

“Jesus’ 1st 3 Questions” // John 1:35–51 // *Jesus, Lord at thy Birth, Christmas 2022 #2z¹*

Announcement

Merry Christmas everybody! In case you were unaware, Christmas is two weeks away. And I know just saying that gave some of you anxiety attacks...it’s okay. In these latter days God has given unto us Amazon, in the city of Seattle, to take away our Christmas woes.

Quick survey: How many of you had finished your Christmas shopping by Thanksgiving? How many of you are just realizing, via this announcement, that you need to START Christmas shopping?

Well you’ve been hearing about it the last few weeks, but we will be having Christmas services with the Summit on Thursday, Dec. 22 and Saturday, Dec. 24 (Christmas Eve) at our permanent locations: Apex, Blue Ridge, Brier Creek, Capital Hills, and North Durham. (Our *SEE* campus will be celebrating their Christmas services a week early, on Dec 18, but every one of their services turns into a party so I imagine it might go all the way until Christmas Eve anyways. *SEE* has way more fun than the English speaking services, I promise you.)

Here’s the deal: you need to have a ticket to attend. Here’s the better deal: tickets are FREE. We do this so we can make sure there’s room

¹ Works Consulted: Joby Martin, “[The Gospel According to John - Week 3: Come and See](#),” this sermon was preached at The Church of Eleven22, and posted April 25, 2021; Tony Evans, “[Session 2](#),” this teaching was published by RightNow Media, 2018; Timothy Keller, “[You Shall See Heaven Open](#),”

for everyone. Tickets will be available later this week, so be sure to keep an eye out on your email and our social media accounts.

Got it? 1) Thursday and Saturday. 2) Get a ticket.

For all times, locations, kids’ information, volunteer information, what to expect, a live Santa-tracker and why elf-on-a-shelf is terribly bad Christmas theology, go to summitchurch.com/christmas.

Introduction

John 1, if you have your Bibles... I don’t know if you’ve seen all the hullabaloo around Harry and Megan’s new Netflix tell-all that’s coming out this weekend (I haven’t watched it, and don’t intend to), but it reminds me of one of my favorite stories about the British royal family. **One of the royal family members, Lady Susan Hussey**, was known to be pretty clumsy with her small talk--you know, the kind of person who is always making awkward observations or asking inappropriate questions. We all have that relative. Maybe some of you are that relative. Well, in the early 1990’s, Buckingham Palace got asked at short notice to host a reception for an American delegation on their way home from a NATO summit. Members of the royal household were scrambled to fill the room, and Lady Susan found herself sitting next to a charming visitor. After talking with him for several minutes, she asked, "What do you do for a living?" A slightly

a sermon preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church on December 20, 2009; Tim Keller, “Jesus’ Meal With Peter, John 21,” sermon preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

surprised George Bush replied, "I'm president of the United States of America."

I'm sure we've all had the experience of putting our foot in our mouths. But not recognizing who you are talking to or how you are supposed to respond can lead to some pretty embarrassing situations.

In his Gospel, John introduces us to Jesus and then shows us how to respond. The other Gospels (Matthew and Luke, in particular) give us the what of Christmas (all the facts about Christmas--about the angels and shepherds and Mary and Joseph and the manger...). **John, instead, gives us the why of Christmas.**

In the first half of John 1 he gave us Jesus' resume, if you remember from last week; Jesus is the Word, the light, the life, and glory-enfleshed; and now, in the second half, he shows us how to respond.

