

Surprised By Jesus
Nathanael

Introduction

When was the last time you were surprised by Jesus?

When was the last time the divine unexpected shattered the routine of your day?

When was the last time the old wineskins of this life burst with new wine?

When was the last time the extraordinary of heaven eclipsed the ordinary of the earth?

When was the last time love melted hate, acceptance overwhelmed prejudice, kindness toppled meanness, joy swept away sadness, fruitfulness blossomed through barrenness, the desire to give was stronger than the desire to get, and thanksgiving was more than a turkey, and that bird you eat when you get together with the turkey?

When was the last time you were surprised by Jesus?

He is the Lord of the unexpected. The author of surprises. The master of the unpredictable, the Creator of the unforeseen. He startles. He astonishes. He shocks. That's our Savior! Do you know Him? I'd sure like you to meet Him.

When was the last time you were surprised by Jesus? He surprised all kinds of people in the Bible.

- The woman at the well was surprised that Jesus saw beyond her race, beyond her sex, beyond her past, and saw the power of love's potential in her life.
- Mary and Martha were surprised that Jesus gives us hope beyond death, because He is the Resurrection and the Life.
- An old Lady who had suffered from feminine bleeding that left her penniless, unclean and excluded from Jewish worship, and unfit for marriage was surprised by the power of just a touch of Jesus' robe.
- Nicodemus was surprised that Jesus could give new birth.
- A paralytic was surprised that not only could Jesus make him walk, but could forgive his sins as well.
- A funeral procession was surprised that their corpse was alive.
- Sinners were surprised that Jesus accepted and associated with them.
- The deaf were surprised they could hear.
- The blind were surprised they could see.
- The forgotten were surprised by love.
- The abused were surprised by comfort.

That's who Jesus is! Have you met Him? He's continued to surprise people throughout history.

- Martin Luther was surprised by grace, discovering we are saved by Christ's gift, and don't have to earn or purchase or ticket to heaven.

- William Tyndale was surprised by the power God's Word had when people could read it in their own language.
- Alexander Campbell was surprised by the sufficiency of God's Word, as he discovered that you didn't need denominations with all their levels of bureaucracy and man-made creeds to have a relationship with God.
- C. S. Lewis was surprised by the intellectual integrity of the Christian faith. Starting as a skeptic attempting to disprove Christianity, he found the evidence for it so compelling he was, in his own words, "dragged into the kingdom kicking and screaming."
- Chuck Colson was surprised by grace after being imprisoned for his crimes in the Watergate scandal.

That's our Jesus! Do you know him? He's still surprising people. I asked this question on Facebook and here are some of the answers I got.

- Sherry says she was surprised just now. I was praying on my way to work. I've been struggling with doubts and I told God I was giving it to him. As soon as I said, "Amen" and turned the radio on. They said the words I needed to hear.
- Milan says she thinks of it more as 'blessed' rather than 'surprised' but honestly it seems to be constant! Every time I can't find something - then it shows up in the most random place. Or when I'm feeling anxious and then the scripture I'm reading takes a hard turn and speaks specifically to my heart. Or when I just can't figure out how I'm gonna make something work and then it's like a light bulb goes off in my mind. It seems like an endless list of things I'm blessed by!
- Allen Todd, one of the missionaries we support here at Son-Rise share that on their arrival in Australia, Jesus surprised me by having a fellow Steelers fan in the customs line next to us, a couple in the airport who were not only Christians, but had been part of a church plant that our mutual friends from Bible college had started. Now they are living in Newcastle attending our church and getting involved! Thank you Jesus!
- Amanda shares how she was crying and heartbroken on the floor after her husband left her. She cried out to God and 3 friends called within 20 minutes.

That's our Jesus! Do you know him? He still surprising people. He's surprised me many times.

- I was surprised when a missionary's daughter sold me her car for \$1 when she knew I needed it more for my weekend preaching than she did.
- He has surprised us with groceries, with anonymous money when we were down to our last penny. There was one time when we were between ministries and we had no idea how we were going to pay our bills. A family dropped off a check and told us how my ministry had changed their lives. It was exactly what we needed. Not only that, but that was a point where I was really wrestling with the question, is the ministry even worth it. Maybe I'd be better off selling used cars, or repairing computers.

That's my Savior! Do you love Him? Do you know that he loves you?

When was the last time you were surprised by Jesus?

Nathanael was surprised by Jesus. In Matthew, Mark, Luke and the book of Acts, he is known as Bartholomew. Bartholomew is a family name like a last name. It means "son of Tolmai" which means he had another name. Most scholars believe his given name was Nathanael. Nathanael, son of Tolmai. This is how he is known in John's gospel. We will call him Nathanael, because we get our best look at him in John's gospel. We find Nathanael being surprised by Jesus in John 1:43-51.

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come, be my disciple." Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter's hometown.

Philip went off to look for Nathanael and told him, "We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth."

"Nazareth!" exclaimed Nathanael. "Can anything good come from there?"

"Just come and see for yourself:" Philip said.

As they approached, Jesus said, "Here comes an honest man--a true son of Israel."

