

Behold: Who is Jesus?

Unlikely Men who Changed the World

John 1:35-51

Mark Vroegop

“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” 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. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter). The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 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.” And 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”” (John 1:35–51),

This has been a full week of ministry at College Park Church. It has reminded me, yet again, why I love the Church. Even more, it has reminded me why I love *this* church. The funeral and celebration of life services for Tyler Trent has already yielded some amazing fruit. Besides having about 2,000 people here for his service, we had 14,000 people from 28 different countries livestream the service from our website. That doesn’t include the full coverage by multiple TV stations.

I’m hearing about the impact of Tyler’s life from pastoral colleagues all over the country. But they are also talking about the consistent clarity of the gospel that emanated from every part of his service because of the people who were a part of his life.

I’m so thankful to be one of Tyler’s pastors. I’m so grateful for the care that you are showing the Trent family. Let’s be sure to continue that when the publicity fades. Two of our core values—redemptive

community and extravagant grace—need to be on full display over the next few years as the Trents heal from this four-year journey.

I want to commend hundreds of people who served behind the scenes, including our amazing church staff, who worked like crazy to be sure that the celebration of life was clear, not distracting, and as easy as possible for Trents. They did an excellent job.

I've said it before, but I want to remind you: Sundays matter. The seeds of the message that flowed from Tyler's funeral were planted Sunday after Sunday as we've gathered together. We gather on the Lord's Day to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the hope we have in him. Today is no different. It is good to be together.

Beholding Jesus

As we start the new year, we are back to our study of the Gospel of John. This next series is called "Behold." This is the second of eight messages that are designed to help us understand what John wanted us to see when it came to Jesus. The previous series—"Believe"—took us very slowly through the first eighteen verses. Now we are going to pick up the pace in our study, and we'll see how John quickly establishes who Jesus is. John's aim is for us to believe in Jesus. Remember John 20:31?

*"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe **that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name**" (John 20:30–31).*

John writes this book so that you may come to believe in who Jesus is. And for that reason, John gives us some examples of people who encountered Jesus. He designed these stories to quickly frame our understanding of Jesus by showing us who Jesus is.

Brad Merchant helped us with a great start last week by identifying three steps to a vibrant walk with God from John 1:19-34. Our text today, John 1:35-51, introduces us to the first disciples, the band of men who first followed Jesus and then spread his message all over the world.

Eternal Impact

Just consider the fact that if you traced your spiritual lineage to how you heard about Jesus, it would eventually find its source in one of the disciples of Jesus. Some of you may have received one of those DNA kits for Christmas. And as cool as it is to know where your family is from, think of what it would be like to trace how you heard the gospel. All of us benefit from the witness of the disciples. They carried the message about Jesus, and it changed the world.

But I'm happy to tell you that following Jesus and bringing the gospel didn't stop with the disciples. It continues with each of us. I was reminded of this at the graveside service on Wednesday. After I completed my remarks, I stepped outside the tent and the circle of family and friends. When I looked down, I saw a headstone for Carrie Fogelman, who passed away from her battle with cancer in 2007. I remember hearing about the impact of her life. And when I turned around even further, I saw Tom

McElroy's headstone. After showing this to a few people, I commented that we have a little collection of College Park people who will all travel to meet Jesus together in the resurrection.

But even more, each of them followed Jesus and impacted the people around them. So, while this text is about the first disciples, there are vital lessons for each of us to learn.

Four Marks of World-Changing Disciples

Let's look at John 1:35-51 through this lens so that we can learn something about the disciples, something about Jesus, and see how this applies to our lives. Here are four characteristics or marks of being a follower of Jesus.

1. They are in awe of Jesus (vv. 35-37)

The first mark of world-changing disciples is that they know who Jesus really is, and they are in awe of him. Part of John's mission in writing this gospel is to try to show you what he saw. He wants to help you hear what he heard so that you will believe. Or maybe to help you keep believing. John saw the glory of God in the person of Jesus, and the disciples saw that too.

