

Jesus: The Son of God and the Son of Man

John 1:43-51

The Gospel According to John

Series #8

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in John chapter 1, the Gospel of John, chapter 1.

John's Gospel is written so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name. This account of Jesus' life is apologetic and evangelistic – it is making the case for Jesus of Nazareth as the Promised Savior and Lord from the Old Testament. And John is making that case because he wants people to have true and lasting life in Jesus. In other words, John is concerned to convince us of the truth about Jesus so that we might have this eternity changing encounter with Jesus – that we might have life in his name. It is not enough to know facts about Jesus – to have a head knowledge about his nature and character and accomplishments – the demons have that and they tremble – but they are not saved from the consequence of their rebellion. The truths about Jesus must compel us to this saving belief – this whole-hearted and whole-life trust in Him as Savior and Lord. And this will look like a following after Jesus – a taking up of my cross and a leaving of everything else behind that would hinder my following Him. This saving faith results in a worldview that no longer counts its life dear to itself, but rather forfeits this world so that he may gain his soul as he follows after Christ. That is why John is writing – to call you to saving belief in Christ so that you may have life in his name because it has been proven to you that this Jesus is the only one who can truly save.

To make this case – John began his book with this wonderful theological prologue – this word before the word about the Word. Now he is proving the truths presented in that prologue by showing us the life of Jesus. And he begins, not with the birth narrative of Jesus, but with the humble ministry beginnings of Jesus and his followers. From the testimony of John the Baptist to the calling of some of John's disciples to follow Jesus, we have in chapter 1 the very humble beginnings of Jesus' ministry, and of his core followers. The 5 men listed in verses 35-51 are all from the same area of Galilee and they are all fishermen. There is nothing particularly special about them, really at all. They are from the detested region of Galilee, they are not Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, or Levites. They are just men who are looking for the fulfillment of God's promises. They know the Old Testament and they have heard John the Baptist preach. They have likely been baptized by John in the Jordan as an expression of their repentant hearts, and of their longing for the Messiah – which by the way, has further put them at odds with the religious elite crowd from Jerusalem. These five men are simple, common, regular, ordinary, and maybe even a little strange. But Jesus sets his sights on them. He goes after them and later he will appoint them to be his apostles – the foundation of his church. Do you remember that text in 1 Corinthians 1? “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to

worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” (1 Cor. 1:26-29)

Well, I am not sure there is any better proof of that text than these first disciples who would later become apostles. And what is true in them and of them is certainly true of each of us – not many wise, powerful, or noble among us, so that God might receive all the credit.

Last week we saw this interaction between Jesus and the first three men in this text – Andrew, John the Apostle, and Simon who became Peter. And we observed 5 things that are typically true in a person coming to faith in Jesus. As we pick up the account this week, we will focus our attention on Jesus and how he interacts with his followers – how he calls them and how he sees them and what he promises to them. So, with our eyes set on Jesus, let’s read John 1:43-51.

Next into the witness stand for John is Philip and Nathanael. Remember, he is writing to prove to us that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God, and that there is life in believing in him. John the Baptist has witnessed to this truth, and then it was Andrew and John the apostle’s turn, and then it was Simon Peter’s turn, and now it is Philip and Nathanael’s turn. And through it all we learn more and more about Jesus. First, we see that Jesus finds his followers in verses 43-44.

I. Jesus Finds His Followers – vs. 43-44

- a. Did you catch all the times that the word “found” is used in this text? In verse 43 Jesus finds Philip and then in verse 45, Philip finds Nathanael. And he reports to him that they have found the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Philip is found by the Messiah and then Nathanael is found by Philip. And Philip’s report to Nathanael is from the human perspective – we have found the one we’ve been waiting for!
- b. But underlying it all is this work of Jesus to find his disciples and to call them to follow him. He does not sit back and let this thing develop willy nilly. He is on a mission and he is intentional and engaged in making the Father’s plan a reality. And so, he seeks out his followers. He left the area where John the Baptist was, and he heads for Galilee – the northern part of Israel which will serve as the base for so much of his ministry over the next 3 ½ years. We don’t really know where he runs into Philip, but we know that Philip is from the same town as Andrew & Peter – Bethsaida. And that is just a small fishing village on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This is not where you go to find the best and the brightest in Israel. This is where you find the normal, common, and everyday – the fishermen!
- c. And this is all evidence of God’s sovereign grace – his overwhelming and unstoppable goodness and kindness flowing into the hearts he foreordains for them to flow into. Jesus will say to his disciples in 6:44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last

