

**Personal Evangelism in Biblical Perspective:
iShare–Encounters with Jesus in John’s Gospel –
The Encounter with a Seeking Student and a Skeptical Student**

John 1:43-51

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April 29, 2012 – Morning Sermon

This is our study in John on the iShare encounters. Before we get into our text I'd like for us to look at John 1:14 which is a very crucial text in understanding the entire Gospel of John, the purpose of the Gospel of John by the Holy Spirit through John the Apostle. In John 1:1-5 we have the majesty of Christ who is the Word and we have now after that the wonderful ministry of John the Baptist who is the voice of the Word in John 1:6-8. John 1:14-18 says [14] *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. [15] (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") [16] For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [17] For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever, and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Sometimes it is abundantly obvious when the Lord has gone before us and we're sharing Christ with others. It's almost like the Lord has called me to be a fisher of men but I don't even get a chance to set the hook. The hook is already in and all we have to do is reel them in. It's amazing when the Lord does that. Right after I was converted I began to share the Gospel and one of the jobs I had was a stevedore with Johnson Motor Lines. A stevedore just means you're loading freight on a truck. These were some interesting people I worked with. I worked the third shift which was from 11pm to 7am and we could talk about all the freight that we loaded. The crew that I worked with would use nothing but four letter words the entire night. It was not exactly what you would consider the most fertile field for evangelism but it was a needed field so I just started sharing the Lord.

I wished I could tell you about most of the responses but I'll tell you about Archie. After I shared with Archie he said "Harry, I've been thinking about that. What do you think Jesus does?" I just felt like I could just reel him in at that moment. In

moments like that you know the Lord has already been there through other people that have planted and watered and you're just kind of drawing them in. There are some of those in this encounter we'll look at in this study but let me backup for just a minute.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is the Word. Jesus has been baptized and gone into the wilderness. Now the Word is coming out of the wilderness and He has already been preceded by John the Baptist who is the voice of the Word crying out of the wilderness. So you have the Word going into the wilderness and John the Baptist is crying out from the wilderness to the world saying "Here is Christ!" You're in the wilderness and Christ is the garden. So as Christ is coming out of the wilderness He is coming out by Bethany by the Jordan and we'll be introduced to the first seven days of His ministry. We have already walked through three days of it and we're about to go to the fourth day.

Who is this Christ who is the Word? The Word that is the Son of God has become flesh and we have beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth, and we have received from His fullness grace upon grace. So the Word has come with grace upon grace and now John is going to give you instance after instance of people who were lost who drank from the fullness of His grace and were saved. There is John the Baptist, Andrew, John, James, Peter, Philip, Nathanael and we'll go on and on throughout the Gospel of John of how the Word has now poured forth grace upon grace and out of the wilderness of sin men and women are being brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Now when God has gone before us and we meet people that are already there we kind of see it. We see it with Andrew and John. Here are two students and remember that students in the Bible are not defined by classroom. Classrooms moved around. You were a student when you got a teacher and then the teacher would sit you down in class whenever he needed to. Andrew and John had been following John the Baptist. Now John the Baptist did not exist to bring people to himself, he was pointing people to Jesus so he would say "I must decrease so He must increase." John the Baptist's whole point was you may be coming to me but you'll go through me to go to Him. That's the whole point we're here. You're not coming to me, the pastor, but you're going to Him.

So what happens? On the first day of Jesus' public ministry after coming from the wilderness and being already baptized He is not even there. John the Baptist is there at Bethany and Jesus is on His way back to Bethany by the Jordan. This isn't Bethany near the Mount of Olives. This is Bethany over the Jordan River, on the eastern side of the Jordan River. A contingency from Jerusalem has come down to interview John the Baptist. They had three questions – are you the Christ, are you the Prophet, are you Elijah? Now he comes in the Spirit of Elijah but he's not Elijah. He tells them he is not Elijah, the Prophet or the Christ. He says "I am the one who makes straight the way of the Lord. I am the one who

cries out to Him. He ranks ahead of me. He is greater than me because He existed before me. So I am pointing to Him.” So he makes that clear on the first day.

