

I mentioned last week that from v19 to v51—John recounts the events of 4 consecutive days—on the third day (vv35-42)—John introduced us to the first 3 disciples—Andrew, the unnamed disciple (John himself), and Simon Peter—now in vv43-51 we are introduced to two more—Philip and Nathanael

- I. Jesus Finds Philip—vv43-44
- II. Philip Finds Nathanael—vv45-46
- III. Jesus Receives Nathanael—vv47-51

I. Jesus Finds Philip—vv43-44

1. V43—"The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, Follow Me..."
2. From v44 we learn he was from Bethsaida (lit. House of Fishing), and was likely a fisherman with Andrew and Simon...
3. Mark tells us in v43 that Jesus—"wanted to go to Galilee"—that is—to return to Galilee as He was now in Judea...
4. Bethsaida was a town located in Galilee—thus our Savior returned north for a specific reason—to call two more disciples...
5. Now one of the unique things about the calling of Philip is—Christ calls him directly without human assistance...
6. In fact—Mark simply says—"He found Philip and said to him, Follow Me"—that is—follow Me as a disciple...
7. Thus—what we find here in Philip is a beautiful example or illustration of what's referred to as—effectual calling...
8. [1] It's varied—that is—the manner in which Jesus calls His people to Himself differs in its specific particulars...
9. He called Andrew and John through the public preaching of the word (v37)—He called Simon through the personal witness of Andrew (v41)—He called Philip directly without the use of any means (v43)—He called Nathanael through the personal witness of Philip (v45)...
10. Yet—while the manner in which this calling comes varies—it is always with and through the word of God...
11. Oftentimes it's through the preaching of the word—sometimes it's through the personal witness of other Christians...
12. But then—sometimes Christ calls His disciples directly through the reading or meditation of the word of God...
13. But—my point here is this—while He always uses the word—the specifics of that call vary from person to person...
14. J.C. Ryle—"There are diversities of operations in the saving of souls. All true Christians are led by one Spirit, washed in one blood, serve one Lord, lean on one Savior, believe on truth, and walk by one general rule. But all are not converted in one and the same manner. All do not pass through the same experience. In conversion, the Holy Ghost acts as Sovereign. He calls every one severally as He will..."
15. I have mentioned this point many times over the years—simply because I want our children to understand this...
16. Christ always calls His people through the word, through the gospel, but the way in which He calls them varies...
17. Some of you have been called through the preaching, some of you through your parents instruction, others through your own reading and study...
18. Most of you, likely would confess, that you've been called through a combination of all three of these means...
19. [2] It's personal—that is—regardless the means Christ uses—Christ personally by His Spirit pursues and finds His people...

20. Now—here I need to remind you that—what our Savior did bodily while on earth—He does spiritual now by His Spirit...
21. Thus—by "personal" I mean—Christ Himself, in the effectual call, personally brings His people to Himself...
22. Just as Jesus "wanted to go to Galilee" in order to find Philip—in 1994 He wanted to go to MI to find Mike Waters...
23. Jn.10:16—"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd..."
24. Here our Savior speaks about the gathering of Gentile sinners—"them also I must bring"—that is—through the ministry of the church...
25. Thus—every time a sinner returns from the far country—our Savior found them just as much as He found Philip...
26. [3] It's effectual or irresistible—that is—regardless how Christ finds them—He will find them and they will follow...
27. In other words—Christ doesn't determine to go to Galilee to call someone—only to have His purposes frustrated...
28. Now—some weeks ago (in SS class), I reminded you of the distinction between the general and effectual call...
29. Jn.10:27—"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"—they will hear and follow Him...
30. A.W. Pink—"What a lovely illustration of His own declaration *'The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost'* (Lk.19:10). How it shows us the Good Shepherd going after this lone sheep of His! What we read of here is equally true of every case of genuine conversion. Whether the Lord uses a human instrument or not, it is Christ Himself who seeks out and finds each one who, subsequently, becomes His follower. Our seeking of Him is only the reflex action of His first seeking us, just as we love Him because He first loved us..."

II. Philip Finds Nathanael—vv45-46

1. V45—"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..."
2. How Philip is related to Nathanael we are not told—but apparently he at least knew him enough to seek him out...
3. No sooner did Jesus find Philip did Philip find Nathanael—"We have found Him"—technically Christ found him...
4. Notice who Philip found—"Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph..."
5. That is—the Messiah, the Christ—who was promised throughout the OT—both through prophecy and typology...
6. Now—concerning Nathanael—very little is known—many commentators equate him with Bartholomew the apostle...
7. I'll forgo the many reasons why most commentators believe this—other than to point out—Bartholomew isn't technically a name but description...
8. It literally means "Son of Tolmai"—and likely merely described who's son he is—he was the son of Tolmai...
9. Thus Nathanael is likely his actual name while Bartholomew is a description or identification of his family relations...
10. We find a similar thing with Simon, Matt.16:17—"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah"—Simon, son of Jonah...
11. Now—in v44 Philip described Christ as the Messiah foretold throughout the OT—and—"Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph..."
12. These later details, no doubt, were the result of Philip's recent knowledge—and not something learned from the OT...

