

The Gospel of John

Lesson 2: The Testimony of John and the First Disciples -- John 1:19-51

The crowds keep coming out to the Jordan, and the question keeps surfacing in the same hushed, hopeful tone. Who are you? A delegation of priests and Levites has been sent down from Jerusalem to find out. Is this rough preacher in camel's hair the Messiah they have waited for through centuries of silence? Is he Elijah come back? Is he the Prophet Moses promised? And John the Baptist, who could have claimed almost anything in that electric moment, does something rare. He tells them what he is not. "I am not the Christ." He is only a voice, he says, a voice in the wilderness telling people to make the road straight, because Someone is coming who is so much greater that John is not worthy to untie His sandal.

Then it happens. Jesus walks by, and John points. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" In one sentence he tells us why Jesus came. Not first to teach, though He taught. Not first to heal, though He healed. He came to be the Lamb, the sacrifice, the one who would carry away the sin that no priest and no offering had ever truly removed. John has spent his whole life pointing, and now the One he has been pointing toward is standing in front of him.

What follows is a quiet revolution, the way most of the kingdom's revolutions begin. Two of John's disciples hear him and start following Jesus. Jesus turns and asks them the first question He asks anyone in this Gospel: "What are you seeking?" One of them, Andrew, goes and finds his brother Simon, and brings him to Jesus, and Jesus looks at him and gives him a new name. The next day Philip is found, and Philip finds Nathanael, and Nathanael's skepticism melts when he realizes Jesus saw him before they ever met. One person tells another, who tells another. That is how it spreads. That is how it still spreads.

There is something in this passage for everyone who has ever wondered whether their small part matters. John the Baptist will never see the church that springs from his pointing. Andrew will mostly be remembered as the one who brought his brother. Philip simply says, "Come and see." None of them is impressive by the world's measure, but each one points, and the pointing changes everything. Read these verses and watch how Jesus gathers His first followers, and ask whether He might be asking you the same question He asked them: What are you seeking?

Group Discussion: When the religious leaders pressed John the Baptist about his identity, he kept turning the attention away from himself and toward Christ (vv. 19-27). Why is it so tempting for us to want recognition, and what would it look like for our group, our family, or our congregation to live as people who point to Jesus rather than to ourselves?

Personal Reflection: Jesus' first words to His would-be disciples are a searching question: "What are you seeking?" (v. 38). If Jesus asked you that question honestly today, what would your truest answer be, and how closely does that answer match what you say you are seeking?

Read John 1:19–51

Study Questions

1. When the priests and Levites questioned him, John the Baptist insisted, “I am not the Christ” (v. 20), and described himself only as “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness” (v. 23). What does John’s understanding of his own role teach us about the purpose and limits of every human ministry?
2. John the Baptist said of Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease” is the spirit of his whole witness here. In what specific area of your life is Jesus calling you to step back so that He can be seen more clearly?
3. John points to Jesus and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (v. 29). What does this title tell us about why Jesus came, and how does it connect Him to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament?
4. Andrew’s first act after meeting Jesus was to find his brother Simon and bring him to Jesus (vv. 41–42). Who first brought you toward Christ, and who in your life might God be calling you to bring to Him?
5. When Andrew told Simon, “We have found the Messiah” (v. 41), and Philip told Nathanael about “him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote” (v. 45), what were they claiming about Jesus, and why does it matter that the whole Old Testament was pointing to Him?
6. Jesus looked at Simon and said, “You shall be called Cephas” (Peter), giving him a new name and a new future (v. 42). What does it mean to you that Jesus sees not only who you are but who He intends to make you?
7. Nathanael began as a skeptic (“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”) but came to confess, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (vv. 46–49). What moved him from doubt to confession, and what does this teach us about how honest questions can lead to real faith?
8. Philip’s invitation to the skeptical Nathanael was simply, “Come and see” (v. 46). Who in your life is full of honest questions about Jesus, and how might a humble “come and see” be more powerful than trying to win an argument?
9. When Nathanael confessed Jesus as the Son of God and King of Israel, Jesus accepted the titles and promised he would see “the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (v. 51), echoing Jacob’s ladder. What is Jesus claiming about Himself as the meeting point between heaven and earth, and how does this passage build the case for His divine identity?
10. Look back over this passage. From John’s pointing, to Andrew’s inviting, to Philip’s “come and see,” ordinary people kept leading others to Jesus. As you finish this lesson, what is one specific way Jesus is forming you into someone who points others to Him?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 40:3-5, the voice in the wilderness preparing the way; Isaiah 53:4-7, the suffering servant led like a lamb to the slaughter; Genesis 28:10-17, Jacob's ladder joining heaven and earth; Exodus 12:1-13, the Passover lamb whose blood spares God's people; 1 Corinthians 5:7, Christ our Passover lamb sacrificed for us.