

Seeing is Believing: The Importance of Seeing Jesus in God's Word

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Our sermon series is called "Seeing is Believing." And this week we will see why.

Throughout John 1, we see how John leads his readers to look at Jesus. This is achieved by an overwhelming attention to words that focus on seeing and actions that facilitate sight. Consider a few ways this happens.

First, you have fourteen places where sight is mentioned explicitly.

1. John **saw** Jesus coming toward him (v. 29)
2. John cries out, "**Behold**, the lamb of God" (v. 29)
3. John says, "I have **seen** and borne witness . . ." (v. 34)
4. John **looked** (*emblepō* = *looked intently*) at Jesus . . . (v. 35)
5. John says to his disciples, "**Behold**, the Lamb of God" (v. 36)
6. Jesus turned and **saw** Andrew and another disciple following him (v. 38)
7. Jesus replied, "Come and you will **see**" (v. 39)
8. So Andrew and the other disciple came and **saw** (v. 39)
9. Jesus looked (*emblepō* = *looked intently*) at Peter (v. 42)
10. Philip to Nathanael, said, "Come and **see**" (v. 46)
11. Jesus **saw** Nathanael (v. 47)
12. Jesus said, ". . . I **saw** you" (v. 48)
13. Jesus: "Because I said, I **saw** you . . ." (v. 50)
14. Jesus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, you **will see** heaven opened . . ." (v. 51)

Second, you have disciples "finding" the messiah (v. 41) and finding others (Andrew finding his brother Peter and Philip finding Nathanael) and bringing them to Jesus (vv. 41–42). Then, in the presence of Jesus, we see how Nathanael's blindness is removed, as Jesus introduces himself to "the true Israelite." All in all, these three days of witness (vv. 29–51) are filled with light.

By contrast, Day 1 is dark (vv. 19–28). As the Pharisees, priests, and Levites come to Jesus there is no understanding. John even says, "among you stands one you do not know" (v. 26), one who is greater than John (v. 27). Whether this is on purpose or not, the effect of no sight words in Day 1 and copious number of sight words in Days 2–4 indicates light has come into the world, but not everyone benefits from the light.

As we will continue to see, John makes grand use of light and darkness in his Gospel. And here, John shows how light is being seen and shared with those who are following Jesus. As John 7:17–18 will say later, "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on

his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood."

This sort of sifting between those who see and believe and those who don't is already happening in John 1. And it calls us, the reader, to pay attention to what John wants us to see. But what does John want us to see?

In Days 3 and 4, there is a peculiar pattern of people being brought to Jesus *and* Jesus seeking people too---if Jesus, not Andrew, is the subject in v. 43. If Andrew is the subject, as some believe, then everyone comes to Jesus at the request of someone else. Either way, sight is brought to people; it does occur by itself.

Consider how this looks.

- John tells his 2 disciples, Jesus is the Lamb of God and they follow him. (vv. 35–37)
- Andrew finds his brother Peter and brings him to Jesus. (vv. 41–42)
- Andrew / Jesus calls Philip to follow Christ. (v. 43)
- Philip proceeds to find Nathanael and bring him to Jesus. (vv. 45–46)

Interestingly, no one is persuaded by argumentation in John 1. When Nathanael questions whether something good can originate from Nazareth, Philip doesn't philosophize. He simply invites the skeptic to come and see. And being seen by Jesus, while under the fig tree, his opinion changes.

In these episodes, faith is granted through a personal encounter with Christ. This is true with Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. None are won over by argumentation, all are brought to following Jesus by introducing others to Jesus. Such an observation explains why John will go on in his Gospel to recount multiple testimonies of people encountering the Son.

At the same time, there is a practical lesson here. The greatest argument for Jesus is Jesus himself. While moral arguments for the origin of goodness have their place; they are impotent to save. Only when people are led to Jesus; only when Jesus seeks his people and shows himself to them through the testimony of his followers is faith given. Thus, in these chapters we see how God makes disciples and grows his church.

Faith is a product of being seen by Jesus. It is striking that when Jesus sets his eyes on Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael, these men are brought to faith—i.e., they see who Jesus is. It's not too much to say that their sight of him is a response to his sight of them. And John is recording all of these "sights" so that his readers would see Jesus too.

So take up John's Gospel to see what he shows you. This Sunday we will consider his words more and pray that God would give us greater faith through a greater sight of Christ.

For His Glory and your joy,
Pastor David