

A life-changing relationship

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[0 : 00] It's always interesting, isn't it, to think back on meeting someone for the first time who later turns out to be quite an important person in your life, but you didn't know it at the time.

And you think back to when you first met them. Have you ever done that? Maybe a best friend or an important business partner, or maybe someone even became your husband or wife.

And you think back to when you first met them, and you had no clue what an impact they would make in your life, what they would become to you. Well, I imagine it was much the same for the disciples of Jesus, the first time they met him.

See, they probably didn't have the faintest idea just how this man would end up changing their lives when they first laid eyes on him. And we have the great privilege of having that very first meeting of the disciples with Jesus recorded for us here.

in John. John records it for us. He was there at the time. And his account here in John chapter 1 is different to the other gospel writers when they write about the first interaction with Jesus, when he actually calls them to join him in his mission, right there on the shore of the Lake Galilee.

[1 : 20] They were fishing. They put down their nets. Remember that? Well, John starts even further back with the very first time these men ever met Jesus, further back than when he called them to mission.

And he records for us just how their relationship with Jesus began. And it's an important passage for us this morning, not just historically, so that we can actually understand why it was that the disciples so quickly left their nets and followed Jesus later.

Well, because they already knew him. They already had an interaction with him, as John records. But it's also an important passage for us, because the way that these disciples began their relationship with Jesus is a pattern for how anybody in any age gets to meet Jesus for the first time, to begin a life-changing relationship with him.

And so if you know people who have not met Jesus, which is probably the case, or maybe you yourself have not truly met Jesus, well, then I want to encourage you to pay close attention to this passage to discover just what needs to happen for someone to begin this most important life-changing relationship, the most important relationship you could ever have, or your loved ones could ever have.

How does it start? Well, let's have a look at this passage and see. Now, you'll notice that it all begins with a testimony, firstly. It's striking to note, isn't it, as we read this account of these disciples coming to Jesus, it's striking to note that in almost every case, the faith of these disciples was prepared for by the testimony of someone else.

[3 : 02] Did you notice that? This whole thing begins with John the Baptist's testimony of Jesus. In other words, what John the Baptist had come to discover about Jesus.

That's all a testimony is, by the way. It's sharing what you've come to discover about Jesus, why Jesus is so important in your opinion. That's a testimony. And so John the Baptist is simply sharing his testimony in verse 36 when he tells his two followers, look, the Lamb of God.

And notice, in John's testimony, there's no, I was living a bad life in drugs and prostitution, and then one day I was lying in the gutter and I heard a voice from heaven. No, none of that. Like you might hear today, it's a sensationalized testimonies.

No. In typical John the Baptist fashion, his testimony really has nothing to do with him. And it's got everything to do with Jesus. Because of who he came to realize this man Jesus to be.

The Lamb of God. The one who, as a sacrificial lamb, is going to solve the world's sin problem. And that's what a testimony is. It's a statement of why Jesus is important to you.

[4 : 12] And for John, there's no one more important than the one who can take away sin. And if we're sinners, there should be no one more important to us. And if our loved ones are sinners, and they have to face God one day, the Lamb of God should be the one we want to talk about as often as we can, in testimony to them.

So that they too can realize why he's so important for their life and for their eternity. Anyway, so this all begins with testimony. We see that.

It all begins with John's testimony to these two men. And then, even though they probably didn't quite get what he was saying, I don't know if he even fully grasped what he was saying when he said, Lamb of God.

These two men, we actually discover later in the gospel, it took them quite a while to realize that about Jesus, that he was actually going to take away sin. And how he was going to do that.

But what's interesting here is that they still decide to follow him because of John's testimony. Just because of John's testimony. They figured, you know, they could trust John. They'd been following and listening to John for a while.

[5 : 20] He obviously saw something important in this guy, Jesus. And so out of respect for John, if nothing else, they went after Jesus to find out more. And we see the same thing happening in this passage over and over again.

People come to encounter Jesus for the first time based on the testimony of someone else they already have a relationship with. Verse 41, Peter discovers Jesus how?

Through the testimony of his brother, Andrew, who he already had a relationship with. Verse 45, Nathanael discovers Jesus how? Through the testimony of his friend, Philip. Even though, Nathanael, he's really skeptical.

Did you see that? In the passage, Nathanael's like, what? What are you talking about, Philip? What good can come out of Nazareth? You're talking rubbish. He's really skeptical of what Philip says, and yet he still comes because of his friend's testimony.

That is the power of testimony. And it reminds us as Christians today, when you share your testimony, when you share why Jesus is important with someone else, they don't have to believe what you believe for it still to have an impact on them.

[6 : 31] They just need to see that you believe it and that you take it seriously, seriously enough to tell them about it, seriously enough to risk your reputation to talk about it.

