**Series: What Jesus Would Say**

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

John 1:43-51

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**“What Jesus Says to a Skeptic”**

Nearly 20 years ago, Lee Strobel wrote a book entitled—What Jesus Would Say

-it started out with an off-hand remark in a staff meeting—*what would Jesus say to Murphy Brown?*

-Strobel began to imagine a series of conversations Jesus would have with Madonna, Bart Simpson, Donald Trump, David Letterman, Rush Limbaugh, and others

-were he writing it today, he *might* include Tom Cruise, Beyonce, and Barak Obama

-2000 years ago, John wrote a similar book—you *could* entitle it What Jesus Said

-for it is a series of conversations Jesus *had* with skeptics (Nathanael, Thomas), consumers (the crowd), religious types (Nicodemus), broken people (the paralytic, the adulteress), broken hearts (the sisters of Lazarus)

-John recorded these to make a point—THAT JESUS IS GOD

-he tells us this—“*These things have been written that you might believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing, you will have life*”—20:31

-this is the purpose of the book—as it must be the purpose of our lives—why we exist

-to convince the world Jesus is God—everything else is secondary

Seven years ago—I looked at some of these conversations—and now I want to go back to look at them from a different angle

-putting them in categories starting with the first—What Jesus would say to a SKEPTIC

-for this is where John begins

We are all familiar with the skeptic

-there’s something of him in all of us—asking the hard questions

-the skeptic is someone who says—*I’m going to suspend judgment. I’m not going to commit myself because the demand for sufficient evidence has not been met*

-behind much of this is may be disappointment and fear—fear of being further disappointed, the fear of being wrong

-this was Nathanael—*read 1:43-51*

-the story tells us something in Jesus’ presence, power attracted Philip—convinced Philip

-how else do you explain someone dropping everything to follow—and share with everyone he met, including the Ethiopian eunuch?

-but Nathanael was different—he had his doubts

-doubts that they had really run into the Messiah

*-the same doubts one might have listening to Clyde Lewis and Ground Zero on KXL*

-it was inconceivable that the One prophesied in the OT—the fulfillment of all the biblical prophets’ longings and visions could come from Nazareth

-this was like saying the Messiah would be born in an animal shelter, be part of the carpenters union, hang out with the riffraff, ride on donkeys, wash peoples’ feet, and submit to a criminal’s death

-Messiah’s do not relocate to Nazareth

-Nazareth was nowheresville—a backwater town of about 300—so obscure it was not mentioned in a list of 63 Galilean towns in the Talmud

-a place inhabited by people largely unrefined, uneducated

-the fact Nathanael was from Cana might explain some of the contempt

-for it too was a small town on the other side of the tracks, ten miles distance from Nazareth

-and chances are there was a cross-town rivalry—much like one between St Helens and Scappoose, Banks and Yamhill

-neighborhoods have always looked down at others as primitive, inferior, substandard

-the Messiah would have to come from somewhere more refined—Jesus, from Yellville just doesn’t fit the image

-but more—these people in the Upper Galilee were in the epicenter of conflict with Roman occupation

-this was modern day Gaza, the West Bank

-the region was a breeding ground for insurgents who periodically led rebellions, only to be crushed—Luke 13

-they wanted a Messiah who would fight their battles, ride in on a white horse from some place impressive

-but Philip did not feel the need to correct nor defend nor bully with evidence—and neither should we

*-belief cannot be forced*

-rather he responded as we must to those who are skeptical

-come and see—take a closer look—meet Him for yourself and tell me what you think

-and Nathanael was not so entrenched in unbelief that he was unwilling to explore

-so what is it Nathanael saw? What is it John wants us to see?

