



Sermon – December 19, 2021
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

John 1:43 - 51

John 5:39

John 3:13 - 16

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me back to the book of John chapter 1. We're going to start in verse 43 this morning. And if you've blessed by that worship, will you let our worship team know that today? If you're a guest with us this morning, whether in the room or you're watching online while you're travelling to see family, welcome home. We come to God's word each week because we encounter Jesus there. The Jesus of this Christmas Season, the Jesus we've been celebrating for this entire Advent. And as we've been working our way through the book of John, it's building towards what's happening this Friday night. I want you to make plans to come back here and join us. Bring family and friends along at 5:00 p.m. for our candlelight, family-friendly Christmas eve service right here at Central. Because what's happening is, as we've worked our way through John, we've seen him give us different pictures of the Christ of Christmas. We've seen him describe Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Word of God, the image of God. And now this morning, beginning in verse 43, we're going to see how he speaks of Jesus as the Son of God. So follow along with me now in the text, here's how it begins.

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

And then verse 44 says:

⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip 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.” ⁴⁶And Nathanael said to him, “Can any good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

Let’s pray together.

Father, that’s the desire of our hearts this morning. We want to come and see. We want to come and behold. We want to come and experience the truth of this Christmas story that we find in Jesus Christ and I pray that You would write it on our hearts today and make us more like Him. And we plead that by the powerful name of Christ. Amen.

Well, we’ve got six days until Christmas is here. Do you have your Christmas shopping done? Some of you might be looking around saying, “I haven’t even started yet.” And we know how it goes. The closer you get to Christmas day, the more concerned if you’re ordering online about, “Will that gift get here on time?” I was shopping for some family members and looking at a couple of options and one of them, the shipping arrival date was precariously close to Christmas so I went with the other option, just not to chance it. Because have you ever had one of those moments where you have found the perfect gift but it doesn’t get there on time? Am I the only person that’s ever happened to? Oh no, I see some spouses nudging their neighbor right now. You know what it’s like. You can nail it. You can know exactly what they want, what they need. You can find it but then things don’t arrive on time. The shipping gets delayed, something happens, maybe you’ve done what our family’s done in the past when it doesn’t show up. You cut a piece of a picture of that item out and you wrap that up and give it to them as if that is an acceptable substitute in the moment. See, it doesn’t matter how perfect a gift is if it doesn’t get there on time. It’s of no value. And that’s what John 1, in fact, the entire book of John, is showing to us. As one author put it, the Gospel is only good news if it gets there on time. That’s what John 1 is showing us today. That there needs to be this sense of urgency as the Gospel goes forward, especially during this Christmas season. Because the free offer of the Gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ, what we celebrate here at Christmas, the greatest gift that has ever been offered to the world is only good news if it gets there on time. And that’s what we find happening in John 1. You see right before this passage, Jesus has called Andrew and Peter to follow Him as His first disciples. And now we’re going to see next the way he brings along Philip and Nathanael. And what we’re going to notice here this morning in John 1 is that if we are going to embrace Jesus for who He is as the Son of God, then this text is calling us to come and see two key realities about Him.

And I want you to notice the first one in the portion of the passage we just read. First, we’re going to see how we’re called to come and see the way of the Son of God this Christmas. So one of the most powerful images the New Testament uses about Jesus is this picture of the Son of God. It’s family language. And every family has patterns, rhythms, tendencies that shape who they are, shape what their life is about. And that’s true of the family of God as well. And what

