

John 1:19 – 51

^{1:19} This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ ²⁰ And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’ ²¹ They asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ And he said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No’. ²² Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?’ ²³ He said, ‘I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.’ ²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, and said to him, ‘Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’ ²⁶ John answered them saying, ‘I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. ²⁷ It is he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.’ ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ³⁰ This is he on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for he existed before me.’ ³¹ I did not recognize him, but so that he might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.’ ³² John testified saying, ‘I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and he remained upon him. ³³ I did not recognize him, but he who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.’

³⁵ Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ ³⁷ The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, ‘What do you seek?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are you staying?’ ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which translated means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).

⁴³ The next day he purposed to go into Galilee, and he found Philip. And Jesus said to him, ‘Follow me.’ ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ 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.’ ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!’ ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, ‘How do you know me?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.’ ⁵⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.’ ⁵¹ And he said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Baptism*: a practice of being immersed in water; it was based on the symbolism of the Genesis creation, where God brought forth new life out of water; so it symbolized a dying and rising to a new life that Jews did to welcome Gentile converts into Judaism; the surprising thing was that John did this to Jews – a challenging gesture!
- *Priests and Levites from Jerusalem*: the most influential and powerful Jewish leaders under Roman occupation; they ran the Temple
- *Pharisees*: a pressure group who thought that the priests and Levites were generally sell-outs to Rome
- *The Christ*: means ‘anointed one’ and translates the Hebrew ‘meshiach’; the final king from King David’s line who would liberate Israel from its enemies, interpreted by the Jews to mean the Romans. *The Prophet* referred to Moses’ prediction that God would raise up a Prophet like him (Dt.18:15). *Lamb of God* was a symbolic association with deliverance from sin (e.g. Isa.53:4 – 7) because the original Passover deliverance of Israel from Egypt involved a lamb.
- *Elijah*: An older prophet (1 Ki.17 – 2 Ki.1) who was taken up by God directly to heaven; he was thought to have some final role to play, although it was unclear if it would be him or someone like him

Questions

1. Give historical context. Read notes.
2. Trace the theme of identity
3. John the Baptist's identity
 - a. John was accosted by the established Jewish leaders about his identity, but seemed reluctant to say too much about himself. His answers are terse. He wants to talk about Jesus' identity.
4. Jesus' identity: Lots of titles!
 - a. Why does John call Jesus 'the Lamb of God'?
 - i. Not because Jesus was passive. Because this title came from Isaiah 53.
 - ii. Jesus was going to take away sin. We already got this sense in Jn.1:14 when we read that 'the Word became flesh' – God in Jesus took on our humanity in order to cleanse it, heal it, and transform it, and then offer us the Spirit of his new humanity.
 - iii. John was apparently thinking about Isaiah a lot (see Jn.1:23). That is a major clue to how to interpret Jesus. Note: If you want to read Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12, you can. Here are the important points:
 1. Isaiah foresaw that the messianic king would be a suffering hero who would overcome their sin. He would join Israel in its suffering, and suffer with Israel even though he was innocent of their sins, in order to bring them into a new place.
 2. Is this really a prophecy? According to tradition, Isaiah lived 750 years before Jesus, and predicted that Assyria would take over the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and that Babylon would take over the Southern Kingdom of Judah. We have physical manuscript evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls of the scroll of Isaiah. The 'Great Isaiah Scroll' (google an image of it) dates back to about 200 BC.
 3. Jesus claimed to fulfill this. Get my notes on this if you'd like.
 - b. the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit (1:33): the One who immerses people in God Himself
 - i. The Christian God's internal complexity allows Him to embrace us spiritually. He is simultaneously the One who is totally different from us (Father), the One who becomes One of us (Son), in order to become one with us (by the Spirit)
 - c. the Son of God (1:34): at the time, this was another title for 'Messiah'
 - d. Rabbi (which translated means Teacher) (1:38)
 - e. the Messiah (which translated means Christ) (1:41)
 - f. him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote (1:45)
 - g. Nathanael answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.' (1:49)
 - h. the Son of Man (1:51): another title of the Messiah from Daniel 7:13, emphasizing Jesus' humanity
5. Jesus knows or changes the disciples' identity:
 - a. Why does he change Simon's name to Cephas? He 'looked at him' (v.42) and saw something.
 - i. Notice what people 'see' in this passage? John the Baptist listened to what God told him and 'saw' the Spirit descend on Jesus (v.33 – 34). He saw spiritual reality. When Jesus says, 'Come and you will see' to the disciples (v.39), he's going to show them more than just where he's staying! He's going to open their eyes to what he sees! And also, 'You will see greater things than these... Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.' (v.50 – 51)
 - b. How did Jesus know Nathanael's personality and what he was just doing? How does this impact Nathanael?
 - i. Notice that Nathanael seemed to have the Hebrew Scriptures in mind. He knew that Scripture said that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). What was the connection to Nazareth? It's a little more complex. Nazareth means 'branch town,' and Isaiah 11:1 speaks of the Messiah as 'the branch.'
 - ii. Jesus was referring to himself, not Nathanael, when he said, 'Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.' Isaiah 53:9 speaks of the Messiah: 'Because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.'
 - iii. It's likely that Nathanael had been studying or reflecting on Isaiah 53. So when Jesus identifies himself by it, Nathanael asks, 'How do you know me?' And Jesus responds that he knows Nathanael studies messianic prophecies. The term 'under the fig tree' is an

ancient Jewish idiom that means studying the messianic prophecies. The idiom stems from Micah 4:4, in a passage describing the future messianic kingdom: 'Each of them will sit under his vine, and under his fig tree.'

- iv. That's why Nathanael calls Jesus the son of God and king of Israel.
- c. APPLICATION: How does Jesus begin to change your identity? Jesus sees the 'you' that you were meant to be. He saw the disciples very well! He saw Simon's true name, or what he would become because of a relationship with Jesus. He saw Nathanael's true nature.
- 6. What is the chain of communication?
 - a. John heard God, then believed, then saw the Spirit on Jesus, then spoke about it
 - i. Notice that John said, 'I did not recognize him' twice (v.31, 33). This seems to mean that the only way he did recognize Jesus was by first *hearing* something from God: 'He who sent me to baptize in water said to me' that Jesus will have the Holy Spirit descend and remain on him in baptism (v.33). Once he believes that word, he saw it.
 - b. Who heard John? The two disciples, Andrew and presumably Philip
 - c. What did they do? Went to see, then told others
 - d. Who did they tell? Andrew told Simon his brother. Philip told Nathanael.

God → John the Baptist → Andrew and Philip → Simon and Nathanael
witness → hearing → come and see → testify

- e. APPLICATION: From whom did you hear about Jesus? Who are you telling?

Structure of days:

Day 1 (1:19): John bears witness to Jewish leaders

Day 2 (1:29): John bears witness about Jesus' baptism in the Spirit

Day 3 (1:35): John bears witness to his two disciples (and one of them, Andrew, brings Simon Peter)

Day 4 (1:43): Jesus' call to Philip (who brings Nathanael)

Day 7 (2:1): Jesus at the wedding of Cana – anticipation of Jesus being filled by the Holy Spirit and overflowing to others, allowing others to see him at work. This is a symbol of new creation.