

The First Five

(John 1:38-51)

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Introduction

A man was on trial for burglarizing a house at night.

He had taken electronics and jewelry and a good bit of cash from a home while a family was on vacation.

There was little evidence of the crime.

No fingerprints, no proof of forced entry.

The only link to the crime was the testimony of a man who lived beside the home that burglarized, but he was an elderly man who was 82 years old..

After the prosecution examined the neighbor and he testified to the fact that he saw the defendant enter and exit the house with the stolen goods, the defense attorney was ready to cross examine him..

The exchange between the defense attorney and the witness went as follows..

“Sir, can you state your name for the record.”

Yes, my name is Tom Askins.

Mr. Askins, can you tell the court your age?

Yes, my age is 82.

Mr. Askins, did you testify that you saw my client take the goods out of your neighbors home on the night in question?

Yes, I saw him leave the house with the stolen property.

Mr. Askins, are you sure you saw my client on that night?

Yes, I am sure I saw him.

Mr. Askins, with all due respect, you are 82 years old and your eyesight is probably failing. Can you tell us just how far you can think you can see at night?

Well, with all due respect, I can see the moon each night? How far away is that?

The courtroom burst into laughter and the defendant was found guilty a short time later...

The beginning of the gospel of John is simply a series of eyewitness testimonies about the identity of Jesus Christ...

For the first 18 verses, John the Apostle offers his testimony about the identity of Christ as God in the flesh...

For verses 19-37, John the Baptist offers his testimony about Christ as the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the Savior from sin..

And now as we get to the final section of John 1, we are going to get the testimony of the first believers in Christ...

Now the point of John's gospel is clearly stated by John..

He wrote his gospel to convince his readers to believe that Jesus was the Christ and to find eternal life in Jesus' name...

And the way to convince people is through the testimony of others...

So John starts with his own testimony, moves to the testimony of a prophet of God, and then ends chapter 1 with the testimony of those who believed in Christ..

In sense, the testimonies of the followers of Christ that we will examine today are a reminder that the followers of Christ are witnesses to the identity of Christ..

When you come to church as Christian, you are telling the world that Jesus is the Christ and worthy of your sacrifice and worship.

When you live in obedience to the Bible, you are telling the world that Jesus is the Christ and the Lord of your life..

When you share the gospel, you are telling the world that Jesus is the Christ and the only way to salvation is through Him..

So let's look at these verses this morning and be reminded that the testimony of Christ's followers is vital to the spreading of the gospel...

The first followers of Christ that we will see are found in verses 38-42...

We can label these verses...

I. One, Two, Three (38-42)

Let's simply watch this testimony of Jesus' first followers unfold by taking this verse by verse...

So verse 38...

38 And Jesus turned and saw them following, and *said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?"

In order to set the stage for this scene, we must look back at verses 35-37 from last week...

In verse 35, John the Baptist is standing with two of his disciples when Jesus walks up...

John the Baptist did what he always did, and he pointed his followers to become followers of Christ...

And verse 37 tells us that John the Baptist's two disciples left John and went to follow Christ..

Now, where is this scene taking place?

Well, John the Baptist's ministry was beyond the Jordan in a little town called Bethany.

Now, the Bible speaks of a city called Bethany that is just a couple miles from Jerusalem on the other side of the Mount of Olives..

Mary and Martha lived there with Lazarus, and Jesus will go to that Bethany later...

But this Bethany is beyond the Jordan River which essentially served as the eastern boundary of Israel...

And so John the Baptist is out there in Bethany preaching and baptizing and two of his disciples are with him in verse 35 as Jesus approaches..

Now, we are going to find out that one of these disciples of John the Baptist is Andrew in verse 40, but who is the other disciple?

And I mentioned last week that John the Apostles is most likely the other disciple...

Now, John the Apostle and Andrew are both from Galilee, which is a north of this area about 20-25 miles north of where John the Baptist is ministering...

So obviously these men were away from home in this area where John the Baptist was preaching, but that is what you do when you are convinced that truth is being preached...

And while they are there listening to John the Baptist, the focus of John's ministry appears before them..

So what does John the Baptist do?

He tells Peter and John to leave him and head to Christ...

And in verse 38, we pick up the story as Jesus simply asks them why they are now following him...

His simple question to them is "what do you seek?"

Well, you have to love their answer in verse 37, which is..

Where are you staying?

In other words, "Jesus, if you are the Christ, the son of God, we are seeking a lot from you."

In fact, we are seeking so much that we need to stay wherever you are staying because this is going to take some time...

Can you imagine have God at your beckon call to answer all the questions you have for Him?

Well, that's the dilemma of these two men, so they simply request some time to spend with Jesus..

Verse 39..

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 [aa]tenth hour.

So, Jesus invited them to where he was staying, and we don't know where that was...

It could not have been much out in middle of the wilderness, but they go with him and spend the rest of day from the 10th hour (which would be 4 pm) and the night with Jesus...

And then in verse 40, we see the identity of one of these disciples..

40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

The reason that John the Apostle would describe Andrew as Peter's brother is that John's readers would be most familiar with Peter at the time of John writing this gospel in 85 AD.

