

### “The Invitation”

The gospel of John is the gospel of invitation.

In the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, when Jesus calls his disciples to follow him they pick up their bags on the spot and they leave everything in order to follow Christ.

There seems to be a real sense of urgency in those three gospels in Jesus' call to follow him. But in the gospel of John the call of Jesus is presented a little differently. The calling seems to come more along the lines of “come and check me out.” Spend some time with me and gradually, little by little, you will come to see and experience me for who I truly am.

In our text today the two disciples of John the Baptist begin to follow Jesus at John's prompting, and when they ask Jesus where he is staying at he says to them, “Come and you will see.” It is an invitation by Jesus to come and do some further investigation about who he is.

A little later in our text we see that the disciple Phillip extends the same invitation to Nathaniel that Jesus had extended to John the Baptist's two disciples.

Nathaniel doubts that Jesus is God's Messiah because he hailed from Nazareth, an insignificant little town. Every good Jew knew that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem in Judea. Consequently, Nathaniel asks Phillip, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” and Phillip's reply to him was, “Come and see.” Do some more investigating Nathaniel- dig a little deeper, hang out with him- and then you will find out whether or not anything good can come from Nazareth.

In my message this morning I want to pick up on this theme of invitation and talk about four important invitations that God gives to us this morning in the text.

#### **The Invitation to Rightly Understand the Gospel (v.35-36)**

The first invitation that goes out to us is the invitation to rightly understand the gospel. This would be v. 35-36.

God invites us all to get the gospel right this morning. The key to understanding the gospel is the words of John the Baptist. When he saw Jesus coming he said to his disciples, “Look the Lamb of God!” This declaration occurs twice in John, and it is John the Baptist who makes it both times.

When we hear this phrase our minds should go back to several images that come to us from the OT. We have already seen one of those images in our reading from Isaiah. God's suffering servant would **take** up our infirmities, **carry** our sorrows, and be **pierced** for our transgressions and **crushed** for our iniquities. Like a lamb he would be led to the slaughter on our behalf.

We can not help but think of Jesus and his agonizing death when we encounter this passage from Isaiah. On the cross Jesus Christ was crushed for our iniquities.

We should also think about the Passover meal that commemorated Israel's departure from slavery in Egypt. In that ceremony the Israelites were to take a one year old lamb without defect and they were to **shed** its blood and take some of that blood and wipe it on the doorposts of their homes so that later that night, when the death plague swept through Egypt, God would passover the Israelites, but strike down all of the firstborn in Egypt.

Here again we can not help but think of Jesus- the firstborn of all creation, the perfect, sinless Lamb of God who was without defect.

Just as God executed his justice on the sins of Egypt in the Passover event by killing their firstborn offspring, so too did God execute his justice on our sins by offering up his firstborn Son Jesus on the cross. And just as the innocent lamb shed his blood for the sins of Israel- so that Israel might be spared of the death plague- so too did Jesus, the spotless and innocent Lamb of God, shed his blood so that our sins might be spared from the death plague of hell. Our sins are forgiven, passed over.

The final image that should come to our mind is the Day of Atonement. A special day, occurring in the fall of each year, where the high priests of Israel would go into the temple, into the holy of holies, and make atonement for the sins of the people. Atonement means to be made one with God. The word atonement breaks down into at-one-ment.

In this sacrifice a goat was offered up for the sins of the people, not a lamb. But even though the animal was different two basic principles remained the same. (1) A substitute was provided. Instead of Israel having to shed her own blood for her sins, God graciously provided a substitute in her place. The goat's blood was shed instead of Israel's. (2) The sacrificial substitute was innocent. The animal, who was clean and not guilty of the sin, was the one who paid the price for the sins of the guilty party.

So when we hear the "The Lamb of God" all of these images should flood our minds and we should remember that the very core of the Biblical understanding of how one is saved, made right with God, and has one's sins forgiven, is the concept of God's justice and substitution.

God is just and holy; therefore he can not ignore our sin. Our sin must be dealt with. It must be punished lest God forfeit his holiness, something he can not do and still be God.

For God to not execute his justice on sin would be like a judge never issuing a guilty verdict. It would be a travesty of injustice.

But God is also merciful, abounding in steadfast love, and desirous of forgiving sinners.

God shows his mercy by executing his justice on sin through the sacrifice of the lamb. The lamb stands as a substitute for sinners, so that they could get grace, life, and salvation.

But all of this in the OT was simply a foreshadowing of what was to come in the person of Jesus.

Ultimately all of the ceremonies, the work of the priests, and the sacrificial animal offerings were insufficient to take away sins.

The ceremonies had to be repeated over and over. The priests themselves were sinners, thus their own sins inhibited them from making a perfect sacrifice, and the animals were simply animals and animals can not take away sins. Only God can atone for sins, thus we come to John's statement, "Look, the lamb of God."

The gospel of John tells us that Jesus Christ is God come down to us in human flesh and only he can take away our sins by his perfect, sinless, once for all sacrifice on the cross. Because he is fully God and fully human only he can **make** the perfect sinless sacrifice for us, in his divinity, and only he can **be** the perfect sinless substitute for us, in his humanity.

To get this right is to get the gospel right. Jesus Christ is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"

### **The Invitation to Go Deeper With Jesus (v.37-39)**

Our second invitation is an invitation to go deeper with Jesus.

In v.37-39 of our text the two disciples of John the Baptist are invited by Jesus to follow him more closely.

They heard John's declaration that Jesus was the Lamb of God so they were following him, but as they followed from a distance Jesus turned back to them and asked, "What do you want?"

This question by Jesus was a call to follow him more deeply, more intimately, and more closely. The disciples replied by saying, "Where are you staying?"

