

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Witness of Nathanael John 1:43-51

Those who come to faith in Christ are not left alone when their faith is being tested. The Lord will continually provide assurances to them that Jesus, is in fact the Christ the Son of the living God. If you are here this weekend and have placed your faith in Christ, those assurances are all around you. And those assurances will always be all around you. All we have to do is to keep our eyes on Jesus. This will be graphically demonstrated for us this weekend as we consider **John 1:43-51**.

Let me read this passage for you and I will be reading from the NAS. **"And the next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." (44) Now Philip was born in Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. (45) Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph." (46) And Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." (47) Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite, in whom is no guile!" (48) Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." (49) Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." (50) Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." (51) And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."**

I know that as we read this passage there were two very prominent names mentioned. Who were those names? Philip and Nathanael! But even though there were two names mentioned we will be focusing primarily this weekend on Nathanael. Why? I believe it is important for us to focus on Nathanael because this is the only passage in the whole of the New Testament that gives us any insight into the life of this future apostle. So the question that I would like for us to answer this weekend is this: What do we learn about Nathanael in John 1:43-51? My hope as we seek to answer this question is that we will be better prepared to see the many assurances that God is continuously providing us that our faith in Christ has been well placed. What is the first thing we learn about Nathanael in **John 1:43-51?**

We learn that Nathanael highly valued the Word of God (John 1:43-45). Let us first of all look at **John 1:43 "The next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip, and Jesus said to him, "follow Me."**

The "next day" is the day after the events described in **John 1:35-42**. The "next day" is the day after John and Andrew visited with Jesus and confirmed that He was the Messiah. The "next day" is the day after Andrew had brought his brother Simon to Jesus and Jesus nicknamed him "Cephas" which is Aramaic for "rock."

It was on this "next day" that "He" or in other words Jesus purposed to go forth into Galilee. What did this decision to go forth into Galilee entail? It meant that he had to cross from the eastern side of the Jordan River to the western side of the Jordan River.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Now after the apostle John tells us that Jesus had purposed to take this trip he then introduces us to a man named Philip. Let us continue to read **John 1:43**, "**the next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee and He found Philip.**" Who exactly is Philip?

Philip is a Greek name, meaning "lover of horses." He must also have had a Jewish name, because he would later become one of the 12 disciples of Christ and all of Christ's original disciples were Jewish. But his Jewish name is never given.

We should not confuse him with Philip the deacon, the man we meet in **Acts 6** who became an evangelist and led the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. Philip the apostle was a completely different individual.

What details do we know about him? Matthew, Mark and Luke give no details at all about him. Actually all the information that we know about Philip is found in this gospel. We find a little bit of that detail here in **John 1** as Jesus issues him a specific challenge. We find a little bit more of that detail in **John 6** at the feeding of the 5,000. And we find still more detail about Philip in **John 12** when he is approached by certain Greeks who wanted to visit Jesus. And finally we see in **John 14** Philip interacting with Jesus in the upper room the day before Christ's crucifixion.

So what specifically do we learn about Philip here in **John 1:43**? We learn that Jesus issued a specific challenge to Philip to "**follow Him.**"

Let us again go back and read **John 1:43** "**the next day,**" the day after the events described in **John 1:35-42** "**He**" or in other words Jesus purposed to go forth into Galilee "**and He found Philip** (not Philip the Evangelist but Philip the future apostle) **and Jesus said to him, "Follow me."** Jesus was not requesting Philip to follow Him. He was *commanding* Philip to follow Him.

It seems quite apparent that Jesus knew Philip prior to this encounter. Most likely Jesus had come to know Philip while they both were out in the wilderness area with John the Baptist. It is very likely that Philip had perhaps even been one of the disciples who had heard John the Baptist identify Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world in **John 1:29-34**. And it is even more likely that Philip had heard about the experiences of Peter, Andrew and John which were recorded for us in **John 1:35-42**.

The reason I would say this is because Philip, Andrew and Peter all came from the very same small town of Bethsaida according to **John 1:44**. Let me read this verse for you. "**Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter.**" Because they all came from the very same small town it would have been very likely that Peter and Andrew would have certainly, if given the opportunity, spoken with Philip about what had happened to them the day before.

Did Philip and Jesus know each other or know of each other prior to this encounter described in **John 1:43**? Most likely. We should not think that Jesus came up to Philip and commanded him to follow Him out of the blue.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

But did Philip respond to the challenge given to him by Jesus? It does not say that he did but his actions are consistent with someone who had in fact made that choice. What did Philip do? Philip went to his very close friend Nathanael after being confronted by Jesus and bore witness of Christ (John 1:45). So finally we will be introduced to Nathanael.

