

## The Test

John 1:35-51

### Introduction

Imagine starting a corporation that you knew would eventually employ several million people and would touch the lives of every single human being. This business is your creation and would be in existence for more than two thousand years. Now imagine having conceived and created this incredible operation, but knowing, all the while, that in three years, you will be turning the operation over to subordinates.

Does this sound like an unlikely scenario to you? Well, consider the fact that Jesus Christ would have just over three years to give His subordinates the training they needed before He was scheduled to physically leave planet earth.

Now, if you were the creator of the church, and you knew that in three and a half years, you would be turning your mission over to your disciples, what kind of disciple would you be looking for? Perhaps you would make a test that would reveal who would meet the necessary qualifications. What would the questions be?

I believe that, if we were to devise that test, the questions would look like these:

- What are your past achievements for God?
- Have you been recognized for any outstanding leadership qualities?
- Are you a strong leader, and also a team player, who would rather work with and through others than by yourself?
- Do you remain composed and collected under adverse circumstances?

- Do you have a proven record with others concerning your people skills, administrative abilities, and motivational methods?
- Will you be loyal to the corporation and place priority on its success, rather than on your own personal advancement?

And so on!

### If You Want To Be My Disciple . . .

Well, Jesus Christ is about to choose His first disciples, although I am sure, at this point, they are not aware that they have been chosen at all. We will discover that Jesus did indeed put together a test of sorts, with questions that are far different than the ones we would select.

I want to put the next few events in our study of John into the form of questions; questions that disciples must answer if they – if you and I – want to consider themselves disciples of Jesus Christ.

#### What are you actually looking for?

1. Test question number one is, “Since you want to be My disciple, what are you actually looking for?”

This question is implied in John, chapter 1, verses 35 through 38a.

*Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, . . .*

(we will learn later that one of these disciples was Andrew and, most believe, the other unnamed disciple was John himself),

*. . . and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned and beheld them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?"*

Notice that these are Christ's first ministry words recorded in John's gospel. You could translate this, "What are you after?" And, we know that Andrew and John were serious about following Christ because of the words in verse 37, ". . . and they followed Jesus."

The word for "followed" is used elsewhere in the New Testament for "committed discipleship". However, the same Greek word "akoloutheo," is also used of those whose interest and commitment were only temporary; those who followed Jesus for the wrong reasons.

An illustration of "temporary disciples," is found in John, chapter 6, verses 1 and 2. The same Greek word is used for "following" in these verses.

*After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee . . . And a great multitude was following Him, because they were seeing the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.*

This was better than a circus! But, the exciting events were the only reason these fickle disciples were following Jesus.

Throughout this chapter, Jesus spelled out what it really meant to follow Him. Notice their reaction to His teaching by the end of John, chapter 6, in verse 66.

*As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore.*

So, back in chapter 1, when Jesus saw Andrew and John following Him, He asked them the first test question of a true disciple, "What do you really want from Me?"

- Are you ambitious opportunists, looking for position and power?
- Are you nationalists, looking for a military commander to conquer?
- Are you looking for a formula for success?
- Are you seeking happiness and comfort; food or healing?

Ask yourself the same question, "Just why are you following Jesus?"

- Is it because He works better than antacid?
- Is it because you do not want to go to hell?
- Is it because you think He will double your money or erase your problems?
- Is it because He is good for business?

To all who would be disciples, following Christ is not enough – you must follow Him for the right reasons. To follow Christ for our own purposes is really asking Christ to follow you; to fulfill your mission; to do your will!

H. A. Ironside wrote,

*Many people come to Jesus, I think, because they hope to be benefited by Him. Some come hoping for physical relief. I would rather have a man come to me and say honestly, "I am not concerned about my soul, but I am greatly concerned about my body." I am glad to do what I can for a man who comes to me like that, but it really hurts to have people come professing an interest in spiritual things, when they are only concerned about temporal relief.*

Jesus asks the question, "Do you want to be My disciple? Why?!"

Notice Andrew and John's response, in John, chapter 1, verses 38b through 39.