He does so by asking us 3 questions: **1. "What are you searching for?"** **2. "What is your name?"** And, 3. **"Will you follow?"**

35 The next day... John [the Baptist] was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

- **John the Baptist was a religious celebrity in Israel.** Everybody flocked to hear him preach--some were saying he was the greatest prophet since Isaiah and Elijah. And now, as Jesus walks by, he calls out, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"
- **"The Lamb," of course, was a central feature in Jewish worship rituals--**

- It started with the Passover: the last plague that God had put onto Egypt was to take the life of every firstborn in Egypt. But God promised the children of Israel, who were being held captive in Egypt, that if they would take a lamb, sacrifice it, and smear some of the blood on the tops of the doorpost and on the sides, the angel of death would "pass over" their house and leave everyone alive. Every year thereafter, Israelites commemorate the Passover by sacrificing a lamb and recreating that final night.
- A few years later, when God instructed them on how to set up their Temple worship, he commanded that each family bring a lamb to the Temple each year and offer it as a sacrifice on behalf of the sins of the family. The father of the family, representing the family, would carry the lamb up to the altar, lay it down, and as the priest cut the throat of the lamb, the father would lay his hand on the head of the lamb and confess the family's sins. The symbolism was obvious: the sins of the family were being covered by the blood of the lamb. The lamb was dying in their place. This was called the ritual of atonement.
- **John the Baptist looks at Jesus and says, "This Person, this man, is the Lamb of God."**
 - **That's not what they had been expecting. They had never thought of the lamb as a person.** But John said, "It's always been about him. Everything written in the Torah and the prophets about a lamb has been pointing to him." He was saying, "The Lamb and Messiah are the same person." That would have blown their minds.

- **The admonition John gives is, “Behold him!”** Behold means “Look at him! Recognize who he is! See who he is! Pay attention to him!”
- The admonition is still relevant: You have a sin-debt that needs to be covered. That’s where the Christian message begins. Jesus is the Lamb sent for you. **Behold him!** Consider what his coming means about you.

37 The two disciples (who were with John) heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38 Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” (Or, in Greek, Where are you trying to go?)

These are Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of John (if you underline stuff in your Bible, underline that--**1. What are you seeking? This is our first question.**) **These are Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of John and they have profound significance**, because it’s going to be the question that undergirds a lot of his encounters in the rest of the Gospel. **What are you really looking for, Jesus asks?** And what do I have to do with that?”

I might ask that from some of you this morning:

- What is it you are really looking for in life, and what does Jesus have to do with that? You made a decision to be here this morning. Why?
- You see, all of us, whether we recognize it or not, are on some quest in life to obtain what we think will make us happy. And for many of us, Jesus is part of that equation.
- What is that thing for you? What is it you most desire? What are you really searching for?

- **In those quiet moments, when you’re alone, when you’re not distracted, when you’re not crazy busy**--what is it you most yearn for? Some of you, btw, don’t let yourself get alone--it’s like you hate silence. You keep the radio on in your car; you use any spare moments to scroll through your phone--TikTok or Facebook or checking the scores or whatever--because God forbid you think real thoughts or feel real feelings and actually engage your soul for half a second. You’d think our society had designed itself to keep us from any silence or reflection. I was at SP mall the other day and in between the outdoor stores there is music coming out of the bushes because God forbid in the 20 seconds I’m walking between stores I have a few moments of silence to think about my life choices. If that’s you, if you hate silence, look, I’m not judging--I just want to say that maybe you’re searching for something but you haven’t found it for so long that now you’re just crowding your life with noise so you don’t feel the longing anymore... You never think about real questions anymore, only daily trivialities.

So what Jesus says is as relevant as ever: What are you really seeking? Look at your checkbook; look at your calendar; your browsing history--they’ll give you a hint. Or look at your secrets--the parts of your life you hide from others (the alcohol, the drugs, the cheating, the pornography). That will tell you. Or, look at your obsessions (your work, finding a boyfriend). What makes you jealous or sad or mad?

What is it that you are really looking for, and what does Jesus have to do with that?

Their response, vs. 38, “Rabbi,” “We need a place to stay tonight?”

They think Jesus is literally asking them what they are looking for at the current moment. “*What are you guys really looking for?*” “I need a bathroom.” A recurring theme in John’s Gospel is how Jesus often talks up here on one level while everybody else is thinking down here on this level.

