

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XXI : THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN / JESUS' FIRST DISCIPLES (A WEEK IN THE BEGINNING, PART I)

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John 1:19-51	related passages
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Lesson Overview

Note the four successive days spoken of here (v19, 29, 35, 43) and the third day following (2:1) making it a week in detail. Such a coverage of a specific period of time is unusual, some examples of which are the "Busy Day", the parables, and the Passion Week. AT Robertson calls this the beginning of Christ's public ministry, starting at His baptism and continuing until Jesus' return into Galilee which marks the beginning of His Greater Galilean ministry.

Day 1: John the Baptist is questioned by the religious leaders' representatives

v19 : And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? : This follows on the verses John had previously recorded concerning John the Baptist's purpose (v6-8, 15). Since he had been sent to testify of Jesus, he here testifies of Him before a committee sent by the Sanhedrin (v19-28), before an unnamed group (v29-34) and before two of John's disciples (v35-42). Note John's emphasis concerning John the Baptist is not his unique appearance, his preaching nor his baptizing but rather that John the Baptist's theme is pointing others to Christ. This is in keeping with the apostle John's purpose of writing (Jn 20:31).

Although some of the material in this passage is similar to what has been covered, there is no question that this is a separate occasion. Jesus was baptized and immediately taken into the desert for His temptations and fasting experience (Mk 1:12). Jesus will now appear again to John, probably immediately following His wilderness experience (v29). The events beginning here take place one day prior to Jesus' appearance. The time is February / early March of AD 27 (debated).

"Reports concerning the new preacher and the excitement which he created had been coming in thick and fast. Probably rumor even suggested that he might be the Messiah. There was also his impressive method of urging repentance by uttering heavy threats upon the impenitent, and the fact that he baptized ... Jews, just as if *they*, children of Abraham, still needed repentance and cleansing. Moreover, it had probably been reported to them that this new revivalist (?) Had said certain very unfriendly things about Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt 3:7). Surely, an *investigating committee* was in order. A false Messiah might do a great deal of damage. Was it not the duty of the venerable members of the Sanhedrin to expose false prophets and would-be Messiahs (Deut 18:20-22) and to guard the religious interests of Israel?" [Hendriksen, *John*]

"The Jews ... is a characteristic word in John. It occurs more than fifty times in his Gospel as his own expression, while there are six instances of the formula *King of the Jews* used by Gentiles. In the Synoptic Gospels, on the other hand, to twelve instances of *King of the Jews*, there are but four passages in which the word Jews occurs. In Paul's writings it is comparatively rare, mostly in contrast with *Greek*, and both in contrast with Christianity. In Revelation it is found twice (2:9; 3:9), of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan and do lie. John, in the Gospel, distinguishes between *the multitude* and *the Jews*. By the former he means the aggregate of the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, the *mass* of the people, chiefly Galileans; by the latter, more particularly Judaeans, the leaders of Judaism in opposition to Jesus. The *multitude* are unsettled in conviction, inquisitive, despised by the Pharisees, inclined to listen to Jesus and to believe; moved by an impulse to make Him a king, escorting Him triumphantly into Jerusalem, and not appearing in the narrative of the trial and crucifixion. The *Jews* are tenacious of the expectation of a national Messiah. They represent the narrow, sectarian aspect of Judaism; they are the instigators and leaders of the opposition to Jesus, and to them His crucifixion is attributed. John uses the word where the other Evangelists speak of the opposers of Christ as Pharisees, Sadducees, elders, chief-priests, scribes, or lawyers. He recognizes the distinction between Pharisee and Sadducee, and though he does not mention the latter by name, he characterizes them by their position. Jesus is the key to the sense in which John employs the term *Jews*. He regards them in their relation to Him. The idea underlying the word is habitually that of separation from the character and privileges of a true Israelite through their rejection of Jesus. [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

sent is the word from which we get our word apostle, meaning sent as a deputation. Wuest: "and those who were sent off on the mission were of the Pharisees."