Our text begins in verse 35, which connects the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus again. Remember that John the Baptist was a forerunner to Christ. His ministry was to prepare the people for Jesus's coming. That's why John's statement in 1:29 is so significant.

When John saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). John clearly knew his role as the forerunner of Christ, and he also knew that he was to point people to Jesus. I found myself thinking about his statement "I am not the Christ" (1:20) all week after Brad's message. John the Baptist knew that there was only one person who could take away the sin of the world. He knew there was only one Lamb of God.

Do you know the significance of that concept "Lamb of God"? We are not entirely sure what John the Baptist had in mind, because there is so much Jewish history connected to that term. Further, it seems that John the Baptist grew in his full understanding of Jesus, since Matthew 11:2-19 records his disciples asking Jesus if he really was the Messiah. Jesus may not have fit what John the Baptist had in mind.

The meaning of "Lamb of God" could include the following: the daily sacrificial lamb, the scapegoat sacrifice, the lamb offered by Abraham instead of Isaac, the Passover lamb, or even the apocalyptic lamb, as in Revelation 7 and 17. It is likely that John simply meant that Jesus was the Son of God. He probably didn't know the full extent of what he was saying at this point. He knew, however, that *he* wasn't the Christ. He believes Jesus was the Messiah. And so he pointed people to Jesus.

Apparently, John identified Jesus as the Lamb of God on multiple occasions, because we see that verse 35 highlights that he did it again. This time, however, John makes it clear that John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples. You see, John the Baptist had a group of followers as well.

Once again John points out who Jesus really is. As Jesus walked by, John said, “Behold the Lamb of God!” This time, however, the two disciples leave John the Baptist and make their way toward Jesus. As great as their time with John the Baptist had been, they pursue Jesus to learn more about him.

There was something about Jesus that eclipsed their former calling with John the Baptist. John didn’t tell them to follow Jesus. But the reality of who Jesus was prompted them to follow him.

This is important for two reasons. First, if you are a Christian, be sure that you never lose sight of the person of Jesus. In your growth as a disciple, in your knowledge of theology, and in your spiritual maturity, be sure that you keep your affections set upon the person of Jesus, not on the teaching *about* Jesus. When you set out to make disciples, be sure that you keep Jesus in the forefront. When you counsel people, be sure that they are growing more and more into a love for Jesus. Help people to love the Bible so that they can love Jesus.

Second, take note that the disciples were not the only ones in awe of Jesus. John was too. In fact, he lost two disciples that day. But it was okay because he knew who Jesus was. There was a greater work that needed to be accomplished.

This Sunday, we are launching the Incubator for One Fellowship Church. We are praying about sending 150 to plant this church in the YMCA on Lafayette Road. We are convinced this is the best way to reach people in Pike Township. Church is best when it’s personal, local, incarnational, and missional. But when we send 150 people away, we send good people and good givers (so I’m told). And when people ask me why we would do that, my answer is “because we want to see Jesus’s kingdom advance and not just see our church grow.” Is it costly? You bet it is. I’m saying goodbye to people I really love. But here’s the thing: I love Jesus more.

That mindset is at the heart of what it means to be a disciple. You just can’t get over what you see in Jesus.

2. They follow Jesus (vv. 38-39, 43)

The second mark we see in the text is the fact that these men followed Jesus. To be a disciple of Jesus means that you are a follower of Jesus. The two terms are linked together. The word “disciple” describes who they are. The word “follow” describes what they did. They are linked. Disciples follow.

Verse 37 is the first time the word “follow” is used in the Gospel of John. The word is connected to the concept of a teacher-student relationship. In other places, you’ll hear Jesus even called by this title (see 1:38 and 49). In the time of Jesus, to be someone’s student was often to be associated with them.

The word “follow” is in a particular tense that means a once-for-all action, indicating that it was their intention to cast their lot with Jesus.¹ In their case, however, there is an interesting exchange with Jesus.

¹ Leon Morris, [*The Gospel according to John*](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 137.

