

## John 1:43-51 Philip and Nathanael Bear Witness to the Truth

This passage and sermon is really a continuation of last week as Jesus begins his ministry by calling his first disciples. At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, he displays the mission of the church. And what is the mission of the church? Our mission is to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). And from the very beginning our endeavor is to be a witness to the truth, primarily that fact that Jesus IS the way, the TRUTH, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Him. With this in mind, we need this passage as we will examine how Philip, Nathanael, and Jesus himself bear witness to that which is true. So, these are my 2 parts to the sermon, with applications throughout. 1) Philip Bears Witness to the Truth; and 2) Nathanael Bears Witness to the Truth. (Most of our time will be spent on part 2.)

1. Philip Bears Witness to the Truth. On the next day (the day after vv. 35-42) Jesus decides to go towards Galilee, which is the region associated with the Sea of Galilee. And there, Jesus finds Philip, a Jewish man with a Greek name. This same Philip will later become one of the 12 apostles. It is interesting that John spends the most time telling us about Philip (See 6:6 ff.; 12:21-22; 14:8 ff.). He is originally from a fishing village called Bethsaida (city of nets), which is where Andrew and Peter are from (they ARE fishermen). In our previous passage the disciples of John the Baptist seek Jesus out to follow him. But, in this passage Jesus is the one who seeks Philip.

(A couple Applications: It may be that God will bring people to hear the truth to a place that preaches the gospel, as we "bear witness" as a church, but it is essential to everyone of us that we actively share the gospel and bear witness; this includes inviting them to church. Let me remind us of our covenant which says, "*We will be witnesses for Christ; seeking the salvation of our family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances and all the world.*")

Also, it is interesting that Matthew and Luke (Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13) tell us that Jesus curses the town of Bethsaida for their lack of belief. Yet, in his grace God calls some of his apostles from this place (Andrew & Peter). Brothers and sisters, all of us are called out of this sinful world by the grace of God.)

Let's continue with our truth: Philip bears witness, by reading vv. 43-46: "**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. 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.**" The first thing we notice is the fact that Philip followed Jesus. This is the beginning of his discipleship as Jesus will teach him to obey all his commands. Today, this is what we do as Christians. To be a Christian is to be one that follows Jesus. This means we follow his example and his teachings. And, we are ready to be the recipients of the same things our Lord received, even persecution and death, which is the cost of following him.

The next thing we notice here is that Philip finds a man named Nathanael (presumably an acquaintance and friend, and John says he is from Cana in 21:2). And immediately he BEARS WITNESS to Jesus saying, **“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and Prophets wrote.”** Here, our truth is that Philip is a witness to the long-awaited Messiah to WHOM the Law and the Prophets wrote. This is one of John’s major points in his book. In 5:39 Jesus himself says, **“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me . . .”** This means today we must see the Bible as pointing to Jesus. We cannot understand the OT until we find the message of the OT, which is Jesus. And, in the same manner, we must use the Scriptures as we bear witness! (apply? Do you know the Scriptures? Do you know the Old Testament? Do you know the NT?) Let’s move on.

2. Nathanael Bears Witness to the Truth. Here, as Jesus found Philip, we see that Philip finds Nathanael in order to tell him about Jesus. Now, before we see Nathanael confess and bear witness to the truth of the Messiah, notice what happens . . . He doubts. Do you remember what Philip says to Nathanael when he finds him? He gets it right when he says that the law and the prophets spoke of him. But then he describes Jesus by saying he is from **“Nazareth”** and he is the **“son of Joseph.”** Are these true statements? What do you think? Well, YES, they are true. Jesus grew up in the city of Nazareth in the region of Galilee (Luke 1:26). And Jesus’ father was Joseph the carpenter. But when Nathanael hears Philip bear witness about the Messiah, he obviously thinks back to the OT. And I believe he knew that the OT does not speak of the Messiah as one who would come from Nazareth. And, Jesus is known to many as the illegitimate son of Joseph (news travels in small towns and regions). This is why Nathanel says in v. 46: *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* Where does the OT say the Messiah will come from? He will be from the tribe of Judah, and specifically from the city of Bethlehem. YES, Jesus was the son of Joseph (but not by blood). And YES, Jesus was from Nazareth. But, concerning the ONE to whom the law and prophets wrote, I believe Nathanael does not associate Messiah as coming from Nazareth. But Philip was persuasive and he was zealous to tell Nathanael about the Messiah. And he gives the BEST answer he can give at the moment, *“Nathanael, you come and see.”* With this in mind, let me give a couple applications.

i. You don’t have to know much to bear witness of Jesus. What is important is that you bring people to Jesus; tell those around you to “come and see.” (I don’t think most of our problem with taking people to Jesus has to do with our lack of knowledge about him. I think it has to do with our lack of boldness. One thing we can do is to fill our minds and thoughts with prayers to God to give us boldness and help us take people to Jesus on a regular basis.)

ii. Our truth about the Gospel is often mixed with error. We see this with Philip’s emphasis on Jesus as the Son of Joseph who comes from Nazareth. It is obvious that three years later Philip would not have emphasized these things about Jesus; he would have given a fuller, more accurate description. I think the same is true today. God will use a “needle of truth in the haystack of error.” God will use what truth we know and proclaim to bring glory to the gospel.

