

Following Christ

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Date: 08 September 2024

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 1. I want us to look at this section from verse 43 to the end, just by way of overview.

I'm not going to read it all again. We find in verse 43, the next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, follow me.

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathaniel 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, so on.

Now if we go back a wee bit into verse 19, we find that John the Baptist, that tells us here this is a testimony of John the Baptist.

And we find there that John is telling people who he is. And in a sense from verse 19 right through, we find that there's a succession of people begin to follow Jesus.

[1 : 11] Now we often tend to think of testimony. If somebody's good at testimony meeting, somebody's giving their testimony, we often think of the testimony as a journey to faith.

But testimony is far more than a journey to faith. A testimony is also a journey of faith. So as you get older in the Christian faith, your testimony changes.

Sometimes people say, well I've given my testimony already and that's it. Well your testimony with regard to coming to faith, in a sense that won't change, although you may remember other bits of it. But your testimony of your journey of faith is changing all the time. Now we know that the Lord works very passionately and very individually with people.

And we find it even here. We find that Jesus calls Philip directly, he calls Andrew directly, but it's Andrew who goes off to get his brother Peter and Philip goes to get Nathaniel.

[2 : 19] So we find that the experiences are different for different people. We know that some people come to faith when they're young, some middle aged and there are still thankfully some who come to faith in the older years.

Some come to faith very suddenly and in fact there are some people who are converted and a whole community will go, wow, it's like I wasn't expecting that.

Because every so often somebody comes to faith that you just didn't in any way envisage. Most people who come to faith grow up within the church.

But that's not always the case. Some people come very, very suddenly to faith and it's almost like a stopping moment within our communities when that happens.

Everybody's experience is different. Other people will come very gradually. Some people can tell very clearly exactly, they can tell you the day, the hour when they came to faith.

[3 : 27] It's as clear as a bell, oh I can tell you exactly, there are other people can't. They'll say, well I really can't tell you, I can't give you a day, I can't give you an hour.

But what I do know is that like the blind man said, I was blind but now I see. It was like you know in the dawn if you're out in the morning, very, very early, if you're out while it's still dark and you're making your way home for whatever reason.

You're not really, there's just a gradual, gradual, gradual. The shadows begin to give way to clear our objects and you're beginning to see things more clearly. I can see clearly now.

That's the way the dawn comes, gradually. That's who it is for some people. There's this growing awareness, they come to the place, the point, there's this assurance that Jesus is Savior.

But as we say, there is only one way of being saved and that is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Coming to faith in Christ, resting in Christ, receiving Christ, accepting Christ as Savior.

[4 : 33] But the steps up to that are so different. If you went for instance to the church in Philippi and you went to two of the members in the church of Philippi and said, right, how did you become a

Christian?

First when you spoke to was a jailer and he was saying, man, I was grim, I was suicidal. I was going to kill myself until Paul showed me the way and he said, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

And Lydia, who's in the Philippi congregation would say, I cannot follow you at all. It was so different for me because it tells us very simply of Lydia whose heart the Lord opened.

As Paul was preaching the word, whose heart the Lord opened. It would be more different, so extreme. And that's the way it is for us as well. So we must never be critical of anybody's testimony if we can't follow it because everybody's testimony is different.

We can follow parts of it, but it's normally we have our own. And that's one of the wonderful things about the whole way of salvation.

[5 : 48] And so we find here in verse 43, we find that after we find Andrew and Peter coming to Jesus, we find that Jesus finds Philip in Bethsaida and he just says two words to him, follow me.

That's all. Follow me. And with these words came the power. And you know, it's a wonderful thing to follow Jesus.

It's a very biblical expression. You know, here we often use that expression about people who've been converted. We say, did you hear so and so I started following?

Don't need to say any more. We don't say following. Who have you heard that so and so I started following? And that's exactly what it is. Follow me.

Because when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you begin to follow Jesus. Jesus is head of your life. Now I know that every single one of us will lament at how poor we often feel with regard to our following of Jesus and how often we let him down.

[7 : 00] But the overriding desire within our heart is to follow him. He is number one in our life. Even though there are other idols that chip away and try to get chief place, they don't know Jesus is number one, we're following Jesus.

And we begin to do so. This is this commitment when we come to faith. And you know, in a sense, everybody is following someone or something in life. Some people follow themselves.

They worship themselves. Self is God. Some people that's politically driven and motivated and politics is that everything.

Some people that might be in the world of sport. Sometimes you see banners there of the football club as a religion. Some people that's the way it is. Some people that they're obsessed with celebrity.

