

Whatever Happened to Authenticity?

John 1:43-51

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When our daughter-in-law graduated from Veterinarian College at the University of Tennessee, we rented a room from an Air B and B home in Knoxville.

The home where we stayed was beautifully decorated inside and out. Our host, Steve, was British.

Steve is an entrepreneur, having sold his milk distribution business in London recently for ten million dollars.

As a side gig, he chauffeurs brides and grooms in his 1928 Bentley. He's done this for over 500 weddings.

His Bentley is nice, but it is not in pristine condition, causing one man to quip that his car was a good twenty-footer.

"What's a twenty-footer?" asked Steve in his British accent.

The man said, "It looks good from twenty feet away," the man said condescendingly.

"Well, so do you, mate," Steve said, giving the man back some of his own medicine.

Steve has never met a stranger, not in Britain or in the States and he's a trusting soul.

As he waited for his wife to return home, he cooked us supper and told us a story of the time he was restoring one of his old cars.

When it came time to paint it, a man stopped by and asked if he needed his car painted. Steve thought the timing was perfect.

They worked out a deal, and he paid him \$500 as a down payment. When the man picked up his car, he asked for more money.

After several weeks, Steve called to inquire about his work, but all he got was excuses.

In the end, Steve discovered that the man was a crook and he didn't know anything about painting cars. He'd been shafted.

In the end, Steve lost his money. It ended up being a hard lesson that you cannot trust everyone. Not every person is as authentic as his cars.

It makes you angry, doesn't it, when you discover that a person has been holding back on you and he or she turns out to be a fraud?

Whatever happened to authenticity?

None of us are totally transparent. None of us go around telling every person we meet all that we are thinking or everything about ourselves. That's a good thing. To do so would be insane.

There are a lot of thoughts that pop into our heads that we should keep to ourselves, not only for our own benefit, for the benefit of those we would harm if we spoke them.

But none of us want to get into a relationship with someone who pretends to be someone else.

However, authenticity shouldn't be mistaken for having an unbridled tongue, and the Bible will back that up.

There is far more to being authentic than saying, tweeting, emailing, or texting whatever comes to our minds.

Authenticity involves something more.

Authenticity goes to the heart of our character.

When Jesus was gathering a group of men to become his disciples, he looked for men with character.

He wasn't looking for perfect men. He would have never found a group like that. He chose men who had their share of flaws but also he also chose men with gifts and potential.

All had their own unique traits and attributes.

We don't know much about some of the men he chose. About all we know about Nathaniel is found in a few verses in John.

It says that after Phillip met Jesus, he went and told Nathaniel that he had found "the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45).

When you get some of the best news in your life, who do you call? That is one indication of who your close friends are.

Phillip called on Nathaniel. He was excited. He wanted Nathaniel to meet Jesus.

Nathaniel was someone that could be completely honest with Phillip.

When Phillip told him this wonderful news about finding the one he believed the Jewish people had been waiting to come for over a thousand years, Nathaniel was skeptical.

He wanted to know if anything good could come from Nazareth.

Philip invited Nathaniel to come and see for himself. He wanted him to judge for himself what he thought about Jesus.

That's an excellent way to witness. We don't have to prove anything about Jesus. We just need to invite people to come and experience Jesus for themselves.

So Nathaniel went.

The first thing Jesus said to Nathaniel in front of everyone when he saw him was this: "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." (v. 47)

He spoke to Nathaniel like he knew. That's the point. He did.

The Message Bible says it this way, "There's a real Israelite, not a false bone in his body."

Jesus is implying that Nathaniel is a person that will tell the truth about everything. He was an authentic soul.

There are a lot of people these days that are not politically correct that claim authenticity, but they are also very mean in what they say.

Not everything we do that gets labeled as authentic can also be called Christ-like.

It's one thing to call a kettle black. It's another thing to say a kettle ain't worth jack.

Nathaniel called things like he saw them. That's fine. But, so did Jesus.

We can be truthful, with being demeaning.

That's what Nathaniel was doing when he wondered if anything good could come from Nazareth.

He was being real, truthful, authentic.

It's actually refreshing to meet someone who shoots straight. What's deflating are the people you meet who say one thing to your face and then another thing behind your back.

Authentic people have established a core set of values and they have integrity.

They know what is important and they do not deviate from those set of standards. Because of that, they have developed a healthy sense of self-esteem and a healthy love for self.

We don't talk a lot about love for self because it's often spoken of in negative terms.

We use the word "self-ish" to talk about love for self that gone off the rails.

This is love that looks only to one's own interests and desires, often at the expense of others.

However, each of us has to find our own unique self and learn to be comfortable in our own skin.

We have to learn to love ourselves in a good way.

We need to embrace those things about ourselves that make us special and unique, knowing that God created each of us in His image.

We need to acknowledge that God loves us and has gifted us, but for a purpose, which involves loving and serving others.

We can never fulfill God's command to love our neighbor as we love ourselves if we do not love ourselves.

When we discover a code of values and a set of ethical standards that reflect the life of Jesus and learn to live by them, we begin to love ourselves.

That forms the foundation for taking care of ourselves physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

Being authentic is about being consistent so that we are not one way with one person and another way with someone else.

