

THE MAN WHO KNEW MEN

by Ray C. Stedman

Next year is election year. Political drums are already beating. Already banners are beginning to fly, and the politicians are beginning to spout as we head toward that three-ring circus by which we choose the leaders of the world for the next four years. I could not help but note the contrast with the passage we have this morning from the Gospel of John. Here Jesus chooses the men who will change the course of world history for twenty centuries to come. What a difference!

John tells us that Jesus began with two men who had already been in training under John the Baptist, John 1:35-40:

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." And the two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying; and stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. {John 1:35-40 RSV}

It is clear from that account that John the Baptist intended these two disciples to leave him and join Jesus. In Chapter 3, John the Baptist makes that well known statement, "He must increase, but I must decrease" {John 3:30}, and he has already begun that here. Clearly John understood that once the Messiah, whom he had been sent to announce, appeared, his own ministry would fade. He had already gathered a band of men around him as his disciples, and now he indicates to them that the time has come for them to follow the Messiah.

He does so in an interesting way. We have already seen that he had introduced Jesus in a four-fold manner:

1. As Messiah,
2. As the Lamb of God,
3. As the One who baptizes with the Spirit, and
4. As the Son of God.

Of those four he now chooses one, and it is interesting to see which one. He does not say, "Behold, the Messiah." He does not say, "Behold, the One who baptizes with the Spirit." He does not even say, "Behold, the Son of God." What he says is, "Behold, the Lamb of God."

John understood that the first problem that men have to settle with God is the problem of sin. The only real access we have to the Living God is through the doorway of forgiveness of sin. When we are ready to deal with our sin and to bring it to God, then we have an open door into the Kingdom of God. We never will find Jesus until we find him as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." That is how John announces him, "Behold, the Lamb of God."

Two of John's disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. We are told in this account that one of those disciples was Andrew, the brother of Peter. Everyone asks, "Who was the other one?" We are not told; his name is not given here. Yet this is almost a certain clue as to who this other one was, for we discover in the Gospel of John that John never mentions his own name. He always refers to himself in an indirect, oblique way, such as, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" {John 21:20}, or similar words. Since he does not give the name of the other disciple here, almost all the scholars agree that this must be John himself. So John and Andrew are the two who heard Jesus say these words.

What they heard must have struck a responsive chord, for immediately they followed Jesus. That may have been due to curiosity, but, whatever it was, they must have been drawn on immediately by the question Jesus asked of them. When he saw them following him he turned and said to them, "What do you seek?"

Those are the first words of Jesus in the Gospel of John and they are very remarkable. According to this, they are also the very first words Jesus uttered in his public ministry; and they come in the form of a question.

I have always been fascinated by the questions God asks of man. These four words go right to the heart of life. In them Jesus asks the most profound question in anyone's life: "What are you looking for?" Did you ever ask yourself, "Why am I here? What do I really want out of life?" That is the most penetrating question you can ask yourself.

Anyone who works knows what it is to get up in the morning, eat breakfast, go to work, work all day, come home in the evening, have dinner, read the paper, listen to television, talk to the family, whatever; go to bed, get up in the morning, have breakfast, go to work, work all day, come home in the evening, have dinner, read the paper, listen to television, talk to the family, whatever, get up in the morning, etc. Have you ever asked yourself, "Why? What do I want out of this?"

That is what Jesus is asking in this question. He nailed those men immediately with the profundity of it. "What do you seek?" Not, "Whom do you seek?" That would be the natural question to ask under the circumstances. No, Jesus asked What? What are you looking for? What do you really want? That is the supreme question in life: What do you want?

This reminds us of that first question in the Bible, asked by God of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after the Fall: "Adam, where are you?" {cf, Gen 3:9b}. That question was designed to make Adam ask himself, "Yes, where am I? How did I get here? What has happened to me?" Adam and Eve were hiding in bushes. I do not think Adam asked himself why until God asked the question, "Where are you? What are you doing? Why are you there?" That is the most important question to answer when you are far away from God. When you answer it, you are on your way back to the God who made you.