That's kind of who they follow. Everybody's following somebody. But the Christian is following Jesus. And I hope today for all of us here that it's Jesus we follow.

[8 : 04] Because there is no one greater that we could follow. So we find that when Philip hears the words of Jesus, follow me and begins to follow him.

The first thing he does, he goes straight off and he finds his friend Nathaniel. You know, God gives us family, but he also gives us friends. And you know, friends in life, it's one of the great blessings that we have.

Sometimes we take for granted, but our friendships in life are very important. And how important it was for Nathaniel that he had the friend Philip. Because the first thing Philip does, this goes off.

Once he comes to discover Jesus and follow Jesus, he says, I must go and tell Nathaniel. And you know, that's kind of what happens in our lives when we come to faith.

We want others to know as well. Sometimes we're not very good in the early days, we're sometimes maybe not very good. Sometimes we can be a bit shy about it. We might find it difficult, some people are blessed with a more extrovert personality and find it easier to tell others, others are more introverted and find it a wee bit difficult.

[9 : 15] But you know, at the end of the day, the life speaks. And anyway, we find that Philip goes and he tells Nathaniel very simply, we have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Now, I can imagine that Philip is really enthused when he's telling Philip. And we find that he mentions here what he says, that we have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, a lot of people look in the Old Testament and the New Testament, it does two totally different books. Some people, they just focus on the New Testament, they say, well, the Old Testament's

kind of irrelevant.

Well, it's most certainly not, it's just the one book, two different dispensations. But the Old Testament is full of Christ, often in symbolic way.

It's full of the promises. The Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, they were all given promises that were fulfilled in Christ.

[10:23] The very structure of the tabernacle and the temple was all pointing to Christ. The whole sacrificial system, if you were to go in and to study it, and it's fascinating.

When you go to the Old Testament and look at the book of Leviticus, and something you can get bogged down in that book and say, oh man, I live, nothing here but all these rituals and laws, and yet it was all pointing to Jesus.

And then again, you find that when you go to the prophets, you find that the prophets, they're full of Christ. Because we find that Isaiah prophesies in a salon.

Jeremiah's a righteous branch, Ezekielus a shepherd. We find Malachi as the messenger of the covenant, and Sakariah looking on the one who is puched.

So you find right through the Old Testament, still it's a book that's pointing to Christ. Now, of course, the Old Testament saints didn't have the light that we had.

[11:23] They couldn't see in the way that we can, but they could see sufficient. They believed in the Saviour who was to come. We believe in the Saviour who has come.

That's why it says of Abraham, he saw my day and rejoiced. So now, what a wonderful statement. Abraham by faith, he saw and understood who the Saviour was to be.

Now, Abraham, that was his trust, was in the promised Messiah. And so we're all saved the same way except they were trusted in the Saviour who was to come and we in the Saviour who has come.

But Nathaniel is dismissive when Philip comes all enthused about this message. And he says, can any good thing come out of Nazareth?

Now, you see, Nathaniel was probably schooled or brought up by the way of the rabbis and the religious leaders.

[12:30] And they had forecast that when the Messiah came that he would be a great prince, a personal great power, that he would set up a great kingdom.

And he did all that, but it was spiritual. But they were looking at it as a physical, as a temporal thing here on earth.

And so they weren't able to understand the spirituality of the promises that were around Christ. And Nazareth again was a sort of a, it was a travellers place, people were always coming and going, the merchants went through there and caravans were always going through it.

And very often many of the Jews look down on Nazareth. It was the people of Jerusalem, they look down on Nazareth. And that's why when Philip says, Jesus of Nazareth, straight away Nathaniel is dismissive.

Nazareth. And any good thing come out of Nazareth, particularly somebody like the Messiah. And you know what Philip does here is really so good.

[13:44] Because he doesn't stand there arguing the point and saying, right, let me explain.

Because you will find very often that people when you try and share the Gospel, they will bring up all kinds of arguments and all kinds of, and one of the favourites, remember you're finding it when Jesus is speaking to the woman of Samaria and he's beginning to probe in, what does she do?

She says, you worship in Jerusalem, we worship here in Samaria, she brings in religious division. And you know people, it's an age old argument. You will find straight away whenever you begin to speak to people and maybe begin to make them feel a little uncomfortable, they'll begin to bring up church division and church splits and all that kind of thing.

And what Philip does is really clever. He doesn't stand there debating the point. What he says, if you're not going to listen to me, do you know what I want you to do?

