

Come and See

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 1:34-51

Pastor Bryan Clark

The Apostle John, in his Gospel, has told us that the eternal Creator—God of the Universe—took on human flesh and walked on this Earth to be the Savior of the world. John the Baptist publicly announced Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John concludes that based on what he has seen and heard, Jesus is indeed the Son of God. The story this morning is Jesus calling His first disciples, and there's a message there for those of you who are still seeking, and for those of us who have already experienced new life in Christ. That is what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, chapter one. Verse 34 ends the paragraph from last week.

“I myself, [John the Baptist is saying] have seen and have testified, this is the Son of God.”

(*NASB, John 1:34)

Verse 35:

Again, the next day, John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. (Vs. 35-37)

So again, this is John the Baptist in verse 35. He's **standing with two of his disciples**. Now the text will tell us soon enough that one is Andrew, who will become one of the apostles. The other one is unnamed. But if you put some of the other Gospels together—there are a number of things—almost everyone is convinced it's most likely John, the writer of the Gospel himself. As a matter of fact, I looked in a lot of commentaries, and I couldn't find anyone that disagreed with that. So, there's a high likelihood that the other one is John, and throughout the Gospel of John, John does not name himself. So it's highly likely John is writing as an eyewitness to these events. **With two of his disciples...** That term **disciple** often gets defined in kind of confusing, narrow, restrictive ways, depending on your background. But it's helpful to understand that the Greek word is simply *learner*. It was common in the first century that people would identify a rabbi or a teacher, and they would become a learner, and essentially follow the rabbi around and learn from him. So, discipleship is just learning. It's learning how to follow Jesus. Here at Lincoln Berean, we pretty much look at everything that we offer as part of the discipleship process. It's not a methodology. We're just trying to help people learn how to follow Jesus. So that's what the term means.

...He looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” It's interesting that the text says, **as He walked**. It's kind of a strange thing to say, but I think the point being made is Jesus was not some sort of a supernatural spirit floating along. He was fully human, and He was walking up to them when John identified Him. **The two disciples heard him speak and they followed Jesus.** Now **followed** does not mean they decided to trail behind Him like some sort of stalkers. It's kind of an official term that meant they were *following Him*. He was the new rabbi; they would be His disciples; they're choosing to follow Him. There's this significant moment that John has prepared them for, when these disciples of John the Baptist understand it's time for their loyalties to be transferred to Jesus. As far as we know, this is the last time that John the Baptist actually saw Jesus.

So John is transferring his disciples; that's critical to understand. Over the years in ministry, I've seen far too many occasions where the discipler becomes such a powerful, possessive force, that the disciple becomes far more dependent on the discipler than on Jesus. It should be the desire of every discipler, to eventually get that disciple to find their trust in Jesus, and Jesus alone. John models that as these disciples are transferred to Jesus. Verse 38:

Jesus turned and saw them following, and he said to them, “What do you seek?” They said to him, “Rabbi (which translated means teacher), where are you staying?”

So, this is something that will happen a number of times in this text and in John's Gospel, and that is, he understands there's both a Jewish and a Greek audience to his gospel. So, often he clarifies the terminology—*Rabbi means teacher*—and you'll see that a number of times. I'm not going to highlight it each time, but that's why he's doing that.

The question Jesus asked them may seem odd to us, “**What do you seek?**” But essentially what He's asking is, “What is it you want from Me? What is it you desire?” It's the questions I asked *us* to wrestle with last week: “What is it you're looking for?” “What is the longing in your soul?” “What is it that still is restless?” “What is that desire deep within you that still seems unsatisfied?” And what Jesus is asking, is, “What is it you're looking for? What are you longing for?” They respond by saying, “Teacher, where are you staying?” which again, to us, seems like a strange question. But in a hospitality culture, what they're asking is, “Can we sit down with you and talk about it?” That's what they're saying. Verse 39:

He said to them, “Come, and you will see.”

So, this is like the main theme in this passage this morning: they're seeking something; there's something within them, and Jesus asks them, “What is it you're longing for? What is it you're seeking? What is it you want?” And essentially they say, “Can we sit down and talk about it,” and Jesus says, “*Come and see.*” This is a just a beautiful picture of the heart of Jesus.

So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. (Vs. 39b)

That would be four o'clock in the afternoon. Jewish time gets confusing; it starts at six in the morning. In that culture that was time to settle in and make arrangements for supper and the evening. Verse 40:

One of the two who heard John *speak* and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

So, one of the two is identified as Andrew. By the time this gospel was written, Peter would have been well known as a pillar in the New Testament Church. So that's why he's included as a point of reference to the readers. That would have been a very familiar name. Verse 41:

He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah,” (which translated means Christ).

