

Sermon Series: *The Gospel of John* Reformation Sunday

We Have Found Messiah

John 1:35-51 (ESV)

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35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, **36** and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” **37** The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. **38** Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” **39** He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. **40** One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. **41** He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). **42** He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” **44** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. **45** Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” **46** Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” **47** Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” **48** Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” **49** Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” **50** Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” **51** And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Introduction

Today's text will cover three days, day 3, 4, and 5 of the first week of Jesus's public ministry. It is interesting that John begins his gospel with a rather intense focus on the first week of Jesus' public ministry and then he finishes his gospel with an incredibly intense focus on the final week¹ of Jesus' public ministry.

Day 3

The Witness of John: Attention Turns Away From John

John 1:35-37 (ESV)

35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, **36** and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” **37** The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

¹ The final nine chapters (13-21) are dedicated to the the last week of Jesus' life.

This day is day 3 in John's narrative. As we saw last week, in the previous paragraph, John the Baptist is the main character. This is a private conversation between John and two of his disciples. John says, "**Behold! the Lamb of God!**" This is an abbreviated testimony of what John had said the previous day. John is consistent. His private conversation is consistent with his public proclamation. His message is clear and unambiguous. John looked at Jesus and again, for at least the second time, proclaims Jesus to be **the Lamb of God**.

John has two of his disciples standing with him. Verse 37 tells us that when they heard John say "this," they then left John and followed Jesus. Notice that "this" is what made a change in the lives of two of John's disciples. **Two of John's disciples heard him say this** and their feet began a new path.

To what does the "**this**" refer? What had they heard him say? When they heard him say "this," their lives took a new direction. The "this," of course, refers to Jesus being **the Lamb of God**. These two unnamed men left John and began following Jesus because of what John said about Jesus. John had other disciples who did not at this time begin following Jesus (Jn 3:25; ???) but these two did.

The attention has now turned away from John and onto Jesus. The significance of John from this point onward will increasingly diminish. John had been pointing people to Jesus and finally at least two understood what he had been saying and obeyed him. They followed Jesus.

John was quite a man. You have to be a pretty solid person to lose a couple of your disciples and be OK with it. In fact, John will later say that seeing the attention turn away from him and onto Jesus brought him great joy. John is a man whom we would do well to study and one to whom we should pay close attention.

The First Words of Jesus to His First Disciples

John 1:38-39 (ESV)

38 Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "**What are you seeking?**" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" **39** He said to them, "**Come and you will see.**" So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

Have you ever the feeling that you were being followed? It is possible to have a sense that someone is following you even before you look behind you. Yet we always do look behind us. We look around in order to confirm with our eyes what we somehow sense in our spirit. This is also true on a much larger plain. We have a spiritual sense that God is real and that He is there, but we struggle to see with the eyes of our head what we can only see with the eyes of our hearts.

Notice the two follow Jesus but they do not speak to him. They're following him, but they are not walking with him. They were walking behind him. Jesus is aware that he is being followed. He turns around and sees these two guys following him and he speaks to them. [If you saw two men following you, would you turn and strike up a conversation with them? Jesus does.] When you are coming to Jesus, he turns and comes to you.

What Are You Seeking?

Jesus asks the two, "**What are you seeking?**" These are the first words of Jesus recorded in this gospel. This is a great question, isn't it? What are you seeking? It has the potential to be a very probing question. It all depends upon how we understand it. This is a question both for the two

who are following Jesus and for all who would read this gospel as well. This is a question for each of us. What are **you** seeking?

These two answer Jesus by calling him “Rabbi.”

The word literally means ‘my great one’, but was a common term of honour addressed by a student to his master, his teacher (as John’s explanatory aside points out, for the sake of his Greek readers). The the title was used as a courtesy honorific, applied by respectful people to those they recognized as public teachers of divine subject matter.²

“**Rabbi, where are you staying?**” (v.38). What were these two really asking? Were they simply asking Jesus for his address? This is probably a polite way of saying, “We’d really like to talk to you, but we don’t want to bother you, so could we stop by in a little while and have tea, perhaps?” Jesus understands their polite request and responds with an invitation.

“**Come and you will See.**” This invitation is a conditional imperative and conveys the sense “If you come—and I want you to—you will see.”³ The two accepted the invitation and went with Jesus to his lodgings and evidently stayed with him that night since it was the “**tenth hour of the day,**” which according to Jewish reckoning of time (which began the day at sunrise, which was 6:00 a.m.) was 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon.

