

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

January 25 / February 1, 2026

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Trustworthy

From Believing to Following; From Following to Believing

(John 1:19--2:11)

Study #2

Introduction: In and out of order...

Some English expressions are multi-purpose. They mean different things in different settings. Take the phrase, *“Out of order.”*

When an elevator doesn't work, we say that it's *“out of order.”* When someone tells an offensive joke, or says something that is rude and tasteless, we say, *“That's out of order!”*

And when someone puts something out of the normal sequence - like putting a cart before a horse, or counting chickens before they're hatched - we say, *“That's out of order.”*

This morning, we lean into that third sense as we watch Jesus draw people into the circles of faith and following, in and out of order.

We'll conclude our time in John's Gospel today by exploring what happened at a wedding in the small village of Cana. But we'll make a couple of stops on the way to that wedding.

¹ The Jewish leaders refused to travel a few miles from Jerusalem to see if John was the Messiah, Elijah, or the Prophet, a refusal that spoke volumes about their lack of genuine spiritual interest. This is reminiscent of the same group's lack of curiosity when the Magi came from the East announcing the birth of the King of Israel. They didn't even travel to Bethlehem to see for themselves if it was true.

First, we return to a man who surfaced in our first look into this book written by John the Apostle. That man would be John the Baptist.

John the Baptist's Testimony to Jesus (1:19-34)

John was No Celebrity...Yet He Baptized. Why? (1:19-27)

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were curious about John and his baptizing work. So, they sent a delegation of priests and Levites to question John.¹

They asked, **[1:19] “Who are you?”** and John answered, **[1:20]...“I am not the Christ.”**

So, some people thought that John was the Messiah or one of the Old Testament prophets, come back from the dead. He put those ideas to bed quick.

But this Jewish delegation pressed him. *“We didn't ask you who you are NOT. We've got to make a report to the Sanhedrin and we can't just tell them who you are NOT. We need to know who are ARE.”*

John told them. **[23] “I am the voice of one calling out in the wilderness, ‘Make the way of the Lord straight,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”**

John's whole ministry was to prepare for the ministry of Someone else. And baptizing people was a big part of that work of preparation.

[26] John answered them, saying, “I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. [27] It is He who comes after me, of whom I am not worthy even to untie the strap of His sandal.”²

² Rabbis in Jesus' day said, *“Every service which a slave performs for his master, a disciple shall do for his teacher, except the loosing of his sandal thong.”* Given the state of the streets and roads in the ancient world, that job was deemed below the dignity of the disciple. (Edersheim)

John's meeting with these Jews took place near the Jordan River, where people were coming to him to be baptized. We'll call that day, Day One. Here is what happened on Day Two

John Testified to God's Approval of Jesus (1:29-34)

[29] The next day [John] saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

While it might not be clear to us today, everybody in John's day knew exactly what he meant when he called Jesus, "***the Lamb of God.***"

The Jews used lambs as sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple. And the offering of a lamb signified the turning away of God's wrath.

That's Jesus. Here, John identified Jesus as a Man on a mission of sacrifice and redemption.

On this, Day Two, John baptized Jesus. When he did, he saw ***[32]... "the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him."***³

John knew what that meant because God had already told him that the Someone he was preparing the way for - the One on whom the Spirit descended - He will baptize, not in water, but ***[33]... "in the Holy Spirit."***

And John knew what he knew about Jesus: ***[34] "And I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."***

Day One was the day of John's conversation with the men from Jerusalem. Day Two was the day of Jesus' baptism.

Day Three of John's account of Jesus' ministry marked the day that the Lord began collecting followers.

Jesus' First Believing Disciples, Who Followed (1:35-51)

Andrew and Simon (Peter) (1:35-42)

The Baptizer was standing with two of his own disciples.⁴

And on that day, John did something that was and is very unusual for a leader to do.

He pushed two of own disciples out of his orbit, into the orbit of Another. John ***[36]...looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"***

John deflected attention from himself so that all attention would go to Jesus.⁵ And as soon as these two men heard John speak, they left John ***[37] and they followed Jesus.***

Jesus noticed them following and asked them "***What are you seeking?***"

That's Jesus drawing them out, engaging them. "***What do you guys want? What are you up to? Why are you following Me? Can I help you?***"

They answered, ***[38] Rabbi*** (the word means "teacher"), "***Where are You staying?***"

I sense shyness here mixed with a vulnerable desperation in that answer. And their answer didn't exactly answer Jesus' question. But what they said made it clear what they were all about.