And the reason that we don't get the name of the other disciple is that John is too humble to mention his name here most likely..

So Andrew and John the Apostle leave John the Baptist and spend the evening and night talking to Christ..

I cannot imagine the conversations, but it must have been very convincing because Andrew heads out and finds his brother Peter right away...

Verse 41...

41 He *found first his own brother Simon and *said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which translated means [ab]Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of [ac]John; you shall be called Cephas” (which is translated [ad]Peter).

What a great picture of how the gospel spreads....

Andrew doesn't know everything about Jesus at this point, but he has heard enough to go out and call his brother to come here the good news..

It is a shame that our evangelism often fades after we have been saved for some time...

If you remember your first days and weeks of being saved, you most likely couldn't carry on a conversation without telling someone that you were saved...

Yet often we leave that first love of spreading the gospel and simply leave it to others...

May God return us all to that first love of sharing the gospel with those around us that we once had in the first few days of coming to know Christ in a saving way..

Now when Peter comes to meet Jesus, I am sure that he is more overwhelmed by what Jesus says to him..

First of all, Jesus tells Peter the name of his father which is quite remarkable since Peter had no idea who Jesus was...

But on top of that, Jesus then tells Peter that he will now longer be known as the son of John...

Instead, Peter will be known as Cephas, which means the rock...

And the reason that Peter is called the rock is that his life and testimony will be the foundation of the church...

Peter is not the rock because he was the first pope as the Catholics claim..

Peter is the rock because he first confessed Jesus as the Christ, the son of God...

And that confession is the foundation rock of the church..

All those who have ever been part of the true church have confessed Jesus as the Christ, the son of God..

At this point, Peter has really no idea that Jesus is essentially predicting Peter's own future...

He has simply been brought to Christ and is already overwhelmed by what Christ has said...

So those are really the first 3 followers of Christ...

Now, let's turn to verses 43-51 where we find the next two followers of Christ...

II. Four, Five (43-51)

Verse 43..

43 The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He *found Philip. And Jesus *said to him, "Follow Me."

44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter.

In verse 43, Jesus heads north out the area where John the Baptist has been preaching and ministering and he is headed to Galilee..

To remind us of the layout of Israel in the days of Christ, here is a more detailed map of the area..

Jesus leaves out of the area on the eastern side of the Jordan River and heads to the top of Israel, which is an area known as Galilee...

Judea is the southern region of Israel, Samaria is the middle region of Israel, and Galilee is the northern region...

So Jesus heads north to Galilee where he finds Philip..

On the journey, it seems possible that Andrew, John, and Peter are with him...

In fact, Philip lives in Bethsaida, which is also the hometown of Andrew and Peter..

Though Andrew and Peter had been in the area of John the Baptist's ministry, they are now headed to their hometown walking alongside the Messiah..

It is funny how people leave home, go to college, get a job, and then return to visit their family in the latest sports car...

It is almost as if, they feel a need to show off their success to the hometown crowd...

Well, Andrew and Peter may be the ultimate example of this as they come strolling into town with God by their side...

However, no one really notices except Philip, who was called to follow by Jesus Himself...

I think it is safe to assume that Philip probably had questions like the others for Jesus, but he must have been satisfied with Jesus' answers because he quickly becomes an evangelist in verse 45..

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."

Don't you love this model of evangelism...

Christ calls Andrew, Andrew goes to Peter...

Christ calls Philip, Philip goes to Nathanael..

This is the pattern of the gospel spreading to the ends of the earth...

Now also notice what Philip said to Nathanael..

They found the one that Moses and the Prophets wrote about...

What that means is this..

They found the One who has been predicted to come in the OT...

Moses and the prophets is simply a reference to the OT, which is made up mostly of the writings of Moses and the prophets of God...

And it is important to note that the Word of God is also central to the lives of God's people...

These 1st century men affirmed the identity of Christ because they knew the Word of God...

Jesus obviously used the Scriptures as well to prove his identity to them...

And so when Philip goes to Nathanael..

He doesn't say, "I got goosebumps when I met this man so he must be the one we are looking for..."

He doesn't say, "I got a feeling in my gut that this is the Messiah."

He doesn't say, "This man made me cry so He must be the Christ."

He simply says, "This is the Christ because he matches up with the Word of God."

And take note of how he describes Jesus..

Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph...

Why does Philip tack this on at the end of his statement to Nathanael?

Well, it is there to almost bring a little bit of comic relief to the incredible testimony of Philip?

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to introduce to you, Bob Smith, the president of the Untied States...

He's the son of a textile worker from Whitmire SC...

In some professions, it is almost expected that the person in the role is the son of a banker, son of an attorney, some of politician, son of a business owner...

In some professions, it is almost expected that the person filling the role is from Chicago or New York or Washington DC...

No one would expect the president to be from a small southern town and have a blue collar worker as a father..

The same could be said of Christ...

No one expected the Messiah to be from a no name town and have a no name father, yet everything in the OT pointed to this man with Philip being the Messiah...

However, Nathanael had his doubts..

Verse 46..

46 Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

I just love that line..

Is it so real and to me proves the accuracy of the Bible..

