

Gospel of John Study Session 4

In our last session we took a look at both the identity of John the Baptist and also his message. His appearance gave reason for hope as he was the forerunner of Jesus. He was sent to proclaim that the Messiah had indeed arrived and to point out the Messiah to the people. Yet, in and of himself, he was not a source of hope. He pointed to Jesus Christ as being the sole source of hope for humanity finding God.

In this session we will see a shift in emphasis going from John the Baptist to Jesus and some of those who would eventually be called to be Jesus' disciples. We are going to see how Jesus can transform the lives of anyone who comes to Him. But how do people come to know Jesus or encounter Him? This session answers that question.

Q: Which type of the following endorsements would be the most likely to get you to buy something that you needed?

- a) Celebrity/influencer endorsement
- b) Professional athlete endorsement
- c) TV commercial
- d) Professional council/agency endorsement
- e) Newspaper ad
- f) Billboard ad
- g) Personal friend

Generally, the endorsements of a personal friend are far more effective than any of the others listed.

Q: Why do you think this is the case? (*personal friend is known, authentic, honest, etc.*)

This idea carries into this session as it deals with why what happened in the text worked and how it can still work for us today. We are going to look at effective endorsements.

1. John the Baptist endorsed Jesus to the masses.

[John 1:35-37]

This passage comes directly upon the heels of the last week's session. John the Baptist was interrogated by a delegation of Jewish religious leaders sent from Judea. The main message of John the Baptist was that he pointed out the Messiah clearly. The very next day, John and his disciples saw Jesus walking and John again declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God. When people truly believe what they say, they tend to repeat the message often so that others understand that what they are saying is their true belief.

Q: From what we read last week, what was the ministry of John the Baptist? (*His ministry was to prepare the hearts of people for the coming of the Messiah.*)

John provides a genuine model of what it means to be a servant of God. The human, fleshly tendency for ministers is to make a name for ourselves so that people will remember us and then gather a big following for ourselves. Yet the role of a true witness is to minimize oneself in order to allow Jesus to become the focus of attention. It takes humility which we saw John the Baptist possessed last week. John's endorsement of Jesus rang true because he willingly gave up everything, including his influence and authority, to testify of the reality of who Jesus was.

[Galatians 5:16-26]

Q: What does living by the flesh look like? (*vv. 19-21, 26*)

Q: What does living in the Spirit look like? (*vv. 22-23*)

Fruit is produced as part of the life cycle of a plant. It is not manufactured. There are no such things as orange factories where real oranges are made. They only grow on trees under certain conditions. When the tree bears fruit, it means the tree is alive and well. Likewise, when we walk by the Spirit, the fruit that has the nine attributes listed will be produced. The fact that John the Baptist demonstrated humility (gentleness) is a marker that he was living under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Thus his endorsement of Jesus was an act of the Spirit pointing people to Jesus, possibly at his own expense. Two of John's disciples left him to follow Jesus.

2. Andrew endorses Jesus to his brother.

[John 1:37-42]

Q: Who were the two disciples of John who followed Jesus? (*v. 40 - Andrew was one of them and we are not told the name of the second*)

Q: What did Jesus ask these two men? (*v.38 - What do you seek?*)

Jesus is asking these two men what is truly on their minds. Here the Messiah asks these men what He asks of anyone who would make a show of beginning to follow Him. He wants these men to articulate what they really want in life. That's really the same question Jesus asks anyone who wants to follow Him. "*What do you really want in life?*" "*What is important enough to lay down everything else for?*"

As to the identity of the other man who was with Andrew, while there is no textual evidence or proof, it has been assumed since the early church fathers that this was John, the author of the book, the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Q: How did the two men answer Jesus' question? (*v.38 - Where are you staying?*)

Q: Here John the Baptist has just pointed Jesus out as the long-awaited Messiah and the Messiah asks them what they want out of life and they answer this. Why do you think that these men cared where Jesus was staying? (*They wanted to know where he was staying so that they could*

go with him to get away from the crowds and talk to Jesus in a private setting.)

Notice that these two men call Jesus “Rabbi”. The literal meaning of the word means “my great one” but was a common term of honor given to a master or teacher by his student. By the time of John’s writing this book, the term took on an exclusive meaning “ordained” teachers (those who had completed an official ordination) but at the time of this event, it was a more general term of respect. The text tells us that this took place around the tenth hour of the day which in Jewish time was about 4:00 in the afternoon. So they spent several hours with Jesus in a private setting talking to Him, asking questions, and listening to what Jesus was doing. We don’t know what was said during this visit, but we do know the outcome and impact it had on the two men (or one, if you don’t take the second to be John the disciple).