Come and see for yourself. Come and see. And that's what we should do with people and say, right, you go to the scripture because so many people remember there's so much prejudice, so much bias in people's hearts, that's how we are naturally.

We are opposed to Christ. We live in a world that is opposed to Christ, a world that does not want Christ. And so there's, and it's subconsciously working away within us so that our default position is one that is against Christ.

[15:20] But you say to people, look, you can't dismiss somebody that you've never met. You might have heard of, but it's very unfair to just be dismissive of somebody that you've never met and urge them to go to the Gospels and begin to read the life of Jesus.

Read thoroughly through it. Before you say anything else, read through it. And then come back and we'll talk because so many people have never read through the Gospels.

They've never read the life of Christ. They've never read through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And in a sense, that's what Philip is saying. Before you start criticizing and condemning and putting down, come and meet with Jesus.

And then you might have a totally different picture. And so we find that when Jesus sees Nathaniel coming, he says, behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit.

Now, as we know, the Jews, by and large, are very shrewd people. They have a way of thinking that's different to us.

[16:40] I remember in 1993, Derek Lamond and I went on a bike. There was about 120 people went on a bike ride, raising money for the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society.

They have a hospital in Nazareth. And we had a lot of interesting times out there. And I remember one of the things, we had a lecture from this Jew there, and he said to us, we don't think the way you do.

We are often looking underneath what you're saying. They're very perceptive, very shrewd. That's why probably who I many are, very good business people.

But we've got to remember, if we go right back within the Jews and go right, Abraham, of course, is the father of the faithful, remember that Abraham's grandson, Jacob, that Jacob's, before he was turned, named Israel, Jacob was quite a devious character.

He was quite deceitful. He was a supplanter. And he was the one who by deceit got both the birthright and the special blessing from his brother, Esau.

[17:55] He was a manipulator. And remember when Esau came in in order to get the special blessing, I said to him, you brother has come here by deceit and he's already got the blessing.

That's the kind of passion that Jacob was. But God wasn't finished with Jacob. God began to deal with Jacob. And we find that, remember when we find the Son of God in taking the, what is it, we term a theophany or the appearance of a man, but God wrestling with Jacob through the night. Now a lot of people look on that as wrestling and prayer and yes, no doubt that was part of it. But the main purpose of that wrestling was to subdue, to break Jacob.

Because Jacob was a devious character. Yes, he had, he kind of even tried to bargain with God. You look at the life of Jacob and that's a kind of passion he was.

But that night he was changed. God broke him. And God told him that night your name is going to be Israel. Because now he's a prince with his power with his presence.

[19:10] His whole passion was changed. And you know, God is in the business of subduing you and me as well. And some of these difficult things that come into our life, nobody likes to be broken.

You and I know what it's like if you get a breakage, even a finger, if you break anything, it's sore. And we don't like the idea of being broken.

But God is having to break us inside. Break of personality. Break all the ways that we are naturally. The whole being that is in rebellion against him. And sometimes it's tough. And many of these things that are going on in your life, sometimes you say to yourself, what is going on?

What is happening here? Because life is such a challenge, it's so difficult. But you know, it's through these things that God is breaking us and molding us and shaping us and preparing us.

[20:14] And that's exactly what he did with Jacob, changed his name to Israel. And so we find that Jesus, he says of Nathaniel, and Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit.

And again we should say that that is a beautiful description of our passion. There's no deceit.

The idea comes, Paul, in fact, when Paul is writing elsewhere, he says that the Christian is somebody who has to be sincere and blameless in life. Now that doesn't mean that we're without sin, but that our character should be sincere.

The idea is tested by sunlight. You and I know that the sunlight picks up what we can't normally see. You can come into a room and you think it's dust free. You can come into a room and think, oh, the man, this is sparkling clean.

Then all of a sudden the sun comes out, comes beating through the window. Oh, dust everywhere, you see it totally differently. So this is the idea of sincerity, is somebody who is open, somebody

who isn't working under hand.

[21 : 31] And that's what should characterise the Christian life, that there should be an openness and honesty in our dealings. You see, we're not just Christians in the Lord's day, not just Christians when we come to church and meet with other Christians.

Our Christianity has to impact and affect every aspect of life, it has to affect all the different situations that we confront where we're at and what we're at, because in our dealings, in our workplace, in school, in home and everywhere, it's got to be this openness, this blameless, this without deceit.

