

The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

First Followers

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John 1.35ff

Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"³⁷ The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.³⁸ And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated 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 Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.⁴¹ He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated 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 is translated Peter).

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."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."

Last week we began a series looking at the cast of characters who show up in the four accounts of Jesus Christ's life, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark Luke and John.

As you may know, physicists tell us that LIGHT is actually invisible in itself and it's only as it falls on matter that the effects of the light can be seen. In the same way, we SEE the effects of Jesus Christ most clearly when HE, the Light of the World, falls on the cast. They become visible as He interacts with them. If we want to see the Light that He is, it has to be as He relates to everyday people, The Cast.

Today is a kind of “Root” passage; it gets us back to a basic or rudimentary or unvarnished essence of something that has sadly blurred over time, i.e. what does it mean to BE a follower of Jesus Christ? How do you DO it and what’s the “line-in-the-sand” that has to be crossed? What’s the difference between simply admiring Jesus Christ as a leader or teacher or religious figure and actually adhering to His way, joining His movement?

THIS passage and many others in the Bible use a word for an adherent or follower of Jesus Christ and that word is “disciple”. Sadly, amidst all the many issues and denominations and traditions and cultural baggage the church accumulates (like junk in a garage or attic) sadly we seem to easily forget that it’s about connecting to this Person, becoming a disciple or student or attaching oneself to Jesus Christ. That’s what Christianity IS when all the fluff is blown away and the root/core of Christianity stands alone. What then IS a disciple of Jesus Christ?

A Disciple: 1) Discovers 2) IS Discovered 3) GOES ON Discovering – let’s see how all this emerges from this text.

The Gospel writer John is fixated on being a witness and if you read his account carefully you’ll see that he stresses this WITNESS role in a number of ways.

John the witness ends the book like this (ch 20, 21):

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (20.30-31) and then again: “This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. (21.24)

He’s established his credentials as a qualified reporter and an eyewitness who was given unrivalled access to the events he was recording.

AND he had become persuaded...and so he’s trying to persuade the reader. He is trying to give the reader enough evidence to provoke faith in the Main Character of the story. John is convinced that if we have confidence in this Person, if we come to believe that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”, we will come to know the meaning and purpose of life... John says that believing in Jesus Christ brings a person to LIFE.

Now, because John is “the eyewitness”, he supremely values this whole idea of seeing it happen (John’s not a philosopher or a religious teacher or advisor – he’s a reporter, a witness to the events.) And because that’s his “thing”, he naturally emphasizes the whole act of witnessing, of seeing, of being a viewer, of observing who Jesus IS and observing what Jesus does.

That's why this reporter PACKS this introductory passage with words that have to do with seeing & observing & beholding & looking – discovery words.

There are at least 19 uses of seeing words in these two little stories that have to do with discovery. From the start, John shows us how FAITH that leads to LIFE comes about: it is by seeing Jesus (in some sense, "seeing IS believing"). The core of the passage is the three-times-repeated phrase, "come and see."

The people are (as we saw last week) are coming to John the Baptist, they're "COMING CLEAN" (getting honest about their failings...) But John is also teaching: he's gathered a number of students and teaches them what to expect... been announcing that the Messiah is come but is not yet revealed.

And now, the Messiah IS being revealed and the Reluctant Baptist's work is done, (he saw the Dove come down on Jesus Christ's head) SO he has to get out of the way...AND NOW HE'S transferring his students INTO THE CARE OF the long awaited Lamb of God.

AND John says, "BEHOLD, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Then John repeats it the next day here in this reading)... "THIS is the One we've been waiting for; this is the One I've been called to announce, "Behold...look...the Lamb"

And they DO! The baptizer taught them about this Messiah...taught them to recognize Him... that this Christ, Messiah, Promised King who would somehow deal with humanity's big problem- would take away the sin of the world - JOHN HAD DONE A GREAT JOB preparing his students for this moment and now, he simply says "THERE HE IS....Behold, the Lamb!" (can be seen!)

And they take that to mean: "Go after Him" and they do...and Jesus sees them and asks, "What do you want? What do you SEEK?" and they say, "Where are you dwelling?" AND Jesus Christ says, "Come and See" and "They Came and Saw".

And then, these two unnamed disciples of John the Baptist go get a friend, "WE have found the One we're waiting for, of Whom John the Baptist told us". The one student (named, "Andrew") get's his brother, (Shimon, or Simeon) "Simon."

And Jesus Christ sees Simon (v.42), "Jesus looked at him" (again the emphasis on sight).

Then, 2nd story, Jesus intends to go north into His home region of Galilee and (v.43) "Found" a man named Philip. Philip is from Galilee (same town as the two brothers, Peter and Andrew) and Philip finds a friend named Nathanael (also from Galilee, from a town called Cana).

Philip says, “Nathanael, we found the One promised in the Scriptures and He is ‘Jesus of Nazareth’” and Nathanael says, “How can a big thing come out of such a small town??!!” (Is that town even on the map??)

And Philip says, “Come and see” (There’s that word again – in fact that phrase “come and see” seems to be the thesis statement of the whole passage: “come and see”)

And then Jesus saw Nathanael (the apparent skeptic) coming to Him (v.47) -

Now what’s the hang up with these seeing words, found, saw, behold, looked, seek, know - 19 times!??

Well, John wants his readers to know that Christianity is not a system of advice about how to get to heaven. It’s not a series of ceremonies and “we claim if you follow them closely, God will bless you, protect you, bring you to heaven!” It’s not advice – IT’S NEWS. It’s not called “The Good Advice According to John” but “The Good News”.