we're going to find in this portion of the text is several dimensions of the way of the family of God, the way of the Son of God that you and I are called to live out. So if you'll look back at verse 43 you'll notice first that it calls us to follow the way of the Son of God when it says, the next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." So after Jesus arrives in Galilee, He comes across this man named Philip and He gives him this command, this instruction, to follow Me. That word "follow" shows up only in the Gospels other than one time in the book of Revelation. And it's this idea of accompanying, not following after, but following with, going along side of, to follow as a disciple. And what you might miss is how unusual this would have been in that cultural moment. You see, in that time period a student would select their own rabbi. It was unthinkable for a teacher to select his own students. You know, we just had the national signing day for college football. How'd the Aggies do? I didn't quite catch that this week. And we know what happens is that when those student athletes are selecting what school to come to, they're the one that makes the choice of where they want to go. Some of them will get the hats out and they'll set them on the table and pick out a hat and put it on to announce where they're going. In that time period, if you were to imagine a similar circumstance, maybe they put out three yarmulkes on the table and they could go to this temple or that temple or study with this rabbi and they put this one on. They're the one who makes the selection. And Jesus comes to Bethsaida and let me tell you, there's no 5-star talent in the city. In fact, He enters the transfer portal and finds some 1-star fishermen with 5-star hearts and He says, "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." He calls them to follow the way. And when you follow the way of the Son of God, it changes everything about you. Now all that you are is called to live for all that He is. And I've seen that on display even this holiday season in the life of our own church. We've got one of our church members who recently lost his wife. Went through his first Thanksgiving without her and that loss, that loneliness, just gripped him. And he came to visit me not long after that and he was wrestling with how should he handle the holidays. And when Christmas was coming along what blew me away is this man who had lost the love of his life wasn't sitting there across from me in self-pity, but instead in self-sacrifice. He said, "Hey, can you help me find some way to serve, some way to give, some way to be a blessing on Christmas day because I want the focus off myself and on someone else in that moment." That's what it looks like to follow the way of the Son of God. That's what we see Jesus calling Philip to do here. When we follow Him we're following His purpose, His character, His suffering, His calling. And when we follow the way of the Son of God, it leads to a second dimension of what it looks like to live in the way of the family of God.

You'll notice it there in verse 45 when it shows us how we need to demonstrate, or to show, the way of the Son of God. That's why it says there in verse 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." So how should we show the way of God? Well, what you find here in John 1 is a pattern that emerges. You see, what happens is that the most effective way to

reach someone with the way of God is through your personal experience, he shows us here, and through prophetic expectation. In other words, the testimony of our own life and the testimony of the word of God. And where do we see that in verse 45? Look at how he speaks to the testimony of his own life. He says, “We found Him.” There is a personal transformation that takes place. But then there’s also this testimony of the word of God there. If you look back at the text when it says, Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote. This testimony from our life, this testimony from God’s word is what God consistently uses through His witnesses to show people their need of the Gospel. Let’s dig a little deeper into both of those. Take this idea of the testimony of our lives. See, many scholars believe that right before this happened that Andrew, who had just brought Peter to Jesus, also brought Philip to Jesus. And what we see now in this verse is Philip bringing Nathanael to Jesus. And if that’s the case, then here’s what it means. Every person who meets Jesus in John 1 is there because someone, through their existing relationship with Jesus brought them to the Savior. That personal relationship is the bridge that can often carry the freight of the Gospel into someone’s life. That’s exactly why we’ve been praying over those Harvest Cards out in the lobby for weeks now. Lifting up that God might make Jesus known in their lives. I told you last week I was getting to have breakfast with the person who I’d written down on my card and we had that breakfast this past week. In fact, last night he sent me a text with a screen shot of a Christian book that he has just started reading. The Lord is at work in his heart through that relational bridge, that personal testimony like what we find there with Philip and Nathanael.

But it’s not just through personal experience that God works. Not just through the testimony of our life, it’s also, it shows us there in verse 45, the testimony of His word. So I want you, as we look back at John 1, to slide over a couple of chapters to John chapter 5 in verse 39. Because in John 1:45 Jesus speaks about the law and the prophets. That’s shorthand for the entire Old Testament. He says, those words that we have had in our lives from our very birth, these Scriptural truths that have been around us, they all point ahead to this Messiah who is now here in Jesus. And Jesus Himself echoes that reality in John 5:39. Here’s what He says:

³⁹You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,

Notice what Jesus says there. You look to the Scripture for life and that same Scripture that you put your hope in is pointing to Me, testifying and bearing witness to Me and who I am. In other words, Jesus is saying that this Christmas story we celebrate is all about Him. It’s all been culminating towards the Messiah. And that’s one of the reasons why next Sunday when I preach on that Sunday following Christmas, we’re going to dive into this concept even more deeply from the book of Luke chapter 24. To show how the entire Scripture finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. That’s what Jesus is telling us there that and that if we want to show people the way of the Son of God, it comes through the testimony of our life and the testimony of our Scripture.

