

John 1:43-46

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Preacher: Garry Brotherston

[0:00] Thanks so much for having me here today. And let's open our Bibles to the passage we're going to be looking at. It's from John chapter 1.

These we're going to be looking at that kind of flow out of this particular passage here. So let's hear God's word, then I'll pray, and then we'll look at what this is saying.

So John chapter 1 from verse 43. The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. And finding Philip, he said to him, Follow me.

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. And Philip found Nathanael and told him, We have found the one that Moses wrote about in the law, and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Nazareth? Can anything good come from there? Nathanael asked. Come and see, said Philip.

[1:25] Let me pray for us. Lord, we thank you that you gather people like this throughout the whole world. To speak to them, you're a God of revelation.

And you reveal yourself through your word, Lord. And we trust that you would do that with us today, here in Sterling. Regardless what we've brought into the building, or the things that might be going on in our lives, that you would take away any distraction from hearing your voice through your word. Lord, it's why we have come like this. We need to hear from you. I'm sure in a group this size, there'll be people with all sorts of stuff going on in their lives.

Stuff they can never even share with anybody else. And we thank you that in you we have a God who meets all of our needs. A God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

And so we come before you now, Father, trusting that you will indeed speak to us and meet our needs. And conform us to the image of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

[2:39] Amen. Can anything good come from my life? Now, that's a question many of us ask ourselves, isn't it?

It's certainly a question I've asked, not only before I was a Christian, but also as a Christian. So before I was a Christian, I shared briefly my testimony earlier, just a wee bit of it.

I used to wonder, can anything good come in my life? I would look at my life even as a teenager, and it was an absolute mess. I hated life even for as young as 13 or 14.

And I just saw nothing good really. It was always bad. The picture was bleak. And that's not really surprising, isn't it, when we consider what the Bible says about the human condition outside of Christ.

We're lost, we're in darkness, we're empty, we're enslaved. So that's before a Christian. But what might surprise you is to hear me say that also, as a Christian, I'm still prone to what I might term my melancholy moments.

[3:42] If my wife was here, I should tell you all about them, because they happen every day.

Where I still notice the negatives before the positives. I notice the clouds before I notice a blue sky, which is not really hard in Scotland today, that is it?

So here's kind of how it is for me on a daily basis. I acknowledge, as a Christian, life has changed for the better, of course it has. I acknowledge I'm not what I used to be, but I tend not to think much about that.

Instead I tend to think about how I'm still nowhere near where I should be, or want to be. I see terrible inconsistencies. I'm so impulsive, it's painful.

Impatient. I see an old nature, that's expert at resurfacing. I don't see enough progress, or as my old school report cards used to say, room for improvement.

And then to make this worse, somebody will give me a book, they always think they're helping you, some Christian will come along, and they'll give you a book about some super Christian from the past. You know one of the Christians that get up at five o'clock in the morning, to read their Bible, and pray and things like that, and it's meant to encourage you, but that just makes it worse.

[5:02] If you want to be encouraged on your Christian walks, stay away from books like that by the way, they're really unhelpful. Because all they really make us do is ask, can anything good come from my life?

Was it Martin Luther, I'm so busy this morning, today I need to spend the first four hours in prayer. Well I read that, and I just went, Lord you might as well take me. Because four minutes in prayer, is a bit of a battle for me.

I'm not the only believer to think that way, better Christians than I'll ever be, also had moments where they looked at who and what they were, and it left them terribly frustrated.

Probably the best example of that is, the Apostle Paul, in Romans chapter 7, you'll be familiar with it. Paul cries out, now here's an Apostle, it's changing that whole part of the world that he's in, and he cries out this, wretched man that I am.

Who will save me from this body of death? And Paul felt this way, because even as an Apostle, he, like us, still found himself doing things he didn't want to do, and not doing the things he knew he should do.

[6:04] Now, I've no doubt, that in a crowd this size, there'll be people here, who have their melancholy moments, as I call them. There'll be some of you, who will notice, room for improvement on your report card, before you notice, anything positive that the teacher might say.