- For example, in John 6, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life...” and they respond, “Yum, bread. Some hot yeast rolls sound amazing right now.”
- Or, in John 3, he says, “Unless you are born again you’ll never see the Kingdom of God,” and Nicodemus responds, “Well, how exactly am I supposed to crawl back up in my mother’s womb and get born a second time?” And Jesus says, “Nicodemus, first, GROSS. Have you ever HEARD of a metaphor? I’m talking about a different kind of birth--a heavenly one.”
- In John 4, Jesus tells the woman at the well, “I have this water--living water--and you could drink from and never be thirsty again...” and she responds, “Oh yeah, well where’s your bucket to draw this water?” Jesus is talking about his Spirit and she’s thinking about the well. (BTW, a few years ago I was sitting with some college students at an outdoor restaurant on Franklin St in Chapel Hill; I’d just spoken at a campus event, and a homeless guy came up to us and said, “Hey, could I have some money?” Well, they are college students and so, of course, they’re broke, and I didn’t have any cash on me, so I asked the guy if I could buy him something to eat, and he said he’d just eaten--he just wanted some cash. And all of the sudden one of the college students pipes up and says, “Hey man, what if I told you we had food we could give you that you could eat once and never be hungry

² (BTW, I love little Easter Eggs in the text like this. The fact that it was 4pm has NOTHING to do with the storyline, John is just giving a detail from somebody’s memory--because that’s what you do when you are recalling an incident, you throw in random details you remember whether they are part of

again?” And the guy just stared at him for a minute, then gave him this bewildered look and turned and ambled away. And the college student looked back at me and said, “I don’t understand. That intro totally worked for Jesus.” I told him I didn’t know. But the point is, Jesus was often talking up here, and his disciples are thinking down here.

- That’s what you have here in John 1. Jesus is talking about what they are *really* seeking in life, where they are really trying to go, and they think he’s asking him where they are headed at the moment.

But that’s ok. Jesus doesn’t turn them away: Vs. 39 He (very patiently) said to them, “Come and you will see.”

- **The good news: Throughout the Gospel of John, we’ll see** Jesus receive people with all kinds of mixed motives. He starts with where you are. You just need to be prepared for him to transform those questions.
- **Maybe you are here this weekend because you think Jesus can help you out with some felt-need:** A marriage issue. A singleness issue. A parenting issue. A financial crisis. A health crisis. Maybe you are just scared about what’s going to happen to you when you die or you are troubled about the future.
- Jesus can help you with all those things, but the questions he has for you are bigger. A lot of times you’re thinking down here and he’s thinking up here.

So they came and (they) saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. (or about 4 in the afternoon; they started the clock at 6am.)²

plot or not. I point that out because a lot of people like to write off the Gospels as legends, but legends, especially in those days, weren’t written in this way. Euripedes didn’t say, “Hercules took on the Cyclops... around 3:45 in the afternoon”. These accounts are not written like legends, but as eyewitness testimony.) NB from Tim Keller

40 One of them... was Andrew, Simon's brother. 41 He went and found Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah." 42 He brought (Peter) to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. (From this point on) You shall be called Cephas..." (Cephas is the Aramaic version of the name "Peter"--Peter is Greek--both of them mean 'rock'.)

This is where Jesus first meets the apostle Peter--and it's our second major question: **2. What is your name?**

I want you to notice that in their first meeting, Jesus gives Peter a nickname. I love people like this, who find some admirable quality about you and name you for it. Do you have any friends like that? I've got a couple. (One of my favorite episodes of **Big Bang Theory** is where Wolowitz is trying to get the nickname "Rocketman" from the other astronauts on this new team he's joined--so he sets his ringtone to the song "Rocketman" and has it go off while he's on a Zoom call with them to try to trick them into giving him that name; but just as that happens his mom calls up to him and asks him if he wants any more Fruit Loops, so the other astronauts give him the name nickname '**Fruit Loops**' instead. Or, **George Castanza on Seinfeld** who wants the nickname T-bone and ends up with the name Coco the Monkey--See what I did? I gave something for the younger people and something for the older. I'm trying to be a pastor for all the people.)

