

All In: #2 “Follow Me” – John 1:1-5, 14

Dr. Matthew Cassidy – 9/4/2011

Good morning everyone. Today we are going to start our discovery in the book of John, chapter 1.

Let me tell you a little about how to read this book and we will be looking at the book of John for the whole semester, to December. It is a fascinating book and is quite often called the hardest book to teach but the easiest book to read.

One of the scholars who wrote a giant commentary on it, Leon Morris, said: John is a book like a pool that is friendly enough for a child to wade in but deep enough for an elephant to drown in.

It is a mystical book. There are four biographies of the life of Jesus Christ in the Bible. The first three – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – run in chronological order for the most part. They have a theme of just telling the story.

John has a different objective altogether. He is trying to give us a look at Jesus that the other three do not. He has a theme of belief and how people come to belief. He has this value of being All In in his discussion of people who run into Jesus. People are either all in or all out with Him.

When we look at the first few verses there, in the prologue, John tells us what he is up to in all of his teaching. You can see the magnitude of this man Jesus Christ in just the first few verses. I will read verses 1-5 and then skip to verse 14 where he summarizes the theme of his book.

John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

1:14 The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, **full of grace and truth.**

The Word became flesh – God in skin and He was full of grace and truth.

Part One: Jesus, Full of Grace & Truth; Image of God

It is very common for all of us to imagine what God is like. It is no wonder that the second of the Ten Commandments says, “You shall make no graven images of Me.” Because there is nothing you can chisel or whittle that would look like the majesty and grandeur of who God is.

In our minds, whether Greeks or whatever it might be in the history of mankind, we project some kind of likeness to God. It is usually like a cosmic exaggeration of who we are, our personalities or our temperaments, whatever they might be. It is an animated man.

What is interesting here is that God does just the opposite. God sends His likeness – Jesus is His likeness – this humble man, a modest man, a meek man, with tremendous power but yet He stoops to His knees to wash the feet of the man who will betray Him. It is not like man to do this but it is like God to do what He has done in Jesus.

So, if you want to know what God is like, John is saying – look at what Jesus is like. The Bible says He is full of grace and truth.

So, if you want to know what God loves, you look at what Jesus loves.

If you want to know what causes God sorrow in life, you look where Jesus is tear-filled.

If you want to know what God is like in His mercy, look at how Jesus grants mercy to people. John is saying Jesus is full of this mercy and truth too.

If you want to know about the holiness of God, you go to what angers Jesus because that angers God.

When John writes about holiness, he will use a word called “light.” John has about five words that he uses a lot. We will look at one in a few minutes. But one of those words is light – He is the Light of the world. The Light came to darkness and darkness did not know Him because He is holy and those not holy could not acknowledge Him.

So if you want to know what angers God, that is what angered Jesus. Here is what is fun about that. Hopefully, it angers you. You will see Jesus tear a place apart a couple of times in the book of John. If you hate religion, you can get in line behind Jesus. He hates it too. He hates the manmade set of rules and people using it for power and adulterating the things He has said. He hates it too. You can enjoy that.

When you read the book of John, the point in the first few verses is His being full of truth and mercy, look for those two attributes. That is why he puts it there in verse 14. Look for mercy and truth.

Also, in the dynamic that John has for us when he writes, he wants us to emulate and to act like Jesus. When we do, we are supposed to be doing this mercy and truth. We find ourselves gravitating towards mercy but it has no backbone; it is at the expense of truth and that does not serve anyone. Then there is rigid truth but it is so harsh that it does not reflect God’s truth at all. So, most of us are negotiating this tight rope act between mercy and truth. – But Jesus does this perfectly. If you want to see what God is

like in that balance, you look at the life of Jesus Christ. If you want to know how you can live that life, you look at the life of Jesus Christ.

Part Two: Response to meeting Jesus

What happens? There is a break in the story after verse 18. What happens when the Word became flesh, when all of mercy and truth show up? How do people respond to that. The rest of the chapter is focused on that very question.

I want you to see how quickly this book is moving – how intense the story, the plot itself is moving quickly along. What is John trying to communicate to us?

John 1:35-43 The next day John the Baptist 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.

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”

They said, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?”

“Come,” He replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where He was staying, and stayed that day with Him. It was about the tenth hour (4:00 pm).

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, He said to him, “Follow Me.”

And Philip does ... follow him.

What I want you to see here is that John is writing this book. In the very first chapter, he has this prologue that tells of the greatness and majesty of Jesus. He created all things. There is not a thing that was created that was not created by Jesus Christ.

Then all of a sudden, John says in verse 29 – “the next day” – and again in verse 35 – “the next day” – and in verse 43 – “the next day.” In four days, Jesus is going to pick up five disciples.

