

Responding to John's Testimony

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Date: 18 February 2018

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[0 : 00] Well, some of you will know the TV program Neighbours. It's still going. It's been around for yonks. And some of you will even know that the famous wedding with Kylie Minogue and the other person who we've forgotten about was actually in this church.

So on the next slide, there's a picture. It's a bit hard to see, actually, with the lighting. But if you look back, that's where they were, right there in the old church. And then on the next slide, you can't quite make out his mullet, which was very fashionable at the time.

That's the old church. And then the next one, that's then out the front, as you walked in outside the doors, that's our stonework. But imagine there was someone even more famous coming to HTD. Imagine, for example, I don't know, the Queen of England or a Hollywood star, perhaps Bill Gates, and they were coming to use their power and wealth to bring us blessing, to share with us part of their kingdom, their empire.

And to prepare their way, they sent a messenger ahead of time. And then one Sunday morning, one normal Sunday morning, we're kind of sitting in church like we are here. Perhaps me or Vijay are speaking.

[1 : 12] And then the messenger suddenly stands up and says, look, they're out there. They're in the car park. They're here. How would you respond to the messenger's statement? Would you say, oh, yeah, right, just sit down, be quiet?

Or would you be a little bit sceptical, but, you know, check it out for yourself, kind of perhaps go over there at the window, see what they're driving, see if it really is them? Or would you believe the messenger completely, get up from your seats and walk out, follow after them to get an autograph, perhaps a selfie, or find out how they might give you a share of their kingdom?

How would you respond to the messenger's statement, their testimony? Well, the people of Israel had been waiting almost 400 years for someone even greater than the Queen or Bill Gates to come along.

They'd been waiting for God's promised King, who would bring blessing to them and give them a share in God's kingdom. And then last week, we saw that the messenger of the King had arrived. It was John the Baptist. He was, in verse 23 of your Bibles there, the one that the prophet Isaiah spoke about, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. And we saw last week that he testified that the King was Jesus, this man called Jesus.

[2 : 31] And that he was not any old king, but a powerful king who would take away sins and also establish God's kingdom. Last week, in other words, was all about John's testimony, which is what verse 19 plainly tells us.

Verse 19 plainly tells us that the passage last week is about John's testimony. But this week, it's about responding to that testimony. And the first to respond are Andrew and John.

So we're at point one in your outlines and verse 35 in your Bibles. Verse 35. The next day, John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, Look, the Lamb of God.

When the two disciples heard him say this, they responded, they followed Jesus. And now the John in verse 35 is John the Baptist. And he's there again, it says.

In other words, he's in the town of Bethany. We know that from verse 28, just up the page there. And he's there in Bethany again. This time with two of his disciples. One of those, we're told in verse 40, is a man called Andrew, which is a pretty good name, I think.

[3 : 41] And I suspect the other disciple is another John. Not John the Baptist, of course, but John the Gospel writer, the one writing this book. And I think it was John because he's often mentioned, along with Andrew, he was one of the first disciples.

In the other Gospels, he's often mentioned with Andrew. And in his Gospel, his book of John, he never names himself, which kind of fits with what we see here. Either way, John the Baptist testifies about Jesus again and says, look, the Lamb of God, there he is.

And the two disciples respond, don't they? And they respond by no longer hanging around John, but now following Jesus. I remember a church camp.

I think it was a 10.15 or 10.30 church camp a couple of years ago, longer, I think. But Tim Walker, we dressed him up as Minty Man. I don't know if you were there at that time.

And what we got was we got a T-shirt, put him over the top of Tim, and then sticky tape these Minties to him. And then Jeff told all the kids, look, Minty Man is coming.

[4 : 46] You don't know when, but he's coming today sometime. And then Jeff, partway through the kids' program, stood up and exclaimed, look, here comes Minty Man.

And the kids all responded, not just by following him, but tracking him down, jumping on him, and pummeling him until they got every single Minty off him. The point is, the kids responded to Jeff's testimony, not by sticking with Jeff, but by following the one Jeff pointed to.

That's what the disciples are doing here. And this response of following is emphasised by John the writer, who repeats the word a couple more times. The next time is in the next verse.

And he gives us a hint at what this following includes. So verse 38, turning around, Jesus saw them following. There's the word again. And he asked the disciples, what do you want?

They said, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying? Now, when Jesus asks, what do you want? It's not with a tone of exasperation that sometimes we parents use with our kids who nag us.

[5 : 51] It's literally, what do you seek? In other words, what are you trying to be? Or what do you want? And their answer shows us that what they seek is to be one of his disciples, to stay with him.

And that's what disciples did. They would stay with the teacher and then listen to the teacher. And so that's exactly what Jesus then invites them to do and be. Verse 39, he says, come, he replied, and you will see.