Peter is not jockeying for a nickname, but **Jesus gives him one that prophecies** his future. In **vs. 42** Jesus goes through 3 iterations of Peter's identity:

- "Simon," that's his current name;

- "Son of John," that's his family identity; you could think of that as his past
- and then 'Cephas,' which meant "rock," a picture of what Jesus is going to make him into. That was all in their first conversation! What an introduction!
- But, **there's an important lesson here for us:** When you come to Jesus, you cease to be defined by your past--who your parents were; or your present, what you've accomplished or your mistakes and failures; and you start to be defined by who Jesus is making you into and the plans he has for you. He knows who you are; he knows who you were; and, most importantly, he knows who he is shaping you into.

Let me ask you: What "name" has defined your past and present?

What names have been assigned to you by your Enemy? Stupid. Unloved. A Failure. Difficult. A Problem. A Burden. Not Enough. Addict. Broken. Damaged goods. Failed Father. Criminal.

- **That might be accurate based on who you were;** it might even be who you are, but Jesus calls you by a new name and says, "That's not who you *will be*. I give you a new name: Beloved. Chosen. Adopted. Redeemed. Restored. A rock for my church. A fountain of blessing. A co-heir and co-ruler. One who shines like the stars in the sky, pointing many to righteousness. That's your new name. That's what I'm calling you immediately."

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

OK, let's review what we've seen thus far. Jesus appears before us as **the Lamb of God**, who alone can take away our sins; **he asks us** what we are really searching for in life; he gives us **a new name**; and now,

he extends to us **the essential invitation** of the Gospels: “Follow me,” or, in Hebrew, “*Lay hach harai.*” Which just sounds cooler than, “Follow me.”

What does it mean to become a Christian? According to the Gospels, very simply, to follow Jesus. It’s not to start being perfect; it’s not to know every answer to every theological question, it’s just to follow Jesus. **Jesus invites people everywhere, anywhere, to follow him.**

Now, I want to acknowledge: a lot of people don’t know exactly what that means. Back then, I mean, it was pretty straightforward. You literally just followed him—he went that way, you went that way. *But today, he’s not physically here anymore, he’s invisible, so what does it mean to follow him?*

Great question. Back in those days, when you wanted to follow a Rabbi, you would go and sit at his feet and he would examine you with questions and put you through a series of tests to see if you were worthy to be their disciple.³ If you passed, they’d invite you to follow them, at which point you’d literally go everywhere with them, listening to everything they taught, watching all the ways they’d interact, and trying to imitate their every move.

Ray Vander Laan, a historian who specializes in 1st century Israel, said that in those days the greatest praise you could give to a *talmid* (which is the Hebrew word for disciple) was “*the dust of your rabbi is all over you.*” That didn’t mean “Dude, you’re dirty! Go take a shower!” It meant, “You have followed your rabbi so closely that

you’ve heard everything he said, seen everything he’s done, and everything he’s stepped in has splashed up on you.”

All of that should give you a picture of what it means to follow Jesus. Here’s **Ray Vander Laan’s** definition: “**A talmid (disciple) is someone who seeks not only to know what his master knows, but also to do what his Master does.**” Two elements there.

- **The first: Learning.** You want to know what your master knows. Listen, if you want to be a disciple, there’s no shortcut to this--there’s a lot of learning involved. If you are serious about being a disciple, your life will be filled with a lot of learning; listening to messages; being regular in church; reading books; participating in small groups and leadership cohorts seeking to grow in your knowledge. You say, “But I’m not really an academic kind of person.” Look, you don’t have to be. I’m just saying if you’re in love with somebody, you’re going to learn all about them—and that’s a big part of the Christian life.
- **But that’s just half of the discipleship formula.** I’m not an intellectual--but if you are a disciple...
- **The other half is *doing*.** A disciple doesn’t want to merely know what his master knows; he or she also wants to do what his master does. **How did he live? What were his priorities?**
 - When I was in high school, this bracelet (**pic: WWJD bracelet**) became popular--I still see people wearing them today. It first came out in 1989 when I was in high school, and I told people WWJD stood for... (that was high school J.D.’s sense of humor). But, of course, it really stands for, What would Jesus do? It comes from an old book written in the 1890’s by a guy

