

John, Part 5: A New Identity and Expanded Perspective

John 1:40 ESV One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. **41** He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). **42** He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). **43** The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." **44** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. **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." **46** Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." **47** Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" **48** Nathanael 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." **49** Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" **50** Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, '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 heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

- I. We're returning this week to our study of the Gospel of John, and particularly the story of Jesus gathering his first disciples, from the last several verses of Chapter 1.
 - A. We should remember as we look at this passage, however, that the work of calling new disciples to follow Jesus was never intended to end in the first century, but to go on and on throughout history.
 - B. **Matthew 28:18 ESV** And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
 1. These were the final instructions that Christ gave to his original followers before he ascended to be seated at the right hand of God. His message was simple and perpetual: "Those who follow me should make disciples."
 2. Today, though, many churches and individual believers are concerned with something less than making disciples, and they are selling the gospel short.
 - a) Many churches simply press for people to make decisions for Christ (lift a hand, come forward, pray a prayer) instead of seeing people become disciples for Christ.
 - (1) But when we are satisfied with seeing people praying simple prayers in order to have a sense of security, or in order to join our club, the result is an over-simplified gospel and an immature church.
 - (2) This is the exact opposite of what Christ intended.
 - b) **Colossians 1:28 ESV** Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, *that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

3. If we're honest, the goal of emphasizing decisions is often nothing more spiritual than getting more "butts in the seats", but the goal of discipleship is always spiritual maturity.
 - a) Decisions can be obtained in three simple steps, but discipleship is ALWAYS a messy, long-term project; discipleship gets past the surface into the nitty-gritty of our lives.
 - b) A decision requires intellectual agreement; discipleship requires a desire for and a commitment to a transformed life.
- C. If this is true, shouldn't we be looking for ever-increasing evidence of transformation in our lives?
 1. Placing our confidence only in a prayer prayed long ago, as though it were a ticket we we bought to get in to God's good graces, makes a mockery of the atoning death and the resurrection power of Christ, let alone the gift of the Holy Spirit that was given to conform us to the image of Christ.
 2. Without a doubt, the Christian life cannot begin until we turn toward God in an honest prayer of repentance, however it must not stop there or it cannot be considered to be genuine. Even the Apostle Paul pressed this point...
 3. **2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV** Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you fail to meet the test!
 4. He is saying that the evidence of true Christian life is the evidence of the Holy Spirit working the life of Christ into our daily experience.
- D. Did you know that before about 150 years ago, the thought that a person could be considered born again by simply by raising a hand and praying a prayer with a preacher was never considered possible within protestant churches?
 1. On the contrary, these churches would look for **evidence** of conversion - proof that the Holy Spirit was at work in your life, making you new- before you would be baptized, granted membership or even communion.
 2. This kind of mutual accountability is almost completely extinct in American churches today, but is this a good thing? What benefits has the church forsaken by lowering the bar as far as we have?
- II. Some of you may think that demanding evidence of transformation in someone's life is not helpful, and maybe not even biblical. You may base your opinion on a reading of **Romans 10:9 ESV** ...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
 - A. How simple could Paul make it? He gives two easy steps. Confess with your mouth, believe in your heart and you will be saved!
 - B. But before we distill what it means to become a follower of Christ to just two steps, let's take a closer look at what Paul actually said...
 1. "...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord." Most of us are taught to confess Jesus as our **Savior**. But to call him Lord means an entirely different thing.
 - a) During the days of the Roman Empire, citizenship required publicly confessing "no Lord but Caesar", but this was a bridge too far for the new group of Christ followers!

