

Come and See (John 1:35-51)
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If I were to ask you, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” what would you say? Does it mean you believe in God, go to church, or read your Bible? Is a Christian someone who is narrow-minded, homophobic, or votes for the Republican Party? Does Christianity mean trying to be a good person, practice the golden rule, or affirm people no matter what they believe?

Our culture has all manner of notions about what it means to be a Christian. So do a lot of people showing up in churches on Sunday morning. Regardless of your instinctive answer, consider this. What you *think* it means or what I *think* it means doesn’t matter. What matters is what God *says* it means. Why? Because the simple fact we think something doesn’t make it true. What makes the answer to a question true is whether it conforms to what God says is true. For he is the truth, he defines the truth, and he reveals the truth to us in the pages of his Word.

Thus the best way to answer the question, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” isn’t to look to your own experience or what you’ve observed in someone else’s life. The best way is to open the Bible and listen to what God himself has to say.

The big question the entire book of John sets out to answer is, “Who is Jesus?” There are some mind-shattering answers to that question in the second half of John 1. But the author of the fourth gospel also does something else here as Jesus begins his public ministry. He begins to teach us how to respond to Jesus in light of who he is, which is another way of saying he begins to show us what it means to be a Christian.

What we learn here is not the sum total of all God requires from us as Christians, but it is the essence of our faith, a foundation we never leave behind or from which we move on. Rather, it is a reality into which we press deeper and deeper, a life-long pursuit we refuse to abandon. Here’s the answer. **To be a Christian is to know and follow Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.** For that is who he really is.

The Apostle John presses that claim home by telling us a story, a story from the first week of Jesus’ public ministry where a group of different men each have an encounter with Jesus and become witnesses to his identity. There are places in John where it’s best to work chronologically through an entire passage. There are other places where I think it’s more helpful to read the whole account and then focus on some of the repeating

lessons or themes. Let's take approach #2 as we study the second half of Jn 1 and learn from their experience what it really means to be a Christian.

LESSON #1: JESUS KNOWS AND PURSUES US

Sometimes we think of God as this sort of spiritual force out there who's doing his God thing and we're just one of 7 billion some data points in his cosmic spreadsheet. Interacting with him feels about as plausible as Will the krill trying to move up the food chain in Happy Feet 2. Maybe he wound up the universe, but he certainly doesn't seem engaged with the details of my life.

Jesus shatters that notion, friends. Over and over again, he demonstrates an incredible awareness and intimate knowledge of everyone around him. In v. 35, John the Baptist (not the John who wrote the gospel) sees Jesus walking by and says to two of his own followers, "Guys, look! It's the Lamb of God. It's the One who will sacrifice himself to deal once and for all with the sin that separates us from a holy God." One of the two is named Andrew. The other disciple remains anonymous.

And when they hear John's witness to the truth about Jesus, what happens? They leave John to start following Jesus, literally. They haven't said anything to him. They don't seem to fully understand who he is. They just find themselves strangely drawn to him. What would you expect to read next? V. 38, "And Jesus kept moving along because he was a man on a mission and had more important things to do." No! V. 38, "Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, 'What are you seeking?'"

We'll come back to the content of his question shortly. For now, consider this. From the very first moment you begin moving toward Jesus, Jesus sees you. He's aware of you. He's not hiding behind a door that says, "Committed followers only." He's not waiting for you to interrupt him, preoccupied with greater matters. You begin drawing near to him, you start taking tentative steps toward him, and immediately he begins drawing near to you.

What a comfort that is if you're exploring Christianity, wrestling with this Jesus your friend or family member keeps talking about. Even now, Jesus sees and knows you. You may feel like a mystery to yourself. But who you are and the circumstances of your life are not a mystery to him. What does Jesus say in v. 47 when he sees Nathanael coming toward him? "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

Nathanael had yet to meet Jesus, but Jesus already knew him. He knew his character. He knew the genuine desire in his heart to follow the Lord. And when Nathanael expresses his shock in v. 48, "How do you know me?" what does Jesus say? V. 48, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Nathanael immediately realizes he's not talking to an ordinary man, an ordinary teacher. He realizes the Messiah himself is standing before him. And think about what prompted him to recognize as much. It was Jesus' supernatural knowledge of the smallest details of his life.

Friend, God hasn't changed. No matter where you stand in relationship to him, the ascended Christ sees you. He knows you. Nothing about you is hidden from him. He knows where you are in the present. He knows where you've been in the past. And for all who come to him, he knows exactly what he will make you into by his grace in the future.