It is a fast moving book. John does not have time to tell you about the birth story. That is too slow moving for him. Christmas songs don’t have enough pep. So John gets right on to the adult life of Jesus

Christ who is walking around saying – *Come and see*. And people say *Okay. Come and follow Me*. And they do.

You can see the pattern. When Jesus runs into someone, they stop everything they are doing. Then they follow Him. Then they tell as many people as they can. That is what you see when you are looking at this.

With each encounter, there is the (1) simple presentation of truth (Come and see). (2) There is a response from the hearer. (3) Then there is a decision to follow.

You look at Andrew and John who are following John the Baptist. John the Baptist does what he is supposed to do. He is pointing people to the coming Messiah. These people are seeking truth, the promises of God. John the Baptist says – My job is done here. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” So John and Andrew immediately drop everything and then go to Jesus. They have this conversation which is rather quick. Then there is the response.

Jesus asks: What are you guys doing? Do you need something?

Andrew & John: Yeah, we want to know where you are staying.

Jesus: Come and see.

They come and see. They stayed where Jesus was staying.

Then what happens? They were formerly John the Baptist’s followers and now they are Jesus’ followers.

John 1:41, 42 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).

From John’s point of view, He is clearly a mystic. He sees things that other people don’t see. It is more than the plot. It is what is going on in the spiritual world. Jesus sees into the soul of Simon and sees what no one else sees – not where Simon is but where Simon will be. While everyone else sees a volatile individual who is impetuous and not very dependable, maybe having somewhat of a temper, Jesus says: Simon, son of John, I am going to name you Rocky. I am going to build everything on your character, who you are and what you say.

I’m sure Simon’s brothers and friends were going: Wait, what?

It was common for people of superiority to give nicknames to someone like this. So Peter is off and running.

One writer says: No man did a greater service to the church than did Andrew by introducing Peter to Jesus.

When you introduce people to Jesus, there is no telling the impact you could have on the world because of doing what Andrew did. Every time you see Andrew's name, he is telling somebody about Jesus. He says – Come and see.

Part Three: Nathanael's Response

The story continues in verse 43 and it is now Philip and Nathanael.

John 1:43-51 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, He said to him, "Follow me."

And he does ... follow Him.

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told 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."

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

What ever!

"Come and see," said Philip.

There it is again.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

"How do You know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."

The wheels are turning in Nathanael's head. He thinks – Wait a minute. When I was under that fig tree, that was when I was meditating on the Law and the prophet. That is when I was praying my prayers. The only person who could possibly have seen me or heard me was God. Wow! That makes You God. – Nathanael draws that conclusion and says, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God and the King of Israel." You heard my prayers. I am just wondering if you heard that little wisecrack I said about Nazareth. I was just kind of kidding around. Nazareth – I love that town, really.

But the story comes to a climax in verses 50 and 51. It is a great summary of the power of Jesus Christ in the lives of the people that He bumps into. This is classic in that it is not just for this story line but in our story as well.

John 1:50, 51 Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.” He then added, “I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

You Jewish guys know that story, right?

In Genesis 28:12 where Jacob is on the run, scared, because he is such a conniving individual. He cheats and lies to even his family members. So Jacob goes to bed on his first night away, on the run, and is in turmoil about whether God is present in his life. In his first dream on the lam, heaven opens up and a ladder being there, stretching from earth to heaven and angels are going up and down on that.

Jesus is saying in this passage that the dream says: I am with you Jacob, even in this state of sin. I am with you; I am here.

Jesus is saying: You know that story? I am that ladder. I am the one who connects heaven and hell. I am the one who will bridge the gap between eternity and the temple. I am the one who will reconcile man with God. I am that Man. I am Him. And if you are impressed with things like Me being able to see you under this tree where you thought you were invisible, you haven't seen anything yet. Just hold on, little buddy, and you will see great things happen.

Two Applications

Here are a couple of quick applications that I want you to see, in observing these things and studying the passage in detail and actually the book itself.

The first one has to do with inviting people to understand Jesus. John is trying to show us that it is not that difficult. He says – Just come and see. Jesus says – Come and see. Just let me go around and you hang out with Me; you follow Me; and you make your own conclusion.

Friends, I think a lot of times that is all you and I have to do, at work or in our neighborhoods or with family members. Why don't you just come and see? Sometimes come and see can be – just come to church. We will read stuff out of the Bible and you make up your own mind. You can say come and see to a Bible study. At our church we have these Bible studies and we want you to study the Bible. Or you could even invite a person to your house and say – Why don't we just go through the book of John together? Come and see.