But if you'll look back in our passage in John chapter 1, notice with me in verse 46 we also see this passage calling us to come and see the way of the Son of God. So notice how Nathanael responds to Philip here. It tells us Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" And Philip responded to him by saying, "Come and see." So how does Nathanael respond? He responds with skepticism, with surprise, with doubt, with disbelief. And there's a reason for that. Nathanael knows his rival. Where he's from in Bethsaida and the city Nazareth are at odds with each other and he questions, can anything good come out of Nazareth in the same way that those of you that are Aggies here might say, "Can anything good come out of Austin?" There's that rivalry that's there. But it's not just because he knows his rival, he also knows his Bible. He can look back at our Old Testament and say, "There is no such thing as a prophetic expectation of a coming Messiah that has anything to do with Nazareth. Could anything good come from Nazareth? And I want you to look back at the end of verse 46. Because the way that Philip responds to his skepticism is huge. What does he tell him? Philip said to him, "Come and see." So how does he respond to the skepticism? Not with an argument but an appeal. Not with a confrontation but an invitation. He says, "Come and see. See for yourself." In other words, he doesn't deny his skepticism, he dignifies it. He says, "I understand why you would be uncertain, but let me tell you the way that this has changed my life. Come and see." He's performing that role of a witness. So in the same way in the courtroom as the witness takes the stand, there is a group of 12 in the jury box that are about to make a ruling on the case and they are wired and instructed to be skeptics. They're hearing all the testimony with skeptical minds. And the role of that witness is to invite those skeptics, come and see. Come and hear the truth from my perspective so that you can form your own opinion. And that's exactly what Philip is doing here with Nathanael.

And in the second part of this passage we're going to see what happens when you invite a skeptic to come and see. So look back with me now in verse 47, there's a second big idea I want you to notice here that the text is calling us to come and see the work of the Son of God this Christmas season. Here's what it says, verse 47.

⁴⁷Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" And Jesus answered Him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel." ⁵⁰And Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And he said to him, "Truly, truly I say to you, you will see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

See, this passage shows us that something powerful can happen when skeptics come and see Jesus. That when they encounter the work of the Son of God, it can take them along their

spiritual journey in a way that changes their life. And I want you to notice the steps on this spiritual journey we see right here in John 1. Because back in verse 47 you're going to see about how when we come and see the work of the Son of God it can move us from skeptics to seekers. That's exactly what we notice in Nathanael's response when in verse 47 it says that Jesus saw him and said of him, "Behold an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." You see, every skeptic about Jesus faces a choice. Will they become a cynic or a seeker? You know the difference between cynic and a seeker, right? You see, a cynic is someone who doesn't just struggle to find the truth, it's someone who struggles to find trust, to trust the sources of information that might lead you to the truth. And we're living in a culture filled with cynicism. Perhaps even in this room there are skeptics that are here who are cynical about religious things. And I get it. You've watched hypocrisy in the church. You've experienced deep wounds from people that you thought loved and cared about you. You've had unmet expectations or unfulfilled desires and that has bred a cynicism in you that has hardened you to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But you've got a choice. You don't have to remain in that cynicism. You don't have to remain in that skepticism. See, Nathanael faced that same choice and rather than turn into a cynic, the text tells us that he had become a seeker. It tells us there that he came toward Jesus. He moved towards Him seeking truth, seeking to trust. And what happens in that moment? Verse 47 tells us, Jesus praised him as one in whom there is no deceit. That term, no deceit, means no guile, no cunning, no trickery. In the original language, it was often used about the word bait for a fisherman. It's someone in whom there is no bait. And so, literally Jesus is saying, here is a fisherman in whom there is no bait. There is a purity of heart. There is a humility in his seeking. He is desiring to come to Jesus. And how is it that Jesus knows Nathanael is a seeker and not a cynic? Well look at how the text goes on in verse 48.