In regard to this truth, I see great examples of immaturity, particularly on social media. I see certain groups who “in their own minds” get everything right. And when they disagree with another Christian (maybe well-known teacher or preacher), they point his “presumed” fault loudly and often, and then disregard that brother all together. And then, anybody else who even “associates” or reads or listens to such a brother is also thrown under the bus. Brothers and sisters, you do not have to agree with someone to appreciate ALL the things they get right. And honestly the way I have seen people get treated on social media paints real brothers and sisters as non-Christians, as those who don’t even have the Holy Spirit. Now, I am not saying we are to disregard error; we must hold on to the gospel, we must guard truth taught in Scripture. But, I believe in what I have described, if we take part, we are immature and sinful.

A follow-up application of this truth is humility. I think of Ecc. 1:17-18: Solomon says: **“And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”** Also James 3:13-18: **“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”**

Let’s get back to Nathanael and his witness to the truth as we continue the story in vv. 47-51: **“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.” 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 will 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.”**

In these verses we see that Nathanael goes to Jesus. After all, he is trusting his friend Philip to “*come and see*” if anything good can come out of Nazareth. And Jesus says some amazing words about Nathanael. He says, “BEHOLD, and Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Now, I think this is certainly in reference to his character as a “righteous” “good” Jewish man, who, as we’ve seen, trusted and relied in the OT Scriptures. And immediately Nathanael recognizes something about Jesus. As we read in v. 48 asks Jesus, “*How do you know me?*” In other words, “*Jesus, How do you know about my character? How do you know what kind of Israelite I am?*” And then, without answering his question Jesus says something even more amazing to Nathanael. He says, “*Nathanael, WAY before Philip called you to come and see, I saw you! You*

were underneath the fig tree.” In other words, “*Philip didn’t tell me about you. I know this myself.*”

Brother and sisters, in Ps. 139, from the words of King David, we read: “**O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it**” (vv. 1-6). I believe this is how Nathanael felt. And as he comes face to face with the “*Son of Joseph*” from “*Nazareth,*” he proclaims with all his heart and mind and strength, “**Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!**”

In this moment, Nathanael bears witness to the truth that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah! How did he know? Well, he knew that Jesus knew his character. And he knew that Jesus KNEW him completely. And by knowing him in this way Jesus proved he was more than man. But, still, how did he know? Look over to 1:11-14: “**He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**” I believe John the Apostle makes this clear! This is none other than the new birth. Flesh and blood did not reveal this to Nathanael. The Spirit blows where He wills (John 3). And by the power of the Holy Spirit Nathanael makes this great confession. He bears witness to the truth as the TRUTH is standing before Him. (invitation to the lost)

But there is more to this passage. Jesus refers to Nathanael as a “true” Israelite in whom there is no deceit (v. 47). Do this statement make you think of anyone in the OT? I believe Jesus is alluding to Jacob? Jacob is the son of Isaac. He is the twin brother of Esau. And when he comes out of the womb, he is holding the heel of his brother. His name means, “*to take by the heel*” or to “*cheat*” or to “*deceive.*” And his life is surrounded by deception. We remember him for taking his brother’s birthright, by disguising himself to feel and smell like Esau to deceive Isaac into blessing him. Then, he runs away for many years to find his wife. He later becomes the father of 12 sons, and God changes his name to Israel. (I believe Nathanael and John’s Jewish readers would have gotten this reference as Jesus refers to Nathanael as a “**true Israelite in whom there is no deceit.**”)

But there is more. Jesus says in vv. 50-51: “**Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.**” In order to understand this, let’s think back to Jacob. After his great deception, as Esau was planning to kill him, he flees away to go and live with his grandfather Laban. On the way he comes to a certain place to spend the night. And during night he has a dream. Do you remember it? In Gen. 28 we

read that he saw a ladder that reached from the earth ALL the WAY to heaven. And on this ladder the angels of God were going up and down. And God appeared to him at the top of the ladder. And THERE God assures Jacob that He will keep his promises to Abraham and Isaac and will bring him to the Land of Canaan and will give him lots of children and will bless his descendants.

Can you imagine such an experience? God appears to Jacob! So Jacob calls that place Bethel, which means “house of God.” To Jacob, THAT WAS THE PLACE WHERE GOD MET WITH HIM, the place where God dwells. There is so much here! But, the point of John in this story (which Nathanael the good Israelite would have understood) is that Jesus is the TRUE Bethel. HE is the place where God dwells. “**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us**” (1:14). Jesus is the TRUE Israel of God. And when Nathanael truly sees him, all he can say is “You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel.” You are the ONE that brings heaven down to earth. And you are the ONE that takes your people to heaven! Jesus is saying to Nathanael, “All you have seen is me knowing who you are. But you will see so much more than this. You will see the Son of Man do many miracles. But more than these, you will see the Son of Man live a sinless life. You will see the Son of Man lay down his life as a sacrifice. You will see the Son of Man defeat death and rise again. You will see the Son of Man ascend to the right hand of the Father. You will see the Son of Man pour out the Holy Spirit on his church! You will see God fulfill ALL his promises on his true prophet, priest, and king. And in Him, you will find life eternal because Jesus is the TRUE BETHEL!

This also means that we will see “greater things”. Today, the kingdom of the Son has come upon us. And because we look back upon the cross and the resurrection, and because we have the full revelation of the Bible, we have been given EVERYTHING we need for life and godliness. But, we still wait for sin, death, and the devil to be completely taken away. We still wait for Jesus’ coming. We still wait for the final judgment. We still wait for our new resurrection bodies. We still wait for the new heavens and the new earth and the consummation of all things. Of Course We Will See Greater Things! But, in the meantime, what do we do? We make disciples! THIS IS OUR MISSION! We tell the world about Jesus. We lead people to him. We say, “*come and see.*” We proclaim that the fulness of God dwells in Jesus and that ONLY in him can we find what is truly worth seeking! May we follow the example of Philip and Nathanael to bear witness to the truth!