

Come & See: Bringing Others to Jesus

John 1:35-51

by Pastor Jason Van Bommel

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!”³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.³⁸ Jesus 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?”³⁹ 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, for it was about the tenth hour.⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ).⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.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.”⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”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.”⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”⁵⁰ 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.”⁵¹ 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.”

John 1:35-51, ESV

How do most people come to know Jesus?

Why are you here this morning? If you’re a believer in Christ, how did you come to know Jesus? For most adult believers in church, the answer goes back to their childhood and to Christian parents, or at least one Christian parent. But what about those who don’t grow up in church? How do adults who don’t know Jesus come to know Him as their Lord and Savior?

Mike Fleischmann is the pastor of Inland Hills Community Church in Oceanside, California. He engaged the help of sociologists and conducted extensive research. Here’s part of what he found:

What made the real difference with the unchurched were personal relationships. The majority who find Christ, look back and say that it was a friend who influenced them toward faith. In my interviews, over and over again, people shared about someone in relationship with them.

This friendship may have been for a lifetime or just a season, but it was the right person at the right time that helped bring them to faith.

Denise was befriended by a teacher at her daughter's daycare. Tom had a surfing buddy who came back after summer vacation totally changed by Jesus. John had a neighbor who loaned him tools and helped him in the yard. Phyllis was new in town and met another mom at the park who invited her to an Easter service.

I place much more confidence in the people of my church than I used to. I understand now that most of them are far better situated to lead unchurched people to Christ than I am. And I've learned that if I do lead someone to Christ, I will likely be wearing the "friend" hat and not the "professional minister" hat. (from the Summer 2010 issue of *Leadership Journal*)

People coming to Christ through the invitation of a friend or relative is nothing new, of course. Today we read that at least two of Jesus' first disciples first came to Him because of the influence of a brother and a friend.

Our passage today begins with John the Baptist repeating his testimony from the day before – “Behold the Lamb of God!” The difference is that, the day before, John was baptizing and preaching and saw Jesus coming toward him when he cried out and identified Him as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. In today's passage, it's now the next day and John is standing with two of his disciples – Andrew and a second, unnamed disciples who is probably the Apostle John himself – when Jesus walks by and, as Jesus is walking away, John tells his disciples, “Look, the Lamb of God!” This time, John's disciples actually respond to his message and leave John to follow Jesus.

I. We Have Found the Messiah!

As these disciples turn to follow Jesus, they ask Him where He is staying and He responds simply, “Come and see.” We have no record of their conversation, nor do we know where they go with Jesus or how long they stay with Him. We're not told where Jesus was staying in this fairly remote place, far from their homes.

a. Humility in Jesus' First Followers

We do find out something about their characters in verse 40, “One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.” The humility of both of these first two disciples is evident. Most Bible scholars believe the unnamed disciple is John himself, the author of the Gospel, but we don't know for sure because John never names himself in his own Gospel.

Though he was a prominent leader in the early church and was probably, by this time, the last living Apostle, John never names himself in his Gospel account. He wants all the focus to be on Jesus. In fact, the only times he does directly refer to himself, he simply calls himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” His identity was completely wrapped up in being loved by Jesus.

The other disciple is Andrew, who is immediately identified as Simon Peter’s brother. This is significant because in verse 40, we have not yet been introduced to Simon Peter. But Simon Peter was so well known that Andrew was best known as Simon Peter’s brother. Andrew is the first evangelist among the disciples, the first one to bring someone else to Christ, but his humility is evident in the fact that the man he brought to Jesus ended up being a much more vocal and prominent leader in the church than Andrew did.

b. Andrew, Brother of Simon

Andrew was very determined to bring his brother to Jesus. As soon as he and John had spent enough time with Jesus to have the testimony of John the Baptist confirmed by their own experience, he first went and found his brother, Simon, and then he brought him to Jesus. His testimony to Simon was very simple and clear: We have found the Messiah!

c. Simon, the Rock?

When Andrew brings Simon to Jesus, Jesus looks into Simon’s eyes and tells him, not who Jesus Himself is, but who Simon is and who he would be in the future. Jesus looks at him and says, “*You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas*” (which means Peter).”

Jesus words were thick with significance: “You shall be called Cephas.” John translated the Aramaic name, Cephas, into the Greek equivalent name, Peter. But for us, the meaning is not “Peter.” The meaning in English is “Rock.” The meaning of names in the ancient world, especially among Jewish people, was so much more important to their identity than it is for us today. Today, parents often pick a child’s name based on how it sounds, whether it is pleasing to the ear.

