

John 09 – Jesus Calling 01

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Scripture 1: (Jn. 1:35-51 ESV)

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 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?"

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. 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). 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).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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."

Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

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."

Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

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." 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."

Scripture 2: (Matt. 4:12-22 ESV)

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Sermon:

When we consider the overall narrative found across the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, there is an often overlooked yet important thread running through all five books: John the Baptist, his ministry of baptism, and his disciples; that helps to tie everything together. Usually we only remember him at the start of the Gospels, but his presence, impact, and influence is felt throughout the whole.

- The Gospels make it clear that the Baptist was the precursor, the prelude to, and the forerunner of Jesus' ministry because his baptism of repentance was to prepare God's people to receive our King and Savior.
- Later, during Jesus' ministry after John had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas, the Baptist sent some of his disciples to inquire of Jesus (Matt 11:1-6; Luke 7:20-23) asking whether He truly was the Christ.
- They also questioned Jesus by contrasting His disciples with those following the Baptist's teaching about fasting (Matt 9:14-17).
- Then, the last time that the Baptist's disciples are expressly mentioned within the Gospels, it is to collect the Baptist's body and bury him after his execution upon the request of Salome (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 18:136), which was requested to please her mother, Herodius (Matt 14:12; Mark 6:29).
- Meanwhile, Jesus repeatedly used John as an example when teaching (Matt 11:7-15, 17:10-13) and when He questioned the religious elite (Matt 21:25-32; Mark 11:29-33).
- Then in Acts, the Apostle Paul cited the Baptist's prophetic testimony concerning Jesus' greater ministry while preaching in the synagogue (Acts 13:16-24).
- Lastly, while he was in Ephesus, Paul encountered some of John's former disciples who were now following Jesus but had not yet received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then, after Paul baptized them into the Name of Jesus, they became filled with the Spirit and began prophesying and speaking in tongues (Acts 19:1-7).

So, we can see that the Baptist's influence does not end at the Jordan River, but continues on through the establishment of the Church. Unfortunately, we wrongly minimize John's importance to Jesus' ministry. We think about him only in his roles as Christ's herald and as a prophet like Elijah, while we ignore his work of plowing the field of Israel's heart and preparing fertile ground to receive the Gospel seed. Even though Luke later shows that some of the Baptist's followers turned their hearts towards Jesus Christ, implying that many others eventually did as well, we miss and forget the fact that Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was a disciple of the Baptist before he followed Jesus. Over-looking this fact impacts what we understand about Jesus' calling of the Apostles, as well as His calling of us.

“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!””. Once again the Baptist heralds and proclaims the sacrificial identity of Jesus. Knowing that the Holy Spirit does not give us anything superfluous, we can be sure that the Apostle's repetition of John's declaration serves a greater purpose.

- When he said it the first time, it was definitive. It was describing and defining Jesus.
- But now, the second time he said it, it was indicative. It emphasized something about Jesus that required a response by those who heard him and they responded by following Jesus.

This repetition suggests something else that is very important. Repeating this proclamation about Jesus, suggests that the Baptist repeated it other times as well, probably many times, because we preachers always repeat ourselves and we will reuse our stories or illustrations, over and over again.

This also explains why the order of stories and parables change within the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus taught the same message in different synagogues all across Galilee, therefore He surely must have repeated Himself for the different crowds {and even for the same crowds because some people do need to be told things more than once}. Their differing order is not a sign of inconsistency or contradiction, nor should it suggest a multiple source composition. Instead reminds us of how broad and widespread Jesus' ministry actually was. He preached the Good News about the Kingdom of God all across the regions of Galilee, Judea and Samaria, the Decapolis, and even up in Tyre and Sidon. This geographic area was about the size of New Jersey {the borders of modern Israel are my basis for this comparison; these borders are roughly analogous (actually smaller) than the area of Israel's influence at its height}; an area smaller than 47 of our 50 US States yet also incredibly wide since few people traveled far.

So, while Jesus said and did a lot in a very small area, and His two-fold message was simple and unchanging: that the Kingdom of God is at hand and God loves us; of course, Jesus repeated Himself. John the Baptist must also have surely repeated himself. How many different ways can say the same thing, over and over again?

Please understand that many times, while preachers say the same thing and mean the same thing, we will sometimes say it for a different purpose and intent, which is what the Baptist does here. The Baptist repeats himself to redirect his followers towards Jesus and then we get introduced to the first Apostle: Andrew {St. Andrew, the patron saint of Scotland, who was crucified upon a decussate (diagonal) cross: a saltire or an “X” shaped cross. Among the Apostles and “Saints” tradition remembers him best for bringing people to Christ (namely Peter, but probably also the “Sons of Thunder”)}. .

But the beginning of Andrew's journey following Jesus, does not begin how we usually assume. It does not actually begin on the Galilean seashore with an invitation from Jesus. It begins with him basically “stalking” Jesus on account of John's testimony.

Frankly, the way Andrew came to Christ, is more like the way we often come to Jesus. We each begin to “stalk” Jesus because someone {whether in person, in print, or our hearing} told us about Him, and then the Holy Spirit moved within us, making us want to know more. So we start doing research: asking questions, searching the Internet, talk to our Christian friends or family, and maybe we start going to church just to see what Jesus is all about. This is what Paul was writing about when he said, *“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”* (Rom. 10:14-17 ESV).

So, let us put this story into perspective:

- When the Baptist told Andrew the Good News about Jesus, he was evangelizing and preaching.;
- Andrew heard the Good News and believed it; at least he believed it enough to want to find out more since he certainly did not have the whole story yet.;

- Then Andrew went to the best source possible; he chased right after Jesus and followed Him, by literally following Him.

“The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 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?”

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.”

So, these two guys, Andrew and his friend, they heard John and then went and followed Jesus.

- They heard the Baptist cry out, “Behold, the Lamb of God!”.
- They ran after Jesus, a total stranger, to ask Him, “Where are You staying?”.
- They called Him “*Rabbi*” {the title is perhaps an anachronistic remembrance from the retelling}, even though He was not yet a teacher of any note.
- Jesus replied to them, saying “*Come and you will see.*”.
- So, they came and saw, and stayed for the rest of the day with Him, because it was “*about the tenth hour*”; which was around 4 o' clock in the afternoon.

These two men had the greatest opportunity to get to know Jesus privately: up close and personal; before Jesus began to attract the crowds and His whole host of followers. Thankfully, we know that at least one of them received what they heard with gladness and was ready to answer Jesus' call: Andrew, who is a very under-rated Apostle, whose tremendous impact upon our Christian faith is sadly ignored by most believers.

Knowing about this earlier private encounter, suddenly makes the calling of Jesus' first disciples from the seashore seem more reasonable and relatable. This encounter sets up the first “Apostolic Dominoes” because, as the Apostle John explains to us, Andrew is the one who brings Simon Peter to Jesus. “*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). 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).*”

Now, unlike the story of Philip and Nathanael which follows this, a story which we will examine later, this interjection about Peter is really only a summary statement. This does not describe Peter's first time meeting Jesus, unlike the story of Nathanael, nor is it necessarily next in the immediate sequence of events. The Apostle John is merely explaining Andrew's context: who he is through his relationship to Peter. We are confident of this because Matthew has the story of Jesus' renaming Simon as Peter much later in His ministry (Matthew 16:18), while both Mark and Luke recount the change similarly to John, by interjecting the parenthetical anecdote of, “*Simon...whom he named Peter...*” (Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14 ESV).

The point which the Apostle is trying to make here is two-fold:

- Andrew is Peter's brother; and
- Andrew told Peter about Jesus and brought him to Jesus; making Andrew the “Evangelist to the Apostles”

Following Andrew's first private meeting with Jesus, *"The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee."* Although John does not tell us why Jesus decided to go back to Galilee at this time, the Synoptic Gospels do.

