

“God & Nathanael”–Fully Alive (1 of 4)

Over the next four weeks I'd like to share my simple and honest agenda: I would like everyone who has not yet become a follower of Jesus Christ to make a stand and choose to follow him.

Maybe you've considered becoming a Christian, but you still have lot of questions.

Maybe God is activating your this spiritual side that you never knew existed and you're starting to experience a spiritual awakening.

Maybe you're here because someone else keeps inviting you and you are the kind of person who has your foot on the brake and you're not quite ready to give into this “God thing.”

Maybe you're on the edge, and when you look over that edge you like what you see, but there is this persistent nagging inside of you that says to hold back.

Over the next four weeks in our series, “**Fully Alive**,” I would like you ask you to give up your resistance to God who is tugging on your heart and for you to fully embrace a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Every weekend at Sunrise, people cross over the line of faith and embrace God's forgiveness and love in their lives—and yet, even more of you sit there week after week and put off this decision. You like what's going on here, but you're content to ride the brake when it gets personal.

Over the course of this series I'd like to focus on the two questions that keep coming up when I talk to people about following Christ and becoming a Christian. ***The first one is this:***

Objection #1) Some people either *reject* the message of Christ or *put off* the decision to accept Christ because they have a great fear as to what is going to happen to their lives if they do trust Christ.

In other words, it's not so much that they are rejecting Christ because they don't know if he's for real or if the message is true. But they're holding off on the decision to follow Christ because they're unsure about what the Christian life holds for them. For many there's an unspoken kind of anxiety floating around. Saying, “*If I do trust Christ... then what?*”

Maybe you're in this category and somewhere deep down you fear that you'll lose more than you will gain. Jesus spoke to all of us in this position when he said in John 10:10, “*The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.*” John 10:10 (NLT) (p.) Do you understand the difference? The thief (the Devil) has on his agenda for your life to steal your very life from you. He wants take you're only life away and give you counterfeit life so you think you're satisfied when you're really craving more out of this world. He wants to keep you spiritually dead so that on that final day of judgment when he gets thrown in the lake of fire for all eternity...he takes you with him. That's his agenda for your life!

But Jesus also has an agenda for your life, if you'll just trust him. His agenda for your life is to show you how to discover life...the best life you could ever possibly experience—life that is rich and truly satisfying! Jesus' agenda for your life is to see you spiritually connected with the God who lovingly created you and made you for a relationship with you.

Jesus is the only way to find true life...both for today and for all of eternity. He want's to see you with him for all of eternity enjoying the pleasures of his heaven.

If you are so worried over what's going to happen to you if you trust God...relax, he's printed out his agenda for you. If I could sum up the message of Christianity is this: “*Christianity isn't just a good way to die, it's the only way to really live life.*”

The vision of Sunrise Church is to “*Lead people in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ,*” and that means more than just getting people to say a prayer and join the club.

Many people who call themselves Christians don't look at all like Christ. Yes, they may have their “*fire insurance*” from hell, but their lives are not lined up with the priorities of Christ.

Look around America and you'll find that 75-85% of people say they follow Christ, but when it comes to their *marriage*, or to their *sexuality*, or to their *child-rearing*, or to their *work ethics*, or to their *finances*, their lives are no different than everyone else.

In other words, it's easy to *say* you're a follower of Jesus, but are you *really living* like Jesus?

At Sunrise, we believe that your talk ought to match your walk. And, to a large degree, your walk speaks louder than your talk.

The second objection is this:

Objection #2) Some people feel that once they get all of their questions about God answered, they will be ready to make a decision to follow Christ. Somehow people think that all of their questions must be answered before they can come to God.

If you're not a Christian *there is a reason* why you're not a Christian! And I'm sure you have a very good reason why you're not a Christian. If we could go out to Starbucks this week and have a cup of coffee and talk over your objections, I know without a doubt that your reasons would be very valid. Whether you had a question about the Bible, or about God, or about Jesus, or about why so many Christians don't really live like Jesus—those would be very valid questions.

It would be foolish of me to tell you, *“Just ignore your questions and come to Jesus.”* That would be foolish! That's like saying, *“Just let me take out your brain and you'll make a great Christian.”*

But here's what I want to introduce to you in this series: ***Your biggest questions that hold you back from God actually get smaller as you get closer to God!*** Very few people embrace Christianity after they have *worked through* their obstacles.

(ILLUS: Check list of Obstacles that people have & then non-response!)

People object to God *until* they come up against their need *for* God. **(Illus: Crisis & Tragedy)**

When people come face to face with God, their objections and questions look pretty small!

Let me give you another look at this issue: **ASK: *Single's reasons for not getting married!***

Single people have all of these reasons why they don't want to get married, and yet, their objections to marriage begin to shrink when (*what?!*) when they meet that SPECIAL SOMEONE!

