

Finding Christ

John 1:19-51

Key Verse: 1:34

"I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

Last week, Bob went over the prologue of John's gospel. It's like a preview for a movie. The entire plot of the story is summed up in a couple of minutes and it whets your appetite to want to see more. We have Jesus, the Word, the Logos, the binding element to the whole universe come into his creation to become a man and make his dwelling among us. To those who would receive him and believe in his name, he would grant them the opportunity to become children of grace, children of truth...to become children of God. It's a grand concept that is brought right at the beginning of the gospel: God came as a bag of meat to allow other bags of meat to become God's children. Now, that's enticing. It's a golden opportunity that has no comparison. A life without decay, a life without pain, a life without sorrow, a life without sin: that's what was being promised right there in the first eighteen verses. It's meant to get you drooling and wanting to know more. It's meant for you to want to find this Christ, to find the One and Only. In this passage, six people have been longing to find the Christ and they find him; they find him in very different ways. Let's see how God works to help people find Christ.

The passage begins, "Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Messiah.'" (19-20) In the prologue, last week, we caught a glimpse of a man named John, John the Baptist. He wasn't the author of the gospel, but another John. This John was very interesting. He was the son of a priest, but God had chosen him for a special purpose before he was born. He was to be the forerunner of God's Holy One. He would prepare people's hearts for the coming of God. To that end, John lived like a hermit. He lived in the desert eating bugs and sugar with clothes made of camel's hair. He probably looked quite strange, maybe similar to some of the homeless people of our day, and he would call people to repent of their sins and baptize them as a confession of their sin. He looked like a crazy, wild-eyed homeless guy that yelled at you to repent of the evil inside of you and then dunked you in water when you agreed with him. Despite his unorthodox methods, John's message of repentance resonated with the people and many came to confess their sins and be baptized. There were so many people coming to John that it caught the attention of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. His popularity and message got them to wonder if John was the Christ, so they sent an envoy to find out more about John. However, before they could even ask the question, John freely said that he was not the Messiah, which is the Hebrew for Christ.

Then, they proceeded to ask him, "'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.'" (21) The religious leaders knew that there were many figures that were promised to come. One was the Christ; another was Elijah. He was a prophet of God, but he never actually died; God took him into heaven. It was promised that he would return before the Christ would come (Malachi 4:5-6). Then, naturally, the leaders wondered if John was Elijah. He said, "No," and they turned to the next question. The leaders were wrong on all accounts, and finally, they became fed up and just wanted to know who John was. "John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Make straight the way for the Lord."'" (23) John's point for baptizing was to prepare people's hearts for the coming of the Lord. He was to be like a herald announcing the coming of a king. That was his point, his purpose. Everything else was superfluous.

Now, the guys who had come to question John weren't interested in finding the Christ. They were religious people who were interested in the performance of religious duties and adhering to the law. When John came baptizing people, they wanted to know why John was baptizing. Who had given him the authority to baptize? Why is he doing it? They didn't give him a license to baptize, so they wanted to know who did? And John gave them the answer, "'I baptize with water,' John replied, 'but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'" (26-27) John told them that there was someone who he was not worthy to perform a slave's duty on, and that person was the one who had given him the authority. The men who came to John took the answer, and they were probably totally confused, and went back to Jerusalem. They weren't looking for Christ and they didn't find him.

The very next day John had found what he was looking for. "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.'" (29-31) It was a momentous occasion. In front of everyone who had been following him, John announced that Jesus was the one he was waiting for. John calls him the Lamb of God and the whole reason he was baptizing was to find that Lamb. The term "Lamb of God" has special significance to Jews. It harkens back to the time of Moses and Exodus. When Israel was a slave of the Egyptians, God chose to rescue them from their slavery, lead them to the Promised Land and make Israel his own. This led to a series of plagues on the Egyptians to show that God is the one true God. The final plague was against the firstborn of everybody in the land. God would stretch out his hand of wrath, but he gave his people a way to be protected from his wrath. Israel was to take a lamb and mark the doorframes of any Israelite house. Any house marked with the blood of the lamb would be passed over by God's wrath. The blood of the lamb would save anyone who trusted God from a life of slavery. Similarly, anyone marked with Jesus' blood would save them from a life of slavery to sin and lead them to eternal life in a new Promised Land.

John was intentionally evoking this imagery from the Bible to help the people understand that Jesus was the one the people were waiting for, but he didn't stop there. "Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit." I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One.'" (32-34) John didn't know who the Christ was. He was baptizing so that he could find him. God had given him a sign to look for: the Spirit would come down like a dove and remain on the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. When John saw this sign, he knew that Jesus was God's Chosen One. Now, "Chosen One", "Anointed One", "Christ", "Messiah", and "Son of God" are all synonymous with each other...they mean the same thing that Jesus was the promised savior of the world.

