

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #10

John 1:43-51

John chapter 1 is unlike any other chapter you will ever read in the entire Bible. If you look carefully at it, you will observe that **there are twenty-one names or titles given to Jesus Christ**, which are not said of any other person who ever walked on this earth. The list is so comprehensive that there is no other chapter in the entire Bible that begins to compare. These titles are both Divine and Majestic: **1) The Word (v. 1); 2) The God (v. 1); 3) The Creator (v. 3); 4) The Life (v. 4); 5) The Light (v. 4); 6) The Only True Light (v. 9); 7) The Only begotten from the Father (v. 14); 8) The One Full of Grace and Truth (v.14); 9) The Highest ranked Person who always existed (v. 15); 10) The Only begotten God (v. 18); 11) The Lord (v. 23); 12) Jesus (v. 29); 13) The Lamb of the God (v. 29); 14) The Son of God (v. 34); 15) Rabbi (v. 38); 16) Messiah (v. 41); 17) Christ (v. 41); 18) Jesus of Nazareth (v. 45); 19) Jesus of Joseph (v. 45); 20) The King of Israel (v. 49); 21) The Son of Man (v. 51).**

It is obvious just by these appellations that the Person described here is the greatest Person ever to walk on this planet. John was Christ's best friend and yet he wanted everyone to know that his best friend was Almighty God. Jesus Christ was not just some ordinary man, He was the Sovereign God. What Christ continually did and what Christ continually said continually proved He was Deity. This is why men of sound minds committed their lives to Him. This is why even some who were skeptical eventually came to believe in Him. I do not know of any who are less gullible than professional hunters and fishermen. Typically these kinds of people are very fact oriented because their lives and livelihood depend on it. They carefully study data concerning their species. They know the best times and places to hunt or fish. They are careful with their equipment and they are very safety conscious for one wrong move can spell disaster. That is why when you see a large number of fishermen, who typically are very skeptical of things, believing on Jesus Christ, there must be tremendous evidence to convince them. As we come to this part of the life of Jesus Christ we come to a portion of Scripture that is designed to communicate to us much of this evidence:

JESUS CHRIST CONTINUALLY PROVED THAT HE WAS GOD EVEN BY HIS SELECTION OF DISCIPLES, SOME OF WHOM WERE VERY SKEPTICAL.

Jesus Christ continually convinced people that He was much more than just an average human. His very selection of disciples establishes this. There are two main doubters that Christ had in his discipleship team. One was a doubter at the beginning of His public ministry - Nathanael. The other was a doubter at the end of His public ministry - Thomas. Both ended up being totally convinced that Jesus Christ was God. He is the Savior of the world and He is the King of Israel.

Now the majority of these verses deal with a man whose name in John is Nathanael. **This man Nathanael is referred to in the other synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) by the name Bartholomew.** We are not certain why the name change, but we can be certain that Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same for the following reasons: **1) He appears here in John among the others who became apostles. 2) In three of the four lists of the twelve apostles, the man named Bartholomew shows up next to Philip, which indicates he was closely connected to Philip (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14). 3) John never mentions Bartholomew, but mentions the**

others plus Nathanael. 4) The synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke) never mention Nathanael, but mention the others plus Bartholomew. We conclude that Nathanael and Bartholomew are one and the same person. Kind of like Peter-Cephas-Simon which all refer to the same person.

Now these verses present the story of how Nathanael came to realize who Jesus Christ was. There are four key steps in bringing the skeptical Nathanael to faith in Jesus Christ:

STEP #1 – Jesus finds Philip and invites him to follow Him. 1:43-44

"The next day" is day 5 of John's account of the public ministry of Jesus Christ. On the fifth day, Christ had decided to move to Galilee, located about 100 miles to the north of where He was. Jesus had come out of Galilee from the north into Judea to the south where He met John and was baptized by John (Matthew 3:1, 13). After His baptism, He decided to move back north into Galilee. This north shore area of Galilee featured many fishing villages. Just think of this for a moment, you have the Creator of the Sun, Moon, Stars, Universe, Galaxies, Angelic Life, Animal life, Human life walking around a Lake, walking down dusty roads and paths and allowing people to meet Him. What a staggering reality.

Now Philip was from Bethsaida (noun means "house of fishing") which was on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee in Galilee (John 12:21). Philip must have been in the vicinity of John, along the Jordon, when he had his first encounter with Jesus Christ. Now there are three facts we want to bring out:

(Fact #1) - Philip went to where God's word was being proclaimed. 1:43

Philip had traveled quite a ways from Bethsaida to Judea. More than likely he had traveled with Andrew and Peter to see John because they were all from the same city (1:44). It was about twenty miles as the crow flies from Bethsaida to where John was, so it would have been a good day's journey. Now Bethsaida was known for its fishing industry. **In fact, based on John 21:2-3, we may assume that seven of the disciples of Jesus Christ were fishermen**. When verbal attacks were first made against Christianity one of the things alleged about the apostles was that they were unlearned men, only fishing guys from Galilee (Acts 2:7; 4:13). They were not Biblical scholars. These first disciples were probably all friends and all fishermen who came to faith in Jesus Christ. Truth is the greatest friendships we will ever form are friendships based on following Jesus Christ. There is nothing wrong with forming friendships based on interests - fishing, hunting, occupation - but those friendships will always be best in Christ.

If you are going to become something for God, you must go to where God's chosen servants are proclaiming God's Word. Jesus would have never called someone to powerful service who refused to go to where God's Word was being proclaimed. He learned that there was a powerful voice preaching God's Word, his name was John and he wanted to hear him and learn from him so he went and it was in this context where God called him. God will do far more for you and with you in the context of being faithful in a local church than if you stay home. God does still mightily call people and develop people in this context of the church.

(Fact #2) - Jesus found Philip. 1:43a

The original text is very clear on this point - **Philip did not find Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ found Philip**. This was not some accidental discovery by Jesus Christ, this was sovereignly designed and calculated by Him. Jesus is not the one lost, Philip is. The word "found" is a Greek word which means to find without any previous search (G. Abbott Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 188). In other words, Christ was not out searching and looking and hoping He could find Philip, He knew exactly where He was and He found him at precisely the moment He decided.

The verb "found" is present tense. This is an aoristic present, which means Christ found Philip at a point in time and yet the action or event was in the process of occurring when it happened. Listen, if you know Jesus Christ as Savior, He found you because you were the one lost. You didn't find Him. Jesus found Philip.

(Fact #3) - Jesus invited Philip to follow Him. 1:43b

It is one thing to be called by God to salvation, it is another to be called by God to apostleship. Jesus invited Philip to discipleship and apostleship. **The "follow Me" formula is a peculiar call given to one to become a disciple, while Jesus was physically here on earth.** The Greek word used here in regard to Philip (ακολουθεω) is one that specifically is an invitation to follow Christ in discipleship (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 17). This same word was used in calling Matthew (Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27); it was used in the context of those who hanging around Christ thinking they might want to be a disciple ((Matt. 8:22; 19:21; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23; 18:22). It was used in regard to Peter (John 20:22). In the famous text where Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James and John by saying "follow me and I will make you fishers of men," Jesus uses a different Greek word (δευτε οπισω) which literally means "you come on here and get behind me" and I will make you fishers of men. **You will observe that the noun "disciple" is never used in the Church Epistles. We may also observe that the same discipleship verb "follow me" is not used in the Church Epistles.** The Apostle Peter uses a similar verb one time in I Peter 2:21 in which he says believers should be willing to "follow after" (επακολουθεω) Christ in the sense of being willing to suffer. Jesus applies the "follow me" verb to any who want to be His servant (John 12:26). **The critical dispensational point to see from this is that today one cannot walk around and say "I'm following Jesus" apart from the Word of God and the Church.** Once the Church Epistles had been written, the idea of following the Lord is the idea of obeying the Word, specifically in regard to Church Truth.

In any calling, it is God who does the inviting. You do not invite yourself to anything pertaining to God. The invitation comes from God. The spiritual gifts come from God. He invites us. Notice again Philip is from Bethsaida, a fishing village, so Jesus is specifically choosing several of His disciples who were fishermen from Galilee, not the scholars out of Jerusalem.

Think of what is actually happening here - the same voice that said "Let there be light" now says "Follow me." The only question for Philip is whether he will follow Him. That is the only question for us as well. If Jesus Christ calls a fisherman from Galilee to follow Him, then surely He will call some from Kalamazoo to do the same. Jesus loves to call factory workers, farmers, school teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, boys and girls to follow Him. Those who believe in Jesus Christ and purpose to understand and obey the Word of God specifically in regard to Church Age Truth, will behold wonderful things and be used wonderfully by God.

It is a privilege to serve God. It is a privilege to be a child of God. But whatever our gifts and abilities are, they are all a calling of God. God sovereignly chose us, we did not choose Him. John makes that clear right in the beginning (i.e. John 1:13).

