

The First Disciples of Jesus (John 1:43-1:51)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Recap from Previous Lessons

- a. In previous lessons we discussed the three questions John the Baptist was asked:
 - i. “Are you the Christ?”, whose coming was prophesied by David, Nathan and others in **2 Samuel 7**, **Psalm 2**, etc.
 - ii. “Are you Elijah?”, as prophesied in **Malachi**.
 - iii. “Are you the Prophet?”, as prophesied in **Deuteronomy 18:15-18** by Moses.
- b. John then refers to Jesus as “the Lamb of God”, recalling the Passover Lamb of **Exodus 12** as well as the Suffering Servant of **Isaiah 52-53**, of whom it was said: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before his shearers, so He opens not His mouth.” (**Isaiah 53:7**, OSB, LXX)
 - i. Two of John the Baptist’s disciples, upon hearing this statement by John, proceed to follow Jesus instead of John. Why?
 1. John the Baptist had identified himself as the one identified in **Isaiah 40**, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” (**Isaiah 40:3**, NKJV)
 2. John identified Jesus as the one identified in **Isaiah 52-53!** Therefore, He is the One that John the Baptist came to prepare the way for.
 - ii. As you can see, understanding the Old Testament will help you understand the New Testament much better!

II. John “the Baptizer”

- a. Pharisees asked him a question that still puzzles me:
 - i. “Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, saying, ‘Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’” (**John 1:24-25**, NKJV)
 - ii. John does not answer their question.

- iii. However, it suggests that the Pharisees, who knew the Hebrew Scriptures, may have expected that baptizing people would be a sign of the Messiah or of Elijah or of the Prophet.
- iv. **Question:** Do you have any idea what in the Old Testament might have suggested that the one to come would be immersing people in water? Or that someone to come would usher in a message of repentance along with a general “baptism for the remission of sins”?
- v. **Possible answers:** I am not sure about the correct answer to this question. However, here are some Scriptures from the Old Testament that come to mind:
 - 1. “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean. Put away the evils from your souls before My eyes. Cease from your evils. Learn to do good. Seek judgment and redeem the wronged. Defend the orphan and justify the widow. Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘although your sins are like crimson, I shall make them white like snow, and although they are scarlet, I shall make them white like wool.” (Isaiah 1:16-18, OSB, LXX)
 - 2. “In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.” (Zechariah 13:1, NKJV)
 - a. Note that this reference to the fountain is in the Masoretic Text but not in the Septuagint (LXX).
 - 3. “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap.” (Malachi 3:1-2, NKJV)
 - a. Keep in mind that **Malachi 3-4** is the only place in Scriptures that speaks directly about the coming of Elijah preceding the coming of the Lord.
 - b. Perhaps those waiting for the coming of Elijah and the Lord, in meditating on the passages from the end of Malachi, saw John baptizing people and calling them to radical repentance as the “soap + water” in a spiritual laundry operation foretold by **Malachi**?
 - 4. Bottom line: I don’t know. However, it appears that there was some reason for the expectation that *baptizing/washing people* was associated with *the one who was to come*.

- b. John the Baptist uses another puzzling phrase to explain who Jesus is.
- i. John speaks in a riddle: “This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’” (**John 1:30**, NKJV)
 1. We know from **Luke 1** that John was born before Jesus.
 2. We also know from **Mark 1** that John’s ministry began prior to the ministry of Jesus.
 3. Yet the Word of God (Who became flesh in Jesus), was present “*in the beginning*”, and through Him all things were created (**John 1:1-3**).
 - ii. Other, similar “before and after” riddles in Scripture used to express the nature of the Son of God include:
 1. Jesus is both the *son of David* and the *Lord of David* (**Matthew 22:41-46**)
 2. Jesus says in the Book of Revelation, “I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.” (**Revelation 22:16**, NKJV)
 - a. (This points back to the prophecy in **Isaiah 11:1**)
 - iii. John the Baptist knew for certain that Jesus was the one sent, based on what happened when he baptized Jesus.
 1. John the Baptist tells his disciples what happened when Jesus was baptized.
- c. How did John know for certain that Jesus was the One he was waiting for?
- i. “And John bore witness, saying, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.’” (**John 1:32-34**, NKJV)
 - ii. This is clearly a reference to what happened when Jesus was baptized. (Read **Matthew 3:13-17**)
 1. The account of Jesus being baptized by John is mentioned in all four gospels.
 2. John felt unworthy to be baptizing Jesus.
 3. John’s baptism was “a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” (**Mark 1:4**) However, we know that Jesus was without sin. (**Hebrews 4:15**) So why did He need to be baptized?

