

+ John 1:43-51 + Come and See! + 13th Sunday after Pentecost + 23 August 2015 +

Three simple words changed a life. Three simple words resulted in the transformation of a skeptic into a believer. Three simple words that an excited follower of Christ shared with his best friend. Three simple words that you can share with a friend or a loved one or a neighbor.

Now you might be skeptical that three simple words could do all that, and to some extent, that's expected. We're often skeptical about claims that people make. We want to see actual proof. Yet as much as questioning a claim or promise might prevent you from getting fooled, does that skepticism ever creep into how you view God and his promises?

We live in a culture that is skeptical about anyone who claims to offer absolute truth and that culture affects us. "Does God really know what he's doing?" "Can I really believe the Bible?" "Why does God allow bad things to happen in my life?" "Why is he the only path to heaven?" "Is there really a God out there?" Whether we realize it or not, we might find ourselves questioning God's ability to do all that he has promised—including changing skeptical hearts like ours through his Word. This morning, however, Jesus responds to that skepticism through Philip's three simple words—**COME AND SEE!**

The Jews had waited so long for the Messiah to come. Their wait had started back when God promised our first parents that he would send a Savior to destroy what sin and Satan had done to his beautiful creation. **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel"** (Genesis 3:15) Centuries passed and the Lord took that promise and painted a beautiful portrait of a Savior to come.

Abraham was told that through his offspring, **"all nations on earth will be blessed."** (Genesis 22:18) The prophet Moses spoke of a greater prophet to come. King David was told that one would follow him who would rule on his throne for all generations. The Lord spoke through other prophets—men of God like Isaiah and Jeremiah who proclaimed God's will and prepared his people for the coming Savior, but then even the prophets fell silent.

Centuries passed and God's people grew skeptical about his promises. "Will the Messiah ever come?" "Were Moses and the prophets wrong?" "Why hold on to these promises if there's no fulfillment in sight?" Four hundred years passed and many hearts grew cold. Without warning, a voice began to cry out in the wilderness. **"Prepare the way for the Lord!"** (Luke 3:4) "Repent and be baptized! The kingdom of heaven is near!" A strange-looking man named John was baptizing people in the Jordan River and announcing the coming Messiah. People wondered if he was right.

It wasn't long before the Savior actually did appear. John pointed him out as the **"Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."** (John 1:29) God himself publicly declared this Jesus to be **"My Son, whom I love, with him I am well-pleased."** (Matthew 3:17) Still people wondered if God was right. Would this Jesus be everything they had hoped? Jesus started to call people to follow him—people like the brothers Peter and Andrew and a man named Philip from their same hometown. Philip and the others eagerly followed this Jesus.

You see, Philip knew that Jesus perfectly matched the Old Testament portrait. The long-awaited Messiah had finally come! That was tremendous, huge, big news! With good news like that, Philip had to share it. So he found his best buddy, 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.'"**

Now you'd expect Nathanael to jump up and thank his friend right then and there for telling him about the Savior, but that's not the reaction John records for us. **"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"** Huh?

Nathanael's reaction seems rather typical in a depressing kind of way, doesn't it? You see, Nathanael was a man of his times, a man of his culture, a man of his faith. Others had wrongly claimed to be the Messiah and Nathanael wasn't about to blindly trust Philip's announcement. Nathanael was naturally skeptical because no fulfillment had come to God's ancient promises.

Nathanael knew his Old Testament. No prophet had ever foretold anything about Nazareth. Nazareth was just a backwater town in the middle of a backwater region of a backwater province in the Roman Empire. According to the Old Testament, Nazareth played no major role in God's grand plans.

Nathanael was a skeptic—honest and straightforward. Sadly his skepticism prevented him from trusting in the reality of the Savior. Yet Philip wouldn't give up on his friend. He pressed on with one of the most eloquent invitations in Holy Scripture—three simple words, **“Come and see.”**

If Nathanael wasn't going to believe him, then Philip would show him. Philip wanted Nathanael to see the One who came to fulfill the Scripture. Philip understood what this Jesus had come to do and he wanted Nathanael to understand that too. So he pulled his friend up and they went to see Jesus.

“When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, ‘Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.’ ‘How do you know me?’ Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, ‘I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.’ Then Nathanael declared, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.’ Jesus said, ‘You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.’”