Now we come to day two. On day two Jesus comes walking toward John and when John sees Him he decides to preach a sermon. It is a three point sermon. He says “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Behold, look here He is. The one who did the iShare testimony I’m not the Christ but I want to point you to Jesus, now preaches a sermon. As he points to Jesus he first identifies Christ with a title, the Lamb of God. He is the One who fulfills the Passover lamb. He is the One who is provided as Abraham has predicted, the Lord will provide a lamb in the mount, even as He provided a lamb so that Isaac would not be killed. His second point is he identifies the mission which is to take away sin. That’s why they don’t stay with John the Baptist because he can’t take away their sin. The church or the preacher can’t take away your sin. The Lamb is the only one who can take away your sin. Thirdly, he identifies the scope of the mission which is taking away the sin of the world.

There are two seeking students that are there. They are Andrew and John. I know the Lord has already been working in their lives. How do I know that? The Bible says that when we’re born in this world we are under the bondage of sin and it says in Romans 3 that there are none who seek Him, no not one. There is none who understand but Jesus says that if you seek Him you’ll find Him. How can non seekers become seekers? It is because the Lord seeks them first. The Lord is already at work in their heart to move them. Their first step is to come to the one with the Message – John the Baptist, but they won’t stop with John the Baptist because he is not the Lamb of God. He is the voice of the Lamb. Now they see and hear the Lamb. It says when they heard His word they followed Him.

After hearing that Gospel sermon on Day 3, they go get their brothers. First Andrew goes and gets his brother Peter. Then it looks like from the text that John goes and gets his brother James. Day 1 was the interview. Day 2 was the Gospel sermon by John the Baptist. On Day 3 John the Baptist restates the sermon as Jesus is now walking by him. When they hear John the Baptist say “Behold the Lamb of God” Andrew and John follow Jesus. Then they go and get their brothers. So here are seeking students and it’s pretty obvious the Lord is working in their lives.

Now what do you do with a skeptic? What do you do when someone snickers, laughs, mocks or is critical as you talk about Jesus? How do you respond to the skeptic in your life? Are you going to be intimidated? Do you quit? That is what we get a chance to see on Day 4. We get a second encounter on Day 4. This encounter not only shows us another seeking student, Philip, but a skeptical student, Nathanael. John 1:43- 44 says [43] *The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”* [44] *Now Philip was from*

Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Here Jesus is leaving Bethany and is on His way up to Galilee. By the end of this week He will be at a place called Cana of Galilee. Either while He is leaving or after He is leaving there is this man named Philip who He said to him to follow Him. Philip is from Bethsaida which means house of fish.

I have been taking people to Israel and I hopefully will go back this next March. One of the blessings is they have been continually uncovering things there and one of things I was able to add to the trip was to go to Bethsaida because they now have found it. Back in the 1980s they didn't know where exactly Bethsaida was but now they have found it. That is the place Andrew and Peter were from. Now they have a friend and his name is Philip. In the first 24 hours the church more than doubles and that's pretty good. Jesus gets Andrew and John who go get Peter and James. I love it when Jesus says to Peter "You'll no longer be Simon but Peter, Cephas meaning rock." Jesus just sovereignly changes his name right there. There is an exercise of the sovereignty of God. His name change will have all kinds of implications in the future in his ministry. Jesus finds Philip and says "Follow Me" and Philip follows Him. Philip is ready too. The Lord has prepared him and now he is following Jesus. It comes abundantly clear that Jesus is bringing together His disciples.

One other thing I want to mention is the word found. The Bible says that Jesus *found* Philip. Jesus *found* Andrew and John. The Bible also says that Andrew and John go get their brothers and they say "We have found the Messiah." Which is true? Did they find the Messiah or did the Messiah find them? The answer is yes. He found them and that's why they found Him. They chose Him because He chose them and He worked in their life and they came to Him. Then they go and Jesus finds Philip. Philip goes and finds Nathanael. John 1:45 says [45] *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."* They are saying they have found the One the Old Testament is pointing to. In the context of this, clearly John the Apostle is affirming Moses as the author of the first five books.

Cana and Nazareth are in Galilee. It is very clear in the text that the people of Cana which is where Nathanael is from do not get along with those from Nazareth. There is one other thing I want to point out about Nathanael. When you see the name Bartholomew, that is also Nathanael. Bar means 'son of' so he is the son of Tholomew. So they are all from this area. As Jesus finds Philip and Philip finds Nathanael what is Nathanael's response to Philip saying he found the Messiah? John 1:46 says [46] *Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."* You can almost hear the sneer in Nathanael's voice here or perhaps see his eyes roll back when he says it.

There are some commentators who try to get Nathanael off the hook here by saying that he knew his Bible and the Bible says the Messiah would come from Bethlehem so he is just having a theological problem. I don't think it's a theological problem. I think it's pure bigotry and prejudice. He knows people from Nazareth and he has made a generalization. He thinks it must be absolutely impossible that the Messiah would come from Nazareth because nothing good comes from Nazareth. Here is a skeptic. I've tried religion and nothing good comes out of religion.

