

Message 42 -- JOHN 1:43-51

43 The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.

51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

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This afternoon, I want to discuss four points that come out of this passage:

Point 1: We are called to follow Jesus.

Point 2: Our first response may be doubt and skepticism.

Point 3: Honestly consider the evidence and God will reveal the truth.

Point 4: God provides great things when we yield to the truth

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Point 1: We are called to follow Jesus.

43 The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Now, in order to follow Jesus, we first need to trust Him.

I have a friend who took his little daughter for a walk a while ago. They went for a long walk, outside their little cul-de-sac out on the big, busy street, around some corners. After they had walked for some time, he asked his daughter if she knew where she was.

She said, "No, Daddy."

Then he asked her, "Aren't you afraid?"

Her response was revealing. This little girl said, "No, Daddy, 'cause I'm with you, and you know the way to go."

What love! What trust! If only we could learn to trust God that way. We need to love God enough to say, "I don't know where I'm at, I don't know where I'm going, but it's OK, because I'm with YOU, Lord, and YOU know the way!"

And then we need to follow wherever He leads even if the way seems scary.

One dark night a man was walking down an unfamiliar path. On either side was a deep ravine. Suddenly he stepped into space and began to fall. Thinking he was falling to certain death, he began flailing his arms and legs, clutching for anything he could get his hands on. He was able to grasp a bush along the side, and he held on for dear life. The next several hours were non-stop agony. His body became numb. At last in weakness and despair, he let go and dropped -- six inches to the bottom of the ditch. Think of the needless torment he experienced because of his fear of the unknown.

Think of the needless torment to our own souls because of our fear of the unknown, because of our refusal to let go and let God.

But, most of all, we need to follow HIM! And HE tells us to begin by consulting Him and His word for us.

Gary Paulsen's book Hatchet is a novel for young people that tells of thirteen-year-old Brian Robeson.

The story begins when the small, single-engine plane in which Brian is a passenger crashes into a secluded lake in the Canadian wilderness. After forty-five days of an arduous struggle for

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life, he spots the tail of the plane bobbing on the surface of the lake.

That night he has an idea. Up until now, the plane has been completely submerged, and he has not had a thought about recovering anything out from it. But now that a small part of the plane is visible, Brian recalls the survival pack inside. "Oh, if I could get at the survival pack," he thinks. It probably has food and knives and matches. It might have a sleeping bag and fishing gear." He determines that, come morning, he will find a way to get to the plane.

Rising early, he walks to the lake. He has been stranded now for a month-and-a-half, and he has learned many survival skills, some of them the hard way. He has learned to do things like gathering firewood and food and other essentials early in the day.

Standing now at the edge of the lake, he sees fish swimming about. The lake has been one of his sources of food. He also sees the tail of the plane. On it, perhaps, are the very tools and supplies that will make his life easier.

Here is a direct quote from the book:

"He fought... to get on the plane project and remembered... what he had learned. First food, because food made strength; first food, then thought, then action."

It is the same in spiritual survival. There are so many things to do, so many urgent tasks at hand, so many of them religious or spiritual or whatever. The temptation is to get on with them, to displace prayer and time in the Word with busy-ness for God. But what Brian learned in the wilderness is true for the life of faith as well: it is food first, because food gives strength. First food, then thought, then action.

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Point 2: Our first response may be doubt and skepticism.

46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

If we let them, our own doubts will overcome us and destroy us.

Once upon a time there was a man who thought he was dead. His concerned wife and friends sent him to the friendly neighborhood

psychiatrist. The psychiatrist determined to cure him by convincing him of one fact that contradicted his belief that he was dead. The fact that the psychiatrist decided to use was the simple truth that dead men do not bleed. He put his patient to work reading medical texts, observing autopsies, etc.

After weeks of effort the patient finally said, "All right, all right! You've convinced me. Dead men do not bleed."

Whereupon the psychiatrist stuck him in the arm with a needle, and the blood flowed. The man looked down with a contorted ashen face and cried: "...Dead men bleed after all!"

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Point 3: Honestly consider the evidence and God will reveal the truth.

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

Despite our doubts, we need to consider God's word carefully, and without trying to deceive ourselves by making light of it.

Luther E. Smith is professor of church and community at Emory University's Candler School of Theology. He had this to say in a speech to students about living honestly:

"Faking it for a class session is one thing. But it is so easy to find ourselves making faking it a lifestyle. We fake it with others. We fake it with ourselves. We fake it with God. This summer I saw a bumper sticker that said: 'Jesus is coming. Look busy!'"

At the same time, we shouldn't think that God's truth is too difficult for us to understand. If we yield to Him, His Spirit will take us past the seeming complexity into the simplicity of His truth.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went on a camping trip. As they lay down for the night, Holmes said, "Watson, look up into the sky and tell me what you see."

Watson looked up and said, "I see millions and millions of stars."

Holmes asked, "And what does that tell you?"

Watson thoughtfully answered, "Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Theologically, it tells me that God is great, and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, it tells me that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. What does it tell you, Holmes?"

Holmes deduced, "Someone stole our tent!"

In the study of logic, there is one significant difference between a valid argument and a sound argument: the truth! Both arguments may have conclusions that consistently follow from the premises of the arguments. But a valid argument does not have to contain premises--or assumptions--that are true. In ancient Greece, there were philosophers called sophists who could take either side of an argument and present a logical conclusion. These ancient sophists--similar to many modern-day lawyers--took less pride in knowing the truth as they did in knowing how to win debates.

Those who oppose God may have convincing arguments for their ungodly conclusions. Satan, himself may even offer convincing arguments for us to yield to our own fleshly desires, the world's way of thinking, and even that which clearly opposes God. But don't get fooled by valid arguments alone. On their face they make sense. But look carefully at each supporting premise or assumption of the argument, and ask the question: "Is this true?" Compare it to "Thus saith the Lord" and ask the question again: "Is this true?" The precious truth of God's Holy Word will determine whether the argument is simply VALID or if the argument is also SOUND. And then act accordingly.

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Point 4: God provides great things when we yield to the truth

50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.

51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

God has things planned for us in Heaven which are greater than anything we can imagine. But we don't have to wait until we get to Heaven.

Corrie ten Boom was a great Christian leader whose story, The Hiding Place, is well known, however not many know of her equally courageous nephew, Peter van Woerden. During the days of Nazi occupation in Holland, Peter transported Jewish children under the cover of darkness from their home in Harlem to other secret hiding places where they were saved from the Nazis. He was eventually caught and spent several months in prison.

After the war, he and his musical family traveled throughout Israel, singing and witnessing for the Lord. When he had a massive heart attack, they rushed him to Haddasah Hospital in Jerusalem. The doctor on call that day skillfully saved his life.

After he recuperated, Peter expressed his gratitude to the medical staff. When they discussed the Holocaust, the doctor suddenly burst into tears. So did Peter. For as they compared notes, the doctor told Peter that he was one of those children Peter had rescued. Now, years later, their paths had providentially crossed, and one of those whom Peter had saved from extinction was there to save him.

Scripture reminds us to, "cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." "Our labor is not in vain in the Lord."

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So, once again, John 1:43-51 has these four points for us this afternoon:

Point 1: We are called to follow Jesus.

Point 2: Our first response may be doubt and skepticism.

Point 3: Honestly consider the evidence and God will reveal the truth.

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Hallelujah... Amen!

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