The point here is – let Jesus do the talking. Jesus says, come and see; you follow Me. Other people in the story like Philip and Andrew are saying – come and see Jesus. That is what we are supposed to do. We are just supposed to point people to the words of Jesus the Christ.

There is a rather famous debater of Christianity who comes to the University of Texas every year in the fall. He is a brilliant individual and can answer just about any question posed to him by a cynical audience down there. But the first time I watched him, I thought – Wait a minute. He is a sly dog because most of the time he answers their question with absolute direct Bible quotes and then says – Why don't you read the biographies of Jesus yourself? His method of defending Christianity is just to point them to Jesus – not to church history – not to some distraction because they have a mother-in-law who said she was a follower of Christ but wasn't. He says: Let's just look at Jesus. Come and see.

I think you could probably do that if you don't make it too difficult. Just say – come and see.

That is why John is called the evangelist. That is what the evangelist is telling us. This is how to do it. There are various ways but just get them to read the words of Jesus.

The second thing that happens in this passage is one of the favorite words of John which is *stay*.

Stay in this section refers to where Jesus is staying but look at the words themselves in verses 37-39.

John 1:37-39 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. They said, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you **staying**?”

“Come,” He replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where He was **staying**, and **stayed** that day with Him. It was about the tenth hour (4:00 p.m.).

It seems like a simple word but this word is used 112 times in the New Testament, 66 of those times are used by John. It is one of his hang up words. He loves this word. He uses it in many ways to mean different things but they are related to one another. It can mean to stay with. It can also mean to cling to. But as you see this word used, you need to understand it means: to abide (he uses this later on in the teachings of Jesus), to follow (to handcuff yourself to that person). You want a visual of what stay means? Where are you staying? I want to handcuff myself to you. And we did handcuff ourselves to Him, the whole time.

Later, Jesus is teaching His disciples how to pray and He says: Look, if you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you want and it will be granted. If you stay with Me and My words stay

with you, you are going to understand what I am doing in the world. Ask whatever you want. If you are handcuffed to Me and My words are handcuffed to your soul, just ask.

He loves this word. It means to follow with the intent of doing whatever Jesus says to do. It is not complicated. We get so mixed up about it. It is a very spiritual important word. It has impact on the way we live our lives. It sounds simple – but somehow we have made it complicated.

Francis Chan

I want to introduce you to a guy named Francis Chan. I like his writings a lot and I like his preaching. He is going to let us in on what it means to follow or to stay or to handcuff yourself to Jesus.

[www.flannel.org – Store & download: “Basic: Follow Jesus.”]

Chan: While we may agree that the church is the followers of Jesus Christ, that does not mean we are all in agreement because there is so much disagreement on what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Just like we can distort the concept of fearing God, we can also distort the concept of following Jesus.

When we were kids, this was a lot easier. Remember when we were kids and we played that game Follow the Leader? It is pretty easy right? The leader pats his head; you pat your head. The leader pats his knee; you pat your knee. The leader flaps his wings and you just follow and do whatever he does.

It is weird that in the church we have done this weird thing where we say: The rules to follow Jesus are different than Follow the Leader. In following Jesus, we don't have to actually do what He does. We just do it in our heart.

That doesn't really make any sense. Imagine a kid on a lounge chair playing Follow the Leader, saying 'I am flapping my wings in my heart.' Why does that work in church and not anywhere else?

When my daughter comes to me and I say 'Go clean your room.' She knows better. She will not come back a couple of hours later and say, 'Hey, dad, I memorized what you said to me. You said 'Go, clean your room.' What am I going to say: Oh, good job. That is what I wanted. No. And she will not come to me and say, 'Dad, I can say 'Go clean your room.' In Greek. Listen. That is not going to fly.' If she says: My friends and I are going to gather together and every week we will have a study and figure out what it would look like if I cleaned my room. – None of that is going to fly. Just go and clean it. She knows that.

So why do we think that this type of thinking or talk is going to work with Jesus? Jesus was as black and white as you can get. He would look at people and say: Why do you call me Lord when you don't do what I say?

He says in Luke 6:46 – Why do you call me Lord when you don't do what I ask you to do? Why would you call someone your master and then not listen to him?

Matthew 7:21 – Listen, not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, lord.' Is going to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is only the one who actually does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

What it Means to be All In

That is what it means to be a follower of Christ, to stay with Him, to abide in Him and to be cuffed to Him. That is what John is trying to show us in his rapidly moving chapter in this rapidly moving book. There is excitement and exhilaration in this story of Jesus the Christ. No one is ever bored in this book. There is never a resting spot when you read about Jesus in the book of John.

