

THE SAVIOR IS FOLLOWED

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Messiah invites others to follow Him (John 1:35-42).
2. The Messiah reveals His identity by His power (John 1:43-49).
3. The Messiah promises greater things to come (John 1:50-51).

Background Passage: John 1

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus invited His first followers into relationship with Him and promised that they would experience great things.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus came into the world to call sinners to repentance and to lay down His life on their behalf so that they might be saved. Likewise, as His followers, we tell others about Jesus and call on them to turn from their sin and trust in Jesus.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus gave up His life for us and we have committed to following Him, our lives are to be marked by sacrifice as we are willing to do whatever God calls on us to do as we invest in others so that they might become disciples of Jesus.

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the world as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He understood Jesus's role from the start. Jesus was the sacrificial substitute, laying down His life for His people. John again, the following day, called Jesus the Lamb of God (John 1:36), specifically telling two of his own disciples, allowing them to follow Jesus and become His disciples. The call to follow the Lamb is the foundation of John's Gospel and the basis for the entire story of the Bible. From cover to cover, the Bible invites the reader to look at Jesus, follow Him, and be saved.

EXPLAIN: Items in nature, agricultural scenarios, and animals, among other things, were often used as symbols in ancient middle eastern culture. Symbols and picture references were used often in a culture that was more oral than written.

DISCUSS: If you were to choose an animal as a metaphor for Jesus, what might you choose? (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: Jews in Jesus's day would have understood the imagery of a lamb. They would have known that lambs were used as a sacrifice, especially at Passover. They would have understood the reference to something pure and blameless. But what would have been difficult for them to understand was a person being called "the Lamb of God." How or why would a person step into the role of a sacrificial lamb? Even more, why would this description be used of someone who claimed to be sent from God to be the Messiah and Savior?

OPTIONAL QUESTION: Since becoming a Christian, how has your appreciation grown when you think about Jesus's role as a substitute? (my understanding of my own sin has grown, and I see how deeply I need a substitute; when I see the perfection of Jesus, I'm stunned to think of how much grace it took to save us sinners; it takes a lot of love to take on the guilt of another)

POINT 1

THE MESSIAH INVITES OTHERS TO FOLLOW HIM (JOHN 1:35-42).

35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, **36** and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” **37** The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. **38** Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” **39** He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. **40** One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. **41** He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). **42** He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:35-42** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 35-39** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Discipleship includes **following** Jesus and staying near Him in response to His invitation to come and **know** Him more.

DISCUSS: What does it mean to follow Jesus for the modern reader? (do what He does and says to do; talk to Him in prayer; trust in Him not only to save us from sin and death but to lead us in holiness; worship Him; enjoy His presence)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 40-42** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Discipleship also includes **sharing** about Jesus with others, bringing them to Him so they too can have a new **identity** in Christ Jesus.

DISCUSS: Why is it sometimes difficult to share about Jesus with others? (because we don’t want to be offensive or pushy; because we don’t want to sound like a fanatic or cult-like; because we haven’t realized or appreciated all that He has done for us)

TRANSITION: We get to know Jesus by following Him, and we also have the privilege of telling others about Jesus so they can follow Him. But we cannot know Jesus fully until we know that He is a Messiah with the power to save.

NOTES

MESSIAH

Means “Anointed One,” *christos* in Greek and *mashiach* in Hebrew, from which we get the words “Christ” and “Messiah.” Originally, this idea referred to anointed kings, priests, and prophets called into God’s ministry. Later, it specifically referred to the expected Davidic descendant who would one day be king, ruling over the Israelites and vanquishing their enemies.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Jesus was way more than just some prophet or teacher. And to point to Him as anything less than the King of kings, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, is to reject Him and insult Him”¹

–Trip Lee

COMMENTARY

VERSES 35-39 / Every time John the Baptist is mentioned in the Gospel of John, he is pointing to Jesus. Here, the scene describes John with two of his disciples. This would have been common at the time as religious leaders gathered around them disciples who would both strive to understand the teaching of a master and train themselves in that person's pattern of life. John, as a religious leader and prophet, would have been one to have such disciples. But John's main mission was to point his disciples to Jesus. John very clearly understood that Jesus is the Lamb of God because God had given him this revelation. Since he understood this truth about Jesus, he wanted others to see Jesus as well. When you see something or someone great, you want to let others know about this greatness as well.

John's disciples clearly trusted their leader. He proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God, and they started following Jesus around. They likely were among many who were anxiously waiting for God's Messiah, so when John told them the Messiah was here, these disciples listened. Apparently they followed Jesus so closely that they got His attention, and He asked them what they wanted. What were they looking for?

The latter half of verse 38 implies that they did not fully grasp what was happening, which is predictable. They referred to Jesus as a Teacher, a Rabbi, when they asked Him where He was staying. This was a role of honor and one they knew well because it was the role John was playing in their lives at that time. They may not have known all that Jesus was, but they did know that they wanted to follow Him and stay near Him. These are the first steps of discipleship.

Jesus responded by inviting these strangers to come and see. Jesus invited people into His orbit so they could experience Him in a personal way. This is in stark contrast to how great people operate in our culture today. Great people often try to keep others out, especially if those people are total

strangers who have no business getting close. Jesus was willing to draw others close because He had nothing to hide—He is sinless and personable. When people got close to Jesus, they could see that He really was the Messiah. His actions would confirm His identity.

VERSES 40-42 / Andrew is the first disciple mentioned here. He was one of the two who pursued Jesus and went with Jesus. The reader is not told what Jesus used to confirm His identity as the Messiah to Andrew, but it did not take long for Andrew to be clear that this was the Messiah. John was right. Jesus was the One they had been waiting for.

Andrew's actions are informative. He went and got his brother and brought him to Jesus. There are three points here that are worthy of attention. First, Andrew took what he knew and told someone else. Next, Andrew did this along relational lines. He went to his brother, to the one closest to him, and brought Simon to Jesus. Finally, Andrew followed the pattern that John started. Once he was clear that Jesus is the Messiah, he served as a messenger for this message. He spoke of Jesus's identity, telling Simon that the Messiah is here. The title "**Messiah**" refers to God's appointed one. Like an anointed king in the Old Testament, Jesus is the One who was anointed by God to save sinners and fix the world that was broken by sin.

Jesus, in turn, changed Simon's identity. He gave him a new name. And Simon changed as a result of his interaction with Jesus. This transformation was public since others would know that his name had been changed by Jesus. In this way, Simon serves as an example of all those who are changed when they meet Jesus by faith.

It's also interesting to note that two of John the Baptist's disciples followed Jesus—one was Andrew and one was nameless. Many commentators believed the second to be John himself, the writer of the Gospel.²

POINT 2

THE MESSIAH REVEALS HIS IDENTITY BY HIS POWER (JOHN 1:43-49).

NOTES

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” **44** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. **45** Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” **46** Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” **47** Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” **48** Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” **49** Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:43-49** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 43-45** commentary to highlight the key doctrine of God’s calling on the lives of His people (*the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

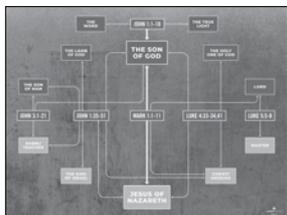
KEY DOCTRINE #66: Calling: The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the **gospel** and internally through the **Holy Spirit** working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are **essential**, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 46-49** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Our **faith** in Jesus is dependent on our understanding of who He is, namely, the Messiah, the Son of God, and the **King** of all.

DISCUSS: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 3: NAMES OF JESUS (POSTER)** and pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 4: NAMES OF JESUS (HANDOUT)**; then ask: **What names of Jesus resonate with you at this point in your life, and why?** (be prepared to share an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

TRANSITION: Jesus was God’s anointed, and He pointed all those who would listen to Him to the great things that were to come in the future.



THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

This expression, and those with similar wording, were used by many in New Testament times to refer to the whole canon of the Old Testament, including and emphasizing God’s promises to His people.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 43-45 / Jesus's invitation to **"follow me"** is a common invitation throughout the Gospels. For example, in Matthew 4:19, Jesus called two disciples to follow Him so that He could make them fishers of men. Later, in verses 21-22, Jesus called out to two others who also left everything to follow Jesus. The idea of following Jesus has become shorthand for the repentance and faith that compels one to spend his or her life loving and serving Jesus. Christians often are described as people who follow Jesus.

When someone follows Jesus, there is a natural evangelistic impulse that emerges. The reader isn't told explicitly that it was Andrew or Peter who told Philip about the Messiah, but the text does say that Philip was from their town, so we may assume that word had begun to spread through Andrew and Peter. This pattern—from one brother to another and then throughout their city—is a model for the movement of the gospel message that will continue in the Gospels and through the book of Acts. When one person comes to believe, often others soon follow in that same faith. The apostle Paul invited those who have been reconciled to God to live as ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20), and this typically begins with sharing the gospel along relational and geographical lines.

After Philip heard the call, believed, and chose to follow Jesus, he then found Nathanael and made a direct claim by saying that Jesus is the One to whom the Law of Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament were pointing. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. When Moses recorded the law, it was clear that the payment for sin would require a substitute. As the prophets wrote and spoke, it also was apparent that the hope for the people rested not in their moral ability but in a Savior who would come. Here again, the reader sees the juxtaposition of the deity of Jesus and His humanity. He is the promised Messiah, and He is also the son of Joseph, a carpenter from Nazareth. He's divine and human.

VERSES 46-49 / Nathanael heard Philip testify of the Messiah's presence, but he found it hard to wrap his mind around the fact that this Messiah was from such a backwoods place like Nazareth. Nazareth was small and off the beaten path. It was a working-class community that gave no indication of being the place from which one would expect the Messiah to come. But what was a challenging statement was met with a familiar invitation—**"Come and see,"** Philip said.

The invitation given by Jesus was now extended by another on Jesus's behalf. Others were invited to come and see if He truly is the Messiah. This type of invitation is the basis of Christian witness. Believers do not need to feel the pressure to have all the answers, but they should be eager to invite people to investigate the claims of Jesus. This invitation also serves as the basis for the corporate witness of the church. As skeptics and critics investigate the truth of Jesus, they are invited to churches where they can witness firsthand the life transformation God produces in and through His people.

Jesus then met Nathanael in his search. Nathanael had a life of integrity that marked him as a faithful Israelite, and Jesus commended him for it. When Nathanael asked how Jesus knew him, Jesus spoke of seeing him under the fig tree. This was a supernatural act of Jesus for Nathanael to respond to the fact that Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah.

Verse 49 links the various descriptions of Jesus used in this passage. Nathanael used the term **"Rabbi,"** or **"Teacher,"** when addressing Jesus. But then he called Him **"the Son of God"** and **"the King of Israel."** This passage moves from Jesus being the son of Joseph to Jesus being the Son of God. Nathanael linked the reality that Jesus is the divine Son of God with the ultimate vindication of Israel. He believed that Jesus will sit on the royal throne as the rightful ruler of God's people.

POINT 3

THE MESSIAH PROMISES GREATER THINGS TO COME (JOHN 1:50-51).

NOTES

50 Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” **51** And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:50-51** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 50** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus promised to show His people greater things to **encourage** their faith in **Him**.

DISCUSS: What causes you to believe that Jesus really is who He says He is? (the transformation He’s brought in my life; being convinced when reading the Bible; finding answers to my questions; my faith; being raised around others who truly believed; seeing answered prayer)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 51** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus described Himself as the **Son of Man**, widening the people’s understanding of who He is and is not.

DISCUSS: Who do you say that Jesus is? (be prepared to share an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

COMMENTARY

VERSE 50 / After Nathanael’s verbal declaration of faith that Jesus is the promised Messiah, Jesus asked His newfound disciple to consider the basis of his faith. Why did Nathanael believe? Simply because Jesus said He saw him under the fig tree?

