



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES: JOHN: GOSPEL OF TRUTH

LESSON: COME FOLLOW ME

JOHN 1:35-51

10/18/20

MAIN POINT

Come Follow Me!

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, read this quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

“The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy

life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”¹

This passage is about the calling of four disciples: Andrew, Simon Peter, Phillip, and Nathaniel. Jesus’s calling on their life was to come and follow him, but it might better be understood as a calling to come and die.

EXPLANATION

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 1:35-42

(Verses 35-36)

Here we see the heart of John the Baptist’s ministry, as he directs people away from himself and towards the Messiah. In verse five, we see John the Baptist is with two of his disciples. Instead of trying to pridefully take ownership of them as a mentor, he directs them to Jesus Christ. In verse 36, he uses the language, “Behold, the Lamb of God!”, where he is making clear to his two disciples that he (John) is not the Lamb of God, but that Jesus is. Thus, these two men should follow Jesus rather than John the Baptist. John deliberately encourages them to transfer their allegiance to Jesus.

John provides an incredible example of what It means to be a servant of Christ here. He does not boast in himself, but he solely proclaims the name of Jesus so that others can become disciples of Jesus. To be a disciple means to follow Jesus. Thus, John is not saying, “Look at me” or, “Follow me,” but he does the exact opposite. In a culture that consistently says, “Look at me!” We must follow John’s example by living in such a manner that says, “look at Christ!” This is reiterated by John in chapter 3, verse 30.

READ JOHN 3:30

Look back at John 1:29, why is John the Baptist’s witness and testimony so important to the overarching message of John?

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 99.

What steps do we need to take in our own lives so that John 3:30 can be true about us?

Why is humility a key characteristic in leading people to Christ?

(Verses 37-39)

A disciple quite literally means to follow someone. The Greek term used is *ēkolouthēsan* and places emphasis on the fact a disciple is supposed to follow, or walk after, a teacher. In walking after a teacher, they learn to model the words and actions of their mentor. When John the Baptist encourages these two disciples to transfer their allegiance to Christ, he is encouraging them to walk after, follow, and abide in Jesus. Abiding in Christ is a popular Johannine theme, especially noted in John 15:4-7, and is an essential quality of true discipleship. Just as the deer panteth for the water, oh my soul longeth after thee (Ps. 42:1)!

In response to their followship, Jesus says in verse 38, “What are you seeking?” The two disciples’ response of “Where are you staying?” is not uncommon for humans. They seek safety, security, and stability, and they are inquiring whether or not there is stability in following Jesus. Jesus does not answer their question with a physical location, but a reassuring call to trust in Him as they must “come and see” (v. 39). One cannot help but look at Luke 9:58 as context, “Foxes have holes... and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place.” These young Jewish boys cannot find their stability, security, or even salvation in a place if they desire to follow after Jesus. Perhaps they sought meaning or purpose to their life by seeking after the temple or a synagogue, but true discipleship is not found in a building. Stability and security in one’s salvation is not found in a place but a person—the person of Jesus Christ.

These men could have been searching for status, prestige, affirmation, excitement, or an experience. Who knew the intentions of their heart? Our Lord Jesus did. He did not desire a man to follow him for selfish reasons or a desire for some material gain. When Jesus calls, he knows the intentions of our heart. Jesus calls those who will be faithful, who desire to save their life by losing it. Those who will come and follow Him, or better said, ***come and die***.

READ LUKE 9:23-25

**Why is it so important that Jesus asks what these young men are seeking after?
Would he have allowed them to follow him if they had selfish or prideful intentions?**

(Verses 40-42)

The first disciple to be called in this passage is Andrew. Immediately after he believes and follows, he professes, “We have found the Messiah” to his brother, Simon Peter. In Jesus and Simon’s encounter, we see a key discipleship strategy by Jesus.