It is quite a contrast to the rest of life. Most of life is fairly routine. Once you start doing something in your life, whether at work or something, it is scary at first because you are not very good at it. You get studied up and then you start doing it for a while. After you have done it for a while, then it is just the same-old same-old. Sometimes we switch jobs for no other reason than to stop the monotony.

I heard a doctor say this one time. It was for the purpose of giving us a sense of safety. It had to do with open heart surgery. He said: I've done this particular open heart surgery procedure over 500 times. I could do this with my eyes closed. You need not worry.”

He gave us that feeling of safety and confidence by saying that. But in reflection I thought – this poor guy probably went into this field because he was good at it but also because he thought – there is a little bit of excitement here. Not any more. 500 times, really? Where is the edge that he is living on now?

Sometimes seasons of life get that way where you feel like you are in a rut or the hobbies you used to love doing and now you are bored to death with them. While that happens in our experiences, in our work place and sometimes in our family life and hobbies, if you are bored following Jesus, you are not following Jesus. You look at this book of John and you see that it is one chapter after another of people getting pushed. They are going to follow Jesus and lead this crazy life or they are going to leave Him for some other reason.

In verses 50 and 51, these two last verses, are the theme of what it means to follow Him.

1:50 says – if you are impressed with Me seeing you under that fig tree, we have just got this thing started. I am that ladder between heaven and earth where angels are ascending and descending. Strap yourself in and hold on. This is going to get good.

If you are following Jesus, it is almost like you are a firefighter where they are resting and training ... but they never know when the alarms are going to go off. Then at that point, it is game on life and

death. If you are a follower of Jesus and you are abiding in Him, the real thing, you are staying with Him – it means there is no telling what He is going to call you to do. If you are sincere about your walk with God and you pray: Okay, whatever You want, God. You better not be bluffing because He could say things like:

- Not Paris but Uganda. It will cost about the same. Not Paris in the spring but Uganda in the fall.

- Right in the middle of a conversation you can hear Him say: Just be quiet and listen to them. Are you a follower at that point? Or are you still going to try to prove you are right.

- Look, I don't care about that. I want you to initiate family reconciliation by serving your family without any expectation of gratitude. Ready. Go. No? Then you are not following Him.

- You are a taker. I want you to sell about as much as you can. I want you to down size and start giving charitably, generously. I want to make you a generous human being like Me. Are you following?

Can you hear Him talking to that surgeon:

- Hey that open heart thing? Here is what I want you to do. I want you to do that in a mosquito tent in Central America on a little boy. And we'll do that whole I-can-do-it-with-my-eyes-closed thing because your eyes will be blinded by your sweat. And it is going to cost *you* \$10,000 to do the surgery. And you will love it. You might find that is the reason you are so good at what you do.

Listen, following Jesus is thrilling. It is exhilarating. It is sorrowful. It is confusing. It is made for TV type of things – but it is not boring and it is not safe. If you want safety, you have got to find another religion.

No one said anything about safety in the book of John. I would love to eavesdrop on the disciples' prayers about 2.5 year into this thing. – *Oh, dear God in heaven, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Could we please just get on this boat one time without a storm or a ghost walking across the water at night. Could we just have a pleasant trip across a little lake without a big lesson involved? How about a day off?*

Jesus was anything but mundane. He is more intoxicating than the cocaine we find ourselves addicted to or some kind of stimulant. He is more valuable than a penthouse in Dubai.

We want to have a relationship with Him where we are sitting under a palm tree with a nice breeze blowing, sipping tea. He is handing us this giant flask, saying – *Chug it. It is life.*

Don't insult Him by saying you are following Him when you are not. Just say – you are a polite reader of biographies about Him and you are quite often impressed by His words of wisdom. But don't

say you are a follower. Because if you are a follower of His, I know where He is going. He is going to put himself in the center of your whole world and He is going to want you to change everything to make Him king. He does that because it is true; He is king. But He also does it because you will love Him for it. He takes people like Peter and sees into their souls and like Nathanael. He sees how they are and takes them to places they don't want to go so that they thank him later for who they become. He wants to do that with you. Do you know why He does that? Because He is full of mercy. He wants to be king in your life because it is true and it is merciful. That is what He is all about.

The book of John is about being all in – not just because it is the right thing to do but because it is the only way that works. John is asking you, after one chapter – 51 verses – are you a follower of Jesus the Christ? Do you abide in Him? Do you stay with Him? Are you handcuffed to Him? Because if you are, you are going to bring a lot into eternity with you.

Dear heavenly Father,

As You are full of truth and grace, I ask that we would desire that and be drawn to You; that we would be all in as John is begging us to be; and that we would surrender the little things in our lives that keep us from wanting to be absolutely just like You. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen