

John 1:35-51

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[0 : 00] Do sit and open your Bibles to John chapter 1. John chapter 1. If you've got a church Bible, that's page 886. If you've got to grab a church Bible there, just by the door.

As you're turning there, let me again invite you to this evening's service. Tonight we've got the joy and the privilege of installing Reuben Hunter as an elder and the associate minister of this congregation.

That is a wonderful thing. It's a gift from the Lord Jesus Christ. We're really grateful for Reuben and Louisa and the family. So can I ask you to come, encourage them. Bring some cake if you've got it. Bring your leftover desserts. We'll eat and celebrate together. David Field is going to be the preacher. So we're looking forward to that. I was at my nephew's wedding on Friday in Edinburgh. It's a really lovely occasion. They're in their mid-twenties. After they'd got married, my sister-in-law turned to me and said, they've got no idea what they've let themselves in for, have they?

[1 : 03] My brother looked slightly alarmed. But that's the case, isn't it, when young people get married. They've got no idea what they let themselves in for. I think it can often be like that a little bit in the Christian life.

It's certainly like that in John 1. At the end of John 1 with these first disciples. Last week, we saw John the Baptist. Do you remember? He drew the attention of everyone that would listen to him to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was so effective at pointing to the Lord Jesus that two of his disciples left him and started following Jesus. And John the Baptist was effective in his ministry of preparing the way, clearing the way for Jesus.

John the Baptist was effective in heightening people's curiosity about Jesus. And there must have been, mustn't there, in these disciples, great anticipation. Even before Jesus arrived on the scene. And so, they find themselves taking these initial steps in following him. They're excited to know, where are you staying? But they don't really know what they're letting themselves in for.

[2 : 07] They don't know what is going to be ahead of them. And in these verses, at the end of John 1, Jesus shows them and us what we can expect in following him.

You see, John's Gospel is not just history. Sometimes people describe the Gospels as a biography of Jesus. That's hopelessly inadequate. What is written down before you is history, but it's got a much greater purpose than a history textbook.

Near the end of this book of John's Gospel, John very carefully and very explicitly says, Do you know what? Many things could have been written about Jesus. But these things I wrote so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

And that by believing you might have life, life in its fullness through his name. And so, in every part of John, there's a clear and urgent purpose to what's written.

And John is saying to us, the readers of this Gospel, God is saying to us, through John this morning, make sure you understand why I'm writing. More important even than John's focus, God has designed this revelation, this record, to accomplish something in your heart.

[3 : 23] So while what you've got on your laps is real history, an accurate history, it is calling forth belief. It is going to change your life.

Look back with me at verse 9. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world and the world was made through him, and yet the world did not know him.

He came to his own, his own people. and yet his own people didn't recognize him. But to all who did receive him, what happened? To all who believed in his name, he gives the right, he gives the

privilege to be children of God.

And so the question for this morning is for these disciples, is what might they expect from Jesus as they turn to follow him? What might they expect from Jesus as they turn to follow him?

[4 : 35] And it's very clearly the purpose of John's gospel that he's writing for. What should we expect from Jesus? So first of all, my first point, only two points this morning, is we should expect a claim on our lives.

As you follow Jesus, you should expect a claim on your life. The moment we turn to Jesus and we begin to follow him, we should expect a claim on our lives.

Jesus is not just going to let you be. Here are these disciples. They're really excited, aren't they? They sense they're into something here. Something exciting.

They want to tell others. They want to bring others. But can you please notice, in every case, in every case, without fail, as soon as a new person gets introduced to Jesus, as soon as a new person comes to Jesus in John's gospel, as soon as they meet Christ, they are confronted, each one of them in a unique way.

Each one of them is confronted with someone who is making a claim on their lives. That is the very first thing to expect when following Jesus.

[5 : 45] He makes a claim on your life this morning. Things will never remain the same. Look at verse 40 with me.

Verse 40, it says, One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother, Simon, and said to him, We have found the Messiah, which means Christ, God's anointed king.

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. Jesus immediately says, I'm going to rename you.