Some here, like me, will be having moments, perhaps even just now, today, where you wonder, can anything good come for my life? Now, I know when we come to church, none of us ever talk this way, we come through the door, and we're all super apostles.

People ask us, how are you getting on? Oh, fine, what are you doing here? If it's all brilliant, what are we all coming here for? If it's that good. And the reason we think, this way is, we're not the finished article.

We're not home yet. Yes, Christ lives in us, but so does sin. Which means, this side of eternity, we'll look at our lives, and we're always going to see, some kind of mess, mistake, mayhem, broken relationships, perhaps a marriage, that isn't where it should be.

Yes, Christians go through that. Wouldn't you think it, would you? Absolutely, we should think it, because we're no home yet. Or maybe a family crisis, we've been praying about, but as of yet, there's no answer, and the prayers are just hitting half the ceiling.

[7:31] In our Christian walk, we sometimes find ourselves going back the way. Perhaps sins of the past, we thought we'd overcome, have begun to resurface.

Let me make a wee confession about this. I'm 51 next month. I feel every single second of it. And I thought after 31 years, as a believer, I'd be more chilled out, calm, collected.

Come a drive with me after church. And you'll see how calm, and collected this man is. All it takes is a journey on Scotland's roads, and I'm crying out with Paul, wretched man that I am.

Shameful, even coming to a church to speak. You know, people cutting you off, and you're no thinking, I'm a minister, and you're about to follow them. It's awful, isn't it? I mean, you laugh because, why is everybody laughing like this?

Because you do the exact same thing. Isn't it? Certainly the guys, and your wife's like, that's you. Well, this morning, let me bring some light into the darkness.

[8:38] This morning, let me encourage those of us who wonder if anything good can come from our lives. And let me do this by pointing out that one of the first things asked of Jesus when he began his public ministry was this.

Can anything good come from where he came from? In the passage I read from John chapter 1, verses 43 to 46, we read of Jesus finding Philip and inviting Philip to follow him, and Philip takes up the call to follow him.

And in verse 43, Philip immediately begins to imitate his master. So where Jesus finds Philip, Philip in turn finds Nathanael. And the finding language continues.

So we read these words, 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. So in these verses, everybody seems to be finding somebody else.

Jesus finds Philip, Philip finds Nathanael, Philip and others find him, Moses and the prophets wrote of. Now in hearing of Jesus coming from Nazareth, I love this response from Nathanael.

[9:45] He's so honest, doesn't he? Nazareth? Can anything good come from there? Now that's quite a statement to make about the town of origin of the one Moses and the prophets spoke of, as we heard in the passage.

Can anything good come from there? And the reason Nathanael asked this question was Nazareth was a bit like us. It was unusual, uncelebrated, unspectacular.

It was like some forgotten place we've heard of in the past where nothing really happened. A wee bit like Yoka where I come from next to Drum Chapel in Clibank. It's a place where nothing good came from, at least nothing good we know of.

And with this in mind, isn't it interesting that though Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which although was a small city among the clans of Judah, it was still a royal city. It was the city of David. Isn't it interesting that Jesus, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, He isn't known as Jesus of Bethlehem, but Jesus of Nazareth.

The Gospels inform us that the unusual, uncelebrated, unspectacular, sleepy town of Nazareth, that's where Jesus' story on a natural level begins.

[11:07] Now you can feel free to follow the verses I'm about to quote here, but maybe just want to listen. But in Luke chapter 1 verse 26, we read these words in the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee.

You can picture Gabriel at Nazareth. What are we going there for? In Luke chapter 2 verse 39, we're told Nazareth is where Jesus' story will return.

We read these words when Joseph and Mary had done everything required in the law of the Lord. They returned to Galilee to their town of Nazareth. Luke 2 verse 51, Jesus went down to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary and was obedient to them.

So Jesus' family were Nazarenes. Jesus was a Nazarene. Nazareth was where he would grow up and that leads to Philip telling Nathaniel in the John's passage I read, the one Moses and all the prophets wrote of as Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Now, outwith the several New Testament references there are of Nazareth, we know little about ancient Nazareth as a place due to its obscurity, its insignificance.