day.” And again in 16:15a, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.” This is the divine side of Jesus’ interaction with sinners. When a soul is set to seeking after truth that can only be found in Jesus, it is evidence of God’s gracious work in them. God started that process in their stained and spiritually dead hearts, and they are found as those seeking after the truth about Jesus.

- d. That’s why Philip tells Nathanael in verse 45 that we have found the Messiah. This is a statement from his limited and human perspective. He truly has found the Messiah. This is the responsibility of all mankind – to see in Jesus the only one who can save and to believe in his name for eternal life. And those who do have truly found Him. But their finding of him is the outworking in life of what God is doing behind the curtain of Providence – He is drawing the lost to himself and He is calling them with this irresistible grace to make them his very own.
- e. That is the wondrous grace we see on display here in Jesus’ interaction with Philip, and with the other 4 men. And did you notice that this work of Jesus to find his disciples and to call them to follow him looks a little bit different for all of these men. With Andrew & John, Jesus invited them into his life for further conversation and interaction in verses 38-39. With Simon, Jesus simply proclaimed to Simon the change that would come through following him in verse 42. And, here with Philip Jesus seeks him out and directly orders him to follow in verse 43. And this command to follow is an active present verb by the way – so this is a call, not to a one time decision, but to a fundamental change in life – to reorder all things by this one preeminent thing – to follow Christ! And then in verses 48-51 we see Jesus express to Nathanael just a small glimpse of his divine nature and then promise him a fuller revelation of his greatness in days to come. So, all of that to say that Jesus’ interactions with sinners to call them to himself does not all fit into one cookie cutter. His ways and methods are as varied as the men he is interacting with – as should ours be. But the central and fundamental truths never change. Jesus is the Messiah – and they should follow him!
- f. Friend – maybe Jesus is seeking after you today. Maybe you came here thinking you and Jesus were on speaking terms, but you realize that you have never really met him like you see these disciples having met him. You know about him, but you don’t really know him. Maybe you have truths in your head about him, but you’ve yet to express this faith of one of his disciples. May today be that day! Hear his voice and follow him!
- g. And beloved – take note of Jesus’ evangelism and follow his lead. Some people need more conversation and an invitation into your life. Some people need to be shown the radical change of life that comes when they are found by Jesus. Others need to be told very directly that they must follow Jesus, and others need to see the Scriptural evidence that Jesus is the Messiah to further inform their belief. There is not a one-size fits all approach when we are dealing with lost souls and leading them to the Savior. And we can go forward in our evangelism with this guarantee – that Jesus finds his disciples. His sheep hear his voice and they follow him!

