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## Will You Seek To Be With Jesus? *John 1:19-51*

### **CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY 201st General Assembly**

- **TUESDAY (SESSION) @ 8:00 AM**  
**IN ROOM 100, RYAN BLDG.**
- **MONDAY (WEEKLY) @ 1:00 PM**  
**IN ROOM 100, RYAN BLDG.**

Capitol Commission Bible studies are held on Monday and Tuesday. The legislator Bible study meets from 8:00-8:45 AM in Room 100, Ryan Bldg. (during session weeks). An open-to-all Bible study meets from 1:00-1:30 PM in Room 100, Ryan Bldg. (please feel free to bring your lunch). The Bible studies are nonpartisan and non-denominational. Our studies will focus on the Gospel of John for the 2017 General Assembly.

– Jeff Whitebread, Pennsylvania State Minister, Capitol Commission

### **John 1:19-51: “A Two-Way Affair”**

I remember the first-time a friend asked me to go clay-pigeon shooting with him and his family, I agreed with a certain amount of reservation. In my youth, I had hunted with my father on my grandparent’s farm. During these times, I successfully bagged a few rabbits and squirrels, but anything flying, was for me shooting in the air, and simply a waste of shells.

We found ourselves shooting skeet, at which point I knew I was immediately in trouble. Little clay disks are propelled from a machine from two locations, a high house and a low house; the shooter stands in various positions in semi-circle, trying to hit the disks as they fly past at different angles and trajectories. Without a doubt, it was fun and challenging, although I was not very good at it.

The last clay pigeon I had to shoot appeared to be coming directly at me. I waited and waited, adjusted slightly and pulled the trigger; and to my surprise I saw clay shatter all around me.

“Good thing I hit that one,” I thought to myself, “or it would have hit me.”

Up to that point I hadn’t considered the sport to be a two-way affair.

When reading John’s account, we begin to realize, there is more of a two-way process going on than the people in the story realize at the time. What some of the early disciples thought they were doing was looking for the Messiah. What they didn’t realize was that the Messiah was looking for them. Eager in their excitement of the moment, they had no idea what an encounter with Jesus was going to involve.

### **John Clears the Way**

*(John 1:20)* - Here we have a man pushed into the public eye and refusing to claim any of the offices they were eager to offer him. The Messiah was

the king from the house of David. He was the king who would overthrow all injustice and rule over Israel, and perhaps the world also. He was expected at any time, and any unusual personality was likely regarded as a potential Messiah. No, John said, he was not the Messiah; he was not doing messianic things.

*(John 1:21)* - Then there is Elijah and the prophet. The Jews had read for centuries in the Bible that the great prophet, Elijah, would return before the great and terrible day of the Lord. (Malachi 4:5). You see, Elijah had not died in the ordinary way, but was taken directly into heaven (2 King 2). Now, many believed, he would return to herald God’s new day. But again, it is clear, John didn’t want anyone thinking he was Elijah.

Elijah wasn’t the only great prophet. Most in Jesus’ time would have ranked him behind Moses. Interestingly Moses speaks of a prophet that God promises to raise up like him to lead the people (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). This prophet, like Moses, was also expected in Jesus’ day.

John the Baptizer refused all such titles. A group of priests and Levites - ministers in the temple - came to check it out. They were most likely sent by the leading pressure group of the time, the Pharisees. If someone was acting in a strange new way, announcing a message from God, and doing strange things - plunging people in water - they wanted to know about it.

*(John 1:23)* – John’s one claim that he makes is that he is a voice. He is the voice, spoken of in Isaiah 40:1-8, which speaks of the grass withering but the Word of God standing forever. The writer of the gospel does not want us to miss the connection with the proceed verses. And this is what the voice commands; get the road straightened out. The master is coming; and the way must be prepared.

Like the siren of an emergency vehicle. The way must be clear for the one who is coming behind. John was not the light, but gave evidence about it. He is of secondary importance to the Messiah, but the reason he come before him is to clear the way for him. He came to smooth the path for others to receive Jesus. John made the way clear through his teaching and life to help others remove the clutter and hindrances that would have been obstacles when they encountered Jesus. We too, in the same way, are invited to be an example to others by clearing away whatever might stand in our way of following Jesus.