These two men wanted some time with Jesus, time to get to know Him, time to hang with Him.

Jesus graciously responded with an invitation: ***[39]... "Come, and you will see."***

³ This revealed God's approval of Jesus. In the synoptic Gospels, we read that God said, for everyone to hear, "***This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased.***"

⁴ We don't know how many followers / disciples he had.

⁵ See John 3:30.

It was about 4:00 in the afternoon when this exchange took place.⁶ They walked with Jesus to where He was staying and stayed through the rest of the day.

And don't you wish we could eavesdrop in on what Jesus and these two talked about? We would love to have heard the questions they asked Him and the answers He gave.

We don't know because the Bible keeps all of that a secret.

All we know is that after that time alone with Jesus, one of them (the only one who was named), **[41] [Andrew] first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah." (which translated means Christ⁷)**

THAT was a bombshell announcement.

There was nothing a Jew longed for in all the world more than for the arrival of the Messiah. Messiah would bring redemption and - they hoped - political deliverance and restoration to Israel's glory days.

Andrew told Simon he had found THAT. He took Simon straight to Jesus. and in that scene involving Jesus, Andrew, and Simon we have a rare Gospel moment. Simon didn't speak. 😊

But Jesus spoke hope-filled words to this fisherman.

Throughout the Gospels, we're so drawn to Simon Peter.

He was a vacillating man of passion and fervor and cowardice and doubt and courage and boldness and failure. And if there was anything Simon was not, he was not rock-solid.

That will change, because **[42]...Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).**

Jesus said, "Simon, I'm going to call you now what you will become as you follow Me: Cephas. Peter. Rocky. Old Faithful."

That was Day Three. Then, on Day Four (v. 43 - **"the next day"**), Jesus returned to Galilee⁸ and collected two more followers.

Philip and Nathanael (1:43-51)

The first one was Philip. John wrote that Jesus **"found Philip."** I think that lets us know that Philip and Jesus already knew each other. Jesus invited Philip to follow, which he did.

And then Philip went on to do what Andrew had done.

[44] Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. [45] Philip found Nathanael⁹ and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses wrote in the Law, and the prophets also wrote: Jesus the son of Joseph,¹⁰ from Nazareth!"

Again, a bombshell announcement. But Nathanael wasn't impressed. Nazareth? Evidently Nazareth had a reputation as a trivial, backwater, hick town, maybe even a bad place.

Nathanael couldn't believe that **"The One"** (Messiah) would come from a place like Nazareth.¹¹

⁶ According to the Jewish reckoning of time, the day started at 6:00am, making **"about the tenth hour"** about 4pm.

⁷ **"Christ"** was a title, referring to Jesus' right to rule as King over Israel.

⁸ Jesus had been on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, in the Decapolis region. He went from the east side to the west side, into the more familiar region of Galilee.

⁹ Given the wording here (**"Philip found Nathanael"**), it may have been the case that Philip and Nathanael knew each other.

¹⁰ **"The son of Joseph."** It is possible that Philip didn't know about Jesus' virgin birth. But then, it was also true that Joseph was Jesus' legal father.

¹¹ Archeologists estimate that no more than one hundred and fifty people lived in Nazareth. Evidently, Galilee was considered more of a backwoods area than Judea. (article from the Israel Institute of Biblical Studies; Eli Lizzorin-Eyuzenberg)

Philip looked at Nathanael, and simply said, ***“Come and see.”*** - and Nathanael did. His willingness to ***“come and see”*** made all the difference.¹²

[47] Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite, in whom there is no deceit!”¹³

To which Nathanael asked, ***[48] “How do You know me?”***
(What an interesting response. Not, *“Thanks for the compliment.”*)

Nathanael understood himself well enough to know that he was not deceitful. But he had never met Jesus. *“So...how did this Man know this about me?”*

Jesus saw Nathanael’s question as an invitation. So, Jesus spoke in a way that would capture Nathanael’s attention and his imagination. He did that, first, with a revelation.

[48]...Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”¹⁴

So, there was a time when, for some reason, Nathanael was sitting under the heavy limbs of a fig tree.

That Jesus saw Nathanael when he knew that no one could see him, showed him that Jesus knew things no one but God could know.

This Nathanael was a quick study. He saw instantly that this Man standing in front of Him was special, was unique, was the One Philip said He was.

Hence, Nathanael’s response. ***[49]...“Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel!”***¹⁵

Then, Jesus gave Nathanael a prophecy.