II. Jesus Fulfills God's Promises – vs. 45

- a. We also see that Jesus fulfills God's promises. And that is what we see in verse 45. This is what Philip was compelled by as he sought out his good friend Nathanael. Philip saw that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises found in Moses and the Prophets. And this drove him to seek out his friend who he knew would also want to know. This is the beauty and the glory of Jesus. He is the fulfillment of God's promises – and this is good news for sinners like you and me, and like Philip and Nathanael. We don't really know if Jesus and Philip had any other conversation – presumably, they did. But Philip was convinced that the one John the Baptist had been saying was coming, was here – and his name was Jesus.
- b. Notice in verse 45 how completely abnormal and normal this statement is. Philip tells Nathanael that they have found the one prophesied by Moses and the prophets. There could not be a more abnormal statement. For thousands of years, the people of Israel have been awaiting the arrival of this promised one – this Messiah. And then you combine that with the very normal statement that he is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. In other words – he is one of us – he lives among us. He is from one of our towns. He is the son of a man who can be readily identified. This is the glorious paradox of the Messiah – he is a man and he is divine. He is the fulfillment of God's promises, but he also lived among these men and grew up in one of their towns. Which is just as it had to be according to the Old Testament Scriptures. This Messiah who was prophesied in Moses and in the Prophets had to be a man – a chosen servant of the Lord. And he had to be a son of David and a son of God. He had to be both human and divine – and this is Jesus, as Philip essentially says here.
- c. Notice also that Philip did not introduce Jesus as the One who has a wonderful plan for Nathanael's life, or who has the remedy to all of Nathanael's ills, or who has the ability to give you everything you desire if you have enough faith. Rather, he presents him in a much more glorious way. This Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, is the fulfillment of God's promises. This is so much the case that Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:20 – “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” Jesus is the Amen of God to all of His promises – they find their fulfillment in and through Him – and therefore, we can utter our Amen to God for his glory. All of the Old Testament Scriptures point ahead to Jesus the Christ and the fullness of His work – past, present, and future.
- d. And this is crucial for Jesus' interaction with sinners. When he calls them to follow him, this is not a call to a movement or to the latest social agenda. This is not a call to do something in order to be accepted by God. This is not a call to your best life now as you truly believe in yourself. This is not a call to better your life by connecting you to the best life coach available – Jesus of Nazareth. No, when Jesus beckons you to follow him, he is calling you to believe in the only One who is the fulfillment of all of God's promises. Because of this, Jesus is what we truly need. He is the fulfillment of the Law. He is the Word made flesh. He is full of grace and truth. He is the Savior of his people from their sins. He is the

prophesied Lamb of God who substitutes himself to undergo the punishment and condemnation for sin that we deserve. He is the embodiment of truth. He is the only way to peace with God. He is the light and the life. He is the cure to our spiritual sickness. He is able to raise the dead and heal the blind and deaf – physically, but especially spiritually. He is the resurrection and the life. He is the great Prophet, priest, and King – all promised by God. He is the Amen to all of God’s promises for they all find their Yes in Jesus the Christ.

- e. In other words, there is no greater offer to be made to sinners like Philip and Nathanael – and like you and me. We have no greater need. There is no longing or expectation that needs to be met outside of Jesus. He is truly the all in all!

III. Jesus Sees Man Truly – vs. 46-49

- a. Not only does Jesus fulfill God’s promises, but he also sees man truly. As he interacts with sinners, he calls them to himself – which is the greatest call he can give – and as he calls them, he also sees them truly. That is what we see on display as Nathanael follows Philip’s advice and decides to come and see what the fuss is all about with Jesus. Jesus’ clear vision of Nathanael is contrasted with Nathanael’s unclear vision of the Messiah. In verse 46, he can’t quite get his mind around anything good coming out of Nazareth – let alone the Messiah of Israel. Nazareth was a small, backwater town up in the hills surrounding the valley of Jezreel. It was a town of about 2000 people in Jesus’ day, and it was not known for anything of any significance. And Nathanael, we will find out in chapter 21, is from the even less significant town of Cana which is just a few miles north of Nazareth. So, Nathanael knows the area very well and just can’t fathom how anything good can come out of that region. And Philip’s response is one of the best evangelistic methods any of us can use. He simply says to Nathanael, “come and see.” This is always a great apologetic or evangelistic answer – come and see this Jesus. Look into him yourself and see if he is truly the Savior of the world or not.
- b. But this will only be effective with those who are truly seeking – who are genuine in knowing the truth. This is the kind of seeker that will always find the Lord – the one who is in genuine pursuit of the truth. That is what we see in verse 47. Before Nathanael can come and see Jesus, Jesus sees Nathanael. And he makes this pronouncement that Nathanael is an Israelite indeed, or truly – in whom there is no deceit! This means that he has no guile in him, or now ulterior motives in his seeking. He does not have an agenda or hidden motives. He is without guile. He is pure and child like in his desire to know the truth about this Jesus. He doesn’t have his mind made up already. He isn’t like Judas Iscariot who is determined to follow Jesus for all that Jesus can give him in wealth and power as the King of Israel, and then when he figures out that isn’t going to happen he will betray him and hand him over to the authorities to be crucified. No, Nathanael’s quest is pure. This is contrasted with the religious authorities at the end of chapter 7. There is a great controversy brewing about who this Jesus is. Some believe him to be the Messiah, and others thought he was a total fraud and should be arrested. So, Nicodemus spoke up and asked a question – “Does our law judge

a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" It's a good and simple and honest question. It is a guileless question of genuine concern to know the truth about Jesus in accord with Jewish Law. But the Sanhedrin replied and said, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