Q: Who was Andrew’s brother? (*v. 40 - Simon*)

Q: After leaving Jesus’ company, what did Andrew do first? (*v.41 - He went and told his brother Simon that they had found the Messiah*)

Look at the difference in that in v.38, Andrew called Jesus “rabbi” but in v.42 he called Jesus “Messiah”. The conversation with Jesus solidified the endorsement of John the Baptist in his mind.

Notice that in v. 38 John (the author) translates the Hebrew word “rabbi” for “teacher” in Greek . Again in v.41 John (the author) translates the word “Messiah” into Greek. This is one of the ways we know John’s audience was not Hebrew speaking or Palestinian Jews. Rather his main audience was those from the dispersion of the Jews outside Palestine who spoke Greek as their primary language. John does the same thing in v.42 when he translates the name Cephas, which means Peter.

The word “found” in v.41 is placed at the beginning of the sentence which gives it a dramatic sense - like a major discovery (which it was).

[Matthew 13:44]

[Matthew 18:12-14]

These verses use that same word “found” or “finds” in the same sense as here in John. It’s an exciting and amazing find. It’s truly a cause for celebration and rejoicing to make such a discovery.

Out of this excitement, Andrew brought his brother, Simon, to Jesus to meet Him personally. Jesus, upon meeting Simon, gave him the nickname Peter, which means a large piece of rock.

This is how the gospel spreads most effectively; from person to person where the first person understands who Jesus is and is excited about the discovery and new life the gospel brings.

3. Philip endorses Jesus to his friend.

[John 1:43-46]

Again, we are seeing the actual speed at which this is happening by the statement, “the next day” (v.43). Jesus went to Galilee and found Philip. Again this is the same dramatic use of the word “found” as we saw back in v.41. Notice in v.45 when Philip is talking to Nathanael, he says that “we” have found Him... The “we” is that Andrew and the other man (probably John) and probably Peter at this point are all with Jesus here in Galilee.

Q: What did Jesus ask of Philip? *(v.43 - for Philip to follow Him)*

Q: What do you think that Jesus meant when He ask Philip to “follow Him”? *(In the tradition of the Jewish rabbis of the day, a teacher would collect students to themselves and invite them to learn about every aspect of life and doctrine from them - by following them - or surrendering their lives to the teaching and loyalty of their rabbi. The question a rabbi would ask before invited a person to follow him was, “Will this person be able to do what I can do in time? Can this person be a rabbi in time?” If not, they not invite them or expel them if they showed lack of promise. It was a commitment but that commitment didn’t usually result in a person leaving their secular job, just be flexible to the rabbi’s needs and schedule.)*

Q: Who did Philip find and ask to come and meet Jesus? *(v.45 - He found Nathanael)*

Q: What did Philip say about Jesus to Nathanael? *(v.45 - They had found Him who Moses in the Law and the Prophets also wrote about - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.)*

Calling Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph was the way in that day and time a person was identified. We would use a first and last name, they used a first name, location of where they were from and their father’s name. Notice that by telling Nathanael that Jesus was the one whom Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets foretold, He is saying that Jesus is the One who fulfills completely the Scriptures (the Old Testament). These early disciples could not have identified Jesus as the Messiah without first believing that the Scriptures pointed to Jesus as the Messiah.

4. Nathanael endorsed Jesus as the Son of God.

[John 1:46-51]

Q: What is Nathanael’s reply to Philip’s discovery of Jesus of Nazareth? *(v.46 - Can anything good come out of Nazareth? In other words, that’s impossible.)*

This gives us some insight into the ancient culture of northern Israel in that day. Nathanael was from Cana which is another town in the area of Galilee. People from Galilee (northern Israel) were often despised by those Jews from Judea (the southern end of Israel). It appears from this statement that there was more than just a local rivalry between villages but that Galileans despised Nazareth as they were despised by Judeans. From John (the author’s) perspective, this further adds to Jesus’ humble beginnings. Instead of claiming He was from

Bethlehem, the city of King David, Jesus is referred to being from Nazareth, a despised town in a despised region of the nation. Some years later Christians were contemptuously dismissed as being a “Nazarene sect” (Acts 24:5).

Q: What is Nathanael’s final verdict about Jesus? (*v.49 - You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel*)

Both of these terms are Messianic in nature. The question for us is how did Nathanael come to this conclusion in just one brief meeting? Think of it. Philip has identified Jesus as being from Nazareth. Everyone who knows Scripture knew that the Messiah was coming from Bethlehem. All Philip and Nathanael knew was where Jesus grew up, not where He was born. They also only knew of His supposed father. Nowhere in this encounter does anyone identify Jesus as the Son of God - just the son of a carpenter from Nazareth, which Nazareth never even is mentioned in the Old Testament it’s that insignificant.