[48Nathanael asked him, "How did you know me?" And Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."](#)

In other words, Jesus was looking for Nathanael before Nathanael was ever looking for Him. That same reality is true for you and me. So often when we are far from God and we decide we're thinking about starting to seek Him, we can imagine that He is totally disengaged from that process. That He's impatient about what's taking us so long. Or maybe He's divinely distracted by world hunger and global pandemics and all the hardships around this world as if He doesn't have a mind or attention or focus on you. But this text gives us a totally different picture. That before any one of us was ever looking for Jesus, Jesus was looking for us. Think about that reality. Think about that truth. He is seeking us. And if that's true, the only way we are going to find ourselves seeking Jesus is when we recognize that He was seeking us first. And when we realize that truth in our lives, I want you to notice what happens next. Because beginning in verse 49 we see that when we come and see the word of God, it doesn't just move us from skeptic to seeker, the next thing we notice is that it moves us from seeker to finder.

From seeking to finding Jesus. And that's what happens in verse 49 when Nathanael responds like this, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel." We see this light bulb moment in Nathanael's life where the Gospel clicks for him. He now comes and sees Jesus and now he sees Him through new eyes, through a transformed heart. And what happens in that moment? He recognizes that Jesus had already seen him for who he truly is and now he sees Jesus for who Jesus truly is. And as that happens, he moves from seeker to finder, from seeking Jesus to finding Him and He describes what he has found in several ways. Do you see in there in verse 49? He speaks first of Jesus as Rabbi. That term is used about Jesus in the book of John 8 different times. It talks about His authoritative teaching. But he's not just Rabbi. Look at how else Nathanael describes Him; the Son of God. This is one of the most frequent titles about the Messiah in the Gospels. And it's first used by John the Baptist back earlier in this chapter in John 1:34. And it shows a sense of unity between the Father and the Son in the salvation purposes of God. But it's also picking up on themes from the Old Testament because the nation of Israel was often described as the Son of God. And yet in their rebellion they hardened their hearts and turned from Him. But now, now there is One who has come to take on flesh as the true and faithful Israel who comes as the faithful Son of God and now just that Son of God but the King of Israel. This is what all the Jews were waiting for. A Messiah who would come as a King to defeat their enemies and bring lasting victory over those who would put them to shame. In fact, you remember when Jesus goes into Jerusalem in the triumphal entry, the crowds gather around Him waving the palm branches, describing Him as the King of Israel. And yet Jesus upends the nature of that kingship, doesn't He? Because you remember back in John 18 when He is standing on trial, He tells those who are in His earshot, "My kingdom is not of this world." It's not the kind of kingdom that they would have anticipated. But now Nathanael sees Jesus in a new light as Rabbi, as Son of God, as King of Israel. He moves from seeking to finding.

And I want you to see how the text finishes. Because he doesn't stay there. Because the last step in the spiritual journey we find here is that when we come and see the work of God, it moves us from finding to following. And that's what we see happening there in verse 50.

⁵⁰Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these."

In other words, when we follow Jesus, we get to see even more the work of God through Jesus Christ that it's taking place. And that's exactly what He tells Nathanael. You will see even greater things than these. He's saying, "We ain't done yet. There is more that is going to take place." And that's exactly what we see happening throughout the Gospel of John. We see greater things through the Son of God. Greater things come through His miracles, through His signs, through His works. Greater things come through His teaching, through His truth, through His preaching. Greater things come on that cross where He dies for the sins of the world. The

way He penalty that you and I deserve because of the judgment of God for the guilt of our sin. And greater things come, John tells us later in this book, when that Savior bursts forth from the grave three days later conquering satan, sin, and death through the resurrection. He looks at Nathanael and He says, “If you think this is great, you just wait. Greater things are coming even still.” And that’s exactly the promise of God to those who are followers of Jesus Christ.