After I became converted I went and shared the Gospel with a number of people that I had known. When I was in High School I used to work selling shoes at Kenny's Shoes. I should write a book titled Jobs I've known, loved and lost. My manager at the shoe place was in college and his name was Dave. After I became a Christian I went back to Dave and said "I have become a Christian and Jesus can save you. All this stuff we used to do God showed me the emptiness of it, etc." Dave gave me this patronizing look and said "Ike, I've done religion. It's empty and it's nothing." Then he went after me and as a new Christian it was pretty easy to get after me. I did have enough sense to say "Maybe what you've tried is not the real thing and that's why it's empty." I remember leaving that conversation and thinking I just utterly failed because I had met a true skeptic at that time. I shared with him myself and the Gospel and then left and went away. So I have had these experiences with many skeptics right from the very beginning of my conversion.

Now what do you do when you encounter a skeptic? What do you do when you encounter someone who is prejudice against the Message or stereo typed all of religion and put Christ and Christianity in it saying "Been there done that. It's nothing"? You do what Nathanael did. I love what happens here. John 1:46 says *[46] Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."* Philip very calmly, courageously, compassionately with conviction says "Come and see. I think Jesus can handle your doubts. Come and see." He did come and it didn't take long for him to see. Look at what happens.

John 1:47 says *[47] Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"* Jesus is not saying that Nathanael is not a sinner or is perfect. We just saw how Nathanael was a bigot. He is prejudice and an unbeliever. Sin is unbelief so Jesus is not saying he is sinless but He is saying "Here's a skeptic but you may not realize that there are honest skeptics. They may be trapped in prejudices, presuppositions and dismissive of Christianity but they really have questions." Dr. Francis Schaffer used to tell us that every time we get a question an honest question gets an honest answer so keep answering them. Jesus sees Nathanael and says "I know what is in you. There is no guile in you. You are trapped in your prejudices and haven't been able to see it. You don't think anything good can come from

Nazareth but there is no guile in you. There is integrity of your skepticism.” Now what happens? John 1:48-51 says

[48] Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” [49] Nathanael answered him, (There are three titles for Jesus in his statement here.) “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” [50] Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” [51] And he said to him, “Truly, truly, (In the Greek this means ‘Amen, Amen.’) I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Jesus doesn’t have to wait until He says something to say ‘amen’ like we would do when a preacher says something, He can just put the ‘amen’ in front of what He says because everything He says is true. In this encounter what are some of the things we can learn?

Here are three takeaways I want you to get from this text. The first one is while true conversion will be marked by both spontaneous and intentional personal evangelism, clearly believers instinctively prioritize family and existing relationships. When people are converted there are true evidences. There is a hunger for God’s Word. They become learners. There is a voracious appetite to know the Scriptures. There is a desire to know who God is, Christ is and who they are. There is a desire to pray, worship and learn to pray. One thing we have already seen is that when Jesus finds you then you start finding other people. They begin to share Christ with others. It just overflows. They find Christ and they just say “I’m a Christian.” They confess Christ. It’s spontaneous. It’s like from their inner most being there are rivers of living water. The Word of God, Jesus Christ is full of grace and truth and grace upon grace has come to me from Christ but I’m not a reservoir of grace, I’m a river of grace, a channel of grace. God’s grace has saved me and I have drunk of His grace upon grace and now it’s flowing through me to other people spontaneously and intentionally.

We can’t miss this. Andrew and John have been converted. They started sharing Christ to their brothers. Then there’s Philip who is from the same place Andrew and Peter are from, Bethsaida. Philip knows this other guy named Nathanael and what’s clear is that while it’s spontaneous, taking the Gospel to someone we’ve never met, there is an intentional sharing of Christ and it begins usually with the prioritization of my immediate family, extended family and my existing relationships. Our fishing pools are already there. It’s amazing what God does. Sometimes you’ll go and you’ll find the people already ready. The Lord has already been there ahead of you because they’re seeking and you’re the one the Lord is going to use in their life. Sometimes they’re not seeking. The Lord is going to use you to start plowing up the field.

