

How doubters become disciples of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to read from John and please follow on in your bulletin as Kevin said or it's on the screen behind me. John chapter 1 verses 35 to 51.

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.

[1 : 0 9] 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.

[2 : 1 9] 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.

This is the word of God. Great. Thank you, Julie. Good morning. Let me pray for us briefly and then we'll dive in. Father God, as we come to your word, your word is life.

Your word is true. Your word is real. Your word is powerful. Come and speak to us. Come and be in our midst. God, we want to hear from you. And so let your word come alive to us, I pray, in your wonderful and gracious name.

Some of you might know the name Lee Strobel. Lee Strobel was an avowed atheist. He was convinced that people just created God because as the way to, or the idea of God to avoid the fear of death.

[3 : 3 4] And Lee Strobel was an American. He lived a very hedonistic lifestyle. He had no spiritual inclinations whatsoever. And he writes this about his life. He said, I lived an immoral life.

Drunken and profane. Narcissistic and self-destructive in every way. And he was an award-winning journalist. And yet he says his life was a mess.

He says that every night when he came home from work, his young daughter feared when he came home because he had such a temper. He was such an angry man. And it was a fearful thing for her to have her dad come home.

But one day his wife, Leslie, does the unthinkable thing. A Christian in their apartment block befriends her and invites her to church. And she goes to church and she decides to become a follower of Jesus.

And so Lee Strobel, the investigative journalist, decides, I'm going to investigate the claims of Jesus and Christianity and prove my wife wrong. And so for two years he goes on investigation to prove his wife wrong, Jesus Christ and birth and Christianity a sham.

[4 : 39] We'll come back to Lee Strobel's a little later. We're working our way through John's gospel as Julie said to us. And we've come to an important transition. We're at the end of chapter one. Up until now, we've been hearing about this guy called John the Baptist.

And John the Baptist has been, have an important message. He's been sharing that Jesus is the Christ. In the next section we're going to look at next week, Jesus finds that he has some disciples.

At the end of verse 11, chapter 2 says, Jesus did the first of his signs at Canaan and Galilee. He manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him. And so before this, Jesus has no disciples.

There's just John. Afterwards, Jesus has some disciples. And we come at the point, the transition in John's gospel, where Jesus gathers a bunch of followers. Jesus gathered some people who believe in him and trust in him and follow him and become his disciples.

And it's an important point because for us, we've got to ask, where did these disciples come from? How did they come to believe? How did they come to follow him? What did Jesus do or say to convince these men, these people, that he really was who he said he was?

[5 : 50] How did Jesus gather these disciples? And it's an important question for us today because still today, Jesus Christ is calling people from every culture, every background, every language or ethnicity or nationality to come and follow him.

What is it going to take? How does Jesus call people to follow him? Well, Jesus, as I said, is calling people to be his followers. And this is one of the driving passions of our church.

It's one of the reasons Watermark exists. We want many, many people in Hong Kong, the greatest city in the world, to come to know him and to follow him. And so in this passage today, we're going to see something of how Jesus calls people to follow him, to know him.

And so let's look at our Bibles or if you've got a bulletin in front of you. I want us to notice that the section that Julie read to us, there are two sections in this passage together, two sections that are very similar.

The first one is verse 35 to 42. And then the second one, verse 43 to 51. And in both of these sections, a similar thing happens. In both of them, people are brought to Jesus through the testimony or the witness of somebody else.

[7 : 01] Right? And the first one, John tells Andrew, there is the Messiah. Andrew goes and calls Simon Peter. In the second section, Andrew finds Philip and Philip goes and finds Nathaniel.

In both of these sections, there is a growing understanding of who Jesus is. In the first section, you'll remember that Andrew comes to him and calls him rabbi or teacher.

But in the end, he goes to Simon Peter's brother and says, we have found the Messiah. So there's this growing understanding of Jesus, not just a rabbi, he's the Messiah. And the same thing happens in the second section.

Remember, Nathaniel comes and he says, who's this Jesus of Nazareth guy? And does anything good come out of Nazareth anyway? He's a bit condescending. But by the end, he says, you are the son of God.

You are the king of Israel. So even Nathaniel grows in his understanding. And of course, the last section of both of these sections, Jesus promises something profound is going to happen.

[7 : 58] He says to Simon, you are Simon, you're going to become Peter. There's a change that's going to happen. And he says to Nathaniel, you will see the angels ascending and descending on the son of God.