- (1) Public confession of Caesar's lordship was intended to mean a pledge of allegiance and submission.
- (2) This is because the word "Lord" (GK: Kurios) denotes not mere **leadership**, but **ownership**, and absolute authority.
- b) This is the relationship to Christ that Paul had in mind in Romans 10, and the level of devotion that the early disciples reserved for Christ alone.
 - (1) To confess with our mouth that "Jesus is Lord" means that we are not our own, but his possession, and that he worthy of unquestioned allegiance and submission.
 - (2) In light of this, isn't it odd that most Christians in the western world view our relationship to Christ as primarily a personal benefit, instead of a tribute due our king?
- 2. He goes on to say that the saving act requires that we believe in our heart that God raised Christ from the dead. Most of us would say, "Done! I believe that! I have believed it all of my life!"
 - a) But the word translated "believe" here means something so much more than just acknowledging something is true, like we believe the sky is blue or that the ocean is deep. Concerning this kind of belief in God, James says even the demons believe and shudder! (James 2:19)
 - b) To believe biblically is to trust in, cling to, and rely on the thing believed; to believe it matters deeply, and that it has implications for your life.
- C. May God grant us the ability to return to Christ as Lord and not just savior! He is a king and a master, but he is a benevolent king and master.
 - 1. It's interesting that if we reject his absolute Lordship, we will judge him to be harsh and demanding, and his standards utterly unattainable!
 - 2. But if we submit to his Lordship, we will find **Matthew 11:30 ESV For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**
- D. So if the goal of discipleship is transformation, what can we learn from Jesus in John chapter one about the ways he changes us?
- III. **John 1:40 ESV One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).**
 - A. No matter who we are, or what we've done, **When we hear the word of the gospel and come to Christ, he will always change our identity.**
 - 1. When Andrew brings Simon to Jesus, Jesus takes one look at him, and without a formal introduction says, "Let me tell you who you are- you're Simon; your daddy's name was John."
 - a) The name "Simon" means 'to listen' or perhaps, 'he has heard'.
 - (1) Jesus may have been pointing out that Simon had listened way too much to other's opinions and been defined by them, or perhaps he had given too much weight to the voice of his own insecurities.
 - (2) This certainly seems to match what the gospels report about his headstrong, big-talking nature.

- b) But more than that, Jesus says “You are the son of John”. Some translations render the name of Simon’s father not as “John”, but as ‘Jonah’, which means a dove: a timid, non-threatening bird.
 - (1) What if Jesus was challenging not just Simon’s perception of who he was, but how his family identity had affected him was well!
 - (2) Maybe Simon felt like he was stuck just being a harmless little dove (just like his dad); never to be taken seriously or make a difference.
 - (3) Ever felt that way? “Well my dad or mom was an alcoholic; or emotionally aloof; or always critical...that’s why I’m like this!”
- 2. But Christ says to Simon, “No more! From this day forward, Simon, you are Peter (or Cephas)! You are a ROCK (that’s what the name Peter means!); you are stable and immovable.” Now think about that for just a minute...
 - a) Who was it that sank like a rock (pun intended!) when he tried to walk out of the boat to Jesus on the water?
 - b) Who had the audacity to correct Jesus when Christ had said he was going to Jerusalem and be crucified?
 - c) Who’s tendency was it to just blurt stuff out, like when he recommended building a resort for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on top of the Mount of Transfiguration, completely ignoring (for the 2nd time) Christ’s mission?
 - d) Who was it that three times denied he even knew Jesus after he was arrested?
- 3. None of that sounds very “rock like” does it? But look...Jesus told him he **was** a rock **before** any of this happened!
 - a) The take home is this: it seems as though Christ is far more concerned with who he’s making you to be, who he knows you **will** be, rather than who you see in the mirror! He gives you a new identity and yet never expects you to live up to it; rather he’s teaching you to let him lift you up into it.
 - b) Jesus patiently loved and taught Peter through all of his ups and downs, successes and failures until the day on the seashore that Peter was called to feed Christ’s sheep. And just a few days after that, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and preached the gospel and 3,000 were saved in a single morning!
 - c) Jesus was just waiting for Peter to stop trying to be a rock so that he could step in and make Peter a rock for the glory of God!
- 4. Listen for his voice. Who is Jesus saying that you really are in him? Which identity do you choose to embrace? The one you see today, or the one that Jesus is calling you to?
 - a) God changed an aimless nomad from Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of a multitude).
 - b) God changed an unscrupulous cheater from Jacob (grasper, supplanter) to Israel (May God prevail, He contends with God, God perseveres and contends).
 - c) Simon the flake becomes Peter the rock; Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the Apostle!