That has an impact on people. When you share Jesus in the workplace and it's awkward and you actually don't feel like you want to do it, the people who see you taking that bold step to talk about Jesus in a world where you just don't talk about that, it'll have an impact on them whether they know it or not.

That is the power of personal testimony. They just need to see that you believe it for them maybe to start taking steps to investigate it for themselves. So here's an example.

When I first convinced Jean, my wife, to appreciate sushi, she wasn't overly keen. She really, you know, she didn't think she would like it.

And yet, you know what? She still tried it. Why? Because I believed that sushi was awesome and so she, you know, she lowered herself to my standard and she tried it and you know what?

[7 : 43] I'm proud to say she is now a true believer and we often, when we can, go out and have some sushi. But you see, the point is it was my testimony which caused her to take those first steps into the wonderful world of sushi.

But that is the power of personal testimony. Even more so in our testimony about Jesus. Yes, in our testimony about foods and things we appreciate and, you know, when we recommend to a friend to watch a movie that we saw, they wouldn't have watched it otherwise but now that their friend has recommended it, they'll try it out, they'll watch it, whatever it might be.

even more so in our testimony about Jesus. Just you sharing what you have discovered can have a profound effect on someone else. And so don't not share the truth of Jesus with someone because you think they won't believe it.

Of course they won't believe it. Not at first but it's because they don't that they need to see all the more that you do and you take it seriously and Jesus is a reality in your life.

And so do they? Do they see that? If you're a believer do your friends and family members and your squash partner and your ringmates do they actually know what you believe about Jesus?

[8 : 56] Do they know why he's important to you? Do they know that to you he is the Lamb of God who takes away sin? Have you testified to them?

Because if they're ever going to meet Jesus for themselves like these men here and if they're ever going to trust him to take away their sin it'll start with the testimony of someone that they already have a relationship with and maybe you're the only Christian they know.

And that's the first thing we realize here in this passage the power of testimony and yet all that said we must also realize that testimony by itself isn't enough.

You know Jean didn't come to realize that sushi was awesome just because I told her. she tried it because I told her but she only came to appreciate it when she experienced it for herself.

And the same applies to believing in Jesus. Even after we've told someone about Jesus they still need to come and see him for themselves if they're going to be convinced. And we often forget this don't we?

[10 : 01] We think no I've told them about Jesus they don't believe so I'm giving up. No. Testimony is just the beginning. They still need secondly to come and see. Because look how the story goes on.

Verse 37 When the two disciples heard him say this they followed Jesus. Turning around Jesus saw them following and asked what do you want?

They said Rabbi which means teacher where are you staying? Come he replied and you will see. In our growth group on Wednesday we were talking about how everybody in the world seems to be looking for something.

You know what I mean? Everybody's seeking something. Nobody's quite happy. Everybody's looking for something. Just as these men were when Jesus turned around and asked them what do you want?

Literally what are you seeking? What are you looking for? That's what he asked them. And they of course thought him to mean in that moment what do you want right now? What are you looking for right now? And they said well we're looking for where you live.

[11 : 05] We want to know where you live. But I think Jesus meant a little more than that when he asked them that question. I think he was saying what are you really looking for?

Deep down inside not just right now but in your life why do you want to come and learn from me at all? What are you seeking? Why are you coming? Well the answer is because they were seeking something which they suspected based on the testimony of John the Baptist could only be found in this mysterious man who they wanted to know where he lives so they could find out more.

And so Jesus says come and see. Not just come and see where I live but come and find out what you're really looking for. And they do.

They go and spend time with Jesus rather than just relying on people's second-hand opinions of him. They experience Jesus Jesus for themselves. Now we don't know John doesn't record for us what Jesus tells them during that time that they spent with him in his home.

But whatever it is we see in verse 41 they come out believing. All because they went and saw for themselves. And again the same happened with Nathaniel.

[12 : 22] Look at from verse 45 he was very skeptical at first. And so what does Philip say when Nathaniel has this skeptical kind of response what does Philip say?

Oh well okay then never mind Nathaniel. Cheers. No. No. All he says look at what he says come and see. And Nathaniel does and Nathaniel also comes to believe who Jesus really is because he came and saw for himself.

Because you know that's the only way skepticism can be overcome. The skepticism of our families and friends when it comes to Jesus. The only way skepticism can be overcome is not by us trying to persuade them or argue with them or show them evidence for the reality of Jesus helpful as that might be but by them coming to experience Jesus for themselves.

That's the only way. The question of course is how. How do they do it? I mean he's not physically living here anymore. We can't go to his house and visit him.

How do people experience Jesus today if that is so necessary for them coming into a relationship with him? Well to answer that we've got to do some work and we've got to jump forward a bit in our passage and look at something strange that Jesus said at the end.