Jesus did not challenge Nathanael’s faith, but He did point him to the fact that the future would be filled with far greater examples of Jesus’s power and deity. Jesus may have had a specific **“greater thing”** in mind, but more likely He was referring to the sum total of all of the great examples of power that these disciples would witness over the course of Jesus’s ministry. They would see the lame walk, the blind see, the poor fed, and the dead raised. God’s kingdom would come to earth in great power at the hands of Jesus Christ. The disciples also would witness the pinnacle of Jesus’s glory on display in His victorious resurrection. This act would make Jesus’s vision of Nathanael under the fig tree pale in comparison. Jesus’s words remind us of the apostle Paul’s invitation to Christians to trust in God and His Son because He is “able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us” (Eph. 3:20). God continues to act in power through His Spirit in the church.

VERSE 51 / Jesus then said, **“Truly, truly.”** In other versions, “Verily, verily.” This is the first of many times John records the use of this “Amen, amen” phrase to add the strength of certainty to what Jesus is about to say.³ Jesus said that it was certain that His disciples (not just Nathanael, as this statement contains a plural **“you”** in the Greek) would see the heavens open. And the mention of the **“angels of God ascending and descending”** is a reference to an important Old Testament story found in Genesis 28:10-17. In this story, Jacob went to sleep for the night while on a journey, and during his sleep, he saw a vision of a stairway to heaven with angels going up and down it. In this vision, God confirmed that He is the God of Abraham and Isaac and that He would fulfill His covenant

promises to Jacob and his descendants (see Gen 12:1-3; 28:13-15). The vision of the angels on the stairway indicated that God was, in fact, with Jacob. He promised: “I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Gen. 28:15). These words were important to Jacob, who likely thought that God had abandoned His promises due to Jacob’s sin and self-inflicted exile from the promised land.

In the same way, the mention of angels ascending and descending was meant to serve as confirmation to those listening that not only had God not forgotten His promises or His people, but He had sent His Son to demonstrate His love and do what was necessary to secure their salvation. Just as the angels ascended and descended in Jacob’s vision and God confirmed His promises to Jacob, so did Jesus here proclaim and promise that His disciples, those who trust in Him, would surely see the angels ascending and descending on Him. The focus, though, is not the angels but the fact that they would truly see Him—Jesus, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Savior of the world.

Here, Jesus used the term **“Son of Man”** for the first time to describe Himself. It is a reference to Daniel’s vision of “one like a son of man” (Dan. 7:13-14) who was given authority by the Lord Almighty, the Ancient of Days. Jesus liked using this term to describe Himself to refrain from politically-loaded terms like King of the Jews, Messiah, or Son of David, broadening the perspective of those waiting for that conquering King, knowing that what He was going to do was not what they expected Him to do—namely, die and rise again.

Christians today, then, are witnesses to even greater things—seeing God’s presence through the witness of Jesus in the Gospels, the enduring presence of the church through history, and the saving grace of God through their personal lives.

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus gave up His life for us and we have committed to following Him, our lives are to be marked by sacrifice as we are willing to do whatever God calls on us to do as we invest in others so that they might become disciples of Jesus.

NOTES

HEAD:

Jesus calls people to Himself. As God, it would be right for Him to keep sinful humans at a distance. He could have moved through His life on earth without much human interaction and accomplished the work of salvation through His death and resurrection. The fact that Jesus invited people into His life and allowed them to see His deity firsthand gives testimony to the fact that God wants to be known. Also, we see clearly that those who know Him share Him with others. These stories illustrate that people who have a relationship with Jesus tell others that He is the promised Messiah—they tell those in their family and those in their city and also participate in sharing this good news with the whole world.

What are some potential risks and joys from sharing with others the good news of Jesus as the Messiah?

