

John 1:35–51 (NIV2011)

³⁵The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!”

³⁷When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”

They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

³⁹“Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). ⁴²And 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).

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”

⁴⁴Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵Philip 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.”

⁴⁶“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” said Philip.

⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

⁴⁸“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

⁴⁹Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

⁵⁰Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” ⁵¹He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”

“Come and see,” Jesus says. So simple, yet so difficult for prideful people. Would we have come and seen as readily as Andrew?

So far, we’ve heard the testimony of John, the gospel writer, that Jesus is the Word-in-the-flesh, the creator and source of life. We’ve also heard John the Baptizer proclaim Jesus to be “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” We’ve even met a few of the Jewish authorities who were sent to check out the work of the wild John. But now, we begin to meet some people we can really identify with. Ordinary people, like you and me. Here is N. T. Wright on the early encounters with Jesus:

Now here, it seems, are ordinary characters, people on a quest, looking for something. The chances are that you’re reading this book because that’s been true of you, and perhaps still is. Someone has suggested, as John the Baptist suggested to Andrew and another disciple, that you give Jesus a closer look. So here you are.

You approach, polite but a bit cautious. John translates the conversation into your language so you can make it your own. ‘Rabbi’ means ‘teacher’. ‘Messiah’ means

‘anointed one’ (the word ‘Messiah’ is Hebrew or Aramaic, the word ‘Christ’ is Greek, meaning the same thing). ‘Cephas’ was the Aramaic word for ‘rock’ or ‘stone’, which in Greek is ‘Petros’, as in our name ‘Peter’.

There are four things going on in this quick-fire conversation. Andrew and Simon (and the other, unnamed friend) are looking for the Messiah, and they think they’ve found him. Jesus is looking for followers, and when he finds them, that gives them a new vocation (Simon becomes ‘the Rock’, an important but dangerous name). John’s readers, out there in the Gentile world, would sense Jesus calling and renaming them too. And we, reading this book in the hope of finding out more about Jesus, may discover that he is simultaneously coming to find us. And perhaps to give us new names.¹

Jesus is gathering disciples.² “Come and see” he says. Andrew and the other disciple (probably John the gospel writer) may think they are looking for Jesus, but, in truth, it is Jesus who finds them. At this point the pair know only what they have learned from

John the Baptizer. But they are drawn by this man from Galilee and they go to spend the rest of the day with him.



The Crown

When Nathanael pronounces Jesus to be the King of Israel (v. 49), it is synonymous with proclaiming Jesus to be Messiah, or Christ. Kings of Israel were anointed with oil. *Mashia* is “anointed one” in Hebrew and gives us our word “Messiah.” Christ is from the Greek word, *christos*, which translates *mashia* in the Hebrew. So, anointed one = Messiah = Christ = king. Every time the Christians referred to Jesus as “Christ” it had royal connotations.

The crown in the rose window is a symbol of God as king. From its very beginnings, Israel knew that God was sovereign and exercised royal dominion over them and all creation. Indeed, God was their king. Even when God allowed Israel to have a human king, Israel was akin to a constitutional monarchy. The ultimate authority in Israel was God, whose covenant set the limits on the king.

By Jesus’ day, Israel had not had a true king from David’s family for nearly 600 years. The long hoped for Messiah was to be a vice-regent, lifted up by God to rule in power over God’s kingdom and a restored Israel. Thus, Paul would refer to Jesus as “he who is the blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15).

What’s the first thing Andrew does? He runs to get his brother, Simon, excitedly telling him that they have found the Messiah. It is “go and get” so Simon can “come and see” for himself.

The next day they head for Galilee, for the action to this point has been at the Jordan river in the south. Intriguingly, the Greek text here (v. 43) doesn’t really say Jesus decided to go to Galilee and, thus, find Philip. In the Greek, it simply says “he decided to go to Galilee.” It could be Andrew who has decided to head north and has gone to get Philip, just as he got Peter to come.

In any event, Philip then goes to get Nathanael, who seems quite skeptical of the whole thing. Philip has told him that Jesus is the one they’ve been looking for, the one pointed to by the Law and the prophets. When Nathanael hears that this man is from Nazareth, he scoffs, as if to say, “That dump!?” Nonetheless, he joins Philip and the others.