13. Matt.2:23—"And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene..."
14. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, then taken to Egypt, and then relocated in Nazareth—where He lived until adulthood...
15. Now—the difficulty here is simply this—nowhere in the OT prophets—is the Messiah foretold to be from Nazareth...
16. Thus—almost most of the commentators suggest that Matthew refers to the prophecies of Christ's humble beginnings...
17. For example, Isa.53:2—"For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him..."
18. V46—"And Nathanael said to him, Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him, Come and see..."
19. [1] Jesus was a real man—He had a real father and He lived in a real village or town—He was a REAL man...
20. Now—I trust most of us understand—that when Philip describes Him as—"the son of Joseph"—that has to be understood in a qualified sense...
21. For the Scriptures elsewhere teach that Christ was conceived and born of the virgin Mary and thus had no earthly father in this sense...
22. Yet—Jesus was the son of Joseph in the sense that Joseph raised and provided for Christ—just as any father...
23. [2] Jesus was a lowly man—that is—the fact that He came from Nazareth was a part of humble and lowly condition...
24. V46—"And Nathanael said to him, Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him, Come and see..."
25. Now—I suggest it's likely that Nathanael wasn't meaning that Nazareth was a uniquely wicked or evil town...
26. But—he's simply confessing—that the humble town of Nazareth was an unlikely choice for the promised Messiah...
27. In other words—he's simply saying—surely the Messiah would never come from such humble and lowly beginnings...
28. Surely the Messiah would come from some exalted and esteemed place—no doubt a place like—Jerusalem...
29. [3] Jesus was a glorious man—now, I take this lesson from Philip's response in v46—"Philip said to him, Come and see..."
30. That is—if you're not sure that Jesus is who He is—then simply come and see—taste and see that the Lord is good...
31. Come and see—He's the ONE Moses and the Prophets foretold—He's the ONE the entire OT points to and anticipates...
32. J.C. Ryle—"Christ is the sum and substance of the OT. To Him the earliest promises pointed in the days of Adam, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. To Him every sacrifice pointed in the ceremonial worship appointed at Mount Sinai. Of Him every high priest was a type, and every part of the tabernacle was a shadow, and every judge and deliverer of Israel was a figure. He was the prophet like unto Moses, whom the Lord God promised to send, and the King of the house of David, who came to be David's Lord as well as son. He was the Son of the virgin, and the Lamb, foretold by Isaiah—the righteous Branch mentioned by Jeremiah—the true Shepherd, foreseen by Ezekiel—the Messenger of the Covenant, promised by Malachi—and the Messiah, who, according to Daniel, was to be cut off, though not for Himself. The further we read in the volume of the OT, the clearer do we find the testimony about Christ..."

III. Jesus Receives Nathanael—vv47-51

A. His character—v47

1. V47—"Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit..."
2. Now—the first question that needs answering is—When was Nathanael actually converted—when was his heart changed...
3. Well—we simply do not know—but we do know—when our Savior looks upon him—his heart had been changed...
4. We saw this same difficulty with regards to the two disciples of v37—who were already disciples of John the Baptist...
5. When precisely these men were converted isn't easy to tell—and in some sense—it really doesn't make any difference...
6. Our Savior looks upon Nathanael and describes him—as a man who was truly anticipating the promised Messiah...
7. Now—our Savior actually makes a beautiful play on the name Jacob by using two related words—Israelite and deceit...
8. The name "Israel" finds its beginnings in the OT with Jacob—remember Jacob's name was changed to Israel...
9. Now the name Jacob means "supplanter or usurper"—it has reference to Jacob's—natively deceitful nature...
10. Gen.25:25-26—"And the first came out red. *He was* like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau [hairy]. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob [supplanter]..."
11. Gen.27:35-36—"But he said, Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing. And Esau said, Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times..."
12. Gen.32:28—"And He said, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel [he who strives with God]; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed..."
13. Thus—what our Savior is saying is this—Nathanael was a true Israelite in whom there was no Jacob or deceit...
14. [1] This implies a powerful work of God—this statement is amazing—our Savior says He was without deceit...
15. Now—obviously this doesn't mean that he was sinless and without any sin—but that deceit no longer reigned...
16. This must be compared to what man is by nature, Rom.3:13—"their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit..."
17. By nature our hearts are full of deceit and lies—we are deceived and deceiving—selfish, self-centered, self-seeing...
18. Oh—my friends—what a powerful and mighty work of God is salvation—salvation from the guilt and power of sin...
19. Ps.32:1-2—"Blessed is *he whose* transgression is forgiven, *Whose sin is* covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit *there is* no deceit..."
20. [2] This describes the true people of God—our Savior describes Nathanael as an Israelite indeed—a true Israelite...
21. Rom.2:28-29—"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God..."

