

## CAN GOOD COME OUT OF NAZARETH?

John 1:43-51 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

As we come to this transition in Jesus' beginning days of public ministry, Jesus decided to go to Galilee, John 1:43 tells us, leaving the area of Bethany across the Jordan, called by historians, Batanea—Bashan in the Old Testament, just across the Jordan River from Galilee, about 20 miles from Cana of Galilee. Jesus' beginning ministry was here in this wilderness area across the Jordan in Decapolis/specifically in Batanea/the other Bethany, not the one in Judaea where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived near Jerusalem. Not long before Jesus was crucified, when the Jewish leaders sought to arrest Jesus, John 10:40 tells us "He went away across the Jordan, back to this place where John had been baptizing at first and there He remained, until in John 11, He got the message of Lazarus being sick. From one Bethany/Batanea beyond the Jordan to the other well-known Bethany, Jesus arrived 4 days after Lazarus died. That's where Jesus performed His greatest sign before the cross, before His own rising from the dead. In those last days of Jesus' ministry, we read in John 10:41-42, "And many came to Him. And they said, John (the Baptist) did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true. And many believed in Him (that's Jesus) there in Batanea.

Our text today begins by saying, "The next day, Jesus decided to go to Galilee." I don't feel ready to go on straight on to Galilee, without stopping to say some last words about John the Baptist, and his parents, Zechariah, and Elizabeth. A few words about John the Baptist's parents, I believe are a great beginning to this message, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" God loves to surprise us with the seemingly impossible, with double doses of unexpected hope, out of seemingly nothing—out of emptiness. According to Mayo Clinic, between 10-15% of all couples in the United States struggle with infertility, with barrenness. That means at least 1 in 10 couples in our country have at some point found themselves in the same boat as Zechariah and Elizabeth. According to the 2020 census, there were 62 million married couples in the US. This means that two years ago, 12.4 million people in the US were touched by the disappointment, pain, and grief, of being unable to conceive and bear children. If all these struggling couples lived in one city, it would be the 26th most populous city in the world. Dr. Dennis Moles, a pastor and university professor in Michigan wrote this past year, "This city of struggling couples would be one of the largest cities in North America." Imagine 12 and a half million image bearers of God who feel the crushing grief of being unable to carry out the first human mandate of God, in Genesis 1: 28, "Be fruitful and multiply!" We are going to be preaching on the subject today, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Interestingly, Jesus' forerunner had parents who were elderly and barren? Could anything good come out of emptiness, an empty womb, an empty nursery, an empty house, and out of empty hopes? We can all understand why Zechariah was dumbfounded when the angel Gabriel announced he and his wife, Elizabeth would bear a son. Miracles only happen when we like Zechariah and Elizabeth allow God to fill the empty spaces in our lives in His time and in His way. It only happens when we learn to embrace God's presence amid the absence of our desires being fulfilled.

Now with these thoughts about a once empty womb and the empty expectations of anything coming out of Nazareth, from the virgin womb of Mary, let's turn to our text today, in John 1: 43-51. From this moment of Jesus being baptized, overcoming temptation in the wilderness, being announced by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, to His choosing of Andrew and Peter and James and John to be His disciples to now deciding to go to Galilee, Jesus is now the center of John's Gospel, the Hub of the wheel of the Gospel. Every part of all of life centers in Jesus. Let me remind you,

“Jesus acquired His name by inheritance, divinely begotten of love; His name was bestowed upon Him from the heart of our Father God. Jesus received His Name by conquest. Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His Name through His blood, His death, burial, and miraculous resurrection. He has given that name to us and He has written His name upon us. Demons are helpless at the sound of that Name, Jesus, for they still remember Jesus puts them to shame. All hell trembles at the Name of Jesus, and heaven stands at attention, when we mention His Name, Jesus. God has given Him a Name above every name, and every knee must bow to His Name. He's seated at His Father's right hand. Jesus gave us the key to pray effectually, by using His Name in prayer. With the court of high heaven watching over us and in the presence of God, we stand in Jesus' Name. Jesus gave us authority to pray and testify in His Name, ever since the day we became new creatures in His Name. Thank God there is power in Jesus' Name. I want us to make four discoveries in our text today by studying this exciting portion of God's Word. These four amazing discoveries made by Philip and Nathanael can also be made by each of us.

### **IN CHRIST IS THE INVITATION WHICH WILL CHANGE OUR LIVES.**

v. 43-44. (I.) “The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “**Follow Me!**” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.” Bethsaida is on east side of the Jordan River at the north side of the sea of Galilee—this is the area known as Batanea/or Bethany beyond the Jordan, less than five miles from Capernaum, Jesus' home away from his original home in Nazareth. Andrew and Peter were also from Bethsaida. Some historians believe James and John were from this important city, rebuilt by Philip the tetrarch in honor of Julia, the daughter of Caesar Augustus. In Bethsaida, Jesus healed a blind man by spitting on his eyes and laying his hands on him. (Mark 8:23) Bethsaida, like Kansas City, Kansas/Missouri (on either side of the Missouri River) was on both sides of the Jordan River on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Both sides of the city are spoken of in the New Testament, but the east side was the largest side of the city. Much of Jesus' ministry in Judaea was where bigotry and the despising of Jesus was the greatest. But Galilee of the Gentiles was the land of Jews and Gentiles. Matthew 4:12-17 tells the story of this territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, spoken of in Isaiah 9: 1-2, 6-7. Listen as I read it. Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah as He called Philip, saying, “**Follow Me.**” This call of Jesus was not just a call for Philip to join him en route to Cana of Galilee. It was Jesus' call for Philip to become His own disciple. Philip joyfully surrendered to His call. Jesus' invitation to us of “Follow Me,” is no less life changing today than when He