When Jesus sees Nathanael coming, he declares him to be a straightforward, what-you-see-is-what-you-get kind of guy. But when Nathanael asks how Jesus could possibly know him, Jesus reveals that he was able to supernaturally see Nathanael earlier when he was sitting under a fig tree.

¹ Wright, T. (2004). *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (14–15).

²“Disciple” can be an intimidating word for some. But all it really conveys is the idea of an apprenticeship. Disciples of Jesus are those who are actively striving to be like Jesus, to be more Christlike. Can a person be a believer but not a disciple? I guess so, at least for a while. Can a person grow in his or her faith without being a disciple? I think not. What does God want from us? To be disciples and to make more disciples. It is God’s job to save souls. Our work is to cultivate more and more apprentices of the Master.

That and the witness of the other men is too much for Nathanael. Despite his understandable skepticism, he addresses Jesus as *rabbi*,³ and pronounces him to be the son of God, the King of Israel. For Nathanael at this point, the phrases “son of God” and “King of Israel” are messianic, two ways of saying the same thing. As John’s gospel proceeds, it becomes clear that “Son of God” with respect to Jesus means far more than “merely” Messiah, but Nathanael can’t have in mind any sort of Trinitarian pronouncement.

And just when we think that we’ve heard it all, Jesus tells the new disciples and, by extension, all of his followers (the “you” in v. 51 is plural) that we will see far more. Just as the angels ascended and descended on Jacob, making clear his appointment by God, so the disciples will see God’s appointment of Jesus as Messiah and more. Indeed, Jesus himself testifies that he is the “Son of Man,” referring almost certainly to the “Last Days” figure from Daniel 7 who is given dominion over all creation.

Let’s step back and look at the various testimonies we’ve been given about Jesus just in this first chapter of John’s gospel:

- Jesus is God, the creator and source of life.
- Jesus is the true light, which banishes the darkness.
- Jesus is God’s one and only Son.
- Jesus is God’s Chosen One.
- Jesus is human.
- Jesus is the Lamb of God.
- Jesus is the one of whom the Law and the prophets spoke.
- Jesus is the Messiah, the King of Israel.
- Jesus is the Son of Man.

John, the writer of this beloved gospel, has already laid much foundation for all that is to come in his telling of Jesus’ story. Why does he tell us any of it? So that “you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

We’ll close with a quote from Bruce Milne on today’s passage; all the going and getting, the coming and seeing:

The relevance of these paragraphs to our present experience is obvious. Christ the risen King continues to issue his summons, ‘Follow me!’ (cf. 21:19, 22). It echoes around the world today through the witnesses of Jesus among the nations. It reaches to overshadowed folks like Andrew; explosive, potential leaders like Peter; withdrawn, struggling characters like Philip; earnest, ingenuous souls like Nathanael; and to every other conceivable classification. Although the world still ‘knows him not’ (see v. 11), for all who commit themselves to him, the discovery waits to be made that the man who hails from Nazareth (v. 46) is yet ‘the meeting point between heaven’s fullness and earth’s need, even in the midst of the bustle and noise of our modern world’.⁴

³Though by the end of the first century AD, *rabbi* came to be used only with respect to those formally “ordained;” in Jesus’ day, it referred only to someone held in high esteem when it came to spiritual matters and learning.

⁴Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John : Here is your king! :With study guide*. The Bible speaks today (61). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press.

“Son of Man”

In today’s reading from John’s gospel, Nathanael is astounded that Jesus saw him praying under a fig tree when Jesus was nowhere around. But Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see “greater things than that . . . you will see ‘heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending’ on the Son of Man” (John 1:51). Using powerful imagery from the story of Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28:10-22) and from Daniel 7, Jesus tells Nathanael all that he needs to know to grasp what he will soon see and hear and experience as Jesus’ disciple.

Because we proclaim Jesus to be fully God and fully human, it is understandable that we often take “Son of Man” to be a statement about Jesus’ humanity, making “Son of God” a statement about Jesus’ divinity. But “Son of Man” is not a cryptic way of saying that Jesus is human. Rather, it is a powerful image drawn from Daniel 7:13-14.