The answer these men give is very cautious. They say to Jesus, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" I think it was Andrew who asked that, because he appears in the gospels as a very warm, friendly, approachable human being. He is the one who received the little boy who had five loaves and two fishes when Jesus fed the five thousand. He is the one who brought Peter to the Lord. He is very approachable, but he is very cautious and careful.

No wonder he became the patron saint of Scotland! In that Jewish body there dwelt the soul of a canny Scot! He is not easily moved, but when he is committed he responds with powerful and deeply loyal action.

Last week we celebrated the 77th anniversary of the great San Francisco earthquake, which was caused by the tremendous earthquake fault that runs down the Peninsula, within a mile of this building, called St. Andrew's fault (the San Andreas fault). It was well named. Andrew was like that -- deep, quiet, not much on the surface, but when he moved, something happened! That is why the San Andreas fault was so named. It is St. Andrew's fault; you can blame everything on him!

Jesus' response shows how well he understood Andrew. He said to him, "Come and see." That is an invitation to investigate. "Come and find out. Take your time; ask what you want; make up your own mind." What a tremendous response to the kind of men that John and Andrew are! They are men who need time, men who do not move quickly; they need to investigate. Our Lord is instantly responsive to that need. I know men like that today. You cannot push them, or drive them; they need time to make up their minds. All they need is an invitation to investigate.

According to this account, they went and stayed with Jesus all day. What they found was so fascinating they could not tear themselves away. According to John, it was the tenth hour when they went. It is somewhat difficult to know just what time that was. If it was Jewish time, then it was four o'clock in the afternoon. If it was Roman time (as I think it was, because John wrote his gospel for a wider world than the Jews), then it

was the same as we count, ten o'clock in the morning. But when the apostles went they found themselves absolutely captivated by the person of Jesus. We are not told what they asked him, we are not told what he said to them, but what he said held them so they spent the entire day with him. All we learn is that, from this encounter, Jesus now has two of his disciples.

Another disciple is immediately involved. Verse 41:

Andrew first found his brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon, the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). {John 1:41-42 RSV}

Here enters Peter, the best-known disciple of all. We all feel close to Peter, the man who suffered from hoof-in-mouth disease! Someone has said that when Peter enters the gospel record he always comes in with a thud! Thus we recognize the humanity of Peter. It is easy to remember the process by which he came to Jesus. Three words tell the story: he was sought by his brother; he was brought to the Messiah; he was caught by what he saw and heard.

There may be a third man involved here, too. Notice that it says, "Andrew first found his brother Simon." The Greek, in fact, is a little stronger: "He first found his own brother Simon." There is strong manuscript evidence for reading it this way: "He was the first to find his own brother" -- which implies that John also found his brother. John had a brother named James. (James and John were the sons of Zebedee.) Andrew and Peter, James and John, as we learn from the other gospels, were all fishermen from Galilee. On this day they are down in Judea, east of Jerusalem, by the Jordan River, where John was baptizing. But they came from Galilee, seventy miles to the north. Undoubtedly they had brought their fish to market in Jerusalem, where they sold most of their catch. There they must have heard of the ministry of John the Baptist. Perhaps the fishing was slow and they had time, so they went out and joined John and became his disciples for a while. Thus they evidenced the hunger and the searching of their own hearts. Now Andrew comes to Peter with the exciting words, "We have found the Messiah!" Can you imagine the excitement in his voice as he said that? He has spent a whole afternoon with Jesus, and now announces to his brother, "At last we have found the One of whom all the prophets speak!"