*And they said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." They came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.*

These two disciples were interested in more than Jesus' address. They were actually asking, "Where is Your dwelling place?" In other words, "We'd like to be able to sit down with You and ask questions and get answers. We'd like to get to know You!"

I wish the Bible recorded for us their lengthy afternoon conversation. It does not. However, it does give us the result, in verses 40 through 42a.

*One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. . . .*

I could easily preach a series on this man Andrew, but for now, just know that Andrew was the

man who was always introducing other people to Jesus. He was the kind of individual who would set a city on fire for Jesus Christ, while everyone else was still looking for a match. In fact, the only three times in the gospels where Andrew is brought onto center stage are when he is introducing someone to Jesus (Peter – John 1:40-42a, the boy with the lunch at the feeding of the five thousand – John 6:5-10, and the Greeks – John 12:20-22).

Andrew would never be in the limelight, though. He would constantly be referred to as “Simon Peter’s brother”. On the day of Pentecost, he listened to his brother preach. Even though he was the first disciple to be called by Christ, he was not the most significant. Andrew was not included in the closest circle of Jesus’ disciples.

Some people will not play in the band unless they get to beat the drum, but not Andrew. He was simply so excited that he had found the Messiah!

Notice again what Andrew says to Peter, in verse 41b.

*... We have found the Messiah . . .*

The Greek word for “found” is used as in, “finding a hidden treasure”. Has it ever occurred to you that the more precious your discovery of Jesus Christ, the higher your priority in sharing Him with others? If you do not consider Him significant, you will not consider Him worth sharing!

Imagine digging in your back yard, while planting a tree or some flowers. You overturn some sod, and a small fountain of water shoots upward. It falls on some brown, dry grass and, to your amazement, the grass slowly turns green and fresh! The water then trickles toward your flower garden and immediately, the wilted flowers stand upright and blossom. You run into your house, grab a cup, and fill it. Maybe you experiment with the neighbor’s cat first and then, you take a sip. You feel invigorated! You run back into the house, look in the mirror, and some of your wrinkles have turned into smooth skin. You have discovered the fountain of youth!

Would you share it with your best friend, or your children, or your older sister or brother? Would you tell your mother or father who are dying of old age? Or, would you re-bury the fountain of youth with dirt and never whisper a word?

One nationwide study found that, on any given Sunday morning, one out of every four people surveyed would willingly attend a church service if they were invited by a friend. Do you know what

that represents? That means that twenty million more people in America would be in church this Sunday, if they were extended an invitation.

Every study of evangelistic outreach in the states reveals the same answers – eighty-five percent or more of all the people who come to faith in Christ are brought to Christ by someone they already trusted.

Do you know who Andrew is, and everyone like him? They are people who just cannot keep Jesus Christ to themselves!

### **Do you really want to be radically changed?**

2. The second test question for those who want to be disciples is, “Do you really want to be radically changed?”

Continue in John, chapter 1, to verse 42, where the second disciple test question is implied.

*He [Andrew] brought him [Simon Peter] to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).*

The word translated “looked,” describes a concentrated, intent gaze. You could render it, “Jesus not only looked at him, but He looked through him.”

Then Jesus Christ, exercising His authority over Simon, said, “I’m going to change your name.”

This was often done, in that day, as a mark of some quality or characteristic that the person displayed. “I’m going to change your name to Peter (from the Greek word “petros”), which means ‘rock’.”

Jesus was giving Peter a name that meant, “strong, steadfast, unmovable, consistent, controlled”!

It is no surprise that Peter did not say anything. He was speechless! And that is unique for Peter, for he was constantly opening his mouth – if only to change feet.

Peter was anything but rock-like. He was the emotional outburst; the one whose mouth became engaged before his brain; the one who would constantly battle with temper, ambition, and consistency.

So, the question was not, “Did Simon want to become Jesus’ disciple?” The real question was, “Did Peter really want to be radically changed?”

