

SESSION 2

Come and See

Jesus wants people to follow Him in faith and truth.

JOHN 1:40-51

MEMORY VERSE: JOHN 1:43b

FIRST THOUGHTS

Most of us are a little skeptical when it comes to promises made to us, with our experiences getting in the way. We want to trust the one making the promise or their product, but we've been let down too many times. We just can't do it. Some people approach spiritual matters with this same hopeful skepticism, keeping their distance due to past experiences. The best response we can make may very well be to come and see, which is what the early followers of Jesus told others as well.

(In PSG, p. 19) **How does a person's past experience get in the way of them following Jesus?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 1:19-51

Jesus's encounter with His earliest disciples occurred in the context of John the Baptist's ministry. John was designated by God as the forerunner of the Messiah. Representatives from the Jewish leaders confronted John over his authority to baptize if he were not the Christ or a prophet returned from the dead, but he never sought their approval. His commission was bestowed by the One who sent him to point out the true Messiah.

John baptized with water, but the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit. In humility, John acknowledged he was not even worthy to untie the Messiah's sandals. Consequently, when Jesus asked to be baptized, John initially refused. He only consented when Jesus insisted on fulfilling all righteousness (Matt. 3:13-17). After the baptism, John testified that he witnessed the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus as the voice of God declared Him to be God's Son. Later, John pointed some of his own followers toward Jesus as the Lamb of God.

Two of these disciples immediately left John and followed Jesus. One of them was Andrew. After spending the day with Jesus, Andrew became convinced that Jesus was indeed the Christ. He took this good news to his brother and brought Simon to Jesus. This encounter was the first of several meetings that culminated in a change in Simon's identity and purpose as the fisherman became Peter, the fisher of men.

Leaving the area around the Jordan River, Jesus traveled to Galilee, probably accompanied by Peter and Andrew. They lived in Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Arriving in their hometown, Jesus invited Philip, another resident of Bethsaida, to follow him. Like Andrew, Philip's first reaction was to introduce a friend—Nathanael—to Jesus. At first, Nathanael was skeptical, but, upon meeting Jesus, he quickly became a believer.

Jesus did not call His disciples randomly. He had a purpose for each one. Some, like Andrew and Philip, were early adopters. Others, like Peter and Nathanael, took some convincing. We should be patient when people do not readily respond to our witness. Like John the Baptizer, we can simply share what we have experienced and trust the Holy Spirit to draw them to Jesus.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

ANDREW AND PETER (JOHN 1:40-42)

Verse 40

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.

John often wrote about the past from a present perspective. *Andrew* was not the more prominent of two brothers, though he was the first to follow Jesus. John still called him *Simon Peter's brother*. When Andrew first met Jesus, Peter was still known only as *Simon*. John inserted the second name, knowing what Jesus would do when they met.

We do not know the name of the second of John's disciples who accompanied Andrew. Some scholars believe it was John. One argument for this assertion is John's refusal to name himself. If so, he probably followed Andrew's example and shared the news with his brother, James.

In this story, John focused on Andrew. He had *heard* . . . *John* the Baptist talk about the One who was superior to him. Andrew watched as his teacher pointed people to Jesus and listened as he declared Him to be the Lamb of God. Andrew needed no other proof. He simply *followed* Christ.

Verse 41

⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).

The context (vv. 37-39) reveals that Andrew and his companion asked where Jesus was staying. When Jesus encouraged them to come and see, they spent the rest of the day with him. Since it was about four in the afternoon, they likely stayed overnight at the guest house where Jesus was visiting. The following day, Andrew excitedly decided to share this good news.

In three biblical vignettes of Andrew, he is always introducing someone to Jesus. In this first narrative, *the first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon*. The name *Simon* is another form of "Simeon," while the verb *find* connotes a deliberate search. He did not go back to the other disciples of John and tell them about Jesus. Instead, Andrew went to Peter. Part of being a follower is becoming a finder. The natural inclination of someone who knows Christ is to want others to meet Him.

The qualifier *first* emphasizes Andrew's priority for reaching his brother. Once he had encountered Jesus himself, Andrew made it a priority to share this message with those closest to him. It is not clear if Simon also had been searching for the Messiah, but Andrew's response reflects genuine love and concern for someone who needed to meet Jesus.

Likely, Andrew's conversation with Simon was more lengthy than the five simple words that John recorded, but these were enough: *We have found the Messiah*. The Hebrew term *Messiah* was translated as *the Christ* in Greek. Jewish beliefs about the Messiah ranged from a conquering king with nationalistic goals to a priest with more spiritual applications. Later, Peter confessed that Jesus was indeed *the Christ*. Jesus commended this insight, though he also had to rebuke Peter's misunderstanding of the Messiah's role (Matt. 16:13-23).

