“COME AND SEE”

John 1:35–51

Key Verse: 1:39

“‘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.”

Are you “woke”? Some people are just clueless, living in their own bubble, with their own self-centered understandings, misunderstandings and prejudices, criticizing and judging. But being “woke” means being socially or culturally aware of what’s really going on in the world. It’s similar to the word “enlightened.” It means to live beyond the mundane repetitions of life, just surviving. It’s to live with an open mind, wisdom, and a deep understanding of people. Throughout history people have sought enlightenment: some, through deep meditation; others, through hallucinogenic drugs or exotic experiences. In any case, once a person is “woke,” life can never be the same. In today’s passage Jesus gains his first disciples, and they become “woke” spiritually. What’s *that*? Being “woke” is described here in the repeated word “see” (39,46,50,51). But see *what*? The verb “see” means not just to look at, but to know, to understand, to experience personally. Jesus says to these first disciples, and to each of us, “Come, and you will see.” What does it mean? How do we do that? Why should we? May God help each of us hear and accept his invitation today.

Look at verses 35,36. Just the day before, John the Baptist had said some amazing things about Jesus. He called Jesus “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” He said the Holy Spirit had come down on Jesus like a dove and remained on him. He said Jesus is “God’s Chosen One”—the Son of God. Now, the very next day, John was there again with two of his disciples, and Jesus was there, passing by. John again said to his disciples, “Look the Lamb of God!” But he wasn’t just marveling at Jesus again. He was telling his disciples to go and follow him.

Many people would like to have some followers, or at least people attached to them—close family and friends. People can get a sense of security, significance, or even some income from having a following. But John was telling two of his closest followers to leave him and go and follow Jesus. Why? Did he want to be alone? Was he tired of ministry and ready to retire? No. It was because his mission was to bring people to Jesus, the true light (1:6–9). John was humble enough to know his limitations. He knew he couldn’t really help his disciples because he was not the Messiah (1:20). We learn from John to point people, even those closest to us, to Jesus.

How did the two respond? They didn’t just say, “Oh yeah, man, wow! Look at that guy!” No, they acted. They left their beloved master John and started following Jesus. It must have been hard to do. They were attached to John, and knew next to nothing about this stranger, Jesus. But they were more committed to the truth of John’s message than to John himself. At this point they didn’t know Jesus yet, but they began following him anyway. It was a small step of faith. But this one small step changed their lives. It tells us how faith starts. It starts with listening to somebody tell us about Jesus, then taking some kind of action to try to follow him ourselves. It’s that simple.

Look at verse 38a. Jesus now had his first two followers, thanks to John the Baptist. It was awesome! These men were taking a risk, stepping out in faith to follow him. But then he asks them, “What do you want?” We may not think much of it at first, but as we think more, it may sound like he’s trying to get rid of them! Why does he start by asking this question, “What do you want?” To Jesus, our motives are most important. He wasn’t satisfied with having some impersonal followers tagging along behind him. He wanted a real, personal relationship with them. Having such a relationship could only happen if he knew their motives. It’s true in any relationship. If we’re not sure of someone’s motives, the relationship cannot but be superficial. What if the person is only forced to be with us? What if he or she is only trying to get something from us? During his ministry people came to Jesus for many things. Some wanted a miracle. Some wanted bread. Some wanted healing. Many would leave when they didn’t get what they wanted.

Jesus is asking each one of us, “What do you want?” It’s a simple question, but hard to answer. Often we don’t even know what we want. We hardly take the time to ask ourselves, “What do I really want?” But it’s especially necessary to ask ourselves if we’re really going to follow Jesus. What am I seeking most? Security? Comfort? Self-fulfillment? Having the wrong motives eventually will hinder us from truly following him.

How did these two men answer? They said, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” (38b). They’re answering his question with their own question. Are they avoiding? No, they’re actually answering. They’re saying, in a polite way, “We just want to be with you.” The Greek word here for “staying” means “remaining.” It’s the same word used in chapter 15. To remain requires time, and, a real commitment. These two men couldn’t be satisfied with just a quick conversation with Jesus along the road; they wanted to spend time really getting to know him. Remaining with Jesus is the only way to really get to know him. It’s true with anyone, right? From a distance we can have many ideas about a person, but it’s only after staying together for some time that we really get to know each other. Sadly, many people don’t spend any quality time together, so it may seem that they know each other, but they really don’t. So how can we remain with Jesus today? He’s not on earth anymore. But we can spend quality time with him as we set aside time for personal prayer and inquisitive Bible reading. We also spend time with him as we get to know those who really know him. If doing these things isn’t our priority, our relationship with him will be shallow, or even non-existent.