"How do you know about me?" Nathanael asked

And Jesus replied, "I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you."

Nathanael replied, "Teacher, you are the Son of God--the King of Israel!"

Jesus asked him, "Do you believe all this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this." 51 Then he said, "The truth is, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down upon the Son of Man."

Nathanael Skeptical of Nazareth

Nathanael was brought to Jesus by Philip. Nathanael was curious, but he was also skeptical. A lot of us are like Nathanael. We're curious about Jesus. We're intrigued. We find a lot of things attractive about him, but we're also skeptical. There has to be a catch, right. It sounds too easy, or it sounds too complicated, or it sounds too old fashioned.

Nathanael was skeptical because Jesus was from Nazareth. These doubts may have been because of Nazareth itself, the kind of town it was. Nazareth was on a trade route, so it was a stopping off place for caravans and travelers of all sorts. It was also near a lot of big Roman construction projects, the kind of projects that probably kept Joseph employed. A lot of merchants, craftsmen, and tradespeople made their way through Nazareth.

Because of all this traffic, Nazareth was full of brothels. These kinds of towns had a certain reputation. As Nathanael said, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

Rivalry Between Towns

Perhaps there was a rivalry between Nazareth and Nathanael's hometown of Cana, about eight miles to the north. Maybe the Nazareth football team had beaten them that year. We

know how intense rivalries can exist between towns. I interned in Houston, TX. There was a tremendous rivalry between Houston and Dallas. I even read of a six year-old boy in Houston who prayed, "God bless Mommy and Daddy and little sister, and bless my puppy dog. And I guess, God, this is good-bye, because we're moving to Dallas."

Religious Insignificance

It could also be that Nathanael had very religious reasons for distrusting Jesus because of Nazareth. Nazareth is never mentioned in the Old Testament. "If Jesus were really the promised Messiah," Nathanael may have assumed, "Why isn't he from Bethlehem." After all Micah had prophesied Bethlehem to be the birthplace of the Messiah. At this point, Nathanael was completely unaware of the unique events surrounding Jesus' birth.

Jesus Welcomes Skeptics

I want you to notice Philip's response to Nathanael's skepticism. Philip didn't try to answer his doubt. He doesn't try to argue with him or prove him wrong. He simply said, "*Come, and see.*" Check it out for yourself. Examine the evidence on your own.

We will run into a lot of people who are skeptical of Christ and our faith. They will have doubts and concerns. Some people feel that they can't share their faith because they don't have answers for every question. But you don't have to have all the answers to let your light shine. Be like Philip who said, "*Come and see.*" When they see the integrity of your life, the authenticity of your faith, the genuineness of our worship, the sincerity of our love, they will see Jesus.

Jesus didn't judge Nathanael because he was skeptical. In fact, Jesus welcomed him. Jesus welcomes our questions. He invites skeptics to "come and see." Nathanael had his questions, but when Jesus saw him, He saw straight to the skeptic's heart. He knew his questions were honest, his concerns were real, his search was genuine. Jesus called him an honest man. He said there was nothing false in him.

Is Your Search Honest?

Let me talk to those of you who are skeptical this morning. Is your search real? Are your doubts genuine? Do you have honest questions? Or are they just excuses. Some people make up skeptical excuses to keep God at arm's length. They aren't honestly searching. They don't really want their questions answered. They just want an excuse for not taking Jesus seriously.

Are you really searching? If you are looking for honest answers to honest questions, then Jesus welcomes you, Son-Rise welcomes you, I welcome you. This is a safe place for your journey of discovery.

Have you been hurt by The Church

People today are skeptical of Jesus and the church for several reasons. Some have been hurt by the church. One lady suffered sexual abuse at the hands of a church leader as a child. The

wrong was covered up and she was swept under the rug. Today, she seethes with anger, and doesn't trust God or the church. Perhaps your disappointment with the church isn't that severe. Maybe, it's worse. I cannot and will not defend everything churches or Christians do. If you've been hurt by the church, I apologize. But know this, who we are in our worst moments does not represent who Jesus is. It's everything Jesus came to change. That's why he died on the cross. That's why we need him.

Some are skeptical because of sermons that beat up instead of build up. Some are distrusting because of the perception that the church is more interested in their money than their lives. Some fear their spiritual development, because they were dragged to church as a kid, dragged to a church that was dead and hypocritical. Church was always something you got to do, not something you get to do.

For all of those who are skeptical of Jesus because you are put off by His church, because the church is full of sinners, I want to be very up front with you. The church IS full of sinners. That's right. I've said it. There it is right out there in the open. We're all a bunch of sinners. We're a bunch of liars, lazy bums, gossips, fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, selfish jerks, irresponsible, unreliable, hypocritical sinners. Yes, we are sinners; sinners who've had their sin taken by Christ on the cross, sinners with hope, sinners with life, sinners who've found victory over sin, and are still finding victory over sin. Sure, we may lose some battles, but the war has already been won. We're a bunch a sinners. And you know what else? So are you. Here's the good news: we've got room for more. We've got room for you. If you want to be a sinner with help and hope, Come and see!

