

Introducing Jesus

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, it's the day of storytelling, so I thought I would begin today by telling you a story as well. The story begins with a woman, and her name, as well chosen, David, is Rebecca. And she's married to a man called Isaac. And Rebecca is pregnant, and she notices that something really strange is happening in her womb. And so Rebecca prays to God. God tells her, there are twins in your womb. And the one who will be God's choice will not be the older as expected, but the younger. And so it happens. The twins are born. When they are born, names are given to them, and their names will reflect their character. The oldest twin had much hair when he was born. And the Hebrew word for hair sounds a bit like the word for Esau. And so she names him, or so they called him Esau. And the second come out, the son came out of the womb, holding his brother's foot. So they called him the name, which means he grasps the heel.
- [1 : 0 7] His name is Jacob. And the name Jacob, though, can also have a double meaning. It can mean he deceives. And Jacob lives. And Jacob lives up to his name. His name means deceiver. And so he takes advantage of his brother, takes the blessing away from his brother. He and his mother together deceive Jacob's father and cheat Esau, the older of his birthright. As a result, Jacob has to flee from his home. He flees from home. And as he flees, he stops at a place called Bethel. Now the word Bethel means house of God. And in Jacob's dream at Bethel, he sees this stairway or ladder going up from earth to heaven. And he sees God's angels coming up and down on the ladder. In other words, messengers are coming from God down to him. God is communicating with Jacob. And as God communicates with Jacob, he promises him some grand promises. He says he'll bless him. He promises that all people on earth will be blessed by him.
- [2 : 0 8] He will be with Jacob. He'll watch over him. He'll bring him home. He will bring him back to the land of his parents. Jacob remains away from the land of his parents for 20 years. And God does bless him. God does watch over him. God does bring him back to his parents. Anyway, as I said, he's been away for 20 years. In that time, he's gained two wives, 12 sons, one daughter, and lots of flocks and herds. And after 20 or more years, as he returns home, God meets him again at the same spot. Just before God, Jacob crosses over, actually in a slightly different spot, before he crosses into the promised land, a strange figure representing God meets Jacob. And Jacob, in the midst of the night, struggles with this strange figure. And he does pretty well in the struggle. And the strange figure cripples Jacob in order to escape. And as a result, God renames Jacob. No longer will he be called Jacob, that is, the deceiver. No. Now he will be called Israel.

- [3 : 14] And the name Israel means, the one who struggles with God and wins. Friends, this is part of the story of Jacob. And it's told in chapters 25 to 32 of the book of Genesis.
- And I want you to remember this story. You see, in order to understand what happens with Jesus in the passage we are going to look at from John's Gospel, you will need to understand this story.
- And I'm going to come back to it and refer to it. So, let's open your Bibles at John chapter 1. And before we go on to verses 35 to 51, where we're going to spend most of our time, I want to just remind you of the things we've found so far in John's Gospel in the last two weeks.
- Remember that I said, John's Gospel doesn't start the way most of the other Gospels start, with the birth story. Instead, it starts before eternity. It starts with a cosmic picture of Jesus.
- Remember those beginning words? It says, in the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him. Without Him, not one thing came into being.
- [4 : 18] What has come into being? In Him was life. And the life was the light of all people. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness did not overcome. That's a very different start, isn't it?
- And then John tells us what happened when this Word of God came into the world. He came as the true revelation of God. He came with a promise of life to those who received Him.
- To those who received Him, He gave the right to become children of God. And for the first 18 verses of John, we have this grand introduction to Jesus. We're told who He is.
- And we're told that Jesus, the Word of God, brought God and life to God's world. That takes us to John chapter 1 verses 19 to 34.
- Now, these tell us about the first witness to Jesus. And remember this from last week. Remember how John the Baptist points toward Jesus. He tells us who Jesus is.
- [5 : 12] That He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And then in verse 32, He's a true witness to this Word. He tells people that Jesus is the one on whom the Spirit remains. And then in verse 34, He witnesses to the identity of Jesus again.
- In those words that pick up the end of John's Gospel. These words of testimony. I myself, says John, have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.
- So there's where we are in John's Gospel. We've heard this grand introduction. We've seen the witness of John the Baptist. Now we're going to meet the very first disciples of Jesus. So look with me. In verse 35, John the Baptist is standing with two of his disciples.
- And he does what he did last week. He sees Jesus coming by again. And just as he'd done the day before, he says, that's the Lamb of God. Then in verse 37, two disciples, we're told, hear what he says.
- And they go after Jesus. And in verse 38, Jesus turns, he sees them, following him, and he confronts them. He says, what are you looking for? And the response is full of respect.
- [6 : 19] They call him Rabbi, or teacher, or great one. But I want you to notice, they're pretty cunning at this point. They don't start with the big questions. They start with a very ordinary, everyday question they ask.
- Where are you staying? And it works. They get the interaction. Come along and have a look. Come and see. And so the relationship begins with these men. And they spend the rest of the day with him.