We have far too many “would be” disciples who make excuses for their personality and their inconsistency. Jesus Christ never offers any excuse

for you, nor will He accept any from you! He does offer a radical exchange program, called “discipleship”.

If you follow Jesus Christ, you can expect Him to clean up your language; you can expect Him to harness your temper, and make you into that person that the Spirit lives through and evidences Himself, in the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23a).

Someone once came upon Michelangelo chipping away with his chisel at a huge shapeless piece of rock. He asked the sculptor what he was doing. Michelangelo replied, “I am releasing the angel imprisoned in this marble.”

Did Peter ever radically change? Did he learn self-control? He later wrote, in I Peter, chapter 3, verses 8 through 10,

*To sum it up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, .*

..

(I seem to remember Peter swinging a sword at the high priest, missing him, and hitting his servant on the ear – Peter was a bad shot),

*. . . or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, “Let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile.”*

Did Peter ever learn the importance of humility? Oh, was Peter ever proud; so filled with egotistical self-confidence. In Matthew, chapter 26, verse 33, he had said, in effect, “Lord, everybody will fall away from You, but not me; I’m made out of better stuff.”

Later, he would write, in I Peter, chapter 5, verses 5b through 6,

*. . . and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time*

Peter’s failures were not fatal – he did indeed learn the fruit of the Spirit.

You say that you want to be a disciple of Jesus, and that you are walking with Him – then understand

that He will place you in the process of radical change.

### **Will you follow Me over the long haul?**

3. The third disciple test question is, “Will you follow Me over the long haul?”

This question is implied in John, chapter 1, verse 43.

*The next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, “Follow Me.”*

This is only one brief verse, and yet, it speaks volumes. The imperative tense of the Greek verb could be translated, “Keep on following Me,” or, “Follow Me over the long haul, Philip.”

And that was critically important to a man like Philip. Why? Because Philip took a long time to catch spiritual truth. It was not because he lacked intelligence, it was because he lacked faith! To Philip, facts and figures were the issue, not faith. And Christ wanted to develop faith in Philip.

Did you know that the only time Jesus ever asked advise from His disciples was when He was surrounded by five thousand very hungry people. We refer to that incident as “the feeding of the five thousand”. They are in the wilderness and Jesus turned to Philip and asked, in John, chapter 6, verse 5b,

*Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?*

Philip never responded to Jesus’ question of “Where,” but instead, got out his calculator and finally said, “Lord, we don’t have enough money.”

The issue was not money, the issue was the miraculous power of Jesus Christ.

At the end of Christ’s ministry, in the upper room, according to John, chapter 14, verse 8,

*Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”*

At this point, the Lord rebuked him for his slowness and blindness, as, according to verse 9,

*Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father . . .”*

Philip just did not get it, because he just could not see it! But Jesus never knocked him out of the flock! He never said, “Hey, you’re just not quick enough on your spiritual lessons.”

No. And I cannot help but believe that, many times, flustered, flabbergasted, frustrated Philip remembered the very first words that Jesus spoke to him. Jesus put His hand on his shoulder and said, back in John, chapter 1, verse 43, in effect, “Philip, follow Me, and don’t ever stop following Me to the very end.”

One amazing thing to think of is how different all the disciples were. They were different socially, economically, and emotionally. They had different tastes and preferences. They were actually, the first illustration of any New Testament church.

I think of the collection of disciples at our church, and any church – we are so different from each other. For example:

- Some love the sounds of Beethoven and Bach and wish the church were more formal, while others like music with a twang and a twitch, and still others do not really like music at all and believe the church needs less singing and longer sermons (they are the pastor’s favorites!).
- Some cannot imagine watching three hours of football, but can certainly watch three hours of tennis, or play three hours of monopoly, or stand in some swollen stream for three hours with a fishing rod and catch absolutely nothing but mosquito bites and then talk about how wonderful it was.
- Some vote for candidates in one political party, while others choose another party, while some choose no party at all and write in a vote or do not vote at all.
- Some are red hot zealots, while others are slow calculators.
- Some say, “Go,” while others say, “No,” and many never say anything at all.