And so they went and saw where he was staying and they stayed that day with him. He was about four in the afternoon. Now here we get a repetition of the word stay, which means remain.

It's repeated in verse 39 and perhaps on the next slide, there it is, to give you, help you see the repetition that John's trying to make. He says, so they came and saw where Jesus was remaining and they remained with him that day.

Following Jesus, it seems, includes remaining with Jesus, to listen to Jesus. And I say this, not just because John the writer repeats the word twice there, but because this word remain is really important in John's gospel.

[7 : 08] In fact, later on in chapter 15, on the next slide, John records Jesus saying this. Jesus says, remain in me and I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself.

It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit for God.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. You see, following Jesus also means remaining with Jesus, in him, like a branch in a vine, sticking with him, listening to him.

And not just when it's easy or not just on Sundays, but when it's hard and every day. And I wonder whether we're given a glimpse of this here where Andrew and John not only follow Jesus, but remain with Jesus.

But they do more than just follow and remain, don't they? Andrew also finds others to bring to Jesus. You see verse 40? Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John the Baptist had said and who followed Jesus.

[8 : 17] The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, we have found the Messiah, that is the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus.

Now Jesus looked at Simon and said, you are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas, which when translated is Peter. Now it's hard to know exactly when Andrew went off to find his brother.

Presumably, his brother was in the same town of Bethany. They'd both presumably come to check out John the Baptist and hang around John the Baptist. So he probably wasn't too far away.

And so perhaps once Andrew saw where Jesus was staying, the first thing he did was not get comfortable, but go and then get his brother and bring him back to Jesus.

So all three of them, Andrew, John and Simon, could remain with Jesus. Either way, Andrew declares to his brother they have found the Messiah, which John says means Christ.

[9 : 20] Messiah, as some of you know, is the Hebrew word used in the Old Testament and Christ or Christos is the Greek word used in the New Testament. And they both mean the same thing.

They both mean anointed one or king. In fact, some years ago I was doing a children's talk at an old church of mine and I introduced myself as Andrew Price and one of the kids thought I said Andrew Christ.

And so he started saying Mr. Christ, Mr. Christ. I said, oh, that's very kind of you to say that, but I'm very far from that. The point is he thought Christ was a surname.

And often, you know, people do. I grew up thinking that as well. But it's not. It's a title. Christ and Messiah, they're titles like doctor or reverend or whatever. And they both mean anointed one or king.

And so Andrew tells Simon they have found this long-awaited king that God had promised to send. And when Simon comes, Jesus renames him Cephas or Peter.

[10 : 22] Peter means rock. And in Matthew chapter 16 on the next slide, we read that this is in Matthew's account of where Jesus renames him.

Jesus says, and I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church. In other words, it seems back here in John that Jesus displays some sort of supernatural knowledge because he knows that Peter will become the main gospel preacher to the Jews.

And on Peter's preaching, Jesus will build his church. But again, the point here is that Andrew not only followed and remained with Jesus, he also finds others to bring to Jesus.

This is all part of how he responds to the testimony of John the Baptist, you see. Well, in the next scene, the Baptist disappears, but we meet two more people who respond in a similar way, Philip and Nathaniel.

So at point two in your outline and verse 43 in your Bibles. The next day, Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, follow me.

[11 : 38] Here, even Jesus finds people to follow him, though you'll notice that when he calls someone to follow, he has immediate success, doesn't he? Unlike Philip, in verse 44, Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Beth Sider, so they've traveled back from Bethany to Beth Sider now, and Philip found Nathaniel and told him, we have found the one Moses wrote about in the law, and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Nazareth? Can anything good come from there? Nathaniel asked. Like Andrew and Jesus, Philip also finds someone else, doesn't he? This time Nathaniel.

But unlike Jesus, Philip doesn't have immediate success, does he? Instead, Nathaniel doesn't believe Philip's testimony about Jesus. Instead, Philip's experience at this point is probably more like our experience, isn't it?

You know, if we ever have the opportunity to talk to others about Jesus, they don't immediately go, okay, let's pray right here and now and become a Christian. They often are sceptical, aren't they? Sceptical like Nathaniel.

Though for some I've spoken to, it's the resurrection of Jesus that they're sceptical about, even though there is good evidence for it. But for Nathaniel, the issue is not the resurrection, it hasn't happened yet, it's the town Jesus has come from.

[13 : 02] That's the problem. And he doesn't know at this point that Jesus was actually born in Bethlehem, as we sing in the Christmas carols, the very town that the Old Testament promised the Messiah would be born in, he just hears Nazareth and thinks no way, nothing good can come from Nazareth.