I love what Jesus says when Andrew brings Simon to him in v. 42. "So you are Simon the son of John?" It's the sort of thing we say when we finally meet someone we've known about for a long time. As the eternal Son of God, Jesus already knew Simon better than Simon knew himself. But now he finally gets to meet him face to face, as God incarnate, God in human flesh. And notice the first thing he says to him. "You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)," or literally, the rock.

To name someone in the 1st century was both an expression of authority and a way of describing their character. By calling Simon "Peter" or "the rock" Jesus reveals that he doesn't just know or see Simon for who he is right now. He knows and sees Simon for who he will fashion him to be – the apostolic leader upon whose confession Jesus would build his church. Whether far off or near, interested or ignorant, Jesus knows and pursues us that he might fashion us into who he created us to be.

The simplicity of v. 43 is beautiful. "The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee." Why would Jesus do that? Because there's someone he already knows in Galilee, though they have yet to know him. He's going to find a man named Philip. Why? So that Philip might fulfill God's good plan for his life.

Praise God for that, friends. Jesus' knowledge is perfect. His pursuit is decisive. When you feel invisible to God and the rest of the world, Jesus knows you. Jesus sees you. When your son or daughter is struggling with their faith, Jesus knows them. Jesus sees them. When you're struggling with sin and tempted to see yourself as a damaged



goods, remember Jesus doesn't just see you for who you are. He sees and knows you for who you are becoming by his grace.

Before you come to Jesus, as you come to Jesus, and after you've come to Jesus, take heart. Jesus knows us and pursues us that he might fulfill his good purposes for us.

LESSON #2: JESUS INVITES US TO KNOW AND FOLLOW HIM

The essence of Christianity is not doing good things for God or getting God to do good things for us. It's far better. Look back at v. 38. "Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, 'What are you seeking?' And they said to him, 'Rabbi, where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and you will see.' So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day..."

Religious people look to Christianity for all kinds of things. We can look to Christianity to give us a sense of belonging in a fragmented culture. We can look to Christianity to strengthen our self-esteem. We can look to Christianity as the key to getting an extra dose of health and prosperity in this life. We can look to Christianity to provide a moral foundation for our children. We can look to Christianity as the key to finding a prospective mate.

The options are as endless as our idols. But the critical question, my friends, is whether you're looking for what God actually desires to give you and what you ultimately need more than anything else, namely, the unspeakable joy of knowing and following him. Did you catch the underlying desire in Andrew's reply, a desire Jesus implicitly affirms with his invitation? They want to be with him. They want to be near him. Jesus says, "Come and see." "So they came...and saw...and stayed."

Friend, the greatest need in your life isn't a bigger house, a sexier body, a longer vacation, compliant children, or a spouse who is actually willing to listen to you. The greatest need in your life, the one thing that outshines all joys and comforts all sorrows, is an intimate relationship with Jesus where your soul is increasingly satisfied with the glory of his goodness.

When people start getting close to Jesus in Jn 1, what's the first thing that happens? They immediately begin to marvel at the wonder of who he is! What does Andrew say? "Peter, we have found the Christ, the Messiah!" The One who fulfills all the promises of God in the Old Testament - promises to rescue, deliver, redeem, and restore all that the curse of sin has made wrong, starting with our relationship to God.

What does Philip say? "Nathanael, we have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote." Remember what our forefather Jacob prophesied in Gen 49:10, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet"? Remember Isa 42:1, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations"? Guess who it is, Nathanael. It's Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Nathanael's own declaration takes the cake. What did the Lord promise David in 2 Sam 7:12-14? "I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body...and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son." What did the prophet foretell in Zeph 3:15? "The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil."

Whether Nathanael recognized the full significance of his words or not, he was exactly right about Jesus. V. 48, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" In Jesus, God satisfies our souls by giving us nothing less than the gift of himself. In Jesus we discover the joy of seeing God and knowing God because Jesus is one who restores our relationship with God by living our life and dying our death.

Jn 1:51 is arguably the high point of the entire passage. Whenever Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you..." that's his way in the Gospel of underlying, circling, highlighting, and putting something in all caps with a trail of emojis. "You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

He's saying to Philip and Nathanael, "Guys, remember Gen 28 where Jacob had a dream at Bethel of a ladder set up on the earth with the top reaching into heaven? The ladder representing free access into the presence and dwelling place of God? I am that ladder. I am the only way to the Father, the bridge between heaven and earth. To come to me is to commune with God because I am heaven opened, God revealed. I'm not just *a* son of man. I am *the* Son of Man, God in human flesh.