When Jesus gave Nathaniel a compliment, he was saying, "This man is consistent. There is nothing false, nothing deceitful about him."

If you are authentic, you are consistent with the truth, with judgment, with fairness, with how you balance caring for yourself and for others.

When Jesus praised Nathaniel's authenticity, Nathaniel was like, "How do you know me?"

Jesus was a bit cryptic in his answer. "I knew you a long time before Philip ever invited you to come to see me. I saw you under the fig tree," Jesus said.

Of course, the Lord knew us before we were formed in our mother's womb, we are told in the book of Jeremiah.

By referring to the fig tree, perhaps Jesus wanted Nathaniel to think back to the conversation that he had with Phillip and the question he asked, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

It was an authentic response from Nathaniel – sincere and genuine.

If so, that would have been an “Ah-ha,” moment for Nathaniel. It made him realize that Jesus really did know him.

When we realize that Jesus really does know us, that is a moment an ah-ha moment for us. That is a moment we must decide whether we are going to be authentic with God.

Are we going to try and hid from God like Adam and Eve? Are we going to run like Jonah?

Or might we respond to God like Isaiah who said, “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

That is an authentic response of a man who has come into the presence of the Living God.

We sometimes miss those opportunities because we don’t know how to live in the moment.

What does it mean to live in the moment?

“What day is it?”

It’s today,” squeaked Piglet.

My favorite day,” said Pooh.” — A.A. Milne

(<https://medium.com/personal-growth/the-5-key-ingredients-of-an-authentic-person-259914abf6d5>)

That’s what it means.

Pooh Bear never seemed to get too far ahead of himself, and maybe that’s why he had so many friends.

Living in the moment doesn’t mean we should not plan ahead.

It means that we should not look so far ahead that we don’t have time for the person next to us or more importantly, that we don’t have time for God.

An authentic person learns to disconnect to engage for the moment and be totally present, giving full attention to the person or group they are with.

We must disconnect from technology, from work, from television, or we run the risk of communicating to people that there is something more important than they are.

God instructed us to set aside a Sabbath for Him. If we don’t, what we are communicating to God is that He is not significant enough to give our total attention.

How can we be authentic Christians if we profess faith in God but run roughshod over the Sabbath?

It was important enough for Nathaniel to stop what he was doing to go see if this Messiah was the real deal.

He was open to the suggestion and the idea that God could intersect his day and his life even though he had his doubts that anything good could come out of Nazareth.

How open are you that God can intersect your day?

Do you live in the moment enough to realize that God is working in your day?

God is working in the lives of those who come in contact with you?

If you are in communion with God, God is working in you to bring them into His presence.

An authentic person is not arrogant and is open to new knowledge.

Nathaniel did not believe anything good could come from Nazareth, certainly not a Messiah, but he wasn't close minded.

“Close-minded people are more interested in proving themselves right than in getting the best outcome.” (<https://www.fs.blog/2017/09/open-closed-minded/>)

How close minded are you to God's presence?

Would you admit that sometimes you are so sure you are right that nothing good can come from something that you are not willing to even entertain the idea that God might be right in the middle of it? Then you miss Him.

Could anything good come to Jericho? Had Zacchaeus not thought so, he would have missed Jesus.

Could anything good come to Samaria to a five-time divorced woman who was living with another man? Had the Women at the Well not thought so, she would have missed Jesus.

Could anything good come to Garasa? Had the man that had demons and no clothes not believe it, he would have missed Jesus.

How many times do religious people miss Jesus because we think Jesus has to show up in the way we have ordered Him, in the form of our worship we have chosen, or in the day we think we have ordered?

Religious people can be some of the most close-minded people you will meet.

However, the Spirit of God is like the wind, and it will blow where it wishes.

To avoid arrogance and to win credibility with others, we would do well to be open-minded enough to know that God is too big for us to capture and order around. We must be open to God surprising us.

Yes, it is true that truth is truth but to be authentic means we must be honest enough to know we are not infallible, and sometimes we misunderstood the truth.

Isn't that what we are hoping people will come to realize when we share Jesus with them?

We are hoping that they will change their minds. We are hoping they will be open-minded enough to ask questions and to have a conversation about life, which will lead to a discussion about God.

Nathaniel changed his mind about Jesus. Something good actually did come from Nazareth.

He was authentic enough that when he met Jesus, he was willing to confess, "Rabbi! You are the Son of God, the King of Israel."

Jesus said, 50-51 "You've become a believer simply because I say I saw you one day sitting under the fig tree? You haven't seen anything yet! Before this is over you're going to see heaven open and God's angels descending to the Son of Man and ascending again."

The day Nathaniel became a believer must have been one of the greatest moments of his life.

He and Phillip never forgot it, which is the reason we can read about it now.

The most significant moment for any of us is the moment that our authentic self comes to affirm the reality that Jesus is our Savior.

Has that happened to you?

At this moment, while the Spirit of God speaks to you, will you confess that you want Jesus to live within you, to guide you in all things, and to grant you the promise of a heavenly home?

Right now, at this moment, tell express this to God.

Be real. Be authentic.

Should you want to share that confession with the church, share that decision with Justin and let him share it with the church.

Sermon Notes:

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