Matthew 4:12 explains that, *"...when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee."* (Matt. 4:12 ESV; Mark 1:14; Luke 4:14), Mark and Luke also agree. Although the Baptist's arrest may not have been the **direct cause** of Jesus' return to the north, it is not an unrelated coincidence because John's arrest caused many other people to leave and return to Galilee; specifically, Andrew.

So turning to Matthew 4, we can find the next stops in Jesus' travel itinerary.

- After hearing about the Baptist's arrest, Jesus left the Jordan River valley and returned to His hometown of Nazareth in Galilee.
- Then He relocated and moved Himself to Capernaum, on the shores of the sea of Galilee, where He began His preaching ministry.

Meanwhile, Andrew also returned home to Capernaum after the Baptist's arrest, and resumed his occupation fishing with his brother Simon. But Andrew did not return home from his time with the Baptist empty handed. He returned with the Baptist's testimony and his own, first-hand encounter with Jesus Christ. Andrew, although he was first a disciple of the Baptist, now had a personal relationship with Jesus and he wanted to share about with those he knew and loved. {It should really be unsurprising then, when a person considers that more Baptists convert and become Presbyterian, than Presbyterians become Baptists. They may get led to Christ as Baptists, but Jesus will eventually call them into the truth, just as He has predestined and foreordained.} This is when we expect he told Simon, *"We have found the Messiah."* and if, as we expect, he was excited enough to tell his brother, then who else did he tell since the Apostle here tells us that he told Peter **first**? I think we would find these others along the Galilean seashore, just like Jesus did.

"While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he [Jesus] saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother; casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him."

Now there are many problems connected to how we usually think about and understand this story. We have these problems because there are a lot of important details missing. We make many assumptions about it and in certain ways, they are wrong assumptions.

The way we usually picture this scene, the way many Pastors present the story is: "One day Jesus was walking along the shore, just minding His own business, when He spots a couple of fishermen working, also minding their own business, and Jesus thinks to Himself, "Hey, these guys would make some great disciples!", so He says to them, *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."* Then wouldn't you know it, these guys just stop what they were doing and leave everything behind to follow Jesus."

Then the preacher will focus on his point. These men just stopped and left everything where it was. They abandoned their nets and their boat. They abandoned all of their equipment and everything necessary to their whole livelihood, right there at the water's edge, and just walked away. What a great response of faith and obedience! Jesus called and they answered. Praise God, Hallelujah! Right?

Wrong! Who does that? Nobody! Nobody does that! That makes absolutely no sense from a human perspective, and it makes even less sense from a divine perspective, if we know anything at all about who Scripture says the LORD God is!

But preachers will preach, and they will take a good idea from a story, and turn it into something it was not meant to be, even though their point may remain true. The response of these Apostles is a great example of obedience and faith in Jesus Christ. Then the preacher will focus upon the immediacy of their response and the huge degree of self sacrifice that they made to follow Jesus by connecting it with other texts like “*Take up your cross and follow me.*” (Luke 9:23) or “*No one who puts their hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.*” (Luke 9:62). That all sounds very good coming out of the pulpit. It sounds well and true because it is broadly true according to the whole of the Gospels. It is right, but for the wrong reasons because it is just not the point of the text.

Now the reason why this story in Matthew is actually problematic when Andrew's earlier encounter is ignored, is because of the terrible question that it raises {regardless of Gospel account}.

Why did these men immediately leave and follow Jesus: some random stranger who was walking by as they were working?

- Did they suddenly lose their free agency or freedom of will?
- Were they compelled by Jesus to go?
 - Was Jesus' command of “*Follow Me.*” made from out of His divine Sovereignty and thus a command impossible to disobey?
 - Could they have said, “No” and not gone?
- Did they have any choice?
 - Why should they go?
 - Where is the reason in their choice?
 - Where is their ability to assent?
 - How could they possibly have made an informed decision in that span of time?

Do you understand how and why this should be so concerning? Do you see why this question is actually frightening?

- First, the question makes Jesus and God the Father look like tyrants, without any real concern for human freedom.; and
- Second, the question make us out to be like robots or puppets dangling from divine strings; which also fuels the worst assumptions about Calvinists and everyone who holds to the Reformed view of Scripture.