And Nazareth was a pretty nothing town. Even today, it's not too big. I think on the next slide is a picture of it. It's very hard to see. I couldn't find a great picture, but it's kind of just above a valley. It's up elevated a bit. And I don't know if you can see in the foreground this kind of steeple shaped building. That's where they think the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary at that point there.

But it was a nothing place. As many of you know, I'm from Sydney and when I moved to Melbourne, I had an interview with someone from the diocese and St. Paul's Cathedral with some of the big wigs and they said to me, the only good thing about Sydney is the road to Melbourne.

The love was overwhelming. I was tempted to remind them that that's what Nathaniel said about Nazareth, but look who came from Nazareth. I just kept my mouth shut.

[14:21] But notice how Philip responds to Nathaniel. He doesn't give up. He says, well, come and see for yourself. So he says, look, that's fine. You don't have to take my word for it, but come and check it out or check Jesus out for yourself.

And Nathaniel does. So in verse 47, when Jesus saw Nathaniel approaching, he said to him, here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit, he says.

It's as though Jesus again displays his supernatural knowledge, doesn't he? As he did with Simon. At this time he knows that there is no deceit in Nathaniel. You see, there would have been people who came to Jesus with deceptive motives.

They're not genuinely trying to see if Jesus was the Christ, the king or not, but trying to trap him and trick him. That's what the Pharisees did, if you remember. Or people would follow Jesus, provided he was the type of king they wanted him to be.

And as soon as he wasn't, then they stopped following him. And we'll see that in John's gospel as well, just as we see it today in our society. In fact, even today people will visit churches, but they're not really interested in finding out if Jesus is the real deal or not, whether he really is the king and savior or not.

[15:41] Rather, they come at Easter and Christmas, get their religious fix to feel better about themselves, and that's it. But Nathaniel doesn't come with deceptive motives.

He comes genuinely looking to see if Jesus is the Messiah or not. But the question for Nathaniel is, how can Jesus know whether he has deceit in him or not?

I mean, they've never met before. And so he asks in verse 48, how do you know me? Nathaniel asked. Then Jesus answered, I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.

Then Nathaniel declared, Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel. Nathaniel now believes, doesn't he, that Jesus truly is the King, the Son of God.

His faith is not blind faith, it's faith based on these mini miracles of Jesus, where Jesus knew he had no deceit in him and saw him under the fig tree before they even met.

[16:50] But Jesus goes on to say that they will actually witness even greater things, even greater evidence than these mini miracles. You see verse 50? Jesus said, you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree, you will see greater things than that.

He then added, very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Jesus says they will see even greater things than these mini miracles here.

And these greater things include other miraculous signs like water into wine which we'll see next week and the rest recorded in John's Gospel. But it also includes verse 51.

They will see heaven open and angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. At first glance, it's a really odd thing to say, isn't it? I mean, what on earth is Jesus talking about?

Well, he's referring to our first reading, if you remember that. He's referring to Jacob, where Jacob had a dream and he saw angels ascending and descending on a ladder up to God in heaven.

[18:05] And Jacob said, this place was the gate of heaven, the way to God, if you remember. But here, Jesus is saying the angels ascend and descend not on a ladder, but on who?

On the son of man, on him. That's what the text says. In other words, he is now the bridge between God in heaven and people on earth. In fact, on the next side, Jesus will say, I am the gate.

Just as Jacob said, this is the gate of heaven. Jesus says, I am now the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. Or more famously, I am now the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the father in heaven except through me. Do you see what Jesus is saying? He's saying, here's now the ladder, the gate, the way to God in heaven.

And the disciples will see this when they see him crucified on a cross. For by his death, Jesus pays for our sins so that we can be forgiven and given access to God in heaven.

[19:12] And by his resurrection he proves that he has both paid for our sins and opened up the way to God in heaven. What's more in our first reading, Jacob also said that this place is the very house or temple of God, if you remember.

The place he met God and heard God speak to him. But on the next side we read that Jesus is now the temple. We read that the temple Jesus had spoken of was his body.

Jesus is now the place or rather the person in whom we meet God and in whom we hear God speak. And again the disciples will see this in his life and words.

For as they look at Jesus character and listen to Jesus words they will see God's character and hear God's name the son reveals the father to us makes God known to us.

In other words verse 51 by referring to this event in Genesis Jesus is saying that he is now the one by whom God reveals himself to people and the means by which people can come to God.

[20 : 26] This is how God would keep his promise to bless all nations on earth through Jacob and his descendants Jesus. And so just as Jacob explained in our first reading how awesome is this place the disciples will soon see how awesome is this person Jesus.

So the question for us this morning is how are we responding to John's testimony? For these first disciples it was John the Baptist testimony that they responded to by following remaining and finding others to bring to Jesus.

