

SERIES: Gospel of John: Seeing is Believing?
 SERMON: *Come and See*
 SCRIPTURE: John 1:35-51
 SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black
 DATE: August 28, 2011

In the car business we learned that people will naturally follow you if you are confident and sincere. So we would frequently say, "Follow me," and lead a client to a car. It was not a technique we used to manipulate people. Rather, we used it to show people products that we thought would meet their needs and budget. Those who are good at sales know a really important truth. **Until a shopper sees the product they will never become a buyer.** So, we would confidently and sincerely show shoppers cars.

John the Evangelist has one main goal in writing his Gospel. He wants his readers to become believers; he wants them to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that they will have eternal life in his name (20:31). And he too knows a very important truth. **Until a reader sees Jesus they will never become a believer.** So, in our text this morning John invites us to come and see Jesus. In a sense he says, "Follow me."

My prayer is that God would continue to open our eyes throughout our study of John so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. As I read the text please pay attention to all of the references to seeing, looking, seeking, and finding.

John 1:35–51 (ESV)

³⁵The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). ⁴²He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."
⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip 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 Joseph." ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to

you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Instead of going through this passage verse by verse, I’m going to divide it by the types of people we see represented in the passage: the curious, the convinced, and the captivated.

THE CURIOUS

I’ve divided the curious into two subgroups: the seekers and the skeptics. John the Baptist’s two disciples mentioned in verse 35 are at first simply seekers, though they later become full blown disciples of Jesus. They are looking for or seeking the Messiah (the Christ) before they even met Jesus personally (v. 41). John the Baptist must have told them that Jesus was the Christ before they saw him. Then, when Jesus walks by, John announces that Jesus is the Christ. Look at verse 36. *“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’”*

These disciples are curious; they want to know more, so they follow Jesus (v. 37). Then, in verse 38a when Jesus notices they were following him, he turns around and looks at them and says, *“What are you seeking?”* So, Jesus acknowledges they are seekers. They answer his question with a question in verse 38b; *“‘Rabbi’ (which means Teacher) where are you staying?”* And look at how Jesus responds in verse 39; *“He said to them, ‘Come and you will see.’”* (He says, “Follow me and I’ll show you.”) And so they go with Jesus and see where he is staying.¹ So, what should curious seekers do? **Seekers are called to come and see Jesus.**

If the first two disciples are at first seekers, then Nathanael would probably be considered a skeptic at first. Look at verses 45-46. *“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 Joseph.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’”*

Most people expected the Messiah to come from Bethlehem, the city of David, because most people expected the Messiah to be a Davidic king; for that’s what the Bible said (in the Law and the prophets). So when Philip says that they’ve found the one the *Law and prophets* spoke of and then he says he is from Nazareth, Nathanael is skeptical, and says, *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* Those who have read the New Testament know there is not a contradiction here because Jesus was *born* in Bethlehem and was *raised* in Nazareth, but Nathanael doesn’t know this, therefore he is skeptical.

And what should we do with skeptics? Argue with them, right? Well, not exactly. Look at how Philip responds to Nathanael’s skepticism in verse 46. *“‘Come and see.’”* So the seekers are called to come and see Jesus. **And the skeptics are called to come and see Jesus.** All who are curious should come and see Jesus.

¹ Little did they know at that point that there was so much more to see than they could have ever imagined. NB. the word “staying” – this is the same word John uses later when he says “the Father is in me” (14:10), when he says that the Holy Spirit will “dwell” with us, and that we are to “abide” in the Christ and “abide” in his words (which is the essence of discipleship). Point – when we come and see there will always be more than we expected (more beneath the surface).

Now keep in mind that although Nathanael at first is a skeptic, he's not a cynic. A cynic doesn't care and they don't want to see. A sincere skeptic on the other hand wants to see the truth, but is not persuaded by what is being presented as truth. Nathanael is a sincere skeptic. How do we know? Look at verse 47. "*Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit.'*" What Jesus means by this is Nathanael was a sincere skeptic. He wasn't putting up a front; there was no deceit in him; he was genuinely skeptical.

A cynical person will frequently put up a front. They'll throw up an intellectual smoke screen as an excuse for not believing, because they don't want to see. But not all people are cynical. Some people are sincerely skeptical and have *legitimate* doubts. If you're dealing with someone who is sincerely skeptical, don't argue with them. Invite them to come and see for themselves. A sincere skeptic will be willing to look at the facts. But *how* do the curious seeker and the curious skeptic come and see?

