

Text: John 1:35-51

Title: Believe Jesus is the Christ because His disciples did.

Time: 12/3/2023 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: I read a news story from St. Louis this past week about a retired police detective who refused to testify in court during the prosecution of some of the cases in which he was the case detective. At 66 years of age, the former detective claims to be too sick to testify, believing that his heart could not take the stress. In response to concerns that criminals would be set free, the officer asserted that “retirement should be retirement” [[propublica.org/article/st-louis-retired-homicide-detective-too-sick-testify-missouri](http://propublica.org/article/st-louis-retired-homicide-detective-too-sick-testify-missouri)].

It is impossible to successfully argue a case without competent and willing witnesses. In his Gospel the Apostle John is arguing the case for Christ. It is his purpose to demonstrate that we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life in His name (20:31). In our passage John supports his case by describing the first encounter of competent and willing witnesses to the truth that John is proclaiming.

John records John the Baptist’s repetition of his declaration about Jesus to two of his followers: “Behold the Lamb of God” (vv. 35-36). John the Apostle is likely the second disciple of John the Baptist, along with Andrew, at the beginning of the passage. He, of course, is a major competent and willing witness in his own right to the case for Christ. But as is his custom in his Gospel, John remains anonymously focused on the witness of others. In addition to Andrew, he mentions Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. Bible students believe that Nathanael was the personal name of Bartholemew (meaning *son of Telamyon*), who is listed among the apostles, paired often with Philip, in the synoptic Gospels and Acts 1. In John’s Gospel Bartholemew appears as Nathanael (21:2).

Writing as the apostle of longevity, John undoubtedly wrote here about the experiences of fellow apostolic witnesses who had since passed away to glory, some as faithful martyrs of the faith. Knowledge of their lives beyond the Gospels comes from less than trustworthy sources, with conflicting details, but we do know that John considered them fit fellow-witnesses as he makes his case for Christ. The testimony of each one's first encounter with Jesus in this passage argues for the case for Christ, and it encourages us to believe on Him and have life through His name. Notice with me four ways these witnesses make the case for Christ.

I. They make the case for Christ by following Him (vv. 35-39).

Illustration: Our culture has learned to talk about "followers" with the rise of social media. I saw a report that the top five social-media influencers with the most followers in the world today are soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo with 891MM followers, followed by four pop music stars - Selena Gomez with 688MM, Justin Bieber with 594MM, Taylor Swift with 530MM, and Ariana Grande with 508MM.

Application: Our passage is about two followers who would eventually help to change the world as they made the case for Christ (v. 37). One is the Apostle Andrew, and the other is unnamed, and so again, likely the Apostle John who leaves himself unnamed in his Gospel. In total, Jesus would have twelve such followers, one of whom would betray Him.

Our passage begins with the words "on the next day," and counting backward from the wedding in Cana of the next chapter, one Bible scholar (Edersheim) concluded that this day was the Jewish Sabbath. The tenth hour of the day is mentioned (v. 39). If John used the Jewish reckoning of time of day, the tenth hour was 4 pm with the Sabbath almost over. If he used the Western/Roman method here, the time was 10:00 am. I tend to agree with those who see 10:00 am as correct,

because John tells us that the two disciples “stayed with” Jesus “that day” (v. 39). Evidently, the day was not almost over.

Andrew and John followed Jesus and spent the Jewish Sabbath with Him. They did so because Jesus had filled the gaze of John the Baptist, from whom they had heard of the Messiah, and because John had told them once again to “behold the Lamb of God” (v. 36). So they followed Jesus first because they believed the Baptist’s message that Jesus was God’s Lamb. Do we believe that this morning? Do we believe that Jesus was sent as a sacrifice to the cross of Calvary to take away our sins? Believing this is the first step of His followers.

Jesus allows these two to catch up to Him, turns, and asks them “What do you seek?” (v. 38). The answer these followers provide demonstrates that they sought not a what, but a whom. They call Jesus *Rabbi*, meaning *my great one*, a common designation of respect for a Jewish schoolmaster in those days, and John tells us that in this case it is best translated *Teacher*. These men followed Jesus because he was God’s Lamb, and they followed Him because they wanted Him to be their Teacher. Are we following Him seeking His teaching?

They ask where He would be staying, and Jesus answers, “Come and see.” Where is Jesus, our would-be Teacher, staying this Sunday morning? He has promised His local churches, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in their midst” (Matt. 18:20). Even today, His followers in churches like ours are few in number, but they are the few to whom He has said, “Come and see.” Have we come this morning to see where Jesus is staying? Have we come to spend the Lord’s Day with Him? If the answer is “Yes, that is why we are here; yes, we want to be where He is staying, where He will teach us, and where we can thank Him for being the Lamb of God for us,” then we too can be His witnesses and make the case for Christ by following Him as these first followers did.

II. They make the case for Christ by introducing Him (vv. 40-42).

Illustration: War in the Middle East is nothing new. 2 Kings 7 gives a record of the conflict between Syrians and the northern kingdom of Israel. Israel's capital, Samaria, had been under siege for some time, and people were starving. Four lepers at the gate of the city were especially desperate, and understanding that they had not long to live anyway, decided to go to the enemy and throw themselves at their mercy.

What they did not know is that Elisha had promised on the previous day that the siege causing famine would be lifted. So the Lord was not surprised like the four lepers were when they found the camp of the Syrians completely abandoned. The Lord had caused the Syrians to hear something that sounded like mercenaries coming against them, and leaving their camp quickly, they had abandoned all their supplies.

The lepers had hit the jackpot without ever playing the lottery. Verse 8: "And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it."