It is here in the English translation that we lose a little bit of the nuance that is in the original Greek manuscripts of the gospel of John.

The disciples are not asking for Jesus' street address. The Greek word that is translated as "staying" in v. 38 in the English is the same word that is used for translating the word "abiding" in John 15. It is there that Jesus talks about him being "the vine" and us being "the branches" and how it is important for us to "abide" in him lest we cut ourselves off from the source of life. Just as Jesus abides in the love and will of his heavenly Father, so too are we to abide in him.

Knowing this to be true about the original Greek it is almost as if the disciples were asking Jesus, "Where are you abiding at?" Jesus reply to them was "come and see"- I will show you where I am abiding at. I am abiding in the love and will of my heavenly Father and if you will come closer and experience that, I will usher you into that same kind of intimate relationship.

The text tells us that the two disciples responded in the affirmative to Jesus' call and they spent the whole day with him. They **abided** with him closely and Jesus ushered them into the presence of God the Father.

That is what Jesus does when we follow him closely; when we spend significant time with him. He abides with us and us with him, and he takes us up into the presence of God in a deep way.

Jesus wants us to have an intimate and deep relationship with God, not a peripheral or shallow one. That is why he calls us to go deep with him in intimacy. This will not happen without us answering the call to spend significant time with him in our lives.

### **The Invitation to Tell Others about Jesus (v.40-47)**

The third invitation from the text this morning is the invitation to tell others about Jesus. This would be v.40-47. This invitation is the natural fruit of having spent a lot of time with Jesus.

We talked about this a lot last week as we considered the ministry of John the Baptist.

He was the one God sent to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus.

That's all John did, he pointed people to Christ. We see him doing this again in the beginning of our text, "Look, the Lamb of God!" But our text goes even further. The fire that burned within John's bones began to burn within the bones of those two disciples whom he had pointed to Jesus.

The first one is unnamed, but he is the author of this gospel. He is John the beloved apostle (not to be confused with John the Baptist) and at the end of his gospel he tells us why he wrote it.

- But these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you may have life in his name. – John 20:31

So from this, we know the apostle John's aim in life was to testify about Jesus, just like John the Baptist in his ministry of preparation.

The other disciple is named. He is Andrew and the first thing he did, after having abided with Jesus, is he went out and told his brother Simon.

Andrew brought Simon to Jesus and Jesus named him Peter (rock) and changed his life.

Next there is Phillip. Phillip, after having answered the call to follow Jesus in v. 43, did the same thing as Andrew. He went out and found Nathaniel and told him about Jesus.

Nathaniel, at first, was resistant to the gospel, but Phillip asked Nathaniel to do the same thing that Jesus asked John the Apostle and Andrew to do, "Come and see." Investigate Jesus, check him out, spend time with him and see if he is not who he says he is.

In any case, the point here is that we are all called to be evangelists. Who might you invite to church this week? Who might you share the love of Christ with? Who is God putting in your path that needs to hear the good news that their sins can be forgiven through the blood of Christ?

### **The Invitation to See Greater Things (Spiritual Truths) (v.48-50)**

The final invitation that God extends to us is the invitation to see greater, deeper things in our faith. This would be v.48-50.

Nathaniel was blown away that Jesus understood his inner nature and motives, though he had never met him.

Jesus saw him sitting under the fig tree and called him a true Israelite- “a man in whom there was nothing false.” (v.47)

This was an interesting thing for Jesus to say about him in light of the fact that, at first, Nathaniel did not believe. But Jesus said this probably because Nathaniel was studying the scriptures under the fig tree (often times that is what people did if they sat under one) and he could see inside his heart a sincere desire to know the truth of God’s word. We don’t know this for sure, but for whatever reason Nathaniel felt like Jesus was reading him like a book. This led to his believing.

But Jesus told Nathaniel that he hadn’t seen anything yet! There would be greater, deeper truths to come if he would continue to believe and abide in him. Nathaniel would come to understand in a deeper way the purpose of Jesus’ coming into the world.

Jesus came to be our mediator between God and man, and that is why Jesus cites this OT imagery from the dream of Jacobs’s ladder, where the angels are ascending and descending on it. That’s what Jesus came to do. He has come down to **descend** upon us so that he could **ascend** us up back into the presence of God through his death on the cross.

The Lord wants us to know and experience the deeper truths of the faith. We are not to remain as spiritual babies, nor are we to get stuck on the elementary truths of Christianity. God wants to reveal to us deeper truth so that we may grow up into maturity in Jesus Christ.

God wants to show us greater things but we must believe and abide. There are great spiritual blessings awaiting the Christian who will do this.

### **Conclusion and Application of the Text**

Let us now consider briefly how this text might apply to our Christian lives.

First, do you understand the gospel? Do you understand why Jesus had to die on the cross? Do you understand why the writer of Hebrews (picking up on the sacrificial imagery of the OT) said that “without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of sins.” ? (Heb. 9:22) Do you really grasp the weight of what your sin cost Jesus, the eternal Son of God, on the cross? Many men were crucified in his day, but only one was innocent and only one was God in human flesh.

Do you get that he paid your death penalty in full, so that you do not have to die? Do you believe in the Lamb of God who takes away your sins?

Second, today is Rally Day. God has extended an invitation to us through the scriptures this morning to (1) rightly understand the gospel (2) to go deeper in our relationship with Jesus (3) to share him with others and (4) to learn greater spiritual truths in our faith.

Our Sunday School classes can help you in every one of those facets in your Christian life. I want to encourage you to commit yourself to one of our classes so that you can experience these wonderful invitations that God extends to us today.

May God grant us grace to obey His Word.

Amen.