

From Simon to Peter #04 - 1st Impressions Confirmed #1

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores how Jesus' early interactions with Simon Peter, Nathanael, and Nicodemus confirm His divine knowledge and transformative power in their lives.

Duration: 29:04

Scripture: John 1:45-51, John 2:23 - 3:2, John 3:16, John 4:1-26, John 4:39-42, John 4:46-54

Topics: "Simon to Peter"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the first four chapters of the Gospel of John, which serve to prove that Jesus truly knew Simon Peter. The speaker emphasizes that Jesus not only knew Peter, but also had the power and grace to transform him. The sermon highlights three illustrations of Jesus' ability to know others, with the first being Nathaniel. Jesus praises Nathaniel as an Israelite without deceit, revealing his true character and heart.

Transcript

Well now, we return again this morning to our main theme in these morning hours, from Simon to Peter. And it's going to be quite a time really before we arrive at Peter. We're on the way.

The aspect of the theme that we are going to consider this morning, we have billed as early confirmations of the Saviour's claims. Early confirmations of the Saviour's claims. The claims of the Lord Jesus Christ were breathtaking.

There is no question about that. No one will dispute that fact. But so also was his entire life and ministry.

There was no other life like his. There was no other birth like his. There was no other life, there was no other death, and certainly there was no other resurrection and ascension.

There were no others. And there will be none. It's most remarkable, as you read the Scriptures, to see how the wheels of providence move in due course from one claim that he makes, to a corresponding confirmation of its truth.

May I suggest that you read the New Testament from time to time with this in view. You notice our Lord Jesus Christ making a claim. And you may be tempted to say to yourself in the quietness of your hearts,

this sounds too good to be true.

Now we might not give expression to our doubts, but in our hearts we might be tempted to think like that. But follow the reading. Pursue the paths of the Saviour.

Keep close to him. And it is--it's uncanny. It is altogether incredible, were it not so evidently true, that as you pursue the footmarks of the Lord Jesus Christ, you see that each claim is substantiated, proved to be true and accurate.

And even when you come to the end of his life and see how his resurrection seals the hole that has gone before, you have to say, yes the resurrection proves much. But there is so very much in him still to know, still to discover, still to discover for ourselves. Now Simon Peter was told by our Lord Jesus Christ that he would be a different man.

Standing before the Saviour, Jesus said to him, Sir you are Simon, son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas, which being interpreted is Petros or a stone, a rock. Those words sounded almost too good to be true.

Did the person who thus spoke to Simon really know him? Did the Lord Jesus Christ know the man in front of him? Or was this a sheer guess? Now you will appreciate, I'm quite sure, sooner or later Simon Peter must have asked himself this question. He said to me that I would become a new man and bear a new name corresponding to my new nature and my new character. But what did he know about me? The first four chapters in John's gospel appear almost to be a commentary upon what happened there in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is, may I use the word again, almost uncanny. These first four chapters in John's gospel serve, among other things, to prove first of all to Simon Peter that the Lord Jesus really knew him. And then, in the second place, to prove that the same Lord who knew him and understood the intricacies of his nature, was also well able to cope, even with a man like Simon.

That he had not only wisdom and understanding, but he had power and grace to transform the man whom he had thus addressed. Now I think it is necessary for us simply to mention at this point that the first four chapters of John's gospel refer to incidents in the life of our Lord which really come before those that we encounter in the other three gospels. Speaking historically, we must place the first four chapters of John's gospel before the beginning of our Lord's public ministry as recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Therefore, the events recorded in John 1 to 4 come fairly soon after the first interview of Jesus with Peter, or Peter with Jesus. And it is against that background that I want to come today to one thread to which I've already mentioned. Namely, the confirmation to Simon of our Lord's knowledge of him, of our Lord's understanding of him.

