

The Savior Who Seeks and Saves

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 1:35-51

Preached on: Sunday, September 29, 2013

Once again we have a wonderful privilege to look into the Word of God and we are in John's gospel, chapter 1. So, if you will turn there with me, John 1. We will be looking primarily at verses 37 through the end of the chapter, but I would like to get a running start by looking at verse 35. So, if you'll follow along, I will read this text to us from John 1, beginning with verse 35.

“Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned and beheld them following, and said to them, ‘What do you seek?’ They said to Him, ‘Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?’ 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. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which translated means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas’ (which translated means Peter). The next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. 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.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!’ 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.’ Nathanael answered Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.’ And He said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”

We have learned thus far in our study of John's gospel in his prologue some of the stunning truths pertaining to Christ, the Incarnate Word that left the majesty of heaven to come and dwell amongst men. The gift of grace so incomprehensible, I constantly find myself being overwhelmed when I think about it. Next, he revealed the historical account of John the Baptist, that austere, mysterious forerunner of the Messiah who preached a message of repentance. “Make straight the way of the Lord. Prepare your hearts,” he says, “to receive the Messiah who has arrived. Recognize him for who he is and follow him.” And the rest of chapter 1 speaks of five disciples that did just that, five that

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followed Jesus. Here we see the Savior who first seeks those in order that he might save them.

This is a fascinating historical narrative which also includes much insight with respect to the inscrutable mystery of the sovereignty of God in salvation balanced with the responsibility of man. But we're also going to see some fascinating truths pertaining to evangelism. We're going to see some unique ways: how the gospel seed is sown and harvested; how God draws sinners to himself. And as I thought about this text and lived with it, especially this last week, I've just found my heart encouraged and I hope you will be as well.

Here, the Spirit of God reveals through his inspired writer, four methods that God uses to call sinners unto himself and we're going to see how he deals a little bit differently with each man based on their unique needs, based on their personalities, based upon their heart. And, frankly, we're all going to see ourselves as we look at this, this morning. Of course, this should be no surprise to any of us because as we look around at creation, we see God is a glorious God that glorifies himself through variety whether it be plants or people, stars or snowflakes, whether it be the living organisms on the earth or the gems beneath the earth. No two things are alike. Everything is different and the same is true in the operation of his grace. Who can ever predict where the wind of the Spirit is going to come from? How it's going to impact a person and bring conviction to their heart?

Not one single person in here has come to Christ in the same way. All of our stories are different, so we see that God does not confine himself to one particular method, but there seems to be four general categories of divine providence that God uses as the primary method of bringing sinners to himself. 1. We're going to see that he uses public preaching. 2. Personal evangelism. 3. Directly by Christ and his Word. Finally, a combination of all of the above. I hope this brings comfort to those who might be concerned that their personal testimony just doesn't quite line up with some others that they might look up to. I remember one young woman who had come to our church for a number of months. She had gone home. She had gotten on her knees in her bedroom and she had cried out for God to save her which he did and she was rejoicing in that and she came back to me and she said, "But Pastor, I haven't come down the aisle and come to the altar. Am I supposed to do that?" And I remember pointing out to her, "What altar? There is no altar. Christ paid, in full, our sins at Calvary. He said, 'It is finished.' There is no altar. You don't need to come forward."

But many times we have, especially in our culture today, these almost superstitious things that we seen with respect to how a person comes to Christ. The variety of methods the Lord uses to save should also silence critics who insist that people can't come to Christ unless you give extended invitations or unless you have long evangelistic revival meetings and so forth. But as we're going to see, God is the one that is sovereign over salvation, not man.

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So, notice first the method of public preaching. Verse 35, “Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’” This is the second day now, that he has said this, that he has preached on this. Jesus is in their midst now, at least two times, and we see the preacher emphasizing this important truth of the gospel.

Verse 37, “The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.” Now, later on we learn, in verse 41, of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, the other disciple we know was John who never mentions his name in the gospel. Now, I want you to remember this is the third consecutive day that John the Baptist has been preaching to a vast number of people and baptizing many people. No doubt, Andrew and John had heard him preach for many hours and now the Spirit of God is moving upon their hearts. They heard the preacher and they followed Jesus.

