

"Come and See!"

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Jesus said, He said, Thank you.

Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to His Word together. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you have made yourself known to us in Jesus.

[2 : 19] And we thank you that you have made Him known to us by your Spirit through your Word. And so we pray that this evening you will open your Word to our hearts and open our hearts to your Word.

For Jesus' name's sake. Amen. Well, I worked as a lawyer in London for a little while. And for a couple of years I was involved on a trial. It was one of the biggest trials in English legal history. I had a very junior role. And the litigation had been going on for 11 years by the time we went to trial. It started in 1993. And we went to trial in 2004.

And then the opening speech from the claimants, I was working on the team for the defendants. And the opening speech was 86 days long from the barrister on the other side.

Which is amazing, isn't it? If a judge actually asked me to stand up and just talk to them about everything that I knew, about everything, it would take a lot less time than 86 days.

[3 : 21] I'd just run out of things to say. But not the case for this barrister. Then our response opening speech was even longer, 118 days long. It was all about this bank, BCCI, which had been this bank in the 1980s.

And then it was shut down in 1991. And what the judge was being asked to work out, there was no jury because it's civil trials, the judge is working out the facts. And he's trying to work out what happened in the build-up to this bank being shut down.

He's got notes of different meetings. But what exactly were the facts that went on for this bank to get shut down? And he's got this really, really, really long speech from a barrister going through telling him everything that happened.

And then he has another really long speech telling him something very different happened. And he's trying to work it out. And, of course, what then immediately changes everything is calling the first witness.

Called our first witness, a guy called Brian Quinn, who was chairman of Celtic Football Club at the time, but had been working at the Bank of England during that period. And very quickly after that witness entered the witness box, the trial was more or less over.

[4 : 30] And the judge realized that he could trust this guy to tell him what had happened. And as he talked it through and it had the ring of truth about it, his account, the trial was sort of stopped.

It was discontinued because it was clear which way the judge was going. Witnesses are key. And we're asking the question in John chapter 1, who is Jesus?

And it's a question that every thinking person in the world should have an answer to. I remember at university, before I became a Christian, having a number of lengthy conversations with friends who also weren't Christians about who Jesus was.

None of us had read an account of Jesus' life for many years, if at all. But we all had strong opinions about it. And what John encourages us to do is he brings before us witness after witness to say, let them tell you who Jesus is.

They were there. Trust the evidence so that you can believe and have the life that's promised. So we looked at John the Baptist last week in John chapter 1.

[5 : 42] And now we're getting into the first disciples who follow Jesus. And we're just going to look at three things. There's a number of sub points, but three big things. The man they discover, the way they respond, and then the hope that they're promised.

So first of all, the man they discover. And the first thing they discover about Jesus, this man, is he's a rescuer. We get that in verse 35. Just have a look down with me. The next day, John was there again with two of his disciples.

When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, look, the Lamb of God. And we thought about this a bit last week.

It's as though when we've got John the Baptist there, he's so significant in John chapter 1. It's as though, I think one of the reasons he's so significant is that he's like a living embodiment, a living representation of all that the Old Testament has promised.

He's like the last great prophet of the Old Testament. And so he kind of embodies that expectation of one who is coming. And he's there with Andrew and another disciple, unnamed, so probably John, who wrote this.

[6 : 55] And they are Bible people. So they know from the Old Testament what we really need is a lamb. John points him out as a lamb. And the reason for that is that Jesus coming from heaven is light coming into the darkness.

And part of that is it's goodness coming in. Now, when light shines, it pushes out the darkness. But it also exposes how dark things have been when you suddenly turn a light on.

And as Jesus steps into our world, he exposes the uncleanness of our own lives and hearts. And as that's exposed, it's only right to recognize that we have a problem before God.

Because God is a just God and he's a holy God. But woven like a thread through the Old Testament story is this God-given system where you can have a lamb that's unblemished.

And God will treat the lamb as a substitute for the individual who brings the lamb trusting his promise. And the person goes forgiven because of the lamb. And as John points out Jesus, as we read John's gospel, we will see that what John the Baptist says at the beginning is demonstrated as Jesus dies on the cross and John the Apostle, as he writes it, shows again and again in different ways.