Now before we come to that, let me put this in a personal way. Why is this so important? Well, I would put it like this. Haven't you ever been so confused with your own heart, and your own sins, and your own failures, that inwardly you have wanted to ask some such question as this? Did the Savior who called me really know me? Did he know what he was in for when he called me after him? Did he know the kind of trouble I was going to give him? Did he know the kind of sins that were latent in my heart, the kind of evil propensities and possibilities that lay dormant in my soul? Did he really know me? Now I find myself constantly asking this.

And I've no doubt but that I'm not alone in this. In other words, we may be tempted to think that really he may have called other people but not called us. We are a little bit of a surprise to him, and because we believe that, we lose out.

We tend to think that there may come a situation which is not catered for in the teaching, and in the ministry, and in the provisions of our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh how necessary it is, right at the beginning of the Christian life, to be assured my Savior knows me. Now this is what I want to get across this morning.

It was something that our Lord, by providence and grace, got across to Simon Peter. And our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will enable each one of us to leave this service this morning with this thing underlined and underscored. My friend, whatever your name is, and wherever you live, and whatever your nature, and whatever the sin that so easily besets you, he knows.

And when he called you to himself, he knew everything that you could possibly do that was evil. And yet he called you, and yet he loved you, and yet he died for you, and yet he makes all the promises of grace over to you. Now that's why I'm taking this tact.

The confirmation of Jesus' ability to know me. Obviously I'm only going to choose excerpts this morning from John 1 to 4. Four chapters is quite a lot to cover. I'm only going to choose three excerpts, three illustrations of this principle.

But the principle is evident. Now the first thing I want you to notice is that he who claimed to know Simon knew others also, and proved that he knew others. And the first one that he evidently knew is Nathanael.

Now here we have a very delightful record in John chapter 1 verses 45 to 51. If you'd like to have your testament open before you, please do so. Now if you're acquainted with this record, and if you're not, please read it as soon as you can when you get away from the service this morning.

If you're acquainted with this record, you will see that a similar kind of excitement which had earlier sent Andrew bounding after Simon, and saying to him, Simon, Simon, we have found the Messiah. Now sends a man called Philip, with equal enthusiasm to share his identical discovery with a man called Nathanael. Philip, we read in in John 1 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 God, we found him, says this man, we've discovered him. Quick as a trigger came the retort from the frank and honest Nathanael, can any good thing come out of Nazareth? We have found him, says Philip, of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. Jesus of Nazareth.

Ah, says the honest Nathanael, wait a moment, it may be, but but but but hardly, if he comes from Nazareth, that Nazareth should be his home, casts a dark shroud of doubt over Philip's reference to Jesus. It was incomparable, it was it was impossible in his estimation at that point, that the Messiah should have anything at all to do with Nazareth. And honest that he was, he expressed his doubt.

Not that his skepticism was based on prejudice, but rather upon two facts, known to him and known well to him. On the one hand he knew something of the glory of the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. He knew something of the regal majesty of the Messiah that was to come, of his splendor, and of his grace, and of his mercy.

On the other hand he knew something of the mean, mean character of Nazareth. And he simply could not bring these two things together, that the glorious Messiah of the scriptures should come from such a meanly background, as the little caravan village of Nazareth. Now Philip was very wise.

You can't argue much with honest doubt. And Philip simply took him by the hand and says, all right I'm not arguing with you, but just come and see for yourself. Come and see! And he did what Andrew had done with Simon earlier on.

He took him to Jesus. Now please note the evident similarity between our Lord's approach to Nathanael, as he is brought into his presence, and his approach to Simon earlier on. You notice what happened? Just as Simon was brought by Andrew, Jesus spoke to him and said, so you Simon the son of Jonah, you shall be a different man.

Now, as this man Nathanael is being brought, just as he's coming near, Jesus said to those around him, and Nathanael obviously heard it, behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. Now watch the response. There's hardly anything more revealing of character and of the true condition of a person's heart than his reaction to praise and commendation.