So both of these sections are very similar. Why is that? Well, John is using repetition to make his point. And what is his point? John wants to show us the uniqueness of Jesus and how he uniquely calls people to follow him.

John wants to show us the uniqueness of Jesus and how he uniquely calls people to follow him. Okay. So when we look at this passage, how do people become followers of Jesus?

Well, one very obvious thing, before we dive in too much, a very obvious thing is Jesus reaches people through relationships. Relationally, right? I think that's the very obvious thing here is how do Simon, Peter and Nathaniel come to follow Jesus?

Well, they didn't just have a dream. They came to know him through relationships, right? John the Baptist points Andrew and another disciple. They go and find Simon and Peter and Peter becomes a follower of Jesus.

[9 : 10] Philip finds Nathaniel. Nathaniel comes a follower of Jesus. And all throughout the world, throughout the history of the world, this is how really people come to know Jesus. I would imagine every one of us in the room that call ourselves Christians.

I know not all of us are Christians, but every one of us that would call ourselves a Christian. There's been some pivotal relationship. Some person in your life. Maybe a parent. Or a sibling.

Or a spouse. Or a colleague. Or a teacher at school. Or a boss. Or a client. Some person that helped you know and follow Jesus. And so one of the obvious questions is, who has God brought into your life?

That you might bring them to Christ. Who is it that you, like Philip says to Nathaniel, who might you be able to say, come and see? Come and see what Jesus has done for me.

Okay, so the one obvious application is, how does God call people, well, relationally? But beyond this very obvious point, in this passage, we're going to see three things that I want us to focus on.

[10 : 11] Three ways that Jesus calls people to follow him. And you might not be a Christian here this morning. Maybe you're on a spiritual journey. You're a seeker. Three ways that Jesus might be calling you.

Revealing himself to you. That you might become a follower. So, let's dive in and look at it. First way Jesus calls us is intelligently. Intelligently. Notice how these followers of Jesus, they come to him on the basis of eyewitness testimony.

I think this is one of the main points we may need to see in John chapter 1. The apostle here wants us to see that the belief in Jesus is based on eyewitness testimony.

When John writes his gospel, John wasn't a fiction writer who decided to sit down and write a novel. Like Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code.

I don't know if you know that book. It caused a lot of controversy about 15, 20 years ago. He writes this fictionalized account of how Jesus really wasn't the Messiah and it's all a sham.

[11 : 15] But the book caused a great stir because it was kind of pitched as a historical novel. And everyone thought, he's done his research. This is true. Christianity is a sham. But actually Dan Brown said, hey, I'm a novelist.

I sit down to write a fiction book. This isn't trying to be historical evidence. But John's gospel is not like Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code. John didn't write down and say, let me write an aspiring novel that will move people.

John's gospel is not a Netflix film that is based on roughly true events but being fictionalized. This is more like a documentary. John's done his research.

He's an eyewitness. He knows. He was there. He's saying, let me write what happened. And if you'll notice, the main character in chapter 1, John the Baptist, is not portrayed as a religious leader or as a great preacher.

He's portrayed as an eyewitness. Listen to how many times John says this. Look at verse 6. He says this. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.

[12 : 21] He was not the light but he came to bear witness about the light. Verse 15. John bore witness about Jesus. Verse 19. This is the testimony of John. Verse 32. And John bore witness.

And again, verse 34. I have seen and I have borne witness. This is the Son of God. You see the point here? John the Baptist was an eyewitness.

His record is an authentic witness of what he saw and know and encountered. That he spoke with Jesus. And this is what really happened. And how did these five disciples or these five followers of Jesus come to know him?

Not through psychic meditation. It's not through hallucination or drug-induced experimentation. It's through the logic, rational testimony of eyewitnesses.

They've come to see. They've come to experience. They've reasoned with Jesus. Look at what it says here. Verse 41. It says, Andrew found his brother Simon and he said to him, come we have found the Messiah.

[13 : 20] And they brought him to Jesus. Or verse 45. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, we found the one that Moses and the prophets wrote about. Jesus of Nazareth. Come and see. And of course, Nathanael is not convinced at all.

He says, you've got to be kidding me. Who is this Nazareth guy? He thinks this is a joke. And he comes and he reasons with Jesus. And he talks with him. And he questions.

And he asks him things. And as he comes, he sees Jesus himself. He comes to believe. Jesus doesn't beat him into submission. Jesus doesn't emotionally manipulate him.

