

## Meeting Jesus

### John 1:35–51

*A sermon by Peter Budd*

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What a day.

What a day when someone meets Jesus – and recognises that here is someone unbelievably special.

What a day – a turning point in a person's life.

What a day – a day that will be imprinted on the memory and treasured in future years.

In this passage from John's gospel, we read about five people meeting Jesus. Five people whose lives would be completely changed by the experience.

John the Baptist had been baptizing somewhere by the Jordan.

All kinds of people had made their way to that out of the way spot.

Some to repent and be baptized.

Some just to ask questions.

And John the Baptist made it clear that he was there to prepare the way for someone far more important.

Then Jesus came – the one he was preparing for.

And one day, John the Baptist was there with two people who'd come to learn from him – two of his disciples – and Jesus passed by.

“Look”, said John, “the Lamb of God” (v. 36)

And those two people went after Jesus to find out more about him.

One of those people, we know from v. 40, was Andrew.

And the other one?

It's very likely the other one was the person who wrote all this down.

Most probably, the John who became an Apostle.

One of the two sons of Zebedee, who had a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee.

Very likely, this was the person who is later referred to as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20).

In which case, this is an intense, personal memory of when John the Apostle met Jesus.

This is John's memory of following after Jesus.

His memory of Jesus turning and asking “What do you want?”

His memory of an amazing day spent with Jesus.

Even the time is imprinted on his memory – “It was about the tenth hour” (v. 39).

What hour that was depends on whether we assume he was using the Jewish time system – in which case it was about 4.00 pm – or the Roman time system – in which case it was about 10.00 am.

But the point is, that the details were etched in his memory – this was a very special day.

As for Andrew, the other person who met Jesus that day; he couldn't wait to tell someone else all about it.

The first thing he did was to find his brother Simon and tell him

“We have found the Messiah”.

This is what they'd been hoping for – a fulfilment of all the old prophecies.

And now Andrew was convinced this Jesus was the One.

And he didn't just tell his brother about it; he took Simon to meet Jesus in person.

And Jesus showed that he knew Simon inside out.

He knew Simon's background – that he was the son of someone called John.

And he understood Simon's potential – “You will be called ‘Cephas’” or Peter (v. 42) – meaning Rock.

Had we been there, we probably wouldn't have thought to describe this impulsive, inconsistent character as a “Rock”.

We probably wouldn't have seen in this burly Fisherman with his North Country accent, a man who would play a key role in the formation of a movement that would spread across the world.

But Jesus understood Simon's potential.

We're not told how Simon responded at that time.

Perhaps it was the one time he was lost for words.

But we know Simon went on to a life of utter dedication to Jesus.

Though it had its low moments as well as its highs.

Later, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, along with John and his brother James, received a specific call from Jesus to leave their fishing business on the Sea of Galilee to be with him.

We read about that call in Matt. 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20 and Luke 5:1-11.

But here we have what was, for each person, a very special day – when they met Jesus.

Another day – a special day for another person.

Jesus found Philip and said “Follow me” (v. 43).

And, like Andrew, Philip's response was to tell someone else about Jesus.

He went and found Nathanael, and told him that Jesus of Nazareth was the One.

The One the old prophecies were all about.

At first, Nathanael was sceptical.

Nazareth seemed a very unlikely place for a Messiah to come from.

But Philip said “Come and See.” (v. 46)

“Come and See” – Don't discount Jesus without finding out the facts.

“Come and See” – Don't judge on the basis of preconceptions or prejudices.

“Come and See” – Experience Jesus for Yourself.

And, even before Nathanael reached Jesus, Jesus showed that he knew Nathanael inside out.

“Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false” (v. 47).

It seems a rather odd thing to say, but it meant something to Nathanael.

“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

And Jesus said “I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree...” (v. 48).

What had Nathanael been doing under the fig-tree?

Perhaps he'd been pondering the story of Jacob,  
who'd obtained his Father Isaac's blessing through deceit – through falsehood,  
but who'd been renamed "Israel" following a wrestling match with God.

Perhaps Nathanael had been wrestling with God, in prayer.

We can only guess at what was going on under the fig-tree.

But this short exchange with Jesus signified something deeply personal for Nathanael.  
So that Nathanael recognised that Jesus really was the One.

The Son of God, the King of Israel (v. 49).

That was a turning point in Nathanael's life.

Jesus promised him he'd see wonderful things.

Things even more wonderful than Jacob saw,

when he had a dream, in which he saw a stairway from earth to heaven,  
with angels of God ascending and descending on it (Gen. 28:10-22).