Many religious/spiritual teachers and leaders and founders of religions have given the world good advice on how to live ... but that is NOT what this is! This is about a Person PROMISED BY GOD from the beginning of human history who, at a point in time actually came... and came to fix the world, “to take away the sin of the world”. So, the almost obsessive and redundant use of “see” and “look” and “witness” and “behold” is all to say, “If this happened it changes everything!... and we’re here to say, “It happened - we saw it!”

And a second reason for this emphasis on “come and see”, is John’s desire for us to believe, he’s showing us how to do it! : it has something to do with “come and see” ...like the first disciples “came and saw” ... went and beheld... sought and looked.

“Come and see” – that ‘s what Jesus says. That’s what Philip said to the skeptical Nathanael and that’s what John (the writer) is saying to us – “You don’t believe that Jesus is the Christ who can fix you, the Lamb who can take way what’s wrong with the world - you think it’s too good to be true, you have doubts, you just don’t know???”

Well, “Come and see”... really, look into it. Examine it. And John will, at the end of the book sympathize with us (his future readers) when near the end of his writing he quotes Jesus Christ who said to the disciples “Because you have seen Me, you have you believed. Blessed are they who did not see and yet believed” and then John writes about himself (next verse) “I have written these things that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name”

See? John is saying “YOU CAN’T ALL SEE...you’re separated by time...the passing of history but I HAVE SEEN FOR YOU!... So check out my report! Come and see!” A disciple discovers.

A lot of people think that faith is some sort of irrational leap into nothingness. “Ya’ just gotta have faith... just believe!” But that is NOT the Christian idea. Believing in Jesus Christ requires you to “Come and see!” Discover and draw a conclusion...

It’s not that all you’re questions are answered by a thorough-going exhaustive inquiry and then (after He meets all your tests/standards) THEN you believe but that you come and see... You acquaint yourself with this story and this Person... you don’t turn your mind off, but turn it on.... (COME AND SEE...really : be with us for the next few months...COME AND SEE.)

Second, one of the amazing things about the Gospel and about believing in Jesus Christ (the way that leads to life)...is that we THINK we’re checkin’ Him out and in the midst of our inquiry... we get this sense... this conviction that He is actually discovering us!

See that’s the gist of this second episode...Nathanael says “OK... I’ll come and see...I’ll analyze Him and put Him to the test... I’ll cross-examine this hillbilly from Nazareth... I’ll discover/uncover Him.”

Only to find out that Jesus has already been observing Him!

“I saw you sitting under the fig tree... you have voiced your honest skepticism and I honor your honesty, ‘You are an Israelite who isn’t interested in playing religion-trying to look spiritual when in reality you don’t believe: YOU JUST PUT IT OUT THERE — an Israelite in whom there is no deceit”

But Nathaniel...gets a sense that he is being found out...WHEN JESUS SEES THE MAN...it’s unnerving... and the same thing happens when He looked at Simon...in fact the word here is “looked into/consider”

He saw or considered Simon and said, “Your name will be Rock - there’s ROCK in you...” (whether that meant stubbornness or strength... both as we’re going to see) but Jesus Christ looks INTO the person who is looking into HIM.

And eventually what happens in people who believe is they find themselves NOT THE PURSUER but the PURSUED...not the discoverer but the one being discovered.

I begin by saying, “Does this Jesus meet my standards or is He a fraud?” AND somewhere along the line I realize “His life exposes ME AS THE FRAUD?... He sees all the things IN ME that I desperately try to ignore or forget...He sees flaws that I haven’t even begun to see in myself ...AND He sees certain potentials that will never come alive UNLESS He breaks them and re-molds them like a potter...or a sculptor working with ROCK.”

He sees me as I am (under the fig tree and under the fig leaves --- all the ways I try to hide my flaws)... and He alone can FIX me... HE IS THE KING... HE IS GOD... and HIS COMING/Life/Death/resurrection IS THE SOLUTION to what's broken in the world...and what's broken in ME!

And if you seek Him...and discover that it's actually HIM seeking you...eventually you can't help but collapse into the NAIL-SCARRED HANDS...and say "Lord, You are the Lamb of God/Son of God. I will follow"

Last, disciples discover Jesus...but 2nd - Jesus has really discovered them AND 3rd -The disciple GOES ON Discovering.

When Nathanael marvels that Jesus Christ saw him under the fig tree (i.e. that Jesus had access to that kind of knowledge) and Nathanael concludes, "You must really be who the Baptizer said You are!!"

And Jesus says, "If that's all it takes to convince you ...perhaps you're NOT skeptical enough... wait till you SEE what's about to take place...you can't imagine!"

And then Jesus Christ references an event from Genesis and applies it to Himself... "You will see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man"

In Genesis 28... Jacob had a vision of a stairway to heaven ... Jacob's ladder ... and angels coming down and up on that BRIDGE/LINK from heaven to earth.

Jesus is saying, "You disciples have no idea NOW but you WILL see that I am not only the Messiah promised from the beginning...I am the BRIDGE from heaven to earth... I AM GOD COME DOWN"

I am not here to tell you how to climb TO heaven... I AM HEAVEN COME TO YOU. My perfect life and sacrificial death and my DEFEATING death is the one way that God has made to you...

BUT to see the greater things...the unimaginably greater things...you can't stay where you are... you have to...COME AND SEE... you have to discover, BE DISCOVERED and ...walk by faith...remain, dwell with Christ by ongoing faith... It's as we rest and trust Him and go with Him that we begin to see ourselves, and others, the world and God – the mundane becomes gradually infused with the Holy and life becomes an ongoing discovery...it begins and continues as we come and see.

As we join His band of disciples, as we attach ourselves to Him – there's a gradual deepening insight and he illumines everything in a new Light and every day, He invites us, "Come and See."