But, that all goes against the whole character of God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture.

Yes, God commands righteousness and He demands our holiness, yet He still allows us the freedom to sin and fall short of His Glory. He could have made us unable to sin, and that is what He will do to us in our final glorification. God wants us to be in a relationship with Him; He wants us to want to be in a willing and loving relationship with Him, but He will not force us into such a relationship, even though we all must be in a relationship with Him as our Sovereign King.

We all must still choose, decide, and respond by following Jesus and thankfully He helps His Elect children make to right choice! Otherwise, no human sinner (the fallen and depraved people that we are) who constantly

acts contrary to God's Law: breaking His holy commandments with our every thought, word, and deed; falsely and wrongly believing that we are “happy in our sin”, will never choose Jesus because nothing that He offers seems like “Good News” to us, because our sinfulness blinds us to the truth. Until we know better; until we know and understand just how terrible our state of sin actually is, we cannot want or desire anything better.

A person who only knows life running on the streets of some major city, desperate and thieving or dealing to survive will never find the idea of “life in the country” or the “beach life” desirable until they:

- First, become dissatisfied with what they presently have; and
- Second, hear about something that is recognizably better.

Jesus did not compel Andrew and Simon to follow Him, nor did they decide to follow Him “willy nilly” or upon a whim and a lark. Something had to happen to convince them and incline them to say, “Yes!”, to believe that following Him was going to change their lives for the better. Leaving and following Jesus had to make sense to them.

That is what the Apostle John is trying to teach us. Andrew and Simon followed Jesus because they believed it was the right and reasonable thing to do; because they believed that Jesus might well be the long expected Messiah. All because the Baptist first told Andrew, and the Andrew told Simon about Jesus.

This story of their calling only really makes sense once when you realize that Jesus surely recognized Andrew in the boat, working on the nets with his brother; and when you also realize that Andrew must have recognized Jesus as the man whom the Baptist called “the Lamb of God!”.

When Andrew saw Jesus, whom he had met before and knew was the “real deal”, walking by and heard Him say, “*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*”, Andrew made a reasoned and informed decision which he then acted upon in faith bringing Simon along with him.

Realizing this, makes the immediacy of their response make more reasonable, logical sense. This does not cause Jesus to seem like a tyrant or a puppeteer. We can see that their free will was preserved and engaged as they responded to Jesus. It was preserved in the same way that our freedom of will is preserved and engaged.

- First, we hear the good news about God's grace given us through Christ's life, death, and resurrection.;
- Then, the Holy Spirit inclines our hearts to begin desiring Christ; helping us to want to say “Yes!” and want to “Follow Him”.
- Finally, when He calls us, then we make the only reasonable choice that remains to us and we go. When we know and understand the difference between what Christ offers us: forgiveness, grace, mercy, eternal life, and a relationship with God as our Father; versus what we presently have: sin, misery, hopelessness, fear, condemnation, wrath, death, and an eternity in the fires of hell; there is only one reasonable choice for us, if we believe in Jesus Christ and everything that Scripture reveals to us.

Although we do not know what Jesus told Andrew on the day that they first met, we know that it was enough for him to believe and enough for him to want to share it with other people, like his brother Simon. So again, if Andrew believed the Baptist's testimony concerning Jesus enough to share the Good News about Jesus with his brother, who else might he have told? Can we really assume or think that he only told Simon? Not at all and the reason why is found just a little farther up the shoreline.

“And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.” I want you to notice that James and John had exactly the same immediate response as Andrew and Simon, but why?

Why do you think John the Apostle tells us this story about Andrew's first meeting with Jesus?

- He tells us because Andrew must have shared it with him.
- He tells us because Andrew almost certainly helped bring him to Jesus, along with his brother, James.
- He tells us because Andrew's testimony likely convinced him to get out of the boat and follow Jesus!

