

*Come and See: John 1:35-51*  
Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church  
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We've begun a study through the Gospel of John, and this morning we come to the end of chapter 1. The first 18 verses of this first chapter were very significant, introducing major themes of this book. The Word, Jesus Christ, was in the beginning with God, and existing as God. So from the very first line of this Gospel we have the doctrine of the Trinity emerging. The Father and the Son, distinct Persons, but united in the Godhead. Later in the chapter, in the verses we studied last Sunday, the Spirit is mentioned in the verses about Jesus' baptism. The Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity.

So we have a lot of deep theological truth presented to us right from the start of this Gospel. John has a clear agenda. He wants the readers of this book to understand who Jesus is. He wants us to believe in Jesus as the eternal Son of God, as the Promised Messiah, as the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, that by believing in Him we would have eternal life through the forgiveness that can be found only in Him. Indeed, Jesus is the way the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him.

The book opens with weighty, glorious truth about Jesus Christ, and then moves to telling a bit of the story of John the Baptist, who was the forerunner to Jesus, who paved the way and pointed people to Jesus. We've been looking at that the past 2 weeks.

And now we come to the final 2 paragraphs of chapter 1, which tell of Jesus' first disciples. These are fascinating accounts, and we learn here some important things about Jesus and about what it means to be a disciple.

Three headings I'll use to cover these verses: Drawn to Jesus, Recognizing Jesus, Bringing Others to Jesus.

### **Drawn to Jesus**

What we see happening in these accounts are individuals who are being irresistibly drawn, effectually called out to follow Jesus. Notice the role John the Baptist plays in this, in God's good providence. John the Baptist has done his job well, his job of pointing away from himself to Jesus. He's gotten that point across. It's not about John. It's all about Jesus.

So in verses 35 and following when John the Baptist is standing there with 2 of his disciples and sees Jesus walking by and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 2 of John's disciples go and follow Jesus.

Do you get what's happening here? Two men who had been following John the Baptist, who had been committed to him, learning from him, assisting him, all of a sudden leave John in order to follow Jesus.

Do you think John was offended? Was he hurt? Insulted? Jealous? Bitter? Well, if he was controlled by the sinful flesh he would be, certainly. The competitiveness and self-centeredness of our fallen nature would make a situation like this very unpleasant. But God had been working in John's life to grant him a happy humility. It was his joy to deflect any attention away from himself and put the spotlight solely on Jesus Christ.

I imagine it still may have been somewhat bittersweet for John to see these 2 disciples of his walk away from him to follow Jesus. I'm sure John would miss their companionship. But at the same time, what a confirmation this would be for John, to see that God was indeed using him to prepare the way for the Messiah. His own disciples are getting the point.

Now in verses 38 and following we have the account of this first conversation that these 2 men had with Jesus. They were literally following after Him, and Jesus turns around, sees them following, and asks, "What are you seeking?" They called Him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), and asked, "where are you staying?" It was apparent they respected Him, they knew what John was saying about Him, and they wanted to know Him better personally.

And then Jesus extends this wonderful invitation, "Come and you will see." The same words show up again in the next paragraph, where Philip goes to Nathanael and says, "Come and see." That's his plea to Nathanael to come and see Jesus. The Promised One has arrived!

I decided to use that phrase as the title for this morning's sermon because it ties together what I think John the Evangelist, the Gospel-writer, wants us to get out of these 2 paragraphs. Jesus is inviting people to come and see, to come and know Him better. And then these first disciples are going out and extending that same invitation to others. Come and see Him. Come and get to know Him. He's the One.

Well, of course, these 2 disciples of John the Baptist responded to the invitation. It was exactly what they were hoping for. And they had the privilege of listening to Jesus for hours. Verse 39 tells us they stayed with Jesus that day. It was about the 10<sup>th</sup> hour, which would have been about 4pm. So they would have had a lot of time to talk before it was time to retire for the evening. Imagine the things they learned about Jesus during those hours. They would have sat at His feet learning, marveling that the

Messiah was right there before them, that they had the opportunity to listen to Him, to be with Him!