We are all so different! How can we work together? Discipleship happens when we stop looking at each other, and start following Jesus Christ – over the long haul!

It is also amazing to consider the different contributions that these early disciples made. For example:

- We have no spoken words recorded from the lips of Philip after the Lord ascended to heaven, but yet, Peter was quick to speak.
- Philip never wrote a book and we have no record that he ever founded a church, but John was a brilliant author and church leader.

Did Philip ever catch on? Did he ever move from sight to faith? The record and tradition of history does reveal that he continued in a variety of ways to serve the risen Lord. In fact, he would die a martyr’s death for his stand. He was hung upside-down with his thighs and ankles pierced, so that he would slowly bleed to death.

And the words of Jesus must have encouraged him to the end, as he remembered the Lord saying, “Philip, keep on following Me, to the end.”

It is the long haul that reveals disciples – not the short sprint!

### **Are you willing to be totally exposed to Me?**

4. Discipleship test question number four is, “If you want to be My disciple, are you willing to be totally exposed to Me?”

This question is implied in the conversation between Jesus and Nathanael in John, chapter 1. Look at verses 45 through 46a.

*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. And Nathanael said to him, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” . . .*

That seems like a biased thing to say, right? But it really was not. Nazareth was in fact, a wicked city that had little room for God. How in the world could the Messiah come out of Nazareth?

Nazareth was the first city to respond to Jesus’ claims with violence. Nazareth was ready to put Him to death after just one day of teaching. I believe a lot of it was due to the fact that Nazareth was only four miles away from Sepphoris, the Roman capital of Galilee. When the Roman rulers needed workmen, they drew from the laboring class of Nazareth, and thus the men of Nazareth were exposed daily to the pagan influence of Rome.

Philip responds in the last part of verse 46.

*. . . Philip said to him, “Come and see.”*

Philip was wise – he did not argue. Few people have ever been argued into Christianity. Philip simply said, “Come and see.”

Nathanael came, in verse 47.

*Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”*

The word “guile” is used elsewhere for “bait” or “trap”. In other words, Nathanael was not an opportunist with deceitful intentions.

Continue to verse 48.

*Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”*

Now, follow carefully what Jesus just revealed about Himself. To the Jews, under a fig tree was a place of peace. When a man could be undisturbed under his own fig tree, he was considered to be truly at rest. Furthermore, the fig tree was leafy and shady, and it was their custom to sit and meditate under the cover of its branches. In fact, sitting under a fig tree was, in that day, a euphemism for “spiritual mediation”. It would seem that Nathanael had been meditating under his fig tree, just before Philip arrived.

In this comment to Nathanael, Jesus reveals His omniscience. He said, in effect, “I saw you before Philip came to you. You were under the fig tree.”

Jesus’ words give the further implication of, “I even knew what you were thinking about.”

Many Bible commentators believe that Jesus was implying that Nathanael had been meditating on the story of Jacob and the ladder from heaven, where angels were ascending and descending on it (Genesis 28). Verse 47 alludes to Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel and who was a very deceitful, opportunistic man. Then later, in verse 51, Jesus refers to Jacob’s ladder by way of analogy, and says,

*. . . Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.*

Jesus implied to Nathanael, “I know where you were and I even know what you were thinking about.”

And, Jesus is letting Nathanael know that more would be revealed to Him than even Jacob’s ladder had. Only God can know those things, right?! And Nathanael realizes that, as he answers Jesus in verse 49.

*Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.”*

Does it encourage you or frighten you that Jesus Christ knows your inner secrets? That may be the bad news. The good news is that wherever you are today, Jesus sees you, and if your heart yearns for light and peace, He knows that too. In fact, a good disciple is someone who openly admits the Lord access to every corner of his heart.

## Conclusion

Do you want to be a real disciple of Jesus Christ? Ask yourself these questions:

- Are you willing to follow Him for the right reasons?
- Are you willing to be radically changed?
- Are you willing to follow Him over the long haul?
- Are you willing to be totally exposed to Jesus Christ?

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