[8 : 17] This is the Passover lamb. This is the one who truly takes away our sin in our place. So as we see John tell his disciples to look, this is the lamb of God, we need to look as well and see that's the authentic Jesus.

He's the lamb. Today, lots of the time, we distort him into different kinds of Jesus. We represent him differently in our own hearts and minds. So in what we might call more liberal churches, Jesus often gets distorted into being Jesus the moral teacher, as though we're all kind of, we're not too bad really.

We're doing okay in life. And God would kind of like us to do a bit better. So he sends Jesus to really get us on the right moral track. And he gives us moral teaching for us to keep.

Now today in evangelical churches, churches that hold to the Bible, we perhaps wouldn't accept that. But we want to fashion Jesus into the therapeutic Jesus.

So in other parts of the world and parts of Glasgow today, what's very popular is the prosperity gospel, this idea that if you trust Jesus, God will give you health and he'll give you wealth and prosperity if you really believe and you pray for that.

[9 : 35] And I guess most of us would think, well, I'm not going to believe that. I'm too sophisticated for the prosperity gospel. But then what we actually do is we have this therapeutic gospel that says I'm going through life and there are certain things, existential things, inner things that I have these felt needs.

I feel that I need fulfillment and I need experience and I need to feel right. And Jesus comes into my life and he gives me those feelings and he gives me that fulfillment that I need, that satisfaction.

That's the therapeutic Jesus. And it's a great reminder that when John the Baptist points Jesus out, he says he's the Lamb of God. For this is the biggest problem that any of us has.

Whether God sees us as righteous or justified or he sees us as sinful and under his judgment, that's the biggest issue in our lives. I was reading a book by writer Mike Reeves this week and he said this, Christianity brings many blessings.

It is right that Christians be involved in the pursuit of neighborhood renewal and social justice. But if one day God's righteous judgment will be revealed, if in the meantime we are storing up God's

wrath against ourselves, if no one can be declared righteous through their own righteousness, then every person on earth faces a massive problem, God's judgment.

[11:07] And this problem dwarfs all the other problems we face. Nothing matters more. And Jesus has come to solve that problem. He's a rescuer.

So the two disciples, they hear John and they see Jesus passing by and they follow him. And just picking things up again, verse 38, turning around, Jesus saw them following him and asked, what do you want?

So he looks them in the eye and says, what do you want? What are you seeking? And they say, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying? And he says, come and you will see.

So we read verse 39, they went and saw where he was staying and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. By the end of that day, look what happens the next morning.

Verse 41, the first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, we have found the Messiah, that is the Christ. They've realized this is the promised king, the anointed king, promised in the Old Testament.

[12:17] And he's a king for the whole world, not just for the Jewish people. I think that's why three times in this passage, do you notice John tells us what words mean? Rabbi, Cephas.

There was another one, Messiah, Christ. It's as though he's saying, this is for you, this is for everyone. He's a king for the whole world.

So that's the next thing these first two disciples discover about Jesus. He's the king. And in verse 49, Nathanael, who we'll meet, says the same thing. He says, Rabbi, you are the son of God, which is a title from the Old Testament, from Psalm 2, for the king.

You are the king of Israel. The king promised in David's line. So Israel, at this moment in history, it's very exciting, because it's like in the Lord of the Rings films, when, or the books, where you've got this land, Middle Earth, and it's in desperate need of its king, of a righteous king.

And it's lost the royal line. And the land is troubled, and struggling, and there's darkness. And then you meet this ranger, Aragorn, and he's cool, but what you really need is the king.

[13:29] And then you start to realize, the character starts to realize, this is the king, and he's been missing, and he's here among us. And there's that excitement of seeing who he is, and the hope being restored.

And that's what's going on in Israel right then. The first two only spend a day with him, but they're confronted by such unique beauty.

It's enough for them to know, this is the one. Just imagine what that must have been like, that first afternoon and evening, with Jesus having pointed out by John the Baptist. Here is perfect gentleness, with unparalleled authority.

Perfect holiness, never puts a foot wrong. But matched by limitless compassion, so that he says to everyone, come to me. Strength and dependability and consistency, so that you know this man will never let you down.

But combined with passionate love, that means he'll go to the cross for his people. The perfect man. And they get it.

