

COME AND SEE

John 1:40-51

Many people came from Jerusalem Judea and Galilee to see John the Baptist when he was preaching in the wilderness east of the Jordan River. The region was about 20 miles east of Jerusalem. Considering that most people walked to where John was calling for people to repent and be prepared for the coming of the Kingdom of God, the decision to make such a trip indicated a significant curiosity. The phenomenon of John the Baptist was God's way of allowing John to introduce or announce the coming of the Messiah which would be the fulfillment of prophecies found throughout the Old Testament. Obviously, there were many different reasons people had for doing more to learn of this "coming one." Some would follow up just based on intellectual curiosity. They just wanted to know. They don't intend to do anything with what they learned but just sought "knowledge for the sake of knowledge." There are many "informed" lost people in the world today who possess "head knowledge" about "religious things." (Sometimes we Christians find ourselves doing Bible study just to learn and we really don't do anything with what we learn.)

Even today, we find a variety of reasons for people's curiosity about religious things. Some observe and perhaps even go a little further because they wish to "disprove" the claims of God on the lives of all people. It could be that they are trying to justify themselves and their behavior by gathering evidence that this One proclaimed by John was not the Messiah.

Still others will observe and perhaps explore deeper into such matters because they are seeking to know the truth and want to find something or someone that provides true salvation from a system that is broken and failing; that is, the world system.

There is a fourth category and these are people who observe the Messiah coincidentally or "accidentally." These are not curious; they are not trying to justify themselves and they are not necessarily seeking the truth. Some will take notice of Christ simply because there was someone who was so radically different that the only explanation is that God was at work in that life. This fourth group may be the majority. They need the shock value of a radically obedient, self-sacrificing life in order to wake up to the fact that their present life is not all there is to living.

Regardless of the reason, Jesus was on display to a lost world. Andrew and his friend, about whom John wrote earlier, looked for Christ and found Him. Peter was brought to Christ by his brother; and the third of the group (Philip) was sought by Christ while Philip was not thinking of Him; and then Philip again, like Andrew, found a friend (Nathanael), and brought him to Christ. Each of these incidents has its own lesson, and each of them adds something to the clarification of John's two great subjects: the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God, and the development of that faith in Him which gives us life.

Andrew and Peter – 1:40-42

⁴⁰One of the two who heard John *speak* and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ). ⁴²He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). John 1:40-42 (NASB95)

John did not mention that John the Baptist baptized Jesus but simply mentioned what John was doing and that the Jewish leaders sent a delegation to John the Baptist to question him. Their first question was "Who are you?" This may have been asked in such a way as to communicate "Who do you think you are?" The word had spread and all sorts of people came to

hear and see John and many were baptized by him. Apparently, John anticipated what the questioners were thinking that “he was someone stirring up people by claiming to the Messiah.” John denied that he was the Messiah which led to the delegation questioning him about why he was baptizing people if he was not the Messiah or the return of Elijah or the Prophet mention by Moses in Deuteronomy. At this time, John had been preaching to and baptizing people for many weeks. The very next day, Jesus came back to where John was baptizing which was after the forty-day wilderness temptation experience that Jesus experienced following His baptism by John. When John saw Him, he made his now well-known statement, “Behold the Lamb of God.” He also added that Jesus (to whom he was pointing) was the One he said was “preferred before me.”

Two young men who were with John the Baptist took a step of faith and started to follow Jesus. All of us who follow Jesus start out following Him somewhat far away. When He sees us following, He asks us the same question He asked these two in verse 37: “What are you looking for?” In other words, why are we following Jesus? Is it because it is the socially correct thing to do where we live? Is it because we are trying to impress someone we know who is a serious Christian? Is it because we think this is the ultimate fire insurance? Is it because we realize that He is the Creator and that He has a claim on our lives?

The two young men didn't have a ready “pat” answer to the question, but responded with a question of their own: “Where are you staying?” In other words, they wanted to sit down and have a serious talk with Jesus regarding all the things they had heard from John about someone who would have a baptism that was different from John’s baptism.

Andrew was one of the two men who met with Jesus that day. The other one was probably John the author of the Gospel of John. Sometimes Christians are referred to as Christ followers. Andrew and John literally did follow Jesus and that resulted in them spending meaningful time with Him. The natural outcome of such an encounter is to want to share the Good News with those whom we care about. Andrew was convinced Jesus was the promised Messiah and he could not wait to share the news with his brother Simon. He then brought his brother to meet Jesus. The lesson that we should not miss is that as we tell others about Jesus, we should follow through and bring them to Jesus. We are not told whether Simon was introduced to Jesus or if Jesus told him his name without an introduction. That would have been impressive to Simon. Jesus then pointed out a characteristic of Simon by nicknaming him Peter (a stone). The renaming of Simon by Jesus has meaning for us in that when a person comes to Jesus, he is given a new nature – old things are passed away, behold all things are new.