The book of Daniel was very popular and influential in Jesus’ day, for good reason. Daniel is about the faithfulness of God toward those who remain faithful to God in the face of intimidation and threats. Daniel is set in Babylon during the exile. Daniel and his friends refuse to accommodate their faith in the LORD God to the culture and religion of the Babylonians. They stay resolute. Through God’s intervention, Daniel’s friends are rescued from the fiery furnace and Daniel isn’t eaten by lions after being tossed in their den.

The Romans were the “Babylonians” of first-century Judea. It was Roman soldiers who stood guard over the temple during the big Jewish festivals. It was Roman governors who desecrated the temple from time to time.

Daniel 7 opens with dramatic images of all those who threaten Israel. These opponents are monsters rising up from the sea of chaos. But in v. 13-14, we meet the “Son of Man” (regrettably translated “one like a human being” in the NRSV). This Son of Man is Israel’s rescuer and vindicator. The Son of Man comes before the Ancient One (God) to be given dominion over all creation. By referring to himself as the Son of Man, Jesus reveals that he is Israel’s rescuer and that he is Lord.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. This week’s study focuses on Jesus’ call of his first disciples. These are ordinary men, Galilean Jews of no particular note. Yet they all find themselves drawn to this man from Nazareth. One, Nathaniel, proclaims “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” Likewise, Andrew has told his brother, Simon Peter, that Jesus is the Messiah.
 - a. Andrew and John, presumably, are the first two disciples. They hear John the baptizer’s own testimony about Jesus’ identity. But what is it about Jesus that draws them to him and makes them stay? Why do you think Andrew is so willing to accept Jesus as Israel’s Messiah?
 - b. Why are these men ready to drop everything and follow Jesus?
2. At the end of today’s passage, Jesus gives his testimony about himself: “You will see ‘heaven open’ and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” There are two brief passages that ought to be read here: Genesis 28:12-15, the story of Jacob’s ladder and Daniel 7:9-14, esp., v. 13. Why do you think Jesus would draw on these two images to speak of himself? What do you he is trying to convey about himself and his vocation?
3. Jesus invites Andrew and his friend to “come and see;” it is an invitation that they accept. How did you first get to St. Andrew? Were you invited? By whom and how? How did you feel when you were invited? Have you ever invited someone to come with you to St. Andrew? You might share some of the inviting stories. We are called to make disciples of Jesus and that had to begin with an invitation. How could we all become better and more willing inviters?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Genesis 28:10-22 The story of Jacob's dream about a ladder connection heaven and earth.</p>	<p>Tuesday, Isaiah 42:5-6 & 49:6 Israel (the people of God) is to be the light to the world.</p>
<p>Wednesday, Daniel 7:9-14 Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming before the Ancient of Days to be given dominion over creation.</p>	<p>Thursday, Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus is the true light that banishes the darkness. We are to be the light of the world, shining the light of Christ into every dark corner.</p>
<p>Friday, Ephesians 5:6-20 We are children of the light and we are to live accordingly.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weekly Joys and Concerns</p>

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Tuesday Lunchtime Class – now studying Gospel of John

We meet from 11:45 to 1:00 in room 127 on Tuesdays.
Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands in its own.
This is very "drop-in." Bring a lunch if you like. Bring a study Bible.

Monday Evening Class – now studying Paul and the Galatians

We meet from 6:45 to 8:00 in Piro Hall on Monday evenings.

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.
The class is usually led by Dr. Scott Engle and is organized into series:

Through Jan 29: a series with Rev. Arthur Jones

*Whose Jesus is the Real Jesus?:
The Gospels and Other Takes on the Son of God*

Beginning Feb 5: a four-week series with Dr. Scott Engle

*Sin: A History
The story of sin and forgiveness from Genesis to now*

Scott's Weekly Bible Studies are available at www.standrewumc.org.
Just go to "worship" and then "sermons online."

There is also an archive of nearly 500 studies at www.scottengle.org

They are posted as easily downloadable pdf files. Your browser can search the listing for studies on specific books of the Bible or Scripture passages. They are suitable for individual study and for biblically-oriented small group discussions. You will also be able to join the Yahoo group (sa_studies) so you can get the Bible studies e-mailed to you each week.

Sermon Notes