Jesus doesn't have the smoke machines and the lights dimmed and the E minor chord playing. And just emotionally manipulate him to following him. He reasons with him. He argues with him. And he shows Jesus really is the Christ.

And John wants his readers to know that what he says about Jesus Christ is historically verifiable, historically reliable, and accurate. The Gospels are not just wishful thinking.

[14 : 20] They're reliable facts of history. John is saying, you can go and ask these people. Go and find Simon Peter. Go and find the disciples. You ask them what their account was like. This is, I'm not sure if you notice here, it says, in our Bible, actually, three times it says, verse 29, the next day, this is what happened.

Verse 35, the next day, then this happened. Verse 43, then the next day, this happened. In chapter 2, verse 1, on the third day, there was a wedding. John is remembering, saying this happened, then this, then this, then this.

This isn't just a fictionalized account of kind of vaguely this happened. He's keeping a diary. Now, there's symbolism involved. We'll talk about that next week. But the point is, this is history.

This is what actually happened. Now, we may say, okay, but that's back in that day and age. I mean, we can't go and ask Andrew and Philip. You know, they'd been dead 2,000 years ago. So, what eyewitnesses are we meant to trust?

Well, we have the Bible. We have the Scriptures. You see, the Bible is, on one hand, it's God's Word to us. That means it's authoritative.

[15 : 27] We listen to it. We submit our lives to it. We align our lives with what God says. God wants to speak to us through His Word. But the Bible is not just a spiritual book. It's also a historical document.

It consists of 60, 65, 66 historical documents that are written by, many of them, eyewitnesses of actual effect and what happened.

And the New Testament wasn't written by 12 guys around a campfire and said, hey, guys, let's write a spiritual book. And we'll tell everyone that it's the Word of God.

Let's convince people about this new religion. Actually, the Bible is written by many people who didn't know each other. They had no relationship. And they all wrote their own historical account of what happened.

And amazingly, it's unified. It comes together with almost zero contradictions. The Bible is one of the most reliable historical documents we've got from the ancient world.

[16 : 22] In fact, far more reliable than almost most of the historical documents we've got in the Western world of other history that we believe. Like Julius Caesar and Caesar's Gaelic Wars. All these historical documents that we take as fact.

The Bible's got infinitely more evidence for its historicity. Let me give you one example. If you've got a Bible, go to Luke chapter 1. This is Luke's gospel.

Luke was a doctor. He was evidently very good at research. And so a prominent member of society, a man called Theophilus, employs Luke to write a historic document of the life of Jesus.

Theophilus has heard about this man. Jesus of Nazareth. He wants to know if what he's heard is true. And so he gets Luke to write this document. Look at how Luke starts his gospel. He says this. See what Luke's saying there?

He's saying, listen, we've all heard about Jesus. Others have taken upon themselves to write biographies like Mark and Matthew and John. But I also wanted to do my own research and to find out, is this true?

[17 : 47] And I've written an orderly account that you may have certainty concerning the eyewitness historicity that Jesus is who he said he is. Friends, the point is this. How does Jesus come to us?

He comes to us intelligently. He comes to us and says, listen to the evidence. Examine the evidence. Listen to the eyewitnesses. On that note, side note here. In five weeks time, we're going to have a seminar after church on evidence for the resurrection.

If you're someone that wondering, hey, is it really true that Jesus rose again? I mean, maybe he just rose in people's hearts. Maybe it's just a spiritual resurrection. No, no, there's a bodily, physical resurrection. Have you ever examined the evidence?

Five weeks time, we're going to talk about that after church in the seminar. This morning, as we were leaving our house, we had a brief conversation with our neighbor. We've got a new neighbor across the way from us.

And he was telling us how he has just converted to Judaism because his wife is Jewish and he's converted. And he said to her, how's that going for you?

[18 : 48] And he said, well, yeah, it's been good. At the end of the day, all that really matters is whether it adds something to your life. And in my life, it's really added something. It's been beneficial. Well, it's true that religion and faith should add something to your life.

It should be beneficial. But at the end of the day, I think what matters is, is it true? Is it true? I mean, if it's not true, it's all just made up nonsense. And it doesn't matter if it adds value to your life.

If it's not true, it's not true. Friends, John wants us to know. Jesus is who he said he is. It's true. This isn't just wishful thinking. This is what he wants us to believe.