When Jesus calls Simon Peter to be His disciple, He foresees how Simon would be faithful. This is known in how Jesus looked (*emlepoō*) at him. This term means to look very closely and intentionally at someone or something. Like a professional golfer must deeply study and read a green before striking a putt, Jesus deeply studied and read Peter’s entire life when he first saw him. After intentionally looking at Simon, he calls him Peter, or “a rock.” Besides this showing off the sovereignty and incredible foresight of Jesus’s divinity, it shows a fundamental approach to Jesus’s strategy to disciple-making. He did not look at Peter for who he was, which was a reject, prideful, neglected, and a lonely fisherman. He was just an ordinary man trying to survive. However, Jesus saw his potential for the Kingdom. Often, Jesus addressed people from the perspective of their potential.² The vision of future potential can be a highly effective means to realizing that potential.³ ***Jesus’s strategy was to start with the end in mind.*** Thus, let us approach people in the same manner of Christ, not looking to their outward flaws or sin struggles, but from the perspective of their potential. What if we looked at others and said, “Look at how great their potential is for making disciples of Jesus Christ.” This will surely change the spiritual DNA of our churches.

Have you noticed a difference in the way Jesus calls disciples from the way a traditional Jewish Rabbi would? What are the differences and why is it significant?

Have you ever refrained from sharing the gospel with someone because you felt they were “too far gone” or simply because they were different than you?

Jesus’ model of disciple-making looks not to someone’s outward appearance or inward sins, but their potential impact for the Kingdom. After all, Saul murdered early Christians before Jesus called him to salvation, but Jesus had a plan for Paul’s life that started by looking from the perspective of His potential.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 1:43-51

The following verses display the calling of two more disciples, Phillip and Nathaniel.

² Cf. Lk. 5:10, 18:32; Jn. 1:47; 4:7; 6:70.

³ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John*, in “The Bible Speaks Today” Commentary Series, ed. By John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic,), 59.

(Verses 43-45)

Although Phillip is one of the less prominent disciples, his confession and proclamation in verse 45 adds depth to John being the Gospel of Truth. Phillip testifies to Nathaniel, “We have found the one whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote.” This is a general statement, but it reassures the readers of Jesus’ fulfillment of the Old Testament that was espoused in verses 16-17.

(Verses 45-51)

While Phillip’s testimony is compelling, Nathaniel responds in doubt since Jesus is from Nazareth. His doubt is understandable, because there was no Messianic expectation coming from Nazareth, only Bethlehem. Furthermore, Nathaniel’s doubt foreshadows a similar story of doubt after the resurrection, where Thomas refused to believe Jesus had been raised from the dead. John’s gospel is a literary masterpiece. ***He begins and ends the Gospel of truth with someone’s skepticism, yet the testimony of Jesus is so compelling and true that all they need to do is “come and see”*** (Phillip’s response to Nathaniel’s doubt in verse 46 as well as Jesus’s response to Thomas’s doubt in 20:27). However, blessed are those who do not see and yet believe!

Jesus greets Nathaniel in a manner designed to hook his attention and catch him off guard. Like Peter’s calling, Jesus’ providence is on display as He knows Nathaniel in a way that is impossible on a first meeting. He destroys any doubt Nathaniel has and reassures him in that “you will see even greater than these” (v. 50). What will Nathaniel see? He will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man (v. 50). By saying truly truly, or *amēn amēn*, to introduce this statement, the Johannine double emphatic presses strong importance on this point. It must not be missed. Jesus is once again reiterating that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Furthermore, He is proclaiming that He alone is the way God and humanity intersect from now on! There is no way a doubting Nathaniel, completely overwhelmed by the truth standing before him, could respond any other way than wholehearted fellowship.