[12:18] We don't know much about it. In fact, Nazareth was so obscure and insignificant, it's almost like gospel writers and you pick this up after you hear me saying this. It's almost they have to explain where it is and what it is.

Here's an example of this. Matthew 2, verse 23, he, Joseph, went and lived in a town called Nazareth. But then it's the next words. Matthew writes, oh, it's in the district of Galilee.

It's almost as if Matthew's saying, oh, it's all there because you'll no know where it is. Mark 1, verse 9, at that time Jesus came from Nazareth and Mark adds, in Galilee.

So he's doing the same as Matthew. You'll no know where it is, it's in Galilee. Luke 1, verse 26, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee.

So it seems Nazareth wasn't well known or well respected. Unlike Stirling, house prices there would be cheap. Perhaps people worked hard in the hope one day they might escape Nazareth, move somewhere nicer, somewhere better, and yet it was obscure and insignificant Nazareth that God chose for his son to be brought up in.

[13:33] Isn't that amazing? Every now and then we'll hear of royal children being sent away by parents to prestigious, prominent cities where they can be taught and learn.

Often royal children would be sent to a place that has a great reputation for culture and learning like Glasgow. Not somewhere safe and sought after.

So think of London, New York, Washington, Rome, Milan, Madrid, Paris. Prince William, he was sent to St. Andrews. Why? The uni and the place had a reputation for producing A students.

So that's how it is with earthly royal children but contrast that with heaven's royal son. God the Father sends the son not to learn in any of the great places of the world.

Instead it pleased the father for his son to be brought up and learn in Nazareth. Nazareth was just the right place where the incarnate son of God could learn humility, submission and obedience.

[14:44] During his earthly ministry as far as we know Jesus himself never identified as Jesus of Nazareth and only on a few rare occasions did his followers call him this.

For example, we saw the one that I read for the passage, John 1 verse 45. When speaking to Nathaniel, Philip says he's Jesus of Nazareth. But more often than not, it was crowds unfamiliar with Jesus who called him Jesus of Nazareth.

Here's a few examples of this. Matthew 21 verse 11, the crowds answered, this is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth and Galilee. Matthew 26 verse 71, another girl saw Peter and said to the people, this fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.

Mark chapter 10 verse 47, then blind Bartimaeus heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth. And he began to shout, Jesus son of David have mercy on me. Luke chapter 18 verse 37, they told him, again a link to Bartimaeus, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

And as well as the unfamiliar crowds, it was Jesus' enemies, particularly demons, for some reason liked to use the term Jesus of Nazareth. But when we read things like that in the Gospels, our ears should, our spiritual antenna, should be, being touched.

[16:04] Why are the demons bringing this up? So here's the demons. Mark chapter 1 verse 24, the demons ask, what do you want to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Jesus of Nazareth, have you come to destroy us?

Luke chapter 4 verse 34, demons ask, what do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? You go to the book of Acts, Acts chapter 6 verse 14, Luke informs us when false witnesses gave testimony against the first church martyr, Stephen, they said this, we have heard them say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.

So a picture emerges where the title Jesus of Nazareth, it was almost used in a disparaging way. Read later on, John chapter 19 verse 19, it seems to be used sarcastically, almost mockingly, as Pontius Pilate places a sign above Jesus' head on the cross and it says, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.

So Jesus humbles himself to death, even death on a cross as the man from Nazareth, the place where nothing good comes from. It's almost like Pilate's sign above Jesus becomes symbolic of how the world views Jesus, the nothing good man from the nothing good place, Nazareth.

We hear that all around us, don't we? Look at our country today, Mohammed promoted Jesus, get him in the bin. Jesus of Nazareth, what good can come from there? And so you start almost feeling sorry for Nazareth.

[17:49] What has this place done to be thought of so negatively? Why should this little town, which already had a reputation for producing nothing good, now it's mentioned on a cross?