"Priests and Levites. Representing the ecclesiastical element of the nation; the two classes employed in the temple service. See Josh. 3:3; 2 Chronicles 30:27; Ezekiel 44:15. The combination occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. These deputies probably came from the Sanhedrin." [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

v20, 21 : And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. : Elijah: the Jews of the time expected a literal

reincarnation of the prophet Elijah, and thought they had found him in the person of John. John denied he was that person. That John fulfilled the prophecy spiritually is beyond doubt since not only was it prophesied prior to his birth that he would go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk 1:17) but Jesus Himself proclaimed John as the fulfilment of the Malachi passage (Mt 11:9-14; 17:12).

another prophet: from Deut 18:15-18 which speaks of another prophet like unto Moses. Some of the Jews of the time attributed this to the Messiah or another fore-runner of the Messiah. The apostles saw this as the reference to Jesus (Acts 3:22; 7:37) and therefore John correctly answers that he is not that Prophet.

v22, 23 : Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. : quoted freely from Isaiah 40:3; refer to lesson 18 for exposition.

v24 : And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. : while most the priests of the day belonged to the Sadducees (the religious liberals of the day), these evidently belonged to the Pharisaical party (who favoured strict adherence to the law).

v25 : And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? : The question of the committee sent did not center around John's preaching but rather his baptizing. The Pharisees knew just not anyone was allowed to administer rites of purification. If John was not the Messiah and not the re-incarnate fore-runner they were expecting, by what authority was he cleansing ceremonially? From this it is evident they did not understand John's reference to Isaiah. They were looking for a fore-runner, but one who was political and not so spiritual, as their expectant Messiah was to set up the kingdom rather than search men's hearts.

v26, 27 : John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. : For exposition of the shoe latchet, see lesson 19.

“By saying , *I baptize with water,*’ John points out that there is, after all, a vast difference between what *he* is doing and what the *Messiah* will do. All John can do is administer *the sign* (water); the Messiah — He alone — can bestow *the thing signified* (the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit).” [Hendriksen, *John*]

Aside from stating the difference between him and the Messiah, John makes the powerful announcement that the Messiah was standing in their very midst, i.e., He belongs to their own generation and is beginning His public work. “Among you” is a Greek idiom meaning literally *a mid one in respect of you. I,* and *a mid one,* stand respectively at the head of the parallel clauses, thus emphasizing the two contrasted parties. Standeth ... with the sense of *firm, persistent* standing. Thus, *stand fast* (1 Corinthians 16:13; Galatians 5:1; Philippians 1:27). The verb emphasizes the firm, dignified attitude of Christ. *Ye know not* is emphatic.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Note the lack of response from the ones sent: the Messiah was there! Why did they not rejoice or seek Him? “In their eagerness to expose false Messiahs, they are ignoring the true Messiah.” [Hendriksen, *John*]

v28 : These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. : either *Bethabara* or *Bethany*. Not the Bethany of John 11:18, but an unknown village. It was not uncommon for two places to have the same name, as the two *Bethsaidas*, the one on the eastern shore of the Lake of Gennesaret (Mark 6:32,45), and the other on the western shore (John 1:44); the two Caesareas, on the Mediterranean (Acts 8:40), and in Gaulonitis, at the foot of Lebanon, Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13).

Day 2: Jesus appears to John: “Behold, the Lamb of God!”

v29 : The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. : Even now as Jesus voluntarily submitted to baptism and defeated Satan in the desert, He had entered upon His task of vicariously taking upon Himself the curse of sin.

The Lamb of God refers to one or all of the following:

- the Passover lamb: possibly since the Passover was approaching
- the lamb for daily offering: since this was well-known among the people due to its daily occupancy
- the lamb in Isa 53:6,7,10: possible since only the day prior John had quoted from the book of Isaiah; as does Matthew in reference to Jesus (Mt 8:17), Peter (1 Pet 2:22), the evangelist Philip (Acts 8:32) and the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb 9:28).

