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John 1:29-46

The Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! **30**This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' **31**I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." **32**Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. **33**I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' **34**I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." **35**The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. **36**When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" **37**When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. **38**Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" **39**"Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. **40**Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. **41**The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). **42**And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter). **43**The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." **44**Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. **45**Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." **46**"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel" (Luther's Explanation to the 3rd article of the creed).

Do you believe this? Do you really believe that you cannot believe in Jesus Christ unless the Holy Spirit has called you by the gospel? This is so passive. It takes us out of the driver's seat. It's not very American. America is the land of the free. We choose our president. It is foreign to think that God chooses us. And yet this is exactly what these words proclaim. When it comes to faith, we are not free. When it comes to faith we do not decide. When it comes to faith the Holy Spirit must call us by the gospel. Listen again, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel."

This should not surprise you. Scripture is clear on this point. God is always the initiator and author of faith. Jesus says: "No one comes to me unless my Father draws him" (John 6:44). Just ask the apostle Paul. God broke into his life when he least expected it. While traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians, God broke into his life and gave him faith.

Think about your own life. When did God break into your life? For most, God broke into your life when you were but a child. When all you could do was cry and dirty a diaper. You were carried to the baptismal fount and there God called you a keeper. Later, God broke into your life through Bible stories

that leaped off the page for you. Later still, God broke into your life when you received the Lord's Supper and you truly heard the words "for you." And then later still, when you had made a mess of your life and you sat in a church or a stadium or arena and you heard the pastor speak about forgiveness and your heart really wanted to be made right with God. That was God breaking into your life in order to draw you to faith.

Timothy Wengert tells a story about how his mother came to faith. He says, "My mother grew up in Milwaukee in a mixed religious household. Her father had been brought up Roman Catholic and her mother Lutheran. However, as the youngest of eleven children, she had never become a member of any congregation. So, in her early twenties, she finally began instruction to join a Lutheran church. When her schedule as a nurse and her pastor's schedule fit together, she would take the streetcar from her house to Bethany Lutheran Church to receive personal instruction from Pastor Beiderwieden, whose daughter was one of her best friends. She went for weeks. Then one Saturday as she made her way back to the streetcar stop, it suddenly struck her: 'Jesus Christ died for me!' The insight was so overwhelming that she kept repeating it. In tears, she turned around and walked all the way back to the church. Bursting in on the unsuspecting pastor, she blurted out, 'Pastor, Beiderwieden, Jesus died for me!' He looked up from his desk. 'Yes, Janet,' he replied with a broad smile. 'That's what I've been trying to tell you for weeks'" (Timothy Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Practice*, p. 31).

I like how she said faith "struck her." She did not find it. It did not come from within her. She did not even decide. Rather, it struck her. It confronted her. It found her and gave her faith.

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my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel."

This brings us to our gospel reading. In this passage, we are told that John the Baptist came to give testimony about Jesus. Verse 7 says, "John came as a witness to testify concerning the light." Verse 15 says, "John testifies concerning Jesus." Verse 19 says, "Now this was John's testimony." And verse 32, "Then John gave this testimony." In other words, John's role was to be a witness to Jesus so that people would be drawn to follow Jesus.

The obvious question is, if John came to point others to Jesus, then who pointed John? We get our answer in verses 30-34: "This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know (or recognize) him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known (or recognized) him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

What's this? The one who prepares the way of the Lord did not recognize Jesus at first glance. The one who prepares the way of the Lord would not have recognized Jesus without God's intervention. John had to be drawn to Jesus by the Father.

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Next, in verses 35-36, we see how God used John to draw disciples to Jesus: “The next day John was standing there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.” I love the description. The two disciples were standing with John, after he pointed them to Jesus, the disciples followed Jesus. They were standing, they heard the message, and they followed.

One of those two disciples was Andrew. After hearing the good news, he went and told his brother Simon Peter, “We have found the Messiah.” Again I like the language. We have found the Messiah! Really, or did the Messiah find him? Had Peter not heard the word he would not have followed. Without that witness Peter would have remained mending his nets. The next day, Jesus initiates faith as he calls Philip and Philip in turn calls Nathanael, “We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (1:43-45).

All throughout the gospel of John we see how God calls people to faith through the word. The Samaritans believe in Jesus because of what the woman and Jesus told them (4:39, 41). The royal official sought Jesus out because he had heard about him (4:47-53). The blind beggar responded to Jesus’ command to go and wash with a trusting obedience before he was healed (9:7). In all these cases the Father was drawing people to faith through the word.

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What does this mean for us? First and foremost, it means that God loves you. For it was in love that God calls you to himself. In love, the Holy Spirit drew you to Christ so that you would find him. In love, God claimed you in the waters of Baptism. In love, God nourishes you at the Lord’s Table. In love, Christ died on the cross for you. “For God so loved that world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). God loves you.

Now, you might object to this. You might not think that God loves you because of the sin that you have committed. You might not think that God loves you because of the circumstances you are in. You might not think God loves you because your loved ones are struggling. The problem with this thinking is that you are looking for God in the wrong places. God is not found in our circumstances. God is there, but He is hidden. God is found in the places he has promised to be found: in the Scriptures, the breaking of the bread, the forgiveness of sins, and prayer. God is revealed in these places in order to draw you back to him. He is there calling you home.

O God our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home

Second, not only does God love you, he also loves your neighbor. This is why we are commanded to pray for them and come to their aid. This is why we do our jobs as unto the Lord. This is why we sent out evangelists and missionaries armed not with a sword but with the word of God. So that Acts 13:48 might happen in their lives. “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the

word of the Lord, and as many as were elected to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). They were elected (called) by the word.

Back to our original question: Do you really believe that you cannot believe in Jesus Christ unless the Holy Spirit has called you by the gospel? Why wouldn't you. It is the best news in the world. For it means God is in the driver seat. And there is no one else better to drive than a sovereign Lord and loving Father who calls us and the world to Himself.

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**In Jesus' Name,
Amen**