Jesus noticed that they were following him. Perhaps he recognized them as John's disciples. So, he asked them, "What are you seeking?" They replied, not by answering his question, but by calling him Rabbi and asking him where he was staying. What is happening here? It would be similar to you asking someone in a class you're teaching, "What's your story?" and having them reply, "Do you have time today to grab some coffee?" You'd know that they are looking for more information.

Well, that's what happened here. In verse 39, Jesus invites them to see where he is staying. They remained with him that day. It seems that these disciples either had some questions for Jesus or simply wanted to understand him more fully. Regardless, they became his followers.

If you skip ahead to verse 43, you will see a different method Jesus used to recruit his disciples. The Bible tells us Jesus traveled to Galilee, found Philip, and said, "Follow me." We don't know how or why Jesus set his sights on Philip. It may have been that he also was a disciple of John the Baptist, or since he was from the same town as Peter and Andrew, that he was known to them.

One commentator, Leon Morris, suggests that Philip had to be sought because he lacked initiative and was more limited in his abilities than others. For example, it is Philip who is overwhelmed with the task of feeding the multitude, suggesting that it would cost an enormous amount of money (John 6:7). He also doesn't know what to do when some Greeks desire an audience with Jesus (John 12:20-22). If Morris is correct, and I'm inclined to think he is, that should be encouraging. Following Jesus is not just for the bold and decisive. It is also for the timid and cautious. I hope that encourages you.

There are lots of different kinds of people who follow Jesus. And we find in John 1 the beginning of the disciples' journey. It will evolve throughout the gospel of John. They will grow in their understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. They will hear Jesus say:

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'" (John 8:12).

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

After the resurrection, Jesus met with Peter. This is recorded in John 21. After asking Peter three times if he loved him, Jesus said: "Follow me."

It is important for you to know that to follow Jesus means that you not only believe in him but also that you obey him. You can't believe in Jesus without following him. The two are absolutely linked together. And the men who changed the world were those whose belief translated into their lives. Jesus's teaching affected their living. And that's what spoke volumes to the world.

That's why we use the word "follow" in our mission statement: igniting a passion to follow Jesus. Our church exists for more than just what we teach, preach, and sing. Our church exists to help people learn how to obey—how to follow—Jesus.

Trevin Wax put it this way: “One of the greatest realizations a person can come to in the early stages of Christian faith is that Christ’s command to follow him means we should follow him and him alone. His call is one of unconditional surrender and total allegiance to his Name.”²

People who change the world are not just those who claim to believe in Jesus; they follow Jesus. They live for Jesus. They talk about Jesus. They die for Jesus.

3. They bring people to Jesus (vv. 40-41, 44-46)

The third characteristic is that they can’t help but bring people to Jesus. Those who are in awe of Jesus and who follow Jesus want to bring other people into a relationship with him.

In verse 40, we learn that one of the two disciples was Andrew. The other one is unnamed, but many commentators think it is John, the author of this gospel. Andrew is Simon Peter’s brother. After his day-long encounter with Jesus, he immediately sets out to find his brother and share his discovery. This is common for Andrew, as we find him regularly connecting people to Jesus (see 6:8 and 12:22).

Andrew’s first response was to find his brother and tell him clearly what he believed: “We have found the Messiah” (v. 41). Take note that John adds parenthetically “which means Christ.” He’s trying to help connect both Jews and Gentiles with these terms. They both refer to the promised or chosen one. Messiah is a transliteration of a Hebrew word. “Christ” is the Greek word for anointed.

Notice that Andrew’s passion for Jesus creates the impetus for talking to his brother. D.A. Carson says, *“That has been the foundational principle of truly Christian expansion ever since: new followers of Jesus bear witness of him to others, who in turn become disciples and repeat the process.”*³

But there’s more here. Skip ahead to verses 44-45. We find that Philip does the same thing as Andrew. He finds Nathanael and tells him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph.” It is interesting that Nathanael is skeptical. This is one of the reasons I love and believe the Bible. It doesn’t portray everyone as a hero with miraculous faith.

