



“Come And See” Evangelism

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In John 1:35-51, John the Baptist points two of his disciples to Jesus. They follow Him and when He asks what they want they ask Him where He is staying. Jesus says, “Come and see”. Then they spend that day with Him.

One of those two, Andrew, then finds his brother Peter and says, “We have found the Messiah”. The text doesn’t tell us that he says “Come and see” but that is clearly implied because he brings Peter to Jesus.

The next day, Philip finds Nathanael and says to him, “We have found the one Moses and the prophets wrote about – Jesus of Nazareth.” When Nathanael questions whether anything good could come out of Nazareth, Philip says, “Come and see.”

Jesus then reveals surprising knowledge about Nathanael causing Nathanael to respond, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” In other words, when Nathanael sees the power of God, he is brought to a place of faith. Jesus showed him something that elicited belief.

Jesus then says, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that. Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”

Again, Jesus is inviting Nathanael to “come and see”. Is this how Jesus went about evangelism? I want to suggest that “come and see” is an evangelistic model we should consider?

Phase One

Jesus’ encounter with the fishermen on the lake shore was not the first time they had met. It appears that there was a phase in their relationship with Jesus that was simply about coming and seeing. It was simply “Come and have a look. See what you think.” They were under no obligation and possibly went back to their fishing in between times with Jesus.

What did they experience in that initial phase? It is hard to know the sequence of events but John 2 follows John 1! Maybe the turning of the water into wine was one of the things they were invited to see, before they were asked for any greater commitment. Almost certainly they saw Jesus teaching and healing and they had private conversations with Him.

Only later, did Jesus approach them and say, “Follow me.” That invitation initiated the second phase of their relationship with Him. Now they definitely were being asked to make a commitment – leaving their business in order to follow, and learn from, this rabbi. It is as if Jesus is saying, “On the basis of what you have seen, will you follow me?”

That makes a lot more sense than assuming that this was the first meeting and they left everything on the basis of having known Him for 30 seconds.

Is this a general pattern?

Is this “come and see” model unique to John 1 or is it Jesus’ general pattern?

It might be unwise to even suggest Jesus had a pattern. His evangelistic encounters were varied, reflecting the situation. They were certainly not formulaic. However, is there a pattern here?

Jesus regularly let people see God, or the Kingdom of God, in some way or another. Miracles, authoritative teaching, friendship opened up opportunities. People experienced God before being asked to follow Him.

In the midst of their theological debate, Jesus revealed that He knew the Samaritan woman had had five husbands and was now with yet another man. It wasn’t the debates that convinced her. It was the fact that she saw God at work in Jesus’ supernatural knowledge of her.

In Acts, likewise, people often experienced God before being challenged to respond to Him. In chapter 2 the people saw the miraculous signs of Pentecost. Then Peter preached. And even in the preaching people experienced God – experienced Holy Spirit conviction. In chapter 3 the lame man was healed at the Temple which drew crowds which provided an opportunity to preach. Seeing, then the challenge to respond.

When John the Baptist’s emissaries came to Jesus asking if He truly was the Messiah, Jesus’ response was “What do you see?” Their decision about Jesus would be on the basis of what they saw – the miracles that Jesus was performing.

Of course, Jesus didn’t stay in one place only and simply wait for people to come to Him. The other side of this coin was “Go and show”. Nevertheless, crowds did flock to Him and the principle is the same: people experienced God at work (or God’s Kingdom) before being asked to commit to Him. They experienced the love of God, the power of God, the holiness of God, the truth of God. They experienced community and compassion or integrity and it was on the basis of that that they were asked to respond.

Seeing did not take away the need for faith. Some people saw and chose not to believe. Others did believe.

I am not suggesting that this is the only model of evangelism but is “come and see” a method that Jesus modelled? And Andrew, the first evangelist? And the early church?

Evangelism but not as we know it

The typical image we have of evangelism is that it involves accosting strangers, and telling them some theological truths: God loves you; you are a sinner and therefore separated from God; God sent Jesus to die for your sins so that you might be forgiven and that separation bridged. We must then challenge the stranger to accept Jesus. Yet many of us feel deeply uncomfortable with that model.

Imagine someone says to you, “Tell me about this Christianity of yours.” What would happen if, instead of trying to persuade with words, we said, “Come and see”?

It would be very legitimate for an enquiring person to say, “Well, show me. Before I make any sort of commitment, show me Christianity in action.” In *My Fair Lady*, Eliza Doolittle sings:

Words! Words! Words! I'm so sick of words!
I get words all day through;
First from him, now from you!
Is that all you blighters can do?

Don't talk of stars burning above;
If you're in love, Show me!
Tell me no dreams filled with desire.
If you're on fire, Show me!