Verse 42

⁴² And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

Andrew was not satisfied telling his brother about finding the Messiah. He took things a step further and *brought Simon to Jesus*. Perhaps, in the same way that Jesus invited Andrew to “come and see,” Andrew wanted Simon to see Jesus for himself.

As soon as *Jesus looked at him* (Simon), He made a pronouncement that would change Simon’s life. He did not explain how He knew that this was *Simon son of John*, but Jewish custom often identified individuals with their fathers. Obviously, in His omniscience, Jesus knew all things. Perhaps, too, Andrew had told Jesus he was going after his brother.

In any case, Jesus made a prophetic declaration: *You will be called Cephas*, the Aramaic form of the Greek name *Peter*. Both names refer to a stone or rock and gave Simon a new identity and a new life purpose in Christ. As he became Jesus’s disciple, he was almost universally called by this new name.

Like Peter, our true identity is found in following Jesus. Some people are known by their family. Others are identified by their vocation. When we follow Christ, everything else becomes secondary. We should live so others might see us and say, “That’s a Christ follower.”

(In PSG, p. 22) **How does meeting Jesus give a person a new identity?**

PHILIP (JOHN 1:43-46)

Verse 43

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”

The next day would have been the third day after John the Baptist pointed Andrew to Jesus. The context indicates that Jesus had been in the area for several days, having come to the Jordan to be baptized by John. He also knew He would meet Andrew and Simon, and perhaps John and James, on this trip. Jesus was deliberate in each move He made. Having accomplished His purpose at the Jordan, *Jesus decided to leave for Galilee*.

Jesus’s hometown of *Nazareth* was in south-central Galilee, a region ranging north of Samaria and reaching nearly to Tyre. Galilee was bordered on the east by the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias or the Sea of Gennesaret.

Andrew sought Jesus, but Jesus searched for *Philip*, as indicated by the term *finding*. Jesus didn’t merely happen upon Philip. He intentionally looked for him. The text does not describe a conversation between the two, although Jesus may have talked with Philip before telling him, “*Follow Me*.” Rather than a mere invitation, Jesus’s remark contained the imperative of command. Philip could have declined, but he did not. He believed Jesus was the Christ and that was enough to commit his life to Him.

Verses 44-46

⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” ⁴⁶ “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip.

We do not know exactly where in Galilee Jesus found Philip. Perhaps He went to *Bethsaida*, the hometown of *Andrew and Peter*, because Philip was from the same community. Situated on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee, the name *Bethsaida* means “house of fish” or “house of fishermen.” Since Peter, James, and John were commercial fishermen, the town’s identity appears fitting for a location with an abundance of fish. However, there is no indication that Philip was also a fisherman.

Like Andrew, *Philip* responded by seeking out his friend, *Nathanael*. Just as Jesus sought and found Philip, Philip intentionally *found* Nathanael. Scripture does not say much about Nathanael outside of this incident. He is

mentioned as being from *Cana*, another city in Galilee (John 21:2). In this narrative, Nathanael may have been visiting Philip in Bethsaida.

Before taking his friend to Jesus, Philip testified, “*We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law.*” Use of the plural pronoun *we* suggests Andrew, Peter, and others were part of Philip’s encounter with Jesus. While Philip did not use the title “Messiah,” his statement *the one Moses wrote about* was a clear reference to the Christ. Philip referred to the writings about the Messiah found in the Mosaic *law* and the *prophets*. After His resurrection, Jesus walked with two disciples on the way to Emmaus and taught them using the books of Moses and the Prophets (Luke 24:27).

Philip spoke of Jesus as being the *son of Joseph* and from *Nazareth*. We understand that *Joseph* was Jesus’s step-father since God was His true Father. However, these early followers had yet to understand this deeper truth about Jesus’s nature. Philip naturally identified Jesus with Joseph and *Nazareth* as a manner of custom (Matt. 1:16; Luke 1:27).

Instead of responding with excitement at the prospect of meeting the Messiah, Nathanael was more skeptical, focusing on Jesus’s hometown. He wondered whether *anything good* could come from that village. The word *good* connotes moral character. We do not know the source of Nathanael’s bias against Nazareth. He may have been thinking about Messianic prophecies related to Bethlehem rather than Nazareth. Or, as with modern society, people were associated with the city where they grew up, not where they were born.

Philip did not try to argue with Nathanael. Debates rarely win people to Christ. He simply invited his friend to “*come and see.*” Only a personal encounter with Jesus would suffice, but that would be enough. While apologetics and personal testimonies have value in responding to doubts, ultimately Christ Himself is the answer.

(In PSG, p. 24) **How might have a person’s preconceived notions about Jesus affect his or her willingness to follow Jesus?**

NATHANAEL (JOHN 1:47-51)

Verses 47-49

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” ⁴⁸ “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” ⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

As Nathanael approached, Jesus affirmed his character. His remarks may have been spoken in the company of other disciples, but they were directed to Nathanael. The word *here* translates an expression that could also be rendered “behold” or “look.” This term involves an exclamation not of surprise but of confirmation.