You are Simon, but I'm going to call you Cephas. From now on, you will be called Cephas. From now on, you will be known by something other than what you have been known by.

And these words, when Jesus speaks these words to Peter, it's not as if he's making some predictive statement. Can you see, it's a declaration. It's a declaration of what Jesus will make this man.

[6 : 56] You are, you now are Peter. Do you know what Peter means? You know what it means, don't you? It means rock. Jesus is saying, Peter, I am going to build my church on you.

I am going to claim your life. I am going to do something that you could never have imagined with your life. Look at verse 43. The next day, Jesus decided to go to Galilee.

He found Philip and said to him, follow me. Just like that. No hesitation. No apologies. It doesn't matter what you're doing. You follow me.

You follow me. I lay claim on your life. It's astonishing authority, isn't it, this man? And then there's this remarkable, intriguing interaction with Nathanael.

Look at verse 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 David.

[7 : 58] Nathanael said to him, can anything good come out of Nazareth? The people in the region of Galilee, in the north of Israel, the people of Galilee were despised by everyone else.

And so they would pick on Nazareth, isn't it? It's like Americans always say, thank goodness for Mississippi, because Mississippi is always regarded as the worst state, isn't it?

I wanted to give an English illustration, but I thought you're bound to offend someone. I'm not bothered by offending Americans. But Galilee, isn't it? Galilee was looked down on, so they would look down on Nazareth.

They're despised. In order to maintain some kind of self-esteem, you look down on others. And so here is Nathanael mocking Nazareth. Can anything good come out of Nazareth?

Well, Philip says to Nathanael, I think this might be the exception, come and see. And Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him. Look what he says.

[9 : 01] He says, Behold an Israelite, in whom there is no deceit, there is no guile. Then he says to him, before you came, before Philip called you, verse 48, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.

Nathanael can't believe it. Despite Nathanael's incredulity, despite his doubts about whether anything good can come from Nazareth, while he's coming to Jesus, Jesus x-rays him.

Jesus knows him. Jesus scans him. Jesus describes him. And he lets him know, Jesus says, I know you.

I've seen you. You thought, Nathanael, you were just sitting under the fig tree, resting in the shade, in the heat of the day, but I know you. I saw you.

And I want you to know that. I want you to know that. Do you see what's happening in these little exchanges between Jesus and these disciples? Do you see, as the readers of this gospel, what you should expect from Jesus?

[10:11] It is clear that Jesus takes the reins in John's gospel. I see you. I know you.

This is who you are. This is what you're going to do. This is what you will be. I make claim on your life.

Things will never be the same once you've met me. And thankfully, wonderfully, gloriously, the Lord Jesus is the same today. That the moment we turn to Christ, he openly lays claim on our lives.

He ever so graciously says to you, things are never going to be the same again. I see you. I know you. I know your circumstances.

I know everything about you. I know when you get up. I know when you lie down. I know your words before you speak them. I know the workings of your mind. I know the desires of your heart. I know every thought about you.

[11:18] I know you full well. And I have a plan for you. I have an intention for you. I have an intention for you and a purpose for you. I'm not just going to rescue you. I know you full well. I'm not just going to rescue you from drowning and leave you shivering on the shore.

I will lay claim to your life because I am the Christ, God's anointed king. And I want to say to you, for those of us who are Christians this morning, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as the people of God, there is such great comfort in this, isn't there?

There is such security and joy that Christ sees me. He knows me. He knows me fully.

There is nothing of me to know that he does not know. And he has laid claim to my life and my life will not be wasted. And my life will not be useless wandering around.

And we should remember, shouldn't we, and remind ourselves and remind one another that he has every right to lay claim on my life. It's my only hope. I need him to do a work in my life.

[12:29] The fact that he knows me is impressive enough, but his authority, his right to lay claim on my life derives from a far greater reality than just his knowledge. Yes, he says, I know you, I see you, but over that and above that, we hear him saying in John 1, I made you.

Do you remember, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

Which is John's way of saying to you and I this morning, you were made by Christ. You were made to be like Christ. You were made for Christ. That is the reason you exist. That is the reason you were put on this planet.