Christianity doesn't mean switching off your brains. Faith and science are not opposed to each other. They're not mutually exclusive. Having faith doesn't mean a leap in the dark. Jesus is who he said he is.

But John says, don't just take it from me. Ask the eyewitnesses. Jesus comes to us intellectually. Christian faith is, but Christian faith is not merely intellectual.

[19 : 46] It's not merely true. It's also personal. That's the second thing. Jesus comes to us personally. Look again at our passage. Look at Jesus' interactions with both Simon Peter and then Nathaniel.

Look at first what he says to Simon Peter in verse 44. He says to him here, he says, sorry, verse 42. He says, you are Simon, the son of John. You will be called Kephas or Peter.

Now it seems this is maybe the first time that Simon, later to be called Peter, is meeting Jesus. He doesn't know Jesus, and yet Jesus knows all about him.

Right? And it's as if Jesus is saying, Simon, you are just learning about me, but I know all about you. And one of the things we read in Luke's gospel, when Simon, later called Peter, discovers that Jesus knows him inside out.

Actually, Simon's a bit petrified. He doesn't like the idea of this. Because Simon, like probably all of us, has got some baggage in his life. There's some skeletons in his closet. He's not sure if he wants everybody to know him that deeply.

[20 : 50] And so Simon cries out, he says, away from me, Lord. I'm a sinful man. Jesus, you don't want anything to do with me. But Jesus, of course, knows everything about him and hasn't come to embarrass him or shame him.

He's come to meet him with grace. Jesus is so gracious, he hasn't come to condemn Simon. He's come to meet his shame with grace. And Jesus knows everything about us.

He knows our family stories. He knows our history. He knows our struggles. He knows our difficulty. He knows everything about us, and he calls us to follow him as we are. I think of the story we're going to talk about in a few weeks' time of Jesus meets a woman at a well one day.

And the woman is also a life full of shame. She's there on her own. She's an outcast from the rest of her village. And he says to her, hey, why don't you go call your husband? And she says, I don't have a husband. And Jesus says, that's right.

You've had five husbands, and the man you're with now is not really your husband, is he? Jesus knows everything about her. First time he's met her, but he knows her whole story. And yet, amazingly, Jesus meets her shame with grace.

[21 : 53] And she runs off to the village, and she says, I've just met somebody that knows everything about me and just told me my whole life story. Could he be the Messiah? But for her, the fact that Jesus knows everything about her is not bad news.

It's good news. Because for the first time in her life, here is somebody who knows her and yet loves her. Her whole life, she's been used and abused, taken advantage of by men that don't really care to know her and don't really love her.

But here is a man that knows her inside out, knows everything about her, and yet loves her. And he meets her guilt with grace and with kindness. And so, what's interesting is, John writes and he says, many from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.

The eyewitness testimony. The point is, Jesus calls us to himself personally. He doesn't just call us intellectually. He says, you and your life and your story, I'm interested in you, and I want you to come and follow me.

And look at how we see this with Nathaniel. Look at verse 47. Verse 47. The point is made clearly. Remember how condescending Nathaniel is about Jesus? He says, honestly, who's this guy from Nazareth?

[23 : 03] I mean, like, come on. Why are you bringing me to him? Verse 47. Jesus saw Nathaniel coming towards him and says, ah, behold, here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.

And Nathaniel says, how do you know me? Right? Have you been watching me? And Jesus says, before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. Now, Jesus tells two things about Nathaniel.

Firstly, he tells Nathaniel what's going on in his heart. He says, Nathaniel, in the deepest part, the most secret place of your heart, I know what's going on in there. I can see you. I know you.

But the other thing is, look what else. He says, before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. Now, nobody really knows what Nathaniel was doing under this fig tree, right? But evidently, it was something, Nathaniel wasn't having a nap.

Okay? There was something deep going on. Nathaniel was obviously wrestling with something. Maybe he was having arguments with somebody. Maybe he was praying. Maybe he was confessing some sin.

[24 : 05] Maybe he was repenting. Maybe he had just been exposed to something in his life that was out of kilter with his faith, was being exposed. And maybe he was repenting. Maybe he was saying, God, where's this Messiah that you've been promising for all these years?

I thought the Messiah was going to come. But whatever's going on, Nathaniel is wrestling deeply with something. Because Jesus says to him, hey, Nathaniel, I saw you under the fig tree.

