COME, AND YOU WILL SEE

John 1:35-51
Key Verse: 51

“He then added, ‘I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”

In last week’s passage, we studied John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus, the Lamb of God. John’s life of mission was not easy. When he struggled to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins, he felt very lonely, like a voice in the desert. But when he held on to his holy mission as the forerunner of the Messiah, he could say with confidence that Jesus is the one who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus surely is the one who saves us and gives us our holy mission in God. May God bless us to hold on to the blessings we have received through our faith in him! In today's passage, John's confession of faith in Jesus begins to bear fruit in the lives of his disciples. We want to learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, and how to have a confession of faith in him as the Christ.

Look at verses 35 and 36. “The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’” As we studied last week, John the Baptist clearly identified Jesus as the Lamb of God. The Lamb of God is the Son of God who came to baptize sinners with the Holy Spirit through his suffering and death on the cross, and his glorious resurrection. Whenever John saw Jesus, he confessed emphatically Jesus is the one on whom he saw the Spirit come down and remain. Jesus is the Lamb of God! Jesus takes away the sin of the world! Jesus is the Son of God! Jesus is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit! Jesus was everything to John. So John told everyone he knew about Jesus. He even told the Pharisees, priests and Levites about Jesus. But not everyone listened to John’s testimony. In fact, most people rejected John’s testimony, thinking that he was too extreme in his faith, message and lifestyle (Lk. 7:33). This time, however, John was with two of his disciples. They had been baptized for the forgiveness of
their sins. They had decided to remain with John in order to learn from his message and life of faith. Now, they heard John's clear testimony about Jesus.

Look at verse 37. “When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.” The two disciples responded to John’s testimony by following Jesus. They had made a commitment to follow John. John was very popular among the common people, and he had been their good shepherd. But they listened carefully to what John had said. John had come to reveal the one who would save his people from their sins. Now, John was pointing to the one he meant when he said that. The disciples had a moment of crisis: should I follow John, or should I listen to what he says and follow Jesus? They listened to John and began to follow Jesus. In this way, these men revealed themselves to be truth-seekers. They did not follow John because others followed him. They did not follow John because of what they thought he could give them, humanly. They had followed John because they wanted to know the truth. So they left behind their shepherd John, and began to follow Jesus directly. Perhaps they did so quietly, so as to observe Jesus and discern his true intentions.

Look at verse 38. “Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, ‘What do you want?’ They said, ‘Rabbi’ (which means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’” As the disciples came closer to Jesus, Jesus turned around to face them, and asked them, “What do you want?” The disciples had made a commitment to follow Jesus. But they didn’t know Jesus, and Jesus didn’t know them. Jesus’ question, “What do you want?” is the dividing line between those who follow Jesus, and those who are his disciples. Following Jesus, we can find many interesting things to do, and many interesting people to meet. Following Jesus, we can even find potential husband or wife candidates. Many people begin to follow Jesus for precisely these reasons. But sooner or later, Jesus also asks us this very same question. “What do you want?” In other words, “Why are you following me?” This is not a trivial question. And it is a question we must have an answer to. Otherwise, we might discover that we can find friendship or love outside of Christian circles, and that Christianity
might become an obstacle for advancement in some companies or countries.

The disciples answered Jesus question, “What do you want?” by asking him, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” The disciples did not ask to be baptized again by Jesus. They did not ask for a miraculous sign to prove that he was the Messiah. They asked to know where he was staying. They respected Jesus too much to invite themselves over to his place. But they really wanted an invitation to come to his place and stay with him. The disciples were eager to spend time with Jesus, to see how he lived and listen to what he had to stay. They wanted to watch him eat his dinner. They wanted to see and know everything about Jesus, the one John had told them about. In short, they wanted to follow Jesus in order to get to know Jesus, and for Jesus to get to know them.

Look at verse 39. “‘Come,’ he replied, ‘and you will see.’ So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.” Jesus immediately invited these curious disciples to visit him for the day. Many great and famous people treasure their privacy. They don't have time to listen to ordinary people or explain to them simple or basic concepts. But Jesus was not like them. Jesus was willing to spend all his time speaking with these young disciples, listening to all their childish ideas and sorting through all of their complicated emotional feelings. Jesus even relished the chance to do so. So he said, “Come, and you will see.” Jesus invited the disciples to come and see everything about him. We can say that Jesus was very pleased with their desire to know him more. Jesus invites everyone to come and know him through fellowship with him in his word and through his Spirit. Revelation 3:20 says, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is also our Good Shepherd who wants to have a personal relationship with each of us, the sheep of his pasture.

It is a great tragedy when those who have followed Jesus for many years fail to take the opportunity to come to know him. The religious leaders among the Jews had made a careful study of the Old
Testament to discern when and how the Messiah would come. They had been following his approaching appearance on earth with great interest. But when the time came for the religious leaders to meet Jesus personally and confess their faith in him, their pride as religious leaders and intellectual Bible teachers made them reject Jesus as the Messiah. In the same way, many young Christians have followed Jesus since their youth, attending church camps and even going on short mission trips. But when the time came for them to come and spend time with Jesus, seeing how he lived and what he taught, they were distracted and looked elsewhere. When they come to the University, they can find all of the friends and interesting activities they want, without even having to attend church or listen to the Sunday sermon. It looks like a great deal, and so they fall away. Christian campus ministries try their best to keep young Christians occupied with even more activities. But now is the time for young Christians to hear Jesus’ question, “What do you want?” and Jesus’ invitation, “Come, and you will see.” It is not the time for young Christians to keep following Jesus as part of the crowd. Now is the time for young Christians to make a decision to meet Jesus personally, and know who he is and be known by him. It is not those who follow Jesus who will be saved. It is those who know Jesus (Jn 17:3) and who are known by him who will be saved and welcomed into his heavenly kingdom (Lk 13:24-27).