[50] Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” [51] 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.”¹⁶

Jesus was telling Nathanael that He was going to be Jacob’s ladder. He will be the link between earth and Heaven, the bridge between God and man.

And just as surely as Jesus saw Nathanael under the fig tree, Nathanael would come to see Jesus as that ladder.

Summary: We have just seen a great set of stories. John gives us a glimpse at critical, spiritual “next steps” a few people made.

- ANDREW followed Jesus after hearing John the Baptist refer to Him as ***“the Lamb of God.”*** He described Jesus to his brother, Simon, with, ***“We have found the Messiah.”***
- PHILIP followed Jesus when Jesus called him and described him to Nathanael as the One about whom Moses and the prophets all wrote - that is, the Messiah.
- NATHANAEL confessed Jesus as ***“the Son of God, the King of Israel!”*** - exactly the words a Jew would use to describe the Messiah.

¹² The name ***“Nathanael”*** doesn’t appear in the lists of apostles in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. We believe that the Apostle Bartholomew was John’s ***“Nathanael.”***

¹³ The word we translate ***“deceit”*** is the word that was used for fish bait, carrying with it the implication of trickery. It was also the Greek equivalent to the name of the patriarch, Jacob, who was a noted schemer. Jesus was saying, ***“An Israelite in whom there is no Jacob.”***

¹⁴ There are numerous theories about what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree, among them: (1) He was seeking privacy while praying; (2) He was seeking privacy while suffering in some way. We don’t know; the text doesn’t tell us.

¹⁵ I think that it is unlikely that Nathanael was expressing belief in Jesus’ divinity. He was more likely using the term ***“Son of God”*** in the Old Testament sense of being God’s chosen king / Messiah. (See Psalm 2)

¹⁶ This refers to a scene from Genesis (chapter 28) when God gave the patriarch Jacob a vision at night. His vision was of a ladder rising from the desert, ascending into heaven. On this ladder, angels traveled from earth to heaven, and back from heaven to earth.

We remember the purpose statement John gave for writing His Gospel near the end of the book. He wrote, **[John 20:31]...so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name.**

All of these we've met today have expressed their belief that Jesus was exactly that: the Messiah. I understand from this that John wants us to know that they are all believers who have eternal life... ..and these believers are now following.

They are spending time with Him, getting to know Him. (Andrew) They are **"following"** Him. (Philip) They are learning about His only-God-can-do-that ways. (Nathanael)

And this - following - is a thoroughly biblical *"order"* to follow when entering the circle of life in Jesus.

When you believe that Jesus, being who He says He is, will give you eternal life, He adopts you into His family as God's child and you receive that gift of eternal life.

Having now believed, your life will consist of taking countless next steps of following Jesus into the adventure of faith and obedience.

We now move past the first four days of John's account of Jesus' ministry to a different scene in a different area, many days (or weeks) removed from what we have just seen to see a different *"order."*

Jesus' "Sign" Led Other Disciples to Believe (2:1-11)

Jesus + Some Disciples at a Wedding (vv. 1-2)

[1] On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there, [2] and both Jesus and His disciples were also invited to the wedding.

¹⁷ Outside of the birth narratives and the crucifixion narratives, Mary is not often mentioned in the Gospels. She was likely at this wedding as either a friend of the couple or as a relative, as Cana was not far from Nazareth.

¹⁸ Jesus was not a grim-faced ascetic. To be with Jesus was to be with joy.

I have learned that first century Jewish weddings normally took place on the third day of the week (as the verse says), so it is Tuesday of a wedding week.

Weddings are now and were then festive affairs. But, by the time we are brought into this scene, the wedding, *per se*, was over and the reception was on.

The wedding itself would begin with a procession of the groom and his friends to the home of the bride.

Once at her home, the wedding guests would give speeches and toast the couple. Next, the wedding party would walk to the home that the groom had prepared for him and his bride.

Then, there would be a brief religious ceremony and that was followed by the reception. Unlike our wedding receptions, though, which may last for hours, a Jewish wedding reception could last days.

John tells us that Jesus' mother, Mary (she is not named) was present at this wedding.¹⁷

Jesus was there, too, and He didn't just show up. He was invited. We don't know if He was invited as a friend or as family, but it certainly was not unusual to see Jesus invited to festive occasions.¹⁸

Jesus' disciples were also at the wedding. They might have been there as friends of Jesus. Or, just as likely, they were friends of the bride or groom, residents of Cana.¹⁹

Notice, too, that the disciples at the wedding aren't named. I think that this is significant. It is possible that Jesus may have had a number of disciples, and some recent study leads me to believe that this group of disciples were most likely NOT the disciples we just met - Andrew, Simon, Philip, and Nathanael.

