

How Disciples Are Made

John 1:35-51

On my shelf is a book called “One Thing You Can't Do In Heaven”. So what is the one thing you can't do in Heaven? You can't evangelise. You can't make disciples, because everyone there is saved, and if you are there, the time for evangelism is over. Making disciples of Christ is one of the few holy activities that will not continue in eternity – our time to do it is here and now.

Of course, the Gospel of John is a very evangelistic book. John tells us in 20:31 that his purpose in writing is “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” So if the book is evangelistic, then a lot of the book is going to be about people who responded positively to evangelism, and became disciples, and people who rejected evangelism and did not. And that's what we find.

Along the way, we find much example and encouragement for our own evangelism. Every true believer here wants to share his or her faith. If you are a Christian, you want others to find what you have found. But often enough, we are intimidated, or afraid, sometimes ashamed, sometimes embarrassed. We perhaps think that sharing our faith is something for particularly gifted evangelists.

But what this passage does give us is an elegant account of the ways people become disciples. The passage before us in John is not the same as the passages in Matthew, Mark, and Luke that record Christ calling men to be His apostles. This is an earlier call, a call to be Christ's disciples. Disciples were people who attached themselves to a particular teacher. It is only later, that Jesus will call some of these men, and others, to forsake all and enter the office of apostle. Here we have the account of Jesus calling men into a relationship of following Him.

It records a few days at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, where six men came to be disciples of Jesus. The way they came, and how they came to be will both remind you of how you came to Christ if you are a Christian, and also encourage you in your evangelism of others. You don't need to be a brilliant debater, or a Christian philosopher, or a trained apologist, or a gifted evangelist to be a disciple-maker. Here we will find four ways that disciples are made. Today, if you are a Christian, then you came to Christ through at least one, and possibly several of these four ways. And, as you go about doing that one thing you can't do in heaven, you need to remember these four ways are simple and yet powerful ways that disciples are made.

I. Disciples Are Made Through Powerful Preaching

³⁵ Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. ³⁶ And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

The first way these disciples are made is through the clear testimony of John the Baptist. John the Baptist had his own disciples; we don't know how many. Some of them stayed with him to his very last days.

John is with two of his disciples. One of them, we find out in verse 40, was Andrew. The second one is not named, some think it may be John the author of this gospel, because there is a lot of attention to what day this happened, and even what time, which seems like an eyewitness. They were likely with John the Baptist the previous day, when he had pointed out Jesus in the crowd.

John the Baptist here repeats his words from the previous day: “Behold the Lamb of God”. Now

that phrase, as we saw, means Jesus is the Messiah. *Lamb of God* means the sacrificial substitute predicted from Isaiah 53, God's appointed Passover lamb, the trespass offering, sin offering, peace offering. He is the chosen one.

Now if you are John's disciples, then the one topic that you will have heard again and again is the coming Messiah. John was always preaching about the One who would come after him, but who was really before him. John's whole ministry was one of preparing hearts for the Messiah. John the Baptist was first and foremost a preacher. He didn't heal; he didn't do miracles. He preached, and he baptised those who repented.

Who knows how many sermons they had heard about the coming Messiah, prophecies from the Old Testament expounded and taught. And now, the day has come: He is here. And not somewhere else – He's right there. Here is the ultimate invitation after a sermon: there He is.

If you are a disciple of John the Baptist, what is the logical thing to do? It is to follow the Messiah! It would seem like a strange thing to be a disciple of the Messiah-announcer, and then when the Messiah Himself comes, you stay with the announcer. To be really true to John's message, you follow the Messiah where He goes. In many ways, John may actually be indirectly placing this expectation upon them: go and follow Jesus. Now we know not all of them did that. Some of John's disciples stayed with him to the very end.

But these two disciples, Andrew, and possibly John son of Zebedee, follow Jesus. Verse 37 says they followed Jesus. That's not just a physical act of walking behind Him. It means they changed masters: from being disciples, pupils in John's school, they now enlist in Jesus's school.

Many people become disciples of Jesus through the clear and powerful preaching of the Word. They attend a church and hear a clear sermon. Someone sends them a sermon to listen to online. They perhaps read a sermon, or an article, or an essay, or even a book, where someone clearly teaches what the Bible says about eternity and God and sin and reconciliation. Through that clear and powerful teaching, people come to the Saviour.