But one of them cannot keep his excitement to himself. So Andrew, you see, is Simon Peter's brother. And he decides he's got to go tell his brother. And so Andrew wastes no time. He tells the news to Simon Peter.

And look at verse 41. Andrew says excitedly to Simon, we have found the Messiah. Now, and Andrew at this point becomes the first in a long line of successors who have found the best way to evangelism.

That is, friend to friend, brother to brother. Now, so far in this talk, we've been using the term Messiah without really defining it. So perhaps we ought to do that now. Perhaps we ought to define the term Messiah.

[7 : 18] And now the term Messiah is a Hebrew term. It comes from the word, the word really means anointed one. When translated into Greek, it translates as Christ.

The way the term is used in the Old Testament probably goes back to the books of Samuel. That is, at least how it's used in reference to the New Testament. In one Samuel, we see Samuel going around anointing people.

And he anoints two particular people, Saul and then David. And then when the kings of Israel fail, the Jewish people think, well, perhaps we should look for another anointed one.

Another Christ. Another Messiah. And they had many, many different pictures about what this new godly Messiah would look like and what he would do. We don't know which one Andrew meant.

But we know what he meant. That is, we know what, we don't know the details of what he was thinking about, but we know what he meant. He meant that the man he had met was God's coming one.

[8 : 23] God's anointed one. The one who fulfills all of God's purposes. The one that all Jews were waiting for. And he cannot wait to introduce Peter to him.

And so that he brings him to Jesus. And Jesus renamed him in verse 42. Now, he said, from now on your name will be Cephas. Now, Cephas is an Aramaic name. In Greek, the equivalent would be Peter.

In English, the equivalent would be Rocky. Jesus calls Peter Cephas Rocky the rock. Now, verse 43.

Jesus gains another disciple. He goes to Galilee, finds Philip, and he says to him, follow me. And Philip does, as verse 44 makes clear. Then in verse 45, it looks as though the number of disciples is going to grow even more, you see.

Look at it. In verse 45, he finds Nathanael. And he too witnesses. We've found him about whom Moses did in the law. And also the prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth.

[9 : 25] Now, I wonder if you can hear what Philip is saying. He's saying, this ordinary man, this man who comes from Nazareth, this man is the one who fulfills all Old Testament scriptures.

He fulfills the whole of the Old Testament scriptures and their general direction. Now, Nathanael I like. He's naturally a skeptical man. And he's not going to be sucked in so easily.

So he blurts it out. And look at what he says. Verse 46. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? In other words, Nazareth, you have got to be joking.

Nazareth is from Judea. And I am a Galilean. And I have no time for Judeans. But more than that, Bethlehem is where future kings come from.

Nazareth, not a chance. So Philip responds. He knows, seeing is believing. So he gives the only answer possible.

[10 : 23] He says, well, come and see. And Jesus sees them coming. And in his hearing, he says, he is an Israelite in whom there's no deceit. Now, Jesus speaks plainly.

