

The Lord Who Sees Inside

John 1:35-51

The Life and Teaching of Christ

I grew up in a harbor town called Harwich, in South East England, where most people were known by their nicknames. There was Lenny the Lick, Snowy, Slasher, Huncher, Moggy, Birdie, Jacko, Dinksy and Hinksy to name just a few. Many of us in the town did not know people's real names. Their nicknames were given to them and those names had stuck. This is very common in England. Jacko, Dinksy and Hinksy were just altered versions of their last names. Sometimes they were given their nickname because of a habit or an attribute. For instance, Lenny the Lick never washed, and Huncher had hunched shoulders. Other times they were given a nickname to describe something that had happened in their lives. Slasher served time in prison for aggravated manslaughter after he killed his wife with a knife, having found her with another man. That nickname was not used to his face, but the whole town called him that. Funny enough, he was well liked and seemed to be a very meek man. Most nicknames were used all the time. If you had no nick name, it didn't mean you had none, it probably meant you didn't know what yours was. I don't know what mine was, and I prefer not to ponder that one. The old adage: "sticks and stones will break my bones but names can never hurt me" is not true. Names people give us can affect how we see ourselves. They can lock us into false perceptions and affect our self image. It can be difficult to break free from the way people see us. I still remember being in my first year of secondary school, (high school) and walking down the corridor, encountering a number of kids older than me who were walking the other way. One of them looked at me and said to the others, "Look, there's Herbert!" (It was a well known fact that Herbert was the ugliest kid in the whole school, and this was a large school). I do not know if it was my "short back and sides" haircut, or the National Health glasses I had to wear, but their unwelcome attention had hit its mark. I had a hard time with self-esteem from that point on. How names and perceptions can affect us! After I became a Christian at the age of 23, I knew that I did have a nickname; I just did not know what it was. I felt sure it was a derogatory term to go along with my changed life and my decision to become a Christian.

In the days of the Bible, names were sometimes given to express things that were happening at the time. For instance, when the High priest, Eli, and his sons all died at the same time, his grandson, who was born at the same time, was named Ichabod. Ichabod is a depressing name; it means the glory has departed (1 Samuel 4:21). How would you like to grow up with that name? Then there is a man who treated David unkindly, a man by the name of Nabal, whose name means fool. How on earth did he get a name like that? How can a mother give a son that name? Would you ever name a baby boy fool? Was it a nickname? We are told that his character was exactly like his name (1 Samuel 25:25). Sometimes influential people in our lives speak things over us that bind us to their view of us. Hurtful words have been spoken by parents and teachers that linger long after they were spoken and affect people throughout their adult lives. Parents can say words like, "You'll never amount to anything!" "You'll never get a decent job!" "You always give up!" "Don't be such a quitter!" Those perceptions of us can hold us to the person we were in the past. Now that our lives have been put under a different Master, Christ, we can be free to be who God is making us to be in Christ. Not only do we see ourselves differently, but we are to choose how to view others differently. Paul, the apostle said it like this:

¹⁶ So from now on **we regard no one from a worldly point of view**. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:16-17).

What's he saying? When we see friends or relatives come to Christ, we are not to view them with the lens that binds them to the way they have always been, but to see them with a new lens over our eyes. We can see that now they are under a new master, anything is possible! The old has gone, the new has come.

Today we will learn about the changing of Simon's name to Peter, a name that means a little stone or rock, and how by a simple act of changing a name Jesus begins to change Peter's character.

Warm-up Question: If you could change your name, would you? What would you change your name to and why?

Jesus' First Disciples

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter). (John 1:35-42)

Before we get into the changing of Peter's name, let's first view the context of how this meeting between Jesus and Peter came about. We are told about two disciples of John the Baptist who hear John call Jesus "the Lamb of God" as He is passing by. John the Baptist was coming to the end of his ministry, having pointed people toward repentance and prepared men's hearts to receive the Messiah and it was now time for men to follow Christ, the true light of the world. John had always sought to point people's attention away from himself to the coming Christ. Now, it was time for John's influence to wane and Jesus' ministry and influence to increase. The true servant of God will always seek the good of his Master and not his own. Who were the two disciples? We are told by John the Evangelist, that one of them was Andrew (Verse 40), but he omits telling us who the other one is. Most people, including myself, believe that it is John the Evangelist himself who begins to follow Jesus with Andrew, otherwise how did he know that it was the tenth hour of the day (4pm) when they left (Verse 39)? John the Evangelist repeatedly neglects to use his own name in the scriptures. Rather than use his own name, we can observe five times when he refers to himself as; "the disciple whom Jesus loved." (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20).

