



Bricks in the Foundation of Faith

Series: John – That You May Believe

John 1:35-51

February 26, 2017

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Beloved, before we get into this text this morning, I want to clarify a couple of things from last week that raised questions. First, you will remember that I said that John the Baptist did not know Jesus' true identity before he baptized Him at the Jordan River. And there was some confusion – and I could have been more clear about this – because we could think that in John 1:29-34, that John was describing the baptism of Jesus, but he's not. When Jesus arrives at the Jordan River and John says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," this is after Jesus' baptism and after He had been in the wilderness being tested by Satan. John 1 is describing when Jesus was returning from that testing to begin His ministry. So when John sees Jesus coming and announces His presence to everyone there, this is about six weeks after Jesus' baptism, where John had been convinced of Jesus's identity by the miraculous signs from heaven and in John 1, he is recounting how he came to know that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

Second, at the end of the sermon I said that the chief reason that we exist on this earth, why we have not been translated to heaven, was so that we would testify along with John, with our words and with our lives, that Jesus is the Son of God. What I should have said, or clarified, is that the chief reason that we exist in this fallen earth, and among fallen people, and have not been taken immediately to heaven – our chief ministry to the lost – is to testify to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Our chief end, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism so perfectly says it, is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. I believe that and you have heard me preach that repeatedly.

The ultimate purpose, the eternal purpose of our lives is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We have minds to know God, hearts to love God intimately, mouths to sing to praise Him, wills with which to obey Him, lives with which to serve Him, souls with which to honor Him. Ultimately that is what human life is all about. But what I was trying to convey

was this. You can do everything in heaven that you are doing right now on this earth, but one thing. You can worship and adore, magnify and glorify God, know and obey – and that, praise God perfectly since there will be no sin in heaven – give praise to Christ for His glorious redemption and faithful love, everything except for proclaiming Christ to the lost and testifying to His worth among the nations so that the lost may be saved. That we can only do now and it is the reason that we have been left upon this earth – to testify with our lives and with our words, “Jesus is the Son of God.” It is in that sense, in relation to the lost, that I meant that the reason that we exist is to testify to the truth about Jesus. So, our ultimate purpose in relationship to God is worship. Our chief purpose on this earth, as it regards mankind, is to testify to Jesus, ok? I hope that helps. I’m grateful to the folks that asked those questions so I could take a couple of moments to clarify these things this morning.

The text that we have before us today deals with the beginning of Christ’s ministry and the calling of his first disciples – Andrew, an unnamed one – most commentators agree that it is the Apostle John, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. Many times, preachers and commentators, put the focus of these verses on the men themselves, their character and strengths and weaknesses, a study on why it is that Jesus specifically chose these men, but I think that misses the point. Just as John the Baptist is not the star of the story, neither are these men. It is not that we cannot learn anything from these men, but the main point is the person of Jesus –who HE is. After all, the Apostle John wrote this gospel so that **you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31, ESV)** So, following John’s lead in writing this gospel, our goal, the driving force, should be to discover what this text shows us about the glory of Christ and how what we see should lead us to an initial and growing faith in Him. And it’s the right approach. What we see in this text, through Jesus’ interactions with these men, are bricks being laid in the foundation of our faith as we see with greater clarity who Jesus really is. So our approach in this sermon is going to be a little different. There isn’t really an outline like usual. Instead, I want us to walk through this text, sort of chunk by chunk, and I’m going to point out what this text teaches us about Christ and make some application as we go. So let’s look at this. Pick it up in verse 35.

“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.” (John 1:35–37, ESV) Now what do we see about Jesus in these first couple of verses? Well, the first thing that we see, is **Jesus is the goal of John’s and of all**

truly Christian ministry. Two days in a row, here is John proclaiming Christ, pointing to Jesus, leading his disciples to see Jesus for who He is. That was the whole goal of John's ministry. It was to shine a light on Christ, to present Him to needy souls, to fade into the background as Christ took center stage. That was it. No gimmicks, no cheap parlor tricks, no bait and switch. Jesus is the goal of John's ministry. Point his disciples to Jesus as he faded into the background – that was his goal. This world is in desperate need of preachers like John, who are gladly willing to let lose any concern for their personal ambitions and popularity out of a consuming desire to point faithfully to Christ. And that, beloved, is the goal of all truly Christian ministry – to point to Jesus.

