

Saw, Said, Heard, Follow

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening, everybody. There is something remarkable about this passage. And it's all to do with the striking difference between it, what we just read, and the stuff that was immediately before it.

You remember from last week, the first 18 verses of John contain this soaring Christology, right? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

I mean, it's mind-blowing, it's way up here, cosmic, eternal view of things kind of stuff. It's way up, way up here, it's amazing. And this week we're brought down to Earth very quickly.

Verse 19 starts with John the Baptist being interrogated by some religious leaders. Who are you? What are you doing? It's like the opening scene of some of those movies where it sort of starts from space looking at Earth, and it's all kind of crazy.

And then it kind of zooms quickly in, and it gets into a country and quickly, quickly, and then it zooms down to like a street scene. It's kind of like that. So we have soaring theology at the start, and then bam, straight into this guy being interviewed by these men.

[1 : 1 5] Why does it do that? Well, it's not an example of bad writing. It's not like John couldn't think of a good transition here.

It's written like this on purpose. Because it's saying, how does this massive revelation of Jesus, all this up here stuff, how does this massive revelation of Jesus work itself out in real human life?

How does the revelation of who Jesus is work itself out in the lives of real people? And I think the surprising thing, I think the shock of the passage is this. What does it mean, this up here stuff down here?

What does it mean? Well, verses 19 to 51 give us two stories. And the heart of both those stories, the heart of it, is witness. Is the idea of witness.

witness. So we have two scenes. We've got John being interrogated here, being interviewed. And then we've got these two guys that become followers of Jesus.

[2 : 1 7] And both of them witness about Jesus. So, how does all this up here stuff affect down here?

It looks like the wonderful gospel humility of John. And it looks like the wonderfully everyday witness of Christ's followers.

So let's begin with John the Baptist. So we'll look at him two halves. Two halves of the sermon. A big half. I guess it's not really a half, but it's like a big half and kind of a small half, alright? Alright.

John. John the Baptist, who was not the writer of John, but he was a wild man. He was the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah. So a miraculous birth. Cousin of Jesus.

Cousin-ish of Jesus, I guess. But didn't recognize Jesus was anything special, it would seem, initially. He was a prophet. A preacher. He had followers.

[3 : 18] He was pretty hardcore. He ate like bugs. And he wore camel hair outfits. And he was out there preaching and baptizing people and telling people that the Messiah was coming.

He was fantastic. Wonderful guy. Very courageous, too. Very courageous. Courageous man. If you look in Matthew and Mark, it tells the stories of how he confronted Herod, who was the Roman Tetrarch.

You know, like the... When he was the ruler of this area, and he confronted Herod about shacking up with his sister-in-law slash niece. It's all about untidy and these royal families.

But anyway, he confronted Herod about this, who had the power of life and death. And John lost his head as a result.

So this wild man, preacher, baptizer, prophet of God, he became quite well-known to various religious leaders of the day. And they became quite interested in him.

[4 : 20] So the Pharisees, who were the religious, Jewish religious leaders, a very powerful group, they were very interested in sort of the minutiae of rule-keeping and ritual practices.

And so they sent a delegation to interview John and wanted to know what he's doing, basically. And they were to interview him and then bring back to their bosses, tell them what was going on. So now, from their perspective, John was a terrible interviewee.

And we'll come to why in a second. But you look at the first few verses, 19 and forwards there. Who are you? I am not the Christ. Are you Elijah? I am not. Are you a prophet?

No. Obviously, very frustrating. You can almost hear the frustration in verse 22. It's like, you've got to give us something here. Give us something. His response was this.

Here's his response. I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said. I'm just a voice.

[5 : 23] I'm just a voice. This is how this amazing man viewed himself. I'm just a voice. I'm just here to point to something else.

Now, what's really interesting about this is that's how he viewed himself. I'm just here to point to something else far greater than me. What's really interesting is how Jesus views John.

John said, Don't open it. I'll read it to you. Just trust me. John said, I'm not a prophet, right? Matthew 11. Let me read from Matthew 11 here.

7, 8, 9, 10, 11. As they went away. This is Jesus speaking. Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John. And he said this. What did you go out into the wilderness to see?

What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes. I tell you, more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written. Behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you.

[6 : 28] Truly I say to you, among those born of woman, there is risen no one greater than John the Baptist. Isn't that interesting? Among those born of woman.

That's a fairly big percentage of people. John was the best. John, in Jesus' estimation, was a great man.

A great man. And yet John didn't seem to recognize it or acknowledge it. How do you explain that? Well, there's two reasons I think a really great person can be great and not recognize it.

Or not acknowledge it. Or not want to acknowledge it. One, they're so self-absorbed that they're incredibly picky. They never see themselves as good enough.

