

What Did His Followers See In Him?

Interviewing John About Jesus

When Barak Obama was asked which book he could not live without in the White House, his answer was instant: "Team Of Rivals". That book inspired Obama to appoint Hilary Clinton as Secretary of State, and to do all he could to find the best people for his government, no matter how opposed they had been to his candidacy. "Team Of Rivals" is a study of Abraham Lincoln. It traces Lincoln from his earliest beginnings, his road to the Presidency, and shows how his ability to appoint his fiercest rivals into key cabinet positions saved America during a time of crisis. Written by Dorothy Kearns Goodwin, a Pulitzer prize winner, it's a book full of remarkable detail that reveals a whole lot about Abraham Lincoln. By the time I had finished reading its 750 pages, I felt as though I knew Abraham Lincoln in a way that I never had before.

Where did Dorothy Goodwin get her information about Abraham Lincoln? Some of it came from the speeches and writings of Lincoln himself. But a lot of information for the book came from his Presidential rivals whom Lincoln made his friends. William Seward, his Secretary of State; Salmon Chase, his Treasury Secretary; Edwin Stanton, his War Secretary; and Attorney General Edward Bates. These were men who had run for President and lost. Yet their greatest contribution to the nation was when they joined forces with Lincoln. They ate with him, planned political strategy with him, debated with him and shared their lives through some of the most tumultuous times of American history. The best insights into the lives of great men and women come from those who are closest to them.

If we really want to know Jesus, the people to ask are those who have shared their lives with him. One of the closest people to Jesus was the Apostle John. Fortunately for us, John was keen to let us know who Jesus was. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he recorded not only his own understanding of who Jesus was and what he did, but he also recorded the effect Jesus had on other people. So today, I want to interview John about Jesus.

In verses 19 – 51 of John chapter one, there are actually six men mentioned or alluded to, who all had close association with Jesus – John the Baptist, Andrew, John himself, Simon Peter, Philip and Nathaniel, who is called Bartholomew in the other Gospels. So let's find out what some of these men made of Jesus.

1. John The Baptist.

John the Baptist was a spiritual heavyweight. By the time Jesus came on the scene, John had already built up a considerable following of disciples. Some of those disciples of John would eventually become the core of the close knit circle that Jesus called his disciples. John the Baptist was making big enough waves to attract the attention of the religious heavyweights in Jerusalem. The common people and even some of the religious leaders of the day were flocking out into the desert to be baptised by him and to hear him preach. John The Baptist was a big player on the spiritual scene. So what did he make of Jesus? Here [is his story](#):

"Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.' "Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." (John 1:19 – 34 NIV)

That's a pretty amazing endorsement from someone who already was regarded as a holy prophet. John is saying that Jesus is so great that he wasn't even worthy to do a job for Jesus that the lowest of the lowest slaves didn't want to do – untying sandals. People thought John was great. He already had a huge following. He was treated as a teacher and a prophet, with a whole following of his own disciples, but John is saying that compared to Jesus, he is nothing.

Jesus, The Messiah

Take a look at the words John the Baptist uses to describe Jesus. When he is asked if he is the Messiah, John is emphatic that he isn't, but then he points to Jesus as Messiah. That's a huge statement. John is clear that Jesus is Messiah before Jesus has done Messiah like things. He hasn't healed any sick, preached or done anything the Messiah might do at this point. Yet John knows who he is. It took some of the disciple's years to figure out that Jesus was Messiah, yet John knew it from the day he met Jesus at the Jordan River.

Jesus, The Lamb Of God

Then John makes another remarkable statement. He sees Jesus coming towards him and says "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." If anything would have set his listeners alight, that would have. Every Jew there would have known the story of the escape from Egypt, when the blood of a lamb smeared over the doorpost of their houses saved the life of every firstborn child. All the Jews knew that every morning and every evening in the temple in Jerusalem, hundreds of lambs were brought to the temple, their throats cut, and their blood ran down from the altar as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. If you go to the dome of the rock in Jerusalem today, you can see the place where the altar used to stand, with the channels cut into the rock for the blood of sacrificed lambs to flow out from the temple. God has given John this supernatural revelation about Jesus. He is going to be the sacrificial lamb. It's his blood that is going to carry away the sins of the world.

Who is Jesus? According to John the Baptist, he's the Messiah, the chosen Son Of God. He's the one who baptizes with the Spirit. He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

2. Andrew And Simon Peter (and John)

Now the writer of this gospel introduces us to two more eyewitnesses of Jesus.

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" "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.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 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 NIV)

One of the disciples of John The Baptist is Andrew. The other one is not named, but it's likely that it is John, the writer of this Gospel. These two are with John the Baptist when they see Jesus passing by. John the Baptist is so full of supernatural insight about Jesus that he says "Look, the Lamb of God!" That declaration goes off like an explosion in the heads of Andrew and John. If John the Baptist is so overwhelmed by who Jesus is, then Andrew and John are absolutely stunned by the revelation of Jesus as the Lamb of God.

How would you react if I had started this church service by welcoming everyone, and then had given a special welcome to President Obama? Or I had mentioned that we had a special band here tonight called U2, and that Bono was going to sing? What if you were getting on a train tomorrow morning and Nelson Mandela sat next to you? That wouldn't have as much impact as when John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said "The Lamb of God!" No wonder Andrew and John followed. No wonder they spent the whole day with him. Wouldn't you?

And after a day with Jesus, Andrew just can't help himself. He has to find his brother and tell him. Andrew finds Simon his brother. "Simon, you have got to come. We have found the Messiah. No, I'm not off my rocker. John and I have spent a day with Jesus and we are convinced he is the real deal. Come and see for yourself!"

3. Philip And Nathanael.

A similar thing happens with the last part of this story. Jesus finds Philip. Philip finds Nathanael. And Nathaniel is cynical, about anyone that comes out of Nazareth. Here's their eyewitness account.

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 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." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." 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 NIV)

How did sceptical Nathanael have his mind changed about Jesus? What blew his doors off was that Jesus already knew him. Before Philip even got to Nathanael, Jesus knew where he was and who he was. Jesus knew what his character was like. With supernatural insight, Jesus had seen to the core of this young man's character even before Nathanael knew anything much about Jesus. The fact that Jesus knew him that intimately before they had even met, just disarmed Nathanael completely.

And he knows about you and about me. He knows what is good about us and all the bad stuff too. He knows what we are thinking. He knows what we have done. He not only sees our past, but he sees our potential. What was even more mind blowing for Nathanael was that Jesus began to describe his life, not just as it was, but as it would be. That's what he knows about you. He knows your past. He knows the ugly stuff and the good. He knows not only what you are, but what you can be. Do you understand that? Jesus sees your future as it could be. And it's a great future. He knows how your life will turn out if you choose to follow him. He sees all the good you will do. He sees what your

life will become. No one knows your potential like Jesus. He would love to show you that amazing future, if you will follow him.

Come And See.

There is one major theme that runs through these scriptures we have heard today. Come and see. Come and see who Jesus is. Find out for yourself. Follow him and discover for yourself that he is a whole lot more than a figure of history, or a great teacher from the past, or a man who went about doing good. Come and see. Listen to those who have already met Jesus. Listen to those who have spent time with him, and discovered that he is the Messiah, the Lamb of God, the baptizer in the Spirit, the anointed one, the Son of God. Come and see and find out for yourself.

You don't get to know Jesus by second-hand experience, because your wife follows Jesus, or your kids follow Jesus, or your grandmother followed Jesus. You get to know him by coming and seeing for yourself. Come and see.

David McChesney, Westlake Church in Nyon, Switzerland