

## **A Storytelling Commentary on John 1:29-42**

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John's story of John the Baptist and Jesus is a story of John's testimony about Jesus to his disciples. While it is not clear whom John is addressing in the first two episodes, it is in effect a declaration spoken directly to the audience of the Gospel. In the third episode he is talking to his two disciples when he climactically sees Jesus and says, "Look, here is the Lamb of God."

These first three episodes are dense with verbal threads. "The next day" is the first verbal thread. It links the first and third episodes. That's how they both begin.

There is also a verbal thread in the second sentence of the first episode "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me" that links this story with the prologue (1.15). Another verbal thread that connects the first two episodes is, "I myself did not know him," (1.31, 33) followed by a statement about baptizing with water.

A verbal thread in the second episode is "I saw the Spirit descending" followed in the second sentence by: "he on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain." And then there is the motif of testifying that again links the first and the third sentence in that second episode: "John testified" (1.32) and then says, "I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." (1.34) Another verbal thread that links the first and third episodes is the Lamb of God: "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (1.29) "Look, here is the Lamb of God." (1.35) John's speeches here are dense with verbal connections and the development of themes.

The only significant verbal thread in the second half of the story of the disciples following Jesus is "Where are you staying?" (1.38, 39) This motif ends with the climactic statement "It was about four o'clock in the afternoon." This is an "inside" comment by the storyteller to the audience. It is also an eyewitness notice that would only have been known and continued in the storytelling tradition by one who remembered the time when he first met Jesus. Thus, it is an appropriate climax to the story because you hear the voice of a storyteller who was present at the event remembering its details.

The second part of this story is about Simon. The verbal thread of Simon's name connects these two episodes: "following was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother," "Then he found his brother Simon," and then in the second episode, "He brought Simon to Jesus" and "Jesus said, 'You are Simon, son of John'". This is all about names; the nicknames that close friends give each other "You will be called Cephas (which is translated Peter)."

The climax of the first episode is the announcement "We have found the Messiah!" This is something that people in Israel had been expecting for hundreds of years. This is a big deal! The sign of Jesus' special relationship with Simon is that Jesus gives him a

nickname, "Cephus" in Aramaic, which is translated "Peter" in Greek. He has a Greek name and an Aramaic name. That was normal for people in the period of Jesus' life in Galilee. A number of Jesus' disciples had Hebrew names (James Bartholomeu, Thaddeus) while others had Greek names (Philip, Andrew). It was all about an intermix of cultures. This story has a tone of deep friendship between John and his disciples and then between Jesus and his first disciples. It needs to be told in that spirit.