³ *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*

named Charles Sheldon called *In His Steps*--it's the story of a really wealthy young adult who took this invitation to imitate Jesus really seriously, and he started to ask himself, in every situation: 'If Jesus were in my place, what would he do? WWJD if he had my resources? WWJD if he was presented with these alternatives I have in front of me?

- WWJD is not the only consideration in the Christian life, but it's a good place to start.
- **Following Jesus means seeking to know what he knows, and do what he does.** Around the Summit--you'll hear us simplify that into the **5 identities of the disciple**: You become a **worshiper, family member, servant, steward, and witness**. That's what he was. As a Worshiper, you'll be part of the weekend gathering and consistently in the Word & Prayer. As a Family Member, you will be part of a smaller community of discipleship in our church, like Small Groups. As a Servant, you'll commit to serving in our church and city. As a Steward, you'll be committed to giving generously of your time, talent, and treasure. As a Witness, you'll be praying for and sharing the gospel and pouring your life out for your one--that is, the one person you're praying for--or your friends that don't know Jesus).
- We call that our 'discipleship pathway'--what it looks like, practically speaking, to follow Jesus, and if you want to know more, just open up your **Summit App** or go to our website and you'll see all **5 identities** and how you can grow in each of them.

45 Philip (went and) found (a friend named) 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."

46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

- Yes, that was a snobby statement. Real quick: Nazareth was the redneck part of Israel. All dueling banjos and pickup trucks and spittin' tobacco and marrying your cousins out there. And Nathanael says, "Can anything *good* come out of there?"
- Veronica and I really appreciate this because I'm from Wheeling, WV and she's from Andalusia, Alabama. Can anything good come out of Wheeling or Andalusia? In college, my family lived in Yadkinville. Can anything good come out of Yadkinville? So, for all of you from redneck, hole-in-the-wall, wrong-side-of-the-tracks kind of towns, Jesus feels you.
- Nathanael said, "Can anything good come outta there?" Totally snobby. Philip said to him, "Come and see." (BTW, I love this as an evangelism strategy--Philip tells Nathanael his story with Jesus; and then Nathanael asks an antagonistic question--'How could the Messiah possibly come out of Nazareth?') but Philip doesn't answer it; he just says, "Come see for yourself." Some of you have a friend you want to tell about Jesus, but you don't, because you are afraid of how they are going to react. Follow this example of Philip. Jesus doesn't need your help converting them, he'll do that. Just tell them your story, like Philip did, and when they ask you an antagonistic question, you say, "Come and see for yourself." Come to our Christmas services with me. Let's read the Bible together." Jesus does all the converting; we just need to extend the invitation. Think of it like if we were asked to defend a caged lion--you don't need to defend the lion, just open the gate, and let the lion do his own defending.)

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

48 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.” 49 Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Now, on the surface, that seems like a pretty disproportionate response, right? (Sometimes we read the Bible...) Jesus says, “I saw you under the fig tree” and Nathanael responds, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” If you and I have never met, and one day someone introduces us, and I say, “Wait, I know you; I saw you in Walmart the other day in the kitchen-ware aisle.” You might be impressed by my memory; perhaps even a little creeped out, but you probably aren’t going to say, “**Pastor, surely you are the Son of God! The King of Israel!**”

I may be using a *little bit* of artistic license here, but just a little. I think the only reason Nathanael would respond that way is if something was happening under that fig tree that was so personal and so private for Nathanael that Jesus knowing about it indicated to Nathanael that Jesus knew EVERYTHING about him.