Ministry that does not fiercely point to the true Christ of Scripture– deliberately, explicitly, repeatedly, purposefully, intentionally, resolutely, and persistently – is not truly Christian ministry no matter what it may claim. Look if it is more about the preacher, or the church, or the programs, or the personal benefits, or social do-gooding – if those things obscure Jesus or reduce Him to a tack-on or a means to an end – I don't know what it is, but it isn't Christian ministry, not gospel ministry. Jesus is the goal of all truly Christian ministry.

What else do we see? **Jesus is the sin-removing Lamb of God.** John has already said this and He says it again, because it needs to be said over and over again. This truth needs repeated, frequent affirmation and declaration. We need to be continually reminded that we have Lamb who takes away our sins. Here, in Jesus alone, is the forgiveness of sins and the removal of real guilt before God. Finally, in Jesus, is the final sacrifice for sin that ends all other sacrifices. The compelling call to believe in Jesus and have life in His name begins right here – with the realization that we need a Savior, that we need our sins taken away, that we need our offenses against God to be covered and removed or we are doomed. Yes, Jesus came to bring us abundant life. Yes, Christ worked miracles and still does today. Yes, He transforms people, but these are the benefits of the gospel – not the gospel itself. The gospel centers on Christ, first, as sin-bearer and sin-remover, the Lamb of God.

That is music to my soul. I am a sinner and Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, became a man and he did two things in my place, in the sinner's place, that we desperately needed. In my place, as my representative, He lived a perfect life of obedience to God. What I couldn't do; what you cannot do, Jesus did. He lived a sinless life in our place, on our behalf, so we could receive credit for that perfect life. But even more, and this is the emphasis here – as the Lamb of God, He paid my debt, the penalty of my sin that I owe to God the Father. He died

the death and suffered the wrath and the fury of God that I deserved in my place, as my substitute. He gave Himself up to die on the cross to pay my debt. He endured the wrath of God, the fury of God against my sin, and paid for it all. That is the central truth of the gospel.

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation (the sin-bearer, the wrath-bearer, the guilt-remover) for our sins.” (1 John 4:9–10, ESV) John the Baptist did his ministry well. The reason these two disciples – Andrew and John – left John the Baptist and followed Jesus was because they knew, by John’s ministry they knew that they were sinners and Jesus is the sin-bearing Lamb of God. They followed Jesus and watch what happens:

“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?” 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 (or 4 pm).” (John 1:38–39, ESV) This is so cool. There is more to this than meets the eye. So often, Jesus’ questions are deeper and more direct than they seem to be on the surface and this is one of those times. When Jesus says, “What are you seeking?” we could take that to mean something as simple as “What can I do for you? Why are you following me?” But it so much more than that. When Jesus asks this question, the heart of it is this, “What are you seeking by following me? What are you really after? Why did you leave John to come after me?” It’s a searching question. It’s a question that needs to be asked today of would-be Christians. What are you seeking – ease, escape from trial, wealth, prestige, power, worldly success, some kind of inner peace? What are you seeking? Do you want the benefits that come with dabbling in religion, or do you what to follow Christ?

They call Him, “Rabbi,” teacher and they speak better than they really know at that point. Their question, “Where are you staying” is their way of saying – we want to learn from you. And Christ responds with these words, “Come and see.” Follow Me and you will have your eyes opened. It’s a command – “come and see” that is spiritual and has a depth to it that we can’t see on the surface. It’s a command and a promise – Come and you will see, I will give you spiritual sight.

What do we see here? What is the brick being laid in the foundation of our faith? Simply this – **Jesus is the true Rabbi, the giver of spiritual sight, who alone has the words of life.** We

are going to see this over and over again in John's gospel. Jesus gives spiritual sight to the blind. Jesus would say later, **"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** (John 8:31–32, ESV) Christ's words set us free from spiritual ignorance, free from worthless human philosophy, free from the snares of Satan, to the freedom of truth and life. His words are truth and life because as Jesus said, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6, ESV) We get a glimpse of that here. We don't know what Jesus taught Andrew and John that day and into the night, but we know their eyes were opened and they saw more clearly who Jesus is than they had seen before and we know that by what Andrew did next. Check this out.