Let me read for you **John 1:45 "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote.'"** Obviously, the truth of Scripture was something that mattered to Nathanael. This is why Philip approached Nathanael in this way. Apparently for Nathanael, truth was measured by how it matched up with the Scriptures. At least it appears that way in light of the way his good friend Philip approached him.

Is this true of your own life? Do you highly value the Word? Do you evaluate what you believe and on the basis of its teachings? Or are your beliefs, convictions and values shaped more by the thinking of the world than by the Word of God?

When we see how Philip approached Nathanael it is very obvious that Philip believed that Nathanael highly valued God's Word and would make his determination about Jesus based on what he thought the Scriptures taught. But even though this is true it does not mean that Nathanael could not be blind to what the Scriptures taught because of his own personal shortcomings which Philip himself was about to find out. Notice how Philip ends his declaration to his good friend Nathanael.

Let us once again look at the verse, **"Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote'"** and then what does he say? **"Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."** This seems like a rather innocuous conclusion to Philip's declaration but obviously it was not innocuous to Nathanael. Let us now read **John 1:46 "And Nathanael said to him, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?'"** His response leads us to the second thing that we learn about Nathanael.

We learn that though Nathanael highly respected the Word of God his personal *prejudice* became an obstacle to his faith (1:46). Obviously Philip had some issue with the Messiah coming from Nazareth. What did he say? **"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"** But why was it an issue for Nathanael? Nathanael's skeptical question does not reflect, as far as it is presently known any widely held opinion of Nazareth. It certainly was not a famous town but it also certainly was not an infamous town either.

We should probably understand Nathanael's words as the utterance of a man who simply could not conceive of the Messiah coming from such an insignificant place. How was Nathanael prejudiced? Nathanael's prejudice was related to the disadvantaged, such as those from Nazareth, being *major players in the emergence of the Messiah.* Nathanael was unable to see how God could possibly use this hole in the wall kind of town to produce the Messiah. This feeling may have been accentuated by the fact that Nathanael's hometown, according to **John 21:2**, was Cana and therefore located only about 15 miles away from Nazareth. In other words, there may have been some inter-city rivalry that played into his statement as well.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Nathanael highly valued the scriptures but his prejudice toward the disadvantaged playing a major role in the emergence of the Messiah affected his objectivity.

When we are seeking to share Christ with our family, friends and acquaintances we need to remember that they may also, like Nathanael, have issues that they need to work through. It may not be the same kind of issue that Nathanael suffered from but their issues can be just as real.

How should we respond to people who are struggling with various issues related to Christ? Perhaps we should consider the example of Philip. How did he respond to Nathanael?

Let us again look at **John 1:46, "Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'" Rather than arguing with Nathanael, which is often times what Christians choose to do, he simply said to Nathanael, "Come and see."**

Those struggling with various issues such as prejudice must not only be given the opportunity to hear about Jesus but to "come and see" Jesus.

How can we do this? Obviously we cannot take people to Jesus in a literal sense. But we can walk in a manner worthy of the gospel and if we do this Jesus will be seen in and through our lives. Hopefully everyday when we get out of bed and seek to live for Christ we are providing an open invitation to the world around us to **"Come and see."**

So what will happen when Nathanael responds to Philip's invitation to come and see? Will his prejudice toward Nazareth prevent him from seeing Jesus clearly forever? Will this prejudice prove insurmountable? What will actually determine the answer to this question? It has everything to do with the condition of his heart.

Let me read for you **John 1:47-49, "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" (48) Nathanael said to Him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." (49) Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."** In these three verses we find the last thing we learn about Nathanael.

What is the third thing we learn about Nathanael in this passage? We learn that though Nathanael had an issue with prejudice, which threatened his faith, his sincere desire to please the Lord ultimately prevailed.

Let us now look more closely at these few verses. In John 1:47 we see Jesus' response when Philip brought Nathanael to Him. What did he say, **"Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!"** First of all what does Jesus mean when He says, **"Behold, an Israelite indeed?"** When Jesus declares that Nathanael was an Israelite indeed, He is simply saying that he has a heart to obey God (Romans 2:25-29). Paul makes this point for us in **Romans 2:25-29.**

And what does Jesus mean when He says, **"In whom there is no guile."** The word "guile" (DOLOS) occurs eleven times in the New Testament and conveys the meaning of trickery or cunning. If we were going to sum up exactly what Jesus was saying about Nathanael based on His

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

entire statement in **John 1:47** how would we sum up what he was saying? When Jesus described Nathanael He is simply saying that Nathanael's love for God was genuine and was free of hypocrisy.