STEP #2 – Philip finds Nathanael and invites him to come to Christ. 1:45-46

As we said last week, every newborn baby has a natural desire to cry out. As soon as Philip came to faith in Jesus Christ, he went and got his buddy Nathanael. He started witnessing to Nathanael and it is a masterpiece for witnessing. Notice what Philip did - notice the action:

(Action #1) - Philip personally went to Nathanael. 1:45a

Nathanael lived in Cana of Galilee (John 21:2), which was less than five miles from Nazareth. In fact, tradition says he is the bridegroom in Cana in John 2 and one of the two on the road to Emmaus (William Van Doren, *John*, p. 122).

Philip personally went to Nathanael to talk to him about Jesus Christ. We are not responsible for a person believing or rejecting Christ, but we are responsible for a person hearing about Jesus Christ. Our responsibility is to tell others about Jesus Christ. One of the best things you can do is invite people you care about to come to this church where they will hear the absolute truth about Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

(Action #2) - Philip personally witnesses the truth about Jesus Christ. 1:45b

Philip said, “we” (Andrew, Peter, John and Philip) have found Him and we have identified Him. According to Dr. Van Doren, Nathanael was very skilled in understanding O.T. law (Ibid, p. 122). Philip tells him that Jesus is the One Moses wrote about in the Law. Jesus is the One the Prophets predicted would come in the O.T. Jesus of Nazareth, Joseph's son is the One all of the sacrifices point to. He is the One and we have found Him. The reason why he brings up the fact that He is the son of Joseph is because Philip is telling Nathanael that the Jesus of Nazareth, the One who was supposedly Joseph's son, was God. Jesus, that supposed carpenter's son, was our Savior and Messiah.

Now Nathanael was skeptical (v. 46). When he heard that Jesus was the son of Joseph out of Nazareth, he said - can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Dr. Harry Ironside said in 1942 that if the Nazareth of today, with its filthy streets, resembles the Nazareth of old, it is no wonder that Nathanael asked this question (*John*, p. 68). Nazareth was a city of Jews and Gentiles and it wasn't particularly known for Biblical scholarship or sophistication. Nazareth wasn't a bad place to live. It was a nice, small mountain village that is surrounded by hills which rise 400-500 feet. It has a relatively mild climate year around and there is the “Fountain of the Virgin” which supposedly is the place where Mary received a message from the Angel. Its population today is some 40,000 to 50,000 people comprised largely of Muslims and Christians. In fact, tourists go there to see the supposed place where Mary's house was located and where Joseph's carpenter shop was (Merrill Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 907). The houses are made of stone and the streets are narrow, about six feet wide. It is not that Nathanael is saying it is such a creepy, lousy and bad place to live.

The adjective "good" is the Greek word "agathos" (αγαθος) which particularly has in mind moral and internal excellence (Smith, p. 2). The Jews specifically despised Nazareth because there was a Roman Garrison headquartered there. How can moral perfection and moral excellence come out of Nazareth? Since Nathanael was from Galilee, he knew the true state of things in a town like Nazareth. How is it possible for Jesus, a guy from Nazareth, to be the fulfillment of all the O.T. law and the One predicted by all of the O.T. prophets? You would naturally expect that this One would come out of Jerusalem, not Nazareth. He may have even conceded He could have come out of the eloquence of Athens or the pomp and power of Rome, but not Nazareth.

By the way, something good obviously did come out of Nazareth and thousands of people have visited it in the past 1900 years. People travel from all over the world just to see this town today. God has His ways of transforming the reputation of any city or any person from dishonor to honor.

But what we have here is Philip being face to face with a Jewish skeptic. Now carefully watch what he does:

(Action #3) - Philip invites Nathanael to come to Christ and see. 1:46

This is one of the best things you can do when you sense you are presenting the truth to a skeptic. Without any major argument of discussion, look them in the face and say, "Come to Christ and See." In other words, you invite Jesus Christ into your life to be your Savior and see whether or not He proves to be God who comes into your life and revolutionizes it. Come to Christ and see if He can really take away your sin, remove your guilt and burdens and give you a meaningful life. Come and See for yourself.

Not many people have ever been argued into Christianity. The best remedy against preconceived ideas about Christ is the "Come and See" remedy. Had Nathanael refused to go see, he would have missed the greatest moment of his life. If any person refuses to go and see, they will miss the greatest event of their life.