"One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). 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 1:40–42, ESV) Andrew's first instinct, having found Jesus – really having been found by Jesus – was to go and tell his brother Simon all about Him and to bring Him to Christ. It speaks to the clarity with which Andrew saw Jesus and the confidence in what he saw. He didn't view Jesus as his own private possession or treat his meeting Him as his own personal good fortune. Having come to understand, at least in part who Jesus is, he wanted to make him known and he started with his own brother.

And the announcement that he makes lays yet another brick in the foundation of our faith in Jesus. **Jesus is the Messiah, God's "Anointed One."** The chosen one. Andrew is right in what he says, although he is saying far more than he realizes at this point and he and the other disciples would come to learn in fullness what it means that Jesus is Messiah, God's supremely anointed one. That word "anointed" is a powerfully important word, one that was used in the OT to speak of prophets, priests, and kings and the idea was that the Messiah would be all of those things in one. And Jesus is the Messiah, in a way that Andrew or Simon Peter could not yet imagine but would come to know. He is anointed by God as the greatest of all prophets. The greatest of all spokesmen for God is Jesus Himself, the Word made flesh. He is anointed by God as the greatest of all priests. He is the anointed High Priest, the great intercessor between God and sinners, the One who can truly bring sinners into the presence of a holy God and the sacrifice of Himself. And Jesus is anointed by God as the greatest of Kings – the King over the universe, the king over every created being, spiritual and material, animals and angels, king over His church, and King of the ages.

Andrew and the other disciples would learn what it meant that Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed one. But here they had a glimpse.

And yet there is more about Jesus that we need to see here, specifically that **Jesus is sovereign Lord with all authority**. Where do we see that? We see it in his changing Simon's name to Peter. Simon comes to see the Messiah, to see the one that Andrew has told him about and in his first interaction with Jesus, **Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas."** The word Cephas is Aramaic for rock and Peter is the Greek word for rock. But the focus here is not so much on the meaning of the name, as it is on Jesus' authority over people and His sovereign power to change them into what He wills for His sovereign purposes. Think about this. Our name is our identity, right? In renaming Simon, Peter, Jesus is demonstrating His sovereign authority over Peter to lay hold of him, to change his name, to determine his destiny and to change his identity. Peter's preaching would be the rock on which the church would be built. Christ would make of him, the leader of the disciples, but it had nothing to do with the potential that was in Peter – I hear people say that kind of thing, that Jesus chooses people and uses people based upon their potential. It had nothing to do with Peter's potential and it had everything to do with Jesus' sovereign power over Peter to make him what he would be in Christ when He was finished with him. We see God doing that with people all over Scripture – Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel, right? As Sovereign Lord, He has that kind of authority over us. He looks at us as we are, takes us as we are, and sees us how He will make us as He restores God's image in us as we follow Him. Jesus determines our identity. But there is more.

***"The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter."* (John 1:43–44, ESV)** Here we have the very short calling of Philip to follow Christ. The idea of that word, "decided" means "purposed" or "desired." In other words, Jesus purposefully went to Galilee to find Philip and call Him to Himself. What do we see from that? Simply this. **Jesus is the seeking Savior who has the authority to command our allegiance**. Jesus didn't just go to Galilee to make Philip an offer of discipleship; He went there to make him his disciple. Jesus has the power to command allegiance and to compel men to follow Him. We see it only in shadow here, and it will be more fully developed throughout this gospel, but it is Jesus who chooses us to be His disciples. Not that we do not make a conscious choice to believe in and follow Jesus, we do. But we need to see that we choose to follow Christ, really come to Him and receive Him as Savior and Lord, but the underlying truth is we choose Him because He set His

purpose on us and chose us first. Later Jesus will say, **“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”** (John 6:37, ESV) **“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”** (John 6:44, ESV) **“You did not choose me, but I chose you...”** (John 15:16, ESV) Jesus has the authority to command our allegiance and the power to make us respond. Then last, we turn to Jesus’ encounter with Nathanael. It’s just incredible. Look at it with me.