That taketh away. Either *takes away* or *takes upon himself*, in order to bear: either *removal* or *expiation* of sin. The one idea, however, is included in the other. The *taking away* of the sin is through His bearing it.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

the sin of the world: not a reference to universal salvation but rather directly attacking the Jewish prejudice against Gentiles. Jesus was not the Saviour of the Jews only but of all nations.

v30 : This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. : that John had

often spoken of Jesus in language similar to what's given here, and so reminds them that this was the Person who was of greater honor than himself. For comments on Jesus being before John, see lesson 7 concerning Jn 1:15.

v31 : And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. : John did not know Jesus any more than the others around him did, at least by reflection or intuition. While physically cousins, it is unknown how much John had contact with Jesus prior to their ministries. Jesus grew up in Galilee, John in the desert. That John knew Jesus was different is obvious by his reluctance to baptize Him, but he did not know Him in the fullest sense. "It is clear from the context (v33) that the reference here is to something higher than mere physical acquaintance: the Baptist confesses that it had to be revealed to him from above that *this Jesus is the Christ*. In that sense he had not known Him. But in order that He (Jesus, in *that* capacity) might be made manifest to Israel, for this reason I came baptizing with water." [Hendriksen, *John*] Wuest: "and as for myself, I did not know Him in an absolute way, but in order that He might be made known to Israel, because of this I came baptizing by means of water."

v32 - 34 : And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. : the Apostle John is taking for granted the readers were familiar with the Synoptic gospel narrative of Jesus' baptism. For exposition of the baptism of Jesus, see lesson 20.

Day 3: Jesus gains His first disciples: John, Andrew, and Peter

v35 : Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; : the two disciples are Andrew and the other is presumed to be the apostle John himself, which through humility does not identify himself anywhere within his gospel (this understanding of the identity here and other places is widely accepted). It is also interesting to note that the synoptic writers always identified John the Baptist by "the Baptist, the baptizer." or the like, as if in distinguishing between the apostle and the fore-runner. In John's gospel however John the Baptist is always referred to as merely "John."

Stood = literally *was standing*, therefore, with the idea of *waiting*; was standing in expectation.

v36, 37 : And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. : as the disciples of John the Baptist heard John speak in reference to Jesus, they left John and followed Jesus.

As He walked = the verb literally means to walk *about*

Speak = literally, *speaking*

They followed: Bengel says, "The origin of the Christian Church." [quoted in Vincent, *Word Studies*]

v38 : Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? : note the form of Jesus' question, not "who" do you seek but "what?" Were they seeking the removal of sins? "If is almost as if He assumes that, like the rest of mankind, they are in pursuit of the *thing* which will satisfy their needs, give reality to their dreams and substance to their hopes. They are soon to discover that the *thing* is in fact a person, the very Person who now confronts them." [Tasker, *John*]

They address Him politely as Rabbi, a word coming from an adjective meaning primarily "great" and therefore "master, teacher." John, writing primarily for Gentile Christians, interprets the Aramaic words. "Rabbi. *My great one; my honorable sir*. Explained by Jesus himself as *teacher* ... Used by the Jews in addressing their teachers, and formed from a Hebrew root meaning *great*. It occurs commonly in John, and is found in Matthew and Mark, but not in Luke. [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Saw = *beheld*: looked steadfastly upon them as if studying them.

v39 : He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. : where Jesus takes the disciples is not revealed. The important thing is the disciples desire an uninterrupted opportunity to talk with Jesus.

the tenth hour:

- refers to 10 PM, beginning the counting at noon. This is quite impossible in the context.
- refers to 4 PM, beginning the counting at 6 AM as was common to the Jews.
- refers to 10 AM, beginning the counting at midnight. This is most acceptable to those I have studied for the following reasons:
 - John is writing to Gentile Christians (for the most part) near the end of the first century and therefore does not need to use the Jewish method of calculating time.
 - in another reference to time (Jn 20:19) John *must* have used the Roman method of counting to reconcile his account of the crucifixion with the other gospel narratives.

- the context seems to favor this interpretation, for the verse says they stayed with Jesus *that day*. If 4 PM it would be more natural to read “they stayed with Jesus that evening.” Also if it was early morning, there would have been time for conversation and still the searching for Peter (vs 41).