Jesus knew Nathanael's comments before he even expressed them. He knew Nathanael's location without being there. He knew Philip would tell Nathanael about his Savior and that Nathanael wouldn't be quick to trust.

You see, Jesus as true God knew Nathanael's heart. Jesus knew Nathanael's heart had been corrupt since conception. Jesus knew Nathanael's guilt, his fears, his worries, his skepticism that the Savior would never come. So Jesus did something about it and changed Nathanael's heart.

Jesus knows our hearts too. Scary thought, isn't it? Jesus knows your heart of darkness. He knows your guilt when you willingly gave into that temptation of lust or worry or greed. He knows your doubt and despair over the seeming weakness of his promises as you live in a world that opposes him and therefore opposes you when you try to share those promises. He knows your acts of lovelessness, your thoughts of hatred, your foolishness of youth and your thoughtlessness of adulthood. He knows your deepest, darkest secrets better than you know them. Doesn't that frighten you? That knowledge rightly means your eternal condemnation, but Jesus doesn't just condemn you.

No, Jesus comes with comfort. He knows how to heal your wounds with the medicine of his Gospel. He knows the temptations that you face on a daily basis because he faced those same temptations. He forgives each and every sin with his holy blood, even for those times when you've failed him. He knows how to make you clean and new in his sight because that's why he came. He builds you up with the promises of his Word and Sacraments so you can daily fend off temptation. In Christ you find the One who knows your heart, but also the One who has opened heaven for you.

Nathanael hadn't seen anything yet. Jesus told him, **“I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”** Imagine that! Last week we heard about all of those Old Testament believers who looked forward to Christ's coming from a distance because they would not see it with their own eyes. Well, unlike them, Nathanael would be an Old Testament believer who would get to see the Messiah fulfill all those promises. He would see Jesus tear down the Law's horrible barrier between God and people. He would see Jesus throw open the gates of heaven with the sacrifice of himself once for all. Nathanael would see far greater things than when he first met Jesus.

As New Testament believers, we often forget or take for granted what we've seen. Before us on the pages of Scripture, we have the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament in the person of Jesus Christ. You don't have to come to me to offer a sacrifice for your sins through the slaughter of a bull or sheep. You don't have to observe every facet of the Law of Moses by observing the festivals and following cleanliness and kosher laws. You don't need to look with longing for a Savior who has never come.

You and I have already seen Jesus. No, we have not seen him with our physical eyes, but we've seen him in the Word and water and meal. We've seen the gates of heaven fly open through the bloody and battered body of a Savior who loved us so much that he paid the ultimate price for undeserving sinners like us. We've seen the countless blessings that flow from his pierced hands that give us no reason to be skeptical about his promises. We've seen the Son of Man become the only path that takes us from this life to eternity. We've seen far greater things than even our Old Testament brothers and sisters who saw the Lord part seas and conquer nations with just a few words. We've seen greater things than the towering skyscrapers of our cities or the mighty mountains and seas. We have seen Jesus!

What we have seen is amazing! We need to tell others about it like Philip. We go and tell our buddies about the One who came to keep God's promises. We go and share this huge message with our family and friends, our co-workers and classmates who still sit under the fig tree.

...But they might be skeptical! They might question your claim or why they need to hear more about this Jesus. Isn't Jesus a con-man pulling the wool over people's eyes? Isn't Jesus a lunatic whose ravings converted a group of fools? Isn't Jesus just another great teacher or philosopher trying to change society or offer another new order for the world?

If Jesus were any of those things, then as Paul says, we are to be pitied among all people for our faith is futile, but God's Word tells us what Philip knew by faith. This Jesus is the very Son of God—the Creator of the world and the Savior of the world he created. He is the source of our faith and the foundation of our lives. He is the One who alone has fulfilled Scripture and every one of its promises, but our buddies, our loved ones, our neighbors can't know that unless we extend that same eloquent, three-word invitation—“**Come and see!**” “Don't believe me? Let Jesus show you! Come and see how Jesus changed my life and why he can change yours!”

Three simple words—“**Come and see!**” Sometimes such a simple invitation is all the Lord needs to change another life, to transform a skeptic into a believer. You have seen what the Lord has done for you and it's amazing!. May the Savior make you bold that many others may “**come and see!**” Amen!