Or, they are simply people who are looking away from themselves. And this is John. His heart was grounded in the belief that his life was dedicated to pointing to another.

- [7 : 37] And it comes out in the passage. It's all over the passage. We see it in his interactions with the Pharisees. You know, like, are you? No. I, no. I, no. I'm just a voice.
- I'm not here to tell you about me. I'm here to tell you about the Messiah. Verse 26 says, I baptize with water. But, but, like, it's, don't get caught up in what I'm doing.
- It's, it's just a sign, right? The baptism is like, it's just a sign. It's, it's pointing to something far greater. This artifact of, of baptizing, what do you, what do you want to call it?
- This, this is, this is pointing to a greater cleansing that's to come. How else did he describe this Messiah that he was pointing to?
- Well, how do we see him pointing away from himself to the Messiah? He says this, these, there's one among you whose sandals I'm not fit to take off.
- [8 : 32] Do you see that there? That's how he describes the person that he's pointing to. There's someone whose sandals I'm not fit to take off. In every culture there's something that people regard as really disgusting or just really off.
- In New Zealand, oh, this is helpful actually, Meryl Jones in New Zealand, Sarah Keller if you're here, these are a couple of people that are heading to New Zealand shortly. In New Zealand, I was going to say in New Zealand, which is actually how you would say it if you're in New Zealand.
- Sitting on tables, sitting on tables, sitting on tables. Disgusting, in New Zealand. Because a table, it's a true story, in great swaths of culture in New Zealand, it would be really bad for him to sit on somebody's table in their home.
- Because tables are where you prepare food and eat food. You don't put your bum on something that you prepare food on. Does that make sense? Meryl Jones, don't sit on a table.
- You disgust me. All right? In the ancient Near East, people wore sandals. And the streets were grossed.
- [9 : 46] The streets were grossed. It was animal waste. It's disgusting. So at the end of the day, you wouldn't wear your sandals inside because they're covered in poop and it's gross, right? Filth and dirt.
- There's not nice asphalt and stuff everywhere. So you'd take your sandals off at the door. Now servants, it was so gross that servants would take off your sandals if you're wealthy enough to have servants.
- Servants would take off your sandals. But there were rules around that. Jewish servants weren't allowed to take off your sandals. It's too gross for a Jew. Gentiles, no problem.
- You can take off sandals. Rabbis is another rule. Rabbis had disciples and they did many of the duties that servants would do. But disciples had to do whatever the rabbis would ask except they weren't required to take off sandals.
- They were gross. John says, verse 27, I baptize with water but among you stands one who you do not know, even he who comes after me.
- [10 : 46] The strap of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie. So this is him again pointing away from himself and you see in the extravagant terms in which he points away to himself.
- He's saying, now here's, he doesn't say I'm not even worthy to take off the sandals. No, he doesn't say I'm only worthy to take off sandals.
- He doesn't say I'm only, I'm just the taking off sandal guy. He says, I'm not even worthy to do that. And the person I'm pointing to, you don't even have categories for that guy.
- You don't even, we don't even, I don't know how to talk about him. I am lower than the lowest and the Messiah is higher than the highest.

John is a wonderfully godly example for us. Wonderfully godly example for us, I think. very bold, very courageous, and yet very humble.

[11 : 48] And we see that all over the passage. I mean, his disciples start following, his disciples start following Jesus and he doesn't seem to have a problem with that. You know, he's not trying to create a legacy for himself.

He's not particularly intimidated by the religious leaders. He has no desire to look impressive in their eyes, which is something, don't we want to do that? Look impressive in the eyes of important people.

He doesn't seem to have any desire to do that. He's filled with this incredible enthusiasm for the Messiah and his life is committed to making him known.

Now how can a person like this be filled with such boldness and humility and be such an effective witness for Jesus? How does it happen?

It happens when you know who Jesus is. It happens when you know who Jesus is and what he's going to do. And the Holy Spirit had given John that insight.

[12 : 52] Twice in the passage, John describes Jesus as the Lamb of God. And the second time, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. If you're new to the faith or on a journey to faith, what's, I mean, it doesn't sound like a compliment to call somebody the Lamb of God.

What is that about? Well, it's talking about the Passover which is a feast, a Jewish feast that celebrates something really amazing. A thousand years before this was written, God's people were enslaved by Pharaoh in Egypt.

And Moses went to Pharaoh and he says, let my people go. You've enslaved them. And he didn't. And so God sent these increasingly serious plagues, frogs, locusts, blood, et cetera.

And finally, he sent the angel of death, which meant that the eldest child in every household in the city would die, would just die. And in a patriarchal society, I mean, that's brutal.

That's the worst thing that can happen. But God tells his people in the city that their child will be saved if they kill a lamb and sprinkle its blood over the doorpost. And if they do that, the angel of death will pass over, their house pass over, right?

