

## “Can Anything Good Come?”

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Second in a series on “Come and See”s in the Gospel of John

John 1:35-39, 40-51

September 16, 2018

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Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

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Remember this television ad, from the early 1980s, about shampoo? Heather Locklear tells about her first experience using *Faberge Organic Shampoo with Wheat Germ and Honey*. It was so good, she told two friends. They told two friends. And so on. And so on. And so on. Except for the flowing-haired actress, it sounds like that Bible reading.

John the Baptizer tells two friends. One, Andrew, tells his brother Simon. It seems they bring Jesus to their hometown, and their friend Phillip. Phillip tells his friend Nathanael. You can imagine it going on, and so on, and so on, and so on. It’s as easy as tossing your super-shining, full-bodied hair in the wind. And powerful.

How powerful? Someone offers you a choice. You can have a million dollars. Or, you can have a bare chessboard with a loonie on the first square. On the next square, 2 loonies. The next square, it doubles again: 4 loonies. It keeps on doubling, so on, and so on, and so on. At the end of 64 squares, you keep all the money.

Which do you choose? A million dollars (and no math)? Or, the loonie doubling just sixty-four times?

Take the loonie. And get a really big truck.

Because by the end of all that doubling . . . you will have \$18,446,744,073,709,551,615.<sup>1</sup> [18 quintillion, 446 quadrillion, 744 trillion, 73 billion, 709 million, 551 thousand, 615 dollars]. You can hire Jeff Bezos to do your shopping, Bill Gates to clean your windows, Elon Musk to drive your car, and the Queen to walk your dogs, because you will have far more money than all the wealth in the world.<sup>2</sup>

It all starts with one telling two, and so on, and so on, and so on. It’s as easy as washing *my* hair!

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wheat\\_and\\_chessboard\\_problem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wheat_and_chessboard_problem)

<sup>2</sup> Calculating the world’s wealth depends on what is included. For descriptions and approximate values of the various forms, see [www.worldatlas.com/articles/how-much-money-is-there-in-the-world.html](http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/how-much-money-is-there-in-the-world.html). Jeff Bezos is the founder of Amazon, the largest online retailer in the world. Bill Gates is the principal founder of Microsoft, maker of the Windows operating system. Elon Musk founded Tesla, SpaceX and PayPal. The Queen is, well, Elizabeth II.

## II

Except in the Bible story, it stops. When Phillip tells his friend Nathanael, the “so on and so on and so on” hits a roadblock.

*“We have found the one whom the Scriptures tell about! Jesus! Joseph’s son! From Nazareth. . . .”*<sup>3</sup>

*“Nazareth! Can anything good come from Nazareth?”*

Nazareth was No-wheres-ville.<sup>4</sup> It was unspectacular, unremarkable, unimportant and insignificant. *The Promised One, the Messiah, the Saviour of God’s People . . . from Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?*

Nathanael blocks the conversation.

## III

Has our conversation hit a roadblock?

Remember the days when, even if someone did not regularly come to church, they still had some connection? At least they knew which church they were staying away from.

Remember when, if someone needed a baby baptised, or to say their “I do”s, or to bury someone (legally), or was going through some crisis, they’d call up the minister at “their church,” who was always obliging, always easy to get along with, and always knew what to do? (Those were the days)

Remember when pretty well everyone believed in God? I mean a Christian understanding of God?

Remember? I don’t know if those days every *really* existed. But that’s how we remember them.

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has done some profound thinking about how things have been changing, and the sort of spiritual landscape we are now walking through.<sup>5</sup>

He describes how around us, and including us, belief in a “god” is just one of many options. And what we understand by “god” is all over the place. The peculiar

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<sup>3</sup> I’ve paraphrased Phillip’s phrase, “the one Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets.”

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 109.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). An excellent “reader’s guide” to Taylor’s work is James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014). Also helpful is Jeff Seaton, *Who’s Minding the Story* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), especially chapter 2.

understanding and experience of “god” that’s been passed on through Judaism, through Jesus Christ, and through the Christian tradition is not the easiest to embrace, nor the most popular.<sup>6</sup>

People, including us, are still looking for “fullness.” We want our lives to “flourish.” We want our world to be better. We talk about being on a “quest,” a spiritual journey looking for something.<sup>7</sup> Yet many have no expectation there is Something or Someone beyond us or the world as we know it, for Whom we might be looking.<sup>8</sup>

People sense something is not right. They are not sure where to go for help.<sup>9</sup>

#### IV

Most of them know, however, it’s not the church! Or Christians! Or Jesus!

Think of the knocks against us:

- Angry and judgmental.
- Complicit in slavery, genocide, crusades, oppression.
- Intolerant.
- Stuck in outdated doctrines that make no difference.
- Heads buried in the sand against science.
- Shallow.
- Boring.
- Irrelevant.

Are these true? Some are. We’ve got to be honest, and have work to do. What matters is that many of our neighbours, friends and in our families think they are true.

Many others don’t give us much thought at all.

You can imagine them say, *“Can anything good come from there? Can anything good come from them?”*

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<sup>6</sup> Taylor develops a topology of “secularisms” (or understandings of the concept). “Secularism 3” is what is actually happening in our society (verse “Secularism 2,” which is the myth of secularization received from the European Enlightenment. Secularism 3 describes “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.” Quoted in Seaton, 21.

<sup>7</sup> These are terms Taylor employs.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor calls this the “immanent frame,” and sees its construction as one of the great achievements of modernity. Though whether or not it is a good thing is a separate question.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor’s term for this is “cross-pressure.”

V

*“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”*

What does Phillip then say to Nathanael? *“Come and see.”* He did not break out a copy of 10 Philosophical and Historical Arguments Why Something Good Might Come from Nazareth. Just, *“Come and see.” Don’t take my word for it. Trust me enough to come and see Jesus for yourself.*

Nathanael does. When he gets to Jesus, through a deeply-layered conversation I won’t unpack now, Nathanael realizes that Jesus already knew about Nathanael, and his heart open to God. Although Phillip brought his friend to Jesus, Jesus had already been active and present in Nathanael’s life, though Nathanael had no idea.

Phillip just extended the invitation and made the introduction. He trusted Jesus to do the rest. *“Come and see.”*

VI

Last week, I introduced you to this park bench. You can imagine it being anyplace you are, anyplace you go. Picture Jesus inviting you to sit beside him, see what he is seeing, see what he is doing, and join him.

Today, imagine it as a place where you can invite someone to come, and sit beside you and Jesus.

In a couple of weeks, we are having an “Invite a Friend to Worship” Sunday. The idea began with our Children’s Worship group. Maybe we older folks can learn something from them. Of course, you can invite a friend to join you in worship anytime. September 30 we’re making it a special focus. It’s something we’re asking you to do. We could call it “Come and See Sunday.”

I suspect God has been leading you to someone you could invite. It might be someone like Nathanael. The sort who will say, basically, *“Can anything good come from church?” “Can anything good come from Christians?” “. . . from religion?” “. . . from God.”*

You don’t have to prove anything to them. You’re their friend.

Nathanael trusted his friend, so he came. He found Jesus was already present in his life.

When we invite, we’re inviting someone into an encounter with God. Then, the ball is in God’s court. God, who has a way of making something good come. Even from Nazareth!