



John 1:38 - 2:10

Notes by Jonathan Herron

JESUS CALLS 'LEARNERS' TO FOLLOW HIM

The narrative turns to John the Baptizer, but only in the sense that he is a forerunner and witness to Jesus. This Logos swoops down to earth. He became flesh (v. 14) and made His temple on the earth and John has seen Him. Jesus broke the barrier between heaven and earth and came to dwell on the earth for the sake of the earth. The light came into the world, but the world did not receive Him (1:9-18). John is Elijah, the one who prepares the way; Jesus is the Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world. But the world can't see Him. The motif of misunderstanding punctures the narrative and will continue. John witnesses the Spirit descending on Jesus and confesses Jesus is the Son of God (1:19-34). John's witness leads to others following Jesus (the disciples), even though some doubt (1:35-51). Jesus assures them that He is the ladder to heaven, which Jacob saw. He is the new branch and fig tree of Israel.¹

John the Baptizer is sending some of his followers after the Lord. The disciples of John recognize the Messiah and spontaneously attach themselves to Him. A minor confirmation is that John's Gospel tells us the Simon was given the name Peter when Jesus first met him (v. 42).

¹ Schreiner, Patrick. *The Visual Word: Illustrated Outlines of the New Testament Books*. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2022). 40.

In the Synoptic Gospels, there is no recounting of this meeting, no indication of when the name was bestowed.

One of the two disciples (i.e. “learners;” the word meant those who had attached themselves to a given teacher) is subsequently named as Andrew, but the other’s name is not given. From early times it has been thought that he was the beloved disciple, John himself. It would accord with this that we have some touches of an eyewitness, the picture of John “standing,” and the look he gave Jesus as he walked.²

Jesus then calls another new disciple, Philip:

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow Me” (v. 43).

Jesus took the initiative, coming to Philip with a very simple command: “Follow Me” — literally, “Keep on following Me.” And Philip did. In the following verses we see immediate incendiary results in Philip’s life — he had a burning desire to share the gospel. One lighted torch lights another torch. So Philip went forth to share the gospel, and soon he found Nathaniel.

Philip found Nathaniel 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.” Nathaniel said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see” (vv. 45-46).

² Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971). 155.

Philip was excited! His words must have tumbled out of his mouth. Nathaniel had not yet heard about Jesus of Nazareth, but he knew his Hebrew Testament. He knew that Bethlehem was named as the birthplace of the Savior, not Nazareth. Besides, Nazareth was just four miles from Cana, which was Nathaniel's hometown, and since there was a little rivalry between the two places, he had to challenge Philip. "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" Philip gave him the best and only possible answer. He said, "*Come and see.*" We need to make that response when we are tempted to argue.³

SPIRITUAL REALITIES IN OUR WORLD TODAY

The ensuing encounter between Jesus and Nathaniel reveals the spiritual realities that were already at work.

Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward Him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathaniel said to him, "How do you know me?" (Vv. 47-48).

Jesus emphasized that Nathaniel was a transparent, honest man. That is probably why Nathaniel reacted to Philip's news by saying, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" He said what he thought. I think that characteristic was confirmed by Nathaniel's reaction to Jesus' words: "How do you know me?"

³ Hughes, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word: John, That You May Believe*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1999). 53.

Notice that our Lord said Nathaniel was an *Israelite* in whom was no deceit. He put deliberate emphasis on that word because Jacob, the Hebrew Testament patriarch, was Israel, and he was full of deceit and hubris — a scoundrel who loved God. God worked in Jacob’s life until finally, after wrestling with God, Jacob was renamed Israel. One translation says, “*Behold an Israelite in whom there is no Jacob.*” Nathaniel was evidently a Hebrew Testament believer, like Simeon and Anna, who was looking for God. Jesus knew Nathaniel’s character before He met him and said he was an honest man. How could Jesus know? That thought must have flashed through Nathaniel’s mind. Beautiful revelation!⁴

With Nathaniel’s mind whirling, Jesus continued to astonish him in verse 48: “*Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.*” This is one of the great cryptic statements of the New Testament. For centuries men have tried to decipher the symbolism of the fig tree. In some Scripture passages it is a symbol for peace. In many others it is a symbol for a home. Or it could be taken literally and just mean a fig tree. What is important is that Nathaniel had a religious experience that no one but Jesus knew about. Maybe Nathaniel had been reading the story of Jacob’s ladder. The point is that Jacob had a profound spiritual moment under the fig tree that Jesus alone knew about. It was as if Jesus were saying, “I know about the experience you had that you shared *only* with God.”

Nathaniel was not only honest but also intelligent enough to connect the dots. He knew that God is omniscient, and he realized that Jesus’ statement demonstrated omniscience. This man had to be God! Consider Nathaniel’s response in verse 49: “*Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel!*” What an incredible answer! Because he was an Israelite full of

⁴ *Ibid.*

honesty, Nathaniel was prepared to come to know God, and when he saw Jesus' omniscience, he responded and believed. He did a complete 180-degree turn and confessed Jesus was the Son of God.

Jesus responds in verse 51 by taking the lid off any remaining mystery: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."* This statement took Nathaniel back two thousand years to the time of Jacob. In Genesis 28, Jacob had just stolen the birthright from his older twin brother, Esau. Jacob was a scoundrel who also loved spiritual things. Because of his fear of Esau's wrath, Jacob went fleeing for his life. He ran forty-three miles in one day across the desert wilderness and was exhausted by verse 11:

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.