So Simon came. Jesus immediately seizes on the meaning of his name: "So you are Simon ["Simon" means a listener, a hearer, one who is constantly listening to what is going on around him], you shall be called Cephas." Cephas is Aramaic, the language that Jesus and the disciples spoke, which is very close to Hebrew. Cephas means "a rock," and John translates it here, using the Greek word for rock, Peter. What Jesus is saying to him is, "So you are Simon. You are now a listener. You are tuned to what everyone around you is saying; you are easily affected by the opinions and attitudes of others." Remember the story near the end of the gospels when, as Peter stood by a fire when Jesus was being tried, a young woman came up to him and said, "Haven't I seen you with him?" Immediately Peter is affected by what he hears, and he denies his Lord. This is the natural temperament of Peter. He is easily influenced, impetuous and impulsive, running after every word he hears. Jesus reads his heart instantly and says, "Your name is Simon, but you shall become a rock." Peter is going to be an anchorman, an immovable foundation upon which others will build, a steadying influence to everyone around him. This is what captured Peter. Here was a man who instantly read his weakness, but who also saw his great possibilities.

I find many men are like Peter. They have great capacity for strength, but they are impulsive, undependable. They have never learned to listen to the right voice, so they listen to everybody. They play, and putter, and restlessly change from this to that until they fritter their life away. What they are looking for is a cause to which they can commit themselves. In the hands of Jesus, a man like that can become as solid and steady as a rock. When such a man hears the right voice, and follows him above all other voices, he becomes like Peter became: a strong, solid, dependable, secure person -- a rock! That is what won Peter: a man who saw his possibilities and declared them to him.

On the following day more disciples are added. Verse 43:

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. {John 1:43-44 RSV}

Notice that John specifically says, "Jesus found Philip," not "Philip found Jesus." Jesus found him. John tells us that Philip came from the same city as Andrew and Peter (and, presumably, James and John, since they all came from the same area). Why does John tell us this? Why does he put it this way?

One of the exciting things about studying the Scripture is to ask yourself questions about it. Why does he say it this way? The obvious question to ask in return is, "Why didn't Andrew and Peter bring Philip to Jesus?" They had just found the most exciting person they had ever met, the one who satisfied all their expectations. He was the Messiah, the Promised One for whom the nation had been waiting for centuries. Why didn't they bring Philip to him?

The answer is, Philip is the kind of man nobody ever remembers to bring. He is quiet and shy; the kind no one would ever think of. The only record of his actions is found here in the Gospel of John; the other gospels simply list him as one of the disciples. He was intelligent -- he asked some perceptive questions of Jesus later -- but he is virtually invisible. No one ever thought of Philip, so Jesus found him.

Last week I was at Biola University, speaking to the graduate students at the Rosemead School of Psychology about the church; why our Lord has called people together to be with him in what we call the church; how it functions; why he has gathered us as his disciples in this twentieth century hour. When I had finished, a young man from that group came up to me. He was serious of face and earnest of expression. I looked into his eyes and I recognized a hunger there. (His name, by the way, was Andrew.) He asked me, "How does one become a spiritual man?" I could sense in that question a deep longing in his heart to have spiritual power, to be a spiritual man. "How do you do this?" he asked me. My answer was, "That is not your responsibility. You don't make yourself into a spiritual man; nobody does. The words you need to hear are the words that Jesus said to his disciples: "Follow me." That is what Jesus said to Philip. Nobody thought of Philip. He was intelligent, and spiritually hungry. Jesus saw him and addressed to him the words that captured Philip's heart: "You long to be a spiritual man? Then follow me. I'll do the making."

In the other gospels it is recorded later that Jesus said to certain fishermen when he called them to action in Galilee, "Come, follow me. I will make you fishers of men," {cf, Matt 4:19, Mark 1:17}. I will do it. One of the encouraging things about being a Christian is that you do not have to plan what you are going to do or be in life. You do not have to run through a computer all the ingredients it takes to become a spiritual person and then program yourself for it. Your part is to obey your Lord. Follow him. Read what he says; do what he asks; stop doing what he tells you to stop, and follow him. He will make you into a spiritual man. So Philip, after Andrew, becomes the second evangelist of the apostles.