called Philip. Any invitation of Jesus we respond to, is never Jesus inviting us to help us out, to reform us, to heal us physically, or to give us a happier life. No, never! Jesus' invitation is to change our lives by cleansing us from sin through His precious blood and thereby to make us His disciples. If we have not been cleansed from sin and transformed within our spirits into a life of obeying Jesus, we have not yet accepted His invitation of "Follow Me." I ask you, "Have you accepted this life-changing invitation in Christ, the Hub of life, "Follow Me!?" Secondly,

### **IN CHRIST IS THE APOLOGETIC THAT DEFEATS ALL ARGUMENTS.**

v. 45-46. (II.) 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." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus was on the move now, and He traveled with Philip, Andrew, Peter, James, and John to Cana of Galilee, which was a short two-day journey of eighteen miles. Notice that Philip couldn't keep the good news to himself. As the commentator Frederick Louis Godet wrote in 1885, "One lighted torch serves to light another. So, Philip went and found another—apparently a dear friend, Nathanael. John 21: 2 lets us know Nathanael too was a fisherman, as were at least seven of the Lord's disciples. Fisherman are courageous, and to be successful, they have to stick to their job, their work, their livelihood, no matter what the weather is like, or how seldom the fish bite, or how fruitless a night of fishing with nets can be. This new would-be disciple called Nathanael is never found in the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but only in John. Rather, we find, in Nathanael's place, Bartholomew. Look at the list of the disciples in Mt. 10:3 and Mark 3: 18, and there is no name of Nathanael. But in Luke 6:14, in Luke's list we find the clue as we read Philip and Bartholomew. This name, Bartholomew is a patronymic name, like Johnson, son of John, Carlson, son of Carl, and Bartholomew, Bar Tholmai/Ptolemy, son of Tholmai. This 6th disciple of Jesus went by two names like Judas Iscariot. Nathanael was his first name, and Bartholomew referred to his legal name by birth—his dad's name.

Notice this introduction of Jesus to Nathanael by Philip. "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth." Up to that last word, of Nazareth, Nathanael was on board. Nathanael knew the Old Testament, and he knew of no mention of Messiah from the prophets. Philip's next two words were more than doubtful or skeptical, they were contemptuous. Nazareth had a bad name in Galilee. Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, probably knew of the rivalry of towns and villages, as Nazareth was a nearby rival village 9-10 miles away, and as far as he knew, nothing good was known to come from Nazareth. But to make matters worse, Philip said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Philip was speaking of Jesus' legal status as the son of His stepfather Joseph, though His true father was God the Father. Philip was wise, and he didn't answer politically, or geographically, or culturally, nor did he argue Nathanael's point. The apologetic of Philip was not an attempt to defend his testimony, but simply, a repeat of Jesus' words, "Come and see." Nathanael had a good point, for where did the Old Testament prophets mention Nazareth. There are other places mentioned like Hebron, Shiloh, Gibeon, Carmel, Ramah, Bethel, and though Jesus

was born in Bethlehem, he grew up 65 miles north of Jerusalem in Nazareth, an obscure, despised little village. Philip didn't want to argue, but he must have known that the only way to convince a man of the supremacy of Christ is to confront him with Christ. Argument and debate don't often draw people to Jesus, but they often do more harm than good. Dr. Thomas Henry Huxley, born in 1825, died in 1895, was an English biologist, anthropologist, and he was known as Charles Darwin's bulldog, pushing the belief not of God but of evolution. This most well-known agnostic once at a house party spoke to a church member and said to him on Saturday night, "Don't go to church tomorrow. Stay home and tell me why you are a Christian." The man replied, "You would demolish my arguments in an instant. I am not clever to argue like you." Huxley replied, "I don't want to argue with you. I just want you to tell me what this Christ means to you." The man stayed home and spent the morning telling Thomas Huxley of his faith in the Lord Jesus. Huxley now had tears in his eyes. He told the man, "I would give my right hand if only I could believe that." The apologetic of "Come and see,"—the simple presentation of Jesus had caught Huxley by the heart. How I wish there was a record Thomas Huxley came to Jesus. The only true evangelist is the man who himself knows Christ and can say to the lost, "Come and see!" The best apologetic is the question of the hymnwriter, Elisha S. Hoffman who wrote, (1878) "Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour? "Come and see!" Thirdly,