I believe that preaching is the first example that God uses because it is God’s primary method of evangelism. From the Old Testament prophets to the New Testament apostles and evangelists and pastor/teachers, God uses preachers and preaching to bring sinners unto himself. In 1 Corinthians 1:20, Paul says, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” And of course, the message preached is the foolishness of the cross. He went on to say, “For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.” We know that Paul exhorted Timothy to preach the Word. This is what John the Baptist has been doing now in the text before us. This is what all preachers must do: point people to Christ, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

All through Scripture we see that preaching is the principle means that God uses to draw his elect unto himself. For example, in Acts 13, we read how Paul went to Antioch and he went to the synagogue to preach. There we read that the whole city assembled to hear the Word of God. Wouldn’t that be amazing if the whole city of Nashville assembled to hear the Word of God? Can you imagine that? And we read in that text that the Jewish leaders heard what he was saying and they started heckling him and called him a blasphemer and so it must have been a very interesting service that morning. But, because of this, they said that they would start preaching to the Gentiles and then Luke tells us this in Acts 13:48, “and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.”

So, it’s fascinating to realize that even in our text before us, that Andrew and John had been appointed to eternal life. Now, they didn’t know that, John the Baptist didn’t know that, but God did. So, God was at work and I find great comfort in this truth: whenever I preach or whenever I share the gospel with someone over a cup of coffee, I know that it is ultimately God that is going to do his work. We always know that the Word of God is either going to harden a heart or soften a heart. It will always do one or the other and so,

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it is our responsibility to sow the seed but it is God who prepares the soil of a man's heart, it is God who will cause that seed to germinate and to bear fruit.

Now, notice what happens in verse 38, "And Jesus turned and beheld them following, and said to them, 'What do you seek?'" Now obviously, the omniscient Christ wasn't lacking information here. He knew the answer but what he was wanting to do is help them examine the motives of their heart. Why are you following me, really? He knew that they sought forgiveness from the Lamb of God. He clearly understood how they were seeking the righteousness of Christ, so Jesus knew whom they sought, but he's asking what. What do you seek? What are your motives for following me? I would ask you to ask yourself the same thing. What do you seek by following Jesus? Have you ever thought about that? What are you seeking? Ease of life? Success? A better job? More happiness in your life? Most people pursue God these days for health and wealth. Many people pursue Jesus and they follow him because they want to join the Christian country club. They need a place to hang out with friends and be a part of something, feel like they're accepted, like they belong. Or do you seek Jesus and follow him because you want to know him? Because you want to learn from him? Because you want to enjoy the rich and intimate soul-satisfying fellowship of the lover of your soul? Do you follow him because you want to be close to him? You want to experience that heart-warming exhilaration? That felt joy of his presence in your life?

Paul understood this and here's what he said in Philippians 3, beginning in verse 8, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." He went on to say that he wanted to "know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." In other words, he longed for the resurrection which even accompanies the rapture of the church. He's longing for those things and he says, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." In other words, "I want to become more like Christ. That's why I follow him. I want to be conformed unto his glorious image. I want to experience the power of his resurrection in my life." He went on to say, "forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." You see folks, this is our motive for following Jesus. It's all about him not us. Can there be any greater prize in all of the world in becoming like Christ?

Well, this is why Andrew and John were seeking Jesus. Again, notice the end of verse 38, "They said to Him, 'Rabbi (which translated means Teacher).'" By the way, this denotes their deep respect for him at this point. They asked him a question, "where are You staying?" Now friends, this is more, way more than asking Jesus, "What motel are you in?" That's not what's going on here. This is a request for fellowship. This is a request to spend time with him, to ask him questions, to enjoy his presence, to get to know him. I mean, stop and think of it: if we saw Jesus coming in here, wouldn't you want to spend time with him? I would. "Jesus, where are you staying? I just want to be near you." That's what's going on here. My, how often I cry out for that very thing. How often I cry

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out, “Lord, I wish I could just reach out and touch you right now. I wish I could just see you. I can see you in your Word and I can experience you in my life but, oh, I want so much more than that. Lord Jesus, come quickly! I want to see you face-to-face.” Well, they had the Lord right there in their presence and like the Psalmist, their souls were panting for God. Like a deer pants for the water brook, their souls were thirsting after God, the living God.