Now, who were these guys. In verse 40 we're told the name of one of them, but only one. "One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother." It's interesting that Andrew was the first to get to hang out with Jesus, and the one to introduce Simon Peter to Jesus, but then Simon Peter became much more well known. So that by the time this Gospel was written, Andrew is identified as Simon Peter's brother.

The other interesting thing is that we're not told who the second disciple was who sat there with Jesus that day. Verse 35 mentions 2 disciples of John the Baptist. Verse 40 only tells us the name of one of them. Who was the other?

It seems that this is another one of those places where John, the writer of this Gospel, is concealing his own identity. Do you remember a few weeks ago, in our first study in this series, I read those passages where John speaks of himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved"? John doesn't refer to himself directly anywhere in the whole book. But there a few places where he refers to himself indirectly. And this seems to be one of those places.

Some of the descriptive details of the story seem to confirm this. These are particulars that would be remembered by an eyewitness – in verse 35 the mention of John "standing" and then in verse 36 of John looking at Jesus as he walked by. John doesn't give us the name of the second disciple. It's very likely it was John, himself.

The following verses tell us about Andrew, and Andrew's mission to go and tell his own brother about Jesus. Andrew's evangelistic message to his brother included the statement, in verse 41, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He's telling his brother, This is the One. He is the Promised One, the One that the prophets have foretold. Can you believe it? He's here!! Verse 42 says that Andrew brought Simon Peter to Jesus.

And Jesus, showing His knowledge and authority, says, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)." Cephas, in Aramaic, and Peter, in Greek, both mean "rock." And if you know much about this guy, you know that he wasn't much of a rock. At least, not for awhile. He was fickle and frail spiritually. He even denied knowing Jesus. But after the resurrection, and after the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, Peter did become a rock. Not that he was perfect. But he was a strong leader, a foundational force, in the early church. By God's grace, he became the man Jesus called him to be.

Verse 43 begins the next paragraph, the account of Jesus calling Philip and Nathanael. And here we have the clear call of Jesus, saying to Philip, "Follow me." That call came to others as well. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark record Jesus calling His first disciples, saying, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." That must have happened sometime after these first conversations that John is telling us about in John 1. And as we read in Matthew and Mark, Jesus was calling these fishermen to be His disciples, and He calls them away from their jobs as fishermen, and says he has something else for them to do. To fish for people. And the amazing thing is that they dropped their nets, left their family business, and went with Jesus. And as we're seeing in John 1, these men are eager to follow Jesus and to recruit others to follow Him too.

### **Effectual Calling, Irresistible Grace**

Now, we have to ask the question: what caused them to do this? What explanation is there for these men dropping everything else going on in their lives and following after Jesus? This is inexplicable on human terms, and that's why it is such a wonderful portrait of Jesus' power and glory. These individuals are irresistibly drawn to Jesus. And when Jesus calls, these men follow. What we're seeing here is irresistible grace. This is effectual calling. Jesus has an authority within Him that enables Him to draw people to Himself effectually, like we're seeing in these passages. When Jesus calls someone in this way, when He says, "Follow me," the call guarantees the response. In this way, Jesus' calling of these disciples is an example of how God calls His elect. It is a sovereign, powerful call that effectively brings about the response that is called for.

If you are a follower of Christ, this is why you are a follower of Christ: you were called. God put that desire within you to seek after Christ and follow Him. It's not ultimately because you weighed the evidence and decided that following Christ is the most logical thing to do. It's not ultimately that you made a decision. It's not ultimately a matter of the will (although the will is involved; there is a decision to be made). But the fundamental cause that we must point to is the effectual call of God. Jesus says to His disciples in John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide."

What an awesome thing it is that my identity as a disciple of Jesus does not rest on a decision I made but on a decision that He made! That gives me great hope because my will is fickle, but His will is sure and dependable. If it was ultimately up to these men to decide whether or not they should follow Jesus, they

wouldn't have made the sacrifices that were involved to go and be part of Jesus' mission. Likewise with us. If it was ultimately up to us whether or not to follow Jesus, we would stick with the way of comfort and ease, the way of the world. But we have been called. We were called out of darkness into his marvelous light, as Peter puts it in 1 Peter 2:9. This is a glorious reality, something to praise God for.

