

Jesus' First Disciples John 1:35-51 NIV

35. The next day **John** (the Baptist) was there again with **two** of his **disciples**.

John means God has been gracious. It was a popular name at this time. In this passage we have three Johns. John the Baptist, John, the Son of Zebedee and brother of James who were fisherman, who wrote this Gospel in his old age while in exile on the Greek Island of Patmos. And John or Jonah, who was the Father of Simon and Andrew another Galilean family in the fishing business.

John the Baptist was by the river Jordan near Bethany or Bethabara - House on the ford, where an ancient ford crossed the river Jordan, The two disciples were Andrew and possibly John. A disciple is someone who attached himself as a student or adherent to a religious teacher.

36. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, **the Lamb of God!**”

This is the second time John records these words of John B. v29 where he adds ‘who takes away the sins of the world’. This is a very strange comment to us, but Jews were very familiar with the idea of a lamb taking away sins; they regularly took a lamb to the Temple where it would be sacrificed for their sins. The idea of a person being such a lamb led to the slaughter was prophesied in the OT in Isaiah 53:7. We now know that this whole passage refers to Jesus and his death on the cross, and John was identifying Jesus as this Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

37. When the two disciples heard him (John) say this, they **followed** Jesus.

Not followed as a disciple, just followed him out of curiosity. Jesus realises they are following him - they wouldn't make very good sleuths.

38. Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher) “where are you staying?”

Actually Rabbi means My Great, My Chief, My Master = my honourable sir, and was used as a polite mode of address particularly of respected Jewish religious Teachers. Jesus was from Nazareth in Galilee, so this was not his home, he was probably staying locally as a guest in someone's home. Hospitality in those days was very important aspect of society. The Spanish have a greeting “Mi casa es su casa” which sums up biblical hospitality – my house is your house. Hospitality is quite different to entertaining- which brings honour and glory to the host, while hospitality gives honour and glory to God. We could do with a dose of biblical hospitality in a society in which the Englishman's house is his castle!

39. **“Come,”** he replied, **“and you will see.”** (lit. He replied “Come and see!”) So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him.

This was the very first time they had met Jesus and they were so intrigued by John’s comment that he was the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, they sought him out and got to spend the whole day with him. I wonder what they talked about. Perhaps they asked Jesus what John meant when he called him the Lamb of God. Notice that before he called them to follow him, he first invited them to come and see. Getting to know Christ is a process. We first have to be introduced, we have to come and see and when we like what we see, we might then be in the place to respond to the call ‘follow me’.

It was now the tenth hour. (4 pm) v40. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.

It was getting late in the afternoon. Andrew had an older brother, Simon - well known to the readers as Simon Peter who became one of Jesus closest disciples. Why were Andrew, Simon and John down in Judea and not looking after their fishing businesses in Galilee? They may well have taken a few days off to go down to hear John the Baptist with a group of friends from their town; people were coming from miles to hear him and many were getting baptised. These Galileans would probably all have been baptised by John, certainly Andrew and John (?) seemed to have become John’s followers and were known to him. Peter was married as were most men in their late 20s & early 30s and his wife may well have had babies. They would probably have been back in Bethsaida with Simon’s mother in law - it was much more of a man thing to go and listen to religious teachers while wives stayed at home with the kids. Strange how in today’s culture it is women more than men who take spiritual teaching seriously.

41. **The first thing** Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, **“We have found the Messiah”** (that is, the Christ)

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother. Don’t you just love that statement! He was so excited with the day he had spent with Jesus – because he had found someone even more amazing than John the Baptist, They had found the Messiah, which in Greek is the Christ, meaning the Anointed One. All Jews longed for the coming of the Anointed One whom God had promised to send. In Jewish practice when someone became King they were anointed, and also priests were similarly anointed. Prophets were also considered as anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. The promised Anointed One would be would a prophet, priest and King; the supreme ruler sent and appointed and anointed by God. In Jewish thinking in those days Messiah would

overthrow the filthy gentile Romans and establish God's Kingdom in which the Jews, being God's chosen people, would rule the world.

42 And he **brought him to Jesus**. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephias" (which, when translated, is Peter, *a stone or boulder*).

Andrew introduces his brother to Jesus. There is no greater things that we can ever do than bring someone to Jesus. This is the first time Simon ever met Jesus. Immediately Jesus has a word for him. Looking him straight in the face he spoke a word from God. He knew his name was Simon and that he was the Son of John, (Matt 16:17 - Barjona = Son of Jonah or John) he had just spend a whole day with his younger brother and would almost certainly have asked him about himself, his family where he came from etc. So there was nothing supernatural about this; but he pronounced that he would be called Cephias (Heb), Peter (Greek) or Rocky (English). This name stuck, as we now know more by this name Peter than by his name Simon. It was a divine insight into his character and Jesus knew at this very first meeting that he would become the most prominent of all his followers. Jesus knows what the Father has called you to become. I wonder what name he has for each of us, who will each of us become in his Kingdom?

43. The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. **Finding Philip**, he said to him, "**Follow me.**" 44. Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.

This would be a short visit in Galilee, he was not moving there to stay. Philip is a Greek name. He was a Jew and we don't know if he had another Jewish name. He is always listed in the NT as Philip. Bethsaida was a seaside town in Galilee, which was a very multiethnic region. Philip may even have been of mixed race like Timothy, whose mother was Jewish but his father was Greek. All of Jesus' original followers were Jews. What does 'finding Philip' mean? Did Jesus just happen to bump into Philip and sensing God's call in his heart for this young man 'found him' and so called him to 'follow him?' Perhaps Philip was a mate of Peter, Andrew and John and had come down with them on this jolly to hear John B. Had he already, like Andrew and John, been impressed with John the Baptist and found a new passion for God in his heart and a desire to live a more righteous life? Maybe Andrew and John had told Jesus about their friend Philip, and so Jesus had sought him out and finding him called him to follow him. Maybe he had even heard Jesus teaching but hadn't been introduced. Some people come to Jesus because they are introduced, like Simon; but here Jesus seeks Philip out and calls him.

45. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

After his own call, Philip immediately seeks out his mate Nathanael = Gift of God. He is the same person as Bartholomew - son of Tolmai, the ploughman, mentioned in the other gospels. Bartholomew was his surname or family name. What a statement Philip made - when did he come to such a conclusion, that he was the one Moses wrote about and all the prophets? What was it about Jesus? What had Jesus said to prompt such a response? He might well have heard Jesus teaching and heard all the things that Andrew and John were buzzing with after their day with Jesus. Perhaps in his heart he was thinking, I'd love to meet Jesus myself. And then there he was! Jesus had sought him out and when he found him he called him to follow him. Philip seems to have responded to Jesus like a shot and then he finds another one of his mates, Nathanael Bartholomew. Perhaps his name popped into his head. I must tell Bartholomew about Jesus an-Nasiri, (of Nazareth) –[in the Koran believers in Jesus are not called Christians but Nasara- those who follow Nasiri, the Nazarene.] But as yet there is a limit to Philip's understanding- Jesus is the son of Joseph, the Nasiri carpenter; he does not quite understand that he is the Son of God. Yet despite his lack of understanding he tells his friend about Jesus. We don't have to know everything about the Bible before we can introduce someone to Jesus. Let's just get on with it, if God pops someone's name into our minds, find them and tell them.

46 “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. **“Come and see,”** said Philip.

Nazareth had something of a reputation in Galilee. It was a tight knit Jewish enclave in the midst of a very open multicultural society. The people of Nazareth were rather exclusive and quite devout Jews, not at all welcoming to people of other ethnic origins. Jesus actually grew up in such a puritanical environment, although his trade would have taken him to surrounding towns and he would have mixed with the multicultural Galileans outside of Nazareth. But at home the reputation of his fellow townsmen was of exclusivity, unfriendliness, snooty, superior, holy than thou religious goody-goodies. Can anything good come of this town that thinks itself the bees knees and looks down on everyone else? Here we have the second time this phrase is used “Come and see”. This is one of the most powerful things we can say to anyone questioning about faith and about the Lord. Come and see, come and see for yourself, come and check it out. Christianity Explored is a brilliant tool to help people like Nathanael come and see. And he did. He responded positive and went with Philip to see, to find out more about Jesus. Do we avoid asking ‘Come and see’ because we assume they would say no. How do we know? Philip invited Nathanael and he said YES! Philip invited him with an expectation that he would get him to Jesus somehow. Despite his cynical first response, Philip didn't back off, he pressed in, ‘Come and see’.

47. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.”

Again through prophetic insight into Nathanael's heart, Jesus opened him up to the truth. How about us asking God for prophetic insight, a word of knowledge, whatever you call it, out in the places that we live and work and play. It can have a powerful effect in opening people up as we see here.

48 "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you."

49. Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are **the Son of God**; you are **the King of Israel**."

Again another amazing response to Jesus - Nathanael understood even more than Philip did. He recognises him as the Son of God - This was a term used by Jews for the Messiah, (but they didn't think of the Son of God as being God the Son, equal with God, neither on the whole did the early disciples.) Jesus Nasiri was 'a man anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power who went about doing good because God was with him.' Again the Messiah was also seen as the rightful heir to David's throne, the King of Israel. It was prophesied that a son of David would once again sit on David's throne as King. Jesus was this promised King but was not the sort of King that the Jews expected at all, a violent warrior who would overthrow the Romans. No, he was going to be quite a different King to any other king on earth; he would be King of kings and Lord of lords.