Simon means “he has heard” or simply “listen.” This is an interesting name for a man who is better known for being quick and eager to speak than to listen. Can you imagine, as a parent, naming your son, “Listen”? Jesus looks at Mr. “He Has Heard” and tells him “You will be called the rock.” Jesus isn’t just predicting the future in a prophecy, but He is declaring to Simon Peter the work that Jesus Himself will do in Simon’s heart to make him Peter. By His words, which Peter will hear, and His Spirit, whom Peter will receive, Jesus is going to make Peter into a rock for his church, a key foundational early leader in His kingdom.

II. We Have Found Him!

The narrative then progresses to the next day. On the next day, the ESV says that “Jesus decided to go to Galilee.” This is one possible understanding of the text, but the text more literally reads like this: “The next day, he determined to go into Galilee. He found Phillip, and Jesus said to him, “Follow me.”

So, who the “he” is at the beginning of verse 43 is unclear, but the context of verses 40-42 seems to indicate that Andrew is still the main subject. Listen to a more literal rendering of the four verses together, verses 40-43 –

One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him 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). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter). The next day he decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip, and Jesus said to him, “Follow me.”

Now, when you hear it that way, it seems like Andrew decided to go to Galilee. In Galilee, Andrew found Philip and then Jesus said to Phillip, “Follow me.” It’s not a critically important point, but if this reading of the text, which is advocated by D.A. Carson and others, would mean that Andrew brought both Peter and Philip to Christ. If we’re mis-reading it and it was Jesus who decided to go to Galilee and who found Philip, then Jesus Himself not only called Phillip to follow Him, but sought him out in order to call Philip to follow Him.

a. “Follow me!”

So, whether it was Andrew who brought Philip to Jesus or Jesus Himself who sought out Philip, Philip is still the first disciple in John’s Gospel to hear the simple and clear call from Jesus, “Follow me.” And Philip responded. The call of Jesus is simple, so simple that we can easily needlessly complicate it: Jesus is Lord and He calls us to follow Him. Once we respond to His call and begin following Him, we learn all sorts of things about Him and we grow in our knowledge and understanding of the Gospel, the Bible and theology, but the call to follow is simple, powerful and life-changing, even if our knowledge is limited and very incomplete.

b. Him of Whom Moses and the Prophets Wrote

After spending some time with Jesus, Philip immediately did the same thing Andrew did, only he went and found a friend instead of his brother. Philip went and found Nathanael, who would become better known as Bartholomew, and told him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

The way Philip expressed himself to Nathanael shows that both men were students of the Scripture. They both knew that Moses and the prophets wrote about the Messiah. They knew that the Scriptures were given to point the people of God toward their true and righteous King, and Philip said, “We have found him!”

c. Anything Good from Nazareth?

Nathanael’s response to Philip has become famous: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Now, it is possible that Philip’s response reflects his disdain for the little town of Nazareth. Philip and Nathanael were both from Bethsaida, and there may have been a rivalry or snobbery involved in his comment.

There’s another way to read Nathanael’s comment, though. Philip had said that they had found the one about whom Moses and the prophets had written, Jesus of Nazareth. It’s possible that Nathanael may just have meant that he didn’t think that the promises of the Scriptures connect the Messiah to Nazareth at all. In other words, “Moses and the Prophets don’t say anything about the Messiah coming from Nazareth!”

Most Jewish people knew that Micah had clearly said that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem Ephratha. What was less commonly known was the reference to Messianic hope in Isaiah 9:1-2 –

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

² *The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.*

While Isaiah doesn’t specifically name Nazareth, he does speak of the area where Nazareth is located and where Jesus spent most of His earthly ministry – in the territories of Zebulun and Naphtali and in the area known as Galilee.

But instead of engaging in a debate with Nathanael about Micah and Isaiah and Bethlehem and Galilee, Philip says the same simple words to Nathanael that Jesus had earlier said to Andrew and John: “Come and see.”

III. The Son of God! The King of Israel!

a. Jesus' Great Insight

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

Jesus sees Nathanael coming from a distance with Philip and He declares that He knows Nathanael's character, that he is a genuine Israelite, not a fake one – literally a true, genuine Israelite, or even an Israelite of the truth. Jesus knew that Nathanael was an honest man, not a mask-wearing, role-playing hypocrite. Nathanael's earlier comment to Philip reflects this character. He wasn't just going to be polite and accept what Philip said and pretend to agree with him. He wasn't rude, just honest and without deception or guile in his character.