I think one of the reasons God uses preaching is because it communicates God's authority. In preaching, God's Word declares truth. It is not a dialogue, a give-and-take between man and his Creator. It is a monologue. God completely monopolises the communication with a declaration of truth, of reality. In preaching, man is not in a democratic conversation with God, man is not sitting at a round table with God, persuading His creator. In preaching, God's Word sits on a podium and tells its listeners the world as God knows it to be.

And that assaults man's pride and intellect. Man wants to style himself as an independent, free thinker. That's why people in the world dislike preaching. It feels offensive to them. They feel talked down to. They feel patronised, or insulted, or demeaned. And that's not an accident or a mistake. It's a design feature of good preaching. Paul says: "[because] the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." (1 Corinthians 1:21). God makes a frontal assault on human pride with preaching, like reading a children's storybook to a group of university professors. Self-important intellectuals will have their pride either hardened or melted through preaching. It will either melt the wax or harden the clay.

By the way, when preachers become embarrassed by preaching, and try to do something else, some kind of sit on a bar-stool and have a friendly chat with the congregation, they defang the tiger of preaching, they fill their magazine with blanks, they turn the sledgehammer of the Word into a paper-mache toy.

Some of you came to faith by sitting under preaching. It was the means God used to stir and grip and persuade your heart. You wouldn't have thought it would work on you that way either. So do not make excuses for preaching, or feel embarrassed by it. God invented communication and knows exactly what He is doing with it. Invite unbelievers to hear preaching. Send them sermons. Sit as often under the preached Word as you can. Don't skip the services of this church. And if the preaching here is not enough to fill your appetite, God has blessed you to live in an internet age where there is no shortage of excellent sermons.

Andrew and the other disciple were moved towards Jesus by the preaching of John. But there was a second means that led them to become disciples.

II. Disciples Are Made Through Personal Observation

³⁸ Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).

Now, as these two disciples of John begin following Jesus, Jesus asks them a natural question: what are you looking for? What are you after? Of course, Jesus knew what they were seeking, but as He often does, He wants us to say it. He wants us to articulate that we are seeking Him: to know Him. They call Him *rabbi*, which is a respectful title that meant Jesus was already recognised as a Teacher, even though He was not an ordained rabbi.

And instead of saying the obvious but awkward idea, we are seeking *You*, they ask, where are you staying?

The answer that Jesus gives is a phrase that comes up twice in this passage: "*Come and see*". He could have answered with something more distant and indirect: I am staying at such and such a place. Right now, I dwell over there.

Instead, Jesus says, come and see for yourselves. Jesus invites them to draw near, and to experience and witness for themselves who He is.

For them to become disciples, Jesus wants them to experience firsthand Jesus at home. And they do. This was not likely Jesus' permanent home, He lived in the north. But it was His lodging at the time. They stayed at Jesus's home from about 4pm, and evidently stayed there overnight, enjoying the hospitality of the Messiah. We don't know all that Jesus said to them, but evidently it was enough to convince them that they had found the Messiah, because in the next verses, they are looking for their relatives to tell them that they have truly, genuinely discovered the Messiah.

Some knowledge only comes by first-hand observation. Jonathan Edwards famously said that you cannot know the taste of honey second-hand. You must taste it yourself. And when it comes to becoming a disciple of Jesus, it is like entering a very close relationship, forming a new friendship, even beginning a marriage. These are not things you can do theoretically. You must experience them.

Becoming a disciple for many people involves coming close enough to observe. What is it that people can observe today? They cannot observe Jesus in the flesh, but they can observe Him present in His people through the Holy Spirit. They can observe how Christians worship and sincerely enjoy God. They can observe lives cleaned up of evil and increasingly becoming purer. They can observe bonds of love and friendship, of genuine affection and compassion, true unselfish patience, care and concern, self-forgetful generosity, sacrificial doling out of time and attention and advice

and money and hospitality. They can observe lives rescued from ruin and self-destruction. They can observe families lived on biblical principles: husbands nourishing and cherishing wives, wives supporting and affirming husbands, children flourishing under nurturing authority.

