

Jesus is the One, the Christ, the Savior

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

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.* ⁴⁷ *When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”* ⁴⁸ *“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”* ⁴⁹ *Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”* ⁵⁰ *Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.”* ⁵¹ *He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”*

I think that an interesting study for a family or a small group or just on your own is to read John chapter 1 and first verse of chapter 2 and map out the very first week of Jesus’ ministry. I think that maybe the Apostle John presents this week as a kind of mirror or bookend to the final week of the Lord’s ministry, Holy Week. That’s the hint from the first words of our passage, “The next day...”

Jesus had already called four men to be disciples, and now on the way to Cana to a wedding, he called two more. Philip responded to Jesus’ invitation by acting out what should be the natural instinct of the believer: “I’ve got to tell my best friend.” He told Nathanael, “**We have found the One.**”

The “One” was a reference to something Moses said: “**The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to everything he tells you.**”^a Jesus was that One, the only One. When Nathanael wondered about anything good coming from Nazareth, Philip gave the answer we should have on the tips of our tongues all the time: “**Come and see.**” Philip invites his friend and the rest of us to “come and see” Jesus, to watch and listen and understand, and remember. At this time, Jesus had not yet performed any miraculous signs, but his wisdom and his righteousness were evident to everyone who saw him.

Philip remembers that Jesus was also written about in the Prophets. It was in those prophetic books that we learn even more about this Anointed One: He is the Christ. Maybe the clearest picture of the Messiah that we get in the Old Testament is the prophecy about his suffering and death in Isaiah 53. The prophet says about Christ: “**The punishment that brought us peace was**

^a Deuteronomy 18:5; Acts 3:22.

upon him.” What kind of an Anointed Christ did Jesus have to be, to bear the punishment that we all deserve? He had to be innocent of all sin, and in fact, he had to be the Son of God.

But to Nathanael, Jesus just wasn't what he was expecting. This was the trouble we have in today's Old Testament lesson, when the boy Samuel was not expecting the Lord to speak to him in the tabernacle. When God spoke, Samuel didn't realize it was God speaking; he had to be told. When Nathanael was invited to come and listen, he didn't expect that the Messiah would show up from the next town, so he had to be told.

And this is the way it is today. So many religions have an opinion about Jesus that seems politically correct, trying (maybe) respectfully to hold Jesus up as a great prophet the way that the Muslims do and some of the Jews and some others and even some atheists, that many Christians are duped into accepting the testimony of an unbeliever over the testimony of the Scriptures themselves. There is a temptation to think: If so many people appreciate Jesus as a great teacher, why should I think more of him than that? Isn't there a "least common denominator" in raising Jesus up sort of midway, this far, and no farther? Wouldn't we all get along better if we could just agree on that?

But if you start thinking that this is the way we should think, then you've certainly heard the voice of the devil whispering in your ear. Because the devil wants us to do anything with Jesus except trust him as the Christ, the Son of God. If we put Jesus lower, we're not raising him up at all. We're doing the devil's work for him by diminishing Jesus in the minds of people who should lift him up as truly God.

We can't be satisfied when someone wants to revere Jesus as a great prophet. If we do, if we give in, if we act like we're satisfied with "close enough," then we are saying with our complacency that we agree. That Jesus is nothing more. He is a preacher who got two or three sermons written down. Isn't that special? But if my inaction, if my sin of omission leads someone to think that they're right, then I've let them wander down the path to hell.

Will that friend look back at me on Judgment Day and cry out, Why didn't you stop me? Why didn't you say more? What kind of a friend do I want to be? Do I want to be a friend who gets along with everybody and never stirs up the water, or do I want to be a friend like Philip, who said, "Come and see!"

Jesus showed Nathanael his power as God. Something only Nathanael knew about had gone on under a fig tree. Based on what Jesus says and on what Nathanael's reaction was, we can imagine that Nathanael was praying. I say that because Jesus responds as if to a question asked in prayer, or in a conversation that was private.

Jesus says: "Here is a true Israelite." "In this man there is no deceit." Had Nathanael been wrestling with these things? Had he wondered whether he lived up to God's demands of mankind? If this was the case, then his conclusion had to be: "I can only trust in God for my righteousness, to be a true Israelite. And if someone has accused me falsely of deceit, then at least God knows the truth."

When Jesus showed that he knows these things and all things, Nathanael exclaimed: **“Rabbi, You are the Son of God, the King of Israel!”** By saying **“Rabbi,”** he takes his place as Jesus’ follower, his disciple. By saying, **“You are the Son of God,”** he acknowledges that Jesus is truly God himself, because the Son of God is also truly God. And by saying **“You are the King of Israel,”** he acknowledged that salvation is from Jesus alone, a Savior greater than any of the Kings of Israel, greater than Solomon, greater than David, the King who would give his life as a ransom for us all.

But Jesus assures us of something else; something even bigger. Jesus assures us that he alone is the only way to heaven. Ever since at least the 1920’s, and maybe longer. But at least for the last hundred years, there has been an idea that there are other ways to heaven besides faith in Jesus. People have begun to say, more and more, that if someone is sincere in their religion—no matter what that religion is—then they must really be worshipping the true God, and therefore they can achieve eternal life.

Don’t let that stand. Don’t be taken in by that kind of nonsense. Jesus says, “No one comes to the Father except through me,” and in our text, Jesus brings up a perfect illustration of his place in heaven. He has us remember Jacob’s dream, the dream of the angels going up and down a stairway or ladder up to heaven and down to earth.

Jesus says: Notice that heaven is open. Without Christ, that would not be true. And notice that the angels are ascending and descending. The angels are not fables; they are not myths. They are real messengers and warriors in God’s army, fighting unseen battles on our behalf and for the good of the church, and they are also messengers doing God’s bidding.

But most of all, they are ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Jesus, who is truly God and truly man, is the only way. The angels come and go only through him. And so too, Jesus is the only way into heaven for us. *When we grieve over miss opportunities, sins of omission, and all of the other sins and the weight of guilt that presses down on us, we remember Jesus who loves us. He is the way to heaven. He has removed your guilt forever and made you a true Israelite; a true Christian child of God.*

Nathanael was a true Israelite because he was looking for the true Savior, Jesus the Son of God. Even though he first doubted that anything good could ever come from Nazareth, he was confessing his faith in Jesus as the true and only Savior just four verses later.

You and I struggle with doubt or confusion because the screams of the unbelieving world get so loud in our ears. When an unbeliever says something that’s close to the truth, we want to breathe a sigh of relief and say, “That’s close enough.” But it isn’t. Don’t let your guard down. When someone gets close to the truth, or when they ask a question that could really be answered by what you know about Jesus, be like Philip. Invite them here. “Come and see.” You don’t have to be the one with the perfect words and the convincing illustration. You can bring them to the Savior’s feet. Just as once, someone who loved you brought you.

Amen.