“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.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”” (John 1:45–46, ESV) Again, we don’t know all that Jesus revealed to Philip, but whatever He told him, it leads to Philip seeking our his friend Nathanael and what he tells him is yet another brick in the sure foundation of our faith in Christ. Philip tells Nathanael, **Jesus is the sum and substance of the OT Scriptures.** The Law and the Prophets is a common term used to refer to the entire OT. That Jesus is the sum and substance of it all is a remarkable claim, but it is true. All of the OT, from creation and fall, the promise of a Savior, the calling of Abraham, the Law of Moses, the good Kings, the prophets, the promises, the Psalms, all of it points to Jesus Christ. He is everywhere found on the pages of Holy Scripture.

Nathanael, at first is skeptical and a little prejudiced. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Rather than argue, Philip says, “Come and see.” It’s great advice and it also places another brick in the foundation. **Jesus is the truth and He can satisfy the examination of an honest heart.** Jesus and His claims can more than bear up under the honest scrutiny of men. There are no secrets. Jesus has nothing to hide. If you will come to Jesus with an honest heart, honestly seeking who He is and what He alone can offer; if you come to Him with no agenda, no axe to grind; if you will come to Him and examine Him, His words, His life, you be faced with the inescapable conclusion that He is just who He says He is. Come and examine Him, scrutinize Him, and you find Him to be exactly who He says He is. Nathanael did just that.

“Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Jesus sees Nathanael approaching and He makes a spot on assessment of his character. He isn’t saying that Nathanael is sinless, but He is saying that Nathanael is an honest and transparent man, a man who says what he thinks, a man with no filter. Without ever having met him, Jesus can look into Nathanael’s soul and evaluate him

without knowing him personally. It surprises Nathanael but nearly as much as what happens next. ***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.”***” (John 1:47–48, ESV) What are we to make of that? Obviously it has great significance to Nathanael. There is something significant in that statement. What could it be? I think all of the commentators are right when they say that Nathanael had been praying in private underneath that fig tree, out of sight of anyone, perhaps even meditating on story of Jacob that Jesus will reference in a moment. The glory of Christ that we see revealed here is that **Jesus is the Omniscient One who knows every person’s heart and circumstances.** Jesus’ supernatural knowledge of Nathanael’s character and of his private experience with God under the fig tree is enough for him to declare what we have already seen to be true: ***“Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”***” (John 1:49, ESV) **Jesus is the Son of God and the King of Israel.**

“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.”” (John 1:50, ESV) Jesus says to Nathanael, in effect, “You haven’t seen anything yet. As you follow me you are going to have your eyes opened to greater and greater degrees of my glory.” Christ’s glory is infinite and His infinite glory will unfold for eternity. His holiness, His love, His power, His mercy, His strength, His transcendence, His majesty continues to unfold before our eyes now, as we follow Him and will continue to do so forever. Then, Jesus gets very specific and references the story of Jacob at Bethel as he was fleeing from his brother Esau. ***“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.”***” (John 1:51, ESV) Now, of course, there is no way to know this for certain, but I think that perhaps Nathanael was meditating on this very passage under the fig tree.

The story goes like this. Jacob had stolen his brother Esau’s blessing from their father, Isaac. As a result, Esau was angry and wanted to kill his brother and so Jacob was forced to flee. Genesis 28:10 and following tell us the story. ***“Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. 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. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to***

the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. 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.” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”” (Genesis 28:10–17, ESV)

When Jesus says what He does, here, He is taking this incredible story from the OT and He is giving to Nathanael and to all of his disciples, the “you” here is plural, a glimpse of the true meaning of that experience of Jacob. When Jesus says, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man,”** He is making three claims, three promises about Himself that the disciples will come to know with certainty.

The first claim is this: **Jesus is the only bridge between heaven and earth.** He is the only mediator between God and man, the only one who can open heaven to sinful man, the only link between a Holy God and sinful men. He is the ladder. More than that, with these words, He is saying, **Jesus is the dwelling place of God with man.** After his dream, Jacob declared, “The Lord is in this place. This is the house of God and the gate of heaven.” But Jesus is saying, “I am the dwelling place of God with man. Abide in me, and I in you and you will abide in God.” Jesus, as the Word of God made flesh, is the new and supreme point at which God and humanity intersect.