So we never know if we introduce someone like Nathanael to Christ what he or she will become. They may well go way beyond, you and become a church leader even an apostle, like Bartholomew. Someone had to bring Billy Graham to the Lord and that someone was travelling evangelist Mordecai Ham at one of his tent meetings that Billy attended, someone had to explain the Gospel to Paul, and all we know about him is his name Ananias who was sent by the Holy Spirit to a certain house in Straight Street in Damascus. Whose life could God use you to change?

50. Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You shall see greater things than that."

I love this. All Jesus did was tell Nathanael he saw him under the fig-tree - and then commented that he was an Israelite in whom there is no guile - God see every one of us and knows everything about us; everything we are thinking, everything in our hearts. He knows you and even if your are not without guile, he is calling you to come and find out more about him, or even now you've got to know quite a bit about him, he is calling to you 'follow me'. If you have never really taken time to find out 'where he is staying' and never spent any time with him don't put him off anymore. Take time to read about him, to get to know him, to listen to him, to come along to the Christianity Explored course, which is a very helpful way of 'coming to see'. If you already know quite a bit about him, and you know he is calling you to follow him;

don't keep putting it off; don't ignore his call. Choose to follow him, commit yourself to him by being baptised, and become a proper disciple.

God also knows the hearts of all those we are wanting to introduce to him. He can use anyone of us to speak words of knowledge to open up people to the Lord, just like Jesus did here and also with the woman of Samaria that he met by the well. Are we open for such prophetic insight? Philip is not the same person as Philip the Evangelist who we read about in Acts. Yet here Philip is being an evangelist, telling his mate about Jesus and introducing them to each other. We can still do that today even though Jesus is not physically here. Mostly people will first hear about Jesus through us which we hope will whet their appetite to know more and what they then see of Jesus is nothing compared to all the greater things that all of us will discover as we follow him. There is no greater adventure, no more exciting challenge that has ever been put in front of people. Sailing round the world, going to the South Pole, all the adventures that Ben Fogle takes people on are over in a few months at the most – this is an adventure for life; no, for eternity!

51. He then added, “I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on **the Son of Man.**”

Now this is a rather strange thing to say. What on earth is he talking about? Nathanael Bartholomew was an Israelite and he would have known the scriptures pretty well, having heard them read since he was a child. He would have known both the stories Jesus was referring to here. Gen 28:12. Jacob's dream where he saw a ladder connecting heaven to earth and angels ascending and descending on that ladder, and the Son of Man, a title taken from the book of Daniel (7:13) referring to a future king who will come on the clouds 'one like a son of man', i.e. he appears to be a human being but is actually more than a human being, he is God. “There was given to him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” Jesus is that Son of Man and he is the ladder connecting heaven to earth. He is the only way to heaven, the only way to connect to God and only through him we can know God. He is the Son of Man's whose everlasting Kingdom will never pass away.”

*So in this passage we have seen five names that Jesus is called – The **Lamb of God**, promised by Isaiah who would take away the sins of the world, the **Messiah**, the anointed descendant of King David who would bring in God's rule on earth and as such would be known as **the Son of God** and also **the King of Israel** and would also be the **Son of Man**, more than just a human being but God himself whose kingdom would not be an earthly realm, ruling over the Jews in Israel, but an*

everlasting spiritual Kingdom that would encompass people from every nation on the earth and would last forever. The Jews of Jesus day would have to some extent understood each of these titles but 21st C people don't have a clue as to what any of these names mean. I hope I have given you enough of an explanation so that you could now explain them to someone else in today's culture. We also see in this account many insights as to how to share the message about Jesus to our friends and neighbours. Some of them will have some kind of spiritual interest and want to know more about faith and spiritual things; so we can tell them "Come and see!" The CEx course is a helpful tool to help people see. When they make contact with Christ in some way, he will call them in their hearts – follow me.

Now this all took place down in Judea by the River Jordan. When all these guys went home to Galilee, they still considered themselves Jesus' followers, but they went back to fishing and just met up with Jesus from time to time, – it was going to be many months later after Jesus had established his ministry in Galilee that he would call Simon Peter and Andrew and John and James, his brother to leave their fishing business and follow him, along with Philip and Nathanael Bartholomew and six others who became his Twelve Apostles, but more about them on another occasion. So we see that there are stages in God's call to follow Christ as his disciples. How far have you come in your walk with Christ?

- You've heard about Jesus but you have never taken the time to come and see. Can I ask you to come and see? Take a step today to get to know him*
- You've come and you've seen for yourself. Can I ask you to respond to Jesus call to follow him? Don't put it off any longer. Take a step of commitment; follow him by getting baptised.*
- You've responded to his call 'follow me' and you spend some time with him now and again and are one of his disciples 'when he comes to town'. Can I ask you to quit being a part time follower and ask you to take up your cross every day and follow him.*
- You know he has called you to give your whole life to telling others about him. Can I ask you to pray and to find someone else with whom you can share this incredible message, a brother, a friend and ask them to "Come and see".*