Certainly Nathanael was human. He had faults. His mind was tainted with a degree of prejudice. But his heart was not poisoned by deceit. He was no hypocrite. His love for God and his desire to see the Messiah, were genuine.

If people's hearts are like Nathanael's they will ultimately come to the place where the truth that has been presented to them about Jesus will eventually make sense. Let me read for you **John 7:17, "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God."** This is a promise from Christ.

Perhaps Philip may have wondered whether or not Nathanael would change his mind about Jesus but Jesus had no doubt at all. Why? Nathanael's love for God was genuine and free of hypocrisy.

Let us now go on to **John 1:48, "Nathanael said to Him how do you know me?"** This is a reasonable response. Though it appears that Philip had probably met Jesus at some earlier point, it is very clear from what Nathanael says here that Jesus and Nathanael had never met. Nathanael is curious how He could know the condition of his heart. In fact he may have asked this question in a challenging tone, in essence saying, "How could You know me, we have never met!"

We see the response of Jesus to Nathanael's question in **John 1:48, "Jesus answered and said to him 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.'"** What was the significance of the fig tree? We may not specifically know the significance of the fig tree but it is clear that Nathanael did and viewed this knowledge of him as supernatural. At that very moment in time not only did his view of Nazareth suddenly change but his view of Jesus changed as well.

Let us look at **John 1:49, "Nathanael answered Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.'"** Nathanael went from questioning whether or not Jesus was the Messiah to speaking of Him in the highest terms available to him. What is the significance of the titles?

He begins with the title "rabbi" far more respectful than when he asked his earlier blunt question, "How do you know me?" But the other titles he assigns to Jesus go far beyond what any disciple would normally ascribe to his rabbi.

Let us look first of all look at the title "Son of God." When the Apostle John used a similar term to describe Jesus in **John 1:14** and **John 1:18** he left no doubt what he meant. He left no doubt that the only begotten from the Father was in fact the only begotten God. But the question here is not what John might have meant by this but rather what Nathanael might have meant when he uses this title to describe Jesus in **John 1:49**. And I believe that we would have to conclude that he was simply acknowledging Him as the Messiah.

Nathanael, in referring to Jesus as the Son of God, was not saying Jesus was God, he was simply repeating what the Old Testament taught about the Messiah (2 Samuel 7:14, Psalms 2:7). After the loftiest term that Nathaniel could pull up to describe the Messiah from the Old Testament, he goes to another very lofty title. He goes on to say, "**Rabbi, You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel.**"

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The title "King of Israel" was used by Palestinian Jews for the Messiah and was used during Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12:13).

This is kind of funny in a way. When Philip approached Nathanael earlier and told him that they had found the Messiah, Nathanael choked on this title being applied to Jesus since he had come from Nazareth. But now he is searching for the most grandiose terms possible to describe his newfound belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

And how does Jesus respond to Nathanael's fledgling expression of faith? Jesus responds by affirming his faith and promising that he would see even greater things than what he just witnessed. Listen to **John 1:50**, "**Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe: You shall see greater things than these.'**" There will be many more things that Nathanael will see that will assure him that Jesus is in fact the Messiah.

And then he goes on to elaborate what he means by this in **John 1:51**. Let me read this very last verse in this section to you, "**And He said to him (to Nathanael) 'Truly, truly, I say to you (meaning all my disciples), you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'**" What an interesting statement. But what does He mean by this statement?

Does this mean that Nathanael and the other future disciples of Christ will literally see the heavens opened and angels ascending and descending on Jesus who is referred to here as the Son of Man? This is not what it means.

There is no record of Christ's disciples literally seeing angels using Him as a ladder to ascend and descend to and from heaven. Christ's statement is figurative. But then what does it mean?

Christ's statement simply means that His future disciples with the eyes of faith will be able to see what Christ has pictured for them in John 1:51. This is what it means. And what has Christ pictured?

Christ is pictured in John 1:51 as actively providing for the needs of His disciples utilizing the resources of heaven which would even include the angels themselves. Would God actually dispatch angels to help us out? Let me read for you **Hebrews 1:14**, "**Are they not all (referring to angels) ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?**" Are there angels in this world today? Yes! What are they doing? They are ministering to us. How can this be possible? It is possible because we have become the disciples of Christ. The disciples of Christ hopefully with the eyes of faith, are continually being able to see His involvement in our lives.

CONCLUSION

How are the disciples of Christ constantly assured that their faith in Christ has not been misplaced? The disciples of Jesus are constantly assured that He is the Christ because they are able to see with the eyes of faith His loving and abiding care.