Do you remember my friend Dave I told you about earlier? I was intimidated. I just kind of did like the blind man story where I was blind and now I see and He did it. It's like the man who found the Salvation Army, Booth who said "I'm a beggar who found bread and here's where I found bread. He's the Bread of Life." Then I just started praying for Dave. Several years later, in my last year at Covenant College I went home to spend some time with my family and I get this phone call from Dave. He said "Hey Ike, how you doing? Could you meet me for sandwiches?" I said, "Yeah let's meet." We sat down at this sandwich shop and he said "Let me get to the point. I have become a Christian." I said "You're kidding." Here is big faith Harry here. He said "Yep the skeptic became a Christian. You didn't make a lot of sense but at least it got me thinking." After me then other people came into his life and the Lord found him and he found the Lord. Now he is going to start telling people.

Do you remember the demoniac named Legion? When he got converted he said to Jesus "Can I get in the boat and go back with You?" Jesus said "No, go home and tell your family and friends what great things the Lord has done for you. God has got these readymade fishing pools for us where we go and share the Gospel. Then we begin to see how the Lord puts together Gospel preaching, like John the Baptist and sharing of your faith, like Simon, Andrew, Peter, Philip and all of these who say "We have found the Messiah!" The preaching of the Word joins all that together. Faith comes by hearing the Word and we see people come to Christ. Yes a true believer is sharing Christ and wants to share Christ but there is an intentionality where they instinctively prioritize family relationships and existing relationships.

I have found one of the most fertile places for evangelism in my life were ten people that I wrote down who in my unbelieving life I had an unbelievable degrading impact in their life. I couldn't wait to get to them to first ask them to forgive me and then second to tell them that Jesus had saved me and He would save them. I have one more on that list of ten and it's been forty plus years now. I'm praying for the Lord to yet open up that door. So there is Philip the seeker, Nathanael the skeptic and they are being converted and the first thing we see is that they overflow with the testimony of Christ.

Now here's the second takeaway. Since by God's grace there are honest skeptics, believers and the church should create venues for them to "Come and see." There are people asking honest questions. So even out of prejudices, dismissiveness, laughing or sneering about what you've said to them, don't dismiss it or them. Small groups are for discipleship, growing together and developing relationship. So what would it be like for you to invite someone to your small group? You could take this summer and the people who you are sharing with you aren't coming to Christ that have questions could "come and see" in your group. If the Lord gives them eyes to see and ears to hear when they come they will find out that Jesus knows them. He knows where they are and who they are.

Jesus knew that Nathanael had been under the fig tree. Jesus knew I had been lying in bed on a Sunday afternoon, having embraced everything they told me was life, and I found it was nothing but empty. God knew the fig tree I was under. He knew the emptiness I had. I know the needle that you're under. I know the pills that you go into. I know the sexual immorality that you think is life. I know where you are externally and I know who you are internally. There was no guile within Nathanael but he was a skeptic. He was a sinner with honest questions. I know your desires. I know your fears. I know all of those things about you. I know what you're not telling other people. I know your emptiness and it's more than I know you. Your only answer is to know Me. There is something greater than just the fact that I know where you are and I know who you are. I will take you from where you are and where I am you will be with Me always. I will take you where who you are and I will form Myself in you. I will build My saving grace in you. I will do that work in your heart and life.

When the Bible is talking about things there are multiple levels of conversations. When Jesus is talking about water, wine and bread He has another message but Jesus is intentional with those multi layers of communication when He is talking to someone. Earlier in John 1 when Andrew asked Jesus where He was staying I think he was asking for Jesus' address but he also realized that every where he had gone nothing satisfied his soul. The reason that Calvin says the heart is an incessant idol factory is because we know the answer isn't in us and the answer is out there. We go to all the wrong places for the answer and what we're ultimately looking for and need is only found in Jesus Christ. Come and see. He knows where you are and who you are. He will change forever where you're going and who you'll be. He is the joy of your soul.

The third and final takeaway is the preeminence of Christ as Lord and Savior of sinners is repeatedly affirmed in the Bible as the purpose of the Old Testament. The whole Bible is here to point us to Christ. All of the Old Testament points to Him and the Scriptures reveal Him. He who is the Word full of grace and truth is all there pointing to Him. That is exactly what John is doing. John the Apostle is giving us encounter after encounter where the One who is full of grace pours forth grace and with grace upon grace He changes people. In this one chapter of John we have already covered ten Old Testament prophecies and titles of Jesus.