HEART:

The people in John 1 modeled the way Jesus changes the human heart. The reader gets a sense of the joy found in these first disciples who exclaimed, “We have found the Messiah!” This type of praise comes from a heart that has been transformed and one that knows firsthand that Jesus really is who He says He is and came to do what He said He would do. We also should have a heart of praise. We’ve seen Jesus revealed in the Bible, and God has revealed the truth of Jesus to our hearts, so our lives should consistently proclaim, “We have found the Messiah,” to anyone who will listen.

Do you view sharing the gospel as a joyful privilege or dreaded duty? Why?

HANDS:

The first followers of Jesus brought other people to Jesus. In fact, they did not seem to waste any time inviting other people to come and see the Messiah. It’s likely that many in the first century were looking for the Messiah, so it was natural for them to want to come and see. Others, however, may not have been looking but were compelled by the invitation. In our day, the same is true. We testify to God’s grace to those who are looking for hope and salvation and to those who are not but who still need the good news of Jesus.

How will you use your influence to invite others to follow Jesus this week?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Jesus has no desire to trick you into following him with a kind of bait and switch. He is utterly up front about the cost. In fact, he urges you to count the cost. ‘For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? . . .’ (Luke 14:28). Let the call to follow Jesus be clear and honest. ‘In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world’ (John 16:33). It is costly, and it is worth it.”⁴

—John Piper

POINT 1: THE MESSIAH INVITES OTHERS TO FOLLOW HIM (JOHN 1:35-42).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“This second cameo (another story of witness involving the Baptizer) provides the evangelist with his actual transition from John to Jesus. In this pericope there is also provided another major clue to why the evangelist must have regarded the Baptizer as an ideal witness. John had developed a following of disciples, and this text indicates that he willingly turned them over to Jesus by his repetition of the announcement to them: ‘Look! [Behold or See!] the Lamb of God’ (1:35). John here is portrayed as evidencing quite the opposite pattern from the usual human tendency to be an empire builder. Therefore he provides a genuine model of what it means to be a minister or servant of God. The human tendency is to make a name for ourselves and to attach our names to other people, institutions, and things so that people will remember us. To minimize oneself (‘to decrease’) in order for Jesus to become the focus of attention (‘to increase’) is the designated function of an ideal witness in this Gospel (cf. John 3:30).”⁵

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

Any time you find something of value and worth, you have a challenge in terms of how you will relay your findings to other people. Will you merely tell them, for example, that there is a bear outside of your vacation cabin or that it’s snowing outside on Christmas morning? Since these happenings are somewhat unbelievable, depending on your location, it’s unlikely that words alone will be sufficient. After all, people will think you are making it up or just trying to trick them. So, the natural impulse is an invitation. If there really is a bear outside or if it really is snowing, then all people have to do is come and see for themselves to confirm what you’ve said. Once they see with their own eyes, then, you don’t even have to tell them about what’s happening anymore. They can make sense of it on their own. You can just sit back and enjoy.

Our Christian witness functions in a similar way. We have found the Messiah—the Savior, the hope of the world. We don’t have to feel the pressure of answering everyone’s questions or providing philosophical discourse to substantiate who He is and what He’s come to do. We can invite people to check out Jesus for themselves and trust that He will confirm His identity to them.

EXTRA

POINT 2: THE MESSIAH REVEALS HIS IDENTITY BY HIS POWER (JOHN 1:43-49).

+ COMMENTARY

“Philip was excited! His words must have tumbled out of his mouth. Nathanael had not heard about Jesus, but he knew his Old Testament. He knew that Bethlehem was named as the birthplace of our Savior, not Nazareth. Besides, Nazareth was just four miles from Cana, which was Nathanael’s hometown, and since there was a little rivalry between the two places, he had to challenge Philip. ‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Philip gave him the best and only possible answer. He said, ‘Come and see.’ We need to make that response when we are tempted to argue.”⁶

+ COMMENTARY

“Lest Israel lose its distinctive nature, an important aspect of the monarchy in Israel is the establishment of a clear theology of kingship. With Saul and his successor David, the Lord is the one who chooses the king, has him anointed by Samuel, and endows him with the Spirit. Only then is the king publicly attested before Israel. Thus, the mortal king is firmly established as an under-king of the great King, the Lord. When Samuel the prophet anoints the king of Israel, that mortal king becomes the Lord’s messiah (‘anointed one’; 1 Samuel 2:10; 10:1; 16:13). From this imagery the future hope of a messiah will be constructed.”⁷