But then they remembered their starving countrymen in Samaria, and their conscience was pricked. Verse 9: "Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household."

Application: In our passage, Andrew and John did not want to hold their peace on this day of good tidings. They knew that in Jesus they had found the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ, the long-awaited Divine Prophet, Priest, and King of

Israel's prophecy. They go first to Peter, Andrew's brother, and by implication afterwards to James, John's brother, and so all four enjoyed the Sabbath rest with Jesus.

Like the four of 2 Kings 7, we are lepers who have hit the jackpot. We live in a day of good tidings. We do not well when we keep the news of the coming of the Messiah to ourselves. Neither Andrew nor John ever had an account on Instagram, but they did have a love for their brothers who needed this news. Do we? What might the Lord accomplish with us if we determine to no longer hide the good tidings we possess?

Edersheim describes what the Lord did with the four of our passage: "Such was on that first Sunday the small beginning of the great Church Catholic; these, the tiny springs that swelled into the mighty river, which in its course has enriched and fertilized the barrenness of the far-off lands of the Gentiles" (3.3.350). Andrew and John made a world-changing case for Christ by introducing Him to their brothers.

III. They make the case for Christ by reading about Him (vv. 43-46).

Application: With verse 43, Jesus begins His earthly ministry on Sunday. John the Baptist had ended his ministry to the apostles on the previous day, the Jewish Sabbath. One era of God's work among men had come to a close, and a new era had begun. But this new era was the fulfillment of the old, which anticipated it on every page of its Scriptures.

Philip tells Nathanael: "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Philip and Nathanael could have a conversation about what Moses and the prophets wrote, because they had read Moses's law and the prophets. What they had read prepared them to believe the case for Christ. Many disbelieve the case for Christ, never bothering to read their Bibles.

At first, Nathanael resisted Philip's conclusion, not finding the word *Nazareth* anywhere in Moses or the prophets. He asks, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Such was the thinking of the day - the Messiah would come from Judah, where Bethlehem and Jerusalem were. When Jewish authorities wanted a label that discredited the Christianity of Paul, they called his faith *the sect of the Nazarene* (Acts 24:5).

Philip told his friend to come see for himself, but had these witnesses possessed a copy of the Gospel of Matthew like you and I do, it would have helped them locate Nazareth in the prophecies that foretold the Messiah. In Matthew 4, their fellow apostle directs his readers to Isaiah 9 in this regard (Isaiah 9:1-7). Even coming from Nazareth, Jesus is the One of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. Do we read of Him there? Have we found the case for Christ in their writings?

IV. They make the case for Christ by confessing Him (vv. 47-49).

Illustration: In 1522, a book by Sir Thomas More was published that included this sentence: "As it often happeth that the very face sheweth the mind walking a pilgrimage, in such wise that, not without some note and reproach of such vagrant mind, other folk suddenly say to them, 'A penny for your thought.'" That is the first known instance in print of the idiomatic expression, "A penny for your thoughts," which we say to people to ask what they are thinking but not saying.

Application: When I get to heaven someday, I may look up Nathanael and offer him a penny for the thoughts he was thinking while sitting under the fig tree that Jesus refers to here. Clearly, what amazes Nathanael is the fact that Jesus did not need to make such an offer. He knew what Nathanael was thinking. They may very well have been thoughts about Jacob, whose name meant *supplanter* or *deceiver*, and so Jesus welcomes Nathanael with the commendation: "Truly an Israelite

in whom is no guile [like Jacob].” Before Jesus is done talking to Nathanael, He will refer to Jacob’s experiences at Bethel and apply them to Nathanael’s life in verses 50-51.

But though Nathanael’s thoughts under the fig tree are still hidden from us, his thoughts about Christ are not hidden at all. He became a witness for the case for Christ through his confession. He confesses that Jesus is the Son of God and the King of Israel. He still did not understand how Jesus could be from Nazareth, but he knew that Jesus was the One who could see Him in a way no one else could. And so he believed, and believing he confessed, and confessing he witnessed.

Is your faith in Christ your open confession of Christ? Have you declared openly and verbally to others that you believe He is all that He claimed to be, that He is your Savior who died and rose again for you? That is what baptism is for, but Nathanael’s example encourages us all to simply let others hear from our mouths what we know to be true about Christ.

Conclusion: As we conclude this passage about these first witnesses, we come to Jesus’s promise to Nathanael in verses 50-51. It is spoken to Nathanael, but it is a promise about all of Jesus’s witnesses (*ye* is plural).

Just like Jacob was changed to Israel in a place on earth called *Bethel*, meaning *house of God*, where he had dreamed of a ladder with angels ascending and descending on it, so one day Nathanael and his fellow-witnesses, like you and I, will see with our own eyes the Son of Man in the Bethel of heaven with the angels ascending and descending upon His command. No ladder will be needed then, because heaven will be open to us as we witness this triumphant and glorious scene.

A prominent context for Jesus’s most-used self-designation, *Son of Man*, is His prophecies of His second coming, when the angels are sent to gather the elect from the four winds of

heaven and to destroy the enemies of Christ on the earth (Matt. 13:40-41, 16:27, 24:30-31, 25:31, Mark 13:26). These passages tell us of the time when the Ultimate Witness for the case for Christ, the Ancient of Days, has His say about the Son of Man, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14:

“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

And so the case for Christ shall be finalized by this heavenly witness, the Ancient of Days. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We must believe on Him to have life in His name. May we be unashamed to follow Him, to introduce Him, to read of Him, and to confess Him boldly as His witnesses today.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*