I saw what you're wrestling. I know what is going on inside you. And what are Nathaniel's next words? He says, oh my goodness, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. We don't know exactly what Nathaniel is going through, but Jesus knew.

And Jesus put his finger on a very deep and profound part of his life and saying, Nathaniel, I know you. I've come for you. I've come that you might follow me. Friends, what's the point here?

Jesus knows the best about us and the worst about us. He knows, and he calls us to himself nonetheless. He knows our past. He knows our failings.

[25 : 06] He knows the sins that we've committed. And he knows the sins that others have committed against us and have left us traumatized. He knows the things that we've done which we wish we could undo and take back.

He knows the dreams that we're chasing. He knows the longings that we carry. He knows the things that keep us awake at night and that are on our mind. The things that cause us to toss and turn in bed that we can't sleep.

He knows everything about us. The best and the worst. And he says, come. Come and follow me. Come and experience my grace. With all your baggage. With everything there is about you.

Come, I want you. I want you to follow me. Come and find your rest in me. In a sense, Jesus is so unlike us, isn't he? He doesn't size us up and say, what university did you go to?

What degree do you have? What's your job? How much do you earn? Jesus doesn't go on a dating app to see our profile. He doesn't do a matchment test before just to see how compatible we are.

[26 : 07] Jesus knows everything. And he says, come. I want you. I want you to follow me. And Jesus calls us personally. However, I must warn you.

In one sense, Jesus calls us to follow him just as we are. He doesn't ask us to clean up our lives. He doesn't say, listen, sort yourselves out. And when you've got it all in order, when your life is good, then you can follow me.

He says, as you are. With all your baggage, come and follow me. But on the other hand, he calls us as we are, but he doesn't leave us as we are. He says, if you're going to follow me, I'm going to change you.

And that leads us to the third point. Jesus calls us intelligently. He calls us personally. But thirdly, he calls us profoundly. He calls us to change us. This is probably my favorite part of this passage.

Look at how both these sections end. They both end with Jesus promising that something profound is going to happen to these two men that are thinking about following Jesus.

[27 : 10] Look at what he says to Simon Peter, verse 42. Jesus looks at him and says, you are Simon, son of John. You shall be called Kephas, which means Peter. What's the significance of this?

In the Bible, whenever Jesus renames somebody or God renames somebody, it's because their life is about to change. Or whenever somebody's life is about to change, God renames them.

So Abram becomes Abraham. Jacob becomes Israel. Saul becomes Paul. Sarai becomes Sarah.

Whenever there's a profound moment of change, God renames someone. It's like he's saying, I'm going to give you not just a new name, but a new identity, a new person. Something in your heart is going to change.

You know, in some church traditions, when you get baptized, they ask you, what name do you want to be called after you're baptized? And it's kind of saying, your old life is being buried.

[28 : 07] You're united with Christ. You're dead in his death. And you're going to be raised out of the water a new person. You go into the water of Martha, you come out Mary. You go in Saul, you're going to come out Paul.

Some people ask you, do you want a new name when you get baptized? And it symbolizes God is changing you. Something deep and profound is happening. When Jesus says to Simon, you will be called Peter, he's giving him a new identity, a new calling, a brand new start.

And friends, at the heart of Christianity, in some ways, is the claim that because Jesus Christ is a person, not just an idea, because he's God, not just merely a man, and because he's good and kind and gracious and merciful, not capricious and arrogant and harsh, encountering him changes you profoundly, deeply, in a deep soul heart kind of way, fundamentally, in the depth of our core and in the depth of our being.

It's why the Apostle Paul says, my old life has died. I've risen with Christ. Not self-improvement, death, resurrection. I'm a new person. God has changed me.

And that's what's going on with Peter here. Simon Peter, when he follows him, friends, and that, dear friend, is what must happen to all of us who claim to follow Jesus. When we follow him, he will come and move and he will recalibrate our hearts.

[29 : 36] He will change us in a deep and profound way. Friends, for those of us that follow Jesus, we must examine whether, in fact, has there been any change in our lives? Is there any evidence of change in our lives?

Have our tastes, our desires changed? Has our language changed? Have our relationships changed at all? Friends, if you're a follower of Jesus, has God actually changed you in any way? Scripture tells us that when we encounter the living God, we will not be left the same.