When they asked where he was staying, what did Jesus say? Read verse 39a. When they had the right motive, that’s when he invited them to be his disciples. He wasn’t desperate, but discerning about who would be his disciples. He sums up discipleship with this one word, “Come.” What did he mean? On the surface he meant to go with him to see where he was staying. But he meant way more than that. “Come” was an invitation to follow him, even though they couldn’t be sure where he would be taking them. It’s really hard to do. Fundamentally it means to trust Jesus and let him lead me. It means surrendering control and entrusting my future to him. It also means making him the guiding priority in my life. This is not just for special people; it’s essential in authentic Christian faith. Jesus is calling those who really want to know him, “Come!” If it’s Jesus calling me, I should be willing to go with him anywhere.

His command “Come” is coupled with a promise: “…and you will see.” Again, he meant they’d see where he was staying. But it was a much deeper promise. What would they see? Their enlightenment would be based on getting to know him personally. We can know “about” Jesus. We can have all the information and even the correct theological knowledge, but still not really know him. To “see” means to have a personal experience with Jesus. As we saw in 1:14, his disciples would “see his glory.” They would experience his grace and truth. As we saw in 1:18, they would “see” God. Jesus was promising to open their spiritual eyes.

Sight and blindness is a theme in John’s Gospel. Some people claim to see, but they remain blind. Why? Because they’re self-righteous. They can’t see God in Jesus, they’re critical of others, and they don’t know themselves. What blinds us? It can be our own desires, or our own problems. We can be blinded by negative or dark thinking, or by our pride. Being spiritually blind is related to having a hardened heart (12:40). What happens to us when we’re spiritually blind? We’re deceived and believe falsehoods. We have the wrong values. We make wrong choices. We focus our lives on foolish things. But when we follow Jesus and he enables us to see, we come to know the truth (8:31,32). We can make wise choices and devote our lives to the things that really matter. We especially can see his saving grace in our lives, the work he calls us to, and the amazing hope of his kingdom. Jesus is inviting us, “Come and you will see.”

So what happened? Look at verses 40–42a. After spending time with Jesus, Andrew “saw.” What did he see? He saw Jesus as his Messiah. He became so happy! He just had to tell someone. He wasn’t just talking to random people on the street; he went and told someone close to him, his brother Simon. He was so convinced of the truth about Jesus that he just brought his brother to Jesus. It shows us how his faith grew. His faith started because he took John the Baptist at his word. But his faith became personal after he spent time with Jesus. And then his faith became active as he shared it with someone else. Andrew is an example of real faith. Of course it’s personal. But it’s not something we can hide. It’s contagious. Intrinsically it reproduces. We can’t keep it to ourselves. It’s not just a duty. If we believe in Jesus, we really *want* others to know him, too.

John records briefly what happened when Simon first met Jesus. Look at verse 42b. Jesus gave him a new name, Peter, which means Rock. But it isn’t just information. It shows how Jesus sees people with hope. At that time Simon wasn’t much. But Jesus saw what he could become. Jesus still sees us, not in all our sins and flaws, but with God’s hope.

The story of the first disciples continues. Look at verse 43. It’s different than Andrew and his brother Peter. This time, Jesus just tells this man Philip, “Follow me.” As we’ll see later, Philip was a very intelligent man. Jesus knew what this man really needed—not talk, but a challenge to put faith into action. Look at verses 44–46. Just like Andrew, Philip goes and tells someone close to him about Jesus. His description of Jesus is much more complicated than Andrew’s, but the point is the same. And when his friend Nathanael is skeptical, Philip encourages him with Jesus’ own words, “Come and see.”

Look at verse 47. Again Jesus demonstrates how deeply he knows people and appreciates their greatness. Some people always focus on the negative, but not Jesus—he focuses on the positive in people. Nathanael wondered how Jesus could know him, so Jesus told him he saw him under a fig tree before Philip called him (48). Jesus wasn’t there to see it in person, so it means he had a supernatural knowledge. Nathanael went from being skeptical to being blown away by Jesus (49). But what seems important here is what Jesus goes on to tell Nathanael. Read verses 50,51. Jesus was again promising someone to “see.” In this case he said “greater things than these.” What are the greater things? It was a reference to Jacob’s vision, who saw a stairway to heaven. But in this case, it would be a vision of Jesus, the Son of Man, as the stairway to heaven. Nathanael would see Jesus as the only way to God, as the great Mediator between God and all human beings.

Read verse 39 again. May God help us to personally accept Jesus’ word “Come.” May we recommit to spending time with Jesus until we can truly see.