Some argue for a Roman reckoning of time, which began at midnight, making the tenth hour 10:00 a.m. in the morning. However the context seems to indicate the day is almost gone and it’s time to settle in before dark. These two men then had the evening to spend talking with Jesus and trying to understand who he was. This is then the close of day three and Jesus has two men who have now attached themselves to him.

Day 4

If this understanding of time is correct, then verse 41 points to the beginning of day 4 and after talking with Jesus all night, the first thing Andrew did that day was go and get his brother Peter and bring him to Jesus.

The Witness of Andrew: The Staggering Authority of Jesus

John 1:40-42 (ESV)

40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. **41** He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). **42** He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “**You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas**” (which means Peter).

John the evangelist finally names one of the two men who left John and began following Jesus. Andrew was one of them. The other remains unnamed. This may be John, the author of this gospel

² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 155.

³ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 75.

since, as we have noted before, he never directly names himself but only refers to himself in oblique ways.⁴

We Have Found Messiah

Andrew then went first thing in the morning and found his brother Simon. The first words out of his mouth were “**We have found Messiah,**” (Μεσσίας *Messias*) which is a Semitic term (Aramaic/Hebrew) John then translates into the Greek term Christ (Χριστός, *Christos*), which means “the Anointed One.” In the Old Testament to be anointed meant that you were **specifically set apart for a particular purpose or office**. Kings were anointed, prophets were anointed for service to God, as were priests. The Coming One, the Messiah, was understood to be the embodiment and fulfillment of aspects of all three of these roles, prophet, priest, and king. Andrew tells his brother, that he had found him.

Andrew then **brought Simon to Jesus** (v.42). Andrew, the less notable brother, is leading Simon to Jesus. He is, like John the baptist, pointing his brother to Jesus. This says something about witness to family members does it not? We ought to be able to bring our family members to Jesus. When we find that for which we have been seeking, then we bring our brothers and sister to discover what we have found. When we discover joy, we naturally desire to share it with those we love most.

Note that John tells us that “**Jesus looked at him.**” Jesus looked at Simon. Why would John tell us this? Can’t we assume that they looked at each other? Of course they looked at each other. Why even note this unless there was something deeper happening in the exchange of looks than mere physical apprehension of appearance. *Jesus looked at Simon*. And Jesus’ question almost sounds like Jesus had previously heard of Simon and had been thinking about him. “**So you are Simon the son of John?**” Perhaps Andrew the previous night had told Jesus all about Simon. Maybe Andrew had shared some crazy stories about Simon and Jesus was very interested in this man.

Jesus Gave Simon A New Name

Then Jesus does something staggering. He gives Simon a new name. Who meets someone for the first time and has the audacity to say, “I know your name is Simon, but you need a new name. I have a better one for you. Let’s call you Cephas?”

In the Old Testament, giving someone a new name was a demonstration of authority over them⁵ and an expression of a new direction or a new purpose. God gave Abram a new name, Abraham, and then set him on a new course to fulfill the meaning of that new name (to become the father of many nations). When Pharaoh Neco captured Jerusalem he had made Eliakim, son of Josiah, king and renamed him Jehoiakim, sending the message that Pharaoh was now his father and he now represented a new reign and authority in this kingdom which now belonged to Egypt (2 Kgs 23:24). Just few years later Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and he did the same thing. He installed Mattaniah as king and changed his name to Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:17).

Jesus said to Simon, “**You shall be called Cephas**” (which means Peter). “Cephas” was an Aramaic word that means “rock.” John does not expect his readers to know Aramaic so he translates the word into Greek, which is Peter. **The message is clear, the direction and purpose of Simon’s life will never be the same.** Meeting Jesus face to face will totally change your life. Having personal encounter with Jesus will forever change your identity. If Simon was a headstrong and self-willed individual, then Jesus is sending an amazingly loud message that He was not merely a teacher to be

⁴ Köstenberger, 76.

⁵ Ibid., 77.

occasionally listened to, but He was a king to be followed and obeyed. Jesus was saying to him, “You are now Simon son of John, but your life will begin to run on the tracks that I will set down for you and you will grow into the man that I will cause you to become.” This had to have been a stunning first-impression. In fact we might say Peter is left speechless. From the point of view of the text, Peter says nothing.

Day 5

Verse 43 now signals the beginning of another day, day five.