5. Are you ready to walk in a new identity? Are you ready to be a new creation? Do you want to keep building the shack of a life you've constructed, are you ready for God to pull out his blueprints and get to work?
 - a) **Ephesians 2:10 ESV** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
 - b) The life of a disciple always entails a new identity that corresponds with God's intentions for your life. This requires giving up your best laid plans for yourself and asking God to do his work in you, embracing everything that he's calling you to.
 - c) And never forget, you'll never be truly or eternally happy until you let him do this!
6. But there is another way we are transformed as disciples. Not only is our identity changed, but ***When we become disciples, God is also determined to change our perspective as well.***

- IV. **John 1:43 ESV** The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." **44** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. **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." **46** Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." **47** Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" **48** Nathanael 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."
- A. Jesus goes to Bethsaida and finds his next disciple, Philip. Philip's first impulse is to tell someone else. He makes a beeline to his highly spiritual, deeply contemplative friend Nathanael. "We've found him! The culmination of everything we were ever told in the Law of Moses and the prophets!"
 1. At this point, Nathanael's heart may have begun to swell with a cautious optimism! "Could it really be true? Could the messiah really have arrived?"
 2. But then Philip goes too far when he tells Nathanael his name and hometown. "Jesus of Nazareth? Would the Messiah come out of that filthy backwater? That redneck town? I hardly think so! Why, the very suggestion is an insult to his majesty and dignity! Can anything good come out of Nazareth!?"
 - B. Philip, undeterred, implores Nathanael to "come and see". When Jesus sees Nathanael, just as in the case with Peter, he doesn't wait for introductions. "Behold, the quintessential Israelite! There's no deceit in this one! He's not playing any games with God, his laws or his promises!" Nathanael is dumbfounded! "How do you know me?", he asks.
 - C. Jesus reveals that there is nothing hidden from him. "I saw you under the fig tree, before Philip came to you." We can only assume from this account that Nathanael was alone under the fig tree, and that no one knew about it, because what Christ says blows his mind.

1. Notice the effect! Nathanael thought he had Jesus all figured out! He was just another wannabe leader from a dusty little hick town. But now here he is revealing the secrets of Nathanael's heart!
 2. Anytime you think you can size Jesus up (Who he is, what he wants, what he can do for you, etc.), he will always exceed your expectations! Your perspective, like Nathanael's will not only be altered, but expanded!
- D. Could it be that Jesus is a bigger deal than you previously imagined...even if you think he's a pretty big deal already? Could it be that he's more powerful than you thought? Could it be that he's worth more than you thought? Could it be that his plans for your life are better and more satisfying than you thought?
1. **Isaiah 55:8 ESV** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. **9** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
 2. Jesus' intention for you on the journey of discipleship is to take you higher and farther than you ever thought you'd go; that you'd find a treasure far more priceless in him than you ever imagined possible. Look at how Nathanael's perspective changed...
- V. **John 1:49 ESV** Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, ***you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!***" **50** Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, '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 heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."
- A. Nathanael goes from skeptic to worshipper in a very short amount of time. He goes from mocking Jesus' hometown to calling him the Son of God and the King of Israel. Everything looks different as a follower of Jesus!
 - B. But Jesus tells Nathanael in essence, "You ain't seen nothin' yet! You will see greater things than these."
 1. Going back to what I was saying in the beginning of this message, way too many of us are satisfied to have our sins forgiven and to not have to worry about hell.
 2. All the while Christ is saying, "Let me show you something bigger! Let me show how the angels of God ascend and descend on Me. Let me show you how I've brought heaven to earth and will soon bring earth to heaven"
- VI. Are you ready for a new identity? Are you ready to have your perspective expanded to heavenly proportions? You may have never realized it before this morning, but a new identity and a better perspective are nothing less than your inheritance as a follower of Jesus Christ.
- A. Let's ask for what is ours, and take ownership of it from the gracious hands of Jesus.
 - B. Will you join me in praying that God would grant us what he has promised this morning? Remember Peter finally understood who he was only when the Holy Spirit fell upon him to empower him. Nathanael only understood reality when Jesus made it clear.
 - C. We will never be who we are meant to be or see what we're supposed to see as long as we are in control. Let's surrender control to the Lord today.