Some people become disciples because they observe something in a group of genuine Christians that they have not seen anywhere else, and they cannot account for it by any human or worldly explanation. Some of you became believers because of something you observed in a spouse, in a child, in a friend, in this church or in another. You came and you saw for yourself.

Powerful preaching and personal observation brought Andrew and possibly John to embrace Jesus as Messiah. But now this began a chain reaction, and Andrew began making disciples. How he did it shows us the third way disciples are made.

III. Disciples Are Made Through Personal Relationships

⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John *speak*, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

Here we see the next powerful way that disciples are made: personal relationships. Andrew's brother was Simon. He finds Simon, and says, "We have found the Messiah." Now quite likely, they don't yet fully understand what is meant by the term Messiah; most Jews had a fairly unformed and fuzzy idea. And as the other three Gospels show, the disciples' understanding of the meaning of Messiah grew as the months and years went on.

But the point is, Andrew brings his brother Peter. He uses his personal relationship to bring Simon to Jesus. It is what we today call a referral. Person A knows B and C, so he introduces B to C.

In fact, every time Andrew is named in this Gospel, he is bringing someone to Jesus. In chapter 6, Andrew brings the lad with the loaves and fishes to Jesus. In chapter 12, it is Andrew bringing some Greeks who want to see Jesus.

The second incident involving personal relationships involves a disciple whom Jesus personally called, Philip. We'll see how Jesus called him in just a moment, for now, let's leap ahead to verse 44.

⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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." ⁴⁶ And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Andrew and Peter come from the city of Bethsaida, which means House of the Fisherman. This is a small town in the north, on the Lake of Galilee.

Philip finds someone named Nathanael. We don't know much about him at all. Some believe Nathanael is another name for Bartholomew, because in all the lists of the apostles, Philip is always placed with Bartholomew. Chapter 21:2 tells us he was from Cana in Galilee, where Jesus will attend a wedding just a few days from this incident and change water into wine. Cana is in the north, in Galilee, just like Nazareth is, so Nathanael would have known Nazareth.

Just like Andrew had said "We have found the Messiah", so Philip says something pretty similar: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote". That's another way of saying, we have found the Messiah. Who is He? Philip identifies Jesus by His name, His hometown

and his family. Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph. Now, we know that Jesus is the legal son of Joseph, but the biological son of Mary. But John lets the irony stand here in his epistle, because any reader will know that Jesus was far more than the biological son of Joseph.

Nathanael is sceptical about Nazareth. We don't know why; it was such a small town, the very first extra-biblical record of it came from an archaeological dig done in 1962. Perhaps it was its small-town, backwater nature that made Nathanael sceptical that Messiah could come from such a small, insignificant town.

Philip's response is the same thing that Jesus said to the disciples of John: Come and See.

Now both these incidents, Andrew finding Peter, and Philip finding Nathanael illustrate how we usually move on to meet new people, go to new places. It is almost always on the recommendation of someone we trust. We visit a new place to eat because a friend told us to try it. We consider hiring someone because a friend recommended them, or we know them through a shared acquaintance.

Probably most people come to Christ through a personal relationship that tells them about Christ, and then encourages them to come and see.

Just use your family relationship, your friendship, your school-days connection, your business partnership, to say to someone come and see. You don't know Jesus, but you do partly know me. So, to the degree you trust me, come and see.

Your life right now is like a concentric set of circles, like the ripples in a pool when you throw a stone in it. The inner circle is your closest family. The circles out from that is your closest friends, and if you are a Christian, your brothers and sisters in Christ. Next would be extended family, more distant friends. Next would be colleagues and work partners, employees. Next would be casual and old acquaintances. Next would be sometime acquaintances in your neighbourhood, your neighbours, shopkeepers, security guards. Next would be strangers. If you had to do an inventory, you would find that you know a lot of people. A lot of people who you can use your personal connection to refer people to the Saviour. You don't always have to have the words. Sometimes, like Philip, you can just say, "Come and See".

No one can foresee what God will make of the person you bring to Him. You don't think much will happen, but you have no idea.