And why is it that we will see greater things? Well, we see that answer at the end of the passage there in verse 51. In this unusual text that’s picking up on Jacob’s dream from Genesis chapter 28, he says this:

⁵¹And He said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

So maybe you remember Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28 where he sees this ladder to and from heaven. The angels of God ascending and descending, that God is visiting man. And what Jesus is telling Nathanael and all of us today is that the true and greater Jacob’s ladder is now here. That God has made a way for divinity and humanity to become one. For heaven and earth to collide. And that happens through the life of Jesus. This one that is called here the Son of Man. I don’t want you to miss that language before we wrap up this morning. See, that Son of Man language coming out of the echoes of Daniel chapter 7 is Jesus’ most common way of describing Himself as Messiah. It’s used repeatedly in the New Testament. In fact, 13 times right here in the Gospel of John. And I want you to just see one of them if you’ll turn over 2 chapters with me to the book of John chapter 3. Because Jesus brings all of these threads together with a closing thought for us this morning. To see the work of the Son of God. Look at how He describes this ascending and descending, this theme of the Son of Man. John chapter 3 beginning in verse 13.

¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

So what is Jesus showing us here? This idea of ascending and descending, this idea of the Son of Man, this ladder that exists now between God and man is not so that we as humans can seek to climb out way to God. That’s what every religion other than Christianity will tell you. That’s what your heart seeking to find a way to God on your own will tell you. That I can climb the ladder through my success. I can climb the ladder through my significance. I can climb the ladder through my good works. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ instead is this; God did not put

that ladder between heaven and earth so you could seek to climb your way to Him. Instead, God put that ladder between heaven and earth so that He, through His Son, could come down to us. Just think about this reality, that the Son of Man in heaven put on the flesh of man at Christmas so He could become the slave of man at the cross in order to achieve the salvation of man at eternity. We were able to host one of the life group Christmas parties at my parent's place earlier this Christmas season. It was the Couples and Young Adults small group, Young Families Small Group and we got into a pretty lively discussion about the proper way for a family to open gifts on Christmas day. So think back to your childhood. What was it like for you? What we found is we had one common ground agreement. Everybody could agree that in their family there was either a grandpa, an uncle, or a dad who everyone was always waiting on. Gotta get the coffee ready, gotta shuffle in there after getting the newspaper, whatever it is. And if you don't think your family has one, that means you probably are that guy. But then things got a little bit more tense because some in the group were civilized and proper in their opening strategies. And so that meant they had a set time that everybody came down for Christmas. And you lined up in a particular order and you went over and you got Santa Claus's gift first and then you went around the room taking turns like respectable human beings and watching others open their gifts. Others, on the other hand, were total barbarians. Go down at whatever time you want. When it's time to open the gifts it's not one at a time, it's all for one, one for all. You're opening these gifts, it's just this flurry of tape and paper being ripped apart all at the same time. There were different things that each family described. But you know one thing I never heard anybody say, I've never come across this in my whole life as a matter of fact, I've never encountered somebody who said, "You know what, the young kids in my family, when they wake up on Christmas morning, there's just no sense of urgency to get to the gifts. You know this one time last year my kid came to me and said, 'Hey mom, do you have any chores you want me to take care of before we open the presents? Do you mind if I knock out some homework before we go to see what Santa Claus brought us?'" That doesn't happen, right? No. And the reason that it doesn't happen is because at last it's here. The gift has arrived. And the way that you enjoy the gift is by embracing the urgency of the moment. On Christmas morning that young child is not taking a wait and see approach, but a come and see approach. And that same reality is put before each one of us today. That God, through His Son, has given us the greatest gift this world has ever known. And each one of us are faced with a choice. Will we respond to that gift with the wait and see approach of a skeptic or the come and see approach of a seeker?

Let's pray together.

Father, Your word tells us that we will seek You and find You when we seek You with our whole hearts. I'm praying for those that might have hard hearts in the room this morning or watching online that instead You would give them a desire with their whole hearts to seek after You. And I pray for the men and women in our church who are faithful members who have

written these names down on these Harvest Cards, Lord, that You would make a way right now in the lives of those that they've been praying for to open up Gospel conversations. Lord, that we might follow Philip in this model of faithfulness to invite those who are skeptics to come and see, to taste and see that You are good. And as we turn our hearts to the Christmas realities just six days away from us now, God, I pray that we would not be caught up in the craziness of the season but instead we would find rest and renewal from the only place that is offered to us. Through the blood of Your Son. And we pray these realities in Christ's name. Amen.