[14 : 03] The lamb will die instead of the family member. And every year after that, the Hebrew people commemorate that event with a Passover feast. So John recognizes that. That's his Holy Spirit revelation.

He knows that Jesus, the Messiah, is not coming with military might to take over Rome, that Jesus is coming to die and die so we don't have to for our sins.

So John realized the treasure there was in Jesus. And he recognized that I think better than anyone else at the time. And that's why he could be so bold and yet humble.

And what's the implications for us here? I'll say it as simply as I can. Folks, your witness will be as, will be effective to the degree that you really grasp Jesus and what he has done.

And you can be a voice like John. You can be bold but not arrogant. You can be humble but not have, you know, bad self-esteem.

[15 : 20] You can do great things but not have your identity tied to it, welded to that. You can live a life not intimidated by people even if you're talking to the Herods of the world.

You can live life without the great desire to impress people. And you can do that all in the service of making Jesus known.

But you can only do that to the degree that you know who Jesus really is and what he's done for the world. I was really, really encouraged by Andrew's testimony last week, wherever he is.

I don't know if he's here. Wherever he is. And I remember thinking, Andrew, you've got, you could tell some really great stories about your life. You know, about piercing your eyeballs or I don't know what you've done, the crazy stuff, like mad, right?

But what was impressive to me was that he talked about the goodness of Jesus. Just the goodness of Jesus in his life. And I think this is why he's a very effective witness because he knows the kindness of Jesus in his life and it just flows out of him.

[16 : 26] So it's not about him, it's about, it's about Christ. All right, that's the first half. The second half will be a lot shorter.

So I've talked about the bold, humble, effective witness of John. Now, now look at the second half of the passage, the second scene. We'll spend a lot less time on this. A reminder, we're talking about how the beginning of John goes from this cosmic, mind-bending theology related to the Edenia of Christ and it, bam, hits the ground running with just real people, real lives.

And that sudden change in topic here poses the question to us, how does this massive revelation of Jesus play out in our life? And one of the ways it does is in witness and we've looked at the mountain, the mountainous man that was John the Baptist.

Now look at some regular people here. This is verses 35 to the end. So, a couple of guys begin to follow Jesus and how does it happen? How does it happen? Well, the remarkable thing is this.

It happens, it's just so everyday. You've got these two disciples of John, they start following Jesus. Why? Verse 35, it says, John said, there is the Lamb of God.

[17 : 37] There's the Lamb of God. And they're curious and they start literally walking with Jesus. They ask him some more details and Jesus says, come and see. One of the other guys, verse 41, one of the other guys says to his brother, we've found the Messiah.

This guy comes to Jesus, Simon, has this life-changing encounter with Jesus. His name is changed to Peter, which means the rock. It's prediction of what?

It's prediction of what, you know, God's going to do in this man's life. The next day, verse 43, it says, Philip was this other guy. He became a follower and it says, he found Nathanael.

He goes, oh, I went looking for Nathanael. I found Nathanael and I told Nathanael about Jesus. And I just told him about it and Nathanael here is an honest sort of skeptic it looks like and he basically says, Nathanael, I mean Nazareth, he says, Nazareth, the Messiah wouldn't be from Nazareth, sort of verse 46, paraphrasing there.

Messiah's not going to come out of Nazareth. And Philip, who is useless at answering questions, just is like, well, just, just, well, yep, yep, well, just come and see.

[18 : 47] Just come and see. And Nathanael has this life-changing experience with Christ as well. Wow, what do we take out of this?

A million things? I'll talk about two quickly and then we'll finish. Have a look at just the first experience, the first encounter verses 35 to 37.

The next day again, John was standing with his two disciples and he looked at Jesus and as he walked by, he said, behold, the Lamb of God, the two disciples heard what he said and they followed Jesus.

I mean, it's just so, isn't it just, the verbs, the verbs, saw, saw, said, heard, followed.

John spoke based on what they, based on what he saw. This was his simple testimonies, his simple testimony and the disciples followed because of what they'd heard.

[19 : 49] John saw something, he spoke based on that and the disciples followed because of what they'd heard. And this is just the, this is just the principle of Christian expansion. The followers of Jesus tell others and they turn into followers who do the same.

And it's very mundane, isn't it? And incredibly miraculous all at the same time. Many of you grew up in Christian families and you don't know a time when you weren't a Christian. But others of you became followers of Christ as a teen or an adult, or child perhaps.

How did it happen? Most of the time it's because someone told you about Jesus. Someone said something to you, right? It's my experience. I was working at Georgie Pie which is kind of like McDonald's but with meat pies.

Fantastic. I mean, try and think of something better than that. You can't, right? Meat pie, fast food. Brilliant. And there were Christians who worked there. They just told me about Jesus.

