John 1:35-51

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[0:00] Let's pray together. Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words,! So that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts! May be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer. Amen.

You may be seated. So my first question, is there anything that's changed that I need to know about? You can tell me after.
I want to say a thank you at the beginning here for all your prayers over these many months of discernment and preparation. And I want to ask that you would continue praying.
To serve as your rector is a noble calling. It's not to be entered into lightly, wantonly, or unadvisedly. But it's a rich privilege.
And I long to do it joyfully and thankfully and prayerfully, the Lord being my helper. So please pray for me as I will be praying for you, my dear brothers and sisters, as we begin this new chapter together.
[1:16] Now, one of the privileges of the last month is I had time to step away and pray and say, Lord, what would you want to put on my heart for us as we enter into these first few months together? And I'll share more about this in the weeks to come.

There's a long laundry list of glorious things. The first being pray, pray, pray, pray, pray. The second being pursue unity with one another in the gospel in every possible way.
The third being by all means do not forget your mission to outsiders. The Lord Jesus is seeking and saving. Be a part of what he's doing. But the main thing on my heart that I felt like the Lord put on my heart, the main thing is simply to keep the main thing the main thing.
And the main thing is Jesus. You know that. And part of the reason why I'm launching a new sermon series today in the gospel of John is because John says, the word became flesh.
We have seen his glory. Glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. And I want us for our first three months together just to be captured by the glory of Jesus.
[2:24] To see glory in him that we've never seen before. To savor it together and cherish it and to share it with other people. And then let all the other things that we do and say and think and plan to just flow out of that simple delight and the beauty of the Lord Jesus.

So my hope is that by being in John, John will help us keep the main things the main things in a season of new beginning as a church. Now I must admit there's something a little bit selfish in this as well.
John, if you're allowed to do this, just is my favorite gospel. I don't know if I'm allowed to say that technically. But it's true. And selfishly I want to preach it. I mean Mark is really good.
Mark starts with John the Baptist. Prepare the way of the Lord. Matthew's greater. I mean he goes all the way back to Abraham. Luke, amazing.
He traces Jesus all the way back to Adam and says, this is the new Adam. But John is simply breathtaking and mind-blowing. He takes us all the way back to God before creation. The last words of Jesus in the gospel are referencing his coming again in glory in the new creation.
[3:33] And in between the glory of heaven pierces earth. And we see something that the human eye has never seen before. In a human face. In a human touch. In human words.

The Lord Jesus himself in our midst. Now one of the beautiful things about John that we're going to discover. And it's the first point that I want to make this morning. Is that John at the very beginning of the gospel wants to say to us.
This Jesus didn't come for just a unique select little group in the world. He came for everybody. The gospel of John is for all people. And in our passage in particular.

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It shows that Jesus came for seekers and believers. So notice how the first words of Jesus in the gospel come in verse 38. Jesus turned around and he saw some people following him.
They had heard about him. They were intrigued by him. They wanted to find out more. And he asked them this question. What are you seeking? It's a question to seekers. And then he extends them an invitation.
[4:31] Come and you will see. So it begins right away with an invitation to seekers. Come and see this Jesus. And if you go forward a little bit. This is on page 887 of your pew Bible.

When Philip finally brings Nathanael to Jesus. And Jesus says, whoa. Jesus tells him, I saw you under the fig tree. Nathanael says, you are surely the son of God.
And then Jesus says in verse 50. Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree. Do you believe? And then he makes a promise. You will see greater things than these. So right away, our passage begins with an invitation to seekers.
Come and see. And it ends with a promise to believers. You will see greater things than you already see in the Lord Jesus. Now, this is really significant, I think, for where we are in our life as a church together.
We are a church that is multi-generational and multicultural. And that's a rich privilege. We are a church where there are many seasoned saints that have been a part of St. John's, walking faithfully with the Lord Jesus longer than I've been alive.
[5:42] And yet we have an increasingly new number of new believers who have just discovered him for the first time. And are wondering, what does it mean to really follow him and devote my life to him? And on top of that, every single week, there's always a trickle of seekers coming in the door.

Just this morning after the 730 service, I talked to one. Somebody invited their roommate. And they said, sure, I'll come. He's not a Christian. And he was here. So we're a church of seekers.
And we're a church of believers. And the way that John opens his gospel is he says, this Jesus is for all of you. His glory is for all of you.
Now, this seeking in our culture, I think, is a unique thing. There's kind of two songs that I think illustrate the seeking that's going on in our culture fairly well.
So one's a U2 song and one's John Mayer. So it depends on your like, what you like. U2, I still haven't found what I'm looking for. Anybody familiar with that song?
[6:46] You should listen to it after this. He talks about it. He says, I have climbed the highest mountains. I have kissed honey lips. I have spoken with the tongue of angels.

