

John 1:35-42: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 30 November 2020

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[0:00] John chapter 1, verses 35 to 42. 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. 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. One of the two who heard John speak and follow 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. Each of the Gospels in their own way begins with the ministry of John the Baptist. Perhaps it is John's Gospel, in chapter 1, that most emphasises this witness.

[1:09] In the other Gospels we read about the baptism of Christ, and the events that occurred at that time, as the Spirit descended upon Christ, and later brought him out into the wilderness, testifying to his true identity.

However, within the Gospel of John, it is in the witness of John himself that this event is recalled, not within the narrative voice of the Gospel writer himself. Likewise, John the Baptist is the one who introduces Christ as the Lamb of God.

There is perhaps an allusion to the Passover Lamb here. As the Passover Lamb, Jesus is the one who is pure, without defilement and spotless. He is the one who is prepared for the sacrificial task of bearing the weight of the world's sin.

Verse 36 is the second time that John has identified Jesus as the Lamb of God. On the previous occasion, in verse 29, he also said that he was the one that took away the sin of the world.

It is not clear that the two disciples that he speaks to here had heard that previous announcement. If they had not, then they do not have the full information that the reader does. Nevertheless, Andrew knows enough to draw the connection between the Lamb of God and the Messiah in verse 41.

[2:19] The reference to the next day again, with which verse 35 begins, implies that there is a series of days, and that perhaps we should be keeping track of them. As we move through chapters 1 and 2 of the Gospel of John, this succession of days emerges.

Considering the creation themes that are prominent from the very beginning of the chapter, it would seem natural to think of these in terms of creation days. Peter Lighthouse has suggested that verses 1 to 18 begin with the light of the world, the first day of creation.

The baptism of John is described in verses 19 to 28 as the division of the waters above from the waters beneath. In Christ's baptism in verses 29 to 34, there is the emergence of dry land from the water, the dove descending like the dove descended upon the land after the flood.

Day 4 is John pointing his disciples to Jesus in verses 35 to 39. Then there is the multiplication of the disciples as the disciples bring their brothers, like the creatures swarm in the seas on the 5th day of creation in verses 40 to 42.

On day 6 in verses 43 to 51, Jesus describes Nathanael as a true Israelite and himself as the Son of God. On the 7th day, the Sabbath, there's rest.

[3:36] Nothing occurs on that particular day. On the 3rd day, the first day of a new week, we have the wedding at Cana in chapter 2. We might be best holding this pattern more tentatively.

The prominent creation themes throughout John chapter 1 do lend weight to it, however some of the details could be disputed, for instance that verse 40 involves a new day. John's introduction of Christ to his disciples is as the Lamb of God, and this identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God is a motif that continues throughout the book in various ways.

They play out even more prominently within the book of Revelation, where the Lamb is a very prominent figure. The two disciples introduced to Jesus by John in verses 35 to 37 follow Jesus. Andrew, who was one of them, went to find his brother Simon to get him to join him. The next day, Philip will do the same. He will find Nathaniel and say that they have found the Messiah. Verse 40 raises the question of the identity of the second of the two disciples.

Frederick Dale Bruner notes that this text could be read to imply that the two disciples of John the Baptist both went to call their brothers. Andrew went first, and the mysterious other disciple went second.

[4 : 49] Some in the early church, he observes, inferred that the second disciple was likely John the son of Zebedee, who would have called his brother James. We see the sons of Zebedee again in the final chapter, with all of its similarities with the opening one.

This identification is, however, quite speculative. And what first refers to in verse 41 is not entirely clear. Is it that Andrew, before he does anything else, goes to find Peter?

Or is it that he goes first thing the next morning? Or is it the fact that he goes first of the two disciples? Or maybe he's the first of all of the disciples to summon another?

It might be most likely that it's referring to a new day. Whether that day is included in the actual sequence is a matter of some debate. Lighthouse, as we have seen already, includes it in the sequence, whereas J. Ramsey Michaels suggests that this roundabout way of speaking about it is precisely designed not to include it in the sequence.

John's direction of his disciples to Jesus is part of the broader movement away from John and towards Christ. As John later says, He must decrease and Christ must increase.

[5 : 56] His purpose is to direct his disciples towards another. The disciples go to follow Jesus, but when Jesus sees them following, he turns and says to them, What are you seeking? This is almost certainly more than just an incidental request.

Jesus is asking them about their deeper motivations and what they are looking for. They respond by addressing him as rabbi, or teacher, and asking where he is staying. They want to abide with him. Such abiding with Christ will be a deeper theme of the Gospel of John. Jesus' response to them, Come and you will see, is another statement that has deeper levels to it than it might appear on the surface.

Come and you will see, is an invitation to a journey of discovery, to come and to discover spiritual insight. We see the language used with that sort of sense elsewhere in Scripture.

It's about four o'clock, or the tenth hour, and they stay with him for the rest of that day. First thing the next day, Andrew goes to find his brother Simon. Chrysostom writes of this, But why hasn't John mentioned what they talked about?

[7 : 12] How do we know this is why they stayed with him? Observe what Andrew says to his brother. We have found the Messiah, which is being interpreted, the Christ. You see how, in a short time, he demonstrates not only the persuasiveness of the wise teacher, but also his own longing that he had from the beginning.

For this word, we have found, is the expression of a soul that longs for his presence, looking for his coming from above, and is so ecstatic when what he is looking for happens, that he hurries to tell others the good news.

This is what brotherly affection, natural friendship, is all about when someone is eager to extend a hand to another when it comes to spiritual matters. Andrew, although the first to come to Christ of the two, brings his brother Simon to Jesus.

Simon will later be the first of the disciples, the most prominent of the twelve. This short section began with John the Baptist looking at Jesus and directing his disciples to him, declaring his identity to be the Lamb of God.

The section ends with Jesus looking at Simon and declaring that he will have a new identity. He will be called Cephas, meaning Peter or Rock. Cephas is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic.

[8 : 27] While John the Baptist's identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God particularly anticipates the cross of Christ, the identification of Peter as the Rock particularly anticipates his later role in the Church.

Here, in contrast to Matthew chapter 16, It is not Simon, but Andrew, that makes the declaration that Jesus is the Messiah. Simon receives the name Peter as he does in chapter 16 of Matthew, but the significance of the fact that it is Andrew that makes this confession should be noted.

A question to consider. How could we harmonise the accounts of the calling of the first disciples in the beginning of the Synoptic Gospels and the account of Andrew and Simon first following Jesus here?

