

Holy Momentum

John 1:35–51

Studies in John #3

I WANT to return to chapter 1 this morning. I tried to bite off more than I could chew with a four-point sermon only to get through one! You may not realize this but I'm always learning how to preach. We spent most of two years in the Old Testament and changing course and going into the New takes some adjustment. Then there's always the need to teach many details of the text that often are foreign to us so that we can understand it plus needing to proclaim a message. There's the pastor's inner conflict of saying too much and taking years to finish off a book of the Bible or saying too little and preaching a series of sermonettes for Christianettes! And there's the ever looming reality that while the sacraments are wonderful, you also need your snackraments afterwards! So, here we are again.

John 1:19 began the historical narrative or story of John's Gospel. And what's the story John is telling? The eternal Word who eternally is in perfect union and communion with the Father and Spirit has become perfectly human so that he might declare to us sinful humans how to get back into fellowship with God. That story began with John the baptizer's witness that Jesus of Nazareth is this Son made flesh to be the lamb sent from God to reconcile us to God. And John's witness led to the witness of others. I want to proclaim to

you today that what we see in Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael is the holy momentum of the kingdom of God. In sports there is a thing called momentum. Sometimes we call it the “mojo.” It’s when you get on a roll. One thing happens, then another, then another, and finally it’s unstoppable! It’s true in life. One heart-to-heart as a couple leads to one action then another, and another. Here John the Evangelist describes how John the baptizer evangelized men, who “saw” Jesus, followed Jesus, remained with Jesus, and told others about Jesus. Then another saw, and followed, and remained, and told. And another. Holy momentum! Disciples evangelize and make more disciples. This story continues two thousand years later.

ANDREW’S WITNESS (VV. 35–42)

We move from John’s witness about the true light of the world to its effects on those in darkness. There are three brief accounts of those who “see,” which is double entendre—this means they literally see him but especially believe in him. They then “follow” Jesus, which is double entendre—they literally walked after him but more importantly became his followers or disciples. They “remain” with Jesus, which is yet another double entendre—they literally stay where Jesus stays, but more importantly, they remain with him or are united to him by faith. Finally they tell others to see, to follow, and to remain with him too.

Again **the next day...John and two of his disciples** (v. 35) see **Jesus** and John says, **“Behold, the Lamb of God!”** (v. 36) The text describes immediate results: **The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed** (v. 37). That’s a powerful calling that only a sovereign God in irresistible grace can accomplish. Amen? A herald plants a seed and waters, but God gives the growth. If you don’t know Jesus today or if you’re not sure if really has forgiven your sins: **Behold, the Lamb of God! Follow** him!

For the first time in the Gospel we hear Jesus’ voice: **“What are you seeking?”** (v. 38) If you could hear Jesus say anything to you, what would it be? I’m amazed at these words! He doesn’t accuse them of being filthy sinners who are unworthy! He doesn’t tie them up in theological knots! He asks *them* a gentle question: **“What are you seeking?”** Again it’s double entendre for, “What are you *really* seeking?” Their answer is all you need to know about their desires: **“Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?”** (v. 38) They see Jesus, they follow Jesus, and they remain with Jesus. It’s funny because they really have no idea what they’re asking. We know the prologue where the Son of God has been in the bosom of the Father for all eternity—and they’re asking Jesus where he’s staying! Jesus says, **“Come and you will see”** (v. 39)—literally, but ultimately. So memorable was this moment that

they could recount later to John as he wrote: **it was about the tenth hour** (v. 39).

After all this we're given a name of **one of these two who heard John speak and followed Jesus: Andrew, Simon Peter's brother** (v. 40). By holding the names back it's as if John is saying, "It doesn't matter the names; anyone who sees, follows, and remains is a disciple." In response to seeing, following, and remaining, Andrew begins this pattern of holy momentum as he **first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ)** (v. 41). Εὕρισκει. As we've Anglicized this word: "Eureka!" We've found the one the prophets said would come, the one all our hopes and dreams are bound up in—the anointed One! Then **he brought Peter to Jesus and Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter)** (v. 42).¹

Do you realize how important a change of name is? In our culture it takes some official document that a woman has been married to change her last name. Or if you want to legally change your name it takes a court proceeding. How much more so when *God* changes a name? Abram became Abraham; Jacob became Israel. How about us? Our parents give us a name, but God

gives us a new one when we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He names us “Christian.”