1. *GOD ALONE KNOWS THE HEART*
   1. He knows our character—verse 47

-Jesus spoke to Nathanael as if He had met him,

-and of course—He had—in eternity past when He conceived Nathanael in His mind

-He knew Nathanael was a man who was authentic—real—not fake—no deceit, no treachery

-He knew because He is God—One who knows us inside out

-He discerns us better than we discern ourselves—our motives, our thoughts—nothing has escaped His undivided attention

-He knows us better than anyone else—including ourselves

-and Jesus wanted Nathanael to know from the start—I know who you are

-but His knowledge extends beyond this

* 1. He knows our movement—verse 48

-“fig tree” is sometimes a metaphor for one’s home—one’s place, one’s life

-Nathanael came to realize Jesus knew his address—knew the boundaries of his habitation, the world in which he lived

-here is Someone who never discovers—never needs to be informed

*-knows our itinerary before it is printed*

-most of us have not had such a dramatic encounter

-but what any of us who have followed Jesus for a length of time have discovered—is that God is well acquainted with us—fully aware

*-He does not perceive fragmentarily—but knows exhaustively* (Oden)

-He knows our interiors—He knows our rising and our sitting—Psalm 139

-we are never out of His mind—never out of His sight

-if we know Him—it is because He first knows us

-all of this impressed Nathanael

-something extraordinary had just happened—faith was born

-hence he accorded the highest words to Jesus—verse 49

-as Bruner put it—“*guileless, cool, rational, studious, intellectual (skeptical) Nathanael now has an emotional, almost a Southern Baptist conversion”*

-in the span of a moment he moved from skeptic to follower—much like Thomas will when he touches the wounds of Jesus

Jesus was not so impressed

-He saw in Nathanael a man given to an emotional moment

-like so many on the spot conversions—he will drift away

*-there’s something more than supernatural knowledge that affirms Jesus is God*

-more than the miraculous

-there is something greater to be seen—something greater than signs is necessary to keep Nathanael from returning to skepticism—back to the sidelines

-there is something greater than signs that demonstrate Jesus is God

-so like Philip—Jesus in effect said—come and see

-only the plural invites all of us to see

1. *HE ALONE CLOSES THE GAP*

-what Jesus will now say has a weight, a gravitas to it—as underscored in the words—truly, truly—verses 50-51

-listen carefully—look carefully—for this is what you will see

-that I am a Messiah beyond your small imaginings

*-that actually—I will exceed your expectations*

-what follows is something of mystery—something almost unexplainable

-you will see this—that the heavens have opened—it happened when Jesus came out of the waters of baptism

-Mark 1:10 is more graphic—the heavens were “ripped open”

-the tense says its effects continue

-suggesting that we now live under the opened heaven—meaning what?

1. it means God has broken in

-in Jesus—God has intruded into human reality

-wherever He went—He gave evidence that heaven had opened and God is now breaking in

-announcing His kingdom, shaking the temple, setting demons to flight, cleansing lepers, healing the blind, raising the dead

-stilling the storms, exposing the Pharisees, taking ownership of the Sabbath, walking on water, feeding the masses, giving unnerving talks, rising from the grave

-starting a revolution far more radical than anyone imagined

1. it means the barrier has been broken

-the heavens torn open is the same word is used one more time in Mark of the curtain torn in the temple

-to symbolize the barrier between God and man has been broken

-in the same way—with the emergence of Jesus’ ministry—the barrier between us and God

-an obstruction created by sin—has been shattered

-and now—something of heaven and earth has connected

-earth is no longer left on its own—heaven is no longer some remote, unreachable realm

*-heaven now has to do with earth*

-Jesus’ coming means work means forgiveness and reconciliation have replaced alienation and estrangement

1. it means that there is now a lot of divine activity

-traffic going back and forth

-the angels of God are ascending and descending upon the Son of Man

-God gave Jacob a similar vision on his journey (Genesis 28)—where Jacob saw a ladder between heaven and earth, and angels ascending and descending

-announcing that God is up to something radical, holy, earth shaking

-only now it is clearer

-Jesus is the ladder—God’s ramp connecting heaven and earth

1. it means that earth is now the place of possibility

-anything possible

-His angels are involved as well—doing what angels do—keeping, ministering

-though Jesus is in heaven—He is present, accessible, active in our world right now

-Jesus is the conduit for divine activity—all of which symbolizes this—

THE WHOLE AWESOME POWER AND LOVE OF GOD IS NOW AVAILABLE THROUGH Jesus!!

-who knows where He might break out next

CONCLUSION

-story of another Nathanael—Larry’s son

-Jackie, Elijah