Jesus Issues His First Command

John 1:43-44 (ESV)

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “**Follow me.**” **44** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

The next day, day 5, Jesus decided to go to Galilee. If they were still in “Bethany across the Jordan” (v 28), then most likely they would have headed north about 20 miles and around the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida which is on the northern shore.

Bethsaida was the home of Andrew and Peter. The name means “house of fishing,”⁶ since so many of the inhabitants were fishermen, as were Peter and Andrew. We are not told why Jesus wanted to go there, but seemingly he was looking for someone and his name is Philip. “**Jesus found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’**” (v.43).

So far Jesus had three men who had been following him—Andrew, Peter, and the unnamed follower (most likely John). Thus far, Jesus had called none of them. They had simply followed him. Jesus had extended an invitation, but so far he has not yet technically called any of them. This fact changes with Philip. Jesus went looking for Philip, found him, and then said to him, “**Follow me.**” Now there are four following him. It is possible that Philip, Andrew, and Peter had previously known each other since they were from the same town (v.44).

The Witness of Philip: Jesus—the One About Whom Moses Wrote

John 1:45-46 (ESV)

45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” **46** Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

Just as Andrew went and found Peter and brought him to Jesus, so Philip went and found Nathanael and brought him to Jesus. Philip’s description of Jesus to Nathanael is similar to Andrew’s description of Jesus to Peter. Philip tells Nathanael “**We have found him whom Moses and the prophets wrote about.**”

⁶ Frank E. Gaebelain, Merrill C. Tenney and Richard N. Longenecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 9: John and Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 40.

D.A. Carson writes, “That has been the foundational principle of truly Christian expansion ever since: new followers of Jesus bear witness of him to others, who in turn become disciples and repeat the process.”⁷ The most effective witness is eye-witness. The most convincing testimony, is personal testimony.

Moses Wrote About Jesus?

The one whom Moses wrote about in the Pentateuch is probably a reference to the “The Prophet” whom God told Moses He would raise up after him.

Deut 18:18 (ESV)

18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. **19** And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.

The Witness of Ethersheim

However, this is only one of hundreds of references in the Old Testament which were understood to apply to Messiah or to the coming of Messiah. Alfred Edersheim (1896) listed a total of “456 references in the Old Teatament; 75 references from the Pentateuch, 243 from the Prophets,⁸ and 138 from the *Hagiographa* [wisdom literature], and supported by more than 558 separate quotations from Rabbinic writings.”⁹

Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph

In biblical times last names were not used as we do today and so people were normally identified by relation to their father (eg. Simon son of John) and their home town, thus “**Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph**.”¹⁰ Although Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he grew up in Nazareth. John has already pointed out to us that Jesus is the one-and-only Son from the Father (v14) and that Jesus is God and thus has no beginning but Philip thus far only notes Jesus’ earthly father and the town in which he grew up.

Jesus’ hometown of **Nazareth** is a stumbling block for Nathanael. “**Can anything good come out of Nazareth?**” Messiah was to be good and Nathanael has trouble believing anything good can come from such a small and insignificant town (probably of no more than 2,000 people¹¹) that is not mentioned in the Old Testament. The fact that Jesus was referred to as Jesus of Nazareth, which was located in Galilee, would later be a stumbling block to the Pharisees (7:41, 52) who evidently did not seek to know the city of his birth (which was Bethlehem).

Nathanael is a prejudiced skeptic. He is prejudiced against Nazareth and he without hesitation speaks his mind regarding the people of Nazareth. He is also a skeptic. He will need some convincing. However, Philip does not attempt to argue with Nathanael. He simply takes him to Jesus using as an invitation the very words which Jesus himself had previously spoken, “**Come and see**” (v.46). It is as if he was saying, “Don’t take my word for it. Check him out for yourself.”

⁷ Carson, 159.

⁸ See for example, Isa. 9:1–7; 11:1–5, 10–12; 52:13–53:12; Dan. 7:13; Micah 5:2; Zech. 9:9.

⁹ Alfred Edersheim, vol. 2, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1896), 710.

¹⁰ On the phrase “son of Joseph” see also John 6:42.

¹¹ Köstenberger, 81.

Perhaps if we did the same, more people might be convinced. If we would simply bring people to Jesus as he is clearly described in the Bible, then perhaps more people would believe that he truly is worth believing in.