So, he said to them in verse 39, “Come, and you will see. So they came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.” I believe that this was, according to Jewish reckoning of time, it would have been about 4:00 in the afternoon. I find it interesting John remembers the very hour that he first met Jesus. Knowing that the Father was drawing them, knowing the Holy Spirit had already convicted them of their sin, Jesus knew they were truly seeking him for the right reasons and so Jesus says to them, “Come. Come and learn from me. Come and fellowship with me. Abide with me.”

You know, it’s interesting, as we look at Scripture, we don’t see one single time, there is not one single time, where Jesus was ever too busy for someone who was really seeking after him. Not one time when Jesus failed to show compassion and enter into fellowship with someone who was truly seeking him for the right motives. And, my friends, he will never do that. He will never turn us away, but he will not entrust himself to a hypocrite. Many times when I’m counseling with people, I ask them to describe their walk with Christ and it’s fascinating; I should say it’s pitiful many times to hear what people have to say. They’re absolutely clueless as to what that really means. They will give a list of some external things that they do, the kind of things that we do in our culture: church attendance, maybe they sing in the choir, they teach Sunday School, they do various things. But in terms of their own private personal pursuit of holiness, you can tell it’s just nonexistent. It’s not there. They are unable to describe what really needs to be there and that is a soul-satisfying communion with the living God. Their Christian life is all sizzle but no steak. Religious on the outside, spiritually dead on the inside.

Well, the point is: the Lord does not engage that kind of a person. It’s when I hear people say, “You know, I just never experience any of this stuff about, you know, really enjoying Christ and all of that.” Well, there’s a reason for that. You will never experience the joy of his presence unless you seek him for the right motive. We have an example of this later on in John, chapter 2:23, he says, “Now when He,” Jesus, “was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name.” By the way, that doesn’t mean they’re Christians, but they believed in his name. “Observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.” In other words, he could see their motives; he could see that they were self-serving motives. They wanted to see more miracles. They wanted to see how they could tap into it, how that somehow they could be the beneficiaries of this amazing man. “Let’s follow Jesus so that my life can be better,” rather than, “I want to

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follow Jesus so I can have forgiveness of sin, so that I can be cleansed, so that I can be declared righteous and enter into this amazing relationship with the living God.”

So, Andrew and John are invited to join him, “Com and you will see,” he says. Which, by the way, given the lateness of the day, would indicate that they probably came and spent the evening and spent the night because in those days, there were no lights so once it starts getting twilight and I’ve been in regions of the world where it’s like this, once it starts to get dark, you start looking for a place to hunker down for the night. Alright? You want to find a place to stay, there is no motel. So, this must have been a very memorable night. It doesn’t say this but I would imagine they stayed up most of the night talking with Jesus. I would. How could you possibly sleep? I’m sure even after they finally turned in, I mean, the mind would...you’re sitting there talking with your Creator. Absolutely inconceivable.

We often love to do that, don’t we? We stay up. All we have to do is put a fire out at our place and believers come over and all of a sudden we say, “Oh, my goodness, it’s 12 o’clock. Well, that’s okay, we’re talking about Christ. We’re talking about what he’s doing in our lives.” It’s just an amazing thing. How much more if he was there? You see, that’s the point. By the way, if you have no real desire to know Christ in this way, you probably don’t know Christ. You know, there’s no greater, more thrilling subject in all of the world than the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, our Lord.

Now, notice what happens after their encounter with the Lamb of God in verse 40, “One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.” Verse 41, “He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which translated means Christ).” As a footnote: we know that later on, John did the same thing with his brother James. And here we see the second method that God tends to use in evangelism and that is personal evangelism. And this is always going to be the mark of a true believer. A true believer cannot wait to tell those closest to them about the Savior. Think about it: you are walking along the street and you find a winning lottery ticket. The reason this comes to mind is that the other day I saw this funny looking card and I realized it was a lottery ticket and I couldn’t resist, I had to pick it up just to see. Well, it had already been scratched off but imagine if it hadn’t been scratched off and you scratched it off and 300 million dollars. Now, of course, if that was you, you wouldn’t tell anybody, right? Obviously, you would be just blown away. But, my friends, I’m here to tell you that being found and saved and loved by the Son of God makes a winning lottery ticket as meaningless as a robin finding a worm.

So, having tasted of the Lord, found him to be the satisfaction of their soul, Andrew seeks out his brother, verse 42, “He brought him to Jesus.” What does that tell you? There is personal involvement here. He didn’t say, “Brother, when you get some time, you need to go and check this out.” No, no, he was intentional. Now, it doesn’t say this but I would imagine, and being around fishermen I would really imagine this to be the case, he said, “Son, get cleaned up, get some clothes on and come with me. Now. We are going to see Jesus.”

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Well, so, this is what happens, “He brought him to Jesus,” and it says, “Jesus looked at him.” The text is literally saying Jesus paused for a moment and studied him. Can you imagine coming up like, “Alright, I want to see who this guy is.” Peter comes up and Jesus studies him for a moment and then he says this, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).” What an introduction. I wish I could see Peter’s face. I have this vision of what Peter looks like, you know, kind of this gruff, tough, always got something to say. I’m sure he has that deer in the headlight look, “What just happened here? What is going on?” The omniscient Savior, not only saw Peter for who he was, but he saw also what he would make him to be.

Here’s why we would say that: his natural name is Simon and we know, according to his character, as we study Simon that he was a rather volatile, vacillating, impetuous, impulsive kind of a guy, undependable, over confident, “I will never deny you,” you know, that type of guy. Self-reliant. I like to put it this way, he was one of those ready-fire-aim guys. He was one of those guys that probably wore a little sign around his neck when he was a little boy that said something like “does not get along well with others, loud, obnoxious.” He was that kind of guy. Definitely not a team player. Not the type of guy that you would want to pick for your team, but Jesus knew exactly what he was. He knew all about him but he also knew what he would make him to be and that’s why he nicknamed him “rock.” “You’re Simon, I’m going to call you Rock,” because that’s what Cephas or Peter means. A man of God that’s going to be fixed and stable and resolute and solid and dependable.

It’s interesting, as you read through Scripture, whenever Peter needed to be rebuked or admonished by the Lord, Jesus would always call him Simon. We see this played out for example, when Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times in Luke 22:31. Jesus used his former name which, again, would be associated with his weak character. He says, “Simon, Simon, indeed Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat.” And then in the Garden when Jesus saw him sleeping after being told, “You need to watch and you need to pray. Don’t be so self-reliant here. Don’t be so over-confident.” And Jesus said to him, “Simon,” not Rock but Simon, “are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour?”

Then after denying Christ with curses on the night of Jesus’ betrayal, you will recall that later Jesus asked Peter three times, “Simon,” not Peter but Simon, “son of Jona, do you love me?” But it’s interesting, after that, never again did Jesus call him Simon. A few weeks later then, he was filled with the Holy Spirit along with the rest of the Apostles at Pentecost and he became the rock that God intended for him to be. A mighty preacher, powerful preacher, that served as the leader of the twelve. The rock who served Christ for 40 years knowing that at the end of his life he would be crucified for his faith.

You know, I find great comfort in this. I look back when I was saved and I’m sure the Lord saw me and said, “David, you’re a wimp but I’m going to make you a warrior. You’re a little nine year old boy that has the fear of man but I’m going to make you fear

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me and you'll never fear man again." And think of all the things that he could say about you. So, he saves us despite who he knows we are, knowing what he is going to make us to be. I find that so comforting as I look at this text. What an amazing grace for each of us, that he makes us into new creatures. The old things pass away and the new things come.

So, Andrew brings his brother, Peter, to Christ, but we know that he did so not realizing it but he did so because of God's uninfluenced sovereign choice of Peter that he chose him before the foundation of the world. He wrote his name in the Lamb's Book of Life. Jesus makes this clear later on in John 6:37. He says, "All that the Father gives me will come to me." There is the sovereignty of God in salvation. The Father gives and they're going to come but then he goes on to say, "And the one who comes to me," there's man's responsibility, we have to come, "I will certainly not cast out." Amazing isn't it?

A lot of tension. John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them." Yet he says in verse 46, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life." On the one hand you see God's sovereignty and on the other hand, you see man's responsibility to believe. John the Baptist, Jesus, all of them taught that you must repent and yet we know, according to 2 Timothy 2:25, that it is God who grants men repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. John 1, that we've already studied, and verse 12, it says, "But as many as received him," that's something we've got to do, "to him he gave the right to become children of God even to those who believed in his name." That's what we've got to do. Comma, "who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." There's God responsibility, God's sovereignty.

So, here again, we encounter this fascinating mystery of God's sovereignty in salvation and man's responsibility. It's a divine tension we cannot understand, but one that is perfectly balanced in the mind of our omniscient God and we must uphold both God's sovereign choice as well as human responsibility in this tension. Emphasizing one over the other disrupts the sacred balance and causes man to create a theology that will be man-centered rather than God-centered. We've got to remember that Scripture teaches that unregenerate, unsaved man is spiritually dead; he's alienated; he's hostile in mind towards God; he's engaged in evil deeds; he's darkened in his understanding; he's excluded from the life of God. There are so many passages: the things of God are foolishness to him; he has no capacity to discern spiritual truth.

So, given all of this, man is utterly unable in himself to even respond to God much less save himself. He's got to be born-again. That's something we can't do. God has to do it. Yet here in the passage before us, we see how God is drawing his elect unto himself and how that is compatible even with man's responsibility to repent, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. A mystery beyond our comprehension and, frankly, I glory in this. I don't get frustrated over it. I can't understand any of the divine attributes. I can't explain to you how God can speak things into existence, can you? Can you explain that to me? Can you explain to me the Incarnation of Christ? How he's fully God and fully human? I don't get

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any of that. We could go on and on and on with this. Isaiah says in Isaiah 55, beginning in verse 8, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.”

Now, we’ve seen how God uses preaching and personal evangelism as methods of his providence to save sinners. Notice thirdly how at times people will be saved directly by the Word of Christ. Verse 43, “The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, ‘Follow Me.’” Here we see a perfect illustration of Jesus’ own announcement of his purpose for coming to earth. Why did he come to earth? Luke 19:10, “The Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost.” Here, the Savior is doing this. As we were just reminded: no one comes to Christ unless the Father draws them. Indeed, our seeking Christ is only a spiritual reaction animated by his first seeking us. We love him, why? Because he first loved us.

Now, we’re not told how God may have been preparing Philip’s heart. We’re not told anything about that, but we see here that no one brought Philip to Jesus, no one told him about the Messiah. Philip wasn’t looking for Jesus, rather Jesus purposes to go to Galilee and purposes to find Philip and to save him. No doubt there are other prior conversation that we don’t have here, but ultimately John recorded the glorious and most important bottom-line statement, “Follow me.” The Savior sought him and saved him. John 15:16, Jesus makes his sovereign choice so clear, even about his choosing of Philip and the others and ultimately all of us. There he says, “You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you.” This is what Jesus did all along for Philip.

I have know many cases with men and women where they were not looking for Christ, they were not led to Christ, they didn’t know anything about Christ. They didn’t hear a preacher, they didn’t have a gospel tract but somewhere along the line they read a passage of Scripture and they are saved. I knew of one man who was in that category. He went into his hotel room, saw a Gideon Bible. He started reading it and every night he came back for about three days and God gloriously saved him. And then he went out hunting for a church and trying to find a Christian because he didn’t know anybody. So, sometimes God saves us directly by his Word.

Jesus finds Philip and tells him to follow him and this is what every genuine convert will do, he will follow Christ. Do you want to follow Christ for the right reason? To observe all the things that he has commanded you? Do you follow him in baptism? Do you follow him in the Lord’s Supper? Do you worship him in these ways? Do you follow him in your faith, trusting in him in all that you do? Are you faithful in service? Are you fearless in evangelism as Jesus was? Do you follow him into the Garden and even up into the Mountain in private prayer and secretive devotion of worship? Do you follow him by denying yourself? Are you willing to do the will of the Father even if it costs you your life? That’s what it means to follow Jesus. My friend, if that is not you, listen very closely to what Jesus says, “Follow me.” Is that so hard?

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You know, it's fascinating as we look at the life of Philip. We see that he was very different than Peter. He was a man that was, what I would call, kind of wimpy, a bit of a coward, he lacked faith as we look at it, he was overly analytical, he was skeptical, pessimistic. He was one of those guys that you hate having on a elder board or in a company or whatever. He's one of these guys that could always find five reasons why that will never work. Alright? That type of a person. He was slow to trust. He always wanted more proof. Kind of this ultra-conservative type of guy. So, why would Jesus pick him? Because Jesus was going to mould him into the man that he wanted him to be.

So, Philip followed Jesus. Isn't it amazing how Christ's strength is made perfect in our weakness. In fact, Philip became a mighty preacher. We know that because of his ministry many, many people came to Christ and he was among the first to suffer martyrdom. He was stoned to death in Heliopolis in Phrygia, Asia Minor. He followed Christ all the way to glory.

Verse 44, "Now Philip was from Bethsaida," which, by the way, means "house of fishing." Those of you going with me to Israel, we're going to be there and we will see that place. But this was "of the city of Andrew and Peter." So, it's interesting, isn't it? Philip's new born soul shares the Savior's burden for the lost and the perishing. He can't be silent.

Verse 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.'" By the way, the law and the prophets refer to the Old Testament Scriptures where, through types and sacrifices and prophecies, Christ is pictured and predicted. And he says, "We have found him." Again, it's rather interesting: they may not have realized it, actually the Savior found them. It was not Jesus who was lost but them.

But they find him and Nathanael said to him in verse 46, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." So Nathanael was incredulous here; he was wondering how could something good come out of this city that we all look down upon. There must have been a common disdain for Nazareth. He's really saying, "Is it really possible that the Messiah can come from a place like this?" You know, every evangelist knows what it's like to introduce a person to Christ and they are skeptical. They have questions and some are fair and some aren't but in every case they need spiritual light and life and the only way they can find this is to point them to Christ. So, that's what happens here, you just point him to Christ. That's what Philip does with Nathanael, he says, "Come and see." By the way, we don't have Christ with us obviously today in person, but we do in his Word so you just point him to his Word. I typically point people to the gospel of John.

Verse 47, "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!'" In other words, there is no deceit here, there is no self-deception or duplicity. So, this implies that Nathanael's skepticism, even his incredulity concerning the Messiah coming out of Nazareth, arose from a sincere heart.

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The Savior Who Seeks and Saves

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 1:35-51

Preached on: Sunday, September 29, 2013

He wanted to be very careful here. This is a very, very important issue here. Is this truly the Messiah?

Verse 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.’” Well, what a magnificent display of the deity of Christ which is going to be John’s focus throughout his gospel. His omniscient eye was not only able to peer into the heart of Nathanael and say, “Here’s a guy with no deceit,” but he was also able to look into that secret place of private worship where he had been. By the way, bear in mind, dear friend, that he sees both of these things in each of us. He sees our heart and he also sees our place of private worship, assuming there is one. And I hope there is for you.

So, he’s awestruck by Jesus’ supernatural insight. Verse 49, “Nathanael answered Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.’” By the way, that’s the same confession as John the Baptist, right? And such a confession is always going to be evidence of new birth. He saw Jesus for who he was, the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah.

Verse 50, “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe?’” By the way, this is more of a congratulations than it is a question. He’s applauding the sincerity of Nathanael’s confession based upon Jesus’ supernatural display of omniscience and his deity. Jesus says, “You shall see greater things than these.” In other words, you’re going to see even more astounding, overwhelming manifestations of my glory and power. By the way, I find it interesting that the first recorded miracle that Jesus does is in Cana, Nathanael’s hometown.

Jesus went on to assure him in verse 51, “And He said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’” Here, Jesus is tapping into that great story of Jacob’s vision where Jacob saw the angels ascending and descending from heaven on a ladder. Remember, in Genesis 28? By the way, the text doesn’t say this but it wouldn’t surprise me if that wasn’t the very text that Nathanael had been meditating upon under the fig tree. Wouldn’t it be just like Jesus to do something like that? And that ladder, of course, back with Jacob, was the type or the example that pointed to the greater antitype, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, himself, would become that living ladder that would bridge heaven and earth because we know that it is through Jesus that we have access into the throne room of God. In fact, Jesus said in John 3:13, “And no one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man.”

Now, in this text, the Son of Man has descended from heaven onto earth to commence his ministry of reconciliation because, indeed, Christ Jesus is the only mediator between God and man. He is the mediator even of the new and the better covenant that we read in Hebrews.

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Well, with Nathanael's conversion, we see the fourth method that God uses to save sinners and that is a combination of all of the above. Think about it: God previously used public preaching to save Andrew and John and then he used the personal evangelism of Andrew to save Peter and then Christ, himself, seeks out Philip and saves him directly by his Word and then you have Philip inviting a skeptical Nathanael to come and see and then Jesus overwhelms him with his glory and saves him. So, here we have a conversion that is an indirect result of preaching as well as a composite of personal evangelism and the Word of Christ. And that's probably true for most all of us.

I remember when I was a small boy, I had godly parents, godly grandparents around me. I heard much about Christ. I had godly Sunday School teachers. We had Boy's Brigade. So, I had all of these people around me but by the time I was nine years old I had heard many things about Christ. I started to become convicted over my sin and eventually at the end of a sermon I stayed seated and I was overwhelmed with my sin. My father and the pastor, Dr. Connelly, came to sit down with me and they asked me what was going on and I cried out to God to save me and he did. There's that combination of all of the above.

Now, folks, by way of application, I want to just give you a few things in closing. 1. I want you to make evangelism a priority in your life. If you can't see this out of the text, you're missing it. I'm talking about passionate, bold, gospel preaching and teaching and sharing. We're told to go and make disciples. And as we see here, our first obligation is at home. Don't be teaching other kids and neglecting your own kids at home or whatever. I like to think of it in four ways: target, pray, plan and implement. Can you remember that? It's real simple: target, pray, plan and implement. Be passionate, be creative, be intentional, be bold, be relentless. Give people books and films and tracts and fire pits. Ask them over, "Hey, you know, we're having a cook-out tonight." Or, "We're going to ask a bunch of guys to go shoot here before long." You know, that type of thing. And in the midst of that we start talking about the gospel. We have targeted people, we're praying for them, we're strategizing.

But then, also remember, God's primary method of evangelism is preaching. So, invite them to church. If they won't come to church, put the sermons on Facebook. A lot of you do that. Or invite them to look at YouTube. Talk about something and say, "Boy, you know what? My Pastor," or some other pastor, "has taught this and you've got to hear this. What's your email address and I'll send you this link?" I mean, this is evangelism, folks.

In fact, what I'm going to ask you to do and it occurred to me that I've never done this before at this church but I believe it's of the Spirit of God: I'm going to ask every person in this church to target someone and send me an email of that person's name and a brief statement of your plan for evangelism. And I'm going to expect every person to do that and if I don't hear from you, you're going to be hearing from me. Okay? I mean, folks, we've got to get serious about this.

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So, now that you're all terrified. But this is so exciting. Let me ask you: Jesus came to seek and to save sinners, do you believe that he's still doing that or not? Well, of course he is. So, let's get with the program. And he uses faithful saints to accomplish his purposes of redemption. I can only imagine the number of souls that we could harvest if we, as a body, got serious about evangelism. So, we need to be passionate and creative and intentional and bold and relentless. I'll do my part. The elders will do theirs. We expect you to do yours. And because we love you, we're going to help you with this.

The second thing by way of application: realize that God is always at work in evangelism long before you showed up. You never know who the Father is drawing. Maybe that person on your target list is one of those people.

Thirdly, even as Jesus fashioned these ordinary men with all of their faults and weaknesses into these mighty warriors of the Kingdom, he wants to do the same for you. But, folks, you have to be like them: you have to get serious about following Jesus. You have to walk with him and abide with him. You have to be like Andrew and John saying, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Will you ask the Lord that this week? "Lord, where are you staying. I want to be with you. My sufficiency is only in you."

And, my friend, let me tell you where Jesus is staying: it's called the church. That's where Jesus is staying. This is his body and he is the head. If you want to get serious about becoming that person God wants you to be, start getting serious about serving and worshiping in his church and watch what he will do. You have been given two pastor/teachers who have been called and equipped and gifted to give you the Word so that you will be prepared for the work of ministry and not be like children so that you will become mature. You've been given godly elders who understand that they have been given this amazing responsibility to have watch-care over your souls. You have been given deacons that love to serve you and there are so many people in this church who are a part of the body, who have all of these amazing gifts and you're going to hang around on the periphery? What is wrong with you? My friend, do not live outside the camp, you will never survive. You will stay Simon, that's what will happen and we need you.

Finally, for those of you who have never begged God for mercy, you've never repented of your sins, you've never asked Jesus to be your Savior, you must do this today. I plead with you as a minister of the gospel: do it before it's too late. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

Let's pray.

Father, we pray that these glorious truths will become so much a part of us that they will be the theme of our song and the theme of our conversation, that they will literally characterize our lives in such a way that others will look and see, "My goodness, that person follows Christ." Lord, we do this because we love you and we want to give you glory but also, Lord, we confess that we do this because we want to enjoy the exhilaration of your presence in our lives. So, we commit it all to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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