[14:37] But in a very real sense, they haven't got it yet, and there's so much still for them to grasp about this king. As they spend time with him, they're going to see that this king has not just authority over people, but authority over nature.

He has authority over sickness. He's got authority over sadness to take it away. He's got authority over death to destroy it forever. In fact, we've already heard from John in chapter 1 that this is the one who sustains us.

He sustains everything, so that every breath that we take, every beat of our hearts, we owe to him. He's a rescuer and he's a king. And I guess the question for us is like the one that he asks them in verse 38.

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, what do you want? It's what are you looking for? It's a question that, on one level, is about what's going on in that moment, but it has a much deeper meaning there.

What are you really seeking? What are you looking for? And I remember when I was growing up, there was a song in the 1980s where there was a music video for it where there was a girl and she was reading a comic book in a greasy spoon.

[15 : 52] And there was like a hero in the comic. And then suddenly this hand came out of the book and invited her to take hold. And she did. And she got like pulled into the book.

And it was this moment where her story, she had become part of it. And there's times when you read the Gospels where that happens to us. The finger points at us. And you're being asked to inhabit what's happening.

And as Jesus says to them, what are you seeking? Perhaps it's a moment for us to examine ourselves and think, what am I really seeking in life? If we come to him and accept his rescue and his rule as king, then he promises to give us rest, peace, life to the full.

Is that what we're seeking? So that their response is, Rabbi, where are you staying? They want to be with him. So that's our first point, the man they discover.

Secondly, we'll think about the way they respond. The next day, Jesus calls Philip. He's from this Galilean town, Bethsaida. And Philip has got a mate called Nathanael.

[17 : 02] And we pick things up in verse 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.

And what we can love about Nathanael here is just this healthy skepticism about what he's told. Just imagine what that conversation actually looked like that day.

Nathanael is having an ordinary day in his village. Maybe he got up and went for a run in the morning and then he's doing some DIY in the house and then he sits down at lunchtime for a cup of tea and his mate Philip comes down the street to see him.

And he says, Philip, hi. How's it going? Doing well. How's yourself? Nathanael says, I'm doing fine. Weather's good today.

Got a lot done. Good morning. Great morning. Really? Why so positive, Philip? You know the one who's promised in the Bible by all the prophets and by Moses who's going to put everything right?

[18 : 11] This morning, I found him. It turns out it's Joseph's son, the carpenter, from the village up the road. It's extraordinary, isn't it? And so Nathanael's response here is just so real.

Verse 46, Nazareth? Can anything good come from there? I don't know if you can relate to that comment. I can because I come from a town in England called Stockton-on-Tees and it's exactly the sort of town that people say that sort of thing about.

But Nathanael's issue here is that his mate Philip has come to see him and said, I have found the one that we've all been waiting for who will bring God's liberation to live in freedom for him forever. And he's from down the road. And it's too familiar for Nathanael. It's too weird. And I know we're not in the same position as that, but I think we face a very similar battle today in Scotland about really trusting Jesus wholeheartedly with everything we've got.

If you're not a Christian and you're here this evening, you might be someone who's searching for truth. You're open to the truth. You want answers to life's big questions. But you're sort of thinking, surely Jesus can't be the answer.

[19 : 29] Not for 2017 in Glasgow. Not for my generation. Because he seems so old-fashioned. People have known about him for centuries.

We might have heard about him at school. He's too familiar to us. So instead, we look for something else. Or even if we're Christians here, you can be a Christian and then you go through life and you find we still have big problems in life.

And the temptation then is to think, Jesus isn't enough here. And so we find ourselves moving on to something else, going after the latest psychological or spiritual trends to get the answers we're really looking for.

Or you might still find us in church on a Sunday, but actually when you look at our lives, really, the excitement is somewhere else. What we think really excites us. It's as though we're saying, Nazareth.

That's not the answer. So Nathaniel basically thinks this cannot be the case. So he says, verse 46, Nazareth, can anything good come from there?

[20 : 41] And Philip says to him, verse 46, come and see. Brilliant. Come and see. And Nathaniel does. Why?

Because he's skeptical, but Philip is his mate. And because he's his mate, he'll go and have a look. And maybe you're someone here today in a similar position who at the moment is quite skeptical about Jesus, but you've got a friend who's a Christian, and because they're your friend, you're

looking into things.