In John 1:1 we found out that He's the Word. In John 1:2 we found out that He's God. In John 1:9 we found out the Old Testament prophecy that He is the true Light. It has been repeated that He's the Christ, the Messiah. In John 1:23 He is called the Lord. In John 1:29 and 36 He is the Lamb of God. He called Rabbi, the Teacher in John 1:49. He is called the Son of God. He is called the King of Israel. Then finally what term does Jesus love the most to use to speak about Himself? He uses this over 80 times in the Bible. It is the Son of Man. Do you see how close those are? That is not an accident. In the Old Testament the Son of God was immediately tied to the King of a forever Kingdom of His people. In the Old

Testament the Son of Man was inseparably tied to the King who would have a King forever. In Daniel 7 we have the Ancient of Days, God the Father. You have the Messiah who comes to Him. As He comes before Him, He is called the Son of Man. To His Son He says "I will give You a Kingdom from all the nations and it is a forever Kingdom."

There is a reason all of these things are tied together. Everything in the Bible is pointing us to Jesus. It's not pointing us to religion but it's pointing us to Jesus. It's not pointing us to the signs but the One it signifies. It's not pointing us simply to the prophecies but the One who is prophesied. It's not just pointing us to the promises but to the One who is promised. Title upon title is given throughout Scripture for Him. I could amass and write the titles of Jesus and just start repeating them and a forty minute sermon would not hold it. It wouldn't even come close to holding the titles of Jesus. Here in John 1 are ten of them. Jesus is being lifted up, full of grace and truth and those who come to drink of Him have grace upon grace in their life. That is where John is pointing us.

The last thing he says is "Look the Son of Man is ascending and descending." Not only is He the Son of Man who is the King, He is the Son of God who is the King. I'd like to look at Psalm 2. This is what we call a Messianic Psalm that is pointing to Christ. Here is God the Father speaking from heaven. Psalm 2:6-8 says [6] *"As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."* [7] *I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you."* [8] *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.* Who is the King? Daniel 7, Son of Man. Who is the King of the forever Kingdom? It is the Son of God who is King forever.

You think it's something that I know where you were, well you'll see greater things than this. You will angels ascending and descending upon Him. That is language that Nathanael knew immediately. Let's look at Genesis 28. This is the event that He is referring to here. This is the passage where Jacob has been travelling and he stops at a place called Beth-el, meaning the House of God. He finds out this the House of God like he has never thought before. Genesis 28:10-17 says

[10] Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. [11] And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. [12] And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! [13] And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. [14] Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the

earth be blessed. [15] Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” [16] Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” [17] And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

Jesus says “I’m going to show you something greater! I’m going to show you the ladder. Jacob’s ladder is Me. I have come from heaven to save you and take you to a new heavens and a new earth. It’s not just you but I’m calling all the families. This land is a down payment. This nation is a down payment. My people are going to come from all the nations of the earth, throughout all of the land and I will bring them to Myself.” It will happen because the angels have affirmed the fact that the ladder of God is the ladder from God and the ladder is God. Without trying to be irreverent, here is another title – Christ the Ladder of God. Not only that but He said this is the place of God. He laid his head on the Stone – Christ the Solid Rock. He said this is the House of God. It is in Christ that we meet God. Then he says this is the Gate of God. Christ is the Stone and the Rock. Christ is the Ladder. Christ is the Gate. Christ is the House of God.

It is all pointing to Me. I will show you something greater. This is not simply a God who knows you where you are and who you are but a God who has come where you are to save you. We are not climbing up Jacob’s ladder. Jacob’s ladder has come for us to take us to glory. God has come down the ladder. God is the Ladder. We meet God in Christ. Christ is the One who has come to save us. Christ is the Gateway. Christ is the Way and Christ is our Hope. That’s why they flee to Christ. They are not saying “Let’s go follow Jesus so we can die for Him.” They are coming to Jesus because He is the Lamb of God, the Gate of God, the Stone of God, the Ladder of God and there is no other Hope. I come to Christ because I have nowhere else to go but to Him who is Life forevermore and He found me. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You that we can tell others “Come and see for here is the Savior.” O Lord, the Word, O Lord, the Lamb of God, O Lord the Ladder of God, O Lord the Rock of God, O Christ the Gate of God, the House of God, the dwelling place of God, O Christ the glory of God, O Christ the Son of God, the King and the Son of Man. We come O Christ to Thee. Thank You for those who have said, “Come and see” and thank You that we can go and invite. Come and see that He is Jesus. He knows where you are and who you are. He has come to where you are to save you so that now that you may live as Christ. O God please allow us to rejoice in this. Please send us to the seekers and the skeptics to bring them to Christ who is the very answer. He is Life forevermore, I pray in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

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