No one would include that line if they were making this story up...

But I know that Nathanael said that because God inspired John to write it...

And we all identify with Nathanael's initial unbelief?

How can this man from Nazareth be the King of the Jews?

Nothing good ever comes out of Nazareth but a Greyhound bus, right?

Well, Philip simply responds in the second half verse 46...

Philip *said to him, "Come and see."

I love the simplicity of that...

"Look Nathanael you may not believe me but come and see for yourself..."

Verse 47..

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and *said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

Just a quick note here...

Nathanael represented a small minority of Jews who were actually students of the OT...

Though they would have the wrong expectations of what Jesus would do, they were at least looking for the predicted Messiah of the OT..

The vast majority of Israelites were victims of a man-made, man-centered religion that had no need of a Messiah...

One thing that these men had going for them is that they were far away from the false religion of southern Israel in and around Jerusalem..

Living in Galilee had apparently produced a small group of men who were not led astray by the man-made religion of the south because they had remained captive to the word of God in the OT..

Jesus was not calling Nathanael perfect or sinless, but he was not the normal Israelite who was pristine on the outside but filled with sin on the inside...

In fact, it may have been Nathanael's honest comment of verse 46 that demonstrated his incredible honesty..

In his mind, Nazareth was a sorry town, and he was honest enough to say that...

At any rate, Jesus' statement about him stunned him...

Verse 48...

48 Nathanael *said to Him, "How do You know me?"

Though Jesus only identified him as a honest Israelite, it was enough to get Nathanael's attention...

He had never met Jesus before, yet Jesus knew he was plain-spoken Jewish man...

However, Jesus was going to raise the level of astonishment in the middle of verse 48..

Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Apparently Nathanael had been sitting under a fig tree earlier in the day or even when Philip found him...

And now Jesus uses his omniscience as God to point out a detail of Nathanael's life that only He and Nathanael would know...

Well, it doesn't take long for that to have an effect on Nathanael..

Verse 49...

49 Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.”

Once again, in just the opening chapter of John’s gospel, we hear testimony from someone else that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God...

John the Apostle has said it..

John the Baptist has said it..

Andrew has said it.

Philip has said it.

And now Nathanael has said it.

But I love Jesus’ response in verse 50...

50 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.” 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.”

If I could be so bold to take Jesus' words and translate them into a little southern slang...

Jesus tells Nathanael...

“You ain't seen nothing yet.”

“Look, I know your name. I know where you were sitting earlier today. I know your heart.”

In fact, I know everything and I also have unlimited power to go along with my unlimited knowledge...

And you are going to see some incredible things happen right before your eyes if you follow me...

In fact, you are going to see heaven opened and angels coming down and then going back up in my life and ministry.

What is this a reference to?

In the book of Genesis, Jacob saw a ladder to heaven and on that ladder were the angels of God going up and down..

For the Jew familiar with the OT, this episode in Gen 28, the lesson was clear, God was at work in the world...

His angels carried out missions to make sure His plans were accomplished...

It was a comforting verse to any Jew who may be tempted to think that God was not at work in the world...

So when Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see angels going up and down on him, he is actually saying that he is going to see the work of God in the world through the person of Jesus Christ...

Jesus will do the Father's work, and it will be apparent through the things that Jesus does that He is God at work in the world...

And ultimately, that is exactly what John wants us to see in his gospel...

Conclusion

John wants us to see that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and he wants us to believe that and find eternal life in Him...

And if you look back over this first chapter, 5 people have now testified to the identity of Christ..

John the Apostle has told his readers that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God.

John the Baptist has told his followers that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lamb of God..

Andrew has told his brother that Jesus is the Messiah.

Philip has told his friend that Jesus is the Messiah of the OT.

And Nathanael has told Jesus that He is the Son of God..

We have read 47 verses and already heard 5 testimonies that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God...

But what is your testimony about Christ?

Who do you say He is?

Now I dare say that anyone in her would deny the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah..

In fact, if I asked you to raise your hand if you saw Jesus as those things, most if not your hands would go up...

If yours would not go up, I would love to speak with you after service...

But if yours would go up to affirm your testimony about the identity of Christ as the Christ, the Son of God, my next question would be this?

How has that testimony affected your life?

What has it changed about you?

Take note, John the Apostle testified about Christ, and he wrote a book about him

John the Baptist testified about Christ, and he preached and told his admirers to leave him and follow Christ.

Andrew testified about Christ and had to go find his brother and tell him...

Philip testified about Christ and had to go find his friend Nathanael and tell him..

Nathanael testified about Christ and left it all behind to follow Him...

In other words, it is one thing to believe that Christ is God, but true belief in that lawyers changes your life..

We live in a culture where everyone says that Jesus is God but no one lives like that is true...

If Jesus is God, give up the sins that HE commands you not to do...

If Jesus is God, take your testimony to friends and family.

If Jesus is God, stop filling your life with the things of the world and start filling your life with the Word of God.

These men had their lives changed by what they found in Christ..

There was immediate change and long term change..

And that is what Christ does to all who seek and find him...

You cannot believe that Jesus is the Christ and not be changed by it. Let us pray.