But we have even more testimony to respond to don't we? The greater things they saw are now recorded for us by John the writer so that we might believe and respond rightly.

In fact, this is why John has written his book. So on the next slide we read from John chapter 20 his purpose statement if you like. John writes Jesus performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book but these are written why?

That you may believe Jesus is the Christ the son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name. This is why John has written his book.

[21 : 49] In fact on the title slide the second half of the verse is there on the screen it's going to be there every week because this is why John has written his book as I said.

So how are you responding to John the writer's testimony? Do you firstly believe that Jesus is the Christ the King? As Nathaniel put it the son of God to believe like the eyewitness testimony of those first disciples who saw the greater things as well.

And there is good reason to believe also for is by believing we can have life in his name. So have you responded to John the writer's testimony by firstly believing in Jesus?

For those who have then secondly are we responding by following him and remaining in him? That is do we follow him not just on Sundays but every day seeking to please him as our king in the way that we speak or the way that we act the way that we care and love for one another and the like or do we serve him on Sundays and then put him on the shelf for the rest of the week?

Just last Friday I was driving down Springvale Road on my way to visit someone from church and I just chosen a hymn for our Wednesday at 2 service it was that old hymn Jesus is Lord Jesus is Lord praise him with hallelujah Jesus is Lord if you know it well it may not be that old to you but anyway I was I just chosen this hymn and so it was repeating in my head and as I was doing that someone kind of did something silly on the road and I let something slip out so I was humming Jesus is Lord Jesus is Lord oh yeah clown get off the road praise him with hallelujah that kind of hit me what I was seeing with my head wasn't really being lived out with my mouth see following Jesus means remaining with him seeking to please him as our king not just on Sundays but on every day even on the road and not just when times are good and God answers our prayers the way we want him to but yeah when times are bad and God answers our prayers not the way we want him to you see we had to respond to

[24 : 08] John's testimony his book not just by believing in Jesus but by following and remaining with Jesus and thirdly responding to John's testimony will also mean finding others to bring to Jesus and we saw that three times did you realize Andrew finds Simon Jesus finds Philip and Philip finds Nathaniel of course we cannot bring people to Jesus in the flesh like Philip did for Nathaniel but we can bring people to Jesus in his word now I realize that for most of us that doesn't seem to be as good does it sometimes I think if only my non-Christian relatives could meet Jesus face to face then they'd believe for sure but there's two things we need to remember at first even when people did see Jesus in the flesh they didn't always believe did they again the Pharisees spoke with Jesus they saw miracles before their very eyes did they believe and follow him as their king they tried to kill him instead you see seeing is not always believing and so you know it doesn't necessarily depend on our relatives or friends seeing

Jesus in the flesh more to the point secondly we need to remember that God has actually said he will call people through his word through the message about Jesus that is the gospel word about Jesus is God's power to save people people don't have to see Jesus in the flesh you see God has said he will work as they see Jesus in his word for as the Bible tells us the word of God is living and active sharper than any two-edged sword the gospel is the power of God to bring salvation Romans 1 1 Corinthians 1 and so on and so we can bring people to meet Jesus in his word or as we speak

about the word of Jesus so pray then that God might give you opportunities to find people and invite them to church perhaps you don't even have to be the one to speak the word you invite them to church Easter is coming up soon invite them to an

Easter service or if you're more confident then you can invite to go out for coffee and open the Bible and say look why don't you come and see for yourself come and check out Jesus for yourself in the Bible again I realize this is not always easy to do and some of financial consultant come to our place on my day off which usually means my brains are not well engaged and he asked us towards the end of the time what made you become a minister golden opportunity right wrong I can't remember what I said I thought of it later I thought well you like to help people invest for their financial future I like to help people invest for their eternal future that would have been sweet but none of that so the hint is don't ask me for any advice on my day off but the point is we may not say what we wanted to say but you never know how

God will use it and so do pray for opportunities to bring people to Jesus in his word or perhaps speak the gospel word about him in some way or invite them to church to hear the word for he is their king whether they realize it or not and he longs to give them life eternal if only they would but believe well the testimony of John the writer will continue over the coming weeks but for today the question is how are we responding will we believe will we follow and remain this week at work at home school and will we find others to bring to him it's not always easy so why don't we pray for God's help let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for your word which testifies to who Jesus is we pray father that you would help us to respond rightly to this testimony by not only believing in him as our own king and savior but by following and remaining with during the whole week and year and life with him as our king and savior such that he impacts the way we speak and act at work at home wherever we may be and help us we pray give us opportunities to find others to bring to

Jesus that more and more might come to know the life that we have in his name we pray for Jesus sake Amen