He's talking about all these, the greatest experiences in his life. He says, but I still haven't found what I'm looking for. He says, I believe in the kingdom coming, that you loosed the chains of bondage and you carried my shame on the cross.
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for. So this song speaks of a yearning of someone who is looking for a better world. They have the hope of a better world.
And yet they can't quite find it in this world. And then there's John Mayer. Some couple decades later, he wrote a song called Something's Missing. He said, I'm not alone.
And I wish I was. Because then I would know I was down because I couldn't find a friend around to love me like they do right now. He's saying I'm surrounded by people and yet I'm still depressed.
[7:44] Why? And he goes on, I'm dizzy from the shopping mall. I search for joy, but I bought it all. It doesn't help the hunger pains and the thirst that I have deep down.

Something's missing and I don't know how to fix it. Something is missing and I don't know where to find it. And then he goes on. He says, friends check, money check, well slept check.
And all the parents are envious. Opposite sex check, guitar check, microphone check, messages waiting on me when I get home check. And yet something's missing and I don't know what it is.
See, the U2 song says, I'm looking for another world and I still can't find it in this world. And this John Mayer song says, someone is someone looking for meaning in this world and realizing they can't quite find it.
And Jesus comes to these two, he says to these two disciples, what are you seeking? And they kind of bumble around and they have an answer, but it's not a fully orbed answer.
[8:46] It's rabbi, where are you staying? In other words, they've heard about this Jesus. They're intrigued by him. They're interested. They think maybe he has the answers of what I'm looking for, but I'm not quite sure yet.

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I need to spend a little more time with him to see if he's the real deal. And so they spend the evening with him. And after the evening, they have discovered that this Jesus is the real deal.
And Nathanael, he doesn't want to go see Jesus. Philip says, come, come and see Jesus. And he says, can anything good come out of Nazareth? And that's probably how a lot of people feel about the church right now.
Could anything good come out of St. John's, Vancouver that used to be Shaughnessy? And he just says, come and see.
And he shows up to Jesus. And he realizes that he has found more than he could ever imagine seeking. And Jesus promises to show him greater things than he's ever seen before.
[9:46] So the Gospel of John is for seekers and believers. And what a wonderful way to start a new season together. Now, is everybody following with me so far?

Are we okay? All right, great. That was a very long-winded introduction. So now here comes the two main points. The first point is how people find Jesus.
And the second point is what people first find out about Jesus. So how people find Jesus and what people first find out about Jesus. Now, it's really interesting here.
How people find Jesus. It might be a better way to say, how does Jesus find people? It's really simple. It's through other people. People find Jesus through other people.
And Jesus finds people through other people. Now, this isn't exclusively the case. Like, Jesus goes and finds Philip directly. And in the Middle East right now, you'll hear plenty of conversion stories of Jesus appearing to people in dreams directly, revealing himself to them.
[10:52] But the normal way that God goes about the work of drawing people to Jesus and people finding Jesus is through other people. And we're given three examples of that in our passage.

The first is John the Baptist. He's a preacher. The second is Andrew going to his brother. So it's family to family, sibling to sibling. And the third is Philip going to his friend Nathaniel.
So it's friend to friend. So we have a preacher. We have a family member. And we have a friend. Now, let's consider each of these briefly.
Look at verses 35 and 36. The next day, again, John was standing with two of his disciples. And he looked at Jesus as he walked by. And he said, behold, the Lamb of God.
The preacher simply points people to Jesus. He's present. This is who he is. This is his significance. And the preacher is not afraid to speak up and say the name of Jesus clearly and confidently, trusting that words about Jesus carry the power of God to bring people to Jesus and that they will not return empty.
[12:03] This line has actually had a rich history. I don't know if you know of Charles Spurgeon a couple centuries ago. He was a great Baptist preacher. And he would fill halls with thousands upon thousands of people.

And it was during the Great Awakenings. And a lot of people would come to Christ. And there was one time where he was going to an auditorium that could seat 5,000 people to test the acoustics because there were no electronics at that time.
And so he chose this verse from John the Baptist to test the acoustics. And he thought nobody was there. So he just yelled out, behold, the Lamb of God. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
And he was testing the acoustics all over the place. And when he was done testing the acoustics, he started walking out. And there was somebody that came from way in the back up to him that was sweeping and cleaning the place and said, I've never known Jesus before.
But you told me about the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. How do I follow him? And he had no clue the guy was there. And it's just an example of the power of Jesus' words.
[13:08] We never know when it's going to strike somebody. We never know when the penny's finally going to drop. And we live in a secular culture, a world of TED Talks and soundbites and podcasts.

And sometimes we can think, does preaching really matter anymore? And the reality is, is yes, it still keeps the flame of faith alive in the church. It's still a powerful means through which God works to draw hearts that are wandering back to the sun.
And it's a means by which the Lord Jesus brings people to himself. But there's also just really ordinary other means. Like you get in verses 40 to 42. You get Andrew in verse 41.

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He goes and he found his brother Simon. And he says, we found the Messiah. And he brings him to Jesus. Just a family member. And then you get Philip himself knocking on Nathanael's door.
You can call it family evangelism and friend evangelism. And people come to Jesus. And there's a couple things to notice about this. Number one is how human and simple this is.
[14:14] Like, God works mightily. As we go on in John, we're going to discover that nobody comes to Christ except by the Holy Spirit opening their eyes.