And so that's the kind of person that Nathaniel was. And Nathaniel 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. Now this idea of under the fig tree was often a place that they used to go for a time of meditation, a time of reflection. And obviously at this particular moment, that's exactly what Nathaniel was doing. Maybe he was a time of prayer and meditation and reflecting. It could very well have been that the passenger maybe had something of the Old Testament with him, or maybe he was just thinking about the life of Jacob, maybe he was.

[22 : 53] Maybe he was thinking about Jacob's ladder. It's quite possible, because Jesus just comes on to talk about that in a moment. And Jesus tells him, when you were under the fig tree, Philip, Nathaniel, I saw you.

Nathaniel is blown away by this. And he's straight away, he recognizes, and he accepts there and then the words of Philip. And he says straight away in response to this, rabbi, he says, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.

And right away Nathaniel recognizes Jesus in his threefold state of where he is there in his office of prophet, priest and king.

Rabbi the teacher, Messiah the Son of God who has come in our place, the King, the one who was over all.

And you know when we become Christians, we have to recognize Jesus in that threefold role as well. The word as our teacher, our guide for life.

[24 : 02] You and I put God's word above every other word. That's what a Christian does. So we recognize Christ as a teacher.

We recognize Christ as a sacrifice, the priest, the one who came to atone for our sins, to make us right with God.

We recognize Christ as king. You know in many ways that's the hardest part. That's where it really takes you over the line.

Because basically we want no king in our heart or queen in our heart but us. It's the hardest thing to give up is our own will. To yield ourselves to somebody else is naturally the most difficult thing to do.

Because we want to be in control. We all talk about control freaks and there are some people who have this obsession with power. But to a certain degree every single one of us has that inbuilt within us, that desire to be in control of our lives.

[25 : 08] And it's the hardest thing to give up and to ask Jesus to come in and for him to take control. But that's what the Christian does. And once you become a Christian you see Christ in these offices of the teacher and the priest and the king.

And then Jesus said to Nathaniel, because I said to you 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 heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. You will see greater things than these.

And throughout your Christian life that is true. You will see from the day you started you come to see greater things. Your knowledge has increased. Your experience is deepened.

You come to a greater understanding of things. You look back over your Christian life and there are high points. Yes there are low points but there are high points. Greater things.

[26 : 14] That's part of the journey. You shall see greater things than these. And then he says you shall see the heaven so open and the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

This takes us back to Jacob. Back to that picture that's exactly the description that was given when Jacob had the dream. Remember when he had run away from home and he stopped that night and he saw this ladder in his dream stretching all the way from heaven, from earth to heaven.

The Lord at the top. And what does it tell us it so describes here the angels ascending and descending. Now it's often been highlighted that the order there is interesting because if we were going to put it, if we were just writing that we would say oh there's that ladder coming down from heaven to earth.

We'll see the angels descending and ascending. But the order is ascending and descending. So they're going up first before they're coming down.

And you say how's that? For the very simple reason that the angels are already here. The angels remember are ministering spirits to the air for salvation.

[27 : 27] You today if you're a believer, you have a ministry of angels around you that you're not aware of. We have, who knows how often we have been protected, delivered, saved by an angelic presence.

Unseen to us, unknown to us, but they're ministering spirits to the air for salvation. That's what the scripture tells us. So that's where the angels are first ascending because they're already there. They were already around Jacob. They're already around Christ and they're already around you as a believer. So the angels are constantly ascending and descending in the experience of God's people.

There is a global conflict in the spiritual realms going on between the forces of darkness and the kingdom of God. And we're oblivious to it.

Remember that moment in Second Kings where the city was surrounded by the enemy? And they were wanting Elisha.

[28 : 32] And the Elisha serve and said to them, oh man, Elisha, we're finished. Elisha said, don't worry, there's more with us than there are with them.

Elisha said, when must have thought, oh poor Elisha, he's losing it. And what did Elisha say, Lord, open the young man's eyes? And he saw and the whole place was surrounded.

Horses and chariots of fire. The spiritual realm was, he was given a glimpse into what was there. We don't see it, but it's there.

And how wonderful to know that protection and that security that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes we might be slow in giving thanks to the Lord for angelic help and protection.

Because we're very quick to blame the dark angels. We're very quick to blame saying, oh, this devil made me do that. Oh, this devil got me again. But very slow maybe to give thanks to the Lord for what is happening to us.

[29 : 35] The promise that he gives of them as ministering spirits to us. Well, may we all know this Jesus. This Jesus who has come to give us life to save.

And may we know all the blessings that come from that. Let us pray. Amen.