The two disciples followed Jesus to spend the afternoon and evening with him. They made a remarkable discovery. Look at verses 40 and 41. “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ).” We don’t know what happened that so moved the hearts of the two disciples to make such a confession of faith. It is a mystery. But it was the fruit of their decision to get to know Jesus by spending time with him. Their spiritual eyes were opened, and they could see who Jesus was, as clearly as they could see one another. They did not take the revelation of Jesus’ identity and mission lightly. With burning hearts, they went to their friends and family and shared the good news about Jesus. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was perhaps a little fearful to go to Simon because of his hot temper and natural leadership skills. But Andrew demonstrated his
simple faith and went to Simon to tell him, “We have found the Messiah.” And then he got Simon up from the dinner table and brought him at once to Jesus, still chewing his dinner. This is not a small event. In this way, Andrew became the first disciple of Jesus. Romans 10:9 and 10 say, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” When we confess faith in Jesus as a testimony to others, we are claiming salvation by faith in Jesus for ourselves. May God help us to spend time with Jesus until we can have a clear confession for others that Jesus is the Christ.

When Jesus looked at Simon, he said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas (which, when translated, is Peter)” Jesus’ greeting to Simon is unusual. The name Simon was very common among the Jews in Jesus’ time. And Simon himself was a typical Galilean, very emotional, opinionated and hard-working. But Jesus did not see a typical man. When Jesus looked at Simon, he saw a man who could be a rock, the foundation for his church in the period of fiery persecution for his disciples. Jesus’ vision of Simon as Cephas, or Peter, shows that our commitment to know him is met by an even greater on Jesus’ part to know us. When we come to him in order to spend time with him and grow as his disciples, Jesus looks into our hearts to see who we are and who we were meant to be in God. To Jesus, this is not mere information. When Jesus revealed God's vision for Simon through the new name, Peter, he also made a commitment to Simon to help him be changed from a very ordinary man into a great man and a source of blessing for the world. We should not think that by coming to Jesus or making a commitment to follow him as his disciple, we are losing something or giving something to Jesus. We must know that everyone who commits to Jesus as his disciple will receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the meaning of life, eternal life and a living hope in the kingdom of God. Jesus makes a commitment to us that no one and nothing can break. John 6:40 says, “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” St. Paul confessed in Romans 8:38 and 39. “For I am convinced that neither
death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Our commitment to Jesus is for this life, and is by faith. Jesus’ commitment to us is for eternity. Jesus has a commitment to make us fit for eternal life in the kingdom of God. May God help us to know the vision that God has for each of us, and believe that Jesus is the one who can make God’s vision for us true when we follow him as his disciples.

The next day, Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. On the way, he found Philip and told him, “Follow me.” Philip followed him, along with Andrew and Peter and the other disciple (probably John the apostle). Like Andrew, Philip spent time with Jesus, and immediately came to know that Jesus is the Messiah, the one Moses promised to his people in Dt. 18:15, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth. He went and told his friend, Nathanael, who was from Cana. But Nathanael was not so ready to believe in Jesus. He hesitated, saying, “Nazareth, can anything good come from there?” Nathanael was a man of skepticism. He was not ready to believe someone from Nazareth. Philip didn’t argue with him. He just invited him, “Come and see.” The invitation to study the Bible 1 to 1 is not complicated. We are not priests. We are friends, like Philip, who invite others to come and see Jesus for themselves through the Bible and through testimony writing. If you have a confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ, you can be a one to one Bible teacher, and a shepherd for others in this lost generation.

When Nathanael came to Jesus, Jesus was expecting him. He said, “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.” Once again, Jesus’ greeting is more than a little mysterious. But Jesus’ greeting reflects his amazing insight into human souls. A true Israelite is one who follows in the footsteps of Jacob, who struggled hard with men to obtain what he wanted, only to find that in the end he could find everything only in God. When he finally sought God’s blessing first, God changed his name to Israel, which means one who struggles with men and God and has overcome. Nathanael must have been struggling under the fig tree in prayer to overcome his human struggles and come
to meet God personally. At that moment, Philip called him. In spite of his skepticism, he had to follow. And now Jesus revealed to him that he understood his struggle. Simultaneously, he revealed himself as the one who had the power and authority to help Nathanael realize his vision and hope for himself. Look at verse 49. “Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”” To Nathanael, the one who could help him become a pure and holy servant of God was everything. So he confessed absolute faith and allegiance to Jesus as his Savior and King.

Nathanael’s confession of faith was so powerful, that we wonder what else is left to be done in Jesus’ spiritual struggle for raising up these men as his disciples. But there was a lot left to be done. Look at verse 50. “Jesus said, ‘You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.’” Nathanael’s spiritual growth did not end with his confession of faith in Jesus; it was just beginning. Nathanael had seen only a small fraction of what there is to see when we follow Jesus as his disciples! What else is there, beyond our hope in God to be cleansed and welcomed into his family? Look at verse 51. “‘He then added, ‘I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’” We must see God’s hope for the world through Jesus Christ. We must see that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. We must see that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world through his wounds and blood shed on the cross. We must see heaven open, and the light of Jesus shining into the darkness of this world. Then, we can take up our crosses of mission, and follow Jesus to the very end.

May God bless you to hear Jesus’ invitation to “come, follow him”! May God bless you to see God’s hope and vision for you, and his hope and vision for the whole world, when all men can see that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and the King of kings!