Not only did Pilate put nails into the body of Jesus, he put a final nail in the coffin of Nazareth. If Nazareth had little or no reputation before the cross, it had an even worse reputation after it, for it would now be forever known as a place connected to a criminal who deserved to die.

Think about it, if there was estate agents from Nazareth back in Jesus' day, they'd be tempted to go and beg Pilate, would you remove Nazareth for the cross? What would this connection with some rabbi who claimed to be the son of God do for our business?

No one will move to Nazareth now. It's not only was this a place known for not producing anything good, but this is a place now known forever for producing blaspheming rabbis. So Nazareth is doomed.

And if we're honest, I don't know how some of us feel, even as Christians. Oh, I know we don't admit it. None is. And you should try this when you're in ministry.

[19:01] You're not allowed to admit it. We've got to walk in here singing onward Christian soldiers. So Nazareth almost seems doomed.

A bit like us. But wait. The story's not finished. The place connected with Jesus, specifically thanks to Pilate, the place connected with Jesus' cross, because a Pilate may be disregarded by the world, but Nazareth is not disregarded by God.

God began a good work in Nazareth, choosing it to be the place where his son would grow up. And as the apostle Paul tells us, when God begins a good work somewhere, he brings that work to completion.

And that's what the Bible would have us see about Nazareth. You see, the sign that Pilate put over Jesus' head, Jesus of Nazareth, that is not the last word on Nazareth and the Gospels.

The last word on Nazareth and the Gospels is in Mark chapter 16, verse 6. Now you can follow if you want or just listen, but this is what we're told.

[20:15] Let me just kind of give a few verses before. So Matthew, Mark chapter 16, verse 1. Women followers of Jesus buy spices to anoint Jesus' dead body. Verses 2 and 3.

They head to the tomb where Jesus' body is, but it dawns on them no one will be able to roll the stone away from the tomb entrance. Verse 4. And arriving at the tomb, to their surprise, the stone's already rolled away.

They enter, verse 5, they find a young man, an angel, dressed in white, sitting on the right side, and it alarms them. And this is what the angel says to them in verse 6. Don't be alarmed.

You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here, in this place of doom.

So Pilate does not get the last word on Nazareth and the Gospels. Heaven does. And one of Mark's lessons is that Nazareth's story, doesn't end in disgrace or dishonor.

[21:21] On the contrary, for anyone willing to read the whole story, anyone willing to ignore the ignorance of Nathaniel, can anything good come for Nazareth? Ignore sneering demons, what do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Ignore Pilate's sarcasm, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. If willing to look beyond that, then we will see that Nazareth, rather than be a forgotten place from which nothing good comes, it's a special place.

Nazareth is a highly exalted place for this was the place out of all the other places in Israel that God handpicked where his son would originate from, and God ordains the last word in the Gospels about Nazareth will not come from Pilate or a demon or even from Nathaniel, rather the last word on Nazareth in the Gospels is a heavenly word.

It comes from an angel. Don't be alarmed, you are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, bold, highlighting pen, underline it, who was crucified, he has risen, he's not here.

So Nazareth is now the town of resurrection glory. When commentary says on this, for more than three decades, Nazareth, Nazarene had been a bitter foretaste of Jesus' coming crucifixion, now the tables have turned, now Nazareth tasted of divine glory.

[22:59] Interestingly, after Jesus ascends to heaven, the title Jesus of Nazareth is taken up in the lips of Peter several times in his ministry, so Acts 2 verse 22, at Pentecost we hear Peter say this, men of Israel listen to this, Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which he did among you through him.

So Nazareth is now the place of miracles, wonders and signs. Acts 3 verse 6, Peter and John are at the temple to see the cripple asking for money. Peter tells them this, silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. And taking him by the right hand, he helped him up and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.

He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Nazareth is now the town of healing and renewal. Fancy that. Acts 4 verse 10, Peter speaks to the rulers and elders of Israel about the healing of the man at the temple, saying this, know this, you and all the people of Israel.