B. His testimony—vv48-49

1. Notice—two things with regards to the testimony or confession of Nathanael—[1] its cause, and [2] its content...
2. [1] Its cause, v48—"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..."
3. That is—our Savior reveals to Nathanael—that as God He knows all things—He knew what he did and thought...

4. Now—what Nathanael was doing under the tree—isn't told us—it's been suggested he was wrestling with God...
5. Alexander Maclaren—"Under the fig-tree, Nathanael must have been wrestling in prayer; under the fig-tree he must have been confessing his sins; under the fig-tree he must have been longing and looking for the Deliverer who was to *'turn away ungodliness from Jacob'...*"
6. But whatever it was—our Savior saw it—He was able to read His heart and know His thoughts—He saw Him...
7. Jn.4:15—"The woman said to Him Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw. Jesus said to her, Go, call your husband, and come here. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, You have well said, I have no husband, for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke well..."
8. Jn.4:39—"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, He told me all that I *ever* did..."
9. 1Cor.14:25—"And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you..."
10. Heb.4:12-13—"For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must* give account..."
11. [2] Its content, v49—"Nathanael answered and said to Him, Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel..."
12. This twofold confession identifies Christ as both God and the Messiah—He's the divine King greater than David...

C. His privilege—vv50-51

1. V50—"Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these..."
2. In other words—Nathanael understood who Christ was based upon His divine knowledge—but he, along with the other disciples—would see great things than these...
3. V51—"Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angles of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man..."
4. Now—here our Savior returns to Jacob and the book of Genesis—but this time to chapter 28 and Jacob's dream...
5. Gen.28:12-17—"Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. 14 Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I *am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you. 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know *it*. 17 And he was afraid and said, How awesome *is* this place! This *is* none other than the house of God, and *this is the gate of heaven...*"
6. Now—let me suggest very simply—that Christ Himself is the ladder—the house of God—the gate to heaven...
7. [a] Ladder of God—a ladder is a means of getting from one lower place to a higher place—from earth to heaven...
8. Throughout John's gospel—our Savior refers to Himself as—"He who was from heaven and came down from heaven..."
9. After His crucifixion and resurrection—He returned back to heaven—to send upon His people the Holy Spirit...
10. [b] House of God—a house a place of fellowship and family—it's only in Christ that man and God are reconciled...

11. [c] Gate of heaven—Christ is the door or gate into heaven—nobody comes to the Father except through Him...
12. Yet—I suggest to you—that what Jesus is specifically referring to in v51—is His ascension and gift of the Spirit...
13. Now—this of course presupposes or includes His incarnation, perfect life, earthy ministry, death, and resurrection...
14. Dan.7:13-14—"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, *One* like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom *the one* which shall not be destroyed..."
15. Jn.14:12—"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father..."
16. Acts 1:9-11—"Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven..."
17. If Nathanael's faith was strengthened because he witnessed Christ's omniscience—then just wait until He sees the miracles, life, death, resurrection, ascension, gift of the Spirit, and subsequent—calling of the Gentiles...
18. [1] God provides salvation—that is—God Himself sends His Son as the Ladder to bridge heaven and earth...
19. In the beginning heaven and earth were together (ch.1)—but because of the fall (ch.2)—thee two have been separated...
20. Yet—what happens in chapter 3—God promises to send a Ladder—a Mediator to bring God and man together...
21. Let me illustrate—think of a family trapped on their housetop—because their entire house is engulfed in flames...
22. The fire department directs one of those large crane-ladders to the rooftop—and then shout up to the family—climb out by the ladder...
23. This is what God has done in the gospel—He's provided a ladder that man would escape this doomed world...
24. Oh my poor sinner friend—perhaps you've become increasingly concerned for the condition of your soul.....
25. Perhaps you've begun to seek the Lord in private—I want you to know something—He sees and He knows...
26. He sees you beneath the fig-tree—perhaps in your bedroom or the basement—He sees your growing concern...
27. [2] God ensures salvation—while it's true He's provided a ladder for ALL to use—He's actually done more...
28. For—there's something I failed to mention about this illustration—the family is unconscious because of the smoke...
29. Thus—God doesn't merely send the ladder to the rooftop and tell everyone to use it—He Himself comes on the roof and finds His people...
30. Christ has come into this world to seek and save that which is lost—He has come to find His lost beloved sheep...