

The Bible’s account of how Jesus built his Church by calling the first disciples to follow him reveals a pattern primarily driven by an invitation to “come and see.” Those who stay with Jesus will learn doctrine about him and powerfully encounter him. Come and see, then become a disciple-making disciple.

Introduction – The mere mention of this one thing is enough to launch your brain into overdrive excuse-making mode. What is this dreaded thing?

I. Preparing Disciples: Come and See

A. The herald: “Behold the Lamb of God” (vv. 35-37)

As the one who announces Jesus to the world and prepares his own followers to become disciples of Jesus, John the Baptist is a herald. The message of a herald demands a response, either a pledge of allegiance or rebellion. So “the next day” when John the Baptist saw Jesus walking by, he announced to his followers, “Look! That man is the Lamb of God. Leave me, follow him instead, and become his disciple. Because that one takes away the sin of the world” (v. 29). In effect, John the herald of the Lamb of God proclaimed to his followers (and to us today), “Go and see.”

B. The master: “What are you seeking?” (vv. 38-41, 45)

1. We hate to use this word, but “master” is the best way to characterize the role a teacher held in relation to his disciple. So when Jesus noticed two of John the Baptist’s disciples (Andrew and possibly John) following after him, he asked “what are you seeking?” It was important that Jesus establish the terms of his relationship with them at the very beginning. Probably they wanted to ask Jesus questions, observe him, and listen to him teach.

2. The Jewish historian Josephus records the region of Galilee had recently seen a few messianic imposters. People were looking for the arrival of the Anointed One (Messiah=Christ). So after Andrew had spent a day with Jesus, the first thing he did was go home to find his brother Simon and announce to him, “We have found the Messiah/Christ!” Andrew brings Peter to come and see Jesus who is the prophesied and promised Messiah, the one who is God’s appointed master over his people.

3. Philip also gave evidence what his answer is to Jesus’ question, “What are you seeking?” The promise of a coming Messiah has a history that we read about in the OT. Everywhere in the OT we find the authors writing what I call “Christ-haunted” texts. The Messiah cannot be found explicitly in every OT passage like he is promised in Genesis 3:15, but every story whispers his name in one way or another. We can summarize the process that God used to prepare the early disciples as, first, send a herald to point people to Jesus, and second, seek him as the one who claims the titles of Master, Messiah, and Bible Fulfiller.

II. Gathering Disciples: Come and Be Seen

A. The seer: “Behold an honest Israelite indeed” (vv. 42-44, 47)

1. Those early disciples certainly were shocked by who they saw. What they discovered is they had come to see Jesus, but it turns out it was Jesus who had first seen them. Consider what happened when Simon first saw Jesus. Jesus looked him up and down (we might say he sized him up), and predicted Simon would have a new name someday. Simon would have immediately understood the importance of this name change, even though he probably didn’t comprehend the full meaning right away. One thing Simon knew was Jesus saw him like no one had before.

2. The next day Jesus decided to leave where he was staying and go to Galilee. He was seeking to gather particular men to be his disciples. When Jesus found Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” Philip was from unbelieving Bethsaida and likely a Hellenized Jew (his name is Greek). Out of the midst of a fishing village full of people who would reject Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus saw one man who he wanted to be his disciple.

3. Philip, a brand new disciple, tells his friend Nathanael about a man named Jesus of Nazareth. And all Nathanael can think is “Nazareth?!” As they approached Jesus preparing for personal introductions, Jesus called his disciples to attention and proceeded to describe Nathanael. “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael is startled by Jesus’ accurate description of his character. He had come to see Jesus, but instead he had been seen by the Seer.

B. The seen: “How do you know me?” (vv. 42b, 48-49)

1. Back to Simon. Jesus knew what Simon would become someday. Hence the name change. Jesus exercised authority over Simon when he renamed him. He saw an impulsive, unstable, passionate fisherman and said, “You shall be called Rock” (that’s what Cephas and Peter mean in Aramaic and Greek). Basically Jesus is declaring Simon will be a transformed man through his experience of following Jesus as a disciple. Simon’s character will change so much because of his encounter with Jesus that people will call him “Petros.”

2. Instead of offering a shallow pop psychology answer, Jesus gives the kind of answer Nathanael knew Jesus couldn’t fake. Before Philip called Nathanael, when he was under the fig tree (probably resting, studying, meditating, and praying—that’s what people did under fig trees back then), Jesus says, “I saw you.” Jesus saw and knew Nathanael by divine foreknowledge, and Nathanael, who was not so easily impressed, recognized he had come and been seen by this supernaturally insightful man from Nazareth, this Jesus Son of Joseph.

III. Shaping Disciples: Follow and See

A. The revealer: “You will see greater things than these” (v. 50)

Jesus promised to reveal to Nathanael “greater things than these.” Through chapter 12, John will recount seven stories of miracles Jesus publicly performed that function as signs (proofs) verifying Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, and authenticating his message of the arrival of God’s kingdom and the forgiveness of sins. By these seven signs Jesus will reveal even greater things than his ability to see into the deep recesses of our hearts. Jesus reveals himself to those who follow and see.

B. The ladder: “The Son of Man” who opens access to heaven (v. 51)

In Genesis 28, Jacob is fleeing into the wilderness from the wrath of Esau his brother. That night, alone and having lost everything, Jacob sleeps under the stars and God gives him a mysterious dream in which Jacob sees a stairway to heaven. Angels are going up and down the stairway, traversing it as a bridge or “ladder” from heaven to earth. Now speaking to his disciples Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael, Jesus claims Jacob’s Ladder is actually a person called “the Son of Man,” which is the most common self-designation Jesus uses for himself in the Gospels!

Conclusion – Let me draw three brief applications for us about disciple making. (1) Come and see means come and ask questions, expecting personalized answers. (2) Come and see means come with others. The pattern of evangelism in this passage is people become disciples first through the invitation of a friend or family member. To any place where Jesus is proclaimed and present, invite them to come and see. (3) Come and see means you need to move from one place to another. The one who claims all the titles we ascribe to him is either worthy of all your worship, wonder, and devotion, or he’s an imposter to be soundly rejected. How will you know unless you come and see?