I love the take that *The Chosen* has on this (**Do you guys watch that? You should!**). They depict Nathanael there under the fig tree at the end of his rope, his dreams and his spirit utterly crushed. Since he was a boy he’s dreamed about building this synagogue but he’s been betrayed and his dreams are destroyed. He’s barely holding on to life. Check this out: [CLIP](#) ⁴

VAMP

Do you have a fig tree that represents your deepest hurts, deepest shame: and what’s it like for Jesus to say to you, “There. I saw you there.”

⁴ “Whatever was happening under that fig tree was so unique and so private that Jesus knowing about it... in itself... was proof to Nathaniel that Jesus was ‘the one.’” Tim Keller

(BTW, I think that phrase, “Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no guile,” indicates that Nathanael had been falsely accused and everybody thinks he’s guilty and Jesus says, “I know the truth; I know the injustice you’ve endured. I see you.”)

What if there was a Savior who knew everything about you--who understood you when no one else did, who knew all your sin and shame, and loved you anyway. **Would you follow him?** Which is our 3rd question: **3. Will you follow?**

This section of Scripture started with Jesus saying to a couple of would-be followers, “What do you seek?” It ends with Jesus revealing to a man named Nathanael that he knows everything about him and has never turned his face away. This is Jesus’ answer to his question, “What are you really searching for?” **“You’re searching for a God who knows your deepest pain, deepest shame, and loves you anyway.” You’re looking for ME.**

You see, psychologists say that one of the deepest human needs is to be known and loved. Known *AND* loved. You need both--because, you see, to be known and not loved is rejection; but to be loved and not known feels shallow, only sentimental. We want someone to really know us--to see us, all of us, the secret parts, the broken parts, and love us anyway.

But see, that presents a dilemma. There’s so much about us, like Nathanael, that is unlovable, even shameful, and we’re afraid when people see that, they won’t love us. So, we keep a lot of ourselves hidden under the fig tree.

We have what I've heard called "the porcupine's dilemma." What's the porcupine's dilemma, you say? The North American porcupine has 30,000 quills. They may look cute, but if one of those quills sticks into you, the barb expands and it's nearly impossible to pull it out--it's like a fish hook; you have to cut it out. **So, here's the dilemma:** Porcupines need love and tenderness like everybody else. But if you are a porcupine, how do you get close to another porcupine without hurting them or getting hurt yourself?

Jesus answered the porcupine's dilemma. He absorbed the barbs of our sin when he died for them. He saw us under the fig tree, in our sin, and absorbed that sin into himself so we could be made new.

That's why he came as the Lamb, so he could meet us in our pain and rescue us.

Israel thought they needed a mighty Messiah who would deliver them from the problems in the *world*--violent oppressors and greedy strong-men and social inequities; what they really needed was someone who would deliver them back to God, to remove the curse of sin from their own souls. To de-barb their hearts.

Which is what Jesus explains in he last 2 verses of this chapter: **50** Jesus answered (Nathanael) him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." **51** 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." **That phrase, "The angels of God ascending and descending" is a reference back to the beginning of the Bible:**

Genesis 28, Jacob, the younger son of Isaac, is running for his life. His older brother, Esau, is trying to kill him because Jacob had cheated him out of his birthright. Jacob is now familyless, virtually penniless. His father, who had protected him from Esau for all those years, has just died, so now Jacob is completely vulnerable. And that's when he has a dream, and in that dream, he sees a "ladder" between heaven and earth. ("Ladder" is really not the best translation--the word in Hebrew really means something like a grand ramp, or a gigantic causeway). And on this causeway Jacob sees angels going up and down. (BTW, just to be clear, Hallmark always gets angels wrong. Angels are not soft, blond-haired, blue-eyed massage therapist-looking guys with wings and robes and birkenstocks. And they certainly aren't chubby toddlers in diapers with nerf bows and arrows. Angels are the military might of Heaven. We know they are terrifying to behold, because every time in the Bible somebody encounters an angel, the angel's first words are, "Don't die! Fear not!" So, Jacob has this dream of a great ramp on which Heaven's mighty militia are traveling to and fro, and the promise is that this might is going to now assist Jacob in his journey. Jacob has been a liar and a cheat, but God promises his help to him anyway.