In the realm of technology and gadgets, John would be known as an early-adopter. When new technology comes out, there are some people who instantly recognize the potential and go out and buy the product. These are the ones who line up outside stores for new iPhones on launch day. Or they are the people who go to the midnight screening of a movie to be among the first to see it. John was an early-adopter. He recognized Jesus as the Lamb of God before God's sign came. He was the first one to find the Christ. Look in the Bible and you won't find anyone earlier than John. You might think, "Wait, there were two people who knew that Jesus was the Christ when he was eight days old." That's true, but John still has them beat. John and Jesus are related and are about six months apart in age. When John was in the womb, Jesus' mother came to stay with John's mother. When Mary came, John was doing somersaults in womb because he knew that the Christ was in the womb next door. That's pretty early.

Is anybody here an early-adopter? Well, let me ask you this: who has a Google+ account? Who has a 4G phone? Who uses LED light bulbs in their home? If you don't have any of those, then you are not an early-adopter? If you don't know what I am talking about, then you really aren't an early-adopter, but it's not a big deal. John's own disciples were not early-adopters either. When John testified about who Jesus was, nobody went to follow Jesus. They all stuck by John. It wasn't until the next day that some of John's disciples found the Christ. "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!' When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus." (35-37) Finally, two guys want to find out what John is talking about. Finally, two guys set out to follow Jesus. When Jesus sees these guys, he asks them why they are following him. Jesus doesn't say it in a rude sense, but in an honest and sincere desire for them to answer in their hearts, "What do you want from Jesus? Why are you following Jesus?"

In response, the two guys ask Jesus where he is staying. This wasn't small talk, like asking how the weather was or what neighborhood you live in. In Jewish culture, their question showed a sincere desire to get to know who Jesus was. They wanted to spend time with him and find out for themselves if Jesus was the Christ. So Jesus invited them to come and see where he was staying. It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon when this happened and they spent the rest of the day with him. The three of

them sat down and had some dinner together and you can only wonder what they talked about. By the time the meal was over and they were done talking, the two guys were convinced that Jesus was the Christ and they were so excited about it. Their hearts were so yearning to find the Christ that, when they found him, they were overflowing with joy and had to go tell someone. Now, one of the two guys is named Andrew and the other guy is unnamed, but it is pretty certain that the other person is the author of the gospel John. So, Andrew leaves Jesus and he goes and finds his brother Simon and tells him, **“We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ).”** (41) It’s amazing to think that in the space of a couple of hours, Andrew is certain that Jesus is the Christ and he has to go and tell somebody, and the first person to pop into his mind was Simon. Andrew, then, brings Simon to Jesus, and Jesus gives Simon a new name, Cephas or Peter. The author John just sort of throws this name change in here, but it really shows that Simon had also found the Christ. By Jesus giving Simon a new name, he is, among other things, signifying that Simon now belongs to Jesus.

“The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, ‘Follow me.” (43) Philip was from the same town as Andrew and Peter. They probably knew each other. When Jesus finds him, he calls out to Philip with a simple “Follow me”. It’s different from how Andrew and John and Peter came to know Christ, and we can really see that Jesus speaks to people in the way that they need. I don’t know how long Philip spent with Jesus, but not long after his calling Philip goes out to find Nathanael and says to him, **“We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”** (45) Again, there is this concept of finding the one Moses wrote about in the Law. As we learned a few weeks ago, everything in the Scripture testifies to the Christ. Apparently, Philip and Nathanael had some familiarity with Scripture and their hearts longed for the coming of the Christ. Like Andrew, Philip was elated at the idea of finding the Messiah that he had to go tell someone, this time that was Nathanael.

Nathanael was a little skeptical. **“‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Nathanael asked.”** (46) Nazareth was a tiny town in the country with little worth. It elicited the same sort of thoughts as saying you were from Arkansas or West Virginia, somewhere deep in the back woods where electricity is questionable and contact with the outside world is minimal. This is what John 1:10 was referring to: **“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.”** Also, Isaiah 53:2 says, **“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”** It’s no wonder that Nathanael was so skeptical, but that didn’t stop Philip from encouraging Nathanael to find out for himself.

“When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, ‘Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” (47) Jesus knew Nathanael; he was skeptical but he spoke his mind. There was no duplicity on his lips. Although he was wrong about Jesus, Nathanael had a redeeming quality of being the kind of guy where what you see is what you get. Nathanael really felt like Jesus understood who he was, and then he declared that Jesus was the Son of God. Nathanael was certain that he had found the Christ.

I’ve said that term a lot, “finding Christ”. It’s the title of the message and six separate people find the Christ in this passage: John the Baptist, Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. It really seems to be the underlying theme of this passage, but you might be wondering why you should care about this. Why is it so important to find Christ? In short, we live in a broken world. A long time ago, and every day since, we’ve sought our own interests and walked away from God our creator. When we did that and when we do that, we walk away from God’s protection and repeatedly wound ourselves, while even nature rebels against us. The Bible says about people, **“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.”** (Romans 1:21-25) We became fools thinking that we don’t need God and God just let us go. When we left, we just fell in deeper and deeper and we didn’t even know it until we are drowning in the filth that surrounds us. At that point, you are so overwhelmed and there is nothing

that you can do to dig yourself out. Your hands are useless and your eyes are searching for help. Paul wrote, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25)

We need a Christ because we can't save ourselves from the miry gunk that we have gotten ourselves into. We need someone to save us! We need someone to take away our sin! We need someone to pick us up and put us on solid ground! We need someone to heal us, to redeem us, to make us new. That is why we need Christ. Only Jesus is able to satisfy that need. As John called him, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away sin. Jesus is pure and blameless, and he is the only one to walk the earth sinless. Although he was tempted in every way, Jesus did not sin by giving in to that temptation. Because Jesus is outside the cycle of sin that we find ourselves in, he is the only one can rescue us from that cycle. Like the Passover lamb, Jesus' blood (the blood he spilled on the cross) marks us as God's children and begins the process of restoring our lives to eternal quality.