The curious should commit to study Jesus. This passage begins to introduce us to the idea of discipleship. Generally when we think of discipleship we think that it is only for the fully convinced Christian. But this passage shows us that the serious seeker and the sincere skeptic can also be a committed disciple, in a sense.

Allow me to explain. Two of John the Baptist's disciples leave John and go to "follow" Jesus who they refer to as Rabbi. And this happens *before* they are fully convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. To follow a Rabbi is common language in the Bible for being a disciple. A disciple is basically a student. And a Rabbi is basically a teacher. The ultimate goal of discipleship is to become like the teacher and to do what the teacher does, but *before* a disciple gets to that point they have to learn everything the teacher knows and everything about the way the teacher lives. That's why I think even the curious seeker or skeptic should commit to be a student of Jesus. Without studying Jesus you will never see Jesus accurately. And if you don't see Jesus accurately then you will never have all of the facts you need to make an informed decision about Jesus.

Now a disciple is not just a student; they are a serious student. The two disciples mentioned in this passage actually go and stay with Jesus and follow him wherever he goes. They give the notion of a full-time student a whole new meaning. A college student is considered full-time if they take 12-15 hours. A full-time disciple is in class 24-7. A college student has many teachers and many subjects. A disciple of Jesus has one subject and one teacher. So the seeker and the skeptic are not just called to be a student; they're called to be a serious student.

I run into a fair amount of people who would consider themselves sincere skeptics. And they throw out really tough objections to the Christian faith. But I'm amazed at how many of these people have not really dug deep into their own objections. Instead they've listened to a podcast or read a blog post where someone used a bunch of arguments that appeal to emotions (*ad hominem* arguments), but they don't really consider all of the facts. Then when I hand them a thick book on the reliability of Scripture they say something like, "Well I don't like to read."

If I just described you, please allow me to challenge you. If you are a sincere skeptic, you need to be a serious student. Being a serious student of Jesus is hard work. But if you want to come and see Jesus, there's no three-minute video we can show you; you have to look hard at the Bible. I am in the process of putting together a space for skeptics, where you can come and be honest about your skepticism without having someone look down their nose at you. But the group will require some study too. If you're interested in something like this, or know somebody who would be, please come talk with me or email me.

If you are a seeker or a skeptic let me encourage you to not focus on the music in this church (which you may love or hate), or the people in the church (who may seem a little strange to you), or the pastor in this church (who also may be a little weird or a little boring). Everyone at this church is imperfect and everything we do at this church is imperfect. But I'm not calling you to be a student of us. If you are a serious seeker or a sincere skeptic I want to invite you to look at Jesus first and foremost, not our people or programs.

Maybe you wouldn't consider yourself a seeker or a skeptic, but if you know someone who is a serious seeker or a sincere skeptic, I'd like for you to consider some similar applications. Please don't try to sell a seeker or a skeptic on some program or by telling them how much different our church is than the one they went to where they had a bad experience. And please, whatever you do, don't try to make them your disciple (or somebody else's). John the Baptist got this. Follow his example and point others to Jesus.

And remember that you win people *to* what you win them *with*. If you try to win them *with* a program that meets their needs, then you'll win them *to* consumer-driven Christianity. If you try win them *with* a great concert or event, then you'll win them *to* entertainment-driven Christianity. But if you win them *with* Bible study, then you'll win them *to* discipleship-driven Christianity, which is the only notion of Christianity we have in the Bible. I'm convinced that looking at Jesus, as we find him in the Bible is the best method of evangelism.

Let's look now at the second group of people in our passage.

THE CONVINCED

We know that the curious seekers and the skeptic in our passage become convinced disciples. Look at verses 40-41. *“One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ).”*

While at first Jesus was simply their teacher, he quickly became their Savior. Notice that these two disciples first call Jesus Rabbi (which means Teacher) in verse 38, but in verse 41 Andrew says Jesus is the Messiah. The same is true for everyone in this narrative. **The convinced are compelled to confess Jesus is the Christ.**

John the Baptist confesses Jesus is the Christ when he says Jesus is the Lamb of God and the Son of God (vv. 29, 34). In verse 45, Philip calls Jesus the one *“whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote.”* In verse 49, Nathanael calls him *“the Son of God! ...the King of Israel.”* All of these confessions are saying in one way or another, “you are the Messiah; the promised

one who was sent to save Israel. You are not just a teacher; you are our Savior, the one who takes away the sin of the world.”²

If you become a student of Jesus for very long you will realize that he must be more than a teacher. Consider C.S. Lewis’ perspective on this.