A visible gospel

What is the gospel? What is the good news we believe in? Can we do more than talk about it? Can we show it?

Of course, if the gospel is simply about getting into heaven, that is going to be hard to demonstrate but we would also have to question whether that is consistent with the Bible. What attractive “good news” did Jesus demonstrate? Love, friendship, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, truth...

Faith is then not a leap in the dark, agreeing with some beliefs. Faith is a response to God – a God who has been experienced; who has been seen.

As one example, Alpha provides people with time to weigh up the evidence. The evidence that people experience during Alpha is not only the teaching. It is also:

- Hospitality and the friendship of Christians
- The opportunity to ask questions and to think
- Experiencing the Holy Spirit on the weekend

It seems to me that that is “come and see” evangelism in action?

Come and see what?

Of course, if our approach was to be “Come and see” it raises the question of what we would show people. Where would we take them? Where would they see God? At our church? In our small group? In our home?

Unfortunately, in many churches people might not see God. Many churches are boring, irrelevant, dull, out-of-touch, cold, old, simply a little club of friends. Could we invite people to our churches confident that they would experience God? Jesus surely wasn't saying, “Come and see an institution.” He invited people to see God and His Kingdom.

“Come and see” might challenge us to re-think what we could show. On the other hand, we shouldn't beat ourselves up too much. If the Holy Spirit has been at work in our lives and in our churches then there will actually be quite profound things that people might see if we invited them.

What are the characteristics of the Kingdom? Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, maybe those characteristics are more present than we realise. If we did invite people to our small groups they might genuinely:

- See people talking about God in their lives
- See people caring for one another
- See people praying for one another
- Hear stories of prayers being answered
- See people (perhaps people they know) whose lives have been changed
- See people enthusiastic about what they are learning from the Bible
- See people who are committed to putting into practice what they learn from the Bible
- See people glowing because God is talking to them

If we invited people to our church they might:

- See a family/a community
- See people in love with God and worshipping Him wholeheartedly
- Hear about a God who is relevant
- Be loved by church people who take a genuine interest
- See servant-hearted people.

If we invited people into our homes they might:

- See that, for us, Jesus comes first
- See that we prioritise reading the scriptures
- See how a Christian copes with adversity.

I heard of a family that invited another person to come for a meal once a week. The first time she came, she was blown away because she had never sat at a table for a meal without everyone fighting. Inviting a person for a meal is not very profound but actually it was very profound.

Maybe Jesus has changed our lives in ways that we forget are profound but that might speak powerfully if we simply said, "Come and see."

Outposts of the Kingdom

We, as Christians and more particularly as churches, are meant to be living demonstrations of the Kingdom of God. Jesus said the Kingdom of God is among us. Our churches are little outposts of the Kingdom that allow people to see a type of community that stands in stark contrast to our secular society. We are meant to be demonstrations of something better – distinctive, holy.

The snapshots we have of the very early church in Acts 2 and 4 show a community marked by:

- Fellowship – the sharing of possessions, caring for one another, eating together
- Devotion to the apostles' teaching
- Worship
- Signs and wonders
- Joy
- Praise

In other words, the church demonstrated God's better option in the midst of a broken world. And people were added to it daily. The life of the church was missional.

In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus is recorded as saying, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

What this doesn't mean

I am not saying that we don't need to talk about Jesus. We do. "Come and see" was just the first phase. Later, Jesus challenged the disciples to the next level of commitment. We still need to bear witness to Jesus and encourage a response to Him.

Any time Jesus healed someone it inevitably raised questions about Him and that person's response to Him (and the observing crowd's response to Him.) A healing could never not raise those questions. The "come and see" must be followed by the "follow me".

I am not saying, "Come and see our church." Rather, it is an invitation to experience God, not an institution. However, one would hope that the church was one context in which people do see God at work.

Conclusion

Did Jesus model "Come and see" evangelism? Did He invite people to experience God and then make a decision about trusting and following Him?

What if our approach was, "Come and see. No pressure. Just have a look"?

Would we feel more comfortable with that style of evangelism, rather than the confrontational? Is it more natural?

It starts with our own lives. Is God apparent in our lives? Do we have anything to show?

Is God present in our small group? Should He be? Should people be able to see God-things happen there and in our church? Is it reasonable that someone could say, "Show me your Christianity"?

I encourage you to consider "Come and see" evangelism – as an individual, as a small group, as a church. What if we emulated Andrew and said, "We have found the Messiah. Come and see." (Andrew was, after all, simply emulating Jesus.)

What if we lived God-filled, Christ-centred, Holy Spirit-empowered lives and then we let people see those lives?

In fact, is that exactly what Jesus has called us to do?

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