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Gospel of John #6  
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## Sermon Summary #6

### “He brought him to Jesus” John 1:35-51

We all know that Jesus is the central figure in all of Scripture. In fact, he is the central figure in all of human history. We’ve already seen this in John 1. John the Apostle has made it clear that the Son of God is eternal. He never began to be but has always been and always will be. He is God. He is the Creator of all things. He is the source of understanding and intelligence. The only reason we know anything at all is because of the enlightening work of the Son of God, whom John calls the “Word” (John 1:1). He is the reason we have been born again and adopted into the family of God. And at a point in time, centuries ago, this Word literally became flesh in the person of Jesus, without at any time ceasing to be God (John 1:14).

So, yes, he is the most important figure now and will be forevermore. It is our response to him and only to him that determines our eternal destiny. But there are other people described for us in the Bible, and there is much we can learn from them. We see in their lives certain sins and failures that ought to be a warning to us all. There are also notable virtues in them that are designed to encourage us and to provide us with an example to follow. This does not at all diminish from the centrality of Jesus Christ. May I simply remind you that the Apostle Paul on several occasions told his people to imitate him as he himself imitates Christ (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:9).

Today we meet a handful of individuals who followed Jesus, and there is, I believe, much that we can learn from them. We do not study them because they are to be worshipped. They themselves point us to Christ. It is to the degree that they live for Jesus and obey him that we choose to imitate their conduct. These men are quite different from one another. They each had their own strengths and weaknesses. Aside from the fact that they are all Jews, the one important thing that they share in common is their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, the Word made flesh. So let’s turn our attention to five of them mentioned in our passage today.

#### *Andrew*

We see in v. 35 that John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples. One of them was Andrew, as v. 40 makes clear. The other disciple is unnamed. Some have suggested this was actually John the Apostle, and in an expression of humility he chooses not to identify himself. But there’s no way to know this for sure.

The name “Andrew” literally means “manly.” He was a fisherman by trade and shared a house in Capernaum with Peter, his brother (see Mark 1:29). Although we don’t know a lot about him, what we do know is quite instructive.

First, we know he was a disciple or follower of John the Baptist (v. 35). Hence, he was a religiously devout and repentant man who was longing and looking for the Messiah.

Second, Andrew is evidently quite humble. He lived in the shadow of his brother, Peter. He is often referred to as “Simon Peter’s brother,” while Peter is never described as “Andrew’s brother.” Andrew is rarely if ever center stage, but seems willing to assume a role behind the scenes.

Third, although he stands in the shadow of his brother Peter, he was far from idle or inactive or useless. In fact, it was Andrew who brought Peter into the spotlight. It was Andrew who brought Peter to Jesus. I especially love the statement in v. 42, “he [Andrew] brought him [Peter] to Jesus.” More on this later. We also read in v. 41 that the “first” thing Andrew did was to find his brother and tell him about Jesus. Andrew was evidently the sort of man who, after seeing Jesus for himself, immediately looks around for someone else to tell. In fact, every time we encounter Andrew in John’s gospel, he is bringing someone to Jesus. He himself never writes a book of the Bible. He isn’t noted as a great preacher. But he loved to bring people to Jesus.

Fourth, later in John's gospel it is Andrew who brought to Jesus' attention the presence of a young boy who had five barley loaves and two fish (John 6:8-9). Andrew didn't think that was near enough to feed the five thousand men who had gathered, but he knew that if anyone could solve the problem, it was Jesus (see also John 12:20-22).

Fifth, there is no indication that Andrew had the gift of evangelism. Nothing in the gospels leads us to the conclusion that he had a great and infectious personality or any particular influence or power. But people like that are often the most effective in bringing people to Jesus, and Jesus to people. If you wonder why God would choose and use someone like Andrew the answer is simple. Paul said it in 2 Corinthians 4:7 – "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." No one who knew Andrew would be tempted to give him the glory that only Jesus deserved!

### *Philip*

Our second figure is Philip, a name that means "a lover of horses." I want to be fair to Philip, but this needs to be said: he wasn't the sharpest knife in the drawer! He was as average and ordinary as they come. He wasn't especially intelligent or perceptive or quick on the uptake. In fact, I think Philip is especially an encouragement to those in the church who struggle to grasp deep and complex theological truths. He appears often to be confused and lags a bit behind the other disciples. Let's take note of a few things about Philip.

First, some have pointed to v. 45 and suggested that Philip was simply uninformed. There he calls Jesus "the son of Joseph." However, it may be that Philip at this early stage simply hadn't been informed about the miracle of the virgin birth of Jesus, or perhaps he means that Jesus was the legal, adoptive son of Joseph. Let's not forget that he had only been a follower of Jesus for a few hours when he made this statement.

Second, in John 6, in the story of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus asked Philip a question: "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" (John 6:5). The text says that Jesus asked Philip this question "to test him, for he himself knew what he would do" (John 6:6). Philip's response is to say, "Well, it will probably take more than 200 denarii worth of bread to feed all these people" (John 6:7). He clearly had no clue what Jesus was trying to tell him. He was a bit out of his depth!