STEP #3 – Jesus brings Nathanael to the place of full belief. 1:47-51

If ever there were a text that presents the proof of the Omniscience of Jesus Christ as God it is this one. From this text, we surmise the following. Nathanael had been sitting under a fig tree thinking about the story of Jacob, who was a Jewish deceiver who tricked his brother Esau out of his birthright, who later wrestled with God and permitted him to see angels ascending and descending (Genesis 28:12). Now when Jesus saw Nathanael, here is what He does:

(Action #1) - He identifies Nathanael as an Israelite. 1:47a

Nathanael was not a Pharisaical phony. He was a real Israelite. He really did want to know truth and know God. There are two types of Israelites: 1) Those who want a relationship with God, those who really want a pure heart (Psalm 73:1); 2) Those who think they already have a relationship with God and already have a pure heart. By using the term "Israelite" we may link this to Jacob (who is Israel), as the next clause clearly does. God does great work with people honest with Him.

(Action #2) - He informs Nathanael that He knew him internally. 1:47b

In Nathanael there was no guile. Notice Jesus does not say “no guilt,” but “no guile.” The word guile means no deceit, no cunning like Jacob. Nathanael was a forthright man. He was honest. He was a straight shooter. One who was truth oriented and fact oriented. There was nothing false or phony about this man. He was real! William Van Doren said that falsehood was a fundamental spiritual disease of the Jews. Nathanael was a man after the truth. God can do powerful things with one who is after God’s truth and not man’s religion. People who play games in religion never get anywhere in a relationship with God. God wants real, honest people who admit who they are and what they are.

(Action #3) - He informs Nathanael that He knew him externally. 1:48

Nathanael wanted to know how Christ knew him and Christ said He saw him when he was under "the" fig tree. Now there are many fig trees in this part of the world, but something happened while Nathanael was under one of those trees that Jesus knew about and so did Nathanael. Maybe he had been involved in something spiritual under that tree. Maybe he had been involved in something sinful under that tree. We don’t know, but when Christ mentions this, Nathanael knows exactly what He is referring to and this dumbfounded Nathanael. How could one have seen him under that tree and even known what he was doing and thinking? **In order for a person to be able to do this, that Person would have to be God.**

Think about this, Nathanael is standing before a Person who can tell him everything about him internally and every place he has been externally. An honest person is comfortable with this. However, a dishonest person, one living a lie, will be very uncomfortable and squirm with this reality.

There are many unseen witnesses to everything we do. God is a witness which means there are three Divine witnesses; angels are witnesses, we don’t even know how many; our own conscience is a witness. The fact is there are witnesses about everything about us. God has seen everything about us when we have been out under trees, in cars, on mountains, in motels, in our homes and at church.

Verse 49 informs us this was all it took. Nathanael recognized this is the Rabbi, the great teacher who is the Son of God, who is the second member of the Trinity and the King of Israel. This was, as John Phillips said, “a quantum leap” in his faith (*Exploring The Gospels, John*, p. 48). What you have here is a previous Israeli skeptic acknowledging Jesus is the King of Israel. Every Jew in the world needs to see this.

When you go to Christ to see who He is, He will show you who He is and convict you of who you are. Be honest with Him and He can do great things with you.

STEP #4 – Jesus promises Nathanael that he will see greater things than this. 1:50-51

Here is John's first use of the "amen, amen" which means "truly, truly" formula. This double repetition, which is used to solemnly emphasize the point, occurs some 25 times in John. What Jesus basically says to Nathanael is that because he has believed on Him, he will see all of heaven connected to Jesus, as Jacob once did. Not only will Jesus let him see the heavens, He will take Him to the Heavens. Nathanael would basically come to realize that because of his relationship to Jesus Christ, he was just living in the suburbs of heaven, while he lived on earth. He will see angels, He will see powerful things in the days to come in direct connection to Jesus Christ and so will we. Keep in mind that John has already written Revelation in which he has personally seen Jesus Christ in heaven and he has seen all of the angelic world connected to Him and worshipping Him. Nathanael would eventually see that too.

If God would permit a liar like Jacob to see His work, he would permit a skeptic Nathanael who had no guile to see it, He will permit us too. Jesus is the only One who can take you to heaven. You come to faith in Jesus Christ and you will see God do great things with you and for you. You will grow. You will see God do things you never dreamed. "Come and See for yourself." Jesus does not beg kings or heroes to come to Him, He collects uncultured fishermen. You "Come and See" for yourself.