Now, once you meet that SPECIAL SOMEONE how many of your objections do you work through before you decide to get married? ***NONE, You just jumped in!***

Through this series I want to persuade you to stop looking over the edge and jump in!

Let me take you to a story in the Gospels of Jesus about a man who didn't get his objection answered, but once he met Jesus—it didn't really matter anymore.

BACKGROUND ON JESUS CALLING HIS FIRST DISCIPLES (p.) *“Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. (*) Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means ‘Christ’).* The Jews were waiting for and looking for their Messiah, the Anointed One from God, to come.

“Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, ‘Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas’ (which means ‘Peter’). Andrew, then Peter.

“The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Come, follow me.’ Philip was from Bethsaida, (One of the cities in the Religious Triangle around the Sea of Galilee) Andrew and Peter's hometown. Andrew, Peter, then Philip.

“Philip went to look for Nathanael (Andrew, Peter, Philip, now Nathanael) and told him, ‘We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! () His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph (Now he says the wrong thing!) from Nazareth.’ (Nathanael is just like most of us in this room. We're way too smart to fall for this “I've found the Messiah” trick! “I've heard that one before!” Nathanael is a bit of a skeptic, and he should be! Look at his objection:)*

*“Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. ‘Can anything good come from Nazareth?’ (As soon as he hears the word, “Nazareth,” his wall of defense goes up! In the 1st Century Nazareth had a bad reputation. Nothing good can come from there! Jerusalem, maybe, but Nazareth! **ILLUS: Doctor with the cure for Cancer in...Gaston)***

At this point, Philip could have made a huge mistake. He could have sat down with Nathanael and said something like this: *“If Nazareth is your objection, let's talk about Nazareth. Let me understand your objections to Nazareth and may I have a few answers for you on why the Messiah could come from there.”* They could have spent all day long arguing about Nazareth, but Nathanael wouldn't have been any closer to meeting Jesus. Nazareth wasn't the real issue, Jesus was. *‘Come and see for yourself,’ Philip replied. (“What about my objections!” Just come and see for yourself! “But I have questions.” Just bring them.)*

When people come face to face with God, their objections and questions look pretty small!

“As they approached, Jesus said, ‘Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.’ (Jesus looks at

Nathanael and sees a man who isn't going to pretend! No punches!)

“How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked. (“Jesus, how do you know about me?” Jesus is no longer a theoretical longing, or a religious hope—Jesus is now a person.) Jesus replied, ‘I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.’

“Nathanael exclaimed, (“Help me understand this Nazareth issue.” NO! Nathanael didn't have his issue answered, but it didn't really matter any more. Jesus knew his name!) ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!’” John 1:40-49 (NLT) (Whatever question and objection Nathanael had to understanding who Jesus was, just fell to the wayside as he came face to face with Jesus. It's not that the “Nazareth thing” was solved, it just became a non-issue.

Roadblocks to Jesus:

- **Intellectual Roadblock**, *“I can't believe the Bible because...”*
- **Informational Roadblock**, *“I don't know what to believe about...”*
- **Emotional Roadblock**, *“I can't believe in a God who allowed...”*
- **Religious Roadblock**, *“I already believe in...”*
- **Willful Roadblock**, *“I don't want to believe in a God who...”*

It's my prayer that you will come face to face with very valid questions and your list of objections AND THEN come face to face with Jesus. I believe that your objections will shrink when you meet him.

Now, maybe some of these are just smokescreens so that you can *entertain the idea of God*, but never really get close to God. Maybe you know that following Jesus is going to require some major changes in your life and you're just not ready to make those changes. That's fair!

Here is my prayer for you; that those really big questions and objections would begin to shrink in size the more you get to know Jesus.

One day, *“One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, ‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’*

“Jesus replied, ‘The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. (Here is Jesus' summation of all of God's teaching to us) And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.” Mark 12:29-31 (NLT)

Our problem is that we want to *“Understand the LORD our God with all our mind.”* Then we can give him our heart and our soul and our strength. But it doesn't begin with having all of your questions answered—that will never happen.

God wants you to love him more than he wants you to understand him. And once you love him, you do begin to understand him.

God's invitation to you today is not to come and *understand* him, but to *love* him. Your objections will get smaller and smaller and smaller as you love God more and more and more.

I don't know if Nathanael ever got his question answered to his satisfaction, but in the end, it didn't really matter. ***God wants you to know him more than you want to know all of the answers to your questions.***

GOSPEL & CLOSING PRAYER: *“Heavenly Father, I want to know you, more than I want to know the answers to my questions. I still need answers to my questions, but even if I knew the answers I still wouldn't know You. I want to know you.”* God can't wait to answer that prayer!