

A Life-changing Encounter
John 1: 35-51
September 6, 2009

In John's Gospel, Chapter One, some disciples of John the Baptist have what seems on the surface to be a casual introduction to the man John has proclaimed the "Lamb of God!" This potent claim – harkening back to the Paschal Lamb in the Passover meal – triggers a reaction by the men, and as a result they would embark on a three year odyssey that would forever change their destinies.

It occurs to me that God desires precisely this same life-changing encounter with every person. Every Believer can recall their personal "John the Baptist" who pointed them toward Jesus and said, "Look there, that's Jesus; He's the Son of God!" And that sparked their life-changing encounter with the Savior.

As we examine the encounter these men had with Jesus in John 1: 35 – 51, I would like to point out three statements Jesus made that I believe are common to every life-changing encounter down through the centuries. It's not surprising that God would know precisely what to ask us in order to get to the heart of our needs. After all, He made us, shaped us in our mother's womb, and endowed us with all the components of our personalities.

In this passage Jesus asks a question, issues an invitation, and then makes a promise. Together, these three statements shape a life-changing encounter.

1. A Question: "What are you looking for?" (John 1: 38).

A. Upon seeing the two fellows approaching, Jesus asks, "What do you seek?" That seems to me rather odd, given that Jesus, as God-in-flesh, knew all about them. But upon further review, I see the question is for their benefit.

1. Jesus wanted them to examine their motives for seeking Him out.
2. Were they star-struck autograph seekers? Were they merely seeking a vicarious thrill? Were they curious about John's provocative statement about Jesus?
3. Or were they in fact seeking a deeper spiritual meaning and purpose, based on the foundation John had laid in their lives?

B. Many people have approached Jesus over the centuries, and their reasons for doing so are legion: academic curiosity; hoping to co-opt His ability to perform miracles; or perhaps to help them rehabilitate their emotional or moral failures.

1. But God desires something more profound. He desires to fill the deepest, emptiest places in men's hearts and souls.
2. God knows we all are seeking love, acceptance, peace, and purpose. But we are unwilling to admit those are missing in our life.

3. The beginning of a new life is the admission I am seeking to fill the empty places in my heart and soul.

2. An Invitation: “Come and See” (v. 39)

A. Here, at the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus shows His approachability. He isn't irritated by the interruption; it is as if He was expected them to come. But of course He did know!

B. The invitation is to come closer, to spend time with Jesus. And this is the critical difference for any person coming into casual contact with Jesus. The closer we come to Him, the more intimately we become with Him in a daily routine, the more likely we will be changed by Him.

C. What did these men learn about Jesus? Obviously they learned He knew far more about them than an ordinary man would know. He instantly knew about their strengths and weaknesses, and He seemed to see right into their souls.

D. Their time spent with Jesus convinced them Jesus was likely more than a great teacher; they sought out friends and relatives to share their growing excitement about Jesus.

1. But I think at this point, their faith was still embryonic. There was much they didn't yet know about who Jesus was, or what His mission was.

2. Even when Nathaniel reacted to Jesus' saying he had been sitting under a fig tree when Philip called him to come see Jesus, his profession was weak and uninformed.

E. But any spiritual journey has to begin somewhere. These men had to respond at the level where they were. They responded in faith, and that is all God asks of us.

1. I am glad God didn't require me to take a Bible knowledge test, or answer a series of theological questions in order to be a child of God. He simply invited me to trust and obey, believing in faith in Him.

3. A Promise: “You will see greater things.” (v. 50)

A. Jesus rewards Nathaniel's simple profession of Jesus as the Son of God by promising he will witness “greater things than these.”

1. I believe He meant that following Him would mean the disciples would see Jesus in His full role as Savior, Lord, and God. He boldly predicted they would witness the heavens literally opening and Jesus acting in all His glory as eternal God.

B. And would they ever! Allow me to give you three of the most obvious examples:

1. Mark 9: 1 – 8: Jesus took Peter, James and John on a mountain, where He was transfigured before their astonished eyes into His glorified state, conversing with Moses and Elijah; a voice said, “This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.”

2. Mark 16: 1: - 14: Jesus, after being crucified, is raised from the dead, as He had said He would, and appeared multiple times to His confused, doubting disciples.

3. Acts 1: 9 – 11: Jesus ascends into heaven in full view of the disciples.

C. Countless times in those three years the disciples witnessed demonstrations of Jesus' deity and sovereignty. But the witnessing of Jesus' deity didn't end with His physical ascension.

1. Acts Chapter Two relates how, while waiting further instructions, the infant church was filled with power by the Holy Spirit – certainly a greater thing than what they saw in John Chapter One!

2. Over and over the disciples of Jesus saw great and awesome things Jesus did. But perhaps the greatest of all was what John saw in a vision on the Island of Patmos, when he saw the Son of God in the new Jerusalem, and the convocation of the redeemed from every tribe and nation before the throne, and hears Jesus say, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Revelation 22: 13)."

You see, when Jesus said, "Greater things than this will you see," He was not talking about trifling matters. He was in fact speaking of doing what only God can do: to forgive sinners; and to give them a new, eternal life. And that is what He wants to do in your life as well.

Sadly, I believe many people only experience a superficial, passing encounter with Jesus. He is nothing more than a momentary interest in the stream of their life's experience. And afterwards, they move on, still seeking for meaning and purpose, still hungering for peace and love. Jesus desires to have that life-changing experience with you. Seek him while He can still be found, and let Him change your life and destiny.

Let's pray!