, the Pharisees tell Nicodemus, "Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee." Third, there may have been some rivalry between Nazareth and Cana, which was also a small city. So, anyway, those are some possible reason why Nathanael reacted the way he did.

But he comes along anyway and Jesus says, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Now, you remember that God changed Jacob's name to Israel. Jacob meant 'heel-grasper,' and his name was synonymous with 'deceiver;' Esau said, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times..." So Jesus is saying, "Behold, a descendant of Jacob the deceiver in whom there is no deceit!" And Nathanael just agrees with him, "How do you know me?" No false modesty here, confirming Jesus' perception of this character, and when Jesus reveals that he saw him underneath the fig tree, which was impossible, Nathanael exclaims: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" And there's Psalm 2 again, which affirms that the Messiah would be both King of Israel and Son of God.

Now Jesus was kind of amused that Nathanael believed so easily, so quickly, on the basis of something so simple, almost trivial, and he says, "You will see greater things than these. Truly, truly, I say to you [plural, all of them], you [all] will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Now what is Jesus talking about here? And who is this 'Son of Man'? Well, this statement should remind you of the story in Genesis about Jacob's vision of a ladder or "stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it" (Gen 28:12). And what was Jacob's conclusion about this vision? What did he think it meant? Well, when Jacob woke up, he said, "This is the house of God" and he named the place Beth-El. So Jacob understood the vision to mean that God had come down from heaven to earth. Now what does that make you think of? Yes, Jesus himself, the Messiah, the Word of God incarnate, had indeed come down from heaven to earth, and he was standing there in front of them, talking to them. Don't you love that! And not only that, but he refers to himself as "the Son of Man."

That title was Jesus' favorite way of telling people who he really was without actually saying, "I am the Messiah." You see, Son of Man, comes from Daniel 7:13-14, which says, "Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days [God the Father] and was presented before him. 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.” So you can see that the Son of Man is none other than the Messiah of Psalm 2, the King of Israel, and the Son of God incarnate, the true dwelling of place of God among men.

Wow, there is so much rich theological truth in these few verses about the first disciples of Jesus. From the very beginning, they were realizing that Jesus wasn't just another teacher, he wasn't just another prophet...Jesus was the Son of God who had come down from heaven to dwell, to tabernacle with men.