In light of the story of these disciples, think about your own story. How were you drawn to Jesus? Who were the individuals God used to point you toward Jesus? What were the initial thoughts you had running through your mind, things you wanted to learn about Jesus, learn from Jesus? What were the initial desires you felt awakened as you realized you actually wanted to follow Him?

I pray that maybe some of you are beginning to experience some of those things even this morning. Maybe God would use this passage of Scripture to awaken those desires in your heart right now. Remember this: on the surface it may appear that these disciples gave up a lot, left a lot behind, in order to follow Jesus. But at the end of the day, they made no real sacrifice. For the treasure of knowing Jesus is far more valuable than anything on this earth. So for any disciple of Jesus, in the first century or the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is more than worth it to follow Him. Don't fret over what it will cost you. Don't hesitate wondering what people might think of you. Just marvel at the opportunity you have to know the eternal Son of God, the One who died on the cross and rose from the dead, that we might live eternally with Him in heaven. There is no news better than that!

### **What Does It Mean for Us to Follow Him?**

We've seen how these men were irresistibly drawn to Jesus, effectually called to be His disciples. For many of us here today, who call ourselves Christians, this is our experience as well. So it's appropriate to ask ourselves, what does it mean for us to follow Jesus?

What will it look like in your life and mine to follow Jesus as one of His disciples? If He has called you effectually, then you will have new desires—desires that cause you to forsake certain things that used to consume you, and desires that draw you to certain things that you used to have no interest in. I mentioned how these men left everything behind in order to follow Jesus. Notice also that Jesus doesn't even tell them where they're going or what they're going to do, precisely. He just says, "Follow me." It's like the call of Abram in Genesis 12. The Lord said, "Go" (Gen 12:1). "So Abram went" (Gen 12:4). Jesus said to the disciples, Follow me. And they followed.

What is this looking like in your life right now? God's call on your life may not mean leaving your country (like Abram) or leaving your occupation or your family of origin (like these disciples). But what *does* it mean for your life? Have you ever considered the possibility that God *may* be calling you to leave your home or your job? Maybe following Jesus *will* take you to a far away place, to a very difficult place, to fish for men. Or maybe following Jesus will mean staying right where you are and becoming a fisher of men within the circles of influence you have right now.

Whether you go or stay, whether you change your vocation or not, I think the key point is that being a disciple of Jesus means giving up any and all "rights" that I may think I'm entitled to and submitting wholly to Jesus' leading. We must surrender ourselves to Him. We must take up our cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34).

Let us do as the hymn says,

My heart, my life, my all I bring  
To Christ who loves me so;  
he is my Master, Lord, and King,  
Wherever He leads I'll go.  
I'll follow my Christ who loves me so,  
Wherever He leads I'll go.<sup>1</sup>

### **Recognizing Jesus**

The excitement that these men had about following Jesus arose from an excitement about Jesus, Himself. They were seeing Jesus for who He is, and they were utterly amazed.

Nathanael experienced this in a unique way. Philip went to tell Nathanael about Jesus, saying 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's initial response was skeptical. He wondered how anything good could come from Nazareth. Apparently there was some animosity toward Nazareth. And concerning the Messiah, who was supposed to be from Bethlehem, this didn't compute for Nathanael. How could He be from Nazareth? The fact is, Jesus was born in Bethlehem according to the prophecy, but He then grew up in Nazareth.

Well, the skepticism evaporates as soon as Nathanael actually meets Jesus and recognizes Him for who He is. And that's why Philip's response is so fitting. He simply tells Nathanael, "Come and see." I know you may have stereotypes. I know you may be skeptical. I know you may not be inclined to believe what I'm telling you. But at least come and see for yourself.

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<sup>1</sup> "Wherever He Leads I'll Go" B.B. McKinney, 1936

I'm sure Nathanael was very glad he did come and see. Because as soon as Nathanael entered Jesus' presence, Jesus made it very clear that He knew Nathanael with a depth that is only possible of God.

Jesus said to Nathanael, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Jesus knew this man, and knew his character. The comments struck a chord with Nathanael, and he responded, "How do you know me?" And then Jesus revealed even more of what He knew about Nathanael. "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

If a stranger said something like to us, we'd think, "I didn't know there were surveillance cameras in that fig tree? Or did I appear in the background of someone's Facebook video? What happened? Where is this guy getting his information?"