I know that Scripture does not expressly tell us that Andrew evangelized James and John before Jesus walked on by, but it is a very reasonable assumption for us to make because we know:

- that all four men: Andrew, Simon, James, and John; lived in Capernaum by the sea.
- All four men were fishermen by trade. We do not know whether they were competitors and rivals, or friends and allies, but the quality of their prior relationship does not matter as much as the fact of their social proximity.
- If Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, then he must have left town for quite a while to go learn from him. Where Andrew was and what he was doing would have been common knowledge, even probably an item of local gossip.
- Then when he returned home after the Baptist was arrested, it would have been very difficult for Andrew to not share about his meeting with Jesus.

So it is very reasonable to expect that James and John knew what was up when they saw Jesus walking by, and then seeing Andrew and Simon running up along behind Him. So that when they heard Jesus' calling to them as well, they were able to make the same reasonable decision, and follow Him. Here we can see the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in giving us these multiple, different Gospel accounts.

This begins to prove the effectiveness of John the Baptist's ministry and work, because the first two, and probably four, Apostles called by Jesus, each responded on account of his testimony.

- First, the Baptist said, “Behold!”
- Andrew heard him and went to meet Jesus.
- Andrew told Simon about Jesus.
- Andrew told other people about Jesus, likely including James and John.
- Then Jesus showed up and called all four of them: Andrew, Simon, James, and John.
- Then they responded and followed Him.

The points which I believe the Apostle John is trying to prove by presenting Andrew's story are:

- The effectiveness of John the Baptist's ministry and preaching in preparing people to receive the Christ;
- Our obligation to respond to the Good News by going and seeking Christ for ourselves; and

- That our natural response after meeting and knowing Jesus Christ, is that we will share the Good News onward and encourage more people to come to Christ.
- Finally, that everyone who hears this Good News, if and when they are called by Christ, they will immediately respond and follow Him because it is the only reasonable choice.

Although it is not explicitly described here, John leaves room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon the heart and mind of people hearing the Gospel. He is who makes the Good News and the truth of Jesus Christ sound good and reasonable in the midst of our fallen and unreasonable *kosmos*; otherwise, without the influence of the Holy Spirit, the truth of God and His means for our salvation do not seem reasonable because it goes against everything that the world offers. That is the simple fact which we are all confronted with daily.

But what does this mean for us? What does Andrew's story and Jesus' calling of these first four Apostles have to do with us?

It reminds us that our faith is both reasoned and reasonable; that we are neither forced or compelled to believe nor that anyone can or will believe “just 'cuz”.

Our faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is reasoned and since it makes sense to us, we have somehow been convinced to believe it. However, we cannot convince anyone, much less ourselves, that Scripture and Jesus is true according to any worldly argument or evidence. Since we cannot, it is a very good thing that it is not our job or our duty to convince others of the Gospel's truth because that is way above our pay grade. Our job, role, and duty is to be more like Andrew and just share it: to tell others the Good News about Jesus and trust that God will take care of the rest.

Remember before anyone can believe the Good News, they must hear it first. Someone must tell it to them, and share it with them before they can have the opportunity to believe, just like us. The Holy Spirit will do all the hard work of preparing the soil in a person's heart, but until the Gospel seed is sown, God will not cause faith to grow within them. God commands that somebody else must do the sowing, and that is what He calls us to do: go and tell, go and sow.

The world outside is full of fields. They are fertile and plowed already, just waiting to be sown. They are waiting to receive the Gospel seed; waiting to hear someone tell them what they need to know about Jesus so that they may believe.

Christians are simply called to be sowers, not growers (1 Cor 3:7); not growers in the sense that we can make anyone to grow in faith. So remember and be encouraged by these examples and follow them:

- John the Baptist sowed and Andrew “grow'd”.
- Andrew sowed and Simon Peter “grow'd”.
- Peter and all the Apostles sowed and then the whole Church “grow'd”.
- Someone sowed and then you “grow'd”.

It is now up to us to be like John the Baptist and Andrew, sowing and trusting that God will continue to do the growing. Now we all had better get to planting, because His harvest time is coming (Matt 9:37).

AMEN