- c. They told Nicodemus to go find out – to search and see – but they had their minds made up. They were full of deceit. This was not a genuine search party; this was a lynching mob. They were not inquisitive; they were an inquisition. This is the exact opposite of Nathanael here. He is genuine in his searching. And Jesus sees that clearly. Jesus does not just see Nathanael coming in the flesh, but he sees Nathanael's heart. He perceives into the depths of Nathanael's being and knows that he is without guile. And this is obviously a surprising thing for Nathanael to realize and so he asks the Lord – How do you know me? And so, Jesus gives him an answer that pulls back the curtain for a brief peak at his deity. Before Philip ever went and found Nathanael, Jesus saw him under the fig tree. This is something only knowable if you are divine. Jesus had a vision of things that others did not have.
- d. On a side note here – there has been a lot of ink spilled about the fig tree and what it signifies about Nathanael and about Israel. The fig tree in the Old Testament is often coupled with the grape vine as an expression of the wealth and personal property the nation will have in the Promised Land. It's one of the staple fruit trees that everyone would have in their yard. It was also a wonderful shade tree that people would often plant close to their house, and therefore it provided a place of cool in the heat of the day, and place of privacy to think and pray and search the Scriptures. And Nathanael obviously knew the Old Testament Scriptures. So, Jesus is essentially saying to him, when you were at your house, under the fig tree, possibly searching the Scriptures and praying – I saw you and I know that there is no guile in your pursuit. You simply want to know the real and true Messiah and you are ready for him.
- e. And Nathanael sure proves he is ready for him doesn't he, in verse 49? He makes this fantastic statement of faith which is rooted in Old Testament truth. He knows that the Messiah must be the Son of God and he must be the King of Israel. This is the dual nature of the Messiah – he must be human, and he must be divine. Certainly, Nathanael is saying much more than he knows he is saying here – he doesn't understand the riches of this statement – but he does believe what he says. And it is rooted in many texts in the Old Testament – but the most likely is Psalm 2:6-7 which declares that God's King has been set over his people in Zion, and this King is also His Son whom the nations must kiss lest the Lord pour out his wrath on them. Nathanael is here expressing this very personal faith that the Jesus he has just met is that Psalm 2 Son of God and King of Israel.
- f. Isn't this surely an expression of that heart that is free of deceit? Nathanael's heart was so primed for this moment because he was so longing to know the truth. He was genuinely seeking. And when the Lord was finally revealed to him, he burst forth into this wonderful expression of personal faith.

- g. Friend, this Jesus always sees man truly. It is not unique to Nathanael. If you have had a personal encounter with this Jesus, then you know that he sees you as you really are. You know that there is nothing hidden before the eyes of this all-seeing and all-knowing one. And you can either try to keep running from this Jesus and trying to find all the reasons in the world why you shouldn't believe in him and follow him, or you can come genuinely and honestly like Nathanael does here. And if you do, Jesus will reveal more of himself to you. If you want to know peace with God through His Son, if you seek first His Kingdom and seek to gain entrance there – He will meet you and welcome you and show you through the wicket gate. But if you are seeking with ulterior motives – seeking a Jesus on your terms or seeking a Jesus you can control or seeking a Jesus you can define or seeking a Jesus you can take part of and leave part of – then you will not find him truly and really. But as the prophet Isaiah says, “Seek the Lord, while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