Nathanael may have been blunt, skeptical. But he's got really good motives, hasn't he? No deceit, no guile. That's what Jesus is saying. He's a man who's willing to examine for himself the claims being made about Jesus.

But then Nathanael replies. And look at it in verse 48. He says, how do you know me? How did you get to know me? And it seems so.

I think Jesus hit the mark, isn't it? You know, Nathanael says, you've got me. It was supernatural insight. He'd seen him to this man. He'd seen him properly. He'd weighed him up properly. Now look at verse 49.

Nathanael's doubts are taken away. Unlike the beginning, he addresses Jesus with respect. Now he says, Rabbi, you're the son of God. You're the king of Israel.

[11 : 21] In other words, Rabbi, you are the Messiah, the promised one, the one to whom the scriptures bear witness. This is a huge step for this man. It's a step based on a miracle. And therefore, it's only the beginning of knowledge and faith.

And so Jesus just pushes him a little more. Do you believe? Because I told you that I saw you under a fig tree. You can't see greater things than that.

And then Jesus moves into the plural. It's as though he's talking to a larger audience. And I think he probably is talking to us. I think he's saying to us, listening in on the story.

And I want you to look at what he says in verse 51. He says, very truly, I tell you, plural, that's us. You will see heaven opened. And the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man.

Now, friends, at this point, let's do some remembering. Let's remember back to that story of Jacob with which we started. And I wonder if you've heard the echoes of Jacob's story in Nathaniel's story.

[12 : 24] You see, these verses are very important. And to understand them, we must hear the echoes of the Jacob's story. First, do you remember what Jesus said about Nathaniel? He said of Nathaniel, here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.

Now, here's the Andrew Reid paraphrase. Okay. I think it captures the meaning of what Jesus is saying. He says this. Here is an Israel in whom there is no Jacob.

Can you hear that? Here is an Israel in whom there is no Jacob. He is saying that Nathaniel is not like Jacob, who was in the first part of his life, not the deceiver.

No, he's not a man who has guile or deceit. No, Nathaniel is like what Jacob became, Israel, a man who struggles with God and prevails. He's like Israel.

That's the very first thing to see about this from the story of Jacob. And I think if you were a Jew, you'd hear it all. And you'd say, I know what he's on about. But here is an Israel in whom there is no Jacob.

[13 : 30] So then look at verse 51. Jesus draws again from the story of Jacob. And he, remember the story about Bethel? The place where God revealed himself, communicated with Jacob.

It's the place where God and the angels descended to earth and spoke to the man. That is, God through his representatives came and spoke. Now look at what Jesus says. He says, very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened.

And the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man. You see, what God is saying, what Jesus is saying is that God is going to do it again. There will be a new house of God.

A new Bethel. A new place where God is going to reveal himself to the world. God is going to tear heaven open. And God is going to come down to earth.

He's already done it. And this time he's done it in Jesus. Jesus is the new Bethel. The new house of God. The new place of revelation. The place where God comes to earth.

[14 : 29] The place where God speaks to humanity. In effect, Jesus is saying to his disciples something like this. Here again is my paraphrase. Watch this space.

Or better, watch this person. You are already using grand titles of me. But you ain't seen nothing yet.

Half the story hasn't been told yet. There has been nothing like this before. In me, God is revealing himself like he has never done before.

Keep your eyes on me. Watch this space. Now to wrap things up today, I want you to ask yourself, what do you think this passage is about? Why is it here?

What's its purpose? Well, I think its first purpose is patently obvious. The first purpose is to explain what Jesus is or who Jesus is. And in this passage, and the ones that have succeeded it, we've seen an incredible array of names and titles being used of this man.

[15 : 32] He is the Messiah, the prophet, the son of God, the king of Israel, rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

All of those are true. All are titles rightly given to this man for he is all of them. He fulfills all of them. But which is the one Jesus likes for himself?