“The really important point in this connection is not, ‘what is meant by the tenth hour?’ but, ‘why does the author mention the hour at all?’ The answer is: the author ... was himself one of these two disciples. That day with Jesus changed his whole life! It made such a deep impression upon him that he never forgot the exact hour when the invitation had been received and the decision to accept it had been taken.” [Hendriksen, *John*] I agree, remembering the night of my meeting the Saviour well even though it transpired almost twenty years ago. While I am able to say exactly when and where I was saved, I do not number myself among those that believe if one does *not* know the exact time and place then they are not saved. My earthly father cannot, and there is no doubt in my mind of his salvation experience. *It is not important to be able to say when, it is more important to be living in such a manner that it is not a matter of doubt now!*

v40 : One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. : again, note the author’s assumption that the readers are familiar with the apostle Peter, using him to identify Andrew.

v41, 42 : He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone. : the verse could read either “Andrew, the first, found his brother Peter” or “Andrew first found his brother Peter.” If taken as an adverb, the sense is that prior to doing anything else, Andrew found his brother, or that Andrew was a natural soul-winner and the first he “won” was his own brother Peter. If taken as an adjective, the sense is that they were in a sense the first “missionaries” sent out by Jesus in search of their brothers. Andrew finds his brother Peter, and it is assumed John also found his brother James at this same time. John, in keeping with his humility in writing, does not mention his activity.

Andrew describes this new Rabbi as the Messiah, immediately recognizing Jesus from His own teachings as well as the counsel of John the Baptist. That the early disciples did not fully realize the import of Jesus’ ministry is evident from the rest of the gospel writings.

Jesus looked intently at Peter, literally *looked upon him, looked him over*. He then gives Peter another name meaning rock in the Aramaic. Before Him was the impulsive Simon, but Jesus knew by divine grace he would one day be the steadfast Cephas (Aramaic) or Peter (Greek). “It is noticeable, however, that Jesus only once addresses Simon by his new name ‘Peter’ (the Greek equivalent for Cephas) during His earthly life and only then, it would seem, to remind him that he had not yet proved worthy of it (see Lk 22:34).” [Tasker, *John*] Vincent on Cephas: “A detached mass of rock. *Cephas* is the Aramaic name, occurring 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Galatians 2:9.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Day 4: More disciples: Philip and Nathanael

v43, 44 : The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. : Jesus, still in the area of Bethany (Bethabara) crosses to the western banks of the Jordan on His way to Galilee. While in preparation for the trip they find Philip. Of all the disciples, only Andrew and Philip have Greek names. Jesus’ first group was diverse, as was the first deacons recorded in Acts 6. *The lesson for us is not that we need to be the same but that we need to view our differences as avenues of grace for the Lord to reach others.* It was to Philip that the Greeks made their request to see Jesus known, with Andrew and Philip bringing the request to Him (Jn 12:20-22).

Would go forth = *was minded to go*

Follow: “Often used in the New Testament with the special sense of following as a disciple or partisan. See Matthew 4:20, 22; 9:9; Mark 1:18; John 8:12. Also with the meaning of cleaving steadfastly to one and conforming to his example. See Matthew 10:38; 16:24; John 12:26. The verb occurs but once outside of the writings of the Evangelists, 1 Corinthians 10:4. It appears in the noun *acolyte*, or *acolyth*, or *acolithist*, a church-servant ranking next below a subdeacon, whose duty it was to trim the lamps, light the church, prepare the sacramental elements, etc. Under the Byzantine emperors the captain of the emperor’s bodyguard was called *Acolouthos*, or *the Follower*.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Wuest: “and Jesus says to him, start following with me, and keep on doing so as a habit of life.”

v45 : Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. : this Nathanael is assumed to be the Bartholomew of the synoptic gospels. Bartholomew is a form of Bar Tholmai meaning *the son of Tholmai*. Nathanael is a Hebrew name meaning *God had given*.

“Moses and the prophets” is taken to mean the entire OT which is not understandable without the proper perspective on Jesus.