Far too often is our ego thereby titivated and our pride so aroused that we are prepared to dance to any tune that he will require of us who has first given us a word of praise. Isn't that so? And if a man comes to you with a word of commendation, far too often our ego is so bloated at that moment that we'll do anything he asks us, we'll say anything, we'll go anywhere because of the praise he's heaped upon us. Nathanael was as unmoved by the commendation of Jesus as by the earlier confession of Philip that he had found the one of whom Moses had written and the prophets.

Honest as he was, he said there was one thing he needed to know before he gave any significance to this word of commendation. Turning to the Lord Jesus, he said, how do you know me anyway? How do you know me? What do you know about me? Why are you commending me? What's the basis of it? Is it just an ordinary word of greeting and you're just hoping that I am this kind of person? What do you know about me? Can you see the honesty of the man? And then comes the thrust. Oh, this wonderful word of the Lord.

You see, here is honest doubt. Not dishonest, not equivocating, not wanting to wriggle out of the obvious truths of the situation and the realities of the situation, but honest doubt. And now the Lord Jesus manifests his omniscience.

Nathanael, he says, verse 48, before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. Now, we can't really go into the details of this because we don't know what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree. But the obvious truth is this.

He was doing something which was intimate, something that was personal, something that was commendable, because our Lord spoke of him as an Israelite in whom is no guile, no twist, nothing of the kind that Jacob had, who was, to use the word here, a twister. There is a contrast here between this Israelite that has no subtlety and Jacob who was a subtle man. I saw you there, says the Savior.

Now, the only thing that we can say is this. Nathanael must have been doing something under the cover of a fig tree that no one, no one had been able to see. He was alone.

He was away from the crowd. He was away and aside from every human eye and the vision of every mortal. But the blessed Lord Jesus who addresses him now knew him there.

And instinctively, knowing how well guarded and shielded and camouflaged he'd been there, instinctively this man says, Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel. Why did he say that? Because of the evident capacity of the Lord Jesus to know him.

He knew him. Jesus not only knew Simon when he said to him, Thou art Simon, son of Jonah. He knew Nathanael.

Thus he who claimed to know Simon, son of Jonah, without there and then proving his claim, confirmed his evident capacity for knowing men by his holy supernatural knowledge of this man Nathanael. How this must have comforted Simon. Come to the second.

The same one who professed to know Simon and proved that he knew Nathanael, also and most certainly knew Nicodemus' heart. Now we're moving into John chapter three. The setting and the context of John three needs to be carefully noted if we are to see its relevance to our particular theme this morning.

Now you will notice that the previous chapter concluded with these words, in verse twenty-three down to verse twenty-five in chapter two. Now when he, that is Jesus, was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did. But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any man should bear witness of man, for he himself knew what was in man.

Now we do not understand John chapter three and the incident of Nicodemus unless we understand those closing words of chapter two. Because Jesus knew men universally, he knew all men. And because Jesus knew man generically, he knew what was in man as man.

He did not commit himself to those who had committed themselves to him in Jerusalem. And the same word is used in both cases. Or if you want me to translate it differently, and it's quite legitimate, there were people in Jerusalem who believed in him, but he did not believe in them.

They believed in him, but he did not believe in them. They made a profession of faith in him, but he had no confidence in them. All they said that they thought he was the son of God.

They acknowledged this, and they acknowledged that, but he had no confidence in what they said. Why? Because he knew all men. He knew the significance of what they were saying.

Now if we rightly understand the meaning and the significance of a little Greek particle, with which the third chapter begins, then it would appear that John is telling us at this point that there was one exception to the otherwise general rule that Jesus made no response to the people who professed to believe in him at Jerusalem. And that one exception was Nicodemus. Now lest you think that I'm taking too much upon myself, let me quote to you from an Anglican divine, B.F. Westcott.

In his commentary on the first verse of chapter 3, he writes thus, the word man, you notice chapter 3 begins, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus. The word man is to emphasize the connection with verse 25. And you remember what verse 25 had said? Verse 25 said, he needed not that any should testify of man, because he knew what was in man.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus. The word man, then, is to emphasize the connection with verse 25. There, Nicodemus offered at once an example of the Lord's inward knowledge of men and an exception to this general rule which he observed in not trusting himself to them.