That is the reason why you've got breath in your body. So what should you expect from the Lord Jesus? Well, first of all, expect him to lovingly, graciously, beneficently, which means, for your good, I discovered this week, he lays claim on your life.

He lays claim on your life that will result in the beginning of a wonderful transformation. But that is not all. That's not all to expect from Jesus. There's something more that you can expect from Jesus.

[13:51] And I've tried to figure this out and put it into kind of a catchy phrase, but I haven't been able to do it. So forgive my lack of brevity in the second point, okay? Secondly, what can you expect from the Lord Jesus?

He lays claim to your life, but secondly, you can expect to be ushered into something far bigger and far more glorious than your otherwise small life. What can you expect of Jesus?

You can expect to be ushered into something far bigger and far more glorious than your otherwise small life. And I nearly said insignificant life, but I wasn't brave enough to say it. But that is true, isn't it?

Because apart from the Lord Jesus, you might think that what you're doing is grand and great, but it is not. And the world's estimation of your accomplishments is not the right test.

But with Christ, as you follow the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be brought into something, you'll be brought into something bigger, you'll be brought into something more permanent, you'll be brought into something a million times more real than the things of this world.

[15 : 04] Look at this verse at the end of the chapter. Look at verse 50. Jesus answered Nathalia and said, because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe?

You will see greater things than these. You will see greater things than this. And then Jesus says, truly, truly, it's the first time he uses this really important phrase in the gospel.

It's Jesus saying, you can trust me on this one. You can trust me on this one. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man, which is Jesus' way of referring to himself.

What's Jesus saying there? He is saying to Nathanael, as you come to me and as you follow me, I'm going to open your eyes and you will see that there are greater things that are happening things more real than the things that so far have occupied your life.

Greater things that I am doing. My purpose is being accomplished. I'm going to let you see that. I'm going to let you close to that.

[16 : 17] And in fact, I'm going to let you get in on that. And so what Nathanael, as we'll see, and the other disciples, and all who follow Christ will have the privilege of seeing is the greatness of what God is accomplishing in the Lord Jesus.

We see something of the greatness of what Christ is bringing to the men, to the world of men and women and boys and girls, of what God is accomplishing in Christ's presence. Through the life and work of Christ and not just seeing it, but being part of it.

We cannot lose sight of this thing that Jesus is getting done, that God, according to John 1, has now broken into his world in full force.

Heaven is open. God is active and all these angels are ascending and descending, representing all that God is accomplishing through Christ.

Christ. And so when you come to verse 51 of John 1, we're tempted to think, isn't it, that this is something we will experience when we die, but that is not the point. It's not a description of what happens when we die in heaven.

[17 : 30] No, it's a description of what the disciples will begin to see as soon as, well, the very next day. Chapter 2 and verse 1, on the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee and Jesus, the mother of Jesus was there and Jesus performs his great miracle.

The first of the signs of his glory, it shows his uniqueness, his power, his authority over creation in ever so small a way it's put on display.

And what they continue to see through Jesus' life, through his miracles, John says, listen, I can only write a few of them. If I were to write all the things that Jesus did in the world, there wouldn't be a library big enough to contain it.

So I'm going to give you just a few signs, a few miracles that the disciples were able to witness firsthand through his teaching that had an unprecedented power, an unprecedented authority. And his life, his sinless life and through his death and most obviously through his resurrection and ascension, he will do greater things. And it won't stop there, will it?

[18 : 41] The disciples for the rest of their lives would continue to see heaven opened. They will see the glory of God's power and purpose.

Through now the Holy Spirit whom Christ has sent continuing his work, amazing things happen. Amazing things happen, things happen, didn't it? people who worshipped idols turned to worship the living God.

Churches were planted, the gospel spreads like wildfire through the whole subcontinent of Turkey. It leaps over the Aegean Sea into Greece and then it leaps onto the peninsula of Italy.

It goes to the capital of the then world, Rome. It spreads out to Spain. Amazing things that they are able to witness. And wonderfully, it didn't stop there, did it?