But Nathanael knew. He knew immediately. He knew this was no hoax. This was the Messiah, the God-Man, all-knowing, all-powerful. So Nathanael answered, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

What an amazing thing it is to come to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, to recognize Him for who He is. And, of course, Nathanael's experience that day was just the tip of the iceberg. Jesus tells him, in effect, you ain't seen nothin' yet. "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." Indeed, Nathanael would see far greater things. In fact, the very next day he would witness the miracle at the wedding at Cana, the water being changed to wine. And many more miracles, including the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and His ascension into heaven, and Pentecost. He would see greater things.

It is assumed, and it seems reasonable to assume, that Nathanael is the personal name of Bartholomew. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Bartholomew is listed as one of the 12 disciples, and he's listed next to Philip.<sup>2</sup> So it seems that Nathanael and Bartholomew are 2 names for the same guy. So he was one of the 12 disciples and would be an eyewitness to many great things that Jesus would do during His time on earth.

### **Genesis 28**

Finally, in verse 51, Jesus makes this comment to Nathanael which hearkens back to a very interesting Old Testament event. Jacob and Esau were the sons of Isaac. They were twins. Esau was the firstborn, but Jacob, through manipulation and deceit and trickery, was able to get the privileges and blessings of the firstborn. And it was just after Jacob had

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<sup>2</sup> See John 21:2 where Nathanael is listed as a disciple. For the name Bartholomew, see Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14.

tricked their father and received from him the blessing intended for the firstborn that Jacob was fleeing from his home, out of fear of his brother. And that's when he has this encounter with the Lord.

Read Genesis 28:11-15

*“And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.””* (Genesis 28:11–15, ESV)

In this passage the promise that was first pronounced to Abraham, and then to Isaac, is now given to Jacob. Jacob did not deserve this blessing, but God graciously chose to bless him. God blesses the undeserving. And even though Jacob deserved to be cast out of the presence of God, God instead promised to bless Jacob with His presence. God promised to be with him.

This ladder that Jacob saw in his dream is such a vivid demonstration of God's presence with him. The ladder stretched from earth all the way up to heaven, and angels were going up and down the ladder.

The image of this ladder stretching from earth to heaven, and God's words to Jacob here, ought to be a great encouragement to all believers. Because God is with us. There is a ladder, there is a bridge, stretching between earth and heaven, between us and God. And even though we deserve to be cast out of God's presence because of our sin, there is a way to enter His presence. There is a ladder that God provides, and that ladder is Jesus Christ.

That's what we learn here in John 1:51. Jesus says to Nathanael, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” This is clearly a reference to Jacob's dream in Genesis 28, where the angels were ascending and descending on the ladder. But here Jesus says that the angels will ascend and descend on the



Son of Man (which is a Messianic title)<sup>3</sup>—Jesus, Himself! Jesus is the ladder. He is the bridge.

It's awesome to see our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ revealing Himself so powerfully to these early disciples. They are drawn to Him. They come to recognize Him for who He is, as best as they can get their minds around it at the moment. And Jesus is calling them to follow Him, and He is revealing to them much truth about Himself.

### **Titles**

Another thing I want us to notice, in connection with the disciples recognizing Jesus, is the frequency of titles that are attributed to Jesus in this passage. Did that jump out at you as we read this? Starting in verse 35, John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God. Then in verse 38 the two disciples call Jesus Rabbi (which means Teacher). In verse 41 Andrew tells Simon, "We have found the Messiah (which means Christ). In verse 45 Philip tells Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And when Nathanael realized personally that this was true, he said in verse 49, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" And in the last verse, verse 51, Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, another Messianic title.