PHILIP’S WITNESS (VV. 43–46)

Again the narrative says **the next day** and our ESV translates **Jesus**. The Greek text says *he*.² I believe it’s actually referring to Andrew since everyone in the story tells another about Jesus. So Andrew **decided to go to Galilee**. Why? Verse 44 says **Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter**. Andrew and Peter are from there so they go home as they wanted to find **Philip** and keep the holy momentum going. When Andrew did he said simply **“follow me”** (v. 43). We translate the “he” of verse 43 because this is what Jesus says in the other Gospels (e.g., Matt. 4:19). But the amazing thing is that Jesus calls no one in this narrative. The call comes through the disciples. This teaches us how vital we are in calling others to follow Jesus. We can never sit back and say, “If God wants to save that person, he’ll do it without me!” Never, never, never!

Then we read of **Philip**, who “sees” Jesus by faith through the witness of Andrew, follows Jesus by following his disciples, remains with Jesus by faith like the rest, and then we goes and **found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him—Εὕρισκει—of whom Moses in the Law and also the**

prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (v. 45). **The Law and...the prophets** is code for the entire Old Testament—and Jesus is about it all! But **Nathanael** says almost famous last words: **“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”** (v. 46) Why does he say that? Remember I said that “the Jews” in verse 19 should be translated “the Judeans.” The Jewish people in the Roman region of Judea despised the Jewish people in the Roman region of Galilee to the north. Now fellow-Galileans despised one of their own town of Nazareth! Philip’s answer: **“Come and see,”** quoting Jesus himself! (v. 46; cf. v. 39)

NATHANAEL’S WITNESS (VV. 47–51)

The final part of the narrative is NATHANAEL’S WITNESS. Now **Jesus sees Nathanael coming toward him...“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”** (v. 47) using a line from Psalm 32. Being without deceit means that you are upright in your relation to your neighbor. **Nathanael’s** question, **“How do you know me?”** is better **“From where do you know me?”** We say, “I don’t know him from Adam.” Nathanael’s saying the same! **Jesus,** the master evangelist, draws Nathanael: **“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you”** (v. 48). Jesus uses Old Testament imagery

where to sit under and eat from your own fig tree is metaphor for home (Isa. 36:16; Mic. 4:4; Zech. 3:10). We often imagine Jesus being like this:

Faster than a speeding bullet.
More powerful than a locomotive.
Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound.

That totally dates me, doesn't it? When we read stories like this we think of Jesus like we think of superman with some kind of spiritual x-ray vision to see everyone, everywhere.³ We learn later that Nathanael was from Cana in Galilee (21:2). Do you know which town was near Cana? Nazareth. Jesus is saying that he's see Philip in his own home environment and seen his godliness. Nathanael's response was, **"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"** (v. 49) He says this because whenever God declares something of his people, they respond in awe and wonder.

Amazingly Jesus' responded: **"Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these"** (v. 50). Now that Jesus has gathered his first disciples he prepares them for what is to come in his ministry. John's also preparing us, the reader, for more accounts of Jesus' glory. And one of them is Jesus' own self-witness at the end: **"Truly, truly—Amen, Amen, I say to you (plural), you (plural) will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of**

Man” (v. 51). The disciples declare Jesus to be the Son of God; he declares himself to be the glorious Son of Man from Daniel’s prophecy.

Do you see him today? Follow him. Remain with him by faith. Tell someone, “Come and see.”

Endnotes

J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John 1–6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2007), 3:15.

¹ On the meaning of this name, see Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 156.

² On the interpretation of ἠθέλησεν referring to Andrew and *not* Jesus, see Carson, *The Gospel According to John*,

² On the interpretation of ἠθέλησεν referring to Andrew and *not* Jesus, see Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 156.

³ See Carson on this being an instance of Jesus “showing...his supernatural knowledge.” *The Gospel According to John*, 161.