IV. Jesus Further Reveals His Greatness – vs. 50-51

- a. And then, in verses 50-51 we see that Jesus further reveals his greatness to this genuine seeker. In verse 50 Jesus is impressed by Nathanael's explosion of faith, and he promises him greater things. And then in verse 51 he makes this truth claim about himself and about what is to come. John's Gospel is the only one to include these statements where Jesus repeats the word truly. It is the Greek word for Amen – and it is Jesus' way of marking off a significant truth statement about himself. And his truth statement here is that Nathanael and the other disciples will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. What exactly is Jesus talking about here?
- b. Well, do you remember way back in Genesis 28 when Jacob was leaving Isaac & Rebekah and was headed for Laban's house to find a wife from his mother's family? Well, he laid down to sleep one night – and he is on the edge of leaving the territory which will later be known as the Promised Land – and he has this dream where there was a ladder set up on the earth reaching all the way to heaven and the angels of God were ascending and descending on the ladder. And above the ladder the Lord was standing there, and he declared to Jacob, this is Genesis 28:13 now – “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.” And he goes on from there to reiterate the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob and to promise him his presence. When Jacob awoke, he knew that he had met with God there and so he set up the pillar as a memorial stone and he called the place Bethel – or the house of God.
- c. So, Jesus knows that Nathanael and these other 4 men know the Old Testament Scriptures. He knows that they know the Genesis 28 account. And so, he references it as a way to say to them that he is the true Bethel and the true Jacob's Ladder. In other words, in the days to come, they will see greater things that simply Jesus knowing something about them that others don't know. They will

see that Jesus is the House of God on earth. That in him angels from God ascend and descend to accomplish all the work of God in the life of Jesus. They will see that Heaven touches earth in Jesus, and earth touches Heaven in Jesus. They will see greater things in Him and about Him in the days to come. They will be convinced that he is truly the Son of Man.

- d. This is a new title Jesus gives to himself here at the end of chapter one – Son of Man. And it is a mysterious one for sure. In this chapter Jesus has been called the Word, and God, and the Light, and the Preeminent One, and the exegete of God, and the Lord, and the Lamb of God, and the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and the Son of God, and the Lamb of God again, and Rabbi, and the Messiah, the Christ, and the fulfillment of Moses and the Prophets, and the Son of God again, and the King of Israel! It is an impressive chapter filled with glorious expressions of the true nature of this Jesus. But the chapter ends with Jesus calling himself this mysterious “Son of Man.” It is likely a reference to Daniel 7 in which God gives to one like a son of man the full dominion and authority over all the kingdoms of the earth. But, other than that, there is not a lot of Old Testament background. And this is on purpose. All of these other titles I have just mentioned all have preconceived ideas in the minds of the Jewish people. When they think of the King of Israel or of the Messiah or of the Son of God – they have their preconceived vision of what that man will look like and do. But here Jesus says to Nathanael that they will see great things in the days to come as they see angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.
- e. In other words, Jesus uses a title that he intends to fill with meaning over the next 3 ½ years of ministry. He is going to show greater things to Nathanael and these other men than they could ever imagine. He will bring heaven to earth and earth to heaven in ways they never before comprehended. Their faith in Jesus is genuine and real, but also very immature and ignorant. They are at the front end of their journey here in John 1. And Jesus’ promise to them is that it is a journey into greater things, not lesser things. They are entering in at the small wicket gate of Jesus here. And they are entering into a universe of glory and greatness like they never could have thought possible. The things they will see and hear and experience in Christ will be far greater than their current expectations.
- f. And beloved, this is how it always is with Jesus. There are always untold mysteries to discover as we follow Jesus. He is like the mysterious ocean depths which hold untold mysteries of God’s creation waiting for scientific discovery. He is like the ever-expanding universe above us in which there are hundreds of billions of galaxies far greater than our own galaxy. And we have only just begun to explore our own galaxy. This is Jesus! There is untold and undiscovered greatness in this Jesus. You will never get to the end. You will never discover the bottom or the top or the east or the west – you will only discover more and more and more and more glory and greatness and goodness in Jesus the Christ!

Conclusion: So, the journey through the rest of this wonderful book is a journey into more and more of Christ! May we see Him as He is, and may we love Him as we should! Let’s pray.