Third, the most well-known scene in which Philip appears is the least flattering of them all. He asks Jesus: "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us" (John 14:8). To which Jesus famously replies, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). One can well imagine the other disciples slapping Philip up side the head: "Philip, you dummy. Why would you ask such a silly question? Wise up, buddy!"

But before you dismiss Philip, don't ever forget that Jesus didn't merely call Philip to follow him. He appointed Philip to be one of the 12 apostles! Philip's name will appear on one of the 12 foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem! Jesus couldn't care less about your theological IQ. He doesn't so much test your mind as your heart. Jesus wasn't embarrassed by Philip's dull wit. He didn't send him away. He didn't make fun of him in front of the others. Jesus loved Philip. Philip loved Jesus. And that's all that ultimately mattered.

We tend to elevate the apostles beyond other, ordinary Christians, as though they were super-smart and super-spiritual. No. They were ordinary guys. Jesus does not need great men and women to get his work done. He just needs those who are willing. Don't ever forget Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1 –

"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

### *Nathanael*

We now move on to our third figure: Nathanael (which means "God has given"). Nathanael is probably the personal name of Bartholomew, and was one of the original twelve apostles. Bartholomew is not a personal name. It literally

means, “son of Tolmai” (a title). In three of the four listings of the apostles, Bartholomew is linked with Philip. Let’s note a few things about him.

First, the impression we get from v. 45 is that Nathanael and Philip were close friends who had often discussed the OT prophecies and promises of the Messiah. Philip is convinced Jesus is the Messiah and rushes off to tell his friend.

Second, at first, Nathanael isn’t all that impressed. His first words are: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (v. 46). Perhaps there was a rivalry between Cana, Nathanael’s home town, and Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus. It wouldn’t have been entirely different from the rivalry between Norman and Stillwater!

Third, according to v. 47, as soon as Jesus laid eyes on Nathanael he said, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” This isn’t to excuse or justify Nathanael’s prejudice against Nazareth. It is simply Jesus’ way of saying, this man’s motives are pure. There is no duplicity in him. What you see and hear in Nathanael is what you get. There is nothing up his sleeve. He is brutally honest about what he thinks.

The word translated “deceit” in v. 47 was originally used to refer to a fisherman’s bait. The fisherman’s aim is to deceive the fish. The word came to mean any cunning device designed to trick or deceive someone.

Fourth, Nathanael is stunned by what Jesus says. We don’t know why Nathanael was sitting under a fig tree, but he clearly understands that it was impossible for Jesus to be aware of this unless he had been given supernatural insight. As we will see later on, I believe the Holy Spirit revealed this to Jesus. Although we shouldn’t call this the spiritual gift of word of knowledge, it likely is a precursor to it.

What’s important for us to note is that Jesus knows everything about all of us! He knows when you sit down, whether it be under a fig tree or in a chair in your living room. He knows your heart, in the same way he knew the heart of Nathanael. You can’t hide from him or fool him. No one can pull the wool over the eyes of Jesus!

There is incredible comfort and encouragement in this. You may think it to be the opposite. You may be unhinged by the thought that every thought in your head and every movement of your body is under scrutiny by the Lord Jesus Christ. Although I don’t relish the thought that all of my thoughts are known to him, I’m profoundly encouraged in knowing that notwithstanding what I think and say and where I go and what I do, he still loves me. I’m still his. He is still mine. And nothing I do or think or say will ever change that.

#### *John the Baptist*

We’ve already looked closely at John the Baptist, but there is something here that is worth mentioning. Look with me at vv. 35-36. Two of John’s followers take one look at Jesus and instantly leave the Baptist and go after Jesus! John is left standing alone. But there is no indication that he is offended by this. His feelings aren’t hurt. He doesn’t sulk and mope. He’s not angry at Jesus or envious of him. In spite of the fact that John had obeyed God, had lived a strange and somewhat deprived life up until now, he shows no resentment toward Jesus when his followers leave him and follow the carpenter from Nazareth.

Why? The answer is found in a passage we briefly considered last week and will look at in greater detail in the days ahead.

“A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:27-30).

John’s entire life was designed to direct attention and loyalty away from himself and to Jesus. Should we do any less?

#### *Peter*

Just a brief word is in order about Peter. His brother Andrew comes to him and says: “We have found the Messiah” (v. 41). That’s all Peter needed to hear. Andrew brought him to Jesus.

What I find most intriguing about this initial encounter between Jesus and Peter is the way it highlights the sovereign authority of Jesus. He immediately changes Peter's name. Who can do that? What arrogance! No. It isn't arrogance. It is the prerogative of Jesus to give us new names to reflect our new identity. He tells Peter that henceforth his name is Cephas. Cephas comes from the Aramaic word for rock, while Peter comes from the Greek name for rock.