Which title does he take and use for himself? It's the title of the son of man. It is the title Jesus prefers. And he prefers it because it's a title that in his day no one else was using.

And it's a title that therefore he could shape and fill with exactly the right content. And he's done it here for us. He's told us I'm the son of man and he's told us what it means. I'm the point of contact with God.

I'm where God is sending a message. When we think of the son of man, we are to think of God revealing himself to humanity in a new and intimate way.

[16 : 32] He is the one through whom permanent contact with God and heaven is made. He is God's unique link with humanity. Friends, the core of this passage is clearly the identity of Jesus.

God, John parades before us these magnificent portraits of Jesus. And he does so for a reason. It's not just so that we can think, oh, this is theologically interesting.

No, it's to force us to make a decision about him. So today, if you are here and you have not yet decided about Jesus, I challenge you to give it some more thought. See, read John's gospel.

Read John's gospel. As you do, simply ask yourself this question, who is Jesus? And then ask yourself, what am I going to do with him? I remember once I had, when I was in student work, a student came to me and said, I'm very confused about Jesus.

People tell me he's this and people tell me he's that. I said, well, why don't you find out for yourself? He said, how do I do that? I said, well, pick up John's gospel and just ask yourself one question. Read through it. It's not hard to read. Ask yourself one question.

[17 : 34] Who is Jesus? Then come back and tell me what you think. And he did. You see, because John is just so clear. This is who Jesus is. So if you don't yet know who Jesus is, just read about it.

Don't believe me. Go and read it for yourself and find out who is Jesus. And this brings us to the next question that I want to ask about this passage or the next thing I want to raise. Did you notice Nathaniel?

Did you notice how he reacts to Jesus and how Jesus reacts to him? You see, Nathaniel is sceptical. And it's clear from the response of Jesus that he doesn't mind scepticism one iota.

You see, Nathan is sceptical and it poses no problems for Jesus. He can work with Nathaniel because scepticism is accompanied by another magnificent quality.

Unlike many Jews that he met, this was a man without deceit, without guile. He was a true son of Israel. He's open hearted.

[18 : 31] He's willing to come and have a look and see what he can see. And Jesus welcomes and loves such people. He admires them. People who are willing to investigate with honest and true hearts.

People who are willing to struggle with God and prevail. Now, these are people God can work with. I don't know about you, but every now and then I'm in Bible study groups where people ask those really sort of tricky questions that look as though they're a bit sceptical or whatever.

And we sort of try and squash them a bit. No, no, Jesus loves them. Because people are about to learn things at that point. So if you're searching for Jesus and you're listening to this sermon or you're reading John's gospel, let me encourage you to do so like Nathaniel does with Jesus.

Be open, healthy, sceptically healthy. That is, be open hearted and ready to learn. Jesus doesn't mind, friends.

Jesus can stand a test. He wants you to be convinced totally about him. So search away, question away. It's good, it's healthy. Don't dodge what you find, though, when you find it.

[19 : 37] Finally, let me turn now to those of us who are Christians. Friends, this passage is not just about inquirers. It's not just about honest sceptics. It's about us. Did you notice that this passage is about us?

It is about disciples of Jesus. It's about witnesses to Jesus. If we're disciples of Jesus, then this is the Jesus that we witness to. He is the biblical Jesus.

Jesus says, I'm the Jesus defined by the Bible. I'm the one who fulfills the purposes of God revealed in the Bible. I'm the one who accords with biblical truth.

Now, friends, if our witness ever moves away from this Jesus and is moved away from its core, and if my preaching ever moves away from this Jesus, it is heretical and it is no longer preaching which accords with God's truth.

So today, I want to give us three tests for our personal life and our corporate life here at Holy Trinity. And you might like to write them down and think about them.

[20 : 37] These are questions I want us to ask ourselves personally and corporately. These are questions I want you to ask of me and of the other preachers and teachers here.

