

# See Greater Things

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[ 0 : 00 ] I wonder if you would take out your Bible and open to John 1. So if you just read to us a moment ago on page 886.

And for those of you who were with us last week, the thing you notice about this last half of John 1 is just how very different it is from the first half of John 1 that we looked at last week.

You remember last week? We started way back in eternity. The cosmic, the eternal word of God, entering our world as flesh full of glory, grace and truth.

And now in the second half of chapter 1, it comes right down to earth. By the end of it, it's practical, personal details of individuals becoming followers of Jesus Christ.

We go from the cosmic right down to what I'd call, I suppose, the granular. And it's the whole thing's about witness, the way in which this happens.

[ 1 : 02 ] It's almost as though if you take chapter 1, that the point, this massive miracle of the word coming into the world, that the way in which that word is now going to be spread is through ordinary garden disciples who witness about the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's a fantastic passage. You know, God sends his son as light and life into the darkness and death, but people, we don't naturally come to Jesus.

We have resistance. And so God has deliberately placed another step in place where those who do become disciples bear witness to him and invite others to become disciples as well.

And you might, for those of you who are studying this, you'll notice from chapter 2, verse 1 onwards, that we begin the miracles, the signs of Jesus, seven signs.

And so from the high eternal section in 1 to 18 of chapter 1 and then from 2 onwards, there is this really low down, detailed, personal, how heaven enters human hearts and individuals become followers of Jesus through the witness of others.

[ 2 : 15 ] There are two sections. Despite the headings in your Bible, let me just point out, the headings are not inspired. The headings in the Bible are not part of the text. Neither are the numbers.

Everything else is, except for the footnotes. I just point that out because I think some of these headings are wrong. But that's another sermon. Let's have a look at the two sections, shall we? The first one goes from 19 to 24, sorry, 34, and it's all about John the Baptist. John the Baptist. And I just want to say, after the wonderful children's focus that we had, that all the things that Dan said about John the Baptist, while they're true, have nothing to do with what John, the gospel writer, says about John the Baptist.

And I say that because John's gospel is really different than the other gospels. And you want to, it's good for us to listen and learn to what John is saying here. The big thing about John the Baptist is that he is the first human witness.

to Jesus, which I guess is a spotlight. I'll give you that one, Dan. So you see verse 19, and this is the testimony, this is the witness of John. He's so critical because the first two disciples who follow Jesus are his disciples.

[ 3 : 31 ] John tells them, there he is, you go follow Jesus. He gives them away to Jesus. And John the Baptist is portrayed here for a number of reasons, but primarily because he is a brilliant example to us of what it means to witness.

The main thing we learn from John the Baptist is his humility. He's out in the wilderness baptizing people and an official delegation comes from Jerusalem and demands, no, who are you?

And they put up the three most popular guesses, you know, Messiah, Elijah, the prophet. And John answers each one with a categorical negative. He says, I am not, I am not, I am not, which reminds us of Peter's denials later on, which are negative denials.

But these, these are very important, you see, because the one qualification to be a witness to Christ is to know that you're not Christ. To know that there is a Christ and you've met him.

But this is true humility. John the Baptist not focused on himself and his career options or, you know, his working conditions. John the Baptist is all about what he's not, which makes it very difficult for the Jewish religious thinkers because they've got, you know, they've got a framework and when people say they're not, they're not, they're very difficult to squeeze them into a box.

[ 4 : 51 ] And something's happened to this man, John the Baptist, something so astounding and radical that it's moved himself out of the center of himself.

because he's found Jesus. And I think, let me drive this deeper, it's only in humility that God gives us spiritual clarity.

That's why verse 29 is as it is. He sees Jesus coming and he says, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And it's a momentous state, there's nowhere else in the Bible that says anything like this.

it's not just a lamb, it's the lamb, not just our lamb, the lamb of God, belongs to God who takes away the sin, not the sins, but all the one great big disease of the whole world.

And it probably comes from the Exodus when, you know, when God was rescuing his people from death, slavery. He gave them lambs and they slaughtered the lambs and ate the lambs and put the blood on the lintel and the angel of death passed over those houses.