¹⁹ Jesus taught in Galilee prior to John's imprisonment (Luke 3:14) So, Jesus no doubt had disciples from that region. These are probably the disciples referenced in John 2:2 and 11.

At this wedding, during the loooong reception, a crisis arose.

A Wedding Crisis (vv. 3-5)

Mary's subtle nudge to Jesus (v. 3)

In the first century - and throughout biblical history - wine was a staple of the Jewish diet. People would choose to drink diluted wine over water because of the frequent impurities of water.

And hosts would serve wine at weddings as a symbol of joy and celebration. At weddings, the wine flowed.²⁰

The guests at a wedding would taste wine as they traveled from house to house. The couple would drink wine to seal their vows. And, at the reception, wine was served.

But, at this wedding in Cana, they have run out of wine. We don't know WHY they ran out of wine. But THAT they ran out of wine would have been a shameful thing for the hosts.

Mary let her Son know about it. **[3] *When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."***

It just makes sense that Mary would look to Jesus at a time like this. Mary KNEW beyond the shadow of a doubt who Jesus really was - the Son of God - and what He was capable of

After becoming the mother of Jesus, Mary had mothered other children. These other children were conceived and birthed in the way that all women conceive and give birth.

Only Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

I picture Mary patiently waiting - for thirty years now - for her Son to reveal His identity.

She thought that this be a perfect time for Him to do something that would reveal who He was AND rescue the wedding host from social disgrace.

And to Mary's unspoken message? *"Jesus, we need to do something,"* the Lord gave an interesting response.

Jesus: "Lady, I know My business." (v. 4)

[4] *And Jesus said to her, "What business do you have with Me, woman? My hour has not yet come."*²¹

This was not Jesus being disrespectful to His mother.

This term, **"Woman"** was the same term He used when, three years later, He spoke to His mother while He was hanging from the cross.

He said, **[John 19:26] "Woman, behold your son,"** when He delivered His mother over to the care of the Apostle John.

Here, He was saying, *"My timetable is My own. I'll handle this in My own way. I don't need your wisdom, your prompting, your nudges."*

When Jesus spoke to her in this way, Mary graciously accepted her new role in her Son's life.²²

And yet she somehow also understood from His words - or His tone or His look - that He did intend to do something, as was clear in her words to the wedding servers: **[5]...*"Whatever He tells you, do it."***

²⁰ The symbolism of wine in the Old Testament: compared with and associated with Israel, Psalm 128; a good wife, Psalm 80; prosperity, Genesis 49; peaceful times, 1 Kings 4:25; spiritual blessings - all through the Old Testament. Valid uses for wine listed in the Old Testament include cheering men's hearts; sedating mourners; included in some sacrifices to God.

²¹ Here, Jesus made a decisive turn in His relationship with His mother. No longer was she the one to whom He submitted. Here, He revealed Himself to be the Lord to whom she was to submit.

²² Mary displays the same submissive spirit she showed when she was told that she would be with child. (See Luke 1:38)

Water to Wine (2:6-10)

The water containers (v. 6)

[6] Now there were six stone waterpots standing there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing two or three measures each. (That is roughly a total of one hundred and twenty gallons)

The Jews of Jesus' day took great pains to avoid ceremonial uncleanness. These waterpots were present to allow people to wash their hands.²³

And Jesus saw in these six stone waterpots the means to reveal His power for the very first time. He gave instructions to the wedding servants.

Jesus (the Word) spoke a word...and it was so (7-8)

[7a] Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water."

So. Quick. What do you think was going through the minds of the servants when they heard that command?

Maybe, "Look, we don't need water. We need wine!" or "What a nutty command."

They had no idea what He had in mind and no clue as to who He was. But - hats off to the servants - they did what Mary told them to do, which was to do whatever Jesus told them to do.

[8] And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the headwaiter." And they took it to him.

We now imagine a servant walking up to the headwaiter, carrying a cup of what he knew was no longer hand-washing water. (Was the server smiling? Giggling?)

Testimony to a sign (vv. 9-10)

As the headwaiter took the cup, he saw the deep blush of aged wine that he expected to see.²⁴ As he took a drink, he was stunned.²⁵

He wasn't impressed with the miracle. He didn't know that a miracle had taken place.

He assumed that this wine had gone through the same process of fermentation that all wine goes through. He didn't know that five minutes ago, this wine had been H₂O.