I think, if you don't mind me saying, I think Jacka at the back is one of the great stories of this. Jacka became a Christian just under two years ago. Her father witnessed to her. And one day, she's told testimony, about two years ago, in April, I think it was, gets on her knees in the living room of her apartment and says, God, if you are real, I need you.

I surrender to you. Have your way. God had been chasing her and pursuing her. And then Jacka told me, after about a week, she finds her language has changed. She's suddenly, she's not using the same words she used to use.

And her vocabulary has changed. And then after a few weeks, actually, her previous desires have changed. She goes out with a friend, she still has the same friends, but she doesn't do the same things she used to do.

[30 : 48] Actually, her desires, the things that she used to do, doesn't have a desire to do them anymore. God changed her radically in a couple of weeks. I think I've told you the story before. In the great Welsh revival, 1904 in Wales, they had a big problem in their towns.

Because when revival came, so many people changed and changed their language, that the owners of the mines and the farms wouldn't swear anymore. And the farm animals didn't know how to listen to their instructions, because previously, they would only swear at their animals.

You, beep, beep, beep, beep. Come and get a beep. Move on. And now, suddenly, they become Christians, and they say, hey, come along. Come with me. And their animals didn't know this new language. They'd only been sworn at for all their lives, because God changed the town.

And the bars closed down, because there was no more business. And the sex industry closed down. Friends, Jesus comes, and He changes us. I heard a story recently of a church I know, where they interviewed a guy on stage, and they said, how long have you been coming to this church?

And he said, 15 years I've been a member of this church. And how long have you been playing in the worship team? Oh, 13 years I've been a musician, a worship leader in this church. How long have you been a Christian?

[31 : 58] Only three months. And for 15 years, he thought he was a Christian. Came every Sunday, played in the worship team, thought he knew Jesus. His life hadn't changed. But then one day, his eyes was opened.

And he realized, something's changing in my life. And he came to realize, actually, he only came to encounter Jesus then. Friends, are you someone who thinks you're a Christian, but actually you've never encountered Jesus?

Maybe you've been a member here. Maybe you're a deacon, a small group leader. Maybe you're one of the leaders. Friends, when Jesus comes into our life, He changes us profoundly. And for some of us, it might be radical, like Jack, in a few weeks.

You see and notice the difference? Some, it's just internal. But over the months and the years, it grows more and more external. Jesus comes and He changes us. He calls us to Himself, to encounter Him profoundly, deeply, in a deep heart way.

And we see the same with Nathanael. And look at what happens here. Nathanael comes to Him and He says, Jesus, how do you know me? And Jesus answered him, Before Philip called you and you under the fig tree, I saw you.

[33 : 01] Nathanael answered him, verse 49, Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You're the King of Israel. Jesus said, because I said to you, I saw you, do you believe? And then, for the first time, Jesus uses the word plural, the word you for plural.

Now He's talking to all the disciples. He's talking to all of us. And He says, you will see greater things than this. And then He said, truly, truly, I say to you, you all will see heaven opened, the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

What on earth is Jesus talking about? Well, there's a story in the Old Testament. Jacob. And Jacob was a bit of a scoundrel. He was a liar, a cheat, a bit of a deceiver, a manipulator.

And Jacob runs away from home because he had cheated his brother, the older brother, out of the family blessing. And so Jacob is on the run. And so he's run away from home and he's sleeping under the stars.

And one night he's sleeping and he has a dream. And in this dream, he sees a staircase or a ladder going up to heaven between earth and heaven. And on the staircase are angels ascending and descending, ascending and descending.

[34 : 11] And in his dream, God comes to him and speaks to him. The God that he doesn't know personally, but he's heard about from his father. And God speaks to him and says, I'm the God of your fathers, the one who's made promises to your people.

And then God says, behold, I am with you and I will keep you wherever you go. I will bring you back this land. I will not leave you until I've done what I promised you.

And Jacob wakes up from his sleep, wakes up from his dream. And he says this. He says, surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it.

And Jacob, the scoundrel, this kind of deceiving, manipulating guy, encounters God for the first time in his life. And he realizes God is gracious. God has come to him. And he says, God is in this place, but I did not know it.

How awesome this place. This is none other than the house of God, the gate of heaven. And in some ways, for the first time, God reveals himself to Jacob. And Jacob's life starts to change.

[35 : 10] He doesn't, he's not perfect automatically. He then goes to his uncle Laban and his uncle Laban is also a deceitful, manipulative guy. Laban cheats to him and lies to him. And Jacob doesn't treat Laban the way he would have previously.