This kind of character is rare, and Jesus apparently really valued it in Nathanael, but of course, what is even more rare is the fact that Jesus could accurately assess from a distance the character of a man he had never met before. This statement stuns the honest Nathanael, and he responds honestly. He doesn't fake it and do the polite thing, saying, "Oh, thank you, Jesus, that's very kind of you to say." No, he says, "How do you know me?"

b. Nathanael's Great Confession

Jesus' answer stuns Nathanael even more than His initial proclamation about Nathanael's character. Jesus says, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Instantly, Nathanael grasps the obvious: This is no ordinary man.

We don't know exactly what Nathanael was doing or thinking about under the fig tree. It's possible that he may have been praying, but he certainly knew that Jesus wasn't around to be able to see him in any ordinary sense. He knew that Jesus must be someone really special, sent by God Himself. So Nathanael says, "*Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*"

Nathanael's confession is one of the truest, clearest and most powerful made in the whole Gospel of John, until Thomas says to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" in 20:28. Nathanael calls Jesus the Son of God and professes Him to be the true and rightful King of Israel. Nathanael, who obviously knows the Scripture, is probably thinking of Psalm 2, the great coronation psalm for Messiah, which declares Messiah to be not only the King of Israel but the Son of God and the ruler of the nations.

At this point, Nathanael is probably still hoping for a nationalistic military-political deliverance for Israel, but even if his hope of deliverance is misguided, his understanding of who Jesus is is certainly not. He is the first to offer such a clear understanding, and we can know that his profession is sincere and from the heart.

c. Greater Things

Jesus responds to Nathanael's great confession with a promise that probably left Nathanael even more stunned: "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these."

Greater things? What could be greater than meeting a man who can see you even when He's not with you? What could be greater than a man who knows the quality of your character before He is even introduced to you?

d. Jacob's Ladder = Son of Man

Well, Jesus tells 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." Jesus promise to Nathanael was intended for a man who knew the Scriptures well. Jesus combined two images from Scripture: Jacob's ladder from Genesis 28 and the Son of Man from Daniel 7.

In Genesis 28, God reassured a panicked Jacob who was fleeing for his life from his home and his murderous brother, Esau, of His covenant promises. God had chosen Jacob, and even though Jacob was not yet a man of faith, God re-affirmed His covenant promises to Jacob in a dream. Jacob saw a ladder reaching heaven and touching earth and the angels of God ascending and descending on the ladder.

Jesus is now saying that He, as the Son of Man, is that ladder that Jacob saw and that Nathanael would see it, too. The Son of Man is a reference to Daniel 7, where Daniel saw "one like a son of man" who received an eternal kingdom of worldwide dominion from God Himself, the Ancient of Days –

and behold, with the clouds of heaven
 there came one like a son of man,
 and he came to the Ancient of Days
 and was presented before him.
 And to him was given dominion
 and glory and a kingdom,
 that all peoples, nations, and languages
 should serve him;
 his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
 which shall not pass away,
 and his kingdom one
 that shall not be destroyed. – Daniel 7:13-14

Jesus is telling Nathanael that He Himself will be the bridge between heaven and earth; He will reconcile God and man. In doing so, He will receive a kingdom from God that will extend over the whole world and will never end. And Nathanael will see it himself. Ultimately, the words of Jesus would be fulfilled in His death, resurrection and ascension, which Nathanael would witness. By His death on the cross, Jesus reconciles God and man, providing a bridge between heaven and earth in His own sacrificial death. By His resurrection from the dead, Jesus was declared to be “Son of God with power,” as Paul says in Romans 1:4. In His ascension back to heaven, to the right hand of God, Jesus was enthroned as the eternal King of kings and Lord of lords.

Come and see! How will others come to know Him?

Jesus is the Messiah. He is the One about whom Moses wrote in the Law. He is the One about whom the prophets wrote. He is the Son of Man who reconciles heaven and earth and reigns over all the nations forever, and He is coming again soon. Do you know Him? If you don't, come and see! Come and see who Jesus is. Trust in Him and follow Him and He will show you.

If you do know Him, how will others in your life come to know Him? How will your friends and family come to know Him? Will you invite them to come and see?