Jesus then draws a parallel to Nathanael. "You, Nathanael, you are like Jacob: Vulnerable. Friendless. Empty. Guilty. But salvation has found you under the fig tree, Nathanael, just like it found Jacob in the wilderness."

But then Jesus puts one amazing twist in there: He says, vs **(51),** "Nathanael, you are going to see **"these angels of God ascending and descending ON the Son of Man."**

Y'all, this is an astounding claim. Jesus says, "I am the mighty power of God. All of Heaven's might resides upon *me*. I know it doesn't look like it: I'm just a humble teacher from Nazareth. But the might of God has come to earth as a poor baby, born in a stable—a baby who grew up to be a humble carpenter walking through Jerusalem; a meek man who will lay down his life for his enemies rather than slaying them.

Jesus could have come to earth as the lion, but instead he came as the lamb. Our God showed his real power not by destroying his enemies but by dying for our sin, and then conquering our greatest fear by rising from the grave. And now that Lamb offers salvation to all who will receive it—not just to the strong like Esau, or to all the winners, but to the ones hiding under the fig tree. To any who are humble enough to receive it.

This section of Scripture started with Jesus saying to a couple of would-be followers, "What do you seek?" It ends with Jesus revealing to a man named Nathanael that he knows everything about him and loves him anyway. And then asking him, "Will you follow me?"

Ready for me to blow your mind? "What are you seeking?" is not only the first question Jesus asks in the Gospel of John; it's also one of the last.

After Jesus had been crucified and resurrected, Mary Magdalene, was outside his tomb, weeping, because she's looking for his dead body so she can embalm it. Jesus, of course, is fully alive with no need of

embalming. So, Jesus comes up behind her and asks the same question he opened the Gospel with, "*What are you seeking?*"

She is so overcome with grief and her eyes so blinded with tears that she doesn't recognize him, and that's when he does one simple thing: he says her name. Tenderly. Mary. Because see, that's what she's really been searching for. It's the same thing Nathanael had been searching for. It's the same thing YOU are searching for.

Let me borrow the words of Ronald Rolheiser:⁵ "In the end, that (hearing God call our name, again, with affection) is what we are all looking for and most need. It is what gives us substance, identity, and justification beyond our own efforts to make ourselves lovable, worthwhile, and immortal."

All of us, whether we realize it or not, are searching for something--something to give us identity, security and happiness. Something to fill this gap in our heart.

What we need to hear is Jesus, the Son of God, affectionately and personally pronouncing our names: "Jennifer." "Shane." "Molly." "Rebecca." "Michael." "I see you. I understand you. Nobody else saw you under that fig tree--that place where you are trying to hide. That place of pain, where you were yelling at God, "Are you even there?!" But I saw you. I know your pain. I know all your mistakes and your sin and your shame and I love you anyway. I've never turned my face away from you. ***Follow me.***"

⁵ Ronald Rolheiser, *A Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity*, ch 6, p. 182.

So, what's your answer? Will you follow Jesus?

Bow heads... right now, I believe for many of you he is calling your name. You hear it in your soul. He may not do that forever. Respond today...

(BTW, again, think about the **simplicity of evangelism** in this story:

- Philip invites Nathanael to Jesus and Nathanael raises all these objections and Philip just says, "Come and see." He knows Jesus will do the rest.
- For some of you, that's what you need to do at Christmas. There's somebody in your life you need to invite to encounter Jesus at our Christmas services, but you know they may react with all kinds of scorn and ask you a bunch of questions you can't answer. You just respond like Philip did. Tell them you don't know how to answer all their questions, but then you tell them, "Here's what Jesus did in my life," followed by "Come and see for yourself." You can do that, can't you? Invite someone for Christmas. Who do you need to pray for? Who is God putting on your heart?