[ 5 : 58 ] And here, this Lamb of God comes not just to cover and to rescue, but he comes to bear away, to take away, to carry away the sins of the world. In other words, the work of this Lamb, when this Lamb's done his work, the people who belong to him are blameless and innocent, pure, without any sin.

That's you and me, by the way. And how did John know that Jesus was the Lamb of God? How did he know it? Well, it came directly from God. You see verse 31?

Let's go to verse 33. I myself did not know him. Well, he did sort of know him. I didn't really know who he was, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, he on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

Okay. Here is his humility. John the Baptist is very clear about his ignorance. Because seeing who Jesus is does not come from our own natural and native spiritual insight.

It has to be revealed to us by God himself. It's very important. Behind all imperfect and partial human witness is the revelation of God himself.

[ 7 : 18 ] This is a very, very big theme in the gospel. There are lots of witnesses to Jesus in the gospel. I tell you this because as we go through, you'll see this again and again and again. In fact, I just want to introduce you to one or two.

Just turn over to chapter 8 for a moment, please. It's on page 894. Chapter 8, verse 17.

Jesus is in big trouble. He's facing his opponents because he's been testifying, witnessing to himself. In verse 17, he says, In your law, it is written that the testimony of two people is true.

I am the one who bears witness about myself and the Father, God the Father, who sent me, bears witness about me. So it's not just me. He's saying, God the Father bears witness.

And where does God, the Father, bear witness to him? Turn back to chapter 5 for a moment. Verse 36. I think he's talking about the Old Testament.

[ 8 : 21 ] Now, chapter 5, 36. Jesus says, The testimony, the witness that I have is greater than that of John, John the Baptist. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, these are the miracles, the very works I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.

So here's another whole category of witness in the gospel, the works of Jesus. Now, verse 37. The Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me.

His voice you've never heard, his form you've never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he sent. You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, but it is they that bear witness to me.

See? In Jesus' view, the whole of the Old Testament is God the Father bearing witness to him. So we go back to chapter 1. What was it that God said to John to let him know who Jesus was?

Back to 32. Well, let's go to 33. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize the water, he said to me, he on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God.

[ 9 : 48 ] So this is the day of Jesus' baptism. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, Jesus is baptized, the Spirit comes down and remains on him, and God had told John that this was going to be the one.

And we just need to see how deeply engaged God is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's the Father who bears witness to his Son, it's the Spirit who bears witness to his Son, it's Jesus who bears witness to himself.

And at the heart of the thing that God tells John, it is about the relationship between Jesus and the Father, the fact that he is the Son of God. And the work that Jesus has come to do, let me just pause on this for a moment.

This is, we don't really have time to do this, but this is a very rich vein here. John says that Jesus' ministry does two things, they're the two sides of one coin. He says, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, and he's the one who baptizes us and pours out the Holy Spirit on us. Two sides of the one coin. Jesus forgives our sin, forgives us our sins, and God comes to dwell in us by his Holy Spirit. We have redemption through the blood of Christ, we have reconciliation with God through the presence of the Holy Spirit, those two things come together.

[ 11 : 05 ] That's the gospel. So when the apostles were preaching in the book of Acts and people say, what do we do? If you're not a Christian, you want to become a Christian, what does it say? It says, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, and what do we receive?

For the forgiveness of your sins, and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. I wish I had more time for that. I want to get back to John 1 though and stand back for just a moment.

Do you see the chain that is going on here? It begins with God, the chain of witness or the chain of testimony. God testifies to his son through the Old Testament and here at the baptism.

The Holy Spirit comes on Jesus Christ and testifies that he is the one who will baptize in the Spirit. And then John the Baptist, God the Father bears testimony to John the Baptist as the individual and then John bears witness and testifies.

This is the one. This is the one. You see, John the Baptist, he's the first human witness and he begins the chain reaction of witness and directing people toward Christ that ends with you and with me.

