
COME AND SEE

Some items of cynical wisdom for you to consider this morning:

- Change is inevitable – except from a vending machine.
- He who hesitates is probably right.
- If you think nobody cares about you, try missing a payment.
- For every action, there is an equal and opposite criticism.
- A clear conscience is usually a sign of a bad memory.
- Bills travel through the mail at twice the speed of checks.
- 42.7% of all statistics are made up on the spot.
- If at first you don't succeed, then skydiving isn't for you.

I share the tidbits of cynicism today in honor of perhaps the greatest cynic in the Bible: Nathaniel.

- But this is not a story about being cynical.
- Rather, it is a story about the power of life with the LORD.
- It is a story of what can happen when the invitation is offered to “Come and see.”
- And it is a story about two friends, the cynic and the enthusiast.

Nathaniel was a cynic.

- We're not told much about Nazareth, but we might make some educated guesses.
 - Nathaniel was one who spent time in the study of scripture.
 - We're told that he was sitting in the shade of a fig tree.
 - That was the place of prayer and study.
 - He was also looking for the coming of the MESSIAH.
 - That's why his friend rushed to tell him about JESUS.
 - Nathaniel was passionate about his country—a true Israelite.
 - This meant that he longed for GOD to redeem the people of his homeland.
 - And, again, Nathaniel was a cynic.
 - He couldn't believe that the MESSIAH would come from the backwater, hill country town of Nazareth.
 - “Can anything good come out of that hick town?”

By the way, it's not a good idea to judge leadership based on generalization.

- Many years ago, the church my aunt attended was looking to call a new pastor.
- The council told the bishop that any candidate would be fine, except one with a beard.
 - Upon hearing that, one lady said, “That pretty much rules out JESUS.”

Philip, on the other hand, was an enthusiast when it came to faith.

- He was open to GOD's possibilities and was quick to share new insights with others.
- Certainly, there must have been something special about JESUS that led Philip to become a follower right away.
 - It must have been an epiphany, an immediate and meaningful realization.
- Philip was one of those people who was joyful in the LORD.
 - And when GOD revealed something new to Philip—an epiphany—he had to share that with others.

Upon meeting JESUS, Philip goes right away to his friend Nathaniel.

- Even when Philip tells him about JESUS, Nathaniel's cynicism cannot drown Philip's enthusiasm.
 - “Just come and see!”
- The enthusiasm of faith overcame Nathaniel's negativity and he accepted Philip's invitation.

The Bible has many such contrasting characters.

- These contrasts allow us to think about the approach we want to take to faith and to life.
 - The serving of Martha vs. the devotion of Mary.
 - The pessimism and doubts of Thomas vs. the charging ahead, often without thinking of Peter.
 - The self-centeredness of the Pharisee vs. the humility of the tax collector.
 - The cynicism of Nathaniel vs. the enthusiasm of Philip.
 - Each of these pairs and others challenges us to decide how faith will guide us.

While Philip wins Nathaniel over with his infectious personality, JESUS takes a different approach with Nathaniel.

- Rather than overwhelming someone with positive force, JESUS' gift is to meet people where they're at.

JESUS shows a depth of awareness about people of which only GOD is capable.

- JESUS says, "Here is a true Israelite," identifying Nathaniel's passion for the freedom of Israel from the Romans.
- But there's a deeper meaning, too.
 - The name "Israel" means "wrestles with GOD."
 - JESUS recognizes that Nathaniel is one who struggles to make sense of his relationship with GOD,
 - and how to merge faith into life.

JESUS also says that, in Nathaniel, there is nothing false.

- There is a subtle implication here.
- As I said before, "Israel" means "wrestles with GOD."
 - It was the name given to Jacob by GOD in Genesis.
 - Jacob was a man in whom there had been loads of falsehood and deceit.
 - After being named Israel, his life turned around to faithfulness to GOD and following GOD's will.
- Nathaniel was a man who spoke what he believed to be true,
 - even if it was that he didn't believe that anyone from Nazareth was any good or had any value.
- JESUS met Nathaniel there, with that opinion, and showed that HE knew Nathaniel's heart.

Perhaps you've been confronted by someone who expected you to be in a different place in your faith.

- Such confrontation only serves to create discomfort and defensiveness.
 - Barriers like these prevent the open conversation that leads to growth in faith.

Our LORD, however, knows us intimately.

- GOD meets us where we are at and invites us to come and see,
 - to consider the possibilities that can come from a deeper relationship with the LORD.
 - JESUS invites us to come and see the greatness of GOD.

Nathaniel will one day reach a point where he can call JESUS the SON OF GOD and the KING of Israel.

- Those words reflect what Nathaniel hoped for in the MESSIAH.
 - At first his vision was limited as these names reflected his belief that the MESSIAH would be a political and military leader who would overthrow the Romans, free Israel, and become its king.

- Yet GOD's possibilities surpassed the impossible and changed Nathaniel's vision for what could happen with GOD.
 - JESUS even foretold this when HE said to Nathaniel, "You will see heaven open and the angels ascending and descending on the SON OF MAN,"
 - serving the ONE Nathaniel hoped would be an earthly king.
 - JESUS was telling Nathaniel and us that HE cannot be limited to earthly goals and dreams.
 - What JESUS offers to all who believe in HIM goes beyond anything Nathaniel or we might imagine.
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Have you ever read Victor Hugo's Les Misérables? You should!

- The main character is Jean Valjean, a hardened convict who, after being released from prison, is unable to find work.
 - Everywhere he goes, he must show his papers only to have people turn him away.
 - Finally, he jumps parole and goes on the run.
 - Jean Valjean finds shelter in the home of a priest.
 - But that night, he steals the silverware and silver candlesticks.
 - He is caught by the police and taken back to the priest.
 - The priest sends the police away, telling them that the items were gifts.
 - After the police are gone, the priest tells Valjean that he spared him in the name of CHRIST and gives him the silver items.
 - And he charges him to become an honest man.
 - Valjean is changed, from a cynic to a man dedicated to goodness.
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Philip and the priest invite cynics to come and see the LORD.

- Both of these cynical men are changed as they see the greatness of GOD.
- The greatness of GOD is available to all who turn to CHRIST.
- The possibility of mending broken relationships.
 - The possibility of giving hope to the hopeless.
 - The possibility of finding those who are lost.
 - The possibility of transforming lives.
 - The possibility of turning cynics into believers.

Do you know someone who fits one of those descriptions?

- Invite them to come and see.

Do you find yourself in one of those places?

- Say, "Yes," to the offer to come and see the LORD.

JESUS already knows your heart.

- JESUS will meet you where you are and lead you to places you can't imagine.
 - You will see the heavens opened and the greatness of GOD.
 - Does that sound good?
 - Then come and see.