Verse 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." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." {John 1:45-46 RSV}

There is the famous quotation about Nazareth, the response of Nathanael to Philip. (By the way, Nathanael is not listed in any of the gospels as being part of the apostolic band, because, in them, he is called by his patronym (the name of his father) "Bartholomew." "Bar" is the Aramaic for son: "the son of Ptolomy," or Tolmai, in Hebrew, Bartholomew: that is Nathanael; his full name is Nathanael Bartholomew.)

Philip bases his appeal to Nathanael on the Scriptures: "this is the one of whom Moses and all the prophets spoke, the Messiah." Then he identifies him in a local context, "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." That was too much for Nathanael, because he came from Cana of Galilee, a little village just over the hill from Nazareth, about two miles away (where, by the way, the next scene in this gospel takes place, the changing of water to wine).

I have been through Cana. It is a tiny village, just a little off the beaten track today, whereas Nazareth is now a large city, having become famous as the home town of Jesus. It is the site of a large church dedicated to the annunciation of Mary, and a fairly large city has grown up all around it and filled the hillsides. Cana today is a small village, but in those days it was the center of commerce, while Nazareth was a dusty little village with a bad reputation.

Nathanael is speaking with some degree of scorn: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip's answer is very wise: "Come and see. The One whom I am talking about will stand on his own feet. It doesn't matter where he comes from. If he is the Messiah, you'll find it out when you talk to him. Come and see."

This fourth disciple is described in the following section, Verse 47:

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" 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." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall 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 upon the Son of Man." {John 1:47-51 RSV}

What a fascinating account! Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and immediately, as he has done with every one of these men, makes a pronouncement on his character. Jesus knows what is in men. (In the third chapter we are told that he did not need to have anybody tell him about someone because he knew what was in man.) Many people have read this as though Jesus here is exercising the omniscience of deity. I believe in the deity of Jesus, but I do not believe that in his earthly ministry he exercised omniscience. There are times when he tells us he did not know some things, and an omniscient God knows everything.

What happened here is that Jesus was so aware of the makeup and nature of humanity that he could accurately read the signals we all use to telegraph information about ourselves -- what we call body language. We have all had some experience with this. We have seen an expression on someone's face, and said, "I know what you're thinking" -- and we were right. How did we know? Because we were reading that person's body language. We all telegraph information about ourselves. If I could read accurately I could tell what kind of people you are at a glance just by the way you are sitting, the way you look, etc. I could tell that some of you are very sleepy, and I could tell that some of you are very alert, watching, and interested! You do not know what I am reading as I look out at you. But Jesus could read people instantly and accurately in a way no one else could. "He saw Nathanael coming to him," and instantly he read what Nathanael was like: "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" There was no deceitfulness, no tendency to hide or be devious.

I submit to you that that is indeed a miracle! "An Israelite in whom there is no guile!" Any of you who have had anything to do with a Jewish businessman knows what a wonder this is! I do not think I will be accused of anti-Semitism in saying that; I have many Jewish friends and I find they laugh at themselves about this. They have a peculiar propensity for being sharp in a business deal, of being able to lull somebody's suspicions and bring him along. Many a Gentile has had to say, "I was a stranger, and you took me in!" But Jesus read Nathanael, and said, "Behold, here is one without guile! Here is an Israelite without any Jacob in him," literally.

Nathanael's immediate response was, "You are right. How did you know that? How did you know me?" Jesus replied, "Why, before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Again, many of the scholars feel this is a sign of Jesus' divine ability to see beyond the natural, that this is a miraculous vision; that Nathanael was probably way off over the hill, hidden from natural sight, nevertheless Jesus saw him. I do not think that is implied here at all. The reason I do not is because of the word that John uses when Jesus says, "When you were under the fig tree, I saw you." That is not the word that is translated "looked." (As earlier, in Peter's case, Verse 42, "Jesus looked at him and said, ...") John is not using the word that means to visually observe or see. The word really means to perceive, to understand. That is what Jesus is saying to Nathanael: "I saw you with my eyes, visibly, over there, talking with Philip. I saw Philip telling you something, and I saw

your response. I could not hear your words but I saw you. And in that I saw who you are. I knew instantly, even then, who you were. You told me by the way you responded physically." This is what convinces Nathanael. Here is a man who instantly knows what is in man.