What is your perception of the personal love of God

toward you? Are you secure in God's love? What do you think needs to happen for you to be secure in God's love?

John seems to have a depth about his walk with God, confident and secure in the fact that he was loved of God. When a man or woman knows that he or she is deeply loved of God, he can go through any kind of trial.

When we are told that they followed Jesus (Verse 37), it doesn't mean in a discipleship sense, they were literally following Him. They were walking along and hoping to catch some personal time with Him. They were inquisitive about this man called Jesus. They did not know Him, they had not met Him, and all they knew about Him was that John the Baptist had called Him the Lamb of God. When a man is inquisitive about Christ, it is because there is a need or a thirst in his soul. Jesus said: "No one can come to me **unless the Father who sent me draws him**, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). If there is an interest in Christ, it is a good indication that the Father is in the act of drawing the person to Christ. When Jesus becomes aware of two men following Him, notice that He turns around and asks them what they want. Jesus was aware of their hunger and wanted to satisfy it. I love that about Jesus. He always has time for people. He could have carried on walking, thinking that He needed His own space, or His own personal prayer time, but He made time for those who were hungry for God. Jesus always made space in His life to disciple those who wanted to follow Him.

Were you following at a distance at one time? How did Jesus invite you in? Were you inquisitive about the things of God?

Following Christ is not enough. We must follow Him for the right reasons. We have to lose our lives in order to follow Him. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:17). Remember, there were some that followed Him for political reasons, hoping that He would lead a revolt against the Roman Occupation. There were some, like Judas that had mixed motives for following Him. I notice that Jesus allows them to voice what is going on in their hearts by asking the question, "What do you want?" (Verse 38).

Let's personalize this question. If He were to ask you that question, "What do you want?" How would you answer Him? What do you want from Him?

"Where are you staying?" was their answer. It was almost as if they were asking, "Can we hang out with you and get to know you?" What a wonderful experience it would be, to sit with Jesus, to visit Him in the place He was staying and just enjoy being around Him. What condescension we see in Christ as He welcomes them back to His place and chooses to hang out with two smelly fishermen. What was the result of Andrew and John the Evangelist spending the rest of the day with Jesus? Andrew could not contain himself, he was so fired up. Before he could do anything else; he had to find his brother, Simon. He excitedly told him, "We have found the Messiah." Were these two men, (Andrew and John), on a mission to find the Messiah? He who seeks will find, He who knocks, the door will be opened (Matthew 7:7). The first thing that Andrew did after meeting Jesus was to introduce his brother to the Lord. When Peter stood before the Lord, we are told: "Jesus **looked at** him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter). The Greek word *emblepein* is the word translated "looked at." It means to gaze with a concentrated, intent look. It is the gaze of the Son of God who has the ability to look deep into a person's heart and see everything that a person is and what he has done (John 4:39). Character, commitment, and faith are just some of the qualities He sees, even though they are not yet fully formed in their characters yet. The Lord can see the inner qualities of a strong leader such as Peter, but He can also see the vacillation and undependable side of his heart too. Seeing all this, He still chooses him.

When Samuel, the prophet, was sent by God to anoint a new king for Israel, he was sent to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem. Jesse paraded his sons before Samuel and when he saw the eldest, Eliab, Samuel was immediately taken with the size of this young man, thinking Eliab to be the one that he would anoint because of his size and strength. God saw things differently:

⁶ When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD." ⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. **Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart**" (1 Samuel 16:6-7).

Only after Samuel had gone through all Jesse's family and refused all of the obvious candidates, was David called from his job of watching the sheep and anointed as the new king.

A question for personal reflection: Under the concentrated gaze of the Son of God, what inner qualities of your character are you happy that He sees? What qualities would you be disappointed at Him seeing?