### **IN CHRIST IS THE VISION THAT SEES INTO OUR DEEPEST HEARTS.**

v. 47-48. (III.) Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." In spite of Nathanael's doubts about a person from Nazareth being his Messiah, he came to see Jesus for himself. As Nathanael came to within earshot of Jesus talking to his other four disciples, he heard Jesus say, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit." What a tribute! In Psalm 32:2 David testified, "Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and in whose spirit, there is no guile/deceit." What a tribute. Nathanael knew about Isaiah's words in Isaiah 53:9 about Messiah who would bear our transgressions and it says, "And there was no deceit in His mouth." What a tribute to Nathanael's integrity. It cost Nathanael a good bit of swallowing his pride to come and see a man from Nazareth. Jesus knew the cost, and He rejoiced that here came a man who was absolutely sincere about Israel's hope and salvation. Jesus words touched the very nerve centers of the desires and hopes of Nathanael, and to think he had never met him before. It astonished Nathanael and he replied, "How do you know me?" What a searching question; haven't you asked the same of Jesus?

Jesus' answer was penetrating, and it showed Nathanael the all-seeing eyes of Jesus. Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Jesus now had seen into Philip's heart, and into his deepest longings for Messiah to come. This sounds like what the Samaritan woman told the townspeople about Jesus. "He told me everything I ever did. Is this not the Christ?" There is a mystery Jesus left with Nathanael when He said, "I saw you under the

fig tree.” It was the custom of devoted Jewish men and women to pray daily in a secluded place, under one of the many fig trees of the land. Just know Jesus was not guessing with Nathanael. This mention of something earlier that day for Nathanael pierced his heart. The Jews often prayed for Messiah to come. Here Jesus was saying, “I saw you praying for Me to come; I am the fulfillment of the deepest longings of your heart. This reminds me of David in Psalm 139:1 and 6. “O Lord, You have searched me and known me!...Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high; I cannot attain it.” Where did Jesus see you today? Was there deceit in what you were doing and seeing? He saw you/me! Fourthly,

### **IN CHRIST IS THE GIFT OF FAITH WITH UNBELIEVABLE REWARDS.**

v. 49-51. (IV.) Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel.” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, “I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.” 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.” Nathanael now surrendered his heart to Jesus’ gift of faith. He capitulated, thinking, “This man, Messiah sees into my most intimate and secret longings that I’ve never dared to put into words. He knows every sigh of my soul. He understands my dreams. He hears and answers my prayers. Nathaniel blurted it out. “Rabbi (Teacher) You are the Son of God!” What a confession! We can’t tone it down. Nathanael had Jesus take his contempt away and Jesus drew him by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we trust in Jesus and become His disciple, acknowledging the truth of who He really is, He rewards our faith. Jesus said to Him, “Because I said to you, “I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe?” Jesus said, “I’m going to reveal greater things to you.”

Here's where I envision that Jesus smiled as He heard Philip confess that He was the Son of God. Now Jesus said something strange, saying that the greater things would center on Jesus calling Himself the Son of Man. The word, “Son of man was one of the Lord’s favorite titles for Himself. It is used 83 times in the four Gospels, and 13 times in John’s Gospel. This title speaks of both the deity and humanity of Jesus in His being Messiah. As the Son of Man, Jesus is the “living link” between heaven and earth. This explains Jesus’ reference to Jacob’s ladder in Genesis 28. Jacob, the deceitful fugitive from his angry brother Esau, thought he was all alone, but God sent His angels to guard and guide him. Jesus was telling Nathanael that He was Jacob’s ladder between heaven and earth. Remember Jesus said in John 14: 6, “No one comes to the Father but by Me.” John often mentions that Jesus said He came down from heaven. He was and He yet is God come in the flesh! I’ll sing!

Nathanael’s question still remains, as it shows up in a beautiful song David Ingles wrote in 1976. (1) “In Mark one twenty-five Jesus set a man free, saying, Hold thy peace. He shut the spirit up by the power of the Word. He came out of him. A leper came to Him, asking of Him, “If you will. I can be clean.” Jesus said, “I will,” put forth His hand, touched him and he was made clean. Chorus: If anybody here knows anything good about Jesus of Nazareth, step right up and tell it so the people will know. The call goes out in this same hour, who will go forth with His Word and power? Who shall His generation declare? Jesus is the Son of God! (2)

In the house Jesus was preaching the Word, the place was full; four brought a sick one but couldn't get in except thru the roof. They let down the bed wherein the sick lay While the preachers made a fuss to Jesus that day, but He said to the man, "Arise and walk, and thy sins are forgiven of thee" Chorus: (3) Jesus entered into the synagogue again on the Sabbath day; He said unto the man who had a withered hand, "Stand forth!" And when He looked around with sorrow He grieved, at the hard-hearted people, at their unbelief; But He said to the man, "Stretch forth thy hand! It became just as good as the other." Chorus: Beloved, in Christ is the invitation which will change our lives—**Follow Me**. In Christ is the apologetic that defeats all arguments—**Come and see**. In Christ is the vision that sees into our deepest hearts—**I saw you**. In Christ is the gift of faith with unbelievable rewards—**You shall see greater things than these**. Amen!