Whatever transpired, we aren't privy to that information. Whatever the conversation was, Andrew concluded that, “This is the Messiah; this is the One we've been looking for. This is the One my heart longs for!” Having made that conclusion, what's the first thing he does? As a matter of fact, it's

interesting that John, the writer of the Gospel, actually identifies the first thing he did was what? *He found his brother, to tell him, "We have found the Messiah!"*

Think about this. For hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years, the nation has waited. Finally, the Messiah has come. If you truly have concluded, "This is the long-awaited Messiah," what could possibly be more important than telling someone you deeply love, "We have found the Messiah!" This will be part of the theme in the Gospel of John. If we truly believe Jesus is the Savior of the world, if He has truly changed our lives, how could that possibly remain a secret? How could we not tell the people around us, "We found the Messiah!" It doesn't have to be an argument. It's not a presentation. There's no disrespecting; there's no arm twisting. There's just an invitation to come and see. There was no possibility in this moment that Andrew could have ever understood that his brother was about to become a world changer for Jesus. But it started with a simple invitation, "Come and see for yourself." Verse 42:

He brought him to Jesus. And Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas," (which is translated Peter).

So Peter comes, and Jesus identifies him by his given name, **Simon**. He's just simply identified as **the son of John**, which is a completely different John, just his family name. But Jesus does two things. One is: when you rename someone, it's an act of authority. You can't simply walk up to anyone on the street and rename them. Even in the first century culture, it was an act of authority. But the second thing is: "I'm going to rename you **Peter, the rock**." In essence what Jesus was saying is, "You are about to experience new creation in Christ." John the Baptist said, in the previous paragraph, all he could do was baptize in water. But the One coming after him would have the power to baptize with the Spirit, meaning He would have the power to regenerate new life, recreation—new creation—what John will call *born again*. And that's what he's offering Peter. "I offer you a new story, a new life; you will be a rock." Verse 43:

The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me."

Almost all Bibles have maps in the back, so you can look it up at your leisure. But the land of Israel is very small. And basically, to understand the geography through the Gospel of John, basically the South is Judea; so it's around the Dead Sea. Jerusalem is close to the northern end of the Dead Sea, so that's the South—Jerusalem, Judea. Jerusalem would have been the political, religious capital of the nation. The Jordan River goes straight north to the Sea of Galilee, and there are all these little fishing villages around the Sea of Galilee. That's primarily where Jesus will call home. That's where many of the miracles and activities happen—North—in a very rural agricultural, fishing part of the country. The distance from Jerusalem up to the Sea of Galilee, depending, 60, 70, 80 miles as the crow flies. So now we're up North in Galilee, where a lot of the story will happen. *And He finds Philip*. We don't know a lot about Philip, but he actually becomes one of the twelve apostles. But every place where Philip says or does something, he comes across as being very ordinary. We identify Peter as some sort of a New Testament superstar. Philip will be consistently portrayed as *Ordinary Philip*. But what's interesting is Jesus found him directly, and He said to him, "**Follow Me**." Jesus didn't say you have to be a superstar. As a matter of fact, that's just completely irrelevant. The only issue on the table is, "Follow Me," and the rest is up to Jesus. It doesn't matter who you are. All He's asking is, "Follow Me and obey Me," and the rest is up to Him. So, he directly calls to Philip, "Follow Me." Verse 44:

Now Philip was from Bethsaida...

[Bethsaida is a small fishing village; the word Bethsaida actually means *House of Fishing*.] **...of the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathaniel 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 Joseph. Nathaniel said to him, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”** (Vs. 44-46a)

So again, Philip has come to the conclusion: “This is the long-awaited Messiah; this is the One that the Old Testament is about—in the Law and the Prophets. It is the reminder that the storyline all the way through the Bible is Jesus. That's what he's identifying. Now whether or not Philip was that biblically literate or whether simply, in the time he spent with Jesus—again, we're not privy to that conversation—Jesus taught him and helped him understand. What we do know is as soon as he believed it, immediately, he went and found someone he cared about. And he said, “We have found the Messiah!” Again, it's the same pattern. If you really believe that, how could it remain a secret? So, he immediately tells Nathanael.