When Jesus looks at men, he not only sees what a man is, but what he will become. He alone has the ability to shape our lives as a potter does the clay, to bring about what He has purposed for us to be and do. It's as if the giving of the name will remind Peter of the person that he is to become; a rock, and not the undependable and impetuous Simon, who spoke without thinking. The gospels indicate a number of experiences that serve to shape Peter into the man his new name would represent. It was not an easy transformation; it took time and included lessons that Peter had to learn. At the Last Supper, when an argument broke out among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest, Jesus turned to Peter (more than likely because he was the source of the argument), but called him by his old name before he met Christ, as if to mildly rebuke him for turning to his old ways and old lifestyle. ³¹"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³²But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). Peter's response indicated that he thought he had the inner capacity to pass any test to his devotion with flying colors. He would never deny his Master! The final test came as he followed Jesus on the night He was betrayed. He was confident that he would never forsake Christ and yet three times when he was under pressure, he denied he ever knew the Lord. Later on, at the High Priest's residence, he even called down curses on himself to hide the fact that he was a disciple (Mark 14:71). It is possible that the whole experience Peter had to undergo was fashioned by the Lord to reveal where Peter really was spiritually. His heart needed to be broken and refashioned on the Lord's potter's wheel. Peter needed to repent and turn from his Simon lifestyle to finally be the rock God was making him to be. The giving of the name Peter helped remind him of how God sees what is within.

Tommy Lasorda, former manager of the Los Ange-

les Dodgers, tells the story of a young, skinny pitcher who was new in the Dodgers' minor league system. The youngster was somewhat timid, but had an extraordinarily powerful and accurate arm. Lasorda was convinced that the young pitcher had the potential to be one of the greatest ever. But, Lasorda says, the young man needed to be more fierce and competitive. He needed to lose his timidity. So Lasorda gave him a nickname that was exactly the opposite of his personality: "Bulldog." Over the years, that is exactly what Orel Hershiser became—one of the most tenacious competitors who ever took the mound in the major leagues. The nickname became a perpetual reminder of what he ought to be, and before long, it shaped his whole attitude.¹

What good reason would God have for breaking a man's heart?

It is a spiritual truth that we can only reproduce what we are. Using the analogy of a tree, Jesus put it like this:

¹⁵ "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise **every good tree bears good fruit**, but a bad tree bears bad fruit (Matthew 7:15-17).

When we commit our lives to follow Christ, we are signing up to be changed into the image or character of Christ. You can't lead people further than you have gone yourself. Jesus said for us to take the beam out of our own eyes so that we can better see to take the sliver out of other people's eyes (Matthew 7:4-5). The more the nature of Christ that is formed in us, the more we can help others reproduce the same Christ-like character. It is not us doing the work; it is the Spirit of God using the model leader whose life is laid down for others. Make the tree good and it will produce good fruit. Jesus put it like this:

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while **every branch that does bear fruit he prunes** so that it will be even more fruitful (John 15:1-2). (Luke 13:7-9, has a similar thought along the lines of making a tree better by fertilizing it).

How does the analogy of pruning vine branches relate to each of us? What is the Lord speaking to us about?

Have you had a breaking experience? How did God use it to refashion you?

As an example of a changed and fruitful life, let's take a look at the legacy of one godly man, Jonathan Edwards, the famous preacher and revivalist from the 18th century. See how God used this one life to affect the lives of many.

The father of Jonathan Edwards was a minister and his mother was the daughter of a clergyman. Among their descendants were fourteen presidents of colleges, more than one hundred college professors, more than one hundred lawyers, thirty judges, sixty physicians, more than a hundred clergymen, missionaries and theology professors, and about sixty authors. There is scarcely any great American industry that has not had one of his family among its chief promoters. Such is the product of one American Christian Family, reared under the most favorable conditions. The contrast is presented in the Jukes family, which could not be made to study and would not work, and is said to have cost the state of New York a million dollars. Their entire record is one of pauperism and crime, insanity and imbecility. Among their twelve hundred known descendants, three hundred and ten were professional paupers, four hundred and forty were physically wrecked by their own wickedness, sixty were habitual thieves, one hundred and thirty were convicted criminals, fifty five were victims of impurity, only twenty learned a trade (and ten of those learned it in a state prison), and this notorious family produced seven murderers.²

What you are is what you will reproduce. John Wimber was a Church Growth Consultant for awhile before he became the pastor of Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Anaheim, California. One day, as he was teaching a group of pastors how to grow their churches, he hadn't gone long into his teaching when one impatient pastor stood up and said, "I know all this, just teach me how to add more people to my church." John was very patient with him the first time, but when the frustrated gentleman stood up a second time and said the same thing John had a strong thought, a word of wisdom, for the man. He looked straight at the man and said, "How many more like you do you want?" The man fell backwards into his chair as if floored by the thought, saying, "I don't want any more like me, I want them to be like Jesus!" The simple truth is that you cannot take

¹ Told by John MacArthur in his book, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, published by W Publishing Group, Page 34.