*...I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*³

Jesus was a man and a teacher, but he claimed to be much more than a man and a teacher; he claimed to be the Messiah, the Christ, and he claimed to be God, the Lord. The book of John wants us to see that Jesus is the Christ. And those who are convinced and believe he is the Christ will confess he is the Christ. But that is not all.

One of my favorite aspects of our passage this morning is the excitement and anticipation that is brimming at every turn. And that excitement is seen most clearly in the characters’ bold witness for Jesus. **The convinced are compelled to call others to come and see.**

John the Baptist is convinced and he says two times, “Behold, (or Look!) *the Lamb of God!*” (vv. 29, 36). His sole purpose in life is to point others to Jesus and he’s constrained to do it, eager to do it, excited!

The first thing Andrew does, after he is convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, is find his brother Simon. Listen to the language in verses 41-42. “*He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus.’*” Then the very same thing happens with Philip. He follows Jesus and then becomes convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. Then the first thing he does, after he becomes convinced, is find Nathanael. Look at verse 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 Joseph.’*”

² “Son of God” – David was called the son of God because he was God’s appointed ruler. The people expected the Messiah to be a son of David, therefore, a Son of God. When John the Baptist and Nathanael refer to Jesus as Son of God, they mean the long-awaited Messiah who would be the son of David. They don’t understand yet that Jesus is God in chapter 1. However, John the Evangelist has both meanings in mind. As we have said, the Word was with God and the Word was God (v. 1). Keep that in mind as we move forward in the book of John. What comes off the lips of a character in the narrative is one thing; what comes out of the pen of John the Evangelist is another. Just like the word “staying”... Again, the point is with Jesus there is more than meets the eye. Therefore, you must stay tuned, there will be more next week.

³ In *The Quotable Lewis*, p. 340

Nobody told these guys they better do some evangelism if they wanted to be a good Christian. They couldn't help themselves. "Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm gonna let it shine!" The convinced are compelled to call others to come and see.

Many kids have grown up in youth groups where they were told over and over again to bring their friends to youth group; and they were made to feel guilty if they didn't. I heard a youth pastor say one time, "You better bring your friends to the bon fire this weekend, or they'll be going to another fire." (Funny, but sad.) Now I'm not saying that the thought of our friends going to hell is not a legitimate motivation for evangelism, what I'm saying is it shouldn't be the only or even the primary motivation.

Fire is a legitimate motivation. But our primary motivation for evangelism should be the fire that is burning in us because we have encountered Jesus and we can't wait to tell others that we have found the Savior who died for our sins. The convinced are compelled to call others to come and see. This is the main way we spread the good news that Jesus is the Christ who takes away the sin of the world.⁴

Many of you have been to a Christmas Eve service where at the end of the service they sing Silent Night and everybody has a candle they hold up during the song. I like the way we do it here because we only light one candle with a lighter. Then all of the other candles are lit from the flame being passed on. In a moment's time the entire room is glowing with hundreds of candles. The same is true with person to person evangelism. We pass the fire of Christ that is burning in us from one person to another. When that happens it can have an exponential impact.

How many of you have watched a really funny YouTube video in the last month? How did you find out about the video? Chances are you didn't go searching for the video on your own. It is more likely that someone told you about the video or emailed you a link. They said, "You've got to see this video, it's hilarious." Then you watched it and may have passed it on to others. And as enough people spread the word, the video "goes viral."

Word of mouth is how news spreads. Electronic media is a powerful force, but I don't think it has (or ever will) surpassed the age-old media of one person, who's fired up, sharing with someone else, who in turn shares with someone else.

For those of us who are convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who died for our sins, we will be compelled to "go viral." However, that doesn't necessarily mean we need to quit our jobs and become missionaries. In this passage, the disciples started by telling their family, friends, and co-workers. Andrew told his brother Simon. Andrew and Simon were fishermen from Bethsaida. They went there with Jesus and found Philip, who was most likely a fellow fisherman. And Philip found Nathanael who was likely a friend or a co-worker.

Those who have found the Messiah should find others and tell them about Jesus. But the main thing I want to draw out here is not that we *should* tell our friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors about Jesus, but we should *want* to tell them. The fire that is alive in us shouldn't be

⁴ Illustration from F. Dale Bruner lecture: Statue of the Jesuit Missionary Francis Xavier and Ignatius of Loyola pointing with this inscription: "Go! Burn!" or "Go! Set the World on Fire"

put under a bushel. If we're fired up about Jesus we'll tell others and we'll want others to see by the flame and to be warmed by the flame. Who will you tell?