Nathanael questions if anything good can come out of Nazareth. His bias shows up. And yet Philip said, “Come and see” (v. 45). Philip is undaunted in his invitation. Like Andrew, his passion over what he has seen eclipses the initial skepticism of Nathanael.

Are you exhorted by the example of these disciples? You need to know two things here: 1) followers of Jesus talk about Jesus, and 2) being amazed at Jesus creates talking about him. That’s one reason why our pastors and elders keep talking about evangelism and encouraging you to invite people to church. Sharing the gospel and inviting people to meet Jesus is one of the clearest signs of whether or not you are really in love with and following Jesus.

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/following-christ/>

³ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 159.

I don't share this to guilt you but to inspire you. Maybe you could start by asking the Lord to give you an opportunity—to open a door, open my mouth, open their heart.

We are hearing amazing stories of the impact of the story of Tyler. I could share a number of them, but this one is deeply encouraging. One of our pastors received this text in the days leading up to Tyler's service: "I was just listening to Hammer and Nigel on WIBC in the car . . . they were talking about Tyler Trent and the funeral arrangements, so they obviously mentioned College Park Church. I'm not sure which one it was, but he said, 'I know that's a church that is going to take care of the Trent family. My neighbor invited me to their Christmas Eve service a couple of weeks ago, and I couldn't tell you the last time I went to church. It's been a year or two. But I went, and it was tremendous! You could just tell this is a church that really loves God and has some great people.'"

4. They see the work of Jesus (vv. 42, 46-51)

The final mark of a world-changing disciple is that they get to see the work of Jesus in their lives and in the world. In other words, they get a front row seat to grow even deeper in love with Jesus as they marvel at what he can do.

We see this in Peter's case in verse 42. When Jesus meets Peter, he acknowledges his name—Simon. But Jesus changes his name to Cephas, which means Peter. We don't have time to fully explore this today. But in John's gospel, this becomes a marker of what will happen to Peter. Jesus is going to change Peter's identity, his character, and his courage. He will become "the rock"—that's what Cephas means. And if you were to follow Peter's life, it is amazing how he was changed by Jesus.

When it comes to Nathanael, he marveled that Jesus already knew about him. In verses 47-49, Jesus told Nathanael that he saw him while he was under the fig tree. Nathanael knew that Jesus was orchestrating the events of his life. Jesus was pursuing him. And it led him to believe.

You may be here today with that very sense. God has done some things in your life recently to get your attention. You know that things are happening, and it's not by mistake. I said as much at Tyler's funeral on Tuesday, and I'm praying that many people will respond like Scott VanPelt from ESPN did when he tweeted "I found myself thinking a lot about what I heard. Pastor Vroegop said something that won't leave me, 'If your life intersected with Tyler's, it wasn't an accident.' I know that's the truth for me." It surely is. And I'm praying that hundreds of people would know that God is on the move.

Our text concludes with Jesus telling Nathanael that he hasn't seen anything yet. In verse 51, he pulls from an Old Testament story of Jacob's ladder. He says that they will see heaven opened and angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (v. 51). What does this mean?

Jesus is referring to their ability to see the intersection between heaven and earth in the ministry of Jesus. In other words, they are going to see things that are unbelievable and supernatural. In fact, John is getting ready to tell about the first miracle in chapter 2, but that is for next week.

The point is that these disciples are going to get a front-row seat to see God at work.

You see, that is one of the greatest blessings about being a passionate follower of Jesus. By being in awe of Jesus, following him, and telling others about him, we get to see God at work.

Some of you are here today and you are not yet a Christian. Do you know that God wants to do a work in you? The events of your life are happening by divine design. God is calling you, inviting you to come to Jesus today. Why not believe in Jesus and become his follower? You have no idea what you are missing until you do.

And finally, let me encourage those of you who are followers of Jesus. How's your passion for the gospel? What is your affection for Jesus like right now? Where are your heart and mind when it comes to pursuing Jesus?

These disciples carried the message of the gospel and they changed the world because of what they saw in Jesus. And when the world saw Jesus in them, it changed everything.

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