The Piercing Insight of Jesus

John 1:47-48 (ESV)

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” **48** Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

Jesus does not commend Nathanael’s prejudice. He commends his honesty. This is the only instance of the term Ἰσραηλίτης (*Israēlitēs*, Israelite) in this Gospel.¹² Jesus means something by it. Israel was the name given to Jacob, in whom there was deceit.¹³ Jacob deceitfully gained possession of his brother’s blessing, but Nathanael is not like his father, Jacob. He is not a deceitful person. There is no duplicity in him. Psalm 32:2 pronounces blessings upon “the man in whom there is no deceit.”

Nathanael is shocked that Jesus knew him so well. **How do you know me?** Jesus knows our hearts better than we do. He has the ability to see into the depths of our being. His insight can pierce the center of our thoughts. “He is light and in him there is no darkness at all.” He knows the content of our thoughts, and this fact stunned Nathanael. We are unable to hid our secret thoughts from the Lord, so why do we try. We will eliminate much useless talking in our prayers if we would remember this.



I Saw You Under the Fig Tree

Jesus responded to Nathanael’s question by saying, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

The fig tree is can be a very large tree. In the Old Testament it is often a symbol of home, leisure, prosperity, and safety (cf. 1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4; Zech. 3:10). In rabbinic literature it is spoken of as a place for meditation.¹⁴ When you see one and consider the hot climate, you can understand why.

Whatever all is intended in this saying it conveys that Jesus is able to perceive more than is humanly possible and Nathanael understands this as his response indicates.

Nathanael’s Public Proclamation

John 1:49 (ESV)

¹² Köstenberger, 82.

¹³ See Gen 27:35-36.

¹⁴ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-), Jn 1:48.

49 Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Whatever happened in that interchange suddenly removed Nathanael’s prejudice and skepticism. He had met Jesus personally. Indeed something good can come out of Nazareth. The Son of God and the King of Israel. This is an amazing response. Jesus had demonstrated knowledge of Nathanael’s heart and knowledge of whatever is meant by “I saw you under the fig tree.” All of this along with Philip’s witness was enough to convince Nathanael that Jesus was the Promised One, the Messiah.

Stay Tuned More To Come

John 1:50-51 (ESV)

50 Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” **51** And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Jesus offers Nathanael a wonderful promise. Nathanael believes based upon what he has already seen, but Jesus promises that he will see more. Nathanael responded in faith to only a few small signs. Jesus then assures him that this faith will be provided with much more evidence to substantiate his belief in Jesus as Messiah. Essentially Jesus is saying stay tuned, there is more to come.

Jesus describes a scene of heaven being opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man describing him as the ladder. This scene appears to be incredibly similar to Jacob vision (Gn 28:12).

“And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. . . . Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go. . . . For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” (Gen 28:12-16)

There are probably two conclusions that we should draw from this. One is that the way into heaven from earth is the Son of Man. One climbs up into God’s presence on a ladder. The way to God is through the Son of Man, which is through Jesus. Second, Jesus is the place to meet God. You no longer have to go to Bethel (“the house of God”) you simply have to go to Jesus. Evidently Nathaniel believed this. From now on Jesus would be the place of divine revelation.

As we close, consider the titles of Jesus used in this passage.

1. The Lamb of God (v.36) who takes away the sin of the world.
2. Rabbi (v.38, 49) a teacher of divine truth
3. Messiah (v.41) the Promised One who was to come
4. Him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote of (v.44) the fulfillment of the hope of Israel
5. Jesus of Nazareth (v.44) perhaps they learned this while talking with him that day (v.39)
6. The son of Joseph (v.44) his earthly father
7. The Son of God (v.49) his heavenly father
8. The King of Israel (v.49) Sovereign of all Israel

9. The Son of Man (v.51)

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” (Dan 7:13-14)

Son of man can in Scripture simply refer to a man, a human and certainly this phrase refers to Jesus' humanity. However, He is so much more than that. He is the Messiah, the King of Israel, the One-and-Only Son of God, the one to whom all dominion and all glory will be given. His reign will be everlasting. His kingdom will never end.

Are you joyfully his subject?

Jesus is so much more than a good moral teacher. He is the King of kings and Lord of all lords. And yet what do we see. He decided to go to Galilee to get Philip.

He seeks individuals to know him personally.

He asks you “What are you seeking?”

This morning I tried to bring you to Jesus. I pray that seeing Him, as we have seen Him in these verses, will make a difference in how you live your life this week.