Even more wonderful than Jacob's dream,

because Nathanael would know the One who is the stairway from earth to heaven,  
the One who is the way to God,  
the Son of Man: Jesus himself.

Nathanael is only mentioned once again in the New Testament, by that name at least.

That's in John 21:2,

where he's amongst those who saw the risen Jesus at the Sea of Galilee.

However, the various lists of the Twelve disciples all mention a "Bartholomew".

(Matt. 10:3; Mark. 3:18; Luke. 6:14; Acts 1:13)

Now, "Bartholomew" means "Son of Ptolemy", and he would also have had another name.

So, maybe, he was Nathanael Bartholomew.

If our identifications are correct, then these five people,

John (who came to write the Gospel),

Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael,

all came to be numbered amongst the twelve closest followers of Jesus.

And when each of them looked back to the day they met Jesus – what a day that was.

For each one, it was a unique and personal experience.

Jesus dealt with each of them differently, according to their character and needs.

And each went on to contribute in their own way to the mission of Jesus.

Let's think a little more about Andrew and Philip.

They had some things in common.

Both came from the same town – Bethsaida.

Both responded similarly after they met Jesus – by going and telling someone else about Jesus;

Andrew told Simon and Philip told Nathanael.

But when we look closely at the story, the differences in their characters begin to emerge.

Andrew was one of the two people who heard what John the Baptist said about Jesus, and followed Jesus to find out more. (v. 37)

He didn't wait to be asked, he just followed.

And later, having spent time with Jesus, we're told

“The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon...” (v. 41)

Andrew was quick to act; impulsiveness may have been a family trait that Andrew shared with his brother Simon.

In the case of Philip, however, Jesus sought him out and asked him to follow. (v. 43)

Philip seems to have been the sort of person who thinks things through, but needs encouragement to act.

If we read on in John's Gospel, in ch. 6, vv. 5-9, we have more insight into the different characters of these two disciples.

It's the story of the feeding of the five thousand.

A great crowd of people had followed Jesus to the far side of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus said to Philip

“Where shall we buy bread for all these people to eat?”

Jesus was trying to draw a response out of Philip; it was a test.

Philip's response was

“Eight month's wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

Philip's practical mind had correctly analysed the situation.

But he didn't look beyond the situation, to what might be possible with Jesus.

Andrew then spoke up

“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish...”

He was eager to be helpful.

But then even Andrew realised how ridiculous it was to offer five small loaves and two small fish to all those people.

He added

“...but how far will they go among so many?”

But with Jesus involved, they did go far enough, and further.

If we read on in John's gospel, in ch. 12, vv. 20-22, we meet Philip and Andrew again.

Some Greeks wanted to see Jesus and they came to Philip to request an audience.

Philip, it appears, didn't feel able to turn them away, but wasn't sure about taking them straight to Jesus; so he goes to tell Andrew.

Andrew wasn't hesitant about going to Jesus.

So Andrew and Philip went together.

Andrew: outgoing, quick to act.

Philip: more reserved, thoughtful, practical.

Two different characters.

But Jesus had a role for each of them amongst his followers.

And Jesus understood their different needs, and dealt with each of them as individuals.

It's still true today, that Jesus invites all kinds of people to follow him.  
We find many different characters within a church.  
But each has something to contribute.  
And each has a personal story of Jesus in their life.

Some people can look back on a particular day when they first learnt about Jesus  
and recognised that he is someone unbelievably special.  
Some, like myself – a missionary kid – grew up hearing about Jesus, grew up knowing all the  
facts; but we still come to a point where we have to say:  
“Yes, I have my own experience of Jesus”  
“Yes, I know Jesus for myself”  
“Yes, I'm committed to following Jesus throughout the rest of my life.”

But there are those who haven't yet really met Jesus.  
Or who have met him, but, like the rich young man we read about in Matt. 19, Mark 10 and  
Luke 18, have not followed him.  
For them, today could be a very special day.  
The day they enter into a new experience of Jesus.

Going through John's gospel, we meet Philip again in ch. 14, v. 8.  
Jesus had just said:  
“I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through  
me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you  
do know him and have seen him.” (John 14:6-7)

Philip – practical, thoughtful, but perhaps a little slow – Philip said  
“Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

And Jesus answered, in I think a tone of enormous love, but perhaps tinged with slight  
exasperation:  
“Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?  
Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father...” (John 14:9)

Jesus is the way to know God.  
Jesus is the stairway to heaven.  
As Jesus indicated to Philip's friend Nathanael on the day they first met.  
Jesus is someone unbelievably special.  
What a day – when someone meets Jesus.

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