Andrew brought Peter. Philip brought Nathanael. But what the Lord did with Peter, Nathanael and Philip illustrates the fourth and primary way that people come to be disciples.

IV. Disciples Are Made Through Christ's Personal Call

⁴² And he [Andrew] brought him [Simon] to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).

Here we have Simon being renamed as Cephas, which is the Greek form of Petra, Petra, a Stone. Jesus renames Simon, which is a significant moment. In ancient times, a name stood for the whole person, and summarised your entire personality. For Jesus to rename Simon was first for Jesus to claim ownership of Peter. You can't rename what isn't yours. Second, it is Jesus deciding on Peter's future character and destiny. He will be a rock for the newborn church, a foundation stone. This is nothing less than Jesus personally calling Peter to himself.

We see a second instance of this in verse 43

⁴³ The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me."

Jesus finds Philip. We are not sure if Philip was here in Bethabara, or if this was on the way up north to Galilee, or maybe even in Galilee. Either way, Jesus finds Philip and gives him a direct, personal call: follow me.

The third instance of this is with Nathanael. We have already seen that Philip found Nathanael, referred him to Jesus, but Nathanael was sceptical. So now we see what happened next.

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" 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." ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Jesus uses a play on words. You might remember that the name Israel was given to Jacob, the deceiver. The word Jacob means the heel-catcher, the supplanter. Jacob, in his early life, was all about deceit: lying to Jacob, tricking Esau out of his birthright. But when he wrestled with God, and his name was changed to Israel, he was a different man. So Jesus is saying, Nathanael is an Israelite with no Jacob in him, he is full of integrity and truth and unfeigned piety.

Nathanael asks Jesus how they know each other, and Jesus refers him to some incident under a fig tree. We don't know what this means, but we can only speculate. Perhaps Nathanael had been praying alone under a fig tree once, and poured out his heart to God. Perhaps it was under a fig tree that Nathanael made some act of devotion or commitment. But Jesus references a moment that Nathanael thought was known only to him and God. Nathanael responds by acclaiming that only the Son of God, King of Israel, Messiah could have known that.

Jesus responds with a kind of commendation of his faith. You believe because of this thing. That is just an entree for the meal, that's just a starter. You are going to see a full revelation of the glory of God; you will see a fulfilment of Daniel 7. You will see the equivalent of Jacob's ladder, except it will be with Me, the Messiah.

But the point is, by using the reference to the fig tree, Jesus used something that only Nathanael could have known, and only God could have known. This is intensely personal: this is Jesus calling Nathanael as an individual.

Whether it is powerful preaching, whether it is personal observation, whether it is a personal relationship, in the end, the decisive thing that brings you to Christ is His personal call. One of the terms the New Testament uses for true Christians is "the called".

⁷ To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:7)

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. (Romans 8:28)

³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:30)

⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; (Ephesians 4:4)*

Reams of Scriptures use this term to show that the believer is called. What does that mean? In the Gospel of John, Jesus also calls it being drawn. It is the persuasive work of Christ through the Holy Spirit, pulling you away from the world, separating you from sin, and calling you to Himself. The New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith puts it beautifully. It says this work is done in a way beyond our comprehension “by the power of the Holy Spirit, in connection with divine truth, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel”. God the Spirit uses the Word to change our hearts and minds so that we voluntarily submit to God in repentance and faith. That's the call. And when it works and brings you to salvation, we name it the effectual call, because it was effective, it achieved what it set out to do. When a mother calls the children to come, she wants them to come, and when Christ calls you, He intends for you to come to Him.

If today you have repented of sin and self and believed on the Lord Jesus for life, then that is the result of the personal call of Christ to you. Jesus says, My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me. If you are a Christian, then it was not an audible voice, but it was an inner pressure, and inward persuasion, an unstoppable conviction in your mind that this is true: Jesus is the Saviour, and I need Him.

The one thing you can't do in Heaven is evangelism. But evangelism is not always the same in all people at all times. Sometimes it is exposing people to powerful preaching. Sometimes, it is inviting them to personal observation. Often enough, it is leveraging your personal relationships and inviting them to come and see. Ultimately, it is Christ's personal call that opens the eyes. So, let us go and tell, and invite others to come and see.