[ 12 : 16 ] And if we knew the facts, you and I could trace testimony and witness back to this passage. We don't, thank goodness. But wouldn't it be marvellous to hear some stories from each other about how we receive the testimony of Jesus Christ.

If you look at verse 35, what does John do? He does the exact same thing privately as he does publicly. He's standing with two of his disciples, Andrew and John.

And as he looked at Jesus, as he walked by, he said, Behold, the Lamb of God. And the two hear him say this and they follow him. It's extraordinary, isn't it?

I mean, most people who want to be leaders, they want to get a following. They want to get disciples. John the Baptist does the opposite. The climax of this life of witness, Andrew and John leave him behind and go and follow Jesus.

He's the first human witness and it shows the critical witness now of the critical importance of witness in the world. I love watching those domino world records.

[ 13 : 27 ] I don't know if you've seen them or not. The current world record, I think, is half a million dominoes. And, you know, if you're stuck, if you've got a bit of time on your hands, it'd be easy to be.

But there are, you know, there are all sorts of shapes and sizes. There are mountains which collapse quickly and then there are these different lines that go together in big groups and then there's usually just one line, tick, tick, tick, tick, and everyone, everyone takes a deep breath while that happens.

And I think witness is a little bit like that. There is this domino effect of witnessing to Jesus Christ that goes down throughout the centuries and you and I are the beneficiaries of the witness of others.

And so, as we shift into the second part of the passage, we go from John the Baptist being the first witness to, I found such trouble thinking of a heading for this second part of the passage.

I asked Dan before the service and this is what he came up with. The wonderful way of the word in the world is with witness. I thought that was too much alliteration myself.

[ 14 : 44 ] The point of the second half of the passage is that witness is the way ordinary people become followers of Jesus Christ. So, by the end of the passage, there are five, Jesus has five followers, five disciples around him.

And that's, there's this lovely chain reaction, you know, the first thing that happens when Andrew and John leave John the Baptist is they follow Jesus.

That's the disciple word. They move because discipleship is movement and change in our lives. It means following the direction of Jesus. And when they come up to Jesus in verse 38, we then hear the first words of Jesus in the gospel.

What does he say to them when they come up to him? He says, what are you seeking? What are you after? What are you looking for? It's a great question. It's not an academic question.

See, throughout the gospel when people come to Jesus, he loves them, he welcomes them, but he usually asks them some sort of searching question. I'm sure he's asking you searching questions all the time.

[ 15 : 55 ] What are you seeking? Who do you want? What do you wish me to do for you? And what's Andrew and John's response? Verse 38, they say, where are you staying?

Not the most profound words, perhaps, in the Bible. Although, it might be just, you know, social awkwardness, you know, like, if you catch a minister in the corner, you know, they can talk about weather for half an hour.

It might just be like that. Or it might be, it might be, that they're indicating their willingness to go with Jesus and follow him. Or it might be that John is using one of his favourite words, this staying, word, which he uses for the relationship between God, the Father, and the Son abiding together and them abiding in us and our hope of abiding with them forever.

I don't know. Whatever, what follows is a domino effect because they go and stay with him. The very next day, Andrew goes out and he invites his brother, Simon, to come and join Jesus and Simon joins them.

Then they find Philip. Philip, the very next thing, goes out and finds Nathaniel, who's a bit of a crusty old sceptic and Philip, I'm going to look at this in a moment, Philip brings Nathaniel to Jesus so Jesus can do the heavy lifting and then Nathaniel receives this wonderful promise which becomes the basis of all our witness from then on.

[ 17 : 24 ] A lot in this passage, I'm just aware of the time, so there's only time for us to learn two things, I think. I want to focus just on two things and the first is, the Christian witness is invitational and communal.

Somehow we have managed to overlay the idea of witness with so much guilt, so much technique. If you're feeling guilty as I'm talking about this, stop it.

Don't you don't, that's not helpful I think. We've made witness into a field of expertise, so much about us and not about actually what we're doing. And I think a lot of Christian witness needs to be repented of and the attitude to people who are witnessing to has to be repented of.