Do You have Intellectual Doubt

Others are skeptical because they have intellectual doubts about the credibility of the Christian faith. How can we take a collection of writings thousands of years old as the authority for our lives today? Things like miracles, healings, and resurrection seem more like myth and legend in a world of science and technology.

Some think that becoming a Christian means that you have to throw your brain out the window. But nothing could be further from the truth. The apostle Paul freely engaged with the philosophers of his day in Athens, and he invited them to examine the claims of Christianity. Some of Christianity's greatest defenders have been those who once had strong intellectual objections.

The most brilliant of minds have examined the claims of Christianity and found them to be quite plausible. C. S. Lewis once thought Christianity untenable. Josh McDowell came to Christ as a graduate student who had set out to disprove Christianity. Lee Strobel was an atheist and an investigative journalist when his wife converted to Christianity. He began to investigate the claims of Christianity himself to disprove his wife, and as a result of his studies became a Christian at the age of 29. Today, he writes books that make an intellectual defense of Christianity. Each of these people became great defenders of the Christian faith.

I had a professor in Bible college who had once been a staunch advocate of evolution. His efforts to disprove the faith brought him to Jesus. We it be a surprised to learn that Jesus wants us to love Him, not just with all our hearts and souls, but also with all our minds. Do you have intellectual questions about Jesus? Come and see.

Do you struggle with The Problem of Evil

Others struggle with the problem of evil. They discount Christianity because of all the apparent injustices in the world. How can there be a God that is both all-good and all-powerful when there is so much evil in the world? Natural disasters kill people by the thousands. Crazy gunmen open fire in schools slaughtering our children. Babies are born with gross deformities, others with crippling disease. How can we believe God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son in the face of all this?

I will not deny the presence of evil in our world, but the real problem is not evil in the world. It is the evil in us. The problems in our world are not a testimony to what's wrong with God, but a testimony to what's wrong with us. Our sin has affected the very fabric of the universe. The Scriptures tell us that all of creation groans under the weight of sin waiting for the day God will set all things straight.

So why doesn't God set things straight right now? Why does He let bad things continue to happen? Because to set all wrong things right, means he would have to set us right, and if we don't have a right relationship with Him, that could be devastating. We should be pleasantly surprised to learn that the reason God delays is because according to the Bible, *"He is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* Do you struggle with the "problem of evil?" Come and see.

Are you afraid to Kiss the Good Life Good-bye

Some are reluctant to come to Jesus simply because they fear boredom. If they come to Jesus they will have to kiss the good life good-bye. They see Christianity as void of all excitement and fun. God doesn't want us to have a good time. If we start having too much fun, God will be there to blow the whistle.

Unfortunately, many Christians and churches make faith seem boring. But this is not how it should be. Jesus never meant it to be that way. I'm not a TV evangelist that will soft-sell the challenges of faith and promise you riches beyond your wildest dreams. The Bible is quite open that in following Jesus there will be trials and tribulations. We are in a great spiritual struggle, and the fight is hard.

But following Jesus is also filled with unimaginable blessings and indescribable joy. You will have encounters you can't explain, and experiences that can only be described with the word, wow! Jesus says in John 10:10 *"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."*

Not only that, but Jesus invites us to join him in his mission. We get to help bring this abundant life to others. The purpose of the church isn't just to tell people about life in

eternity, it is to help make life here and now more abundant in every way.

And this doesn't even get into the fact that this abundant life isn't just for the few decades we spend in this life. There is eternity on the new earth that truly is beyond your wildest dreams.

Do you think knowing Jesus will be boring? Come and see.

Jesus welcomes the skeptical. He welcomed Nathanael. He will welcome you. Jesus surprises the skeptical. He surprised Nathanael. He will surprise you. He will surprise you with how well He knows you. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

Jesus knew Nathanael. He told him, *"I saw you while you were still under the fig tree."* Now many have speculated but we really don't know what Nathanael was doing under that tree. Perhaps he was praying, or reading the Scriptures, or perhaps he was just thinking, but we don't really know. But Nathanael knew, and so did Jesus. And that surprised Nathanael. He may have been skeptical at first, but he was so overwhelmed by Jesus' intimate knowledge of him that he immediately declared, *"You are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."*

Do you want to be known? No, I mean really known? Not on a surface level or some artificial level that we let most people know us. Are you ready for Jesus to know your inmost being, yet still love you anyway? He already knows you, but will you know Him? He will surprise you. Do you know Him? I'd like you to meet Him.

There are many here that do know Him. And they have been surprised by Him. I told you earlier that we were going to give you the opportunity to tell how God has surprised you. How God has done the unexpected in your life. What I want you to do is form little groups wherever you're sitting, and one or two of you share of a time that God did the unforeseen in your life. I know God has worked in your lives. I've heard the stories. If you're visiting with us today, you don't have to say anything, you can just listen. If you're outside, visit with the others in your car and talk about a time God surprised you, when he did the unexpected in your life. Tell your kids.

He is the Lord of the unexpected. The Author of surprises. The Master of the unpredictable, the Creator of the unforeseen. He startles. He astonishes. He shocks. That's my Savior! Do you know Him? I'd sure like you to meet Him.