Nathanael's response is a confirmation of his forthrightness, his guilelessness: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel," i.e., the Messiah. Jesus commends him for that simple, immediate faith: -- "Because I said to you I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? That's wonderful, Nathanael. But faith like that is going to be shown greater things yet." Then Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly [this is the first time Jesus uses that expression, which always headlines what he is saying, to indicate that it is very important], I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

This is a reference to the dream that Jacob had centuries earlier. Jacob left his home, fleeing from the wrath of his brother Esau, and headed for his uncle's home in far-off Aram. At the site of the little city of Bethel (now in Israel), he had a dream. Lonely and frightened, Jacob put his head on a stone for a pillow, fell asleep, and dreamed that he saw a ladder reaching up to heaven, and on it saw the angels of God ascending and descending. Jesus said to Nathanael, "You are going to understand that dream when you learn of me. You will learn that I am the way to God for man, and the way for God to reach man. I am the link, the mediator, who spans the gulf between God and man." Our Lord intended this to be understood by all his disciples. When you come to know Jesus you have found God.

In this brief account we found four men at least (possibly six, because John and James would be included here as well), whom Jesus had called to himself.

As we close this morning, there are four observations I would like to make that apply to us:

The first is: these are men, not women. I know I may make somebody mad with what I am going to say because it is contrary to the spirit of the age in which we live, but our Lord consistently called men into the ultimate leadership of his church. This is also reflected in the letters of the apostles. They, too, insisted on men being in that final level of leadership. That is not because men are smarter, or better, or more gifted than women, because they are not; it is simply because the function of leadership in that ultimate sense is given, in the wisdom of God, to men.

Women are given gifts of leadership, and our Lord employs them. Jesus treated women as no other person of his day treated them. He shared with them openly; he taught them things that the others failed to hear or learn; they were the first evangelists after the resurrection. There is a tremendous recognition of the value and work of women in our Lord's ministry. But when it comes to leadership he reserved that for men. I do not know why fully, except that, through the centuries since, whenever that principle has been forsaken there has always been weakness in the church. Where men are true to what they are called to be -- and oftentimes they are not -- strong churches result. That is clearly reinforced here.

But the second observation is: these were ordinary men. There is nothing unique about them. They were not special men; they were not unusually intelligent men. They were just like us -- ordinary persons. Jesus could have called his disciples from any group he happened to be with and they would have been successful apostles, just as he made these men to be. That is because the secret does not lie in the men but in the Lord who understands men. who uses them and makes them into what he wants them to be.

The third thing that strikes me is: Jesus never handled any two alike. Andrew was cautious, Peter was impetuous, Philip was shy, Nathanael was guileless. Jesus spoke differently to each of them. He understood them. He took them for what they were. He did not try to make them all fit a pattern or a mold. He did not crank out identical, Xeroxed people like we so often try to do today. He treated them all differently, for he understood who they were.

The final observation is: that is the way Jesus knows us today. We, too, are called to be his disciples, as these men were called. Men and women alike are called to be disciples of Jesus. That means he knows what to send into each life. He knows where to put us. The people he wants us to be with, difficult and obnoxious as they

may be, he put there. He knows what to permit in your life; he chooses it. Following him means that you accept where he takes you and what he gives you. You look for meaning and purpose according to the wisdom that he represents. You trust him, you obey him, you put yourself in his hands. His promise is that, knowing us thoroughly, he will act in love for our best interests, for our good. And he will do what he starts out to do: he will make each one to fulfill the potential, the possibilities, of life.

That is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Title: The Man who Knew Men

By: Ray C. Stedman

Series: The Gospel of John

Scripture: John 1:35-51

Message No: 5

Catalog No: 3835

Date: April 24, 1983

[PBC Homepage](#) | [Discovery Publishing](#) | [Ray Stedman Library](#)

[Copyright \(C\) 1995 Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.