You are really tired when you can sleep on a stone! Jacob was in terrible shape. He felt wretched and alone, as if he didn't have a friend in the world. But even in his tremendous loneliness out in the wilderness, God loved him, rascal though he was. So God came and comforted him with a vision.

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!
(v. 12).

Under that ominous Syrian sky God gave Jacob a vision of encouragement. “Look, Jacob, do you think you are all alone out here? There is traffic between heaven and earth on your behalf. Let that comfort you.” That was the dream Jesus referred to when speaking to Nathaniel, though He mentioned no ladder:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

The finest Greek scholars say this means Jesus is the ladder. What a tremendous truth! The ladder is Christ! *“Nathaniel, you have not seen anything! As you enter into the fulness of your relationship with Me, and as your spiritual vision is broadened, you are going to see swarming angels and hear the rustle of their wings as they move on that ladder between heaven and earth for you.”* And this is actually what happens on behalf of believers today. Allow this vision to broaden your vision of Christ today!

Heavenly hosts minister to us in today’s world. Of course, sometimes angels get a little curious, as we know from 1 Peter 1:12: *“It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you... things into which*

angels long to look.” They want to understand what is going on in this world. If our eyes could only be opened, sometimes we would see the sky full of angels!

THE SIGN IN CANA

The first half of John’s Gospel is known as the Book of Signs. Jesus’ signs show He is the Son of God. When John uses the word “sign,” he always uses it with the idea of a miracle that conveys a deeper spiritual teaching, and that is certainly true here. We not only see Christ showing His glory in His power to change the physical elements from water into wine, but in His power to change a life. This is what this is really all about: “They have no wine…” is not only the statement of a young couple’s problem but, as John saw it, a spiritual condensation of human experience without Christ.

Heading into this second chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus encounters four Jewish traditions (jars, temple, rabbi, well) and transforms their meaning, displaying He is the reality to which they all point. The old has gone, the new has come. Life without Christ is a life without wine. Jesus goes to a wedding party, where seven jars for ritual purification become containers for new wine (2:1-11). No longer will the old purification rites be needed; the abundant new wine of the kingdom has come as Isaiah predicted (Isaiah 25:6-8). F.F. Bruce says, “Christ (is) changing the water of Jewish purification into the wine of the new age.”

Like these newlyweds, the universal experience of humanity, apart from Christ, is that there comes a time when the wine runs out, when the joy and exhilaration of life are gone. The solution is Christ:

When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever He tells you” (vv. 3-5).

You could translate Jesus’ question this way: “Why do you involved Me?” He did not come to earth to do what man wanted. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus demonstrates a single-minded focus to accomplish His Father’s will (4:34; 17:4). Jesus did not come to obey mankind — even His mother — but God. He did obey His mother. He never sinned. But Jesus did not leave heaven to please men. Otherwise He never would have offered His life as a sacrifice for sin. If Jesus responded to what men desired from Him, He would have filled bellies, healed diseases, and overthrown Rome, and then all humanity would have died and gone to hell.⁵

Jesus tells her, *“My hour has not yet come.”* As we travel through the Gospel of John, the “hour” Jesus refers to guides our journey. In chapter 7 John adds this note: *“Then they tried to seize Him. Yet no one laid a hand on Him because His hour had not yet come”* (7:30). We find a similar statement in chapter 8. At the end of chapter 12, after Jesus has made His final triumphant entry into Jerusalem and He is preparing to lay His life down as the perfect Passover lamb, He says to His disciples, *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”* (12:23). The hour is the time of His suffering and death. The hour is the pinnacle of human history, when the perfect Son of God became sin for us so that we might be made righteous. The hour is the reason Jesus came to earth. He came to offer His life on the cross for your sin. He was born for this hour. He was born to die. IF you combine this statement about His “hour” with an

⁵ Carter, Matt and Wredberg, Josh. *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in John*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Reference, 2017). 45.

understanding of His purpose to do His Father's will, you'll see early on that Jesus came for a greater and grander purpose than even His mother or disciples realized at the time.

In spite of His mild rebuke, Mary is confident Jesus could and would do something (v. 5). She demonstrated faith — a willingness to leave it in His hands, confident that whatever He said and did was right. Wow, she was right!

The miracle is now set into motion. The servants take the waterpots, each holding twenty to thirty gallons, so that we are now talking about as much as 180 gallons of wine! What a great wedding gift to the couple — a gift that would provide them with money for a long time. The message to Jesus' Jewish listeners was particularly pointed, for we know from the Dead Sea Scrolls that such stone pots were used for ritual purification, confirming verse 6 ("rites of purification"). By performing His miracle in those stone urns, the Lord was testifying that the old religious rituals were dead and that He was filling the urns with new life. Jesus was saying that He brings joy to life, and the joy He gives is abundant and overflowing, with the best yet to come (John 10:10)!

Next week: Jesus clears the temple with a whip (2:13-25). Jesus is the new temple; no longer do they need the building to meet with God, for they can see God in the person of Christ.⁶

⁶ Schreiner, Patrick. *The Visual Word: Illustrated Outlines of the New Testament Books*. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2022). 40.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do we know Jesus is the Son of God?
2. How do beliefs affect your decision making?
3. What does the way Jesus addresses His mother tell us about our relationship to Him?
4. What does Jesus mean when He says, “My hour has not yet come?”
5. What does the wedding miracle reveal about Jesus’ power?