I mean some forms of Christian witness have no care for the person that they're speaking with. You know the Christian has this wad of information they have to download on the other person irrespective of where the other person is, thinking that they're brave and faithful for saying it.

There's a lot that passes for Christian witness today that frankly is just narcissistic, and shows Christian insecurity. I'm not talking about being afraid of being politically incorrect and never offending anyone.

[ 18 : 41 ] I'm talking about the absence of love. Last week after our service downstairs at lunch, Dr. Warren Larson spoke about understanding and responding to Islam today.

He told this terrible story of a Christian protest in a western country outside a mosque where the Christians, this was their great witness, they had signs up saying Jesus hates Muslims.

Isn't that amazing? And a reporter went in and asked one of the members of the mosque what they made of it and this member of the mosque said, I don't think Jesus would say that. That's not Christian witness.

Got to see in this passage how genuine Christian witness is invitational and communal. how does Jesus handle Andrew and John when they first come to him?

They call him Rabbi. Rabbi. He doesn't berate them and say I'm the eternal son of God who's come from heaven with the father, I'm the creator of heaven and earth, the maker and judge, etc.

[ 19 : 42 ] What does he say? Verse 39. He just says come and see. If you come and I wish you would, you will see.

It's absolutely wonderful. There's no debate, there's no theory, it's an invitation. He doesn't say get your act together, get it straight before you can do anything.

He says come with me. He opens the door for hospitality. He takes them to where he's living. He opens his life. He creates a space.

He creates time in his life for them. It's the normal way we become disciples as we are invited to come and see. It's exactly the same with Philip and Nathaniel.

Philip goes to Nathaniel, Nathaniel asks him a curly question. What does Philip say? He says come and see. Test it first hand. Come with me. Come and join those of us who are trying to discover this stuff.

[ 20 : 41 ] I don't have all the answers but come and see. It's always wonderful to welcome people in church who are investigating Christianity. We want to invite you to come with us and to see Jesus Christ because the road to discipleship is normally through another person.

Both Peter and Nathaniel are found by their friends. This found word comes up again and again. A friend reaches out, invites us, brings us. That's how we became disciples. Could have been by parents, could have been by friends.

things. And I don't think Vancouver is an easy place to find our friends for Jesus Christ. And I think one of the unfortunate things that happens is that many of us as Christians begin to wonder if God would ever use us to find someone else for Jesus Christ.

Must believe that God can use you. Very important to us as a Christian community here at St. John's. The way of the gospel through history and through here in Vancouver is not through massive big events of outreach.

It's by each of us praying and finding friends and inviting them to come and see. There's absolutely no reason why you shouldn't find someone this year who could be seeking God.

[ 22 : 00 ] My own experience, I find people are more open when I'm ready. But if I'm praying for an opportunity, opportunities seem, I seem to be able to see them. Although it's a little bit terrifying for people when they meet me as a minister.

It used to be that was an open door to talk about the faith. Nowadays I have to explain it away. I was going to tell you a failure story but you don't need to hear it.

I just, I really, I want to lay it on your conscience as I lay it on mine. I'm not trying to make you feel guilty just saying pray that God this year would lead you to someone who you can invite to come and see.

Because true Christian witness is invitational and communal. And the second thing is that true Christian witness is always defective and effective at the same time.

I love this. You stand at the end of the passage, there are five people around Jesus. Andrew, John, Peter, Nathaniel and Philip. But as John tells us the story, despite the wonderful effectiveness of the witness, the witnesses and their witness is very feeble and flawed.

[ 23 : 13 ] And we see this particularly in Philip. I love Philip. Commentators call Philip a limited man. Don't be sorry for him, it's just what they say, it's just the reality.

I mean every time you see him throughout the book of John, he's putting his foot in his mouth. Not quite like Peter. He's not a leader like Peter. And he's not so switched on.

So in the upper room, like at the end of Jesus' ministry at night before he dies, chapter 14, Jesus has revealed the Father, he's explaining where he's going, he's commissioning his disciples.