And that's just like Nathaniel. The same invitation is there for us. Come and see for yourself. And you can do that through John's Gospel. I've got some copies with me just of John's Gospel.

It takes very little time to read. Why not read it and look for yourself at what your friend has found. Nathaniel is willing to come and see. There's something else here about Nathaniel.

It's that he's open to the truth. We get that from his conversation with Jesus. Let's pick it up again at verse 47. When Jesus saw Nathaniel approaching, he said of him, Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.

[21 : 58] How do you know me? Nathaniel asked. Jesus answered, I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you. Now we don't know what he was doing under the fig tree, but whatever it was, it was something so secret that nobody could have known about it except God.

And clearly it's enough to shatter Nathaniel's worldview. And he says, verse 49, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. What are we seeing?

We're seeing that Jesus knows what's inside a man. He shows Nathaniel, he knows him inside out. He knows who he is. There's no falsehood in him. He knows where he's been under the fig tree.

And that is enough to persuade Nathaniel. And what Jesus says about him, there is no deceit in him, is probably a model for us as well.

Because it shows Nathaniel is willing to be honest before God. And it may have had a deeper meaning for Nathaniel. I think this is probably the case. See what you think.

[23 : 04] Psalm 32 was written by King David, an Old Testament song, and written by a time when David knew he needed forgiveness from God. And he covered up his need of forgiveness.

He covered up his sin. He didn't confess it. And he was left in dire straits, desperate situation. And eventually he confesses his sin and he gets the assurance of forgiveness from God.

And he writes the song, Psalm 32. Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven. whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them.

And in whose spirit is no deceit. It's the same phrase that Jesus uses of Nathaniel. In his spirit there is no deceit. The one in whom there is no guile, there is no deceit.

So the psalm is talking about a particular kind of deceit. It's the deceit of not being willing to admit before God that we need forgiveness from him and turn from our sin.

[24 : 05] And maybe that psalm was very special to Nathaniel. So Jesus is showing Nathaniel that he knows him and knows his heart. But also there's a challenge for each of us because when we get to further on in John, what Jesus will teach us is that the reason people reject him isn't because of lack of evidence.

It's not that they can't believe. It's that they won't believe. And fundamentally that's because they don't want to change. He says, light has come into the world but people love darkness instead of light because their deeds are evil.

That's not true of Nathaniel. He knows his sin. He's willing to be open about it and turn from it to God. But maybe we're people who are holding on to sin that we're covering up in our lives.

And it holds us back from seeing Jesus. So like Nathaniel, you might be somebody who needs to bring that to God as you come and see Jesus to welcome the light of the world into our lives.

The last way these first disciples respond to Jesus is they go and tell. Yes, they come and see but they then go and tell about him as well. Because John identifies for us here three different types of relationship that the early disciples used to share the light about Jesus.

[25 : 33] There is family in verse 41. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him we have found the Messiah. So he uses family.

The next is geography because we learn in verse 44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter is from the town of Bethsaida. And the third is friendship verse 45. Philip finds Nathaniel and says, come and see.

It's not very popular today is it, sharing our faith. In some countries it's illegal and I wonder if in the UK today they don't need to make it illegal because there's such social pressure on us not to speak about Jesus to others but also because I just wonder if some of us we've lost our confidence that Jesus really does have the power to save people if we tell them about him.

I remember at university there was I went to university and there was this huge mission week from the Christian Union in my first year and you couldn't avoid that it was going on.

There were posters on every staircase of every college. There were big banners up in the main streets. You couldn't miss that there was this week of talks inviting people to hear about Jesus and I

think I was quite interested in hearing about Jesus and I didn't go to any of it and the reason I didn't go was nobody asked me to go.

[27 : 01] I didn't have a friend who said to me will you go with me? I would have gone. I became a Christian later on at university and that was thanks to well it was thanks to God but it was humanly it was down to a couple of Christian friends being willing to be bold with me and talk to me about Jesus like these disciples who share the light.