+ COMMENTARY

“The use of Son of God to designate the Messiah ultimately depends on passages such as 1 Samuel 26:17,21,25; 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7 (linking sonship and Davidic royalty) . . . That appears to be how Nathanael used it, but readers of John’s Gospel will quickly learn that the categories ‘Son’ and ‘Son of God’ are used to depict the unique relation of oneness and intimacy between Jesus and his Father. Jesus’ sonship to God, however functionally described, involves a metaphysical, not merely a messianic, relationship . . . Nathanael spoke better than he knew. The title King of Israel was used by Palestinian Jews for the Messiah; it is again applied to Jesus in 12:13. In John 18–19 the similar ‘King of the Jews’ occurs several times. Jesus did not quickly adopt either title for himself, as both expressions were in the popular mind largely tied to expectations of a political liberator. Yet Jesus was the promised King, even if he would have to explain that his kingdom was not of this world (18:36).”⁸

+ ILLUSTRATION

Can anything good come from Nazareth? This question is easy to illustrate regardless of where you are from. You might not know anything about Nazareth, but you can identify a local or state-level rivalry, disdain, or hatred related to high school or college football. Sports rivalries can maintain a sense of good humor between the factions, but some rivalries are intense and heated. Imagine one college hiring on a head coach whose alma mater was that school’s bitter rival and enemy. This helps to illustrate something of the disdain Nathanael had for Nazareth.

POINT 3: THE MESSIAH PROMISES GREATER THINGS TO COME (JOHN 1:50-51).

+ COMMENTARY

“In verse 51 Jesus hints at the sort of ‘greater things’ Nathanael can expect. Jesus alludes to the episode in Genesis 28 when Jacob had fled his home, having stolen the birthright and blessing from Esau. Jacob dreamed of ‘a ladder . . . And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!’ (Gen. 28:12). Yahweh himself appeared, promising to Jacob the blessing of Abraham (Gen. 28:13–14). Jacob responded that the place was ‘none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven’ (Gen. 28:17). The ‘ladder’ or ‘flight of steps’ Jacob saw may have been an ancient Near Eastern ziggurat, a point of connection between earth and heaven. Jesus puts himself in the place of that temple-like object. The reference to the Word ‘tabernacling’ in John 1:14 is now joined by this indication in verse 51 that Jesus, the Son of Man, will be the point of connection between earth and heaven. Thus verses 14 and 51 both contribute to the theme in John’s Gospel that Jesus is the replacement of the temple. Moreover, the Genesis passage addresses the blessing of Abraham, a blessing that will be realized in and through Jesus.”⁹

+ COMMENTARY

“This chapter closes not with another witness by mere humans but with Jesus’ own emphatic self-witness to be the ‘Son of Man.’ The term ‘Son of Man’ occurs thirteen times in this Gospel, and its major use seems to be closely akin to the eschatological use of the term in the Synoptics. The theological motifs that are most in focus in the use of this designation are the lifting up, raising, and glorification of the Son of Man (3:14; 6:62; 8:28; 12:23,34; 13:31), the descent and ascent of the Son of Man (3:13; 6:62), and the judgment role of the Son of Man (5:27).”¹⁰

+ ILLUSTRATION

There are numerous ways to illustrate the concept of “greater things” based on the teacher’s experience. One option could be to think about marriage. At the wedding, the couple professes love for one another, but in many ways, the love is just beginning. The couple has not weathered the challenges of maturing together, raising kids, experiencing loss and difficulty. If you meet the same couple after 20 or 30 years of marriage, then you will see “greater things” fleshed out in a deepened love and appreciation for one another. If you hear those couples speak, they will speak of a love that has grown, deepened, changed, and intensified through the years in a way that makes their wedding ceremony seem small and insignificant in comparison.

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