Now Nathanael's a bit of a puzzle. We're not quite sure who Nathanael is. There are various theories but we're not sure. He doesn't show up as one of the Twelve, but there are those who speculate that perhaps he's Bartholomew, who is one of the Twelve. Many of these biblical characters had more than one name, so a name like Bartholomew isn't actually a name; the word means son of...and then his dad's name. So, he had a first name but it wasn't Bartholomew; we just don't know what it was. There's nowhere in the Gospels where Nathanael and Bartholomew are both listed in the same list, which causes some people to think, then, that may have been his first name. And we know Bartholomew is a family name, what we would call a last name. So that's possible. But Jesus had lots of disciples that weren't one of the 12 apostles. So, for sure, he's just one of the disciples—the followers of Jesus. So, Philip finds him, tells him, and Nathanael responds by saying, “**Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?**”

Now, first of all, several years ago a whole group of us went to Israel—seventy-some people, I think it was. On the very first morning, probably two-thirds of us ate something on the buffet that made us very sick—and the first stop that morning was Nazareth. And for two-thirds of us, about all we saw of Nazareth was the inside of the public bathroom. So, just kind of imagine the most neglected park in town, and then a public restroom in that park, and you're getting close. It was extremely unpleasant. So, we kind of determined that our verse of the day was: “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (*laughter*) I can't help but think of that when I tell this story. So, for a few of us, it has a different meaning.

What it actually meant in the text wasn't that Nazareth was a bad place or an immoral place. It's just that it simply was an insignificant place. It was just a small, insignificant fishing-village town. As a matter of fact, so was Bethsaida. So, it's entirely possible there is just kind of a small-town rivalry, and that's coming out of Nathanael's comments. I think more to the point is that the people in the first century simply didn't expect their long-awaited Messiah—the King of Israel—to come out of podunk Nazareth. This will be a huge problem all the way through Jesus' public ministry. It's not what they were thinking. They were certain he would end up in Jerusalem, running the temple as a political and religious leader. He would take over the nation and deliver them from Rome. They just could not comprehend that the long-awaited Messiah would emerge from Nazareth.

It's the same problem today. So many groups and organizations have kidnapped Jesus. There's a political Jesus; there's a religious Jesus. So many people in our culture think they understand Jesus, and they have no idea of the Jesus of the New Testament, who came as the Lamb of God to be the Savior of the world. For so many people, he's just not what they expect. So, the last part of verse 46:

Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Again, there's no arm twisting, no manipulation, no arguing, just a very kind, respectful invitation. "*Come and see for yourself.*" Verse 47:

Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite, indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathaniel said to Him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathaniel answered him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

That's kind of a confusing paragraph there. So, what's happening? Nathanael is coming to Jesus. Jesus sees him coming, and identifies him as "...**an Israelite, indeed, in whom there is no deceit.**" King James version says *no guile*. It's actually a Greek word that means *bait*. We're in a fishing village, and this is the term that means to bait a hook to catch a fish. So that's the idea of *deceit* or *guile*. Simply said, Jesus is saying, "This is a true seeker. This is not someone whose heart is full of excuses and deceit. This is a true Israelite who is trying to find the truth to satisfy the longings in his soul."

Some of you here this morning, you're still trying to sort this out, and I understand that. We're actually very happy that you're here. There will be no manipulating; there will be no arm twisting; there will be no pressurizing. We just want to respectfully invite you, through John's Gospel, to come and see. But your part in that is: it has to be an intellectually honest pursuit. Our culture is filled with people who simply don't want Jesus; they're not interested. They're never going to see the truth. They don't want to see the truth; they just don't want to know. They're determined to be their own god, and it doesn't matter what the evidence is, they will not believe! Sometimes we find ourselves getting in all kinds of arguments with them, which are totally unproductive. If people don't want to know, they don't want to know. You can't somehow control that or change that by arguing with them. But a true seeker really wants to know the truth. There are genuine, authentic longings and desires deep within them, and they're wondering, "Is it possible that Jesus could be what I'm looking for?" I hear people say things all the time like, "Well, the Bible is full of contradictions," or, "It's all full of errors," or they have this thing to say, and that thing to say, and most of the time that's just a way to avoid Jesus. Coming up with twenty good ways to respond to that, probably won't bring them to Jesus. That's not what it is. But if people are willing to truly seek, "*Seek, and you shall find.*"

So that's what Jesus is saying about Nathanael; that's Nathanael's heart. And Nathanael responds by saying, "**How do you know me?**" At this point Jesus supernaturally identifies: "*Before Philip came to you, before we saw you, you were sitting in the shade, under a tree, reading Genesis 28.*" In this moment, because Nathanael is a true seeker, he realizes there's no way an ordinary human could have known that. He realizes this is a supernatural moment and responds, "**You truly are the Son of God, the King of Israel.**"—two really powerful titles! When he was identified as **an Israelite, indeed**—in other words a true Israelite—then to say, "**Jesus is the King of Israel,**" he was essentially saying,

“You are my King; You are the Messiah.” Jesus responds by saying, “You ain't seen nothing yet.” So, maybe He has better grammar than that, but essentially Jesus says, “Really? You believe, just having seen that?” which is a reflection of the purity of Nathanael's heart. “Nathanael, you haven't begun to see the evidence that I am, indeed, God in the flesh.” Because the word *believe* is such an important word to John: “These things are written that you might believe,” —it's the word he's going to repeat all through the Gospel—then it's worth noting: “This is the first place in the Gospel He specifically identifies someone who believes—and that's Nathanael!”