What does Philip say? Lord, just show us the Father will you? Jesus says, Philip, you've seen me, you've seen the Father. This is kind of let's go back to chapter 1 business. The great thing is that Philip is just as much part of the team, part of the crew as all the rest.

He's not outwardly impressive, but he is a disciple. And just like Andrew, as soon as he begins to follow Jesus, he begins to witness. Look down, verse 43, he begins to follow.

[ 24 : 23 ] Verse 45, Philip found Nathaniel. And when he finds Nathaniel, he blurts out this garbled, complicated statement about Jesus.

Perhaps he'd learned it off by heart, I don't know. He says, we have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. Don't recommend you try that one.

Actually, Jesus was not from Nazareth. He's not of Nazareth. He was from Bethlehem. And actually, he's not really the son of Joseph. That's a bit mangled.

He's got some good stuff in there. And Nathaniel's response is wonderful. It's both cynical and sincere. Can anything good come out of Nazareth?

It might be cynical. It might be a little bit of small town snobbery. I'm from Bethsaida, Nazareth, rivalry. He might be saying, messiahs, they just don't come from Langley.

[ 25 : 32 ] Or Ladner. Or Lionsgate. But there may be something more to this. Because the Old Testament does point out that the messiah is going to come from Bethlehem.

And I think we ought not be surprised when we do witness about Jesus Christ there will be prejudice and there will also be genuineness in that prejudice. What I mean by that is not every difficult question is just a smokescreen to hide people from the claims of Christ.

There's something to this question and Philip wonderfully knows he's in way over his head.

Nathaniel knows the Bible better than Philip does but he hasn't met Jesus yet.

Philip doesn't pretend to know what he doesn't know. He doesn't even begin to try and answer. He does the very best thing that he could do verse 46. He says to Nathaniel come and see.

And despite his defective witness it is effective because he brings Nathaniel to Jesus. And all, I just say this for your encouragement, all our witness is defective.

[ 26 : 39 ] Don't wait till you get it right. If you're waiting until your witness is really polished you're never going to say a word for Jesus. Jesus. And even at the best, your purest, most profound words about Jesus don't come close to the reality of who Jesus is and what he's going to do.

That's the work of the Holy Spirit in people's hearts. But effective witness comes basically of pointing people to Jesus Christ. So Nathaniel, he comes to Jesus.

Nathaniel's wonderfully honest. Jesus gives him a little more. This is the fig tree conversation. I'm not going to talk about it. The one question I got between the services is what about the fig tree? Forget the fig tree.

Jesus gives him a response and verse 49, Nathaniel says, Rabbi, you are the son of God, you are the king of Israel. Because Nathaniel is responding to what he does know.

And so then we come to verse 51. It's a wonderful truth, which kind of brings us back up again.

Verse 51, Jesus said to him, truly, truly, amen, amen, I say to you, plural, you will see heaven opened, the word means it's open and it stays open, and the angels of God are ascending and descending on the son of man.

[ 28 : 00 ] heaven. It's a reference to the Old Testament vision that Jacob had the dream. You remember when he was leaving the land? And he dreamt of a ladder and the angels of God ascending and descending from heaven.

He called it the place of God. And Jesus' point is that God is replacing any ladder with me. I'm the connection between heaven and earth.

I'm the connection between the creator and creation. I am the means by which heaven comes to you and you come to heaven. I'm the point of intersection. I am the son of God.

I am human. I bring God from heaven to you and you to God from heaven. And the way that news is going to spread is as ordinary believers like us make the work of witness essential and critical for us in a church.

I've said this before and I'm not trying to make you feel badly about this but it's only through witness really that our friends and family will find Christ. It's only as we find others that people will find Christ.

[ 29 : 06 ] And know this that like John the Baptist what stands behind all our witness is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit bearing witness to Christ. That's the point of this second half of the chapter.

Forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with God comes to others as followers like you and me witness and invite people to come and see. Disciples with very little experience in shaky theology but they recognize the best gift they can give their friends and loved ones is to bring them to Jesus so they might come and see the word of God, the Son of God, the Lamb of God.

So let's begin to pray that God would make us witnesses for him. Let's kneel shall we?