

## **The Call**

**I Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:43-51**

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One of the Old Testament stories I remember from my childhood is the call of Samuel. I think I connected with this story because Samuel was a child too. It seemed that all the other Bible stories were about grown-ups. Here was a story about a boy, and he was the hero. I could see young Samuel assisting the aged priest Eli, who was nearly blind. I could picture Samuel lying on a cot in the dark, mysterious temple of the Jews. A burning torch provided just enough light to make it a bit eerie. The Ark of the Covenant was nearby. I could imagine Samuel being awakened by a voice in the night calling his name, "Samuel, Samuel."

Thinking that Eli was calling him, I could see Samuel rising from his cot and running dutifully to Eli's side and saying, "Here am I."

But Eli said that he hadn't called Samuel and that he needed to go back to bed.

This happened again and then again. Three times Samuel heard his name called, and each time he ran to Eli's room. On the third time, however, the wise priest, Eli, perceived what was happening. Samuel was being called all right but not by Eli. Notice the "blind" priest "saw" that God was calling the boy. He told Samuel to go back to bed, and when he heard the voice again to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Samuel went back to his cot in the dark, mysterious sanctuary, and he soon heard his name once again, "Samuel, Samuel." This time the boy responded as he was instructed, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Indeed, it was God, and God had a message for young Samuel. God told him that God was about to do something so great in Israel that it would make the ears of everyone who heard about it tingle. Unfortunately it was bad news for Eli and his family, but it was good news for the people of Israel. This memorable story of Samuel's call ends with these affirming words: "As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the

ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.”

As an adult I still have appreciation for the call of Samuel, but now I have even greater appreciation for the way Jesus expanded the idea of a call from God. In the time of Samuel, God’s call was not offered to just anyone. Only a special order of priests and prophets, almost always men, received God’s call. But with Jesus everything changed. Jesus didn’t call anyone to be a priest or a prophet. Instead, he called *everyone* to be a disciple. And Jesus didn’t call only men. Mary and her sister Martha, Mary Magdalene, and other women heard and responded to the simple call of Jesus: follow me.

In our text from John, Philip and Nathanael hear and respond to that simple call of Jesus. Interestingly, John has been tracking Jesus’ activities by counting the days. In verse twenty-nine, for example, he says “the next day he saw Jesus coming.” Then in verse thirty-five, he does it again, “The next day again John was standing...” Our text for today opens this way: “The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee.” John is tracking his activities day-by-day. In other words, this experience with Philip and Nathanael appears to be just another day. Nothing special. Just like the ones before it. It was just another day. But wait till you see what happens.

John says that on this ordinary day Jesus “found” Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Notice that Jesus didn’t simply “see” Philip or “come upon” Philip or “approach” him. He “found” him, the text says, suggesting that Jesus deliberately sought Philip. According to John, Philip was so affected by this encounter with Jesus that he did become a follower. Not only did he commit to follow Jesus; he also went to find his friend Nathanael. Now, I like this brief exchange between Philip and Nathanael. He told Nathanael that they had “found” the Messiah. He was a man from Nazareth named Jesus, Philip said. Nathanael, the skeptic, responded, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

It was a rebuke. That was Nathanael’s way of saying, “Back off, Philip! I’m not going there with you, Philip.” I love the way Philip responded. He didn’t try to convince Nathanael. No arm-twisting. No four proofs of the Messiah’s existence. He said simply, “Come and see.”

And apparently he did. John says that Jesus saw Nathanael coming. They too had a brief interaction, and Nathanael, the skeptic, made this confession, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

What we have in our scripture lessons for today are different experiences of the call from God. Samuel, a child, was being groomed for such a call. From the day of his birth, his mother, Hannah, gave him to God. He was destined to become a prophet. Philip and Nathanael, on the other hand, were adults and unlikely candidates for a call. They were not groomed for it and did not belong to a priestly tribe. They were two ordinary men on an ordinary day. But God chose each of them and called them to do the work of the Kingdom of God.