[13 : 43] And so Nathaniel is skeptical as he is he's persuaded to come and see for himself and then even after meeting Jesus he isn't quite convinced until verse 48. Have a look. How do you

know me?

Nathaniel asked. Jesus answered I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you. Then Nathaniel declared Rabbi you are the son of God you're the king of Israel. So we see now Nathaniel comes to believe when he sees Jesus miraculous knowledge of him something that only God could know. We don't quite know where the fig tree was or what Nathaniel was doing maybe praying but only God he knew only God could know that he was there and yet he sees that Jesus knows.

But then Jesus says you think that's impressive? You ain't seen nothing yet. Look at verse 50. Jesus said you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree you will see greater things than that.

He then added very truly I tell you you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man. What on earth is he on about?

[14:46] what is this angels and descending and heaven open and what is he talking about? Well if you know your Old Testament and if you were listening to Alan reading from Genesis earlier you'll realize that he's referring to something in the Old Testament.

He's referring to the patriarch Jacob's vision of a stairway to heaven where God revealed himself to Jacob and showed Jacob effectively in this picture of a stairway to heaven he showed Jacob that he God is going to make a way for people to access him directly.

He's literally going to connect heaven and earth and then he went on to give Jacob this great promise this covenant promise that it's through this relationship that God is establishing through this covenant that God is going to connect earth and heaven.

There's a great promise. Well here Jesus all these these centuries later is saying to Nathanael you're about to see Nathanael that I am that way I'm that stairway to heaven that Jacob envisaged. I Nathanael am where God is revealing himself to people. I am the means by which God is going to establish his covenant with people and connect heaven and earth and you will know that when you see the greater things I'm about to do.

[16:15] That's what he's telling Nathanael. So what greater things is he about to do? Well you've got to read the rest of John to see that because it's what John goes on to record.

This is all chapter 1 is John setting up his gospel. He's giving us a reason to read the rest of it and we come to this point. Jesus promises to do greater things which are going to reveal him as the stairway to heaven and John is effectively saying now you've got to read more to see what those greater things are.

So it's as we read these things in the rest of his gospel and the other gospels that we will see greater things about Jesus than even Nathanael saw that day.

Isn't that amazing? We will see greater things about Jesus in reading these words and in studying them together in growth groups and by coming and listening and by going home and reading for yourself we will see greater things about Jesus than even Nathanael saw when he was standing right in front of him.

In other words, point is, a person doesn't need to physically see Jesus in order to experience him. And if you're a Christian, if you have a relationship with Jesus, you know that to be true.

[17:29] You haven't seen him physically and yet you experience him and you experience a true living relationship. It's not a figment of your imagination. You know that. And the reason is, how is that possible?

Because everything we need to experience about Jesus is written here in the gospel accounts. And that is why God has preserved it. That is why God caused it to be written down.

That is why for 2,000 years God has preserved it perfectly so we can have it in our own language. It's that important. And God has inspired men and women to go take it out.

And God has inspired men and women to translate it into every language under the sun. Because this is the way that we experience Jesus. This is the way we come and see by reading his word. And so I want to speak to you, if you're here this morning, first of all, if you are still seeking and you know you are.

Maybe you'd never admit it, but deep down inside you're not satisfied. You're still seeking something. What are you seeking? What do you want?

[18:31] That's what Jesus would want you to think about this morning. maybe he's turning around to you this morning and saying, what are you seeking? Because whatever it is, to find it, Jesus is

saying, come and see.

Come to me. Come and experience who I really am, because I know you better than you know yourself, and what you're really seeking is me, whether you realize it or not. But don't rely on someone else's second-hand account.

Don't even rely on the words of a preacher. You need to experience Jesus for yourself in the gospel accounts. And so pick up this gospel. For a start, read the gospel of John, and just read, just start reading.

Because there's no substitute for coming and seeing for yourself. And if, on the other hand, you are a believer, and you have a relationship with Christ, and you want your friends and family to see what you've seen, which I hope you do, then realize that won't happen.

They won't see that unless they too come and experience Jesus for themselves. And so your goal should get them to be reading the gospel. That should be your primary goal.

[19 : 45] Not to sit down and argue about faith and God and eternity with them, but to get them reading the gospel for themselves. Maybe offer to read it with them. You'd be surprised how many people are actually curious about what the Bible, the best-selling book in history, actually says, but they've never had a chance to read it because no one's helped them to do it or directed them where to start.

Maybe they just need someone to help. They're curious. More than you know. You know why? Because they're still seeking, and they won't rest until they've found what they're looking for. So get them to come and see.

Get them to come and see what you've seen. Just like Philip did with Nathaniel. Even when Nathaniel was skeptical, all Philip said, his witness, he wasn't a trained theologian. He didn't go to a course on evangelism.