Q: What was it that Jesus did that convinced Nathanael that Jesus was the Messiah? (*v.48 - Jesus knew that Nathanael was a man without guile and saw him under the fig tree before Philip called him.*)

Q: Which attribute of God does this demonstrate that Jesus possessed? (*God’s omniscience - Jesus knew what He should have been able to know and Nathanael understood this. Outwardly He knew Nathanael was under the fig tree but inwardly Jesus knew that Nathanael was an Israelite in whose heart there was no deceit.*)

While Nathanael’s first response to Philip and Jesus was one of disbelief, when he gets the big picture of what’s happening, he jumps on board and endorses Jesus as the Son of God and King of Israel -both of which were terms for the expected Messiah. His unbelief became belief.

What is interesting is that while Jesus does not deny being the Son of God or King of Israel, He is not quick to take up these titles and apply them to Himself. Both of these expressions were in the popular mind largely tied to the expectations of a political liberator. Yes, Jesus was the promised King but He’d have to explain how His kingdom was not of this world. (John 18:36).

In v.51 we see the first use in John of the familiar phrase of Jesus, “*Truly, truly I say to you...*” It translates to “in truth, in truth” or as we would say “amen, amen”. It denotes certainty and steadfastness. We use it at the end of prayers to express hearty agreement - what was just prayed is the certain truth and we agree in our hearts with that truth. When Jesus uses it in the gospels, He is emphasizing trustworthiness of His words and their importance.

While Jesus is responding directly to Nathanael in v.52, the “you” is plural. Thus the promise is for all the disciples of Christ; for all those who follow Him. Yet what is it that is promised exactly?

[Genesis 28:10-19]

God opened heaven for Jacob and promised Him access to Himself (God) and blessings that go with access to God.

Q: In v.51, where are the angels ascending and descending? (*v.51 - on the Son of Man - Jesus. In Genesis the angels were ascending and descending upon Jacob and now they are doing so on Jesus and the disciples will see this for themselves*)

This means that the one they have by faith come to acknowledge as the Messiah has been appointed by God to grant access to God directly. In the Old Testament, Jacob called the place where God revealed Himself, Bethel, which means “house of God”. Yet, Jesus has rendered such holy places as obsolete (Bethel, the Temple, etc.) because through Him comes the fulness of grace that surpasses the grace given under the old covenant. This statement by Jesus was to indicate that they would all soon have direct access to God. Instead of a ladder as seen in the Old Testament, Jesus is the means that grants man access to God.

[I Timothy 2:5-6]

Q: At this point, how are all of Jesus’ disciples making contact with Jesus? (*They are being brought to Jesus by other people.*)

Q: What do these men have in common with each other? (*they are from the same geographical area, they are nobodies - unknown, common men, other answers possible*)

Q: What does this passage teach us about how the gospel is spread? (*It can be spread by word of mouth to those closest to us*)

Q: What was the attitude of those men who shared Jesus with their family and friends? (*they were excited to tell them about Jesus*)

It is important to note that Jesus asks all people the same question today as He did back in John. What are you seeking? What are you looking to for in life? Do you want acceptance, position, influence, excitement, escape, love, security experience, or approval? After that question comes the invitation to follow Jesus. Jesus invites us to come and see that in Him He will fulfill everything we’ll ever need. In Him we will have access to God.

There are a few other loose ends we need to deal with briefly to finish out this section.

1) The name Nathanael only appears in John. In the other gospels he is called Bartholomew. Nathanael is the personal name called among friends while Bartholomew was the name identifying him to others - like son of ... Bartholomew is linked with Philip in three other cases in the Synoptic gospels (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:14 but this is not the same man as in Acts 1:13).

2) Also we need to harmonize the gospel accounts of Jesus calling His disciples.

[Matthew 4:18-21]

Many people see this as a contradiction in the Biblical record. However, it isn’t and it’s

an easy one to explain. The account in John came first. Jesus met with Andrew and probably John in the John account. He answered their questions and gave them what they needed in order to believe in Him as the Messiah beyond John's endorsement. Then a short time later, the Synoptic accounts took place. Jesus was walking by the shore and saw Andrew and Peter and John and James and called them to follow Him and they did. They were ready to follow Him because they had already met with Him and made the decision to follow Him based on their prior meeting. It much more probably that these men were willing and ready to make a life changing decision based upon a man they had talked to first rather than just a man they had heard about. The main thing is that when called by Jesus, they responded and their lives were transformed by Jesus.

Q: What obstacles keep you from sharing Jesus with others?

Q: Who do you know that needs to come to know Jesus?

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?