### **John Points Toward Jesus**

*(John 1:29)* - John the Baptizer is famous for many things, but his most important role is to point away from himself and towards Jesus. Here he points him out as ‘God’s lamb’. And with that he indicates, at the start of

# Will You Seek To Be With Jesus? (cont'd) - *John 1:19-51*

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the gospel story, how things are going to end, and why. Jesus is to die a sacrificial death for the sins of the world.

The death of Jesus takes place, in this gospel, on the afternoon when the Passover lambs were being killed in the Temple. Jesus is the true Passover lamb. John wants us to understand the events concerning Jesus as a new, and better, Exodus story. Just as God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, so God was now bringing a new people out of an even older and darker slavery.

But who is this new people? In the original Exodus story, Israel is rescued from the dark powers of the world, which in that case meant the Egyptians under Pharaoh. But now, according to John, God's lamb is going to take away the sin of the world itself. This can only mean that God's rescue operation is moving out, wider than just Israel, to embrace the whole of creation.

Again and again in John's gospel we will see the ancient people of God, not least their rulers and self-appointed guardians of tradition, missing the meaning of what Jesus is doing, while people on the edges, outside the boundaries, get the point and find themselves forgiven, healed, brought in by God's transforming love.

**(John 1:33)** - Only when the lamb has been killed for the world's sins can the spirit of the living God be poured out on his people. Only when the Temple has been made clean and ready – the Temple of human hearts, polluted by sin and rebellion – can the presence of God come and live there.

## The Invitation: Come and See

**(John 1:35-38a)** - This is the point where John knows that many readers will begin to identify with the characters in the story. These are ordinary people who are on a quest, who are looking for something. This may be true of our lives, maybe someone has suggested that you give Jesus a closer look. You approach, polite but a bit cautious, maybe you are shadowing him, and then he turns, stops, and asks this probing question. 'What are you looking for?'

What he is asking is what we are seeking. This is such an important question, one we should ask ourselves over and over. What is it that you really want? Because what we truly desire, what we are most passionate about, will determine how we organize our lives.

**(John 1:38b)** - Notice the strange answer the disciples give to Jesus' simple question, "Where are you staying?" Jesus knows their hearts. They are following him because they are passionate about living a good life, a life of meaning and purpose, and they are hoping Jesus is able to lead them to this life.

**(John 1:39)** - Jesus answers with a simple yet profound answer: "Come and see." He answers both questions—the one about where he is residing, and the one about what they are most seeking. He knows that if they

follow him they will find what they truly want in life. Jesus has called each of us to be one of his disciples. The Holy Spirit is leading you through your desire for a deeper life, a more authentic faith and a more certain hope in the God Jesus knows.

Jesus continues to invite each of us to become one of his apprentices. This is not because of our strength, skills, or what we bring to the table, but because he knows that if you learn how to think as he thinks and to do the kinds of things that he did, we can live an amazing life.

## The Promise: God's Presence & Power

**(John 1:51)** - Jacob was a schemer. Even the story of how he was born included this telling detail: he'd been holding on to his twin brother's heel. He was trying to trip him up, even in the womb. And the habit stuck. He tricked Esau out of his birthright, and out of his father's blessing. Eventually the tables turned, and Esau tried to kill him.

As Jacob ran away, with not a penny to his name and nothing but the clothes on his back, he had a dream. He saw a ladder with its foot on the ground and its top reaching to heaven. God's angels were going up and down on it. The Lord himself stood beside him, and promised him that he would bring him back to his land in peace and prosperity. The point about Jacob's ladder was that it showed that God was there with him, in that place.

The angels going up and down on the ladder, would then be connected with the belief that when you worshipped God in his house, God was really present, with his angels coming and going to link heaven and earth.

**(John 1:50)** - Jesus' response to Nathaniel seems to be saying: 'Don't think that all you will see is one or two remarkable acts of insight, such as you just witnessed. What you'll see from now on is the reality towards which Jacob's ladder, and even the Temple itself, was pointing like a signpost. If you follow me, you'll be watching what it looks like when heaven and earth are open to each other. You won't necessarily see the angels themselves, but you'll see things happening which show that they're there all right.'

When you're with Jesus, it is as though you're in the house of God, the Temple itself, with God's angels coming and going, and God's own presence there beside you. That promise, of course, remains as true today as it was then. That, as John explains much later (20.31), is why he's writing this book.

**Legislator Bible study:** Tuesday, March 14th at 8 AM,  
Room 100 Ryan Office Building  
**Open-To-All Bible Study:** Monday, February 13th  
at 1 PM, Room 100 Ryan Office Building