All he did was he said, come and see. And that's all you need to do. But then finally, there's one more factor involved in someone coming to know Jesus. And we see in this passage, because even after someone's heard testimony about him, even after someone comes and sees him and reads about him for themselves, that doesn't automatically result in them believing in him, does it?

Because after all is said and done, to truly believe in Jesus in the end is actually a work of God.

[21 : 06] A work of God. We see that right here. Because what stands out in this passage, it's almost eerie as you read through it, is how Jesus actually knew these men way before they knew him.

Did you notice that? Like Nathaniel, Jesus knew him intimately way before they even met. And look back at what happened when Simon arrived to see Jesus.

Verse 42, Jesus looked at him and said, you are Simon, son of John. This is before they even had introductions. You are Simon, son of John.

You will be called Kephas, which when translated is Peter. See, Jesus already knew Simon. And not only did he know who he was, but who he would become, which is signified by this new name that Jesus gives him.

Jesus knew that Simon would believe and be transformed into a new person. But how? How did he know that would happen for sure?

[22 : 12] Well, the short answer is because Simon had already been chosen by God to believe before time began. he was already known by God.

He didn't come to believe and be saved because he somehow figured out that Jesus was the son of God, but because God chose him due to nothing that he did. And at the right time, God called him to faith.

And the Bible teaches that is true of everyone who believes today. If you're a believer, it's not because you chose to believe. it's because God chose you through nothing you've done before you were born, before you could do anything.

And he knew you by name before you ever knew him, if you are a believer this morning. And he arranged everything that happened in your life to bring you to the point of finding him in Jesus.

Whether by putting you in a particular family who told you about Jesus, or by putting a certain person in your life, or by leading you to join a particular church where you learned about Jesus and experienced him for yourself, God arranged all of that, however it was, if you're a believer, that you came to faith.

[23 : 28] God already arranged that entire path before you were born. And he also arranged everything that is still to happen in your life to make you into the person that he has destined you to be.

And that is sure. He already sees you as that person if you are in Christ. Christ. That is a fact for every believer. And if you truly believe it, it changes everything.

When you know that the God of the universe has set his love upon you and chosen you for eternal life due to nothing that you've done, and that he already sees you, not as you are now, as the person you see in the mirror, but as the person that he's destined you to be, and that he will cause you to be.

And he's already set up all the things that are going to happen in your life to make you that person, whether they're trials, whether they're meeting people, whether they're your involvement in his church on earth, in coming to understand him more through the word, God has already set that all up.

It's already sorted. It's already planned. It's already solid. It's already written because that is the God we serve. And to know that, you know, as I was meditating on that this week, to know these things, that if you're a believer, you know God has already set his love upon you, he already knows you.

[24 : 52] And to know that is to know a peace and a joy and a security that you can never find anywhere else in this world. And so do you know that this morning?

Have you come to believe who Jesus really is? because if you have, if you can say with assurance, you believe that, you believe him to be the son of God, the lamb of God, then all of this is true of you.

That means God knew you and chose you because belief is a miracle. It's a gift. It's not something that you chose to do. It's something that God gave you. If you believe, just realize what a great gift that is and thank and worship God through what he's done to bring you to that point.

But what if you don't? What if you don't believe in Jesus? What if you're sitting here this morning and you say, well, I can't say that of myself. What if you're still seeking?

Does that mean that God hasn't chosen you? No, not at all. In fact, the very fact that you're here this morning or listening to this recording is likely because even now God is calling you to find him in the person of Jesus like he did for these first disciples.

[26 : 01] And so all I want to say to you is come and see. Come and find what you're looking for. As you read through the gospel accounts over the coming weeks, as we go further into John at church, you never know.

You may find yourself like these disciples did, truly meeting God for the very first time. And I pray that that'll be the case for you. Let's pray. Yes, Lord, we do worship you this morning.

We thank you for this reminder that for those who believe, you knew them before they ever knew you. That you chose us to believe.

That you set up everything for us to come and know about Jesus. Lord, we worship you for your love that you've set upon your people. And we do pray that as we are about to celebrate communion, that as believers we would in our hearts just overflow with joy that we do believe, that you have called us to believe.

I also pray for anyone here this morning who is still seeking you, who has not yet found you in real personal relationship. I ask, Lord, that you would help them to come and see, that you would help them to open a Bible and read through John.

[27 : 17] And through it, as they read, you by your Holy Spirit would speak into their very hearts. They would hear your voice people who are going to know Jesus for themselves. Thank you that you've done everything for us to be saved, for us to have our sins taken away through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

We pray, Lord, that as we go out into a new week, you would help us to testify to that, to those around us. And that through our testimony, you would bring others to discover what we've discovered.

We pray this all through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.