But there is one more thing. I said there were three claims, right? Here’s the third. It is found in the phrase, “Son of Man.” By far, this was Jesus’ favorite name for Himself. It is drawn from the imagery of Daniel 7, the vision of the Son of Man, who appears at the end of history to exercise universal judgment and to receive the worship of the nations. **Jesus is the Son of Man with power and glory.** Daniel, in his vision, records the scene like this: **“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.” (Daniel 7:13–14, ESV)** This is Jesus’ true identity. This is who He is. He is the King of the Kingdom of God, with power and glory, and all will bow to Him and His Kingdom will never pass away.

There is far more to Jesus than, at first, meets the eye. In fact, He can only be understood if God gives us eyes to see and hearts to believe. This is who Jesus is. This is the glory of Christ.

Jesus is the goal of John's and of all truly Christian ministry.

Jesus is the sin-removing Lamb of God.

Jesus is the true Rabbi, the giver of spiritual sight, who alone has the words of life.

Jesus is the Messiah, God's "Anointed One."

Jesus is sovereign Lord with all authority.

Jesus is the seeking Savior who has the authority to command our allegiance.

Jesus is the sum and substance of the OT Scriptures.

Jesus is the truth and He can satisfy the examination of an honest heart.

Jesus is the Omniscient One who knows every person's heart and circumstances. Jesus is the Son of God and the King of Israel.

Jesus is the only bridge between heaven and earth.

Jesus is the dwelling place of God with man.

Jesus is the Son of Man with power and glory.

What do you do with this Jesus? What do you do with Him? This is someone who has glory like no other. What do you do with Him?

If you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, listen now, honestly examine Him, honestly examine His claims, ask Him to open your eyes to see Him as He is... and when you have done all of that, fall on your knees, humble yourself before Him and confess how blind you have been, how little you have known, what a sinner you are and how desperately you need a Savior. Ask the Lamb of God to save you and take away your sins. Believe in Him.

Jesus calls us first to believe in Him as the Son of God, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world – that’s where it must begin. But He also calls us to follow Him, to be with Him, to have fellowship and communion with Him. The calling is not simply to know about Jesus or to admire Him; it is to believe in Him and to follow Him all the days of our lives. To follow Him in real and practical ways, to willingly surrender our lives to Him where He leads, to lay down our rights to ourselves, to lose our lives for His sake and in doing so to find them. This kind of real surrender, of true discipleship is what is missing from so much of contemporary Christianity. It is so easy to try to compartmentalize faith in Christ, to keep it confined to one little area of our lives. But Jesus won’t allow that. Not this Jesus. Not the true Christ of Scriptures. Right from the beginning, we see that to be a Christian is to follow Jesus Christ. There is no Christianity apart from a personal and growing faith in Christ in which He becomes more and more practically our master and we become His disciples. Christianity is that simple: it is seeing Jesus as the Savior that God has sent and going to follow after Him as the central desire of your life.

If we are Christ’s disciples, let us follow Him. We can follow Him more closely. We can learn more of Him than we have learned. We can walk in greater fellowship and obedience to Him than we have. Let’s do that.

If we are His disciples, let us prize Him. Let it be for us, Christ at any cost. Let us treasure Him and learn all we can of Him. Let us prize Him so that others see clearly in our words, our commitments, our manner of living, our character that we prize Him above all others for who and what He is to us. Our Lord Jesus Christ deserves the very best that we can bring to Him, so let us give Him our hearts, our minds, our time, our talents and all we have, to show how greatly we prize Him whom we have found in Him. What we must do is make sure that we are truly serving Christ and not just ourselves in Jesus’ name.

Last, if we are Christ’s disciples, let us tell others about Him. As Charles Spurgeon has said, “We have a God who is infinite and omnipotent, whose supply is inexhaustible and who will be glad and gratified as we spread far and wide the invitations to the great feast in honor of His Son! My brothers and sisters in Christ, as you love Him, follow His blessed example by going after the lost sheep until you find them... Our streets swarm with the unregenerate! Many of you live next door to them when they are at home. Some of you live in the same house with them. Some even sleep in the same room with them. Plead for your husbands or wives, your brothers and sisters, your parents or children—and plead *with* them as well as

for them! God forbid that you should be eternally separated from those who are so near and dear to you!”

Let us follow Christ, no matter the cost, for He, and He alone, is worthy!

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