Philip – 1:43-46

⁴³ The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, “Follow Me.” ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of 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 any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” John 1:43-46 (NASB95)

In addition to the promise of the Messiah coming to His people, Moses and the other prophets recorded (in the Old Testament) many references to a person who would come into the world and be the fulfillment of that to which the rituals and ceremonies pointed. From the very beginning of God's dealing with man, He has been in the process of revealing Himself to us so that we can know Him. The people in Israel who were students of prophecy knew the time was right for the coming of the Messiah. From Daniel’s prophecy they would know that after 69 “weeks” from the time of the order to rebuild the temple that the Messiah would appear. The

weeks were understood to be seven-year periods. So, 69 weeks times seven years was 483 years. Artaxerxes gave the order to rebuild the temple in 457 BC and 483 years later would put the time around AD 27 - the time of the baptism and start of the public ministry of Jesus. Some were looking for the Messiah because it was time for Him to come.

Philip did not use the term Messiah as Andrew did but used the more general reference (the one written about). Not everyone agreed that all such references (such as the suffering servant) pointed to the Messiah but were references to the nation of Israel. In our 20-20 hindsight we can clearly see that these references pointed to Jesus. The fact that Philip had such insight shows a familiarity to the Old Testament and that God was already working in his life so that he was ready to respond to the call that Jesus issued to "follow Me."

Nathanael may have been familiar with the scriptures regarding the Messiah and that familiarity may account for his remark regarding Nazareth. The prophecies did not indicate that the Messiah would come out of Nazareth but Bethlehem. But Nathanael had no way to know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and had later moved to Nazareth. Another possibility is that Nazareth did not have a reputation of being a good place to live and what he said was a fairly common response when the name of the town was mentioned. This apparent discrepancy in the town from which the Messiah was to come (or the bad reputation) did not stop Nathanael from checking into the matter.

Nathanael – 1:47-51

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming to 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 and said to 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 and said to him, "Because I said to you that 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 the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." John 1:47-51 (NASB95)

As Nathanael walked up to Jesus, he heard Jesus commenting that he was a "true Israelite." The meaning of this description of being "an Israelite indeed without deceit" has roots in the account of how God had worked in the life of Jacob and the outcome was that Jacob (who was a schemer and manipulator) wrestled with God and experienced a life transformation to become a person who was noble and was no longer driven by selfishness and deceit but was liberated to become a person of integrity and honesty. This change (in Jacob) was so significant that God gave him a new name. Ideally, the person Jacob had become after many years of struggling in his own strength and by his own wit and then having wrestled with God was what God was looking for in the descendants of Israel from which He would form a nation of people favorably disposed toward God. As we know from the historical accounts there weren't many of Israel's descendants who had such character as Israel (the man) did following his encounter with God.

Since Nathanael and Jesus had never met before, his skeptical response was "How do you know anything about me?" Sometimes when we meet a person for the first time and have a few minutes of conversation with them we might get a fairly good idea of the kind of person we just met. Jesus made His assessment statement while Nathanael was still walking toward Him. Perhaps Nathanael thought that Phillip told Jesus something about him. Neither of these possibilities were explanations of how Jesus knew what was in the heart of this young man.

I guess this is a lesson that all of us need to realize: Jesus knows all about us and we cannot fool Him. We may have everyone else fooled but Jesus knows the kind of person we really are. Not only did Jesus know the kind of person that Nathanael was, He knew about the

things Nathanael had been doing. Jesus told him “I saw you under the fig tree.” Apparently, Nathanael’s experience under the fig tree was something that only he and God could have known about. This was probably his “wrestling match with God” in which his life was changed in a way that was analogous to what Jacob experienced.

Nathanael was now faced with a perplexing mystery. How could an ordinary person know such things about him? Nathanael had just been told by Phillip that he had met a person who was “the one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote.” Did Nathanael believe Phillip? Apparently, he was not fully convinced but was willing to put forth an effort to see for himself. Since there was no logical explanation of how this man from Nazareth could have known about the fig tree experience, Nathanael concluded that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God and King of Israel.

Jesus promised Nathanael that he would see far greater things. He would see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon Jesus Himself. Jesus did open the way into Heaven. He Himself is the Way to the Father. By His death He became the opening for us to enter eternal life and to enter into the presence of God. The reference to angels ascending and descending goes back to the vision of the ladder between heaven and earth that Jacob had at Bethel. Jesus is that ladder that links heaven and earth and the messages of God to man and the prayers of man to God are made possible because of that link.

We need to be as Andrew and Philip and bring others to Jesus when we discover the satisfaction He brings to our lives. There is a whole world of people who need to know that they can be forgiven, and someone needs to help them see that forgiveness is found in trusting in and relying upon the promises of God found in His word regarding Jesus. When we place our faith in Him, then we begin to see how God is at work in all the world to bring about His plan of salvation.