The good news is that Jesus does this for all of us, or will do it in the future. Jesus is speaking to the church in first-century Pergamum and says,

“To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it” (Rev. 2:17).

#### *Jesus is Jacob's Ladder*

Nathanael was astonished that Jesus could know things about him that couldn't be known by natural means. But Jesus points out that there are far greater things than this. Look at v. 51.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:51).

Jesus is referring to an incident in the life of the OT patriarch Jacob. We read about it in Genesis 28. There Jacob is traveling from Beersheba to Haran when he stops in Bethel and falls asleep.

And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:11-17).

Before we briefly dive into this, please know that when Jesus says what is recorded here in John 1:51, he is not speaking only to Nathanael. The verbs in v. 51 are plural, not singular, indicating that Jesus is speaking to all those have chosen to follow him.

The most remarkable thing is that Jesus is here claiming to be the decisive and consummate link between heaven and earth, between God and humanity. He is the mediator between heaven and earth on whom the angels must come and go. ***Jesus is here claiming to be Jacob's ladder.*** What Jacob dreamed is now fulfilled in your midst. “I am the revelation of God to mankind. I am where you go to find and to know God.” As Jacob's ladder, he is also Bethel, God's house, the place of God's dwelling among men.

When Jesus tells them that they will see “heaven opened” he uses the language of revelation. He is telling his disciples that they will receive divine confirmation in what they are about to see and hear during the course of his earthly life that he is indeed the Messiah.

#### *The Dirty Dozen: Some Concluding Thoughts on Evangelism*

What strikes me most as I read about these five men who followed Jesus is the way in which they unashamedly and boldly told others about him. John the Baptist loudly declared to everyone: “Behold, the Lamb of God!” Andrew instantly runs to his brother Peter to tell him about Jesus. And “he brought him to Jesus” (v. 42). As soon as Philip is

introduced to Jesus, he runs to tell Nathanael. So why don't we do the same? What accounts for our reluctance to be as quick to tell others about Jesus and to bring people to him?

I've identified 12 reasons (excuses?) why we don't share our life-changing faith in Jesus. I call them the Dirty Dozen. Yes, this is designed intentionally to make all of us, myself included, feel uncomfortable. Here they are.

(1) We are reluctant to share the gospel with others because of a loss of belief in the reality of hell. If there is no eternal conscious punishment for those who reject Jesus, why bother with taking the time and making the effort of telling them about him? There are empirically verified statistical studies which demonstrate that when a denomination or church loses its conviction concerning the reality of hell, its commitment to global missions diminishes, both in terms of the money devoted to it and the people they send.

(2) We are hesitant to share the gospel with others because of a loss of belief in the exclusivity of Jesus Christ. More and more are coming to the conclusion that all religions are equally valid paths to God; sincerity is what saves, not faith in Jesus. If conscious faith in Christ as Lord and Savior isn't necessary, neither is evangelism.

(3) We justify not sharing the gospel with others by appealing to God's sovereignty. Some have embraced the unbiblical notion that if God wants to save the lost, he'll pull it off without my help. This is a monumental failure to remember that God accomplishes his purposes through means. He has chosen to make use of us and our testimony and witness to make Christ known. Consider two texts that clearly demonstrate this truth: Acts 18:1-11 and Romans 10:14-15.

(4) We find an excuse not to speak of Christ by thinking: "If I don't do it, someone else will." Let's call this what it is: willful disobedience.

(5) We fail to passionately share the gospel with others because we are devoid of gratitude for what God has done in saving us. If a person does not fully grasp the magnitude of God's mercy in delivering us from a well-deserved damnation, it is unlikely we will feel much zeal to share such good news with others.

(6) We don't share the gospel with others because we lack any substantial and heartfelt fear of God. Paul says this about himself in 2 Corinthians 5:11 – "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others." In context, Paul is referring to the fact that he (and all of us as well) will appear before the judgment seat of Christ "so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Cor. 5:10).

(7) We don't share the gospel with others because we are smugly comfortable with our life and we don't want to disrupt it. Evangelism is often inconvenient and intrusive and time-consuming, and we resist most things that threaten our physical and emotional comfort.

(8) We don't speak of Christ to others because we are selfish and prejudiced! There is no better example of this than what we see in the life of Jonah (see Jonah 4:1-4).

(9) We fail to share the gospel because we live in bondage to the fear of man. We are afraid of rejection, being laughed at, and being mocked as fools. We cherish our own reputations and status in society more than we do the glory of Jesus and the eternal destiny of lost souls. This is perhaps yet another example of how selfishness and self-preservation hinder our evangelistic outreach.

(10) We don't share the gospel because of a fear of persecution.

(11) We are reluctant to speak to others about Jesus because of our fear of not being able to give answers to hard questions they might ask.

(12) We justify not speaking of Christ by saying: "I don't have the gift of evangelism."

Oh, that it might be said of us, what was said of Andrew: "He brought him [her] to Jesus" (John 1:42).