4. Jesus insisted that He must be baptized “to fulfill all righteousness”. (**Matthew 3:15**)
 - a. **Hebrews chapters 2-5** explains that Jesus, “the captain of our salvation”, had to be made like us in every way. He took on flesh and blood, was tempted in every way just as we are, can sympathize with our weaknesses, learned obedience and was perfected through suffering. He showed us the way, went before us and provides the pattern that we are called to follow. He can relate to what we are facing and is able to intercede for us to the Father. He had to be baptized, as a part of his mission.
- iii. Therefore, I see two reasons why Jesus had to be baptized by John, “to fulfill all righteousness”.
 1. At Jesus’ baptism, the descent of the Spirit and voice of the Father confirmed to John the Baptist that Jesus was indeed the One John had been preparing the way for.
 2. Jesus provided the pattern for us to follow. He showed us the way in all ways, including by being baptized. The Holy Spirit came down upon Him at His baptism, as we also receive the Spirit when we are baptized. (**Acts 2:38**).

III. Andrew Introduces His Brother Simon (Peter) to Jesus (Read **John 1:35-42**)

- a. Andrew was one of the two disciples of John the Baptist who then proceeds to follow Jesus.
- b. Andrew tells his brother Simon, “We have found the Messiah.”
- c. We learn that the words *Messiah* and *Christ* mean the same thing, in different languages (*Christ*’ being in Greek).
- d. Jesus gives Simon a new name: Peter (stone, or rock)
 - i. Significance of name changes in Scripture
 1. Abram changed to Abraham (father of many) and Sarai to Sarah in **Genesis 17**.
 2. Jacob changed to Israel (God prevails) in **Genesis 32** after wrestling all night with the Lord.
 3. Name of Hoshea the son of Nun, assistant of Moses and one of the two faithful spies sent out (of 12), was changed to Joshua (= *Jesus* in Greek, as in the LXX) in **Numbers 13**.
 4. Saul of Tarsus would later have his name changed to Paul.
 - ii. Why did Jesus change Simon’s name to Peter (*‘stone’* or *‘rock’*)?
- e. Significance of Peter in the church (Read **Matthew 16:13-19**)

- i. **Question:** Who or what is “the rock” referring to, upon which Jesus will build His church?
- ii. **Possible Answers:**
 1. *Peter himself* (the man).
 2. The *profession of faith* that Peter had just made, specifically when he stated, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
 3. Something else? (I can’t think of anything.)
- iii. This question continues to have great significance today, related to claims made by the Roman Catholic Church.
 1. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the *rock* on which the church was to be built is *Peter himself*.
 - a. Note that there are about 1.2 billion Roman Catholics in the world.
 - b. In the U.S., about 25% of the population identifies as Roman Catholic; the state with the highest percentage happens to be our own state of Massachusetts (44%).
 2. Peter has great authority. Catholics make the points:
 - a. Peter was given “the keys to the kingdom”
 - b. Whatever *Peter* binds on earth will be bound in heaven...
 3. THEN, the Roman Catholic Church assert that this authority given to Peter *continued on in other men*, after Peter’s death.
 - a. According to some historical accounts (but not mentioned in Scripture) Peter went to Rome, where he founded and led the church there. Therefore, Peter was considered bishop of Rome.
 - b. Peter was martyred in Rome, according to church history.
 - c. Roman Catholics assert that Peter’s authority over the entire church worldwide continued through his successors, who would be the subsequent bishops of Rome.
 - d. The “*bishop of Rome*” = *the Pope* of the Roman Catholic church.
 4. How the Roman Catholic Church views the church and the Bible, in a nutshell (a summary of *their reasoning*):
 - a. Jesus did not write a book; He founded a church.

- b. The church gave us the Bible. Therefore, the church has authority to determine what is in the Bible, and how it should be properly interpreted.
 - c. *Which church?* The one Jesus himself founded; the one led by the *successor to Peter*.
 - d. The Holy Spirit continues to guide that church into more and more truth. Therefore, it is able to authoritatively teach things today that were unknown to the apostles and the early church.
 - e. Personal note: Growing up in the Roman Catholic church, when challenged by my Protestant friends, I thought the most important verse in Scripture was **Matthew 16:18**. I really did not need to know the Bible; just follow what the Roman Catholic church taught! (This is one of the reasons why so many Roman Catholics today are very weak in personal study of the Scriptures.)
5. There are several instances in Scripture where Jesus used expressions of speech that his hearers could take in more than one way.
- a. In **John 2:19** Jesus said, “Destroy *this temple*, and in three days I will raise it up.” At the time, everyone assumed He was speaking literally about the temple building he was standing near. Only later did they understand that He was using the term “temple” to refer to His body which later would be resurrected from the dead.
 - b. In **John 11**, Jesus says Lazarus is ‘sleeping’. Jesus uses that term figuratively (confusing his hearers in the process) to mean Lazarus is *dead*.
6. Protestants have strongly reacted against the Roman Catholic claims related to Peter.
- a. Consequently, they tend to minimize Peter. They generally feel obligated to argue that Peter *must not* be the rock Jesus was referring to (perhaps thinking that if Peter is the rock, they would need to become Roman Catholics, follow the Pope, etc.).
- iv. But what if Peter was the rock Jesus was referring to? Would that logically lead us to the modern Roman Catholic Church, the authority of the Pope over all Christians, etc.? Not necessarily! Let us consider:

1. Clearly, it seems to me, there was *some reason* that Jesus changed Peter's name to 'rock' or 'stone'.
2. Also, Jesus said Peter would hold the keys to the kingdom, and whatever he bound or loosed... (However, He applies the second part of that to many disciples in **Matthew 18:18**)
 - a. Peter was destined to play a crucial role. *Peter was the one* who preached at Pentecost and starting the church. Read **Acts 2:14; 2:36-40**
 - b. *Peter was the one* who opened the gates to the Gentiles in **Acts 10** starting with the household of Cornelius. Read **Acts 10:34; 44-48; 11:15-18; 15:6-11**. Peter played a central role in showing that Gentiles could come into the church without first becoming Jews, and without being required to follow all the Law of Moses.
3. On the other hand, *let us also consider* what Jesus said to Peter in **Matthew 16:21-23**!
 - a. When I was in the Roman Catholic church, I don't recall hearing much about *this* passage regarding Peter!
 - b. "Get behind me Satan!" Peter had the things of the man in mind, not the things of God.
4. Whether you hold the rock of **Matthew 16:18** to be Peter the man, or to be his profession of faith, logically I cannot get to the bishop of Rome / Roman Catholic church explanation. Many links fail in that proposed logical chain (especially attempting to extend that authority to subsequent bishops of Rome, several of whom were totally corrupt).
 - a. Even if Peter (himself) was "the rock on which the church was built", Peter is long dead now.
 - b. He did his job, played his crucial role, and even left behind great messages in the Book of Acts and in his two letters, to guide us forward.
 - c. He delivered God's plan of salvation and opened up the gates of the kingdom to the Jews first, and then later to all of us Gentiles.
 - d. There is NOTHING in Scripture regarding any successor to Peter, much less about such a successor being located in the future in Rome!
 - e. So regardless of whether you personally hold Peter the man, or his profession of faith in Matthew 16 to be "the rock on which the church is built", it does not logically

lead to the Papacy and the Roman Catholic Church that developed later.

IV. Conversion of Nathanael (Read **John 1:43-51**)

- a. Nathanael was skeptical; he even denigrated Nazareth, the town Jesus grew up in!
- b. However, Nathanael was willing to check it out for himself. He was a truth-seeker who needed to see evidence.
- c. Nathanael was convinced when he saw that Jesus had supernatural ability to see where Nathanael was before, as well to know what was in Nathanael's heart. He immediately recognizes Jesus as the Son of God and king of Israel, the one promised in **Psalm 2** and **2 Samuel 7**.
- d. Jesus praises Nathanael as "a true Israelite in whom is *no deceit*."
 - i. But wait: didn't Jesus know that we are all deceitful and totally depraved?
 - ii. Read what Paul said, in **Romans 3:10-18**
 1. No one seeks God, no one is righteous, all are corrupt, all deceitful.
 2. Word for "deceit" used by Paul in **Romans 3:13** (where Paul quotes from **Psalm 5:10** in the LXX) is same word used in **John 1**, when Jesus said there was no "deceit" in Nathanael!
 3. How do we resolve this apparent contradiction?
 4. Jesus clearly rejected modern Calvinist doctrine of "total depravity".
 - a. **Matthew 5:19-20** (unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees...)
 - b. **Matthew 10:11-15** (look for a *worthy* person, and stay with them)
 - c. **Matthew 10:40-42** ("He who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.")
 - d. **Matthew 13:16-17** ("Many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see.")
 - e. **Matthew 23:29-35** (Jesus said that the blood of all the righteous would come upon the wicked scribes and Pharisees)
 - f. **Luke 8:15** (The fourth soil in Jesus' parable is those "*with a noble and good heart*" who accept the word of God, keep it and bear fruit)

5. Jesus believed there were worthy, honest, good hearted people that were seeking God – Nathaniel being one of them!
 6. We must understand Paul in context of Jesus (not the other way around!)
 7. Consider also what Paul says in **Romans 2:7**.
 8. In **Romans**, Paul was addressing *two groups of people*: the Jews versus the Gentiles. He was explaining to the Jews that they have no business looking down on the Gentiles. That their righteousness would not come from having received the law of Moses.
- iii. **Application for us:** There are, in fact, honest people out there, who are skeptical and need to be shown evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. There are people that the Scriptures refer to as ‘righteous’ people (yet *not* flawless and *not* without any sin) who are honest. God appreciates that; He wants us to find them and persuade them to believe, repent and become Christians!
- e. Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see “heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”
- i. “Son of Man”
 1. “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.” (**Daniel 7:13**, NKJV)
 - ii. Angels of God ascending and descending
 1. Read **Genesis 28:10-12; 16-17**
 - a. Jesus is the stairway or ladder connecting heaven and earth. He is the gateway to heaven. He provides the way for God’s blessings to come down to us, and the mediator connecting us to God.
 2. There are so many ways to describe Jesus. He is *the* Great Prophet, the King, the Christ, the Son of God. He is also the Stairway/Ladder to heaven: the One who connects us with all the blessings of God!