We've looked at the curious and the convinced. Now I want to look at a third group I see represented in this passage.

THE CAPTIVATED

Keep in mind the captivated were first curious and then convinced; and the captivated will never quit being curious and convinced. All disciples will continue to seek Jesus, to study Jesus, to confess that he's the Christ, and to call others to come and see. But the captivated have not only *seen* Jesus, they know they have been seen *by* Jesus and therefore they can't wait to see more!

The captivated know they have been seen by Jesus. We're called to come and see, but notice also how many times the text refers to Jesus seeing the disciples. Jesus "*saw*" the two disciples (v. 38), he "*looked*" at Simon (v. 42), and he "*found*" Philip (v. 43). But Jesus not only sees the disciples externally; he also sees inside of them. He sees through Peter. Look at verse 42. "*Jesus looked at him and said, 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter).*" Jesus sees right through Simon. He knew who he was and he knew who he would be.

Jesus also sees through Nathanael. Look at verse 47. "*Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!'*" Jesus has been reading Nathanael's mail. He knows he's a sincere skeptic. And Nathanael wants to know how Jesus knows him so well. Look at verse 48. "*Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?'* *Jesus answered him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.'*"

Wow! John wants us to see Jesus and to know Jesus, but he also wants us to know that before we ever saw Jesus he saw us and before we ever came to know him he knew us. John doesn't just want us to know about Jesus, he wants us to know him personally. And a personal relationship is a two-way street. Jesus sees us and knows us and we're called to see him and know him.

This should captivate our hearts, to think that the God of the universe – the eternal God who created everything – would want to be known and knows us personally. The fact that Jesus knew Nathanael, inside and out, captivated Nathanael's heart. It was enough for him to go from being a curious skeptic to a captivated convert; he *did* believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Look again at his testimony in verse 49. "*Nathanael answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'*" He sees Jesus and becomes a believer.

But John not only wants us to see Jesus and to see that he sees us. He also wants us *to want to see* so much more. Look at Jesus' response to Nathanael in verses 50-51. "*Jesus answered him, 'Because I said to you, '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 heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'*" To paraphrase in the words of 70s rock band BTO, Jesus is saying, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!"

As I said earlier, this whole chapter is filled with excitement and anticipation. Does it captivate your heart? Are you thinking, “I can’t wait to see more?” If that is the case, John has accomplished his purpose. **The captivated can’t wait to see more.**

When Jesus says, “...*you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man,*” he’s referring to Genesis 28 which Pastor Dick read earlier.

In Genesis 28, Jacob has a dream and sees a ladder going up into heaven with angels going up and down. The ladder represented the bridge between heaven and earth, between God and man. God made himself known to Jacob and reminded him of the promise made to Abraham that one day there would be a son of Abraham who would be a blessing to all.

Jesus is saying, “I’m the new bridge between heaven and earth; I’m the new bridge between God and man. As you see me you are seeing God. And you will see amazing things!” His statement is the introduction to the seven signs/miracles that begin in chapter 2. And his statement ultimately looks forward to the most amazing display of God’s glory in the whole book of John, when Jesus, the Son of Man, is lifted up on a cross to die for the sins of the world.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus proved himself to be a Messiah beyond anyone’s imagination – a Messiah who saves the world from their sin, and the one who would bless all nations. It was through Jesus’ cross that he became the true bridge or ladder between heaven and earth, between Holy God and sinful man. If we believe that Jesus is the Christ and that he died for our sins and was raised from the dead then we can have eternal life in his name. Do you believe?

I’m praying that each of us will believe, either for the first time or in a deeper way. However, I won’t twist your arm to believe. I simply ask you to come and see. Are you a curious seeker or skeptic? You ain’t seen nothin’ yet. Come and see. Are you a convinced disciple? You ain’t seen nothin’ yet. Come and see. Are you a captivated convert? You ain’t seen nothin’ yet. Come and see. The response is the same for each of us. We’re called to come and see. There is so much more to see. And the more we see, the more there is to believe about Jesus. I hope you have seen more today than you had previously, but mainly I hope you are motivated to continue coming to the Bible and that you will desire to see more.

Stay tuned. We’ll get to chapter 2 in two weeks.

Benediction:

2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

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