Note Jesus is known to have come from Nazareth, indicating Jesus in all probability lived there His entire earthly life until the call for baptism. He was also known as the son of Joseph which He legally was. This is no reflection upon the virgin birth nor that Philip did not know the place of Jesus’ birth.

v46 : And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. : the reference could be that Nazareth had such a negative reputation or there was a town-rivalry, or merely that Nathanael knew of no prophecy which indicated the Messiah as coming from Nazareth.

v47 : Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! : guile comes from a word meaning *bait for fish*, and therefore *a snare*, then: *deceit, guile*. Perhaps Jesus had in mind the first Israelite Jacob who was known for his deception. “A really honest and sincere Israelite, a Jew without duplicity, had become such an exception that at the approach of Nathaniel Jesus exclaimed, ‘Look, truly an Israelite in whom deceit does not exist.’” [Hendriksen, *John*]

v48 : Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. : a man of lesser integrity might have thanked Jesus and kept his thoughts to himself, but not Nathanael. Possibly Philip told Jesus of Nathanael? But the response of Jesus showed a greater depth of knowledge than Nathanael thought possible. In a show of infinite knowledge and presence, Jesus tells Nathanael of seeing him when he was probably in solitude. Vincent implies more is involved: “The preposition with the accusative case, which implies motion toward, indicates his withdrawal *to* the shade of the tree for meditation or prayer. The Jewish writings tell of distinguished rabbis who were accustomed to rise early and pursue their studies under the shade of a fig tree. Compare Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10.... Nathanael asks, Whence *knowest* thou me? Jesus answers, *I saw thee*.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Is the meaning here, “while you were alone in prayer, it was Me to Whom you were praying, and I saw you there” ?

v49 - 51 : Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. : the response from Jesus may be taken as a question as here, or as a statement, “Because I said to you I saw you under the fig-tree you believe. Greater things than these you shall see,” in the sense that as a reward for his faith, greater things would be revealed to him.

Jesus again makes use of the patriarch Jacob who rested in the night while fleeing from his brother Esau, seeing a ladder with angels ascending and descending with the voice of God re-affirming His covenant with His people to be. Jesus is as it were *the link between heaven and earth, the bond of union between man and God*.

Verily, verily = amen, amen. “The word is transcribed into our *Amen*. John never, like the other Evangelists, uses the single *verily*, and, like the single word in the Synoptists, it is used only by Christ.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Heaven = literally with the article, *the heaven*

Open = literally *opened*, the participle signifies *standing* open, and is used in the story of Stephen’s martyrdom, Acts 7:56. Compare Isaiah 64:1.

Angels: with the exception of 12:29 and 20:12, John does not use the word angel elsewhere in the Gospel or in the Epistles, and does not refer to their being or ministry. Literally *messenger*.

Son of man: “In John’s Gospel, as in the Synoptists, this phrase is used only by Christ in speaking of Himself; and elsewhere only in Acts 7:56, where the name is applied to Him by Stephen. It occurs less frequently in John than in the Synoptists, being found in Matthew thirty times, in Mark thirteen, and in John twelve.... The phrase *Son of man* is the expression of Christ’s self-consciousness as being related to humanity as a whole: denoting His real participation in human nature, and designating Himself as the representative man.... While the human element was thus emphasized in the phrase, the consciousness of Jesus, as thus expressed, did not exclude His divine nature and claims, but rather regarded these through the medium of His humanity. He showed Himself divine in being thus profoundly human. Hence two aspects of the phrase appear in John, as in the Synoptists. The one regards His earthly life and work, and involves His being despised; His accommodation to the conditions of human life; the partial veiling of His divine nature; the loving character of His mission; His liability to misinterpretation; and His outlook upon a consummation of agony. On the other hand, He is possessed of supreme authority; He is about His Father’s work; He reveals glimpses of His divine nature through His humanity; His presence and mission entail serious responsibility upon those to whom He appeals; and He foresees a consummation of glory no less than of agony. See Matthew 8:20; 11:19; 12:8, 32; 13:37; 16:13; 20:18; 26:64; Mark 8:31, 38; 14:21; Luke 9:26, 58; 12:8; 17:22; 19:10; 22:69. The other aspect is related to the future. He has visions of another life of glory and dominion; though present in the flesh, His coming is still future, and will be followed by a judgment which is committed to Him, and by the final glory of His redeemed in His heavenly kingdom. See Matthew 10:23; 13:40 sqq.; 16:27 sqq.; 19:28; 24:27, 37, 44; 25:31 sqq.; Mark 13:26; Luke 6:22; 17:24, 30; 18:8; 21:27.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]