It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. So Nazareth is now a place connected with the resurrection.

[24:20] Acts 10 verse 38, Peter preaches at the house of Centurion named Cornelius and says this, God anointed Jesus of Nazareth. It's almost as if they're deliberately trying to do this.

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power and he went around doing good. Remember the question, can anything good come from Nazareth? And healing all who were under the power of the devil because God was with him.

But not only Peter, but Paul also seems keen to highlight Nazareth in the book of Acts. So easy to miss this, but now that you've had it pointed out to you, you'll no miss it. So Acts chapter 26 verse 9, Paul speaking to King Agrippa and he says this, I too was convinced I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

And lastly, I did tell you your fingers will be well exercised before the morning's out. Acts 22, you might want to turn there if you can, but Paul shares his conversion experience and in verse 6, about noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me, I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

Who are you, Lord, I asked. And let us hear Jesus' reply to Paul. I am Jesus of Nazareth. Now that is the only record of Jesus himself self-identifying with Nazareth.

[25:55] And he does so not as a ruin on a cross, but as a risen, ascended, glorified ruler of the universe. Now try and picture the people of Nazareth when they get wind of this, puffing out their

chest and asking people for other towns around them, what town was it the king of glory mentioned to Paul by the way?

The other towns reply, Nazareth. the people of Nazareth reply to them, and he's Jesus of where? He's Jesus of Nazareth.

God sent his son into the world and chose his son should come from and be brought up in, not in one of the great places of the world like Sterling, but in Nazareth, a forgotten town of forgotten people.

And you know, God did that deliberately I think. Why? Because he wants to tell forgotten towns and forgotten people like us, who think nothing can come good for my life.

Have you seen my family situation, my work situation, my marriage, my mental health? Have you seen it? And all of this is God saying, I've not forgotten about you.

[27 : 19] Just like I never forgot Nazareth. In Jesus Christ, God has come to us and came for us.

In Jesus Christ, just as he did with Nazareth, God has began a good work in us. Which brothers and sisters, rest assured, they will bring it to completion. Christian. If you look at me, I keep thinking I'm going to fall off the rails every day as a Christian.

God So you can do whatever you like with this. I'm clinging on to this. Because my Christian life is not a wonderful picture.

Again, when you're a minister, you're meant to come here and say, I've got it all worked out. We read theology and Calvin's institutes and all that. I love all that. But goodness, spend ten minutes with and you'll say, dearie me, can anything good come from Bishop Briggs?

But regardless who and what we are, regardless what we see just now, God who brought good brought the best from Nazareth is God who promises to bring good the best for us and for our lives when we come to his son, Jesus of Nazareth.

[28 : 45] You see, God thrives in taking people in situations that look helpless and hopeless, the family situation tearing you apart, the wavered child, the unbelieving loved one, that diagnosis, helpless, hopeless, Nazareth-like.

God thrives on that stuff and he takes it just like he did with Nazareth and he makes it glorious. And friends, that's the end game for you and even for me.

Can anything good come for us? You wait to see glory. Glory, glory, glory, glory, glory, hallelujah. Somebody put it to me a number of years ago, just now we are in the body repair shop, bus tires, leaks, faulty windscreen wipers, the whole shabang, but the showroom is still to come.

Let me pray for us. Lord, we thank you for what you reveal in your word that your plan is for good, as we just sung earlier.

[30 : 12] Our good and your glory. But Lord, your glory is our glory. The Bible tells us when Jesus returns, we will return with him in glory.

And so we thank you that although many of us probably feel done in with life and battered and bruised with the storms of adversity and just getting up in the morning, thank you that that's not the end game.

Just as was the case for Nazareth, can anything good come from you there? Absolutely. And the good you have started, you will bring it to completion. So for any struggling believer that's here today, Lord, and if we're honest, that's every one of us, help us to cling on to your great promises that glory awaits your people.

And as we think about that, Lord, we give you all the glory and all the honour and all the praise. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. my time, I for to that's to that's to that's to to to I do ■■■u in my song there