Being a Christian means knowing Jesus for who he really is and continuing to see and rejoice in him for who is. The promise Jesus made to Nathanael in v. 50, "You will see greater things than these," is fulfilled at the cross where the Son of Man was lifted up, and the hour of his greatest humiliation became the hour of greatest glory.

And when we come to know and behold Jesus as our crucified and risen Savior, what happens? We are ravished by his glory and empowered by his Spirit to freely exchange our pursuit of the fleeting treasures of this life for the eternal joy of following him. We hear Jesus' voice summoning us the same way he summoned Philip, "My son, my daughter, follow me," and we say with grateful wonder, "Yes, Lord. Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. In every area of life, at all times, in all situations, whatever you say, I will obey."

That's what it means to be a Christian. The essence of Christianity isn't doing good things for God or getting God to do good things for you. It's knowing and following Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. We follow him because we know him, and the more we follow him, the more we come to know him.

LESSON #3: TO FOLLOW JESUS IS TO COMPEL OTHERS TO JOIN YOU

One of the most striking aspects of the entire story is the way Jesus' followers immediately say and do what Jesus says and does. What did Jesus say to Andrew in v. 39? "Come and see." What did Philip say to Nathanael in v. 46? "Come and see." What did Jesus do in v. 43? He found Philip. What did Philip do in v. 44? He found Nathanael.

Part of what's so amazing here is that no one tells Andrew or Philip to go and bring others to Jesus. No one, Jesus included, tells them to bring other people with them. It's their immediate and instinctive response, as if it were the obvious and most rational thing in the world to do. And it forces a tremendously important question. If you're not bringing people to Jesus the way Andrew brought Peter, if you're not really engaged in personal evangelism, Christian, could it be that you've lost sight of who Jesus really is?

From John the Baptist in v. 35 to Nathanael in v. 49, the men who encounter Jesus cannot help but speak of what they have seen and heard. His goodness and majesty consumed them. They could no more stay quiet than one of my boys when they open the birthday present of their dreams. To know Jesus is to follow Jesus and to follow Jesus is to bear witness to Jesus, no dutifully or begrudgingly, but gladly and freely. It's a theme we'll encounter again and again in John's gospel. In 20:21, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Two weeks ago, I asked you to email me whenever God gives you an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with someone, even if it's just part of the gospel. And as far as I'm concerned, the more "ordinary" it seems, the better, because that's where real life happens. Here's what one of our college students, Garrett Rozier, wrote:

A couple of Sundays ago we read...James 5:20 "Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." This verse struck me because I immediately thought of a friend of mine. I had had opportunities in the past to share the gospel with him, but when I heard this, I prayed that God would give me an opportunity to share again. God answered that prayer that following night when we had a very lengthy conversation about what it meant to be saved and following God with all your heart. It was encouraging for me to see how much the conversation provoked him and I hope to have more opportunities in the future. I am thankful to God for giving me the opportunity and answering my prayer...We have the best news in the world and we need to share with everyone.

Brothers and sisters, he's right. What does John say was the "first" thing Andrew apparently did when he began following Jesus? V. 41, "He first found his own brother Simon..." Follow his example, brothers and sisters. Don't wait for your family members to ask you. Don't wait for your friends to ask you. Call them. Find them. Open your mouth and tell them what Jesus has done for you. You can't change their heart. You can't make them follow Jesus. But you can do what Andrew did. You can bring them to Jesus.

In 2018, I began praying that the Lord would not let a year of my life go by without giving my privilege of leading at least one person to faith in Christ. The Lord has answered that prayer and I'm asking him to continue. It's not a sales job. It's not a religious pitch. It's an act of love, an act of worship. To follow Jesus is to compel others to join us because he's that good.

CONCLUSION

To be a Christian is to know and follow Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. For that is who he really is. I want to conclude by making a personal appeal to those of you who are growing up in the church like I did. Don't ride on the coattails of your parent's faith or your friend's faith. I'm grateful they see Jesus. I'm grateful they're following Jesus. But you need to come and see him for yourself just like Simon, just like Nathanael.

How will that happen? By opening the pages of his Word and asking God to help you see Jesus for the Savior he is. Faith in Jesus requires a faithful witness and a personal experience. You've received the former. It's the great privilege of growing up in a Christian home. Only Jesus can give you the latter, my friend. Don't assume it. Seek it. Labor to understand his person and his ways. Make knowing Jesus the great ambition of your life and as you grow older, don't stop.



He is not a shiny coin we stuff in our spiritual pocket. He is a house of treasures waiting to be explored. Make the request a group of Greeks brought to Philip in Jn 12:20 your daily cry to God. "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."