And so I, and they said, why don't you come and see? Come and, come to our youth group. And looking back, it was, in New Zealand we have a saying, woeful. Do you have a saying over here? Woeful?

[20 : 57] Woeful? It inspired woe. It was so bad. Looking back, it was so bad. I just thought it was the best thing I'd ever experienced in my life in terms of community and love.

They just invited me. Let me say this really, really plainly. A lot of you here have a lot to offer and are not helping people find Jesus.

And perhaps you don't want to embarrass yourself or cause problems. Perhaps you think you don't have the skills. Perhaps you don't have any non-Christian friends. This is a problem I have.

Work at a church. Hang out with a bunch of church people. Married to Christians. Christian. I joined my PTA, my parent advisor, whatever it's called, the parent council at my girls' preschool.

I don't want to be involved. But I thought, how am I going to meet people who aren't Christian? So I joined. I'm like one of the four parents now that run. I think as far as I can tell, I'm the only Christian at the school.

[22 : 06] But whatever reason you have skills or don't know non-Christians or don't want to embarrass yourself or cause problems or whatever, whatever the reason, pray.

This is what I'd say. I'd say pray, pray, pray that you would see Jesus. Pray that you would see Jesus. that you would know the fullness of Jesus in your heart.

That you would have this testimony of transformation in your life. And I think when you really know Jesus, when you know the fullness of Christ in your heart, some of those reasons for not sharing, I think drift, I think they just sort of drift off into the peripherals, I think.

Second thing I'll say about the second lot here is that, I mean, Philip is a great example. Didn't know what he was talking about, right? Didn't have a good answer to what was a reasonable question.

Just come and see. He was just so excited. Second thing I'll say about these interactions is this great phrase, is this great phrase, come and see, which I've mentioned a few times already here. It's used twice in the passage.

[23 : 13] What does it mean, come and see? It means, it means I can't answer all your questions and maybe even if I could, would it make a difference but what I want you to do is I just want you to see Jesus for yourself.

What else does come and see mean? It means, it means let's, let's find out together. Let's do this in community. When sharing your faith, you don't go, you don't say, go and find out.

Come and see, meet with me. Let's look at this together. Let's read the Bible together. We'll pick you up for church. Come to my small group. It's come and see and experience what I experience regularly.

It's awesome. I can't maybe always explain it to you that well but I want you to experience it. I want you to see it for yourself. I want you to encounter Jesus for yourself but let's do it in the context of a community.

I just think that stuff jumps out of this passage. It's, it's, it's so everyday, isn't it? And it's community based. Folks, I'm going to finish up here which means I'm going to talk for a while longer but just, just for one minute.

[24 : 20] All right. This passage, these everyday events, they come immediately after the prologue. That incredible prologue in the beginning was the word.

Because knowing Jesus should make a real difference in your life. It should make a profound difference in your life. And one of the differences is this, that you should be aware of the treasure you have in Jesus and have a great desire to share it and it be shared with boldness and humility and enthusiasm.

If that sounds really daunting to you or too hard for you, pray for a fresh vision of Jesus in your life that you would see him. Do something courageous.

Talk to, talk to Andrew who's running this, running this, four week Bible study on how to share your faith. from the church's end, how do I want to help you do this?

How can we help you do this? You know, I think this is a very important passage for us as a congregation and a church. And I think this is going to be a year of reorientation for St. John's because I think because of the Anglican crisis and using a rented space rather than our beautiful old cathedral that we had, I think it's been very easy for us to be inward looking.

[25 : 52] And I believe God is calling us to look outward again. And you'll see this pop up in a variety of ways around here. One of the ways is these monthly testimonies where you'll be encouraged by people coming to faith and it'll dawn on you, wow, people actually become Christians.

Like regular guys and girls, they become Christians. It's amazing. You'll be encouraged by that. Andrew's group. We'll be talking about missional communities, starting missional communities.

We're going to hear more about that shortly. Hopefully you'll start to see it more in the preaching. Jordan and I and whoever's preaching up here will directly address how the passage relates to people who are exploring faith.

People who don't know Christ, where it's appropriate in the passage will say something like if you don't know Christ, here's what the passage is saying to you. In my ideal world, every week you'll be sitting there thinking, oh, I wish I'd have brought my non-Christian friend along because what the preacher just said was really relevant.

They were just talking to me about that the other day. we'll be doing this because we want you to share your faith.

[27 : 10] I want you to share your faith. And simple, this is the simple everyday way that God grows his church and it's through people experiencing Jesus and inviting others to do the same.

I want to make sure that, you know, I'm doing everything I can to help you with that, to help you experience Jesus and help you share that faith. If you want to talk more about that, I'd love to chat more about that with you.

Amen.