READ JOHN 14:6

John 14:6 reaffirms that Jesus is the only way to the Father. He is the gospel truth enabling us to have access to the Father. He is the one who grants new, eternal life by justifying us before the Father. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

For those wondering if the statement “ascending and descending angels” has a connection to Jacob’s ladder (Gen. 28:10-22), the answer is yes. Do you remember the first time you sang, “We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder” (See commentary/resources below)? When I first sang it, my theology did not have enough depth to notice a crucial weakness in the song’s message. Sinful men and women are unable to climb up to God. It is impossible for humans to reach God on their own. God alone manifests His divine presence on Earth just as He did to

Jacob at Bethel and more importantly through the incarnation of Jesus.⁴ God came after us in our broken, sinful state, He found us, called us, and chose us to be a part of His Kingdom.

Why is it that Jesus's incredible foresight has a great deal to do with these four individuals responding in wholehearted fellowship? Note: This reveals Jesus true identity and shows His dual-incarnate nature.

What is the significance of Jesus referring to himself as the Son of Man in verse 51?

Were you a skeptic before coming to salvation in Christ? What caused you to believe?

APPLICATION

The relevance of this passage could not be more pertinent. Jesus has commanded us to be obedient to the Great Commission laid out in Matthew 28:16-20. Disciple-making is not optional. There are Gospel witnesses everywhere around the world who radiate a massive potential impact for the Kingdom. The Gospel is able to transform the ordinary like Andrew, the explosive, potential church leaders like Peter, struggling people like Phillip, and skeptical, doubting souls such as Nathaniel. Let us see people the way Christ sees them, not looking to their outward flaws or inward sins, but from a perspective of potential impact for the Kingdom. The next great ministry leaders and disciple makers are at your work, walking down the street, addicted to substances, lost, and waiting for you to be obedient. We must not delay.

Jesus often viewed people from the perspective of their potential, why is this so important as we share the gospel and disciple younger believers?

Do you struggle sharing the gospel with others? Why or why not?

John, Andrew, and Phillip each used their personal story as a means to witness to someone else in this passage. Why is it that someone's testimony of coming to faith

⁴ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11* in the "New American Commentary Series: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture," Vol. 25a (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1996), 149.

is such a powerful tool in leading someone to Christ? Have you ever shared your testimony with someone as a means of evangelism?

Who are some individuals in your sphere of influence that are lost? How can you be a witness to them this week? When do you plan on sharing the gospel with them? Be specific.

Before you close in prayer, read Bonhoeffer's quote on discipleship again.

"The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."⁵

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to press this truth that was studied. Specifically pray for the men and women you are trying to lead to Christ.

COMMENTARY / RESOURCES

JOHN 1:35-51

1:37. *Mathētēs*, or disciple, quite literally means follower or learner. This is clarified by the term *ēkolouthēsan*, which explains exactly what a disciple is supposed to do. When following a teacher, they must literally follow him, walk behind him, watch his mannerisms, eat when he eats, say and do what he does. They are to become what they behold.

1:38, 41. The beloved disciple feels an explanation is necessary for three terms mentioned in 38 and 41. These terms are *rhabbi*, which means "the teacher", *messias* or *christos*, which means

⁵ Bonhoeffer, 99.

“the Christ” or “the Anointed One”, and *Kephas*, or “the rock.” John’s emphasis on these terms shows the original readers would not have been familiar with these terms.

1:40. There is debate over who the other disciple is that is not named yet is mentioned in the first section. Phillip and the beloved disciple are the most common understandings, but the most likely option is the beloved disciple.⁶ John only refers to himself in the third person throughout his Gospel, so it is likely that this is one of those occurrences. Phillip is an unlikely option due to the beloved disciple coining his encounter with Jesus happening on the following day.

1:51. This is the first time *amēn amēn* is used in the Gospel of John, and it is used 25 more times as the Gospel develops. The double emphatic is only used when placing additional emphasis on a truth statement—usually said by Jesus showing a particular way He is fulfilling the Old Testament and ushering in the New Covenant.

1:51. For the song in questions you can watch and listen: We are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder (hymn with lyrics) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcW3U9ljdP0>

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Coleman, Richard. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, Baker, 1993, ISBN: 978-0800788087, 160 pgs. \$6.43.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York, Touchstone, 1995, 307 pgs. \$10.93.

⁶ Borchert, 142.