Jesus did not use their meeting to defend Himself against Nathanael’s doubts or disparagement. Instead, He declared Nathanael was *an Israelite in whom there is no deceit*. Some authorities interpret Jesus’s statement to mean Nathanael was a true son of Jacob who lived according to the Torah. However, the literal meaning more directly described Nathanael’s integrity. The word *deceit* suggests guile or craftiness, especially in terms of setting a snare to entrap someone else. Nathanael had come to Jesus genuinely wanting to investigate Philip’s assertions.

Nathanael naturally was curious about how this stranger knew anything about him, much less make such a strong statement. His question, “*How do you know me?*” was not sarcastic. Instead, it reflected an honest inquiry. Jesus’s answer was even more astonishing than His original declaration. Jesus said He had seen Nathanael *before Philip called* him. He identified the setting as *under the fig tree*.

Jesus did not explain what He saw. We understand that in His divine omniscience Jesus knew everything about Nathanael. Some commentators suggest a fig tree would have been common in household courts and would make a good place for contemplation. Perhaps he was praying, which would have fit naturally into the Messiah hearing his petitions.

The primary point of Jesus's statement was not to incite speculation about Nathanael's activity, but it was meant to demonstrate Jesus's specific knowledge of Nathanael. Such knowledge could not have been commonly obtained by a passerby. Something about the scene beneath the fig tree convinced Nathanael that Jesus possessed supernatural insight.

Nathanael's reply contained three confessions. First, he referred to Jesus as *Rabbi*. This title went further than a reference to a religious teacher. It implied a master addressing a servant. Nathanael was placing himself under Jesus's authority and tutelage.

Nathanael's second statement took a massive leap. From *Rabbi*, Nathanael jumped all the way to declaring Jesus to be *the Son of God*. Philip had simply said Jesus was the son of Joseph. Nathanael understood Him to be much more. He realized that only someone with divine omniscience could have known what Jesus described. The title *Son of God* implied equality with God, something that would have been blasphemy if it were not true. Jesus's claims to be equal with the Father ultimately became the rallying cry of His accusers and led to His crucifixion (John 5:18).

Only the Son of God could be the Messiah. Thus Nathanael's third confession was that Jesus was *king of Israel*. Such a declaration, public or private, would have raised accusations of treason. Nathanael's total lack of guile empowered him to proclaim Jesus's right to that authority.

(In PSG, p. 25) **What role does fulfilled prophecy play in a person's willingness to follow Jesus?**

Verses 50-51

⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." ⁵¹ He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."

We might imagine Jesus smiled when He responded to Nathanael. John noted that Jesus promised that Nathanael would see *greater things than that*. Whether Nathanael can be identified with Bartholomew (as some scholars believe) or one of the other disciples, he certainly accompanied Jesus. He was present with some of Jesus's disciples near this same location following the resurrection (John 21:2). Likely, Nathanael also was an eyewitness to Jesus's ascension into heaven (Acts 1:9). And, as an apostle fulfilling the Great Commission, he certainly saw God's amazing acts.

Jesus used a double emphasis to highlight His promise: *Very truly I tell you*. What He had said would surely come to pass. Nathanael would see *'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man*. Again, *Son of Man* was a familiar self-reference for Jesus, but it in no way diminished His standing as the Son of God. If anything, Jesus's reference to Jacob's vision in Genesis 28 would remind listeners that heaven met earth in Him. While Jacob experienced God at Bethel ("house of God"), people would now approach God through Christ.

Believers can be assured of the truth of Jesus's identity. We do not have to witness the heavens opening or angels descending. The testimonies of reliable eyewitnesses have resonated through the centuries via inspired Scripture. In addition, our spirits bear witness through the imprint of the Holy Spirit's conviction.

Only the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of Man, and Son of God can transform our lives. As He has done in us, He wants to do in others. For that to happen, we need to be as effective in sharing our testimony as Andrew and Philip were in sharing their stories.

(In PSG, p. 26) **How does Jesus offer His followers assurance that He is the Son of God?**

KEY DOCTRINE

Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle. (See Isaiah 6:8; Acts 1:8.)

BIBLE SKILL

Connect Old Testament prophecy to New Testament fulfillment.

Study the following passages and relate each to an aspect of fulfillment in Jesus's life: Genesis 3:15; 12:3; Deuteronomy 18:15; Numbers 24:17; Micah 5:2; Isaiah 7:14; 9:7; 53:3; and Jeremiah 31:15. What aspects of Jesus are identified that prove He is the Christ, the Son of God? How do these verses make a case that Jesus was the Messiah?