We're going to discover that nobody comes to Christ except by God the Father drawing them to Christ. And we're going to discover that nobody stays with following Christ unless Christ holds on to them forever.
So it's only by the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that anybody comes to Christ. But that's not what John says here. John starts here with the very human experience of how somebody discovers Christ.
Because he wants us to know the power of a simple invitation for somebody. Notice, it's not like a Billy Graham crusade that fills concert halls.
It's not an angry preacher on a street corner. It's not somebody convincing you of a rational argument for the existence of God or the historical accuracy of the Gospels or the plausibility structure of a Christian worldview, although those things have their place.
[15:14] This is somebody just saying, come and see Jesus. I think you'll find more in him than you think you'll find. And then trusting that Jesus' glory being revealed will have the power to draw them to himself.

It's actually quite simple. It's quite powerful. Because Jesus himself is magnetic. So that's how people find Jesus. And second and finally, what do people first find out about this Jesus when they come to him?
Now, there's a lot of titles of Jesus here. So in this short passage, we get seven different titles of Jesus. And each one of them is rich with meaning. And as we go through the Gospel of John, we're going to see how rich indeed they are.
But I want to highlight two things that may not be as obvious. The first is that people discover they have been and are seen by Jesus.
And then they discover that they will see great things in Jesus. So, first, the people are seen by Jesus. Did you notice that when he came to Peter, when Peter first came to him, he said, Peter, you are Simon the son of John.
[16:29] You will be called Cephas, which means Peter, which means rock. So, he names who he is when he comes. He says, Peter, I know you. And then he says, you will be Cephas.

And he's pointing to his rich future as a person, as a disciple, as a leader in the church for Peter. And Jesus is saying, I'm calling you to become something new with me. And the emphasis here isn't yet on Peter's job description, because we're not actually given it.
That will come later at the end of the Gospel. The emphasis here is that Jesus has the power to make us become the people he is calling us to be. He can give us a name of who we will become. And we will become that under his gracious authority and guiding. So, he sees Peter, and he says, Peter, I know who you are, and I know who you're going to become by my grace. And then when we get to Nathanael, Nathanael comes to him, and Jesus says, Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.
It doesn't mean he's sinless. It just means he doesn't come to trick Jesus, or with double motives. He comes as an honest inquirer. He really wants to know what's the truth about this man.
[17:41] And Nathanael says, How do you know me? And Jesus says, You know, Before Philip even brought you to me, I saw you under a fig tree. And we have no idea what's happening under that fig tree, but it's clearly important for Nathanael.

And there's a lot of guesses throughout church history, and it's probably not worth guessing. But something very personal to Nathanael was happening under that fig tree, and the fact that Jesus called it out and said, I saw you there.
I know who you are. I knew what you were going through, outside and in, in that moment. It just triggers something for Nathanael. Nathanael says, You must be the king of Israel, the son of God. And Jesus looks at him and says, Just by me saying I knew you, you believe in me, I will show you much greater things than that. So one of the first things that new disciples and seekers need to discover about Jesus is that he knows their past, he knows their present, and he knows what they

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will become in the future by his grace.
You are thoroughly and sufficiently known. And the second thing is that Jesus promises that whoever comes to him, whoever follows him, whoever believes in him, whoever trusts in him, whoever lives for him, will see greater things than what these disciples have seen just now.
[19:05] What are those greater things? Verse 51. And he said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened.

That's the imagery of revelation. And the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.
Son of Man is Jesus' favorite way in the Gospels of referring to himself. So Jesus is saying, You will see greater things. And what's the greater thing you're going to see?
It's me. So I'm going to fulfill my promise to you. But he says, You will see angels ascending and descending. That's him going back and referencing Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28.
And in that scene, Jacob was promised that he would see a vision of God. He would see a revelation. The heavens would be open. That there would be a ladder.
[20:11] And that there would be communication and connection between heaven and earth like he had never seen before. And Jesus is promising to Nathanael, he's saying, and all those who follow him, he's saying, I will do the same for you, but in a way that is far greater than the world has ever seen before.

And it's amazing because every single thing that happens in the gospel from this point out, the next 20 chapters, are all Jesus fulfilling what he says he will do right now. He's revealing the glory of God to people in a way that they have never seen before.
From turning water into wine to offering Nicodemus' new birth. From asking for a drink from a woman to offering her living water. from feeding the 5,000 to saying, I am the bread of life.
To healing the eyes of the blind and saying, I am the light of the world. To raising his friend from the dead and laying down his life for his friends. In every single episode that we see in the gospel of John, it is Jesus pulling back the veil on the glory of God, full of grace and truth, and beckoning us to believe.
Melting our icy hearts and softening our ossified minds and opening our blind eyes and bending our stiff knees. Until we can say with the disciples later in the gospel, we have come to believe and know, know in our hearts that you are the Holy One of God.
[21:44] Brothers and sisters, we have a rich journey ahead. It is a journey for seekers. It is a journey for believers. It is a journey for those who have seen Jesus just one time and those who have known him for 70 years.

And for all of us, the great joy is that Jesus is going to show us things about himself that we haven't seen before, that we need to know in this moment of our lives.
And that will fill our hearts and minds with his truth and grace forever. So let's have some fun together. I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.

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