I was talking to a friend this week who was talking to me about his experience playing rugby and he was playing rugby at his local club and he and his friend had been there for a few years and his friend who's a Christian and so they're both Christians and they just decided let's just be more bold and more radically bold with our friends so they prayed and then they said to the whole rugby team we're going to have some evenings where we have some food together and then we just read a bit of Luke's account of Jesus' life together and we just hear what you think and we love you to come and they thought we'll see if anyone comes.

So the first week one guy comes with his kids and it's a bit awkward because they weren't expecting kids and the next week six of the rugby team come and the next week eight of them come and then over the six weeks that they met nine of them came and three of them became Christians. Extraordinary. And what he said to me was really interesting and challenging for me was he said it's completely changed my mind about what people are willing to do with Jesus.

I just always assumed none of those guys would do that and it turned out a few of them were actually interested enough just to come and interact and engage. Amazing.

[28 : 50] How encouraging for us to pray and step out in faith and go and tell. So we thought about the man they discover and the way they respond. Just finally and more briefly let's look at the hope they're promised.

These are just the first days of their encounter with Jesus but look at Simon and the rock. Pick things up again in verse 41. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him we have found the Messiah that is the Christ 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 and Peter means rock.

In other words Simon is going to become a man who knows what his life is founded on and who can therefore become a man of God a man who reflects God's character of steadfastness in love and faithfulness.

That's not the Peter that we encounter as we read the Gospels. We meet a guy who is erratic and hot headed and unreliable but John saves his last words in the Gospel for Jesus' last encounter with Peter where he reinstates him and commissions him to lead the church.

[30 : 13] Peter is going on an adventure where Jesus is going to transform him to be a rock. Now none of us is Peter. We're different to him but there is a similar promise on offer for all of us that if we come to Jesus and we really do surrender ourselves to him and his will he will transform us into people of steadfast love people of faithfulness godly people and that is who he made us to be.

So there's hope for any of us and finally let's look at Nathaniel and the stairway. If you look with me at verse 50 Jesus says to Nathaniel you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree he then added I tell you the truth you shall see well you will see greater things than these I tell you the truth you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man.

Well Jesus is referring Nathaniel back to a story from the Old Testament about the first well one of the patriarchs but Jacob who was renamed Israel you know Jacob the one who had 12 sons one of them was Joseph with the coat and Jacob was a swindler he robbed his brother of the family inheritance and then he had to go on the run because he saw his brothers trying to kill him so he's a fugitive of his own making and he hits rock bottom literally really when he's he has to go to sleep one night on the run and he uses a stone as his pillow and then he has a dream in the night that God gives him and in the dream there is a stairway and there are angels going up and down this stairway between heaven and earth Jacob wakes up he says how awesome is this place this is none other than the house of God this is the gate of heaven and he renamed it Bethel which means house of God so when Jesus says this he is making the extraordinary claim that that staircase is fulfilled in him that means he is the point where heaven and earth meet he is the one that displays the glory of heaven on earth he is the house of God

I don't know whether you've had this experience but quite often with me for some reason I don't know why it's happened so much to me I've been with friends who are not Christians in churches perhaps there's tourists looking around all cathedrals or in church and they swear then they go oh sorry I shouldn't do that we're in the house of God or if you go to Westminster Abbey it's even got a sign on the door saying this is the house of God it's nonsense it's not the house of God there's nothing special about the place but wherever we are we meet with God if we meet with Jesus by his spirit as his word is opened up because he is the house of God he is the awesome place where heaven breaks into our world and for any of us who want to know God he is the gate of heaven let's pray together just have a moment of quiet to reflect on John chapter 1 in our own hearts God and loving heavenly father we praise you and thank you for your word the eternal word who for us is our lamb taking away the sin of the world we thank you that through him we find your forgiveness we praise you for his character for his welcome for his command to follow him heavenly father we pray that by your spirit you'd enable us to come and see Jesus however much we have seen of him before that we really would see him more clearly and more fully and so trust him and grow in faith heavenly father we thank you for the hope that he offers and we pray that you would transform us more and more and fix our eyes on you in heaven knowing that through Jesus we have a gateway to you we pray these things for his name's sake amen we're going to sing together again two final songs and whoever we pray we pray for his name's sake we pray for his name's sake we pray for his name's sake andiri we pray that he falls and he falls in the leaves that he forms and heaps we pray that he attends