What impressed him was the quality of the wine.

He praised the groom whose family was in charge of the reception and the wine²⁶

[10]... "Every man serves the good wine first, and when the guests are drunk, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."

That's the response from the headwaiter, who knew wine. This wine was excellent.

What is interesting is that John records no response from the servers who knew the backstory.

Nor does he record the response of the groom or his family, the bride or her family, or from guests, none of whom (we assume) knew the backstory.

We only have a record of the response from one group that was there at the wedding that day.

²³ Earthenware pots became impure too easily, but stone could be repeatedly washed clean.

²⁴ Fascinating. Jesus created wine instantaneously with the appearance of age.

²⁵ The "Headwaiter" served as master of ceremonies.

²⁶ It is possible (even likely) that the groom didn't know anything about the drama going on with the servants and Mary and Jesus and the hand-washing water.

Disciples Who Follow, Now Believe (2:11)

[11] This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.²⁷

On the surface, it would appear that Jesus did what He did to keep a couple from shame on their wedding day.

But what was *apparently* the purpose of the miracle was not the *actual* purpose. The actual point of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana was to birth faith in the hearts of Jesus' disciples.²⁸

That's why the conclusion of this scene isn't, "*And they lived happily ever after.*"

The punchline was that these disciples of Jesus were now convinced that Jesus was more than they had thought He was. He was the Christ / the Messiah, the Son of God - exactly what Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael believed about Jesus.

Conclusion:

The stories of those three were great stories. Here's another great story, but it is "*out of order*" from those stories.

Andrew and Philip and Nathanael believed in Jesus and then began following Him.

The disciples at the wedding had been following Jesus, learning about Him, listening to Him, getting to know Him, and then they **BEGAN** to believe in Him after they saw the "*sign.*"²⁹

As John used the term, "*a sign*" was far more than a miracle. It was a miracle that pointed beyond itself to a greater reality.³⁰

Jesus didn't do a magic trick to produce shock and awe. He did what only God could do to *signal* who He was: The Christ, the Son of God. (John 20:30-31)

These wedding attenders went to the wedding as disciples, but not as believers. They left, still disciples, but now believers.³¹

It is not unusual when someone follows the *order* of believing in Jesus and then following. (Think Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael)

The wedding story tells us that there is another possible *order*.

In fact, it is very common that someone will come to believe in Jesus after a time of following.

For that reason, here is this, for you who are listening today who are following Jesus, learning more about Him, and even seeking to obey Him - and think that in giving Jesus your obedience you will find eternal life.

We receive eternal life from God by realizing that we bring nothing to the table but our need. He supplies everything.

All we can do is believe that this Jesus, who is the LORD, the Messiah / Christ will give us eternal life if we come to Him believing that He can and will do that.

Following Jesus is a good thing. But doing the best we can to follow Him isn't what God is looking for.

²⁷ To say that someone "*believed in Him (Jesus)*" is the most common phrase John uses to tell us that someone has eternal life. (See John 20:30-31)

²⁸ We find, repeatedly, that it is possible to be a disciple of Jesus without believing in Him. For one example, see John 6:61-65.

²⁹ The verb "*believed*" here is in the aorist tense (active voice; indicative mood) in Greek. Of the many possible uses for the aorist tense (among others (1) as a summary of an action, (2) as the completion of an action, (3) presented without

respect to time at all, (4) looking to the future, or (5) as describing the beginning of an action / entrance into a certain state or mindset = ingressive), the sense here is certainly ingressive, as in "*They began to believe in Him.*" This was not the case for the three disciples we see in chapter 1 (Andrew, Philip, Nathanael). They had already begun to believe. This is why I believe that they were not at the wedding.

³⁰ This miracle is the first of Jesus' 7 (or 8) *signs* John included in his book.

³¹ The meaning of the word *disciple* is, simply "student / pupil / learner."

He values faith. You will find life in Jesus when you believe that He is who He says He is and that He will give you eternal life.

Today, see Him as the trustworthy Savior He is. Believe and receive.

And, since it is very common for people to follow Jesus before believing in Jesus, to all of you who have believed in Jesus and want your loved ones and friends and neighbors to believe in Him, there is this.

Tell them about Jesus.

Tell your friend the stories of Jesus. Tell your friend of His ways and of His loving commands and of His miracles. Pray for your friend - and pray with him, with her.

Over time, your story-telling and your prayers may well convince them of the trustworthiness of Jesus - and they will believe and receive.