So, what does verse 51 mean? Verse 51 is a reference to the story of Jacob in Genesis 28 where Jacob wrestles with God, where Jacob has a dream of a ladder extending into heaven, and the angels are ascending and descending on this ladder. It is the moment where Jacob's name is changed to Israel. And, as a result of what he experiences, he names the place *Bethel*, which means *House of God*. So now put the pieces together. Jesus identifies Nathanael as *a true Israelite*. [Jacob's name was changed to Israel.] He is a true seeker of the fulfillment of Jacob's dream. What we know of Jacob is Jacob was a schemer and a deceiver. That was his story; that was a huge part of the problem. So, when Jesus says, “**You are an Israelite, indeed, in whom there is no deceit,**” one translator wrote it like this: “*...in whom there is no Jacob,*” which actually is an excellent translation. That's exactly what Jesus was saying. The idea of the vision and the ladder, Jesus was saying, “You were just reading that. I am the fulfillment of that vision; I am the ladder that connects heaven and earth. I will be the one that will connect a holy God with sinful men and women; *I will be the One upon whom angels will ascend and descend.* I'm the connecting point between heaven and earth.”

John told us that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word became flesh, and what? Tabernacled among us! House of God—the place where the glory of God resides. Ultimately the house of God, the temple of God, the tabernacle of God, it's not a building; it's a person. It's a person who will be the ladder between a holy God and sinful men and women, the One who has come to be the Savior of the world. That's what Jesus is saying in this conversation. Jesus will demonstrate again and again and again that He is indeed God in the flesh, come to be the Savior of the world. And the first significant sign—miracle—will happen at a wedding in Cana next week.

Wrapping this up this week, there are two messages to think about. There are some of you here this morning, as I said before, you're still trying to figure this out, which is fine; it's great! You're just trying to figure out what's true; you're sorting it out; you're wondering, “Is it possible Jesus could be what I'm looking for?” We're just so glad you're here. I promise no manipulation, no arm twisting, no arguing. We want to lovingly, kindly, respectfully invite you to just come and see, as John unfolds the record of Jesus in a legitimate historical document, “Just come, see.” But your part in that is you have to come with enough intellectual integrity to open your heart and genuinely seek truth. For those of us who have already trusted Jesus as Savior, how could we possibly believe what we believe and have experienced what we've experienced, and keep it a secret? How could we do that? Wouldn't the natural thing be to tell the people around us that we care about that, “I just want you to know that Jesus has changed my life, and we're talking about that at church, so just wondering if you'd like to come and see for yourself?” Don't make this harder than it has to be. It doesn't need to be a presentation. It doesn't need to be arm twisting; it doesn't need to be backing someone into the corner. It doesn't need to be arguing; it doesn't need to be any of that. It's not that complicated. It's a simple, kind, respectful invitation. “Just wondering if you'd like to come and see.” We have invitations all over as you exit. Take a handful; invite somebody to come, and let's do this together.

*These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God,
and in believing, you might find life.*

Our Father, we're just again so thankful, when we were lost in our sin with no hope, You sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. God, may we be faithful stewards of the responsibility to lovingly, kindly, compassionately, invite the people around us to come and see for themselves. Lord, we ask You to do what only You can do: to radically change the lives of people who, in this moment this morning, are struggling in darkness and despair. Lord, that's our prayer. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. Describe your own spiritual search to find Jesus. How did God use circumstances and people along the way?

2. What convinced you to believe that Jesus truly is the Savior of the world?

Bible Study

1. Read John 1:35-43. What is a disciple? How might discipleship be carried out today? What is the role of the discipler?

2. What did Jesus mean by, “What do you seek?” What was His invitation to them? Put this in modern terms. What are people seeking for and how do they “come and see” today?

3. What do we learn from Andrew once he was convinced Jesus was the Messiah?

Read John 1:43-51. Again how does Philip respond when he determines Jesus is the Christ? What does he say to Nathanael?

4. What does Jesus mean that Nathanael had no “guile?” What does that look like today? How can we discern between those who are truly seeking and those who aren’t really open to any evidence for Jesus?

5. What convinced Nathanael? What did Jesus say to him when he believed?

6. Read the Jacob story in Genesis 28. What happened to Jacob and what was his dream and how is Jesus the fulfillment of the ladder from that dream?