² As told by J. Oswald Sanders in the book *Spiritual Clinic*, published by Moody Press, 1958.

people further than you are yourself. Leaders reproduce after their own kind. Apple trees bear apples, pear trees produce pears, sheep beget sheep, and Christians beget other Christians. What we are is what we reproduce. God is committed to shape a person He intends on using. In the example of our study today, He transformed the life of Peter to be the broken pot God had shaped, that would preach the gospel on the Day of Pentecost and see three thousand come to Christ, and also open the door for the Gentiles (Non-Jews) to be saved too (Acts 10:34-35). We can't all be like Peter, but He has a purpose and a unique plan for each one of us to bring others to Christ through our lives. It's not that every one is called to be a preacher, but we all have differing gifts which add to the building up of the Body of Christ. What we are is what we will reproduce in others that follow us. Leaders are models that others follow. Paul understood this principle: 17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you (Philippians 3:17). Jesus looked into the heart of Peter and began this transformation of his character by changing his name. Let's go on to the next passage in John's gospel:

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."⁴⁸ "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that."⁵¹ He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:43-51)

The first thing I see in this passage is that Phillip did not go after Jesus. Jesus came looking for him!

Have you ever felt that God was on your tail initiating things in your life because He wanted to reach you where you were? Tell one another what God was do-

ing.

How do you think Philip felt when he realized that this was the Messiah and He had come looking for him personally?

Our God is the Good Shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep and comes looking for each of us. The God that created the octillion stars has time for each and every one of us! Isn't that amazing? None of us are outside of His gaze and His care. He knows exactly where we are at every second of the day.

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. ⁵ You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast (Psalm 139:1-10).

A relationship with Christ is worth more than the world. Nothing on earth can compare with coming into oneness with Christ. This is the true riches that last forever (Luke 16:11)! It is natural to want to tell others about it. Philip could not contain himself. He had to find Nathanael and tell him. What was Nathanael's first response? Disdain and skepticism! But something in Philip's facial expression and joy caught Nathanael like a hook in his heart. There was something different about Philip that perhaps intrigued him. All Philip would ask him to do was to come and meet Jesus. Nazareth was near Cana, Nathanael's town, and maybe Nathanael knew some of the things that were going on in the city at that time, but Philip wouldn't argue about anything—"just come and see" was the only thing that Philip would say. If only the physical Jesus was around for us to introduce others to today! Wouldn't that be easier to reach our friends and loved ones? "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did," was the testimony of the Samaritan woman in John 4:29. If only I could get my friends to meet Jesus. But, until He comes, you and I are the ones who re-present Him.

Even while Nathanael was still in the act of approaching

Jesus, the Lord gazed into his heart and told him exactly what He saw. “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false” (Verse 47). “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you” (Verse 48). Nathanael was convinced and converted on the spot with just those words. How could it be possible that a skeptic like Nathanael could have such a turnaround in his belief system after just one encounter? Again we see Jesus reaching into someone’s heart with just a few words. He saw Nathaniel and looked into his heart, just as He did with Peter. This brief encounter would change Nathaniel’s life from this point on.

Jesus had what can be referred to as a “Word of Knowledge”; a picture that came to His mind. It was likely that it was something Nathanael had said while he was under the fig tree, some question or statement that he had said to God, that only he and the Lord knew. It may be that in his frustration he had sat down under

the fig tree and asked God to reveal Himself to him. An open pliable heart, that is all that our God needs to reveal Himself to someone and turn their life around. God does it all the time; it is not a hard thing for Him. We see many such stories in the Bible and they are still happening.

Are you hungry to know God better? Are you confident that you are deeply loved of God, like the apostle John? He sees all that is within, good and bad, and still loves you with an everlasting love. If you seek Him, He promises to meet you where you are. Pray this simple prayer:

Lord Jesus, come into my heart and change me. I am tired of my empty life without you. I turn from my sin and selfish life to live for you. Forgive me of my sins and allow me to come to your house. Reveal your great love to me. Amen.