It hasn't stopped. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is unstoppable. Jesus said, I will, present continuous tense, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

[19 : 54] But, and so I, like many of you, could tell stories of people who have been brought from darkness into the kingdom of light. I could tell you of a tramp in Swansea who begged for money, who drank himself nearly into oblivion when I was growing up, who we'd see on the streets, who came into church and was gloriously converted and now preaches the gospel.

I could tell you of a student in York last year, trapped in a spiral of drugs and depression and promiscuity who has been transformed by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I could tell you of a young mum who'd seen her life destroyed by others and betrayal and abuse who's put her trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and her life is being put back together again by God. Nathaniel, you're impressed by what you saw under the fig tree. you're impressed that I saw you, I knew you. You're impressed that I can turn water into wine just as you wait, Nathaniel. You will see greater things than these. You will see heaven opened. I could tell you of stories of missionaries in Paraguay into a place where there's been no witness for the gospel and yet now in the last ten years people have been converted and formed into a church and a church has been established.

[21 : 21] We could tell you of what we heard so wonderfully on Wednesday night from Kathleen and Daniel of how the gospel has triumphed in their lives despite great opposition and in Nigeria.

With the children in Sunday school, I often think of this on a Sunday morning. We are part of a Mexican wave. We did the Mexican wave in Sunday school. We won't do it here. But you think, you should think on this on a Sunday morning.

When you get up, they have already started worshipping God, haven't they? In Fiji and in Western Samoa and in Tonga and all those other places we're hearing about in the World Cup.

They began worshipping God this morning and then New Zealand and Australia and all over the world and we're right in the middle of it. And the saints of God gather to worship God because Jesus said, if you follow me, you will see greater things than these.

You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending through the person and work of Jesus. Nathaniel, you're impressed by my little display of supernatural knowledge.

[22 : 22] Just wait. Wait till you see what I will do in the world. It's not just happening out there, is it? In other places, in the UK or other places in the world or on the mission field.

It's happening right here. And so I look around this room and there are people sitting next to you who were without God and without hope who've been forgiven, who've been brought into God's family and added to his church.

And it's not so dramatic, is it, as the tramp. But it is wonderful what is happening. People have been given a new life and a new home and have been brought into God's kingdom.

They've been given, you have been given a whole new trajectory marked by peace and hope and it won't be without difficulty and it won't be without challenge. But you've been made alive in Christ because God's power and God's glory and God's sovereignty have been brought here for us to see. Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree. Do you believe? You will see greater things than these. 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.

[23 : 42] What can you expect from the Christian life? You can expect to be brought into what God is doing in the world. Now just before I close, I want us to do one more thing.

A bit like a footnote to the sermon. Because this passage teaches us not only what we should expect when we follow Christ. That there would be a claim put on our lives that we would be brought into something greater and bigger.

But this passage also models to us how we get to participate in it. We get to play a part in it, don't we? You can't fail to have noticed the words, I have found the Christ.

Come and see. And the first thing that Andrew does after discovering Jesus is he went and he found his brother and he brought him to Jesus. And Andrew is the first in a long line of those who've discovered that the most common and the most effective testimony is that simple communication, come and see.

I found the Christ. The simple sharing of one's discovery with another. You can't help but notice, can you, that the very first thing that Philip did was go and find Nathaniel and tell him about Jesus.

[25 : 03] It's a basic principle of the Christian life. New followers of Jesus bear witness to others about Jesus and they become followers of Jesus who then bear witness to others and then become followers of Jesus.

Let me give you that again. New followers of Jesus bear witness followers of Jesus to others who then become followers of Jesus who then bear witness to others who then become followers of Jesus. It's very simple, isn't it?

It's probably the reason why you're sitting here today. Do you see the pattern? If God has laid a claim on your life which if you are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ he has and if Christ has allowed you to see that you are part of a far more glorious and a far greater thing that is happening all

around you then you have also been given the great privilege of being used by God to share what Jesus has brought into your life with others.
I have found the Christ. Come and see to his glory let us pray.