So here's question number one. Is the Jesus we preach still the biblical Jesus, the Jesus of Scripture? Let me say it again. Is he still the biblical Jesus, the Jesus of Scripture?

You see, I ask this because there are churches this very morning here in Melbourne. Some are proud of it who no longer preach this Jesus. Jesus isn't a figure that people have two reactions to, I think, in our modern world.

Some want to really distance themselves from him. Some want to claim Jesus as their own but to tame him in the process. Jesus will not be tamed. You can see that here. He is the Jesus testified to by the Scriptures and by action.

He is the biblical Jesus, the Jesus of Scripture. Is this the Jesus we witness to and proclaim at all levels of our life? So this is the first test for us. Is the Jesus we proclaim still the biblical Jesus, the Jesus that Scripture testifies to?

[21 : 52] And John's given us a second test in this passage if we sort of even go back to verse 19. John the Baptist was an ideal witness, wasn't he? He's a man in a position to make himself important in the eyes of others.

But as we saw last week, he doesn't. Remember what he says in John 3 verse 30? He says, Friends, become less. Friends, as a strong and growing church, there are lots of temptations for us as individuals and as groups.

One of the greatest temptations will be to direct people toward ourselves. God wants us to be true witnesses like John the Baptist. True witness is a humble and faithful servant of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are a person that constantly is pointing beyond themselves to Jesus. So that's my second question. I want you to ask it of me, of yourself and of us together.

Are we a humble servant of Jesus pointing away from ourselves and toward him? Now let's turn to the picture of these first disciples we've seen from verse 35 on. Did you notice what disciples do in our passage? Did you notice what they do? Well first of all, did you notice who they are? Well, disciples have families, you see. Disciples live in places that are shared with other people and that they're in contact with regularly. Disciples have friendships like Philip and Nathaniel and it's natural that disciples use those different relationships to introduce people to the person they've found, isn't it?

Friends, part of being a disciple is bringing people to come and see Jesus. It's saying, come and see what I have found. Come and see what I have found. Friends, we preach as disciples of Jesus. We know Jesus. We have networks of relationships. We can introduce people into those relationships, in those relationships to Jesus. We can bring people to come and see Jesus.

[24 : 06] Jesus. I had a wonderful time this morning at eight o'clock. One of our eight o'clock members came up to me and said, Andrew, I've been listening to what you've been saying. And he said to me, and I was at a party, a function with some old friends last week and I talked to him about Jesus. And as my friend got up, he said, thank you for sharing those things with me. I thought, he said, I thought you'd like to know that. I said, I'm overjoyed.

Because that's what we need to be doing, isn't it? We need to be introducing people to Jesus. It can be done casually and ordinarily. It's a question that all disciples should ask.

It's this. Do I have non-Christian relationships? And is Jesus so important to me that I'm telling them about him? Let me say it again. Do I have non-Christian relationships? And is Jesus so important to me that I'm telling them about him? So with that in mind, let's pray for us. And I'm going to pray for any among us that are inquiring about Jesus. And I'm going to pray for those of us who know Jesus and love Jesus and want others to as well. So let's pray together.

Father, we thank you that you welcome honest inquirers and skeptics. Thank you that you've revealed yourself clearly in Jesus. And we pray for those among us this morning who are searching for Jesus. Please direct them toward the truth and help us to guide them in that. And please help them to be honest and frank with what they find in scripture about Jesus. And Father, we also pray for those of us who already know Jesus. Thank you for calling us to yourself and to the knowledge of Jesus and therefore the knowledge of you. Thank you for the ministry that you've given us individually and corporately to make Christ known. Please help us to be faithful in our witness to him, both as individuals and together. May the Jesus we proclaim always be the biblical Jesus, the Jesus known through scripture. Second, please make us humble servants pointing away from ourselves and toward Jesus. And third, please may Jesus be so important to us that we constantly are introducing him to all that we meet. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our King, your Messiah and the Son of Man who has made you known. Amen.