We can also remember back to the earlier parts of this chapter, where Jesus is called the Word and the Light. All of this makes John 1 very unique.<sup>4</sup> You could make a whole study of going through these titles and unpacking the significance of each one. In fact, James Montgomery Boice, in his extensive study through the Gospel of John, has one whole sermon on these titles in John 1. It's called, "What's in a Name?"<sup>5</sup>

Gary Burge, a New Testament scholar who wrote a commentary on John, says this: "John wants us to have an experience similar to that portrayed by these five men [the 5 men being John the Baptist, Andrew and Peter, and Philip and Nathanael]. He wants us to become disciples whose growth in knowledge and devotion is inspired by these stories. John is claiming that discipleship has two essential elements. Disciples must know who Jesus is, and they must have a personal experience that completely reorients who they are."<sup>6</sup>

That's what we're watching unfold in the lives of these first disciples. Their eyes are being opened to recognize who Jesus is,

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<sup>3</sup> See Daniel 7.

<sup>4</sup> "No other chapter in the New Testament provides a comprehensive list like this." Gary Burge, NIV Application Commentary: John, page 81.

<sup>5</sup> Boice, John (5 volumes), page 137.

<sup>6</sup> Burge, John, page 81.

who He really is, His true identity (not that they're totally getting it just yet—much more will fall into place in their understanding after the resurrection). But their eyes are being opened to see that He is the Promised One, whatever that might entail. And they're having this powerful, very personal experience with Jesus such that they're willing to leave everything else behind to follow Him.

Are you a disciple of Jesus? Do you recognize Him for who He is? Do you know that He is a powerful Teacher with unique and complete authority? And do you understand that He's so much more than a teacher? He is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He is the Promised Messiah. He is the Son of God and Son of Man. He is the King of Israel. He is the eternal Word. He is the Light of the world. Have you met Him? Not just read about Him, not just heard some sermons about Him, or had some discussion about Him. But have you met Him in a powerful and personal way such that you're willing to leave everything else behind to follow Him? Have you encountered Him, has He encountered you, in a way that has shown you His deity. He is the God-Man. He is the One who knows everything about you, like He showed Nathanael. He is the One who gives you a new identity, like He did for Simon, calling him Peter. He is the One who reveals Himself to us and calls us to follow Him. And He's the One who will give us a life assignment, like He did for those fishermen, telling them that they were to become fishers of men.

I pray that every one of us here will have the yearning and curiosity, the irresistible urge to know Jesus better, to follow along after Him, in order to know Him better. And as we know Him better we will be more willing and eager to pursue the assignments He gives us.

Which leads us to the final point, very briefly . . .

### **Bringing Others to Jesus**

Let us not miss the outward progression of the Gospel that John is showing us in these interactions. Do you see the pattern here? The news about Jesus is on the move, going from one person to the next. That's what happens, that's what is intended to happen, with this Good News. There's John the Baptist, pointing beyond himself, away from himself, to Jesus. And then these 2 disciples of John who leave John to follow Jesus. And one of those disciples, Andrew, goes to get his brother, Simon Peter. And then there's Philip, whom Jesus calls. And Philip goes to tell his friend, Nathanael, about Jesus. And Nathanael comes and has this life changing introduction to Jesus.

Do you see? Jesus has arrived. His ministry in beginning. And the news about His identity is spreading quickly.

I'll just call our attention to one more detail of this. Don't overlook this. These first disciples begin by going to individuals they already know. Indeed, individuals they know very well. For Andrew, it's his own brother.

Now, it's good and necessary to make evangelistic plans designed to reach all kinds of people, including the many, many people we don't yet know. But as we make those plans, let's not overlook the many, many individuals we already know. And some we know very well. Family members, long-time friends, long-time co-workers. Sometimes those can be the more difficult conversations to have, because we have more invested in the relationship. It can be scarier to broach the subject with people we care about very much.<sup>7</sup> Because what if we offend them? But because we care about them so much, we should be eager to point them to Jesus, to say to them, "Come and see."

Have you been drawn to Jesus? Are you a disciple of Jesus? Do you recognize Jesus for who He is? Are you drawing others to Jesus? These are questions for each of us to consider as we reflect on these paragraphs at the end of John 1. Let us be in awe of the magnetic power of Jesus. And let us be motivated by this explosive, outward-moving, thrust of the Good News about who Jesus is.

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<sup>7</sup> Boice, "If you are sitting in a waiting room somewhere with a packet of tracts in your pocket and a person sits down next to you whom you do not know, you can witness to him and it will hardly cost you anything. That is not difficult. But if you are going to witness effectively to your brother, there must be a change in your life." (105)