The people in this passage knew their need for a Christ. Look at John the Baptist's ministry. His message was a message of repentance. People flocked to John because they felt the burden of their sins on their soul. The people looked around at the world they were in. Their nation was occupied by Rome and the political and religious leaders seemed to only care about their own interests. Everyone was using their position to fatten their own pockets. The people may have complained about their situation. It was all about the people in power's fault, but when John came with a message about repentance, it tugged at their heart. The people didn't need better leaders or to have the Romans removed, they needed Christ. They needed salvation from their sins. A change in their circumstances would not remove the burden from their hearts. The burdens on their hearts were not caused by external circumstances, but they were the result of sin. Somewhere inside the people knew that, and they came to John seeking the removal of sin. John, then, pointed them to the Lamb of God, the Son of God. He pointed them to the Christ; he pointed them to Jesus. It's what all humanity is searching for.

About eleven years ago, I started studying the Bible. I had no altruistic reason to come to Bible study. I didn't know what I needed. I was asked multiple times to Bible study and, each time, I refused. However, God was working in my heart, filling it with burden. Then, one day I made a friend late to Bible study and when she returned, this friend asked me if I would like to study the Bible, I had no reason to refuse any more. Now my heart yearned for something but I didn't know what it was. I had two years of Bible study with little or no fruit. I couldn't tell you why I kept coming back. It wasn't until I saw the fruit of my sin...until I saw the fullness of my depravity...that I realized what was missing was Christ. Actually, I knew something was missing, but it took a while to realize what I needed was Christ to save me. I kept wounding myself and only Jesus could stop me and heal me. Even today, I find myself needing to find Christ. It doesn't stop because I found him once. Right now, there is a lot of stress and changes going on. My family struggles financially mostly due debt that I accumulated in past sin. There are times we have trouble making ends meet. Plus, we have a beautiful four and a half month old baby girl. She's a wonderful blessing, but as the parents in the room know, it's stressful because there is always something new everyday. She doesn't eat well, she doesn't sleep, she wants to be held, and now she's wailing at the top of her lungs for a reason we can't figure out. On top of all that, my wife headed back to school last week. Our schedules just exploded and we are trying to figure things out newly. We are burdened and weary, but it is not from our circumstances. It's my sin that causes me to have a quick temper. It's my sins that cause me to be worn out. My circumstances only bring out what is already on the inside. My circumstances actually show me my need for Christ everyday and I have to find him. He's the only one that can help.

What about you? How is your life? We all have burdens; where does yours lie? The world likes to tell us that we have to be the best at everything we do. People want to have sculpted muscles and a fit body so they spend hours a day working out. Other people want to have the best grades possible so they study everyday throughout the night. Some want the nice house, the nice life and break their backs working to get the 60-inch flat screen and Lexus or BMW that they want. People feel that they have to have these things. There is nothing wrong with being fit, doing well in schools or having nice things, but the world places this burden on our hearts by getting us to think that they are necessary. Then, when we fall short, and we will fall short, we fall into despair. It's not the circumstances that are the problem. The

events of our lives help us to see that we have a bigger problem. We need Jesus and we have to find him.

Now, in this passage, six people found Jesus in different ways. John the Baptist, the early-adopter, was able to see from a distance and was given a sign from God that Jesus was the Christ. Andrew and John found the Christ after having dinner with Jesus. Peter found the Messiah when his brother brought him to Jesus and Jesus gave him a new name. Jesus told Philip to follow him and then Philip knew that Jesus was the Promised One. Jesus knew Nathanael before he came to Jesus and Nathanael was surprised and knew that Jesus was the Son of God. Each of them found Christ and they found him in different ways. I am certain that everybody here that found Christ has found him in different ways just like the six in this passage.

We need Jesus; we need the Christ. He's the only one who can rescue us from drowning in the filth that we find ourselves in. Whether you have never found Christ before or you've walked with him for decades, it's not hard to find Christ. Look at this passage; Jesus came to those who found him. Each person was searching for the Christ, but ultimately Jesus appeared to them. They didn't have to search very far. Jesus, himself, said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8) When we seek Jesus, he makes sure that we are able to find him. He does not hiding. Jesus is standing at the door waiting for you to let him in. He 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 that person, and they with me." (Revelation 3:30) You need the Christ in your life. It's the missing piece. You need the Lamb of God to take away your sin. Recognize your need and see the Lamb approaching you with his arms wide open. Praise the Lord! You have found the Christ.