He's faithful. He serves. He honors his word. And Jacob is starting to become a different person. Do you see what happened? He encountered God and he's starting to change.

But this is what happens. When Jacob, at this moment, discovers the God of the universe, the God of all creation is in his midst. And he's come down to meet him, not in judgment, but in grace.

Not to give Jacob what he deserves. He's come to save him. To rescue him. To heal him. To change him.

When Jacob realizes God has come to him, not in judgment, but in grace. The wheels of change start to turn in his heart. And he starts to become a different person. Okay.

[36 : 11] Jesus takes this example. Because remember, Jacob saw the angels ascending and descending. Jesus takes this example. The same scene of angels ascending and descending. And for the first time, he speaks to Nathaniel and all the disciples in plural.

He speaks to you and I. And he says, this is what will happen to you. When you come to Jesus and you see him. And you find out who he is. And you follow him. What you'll discover is that the God of the universe has come to us.

In our midst. Not in judgment. Not to give us what we deserve. He's come to save us. He's come to rescue us. He's come to redeem us.

He's come to heal us. And when that happens, it will change you. It will profoundly and deeply change your identity. Your view of life. How you view yourself.

It will change your calling, your purpose. It will change you. Friends, the gospel says that because of our sin and our rebellion to God, we all need to change. But the gospel says because Jesus Christ loves us so much, all of us can change.

[37 : 15] Because he came to change us. And so how does Jesus call us? Not superficially, but deeply. Profoundly. Purposefully. In a way that will recalibrate the core of who we are.

You know, if something is off-kilter, it needs to be recalibrated. It needs to be reset. Set to true north. Jesus will recalibrate the hearts, our hearts and our lives so that we know him.

The God of the universe has opened up the heavens and has come down in order to reconcile us to himself that we may know him. So at the end of two years, Lee Strobel does an investigation to prove his wife wrong, to prove Christianity a sham.

But his life changes. He comes to believe not only that Jesus Christ is true and real, believes that Christianity is real. He decides to commit himself as a follower of Jesus, as a disciple of Jesus, and to call him God and King.

Listen to how Lee Strobel ends his book. He says, or in one of his, sorry, one of his books, he says this. I have traveled the world. I have searched high and low. I have found nothing that satisfies the mind, but also my heart and the deepest longings of my soul, like Jesus does.

[38 : 25] Jesus is not only the truth, the way, the life. He is personal to me. He is my way, my truth, my life, just as he can be for anyone who reaches out and is willing to follow him.

So friends, what about you? Are you a follower of Jesus? Jesus is not calling us just to simply follow him in name, someone who vaguely ascends to most of what's in the Bible.

Well, Jesus is calling us to follow him personally, deeply, profoundly, in a way that changes our lives. Jesus comes to us and says, all of you, why don't you come and follow me?

Embrace the cost. Let me meet you personally. Let me meet you profoundly. Let me meet you in my love. Friends, given this understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, would you say you genuinely are a follower of Jesus?

Or do you just honor him as rabbi? Have you, like Simon Peter, you maybe thought of him as a good teacher, but have you come to see him as Lord, as God, as King? Jesus has come down that you may know him and follow him like that.

[39 : 32] Why don't we come to him now in prayer and do that together? Jesus Christ, we, in this church, love you. We don't know you perfectly.

We want to know you more. We don't understand everything about you. For all eternity, we'll get to know you and be ravished by you and grow in our love for you. But God, thank you so much that you have opened the heavens.

You have come down in our midst. The God of all creation, not to destroy us, but to rescue us, to save us. God, this room is full of people who were once lost and are now found.

Who were once blind, but now see. Who were once empty and have now been filled. God, we want to follow you wholeheartedly and we want to follow you more. We want to continue to follow you.

Not just to start off on the journey, but for the rest of our lives to get to know you deeply, profoundly, wonderfully. God, why don't you call us to yourself? Why don't you keep on calling us? God, those of us that started on the path, but maybe we've drifted, we've wondered.

[40 : 34] Other things have become more important to us. Oh God, we pray. Why don't you help us? Call us back to yourself. God, for those of us that don't know you, come and reveal yourself to us.

Open the eyes of our hearts. Help us, God, to see you and to know you. Jesus, we want to follow you wholeheartedly. Come and help us do that, we pray. In your great and wonderful name.

Amen.