Now, I want to ask you a question. Have any of you received a call from God? Your response may be, “No, that’s for preachers and others who go into ordained ministry.” If that’s your response, I would say that you’re thinking more from an Old Testament perspective than from a New Testament perspective. It is true that in the Old Testament only certain ones were called, and almost always they were men. But in the New Testament it really did change. Jesus showed absolutely no interest in priests and prophets. His concern was disciples. He called ordinary men and women to follow him, to hear and understand his way and then to adopt it as their own. Philip and Nathanael did. So did Mary and Martha. And Paul and Lydia. And Barnabas and Phoebe. They heard the simple call of Jesus, follow me, responded, and God used them to do the work of the Kingdom of God.

Today we call this discipleship, responding to the call of God in our lives and following Jesus in whatever way he is leading us. Embedded in this text from John are some important characteristics of this Christian discipleship. Let me identify a few.

First, the New Testament makes no distinction between the call to faith and the call to discipleship. If you were called into faith, you were called to be a disciple of Jesus. There were only twelve apostles, but there were hundreds of disciples. I hope you’ve noticed that we try to say that every Sunday on the back of our worship guide. There is a list of our ministerial staff, the ordained clergy. Just above our names is this statement, “Since God’s call to salvation is simultaneously a call to mission, every follower of Jesus Christ is a minister. Each member of Weatherly Heights Baptist Church is, therefore, a serving minister.” That is good New

Testament theology. Every one of us is called to be a disciple, so let us all be the best ministers we can be.

Second, notice that the call to discipleship was not really complicated. For Philip, it was two words, “Follow me.” For Nathanael it was three words, “Come and see.” Discipleship in the New Testament was defined in terms of a relationship, rather than in intellectual or emotional terms. Discipleship was about being with Jesus and doing the work he did, valuing what he valued. It doesn’t have to be complicated with abstract theories and excessive emotion. Cultivate a relationship with Jesus through his teachings, so that you too are doing what he did and valuing what he valued.

Third, in the New Testament Jesus sought and found his followers. It may have happened in the middle of an ordinary day with not much happening. But they were found by Jesus. So be aware that you are being sought. You may feel it, or, like young Samuel, even hear it. You may be quick to respond, as he did. Or you may be a skeptic, like Nathanael. But be aware that you are being sought, and you will be found.

Fourth and last, there is a cost involved. Dietrich Bonhoefer used to call it the cost of discipleship. It was his disdain for easy Christianity and “cheap grace.” Philip, Nathanael, Paul, Lydia: it cost each of them to follow Jesus. Loving one’s enemies, blessing those who curse you, going the second mile for an oppressor: be assured that there is a cost. Professor Dallas Willard, though, gives us another perspective. He says that there is also the cost of non-discipleship, the cost of being “found” and saying “no.” The cost of non-discipleship, he says, is far greater. It is measured in terms of what we will fail to be and what we will fail to do. What good thing or even great thing will not be done if we say “no”? (From *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, quoted in *Devotional Classics*, p. 16)

Like most of you I was amazed at the rescue of the passengers of U. S. Airways Flight 1549. It made an emergency landing on the Hudson River this past Thursday. Apparently the pilot performed his duties in heroic form. Just before they hit the water, he told the passengers to brace for impact. All braced for the worst. One passenger turned on his cell phone, so his body could be found with its GPS tracking system. Miraculously all 155 passengers and crew survived. Later a passenger named Brad Wentzell said, “We all have a second chance in life.”

Imagine a second chance in life. To be more fully what we want to be and to do more completely what we want to do. It could begin right now on just an ordinary day. You are being sought, and you will be found. Listen for the call. You are being sought for something great. If you don't believe it, just come and see.

### Closing Prayer

Lord, we listen, either skeptically or eagerly. Call our names because we long to be part of something great. Amen.