Jesus did not trust himself to the multitudes in Jerusalem who said that they trusted in him, but as far as Nicodemus was concerned, Nicodemus was an exception. To Nicodemus he opened his heart. He took Nicodemus aside when he came to him by night, and oh, he had a lot to tell him.

And my dear friends, let us notice this. Jesus said more to Nicodemus as an individual than probably to any other individual in the New Testament. For right up to verse 21, it's his sermon to Nicodemus, to this one individual and whoever may have been listening as well.

Now, assuming that our Lord's assessment of the shallow nature of the general response to his signs in Jerusalem was true, and I believe it was true, of course. Assuming that, in due course, we are right in concluding that many of the folk who professed to believe in him early in Jerusalem, at the end of his ministry, joined the crowd and shouted, crucify him! Away with him! Assuming that our Lord's assessment of them was right, how do we know, how do we know that his assessment of Nicodemus was right, that he knew Nicodemus' heart? Well now look, take another look at this record. Have you noticed that Jesus Christ answers, according to John, a question that has never been asked? How closely do we read these narratives? You know, it's very important to read the scriptures carefully.

Have you noticed this? John tells us that Jesus answered a question which had never been asked. Now look at it. Look at the passage.

Nicodemus approaches our Lord with what is virtually a confession of belief concerning the Lord Jesus. It may have been incomplete, but it certainly was not a flimsy confession. These are his words.

Nicodemus comes and he says, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no man can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him. Now, the rhythm and the flow of the language, according to the grammarians competent to judge this, clearly tell us that Nicodemus is in full verbal flight. He started a sentence and he's in process of going on and suddenly he's interrupted.

Listen to it again. Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no man can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him. Therefore, what? Well, he's not come to his conclusion yet.

And the only perfect gentleman that this world has ever seen interrupted him. But now notice how John refers to that interruption. John refers to the interruption in verse 3 in these words.

Jesus answered him, answered him, answered him. Jesus answered him. Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born anew or born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

But Nicodemus hasn't asked a question. Now this is the point you see. Nicodemus is all talk at this point.

You know how we do this kind of thing if we're a little bit nervous and a little bit excited. We go to someone and we talk and we eat about the bush and we say this, that, and the other, because we're all afraid to say the thing that's in our heart. Or for some reason or other, we don't want to expose our soul.

Jesus answered him. He did not answer the question that Nicodemus had asked verbally, but he answered the question of his heart. He shut his mouth to expose his heart.

He closed his own ears to the words falling from Nicodemus's mouth, one after another like a cataract, and stopped him short in order to attend to the question of his soul. What is the need of his heart? What is the question of his soul? Ah, it is death. It relates to the concept of the kingdom of God enunciated by Jesus.

If Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God is right, who on earth is going to get in there? How do you get in? And our Lord from that very moment takes Nicodemus by the hand and leads him step by step and deals with the question of his heart, leads him step by step, until at last, albeit a secret disciple, Nicodemus's profession in Jerusalem was proved ultimately to be something that savored the beginning. And Jesus revealed to him that the life that is necessary to enter the kingdom is a life that is to be mediated by his own death upon the cross, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life, even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, says Jesus to Nicodemus. And he knew that incident very well.

Even as Moses lifted up the serpent, that the dying Israelites looking should live. So he says, you may look to me when I am lifted up and have life, and that is the birth from above that makes it possible for you to enter into my kingdom, to enjoy the privileges thereof. Marvel not that I say unto thee, ye must be born again as an individual man, except a man generically and universally, but born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God, men everywhere, men in general, men before me, you Nicodemus, personally.

You must be born again, and there is only one way. It is life through my death, it is a new birth through my bearing away your sin and breathing pardon to your soul. He knew Nicodemus, he knew him.

He who knew Simon and Nathanael knew Nicodemus also, one other. The same one who promised to change Simon to Peter, proved his unique capacity to know men by his dealings with Nathanael, Nicodemus, and lastly the woman at Sychar's well.

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