

The Calling of Phillip and Nathanael

John 1:43-51

INTRODUCTION:

This morning, we continue our look at the beginning of what is known as Christianity, but what could also be called the Jesus movement. Last week, we discussed the calling of Andrew and his brother Peter. Today we are looking at Philip and Nathanael.

Before going any further I want to hinge on what we discussed last week into this week with a question? Did anyone pick up the difference in the synoptic gospel's (Matthew, Mark, Luke) accounts of calling the first disciples and that of John? In the synoptic gospels, Simon Peter and Andrew, are called to follow Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, whereas in John's account, it seems near the river Jordan where John the Baptist was baptized. Putting the two accounts together it seems that Andrew and Peter had already had an encounter (John 1:35-43) with Jesus near the Jordan before the official "follow me" invitation on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Mark 1:16-20). Most commentators say this would explain why they were so quick to abandon their livelihood because they already knew about Jesus.

Mark 1:16-20 ESV

¹⁶ Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Dr. Bob Utley

"two of his disciples" Mark 1:16-20 seems to be a different account of the calling of these two disciples. It is uncertain how much previous contact occurred between Jesus and His Galilean disciples. There were specific stages of discipline involved in the process of becoming a full-time follower of a rabbi in Jesus' day. These procedures are spelled out in the rabbinical sources, but are not exactly followed in the Gospel accounts. The two disciples mentioned are Andrew (cf. John 1:40), and John the Apostle (who never refers to himself by name in the Gospel).

The term disciple can mean (1) learner and/or (2) follower. This was an early name for believers in Jesus Christ as the promised Jewish Messiah. It is important to note that the NT calls for disciples, not mere decisions (cf. Matthew 13; 28:18-20). Christianity is an initial decision (repentance and faith) followed by an ongoing decision of obedience and perseverance. Christianity is not a fire insurance policy or a ticket to heaven, but a daily servant/friend relationship with Jesus.

John 1:43-51 NLT

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come, follow me.” ⁴⁴ Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown.

⁴⁵ Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

⁴⁶ “Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”
“Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied.

⁴⁷ As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.”

⁴⁸ “How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!”

⁵⁰ Jesus asked him, “Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” ⁵¹ Then he said, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.

A. The day after meeting with the two, Andrew and the other unknown disciple, Jesus decides to go to Galilee.

B. Notice it says in the text Jesus found Philip.

John Stott

Our Christian life began not with our decision to follow Christ but with God's call to us to do so.

C. Philip was from the same town as Andrew and Peter in Bethsaida (which means the “House of Fishing”) which is on the northeastern side of the Sea of Galilee.

D. Jesus is slowly gathering a following.

- E. But notice how it primarily has happened through the word of mouth who have been touched by Jesus.
- F. The best evangelistic technique for sharing the Gospel is by the mouth of one who has been changed by Jesus.
- G. Philip does the same thing that Andrew did. He went and told someone, his friend Nathanael. Nathanael is from Cana which makes sense because John's next topic to discuss is the wedding at Cana.

John 21:2

Simon Peter, Thomas (called "Twin"), *Nathanael from Cana of Galilee*, Zebedee's sons, and two others of His disciples were together.

Dr. Bob Utley

"Nathanael" This is a Hebrew name which means "God has given." He is not referred to by this name in the Synoptic Gospels. It is assumed by modern scholars that he is the one called "Bartholomew," but this remains only a supposition¹

- H. Philip doesn't just run up to Nathanael half-cocked with emotion but rather brings evidence.

John 1:45

"We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

- I. Nathanael was a skeptic wondering if anything good came out of Nazareth.

Hendriksen & Kistemaker

And Nathaniel said to him ... The echo of the word *Nazareth* has not yet died when Nathaniel, in complete candor, exclaims, **Out of Nazareth can any good come?** Though some are of the opinion that this scorn for Nazareth must be interpreted as springing from town-rivalry—a possibility which cannot be denied—yet, in view of the immediate context here (see also 7:52), it is more probable that Nathaniel meant to say, "Is it possible, indeed, that *the Messiah* can come out of Nazareth? Have Moses and the prophets predicted that any good thing in the Messianic category would come forth from that town?" **Philip said ...** Philip

¹ Utley, R. J. (1999). *The Beloved Disciple's Memoirs and Letters: The Gospel of John, I, II, and III John: Vol. Volume 4* (p. 20). Bible Lessons International.

gives the best possible answer—one that closely resembles Christ’s reply to Andrew and John, recorded in 1:39—, **Come and see.**²

- J. When Nathanael does “come and see” Jesus immediately identifies him as an “Israelite with no deceit” or “trickery.” The NLT puts it “a man of integrity,”

Thomas MacCauley,

The measure of a man’s real character is what he would do if he would never be found out.

- K. Nathanael according to this testimony was a straightforward authentic man.

Andreas Köstenberger

This is the only instance of the term Ἰσραηλίτης (*Israēlitēs*, Israelite) in this Gospel. The rendering “true Israelite” (NIV) probably is incorrect. Rather, Jesus says, “truly,” here is an Israelite in whom there is nothing false (lit., no “deceit,” δόλος, *dolos*; see Ridderbos 1997: 90; Carson 1991: 160; Barrett 1978: 184–85; Schlatter 1948: 59). In this, Nathanael differs from the original “Israel” (i.e., Jacob; see commentary at 1:50), who was deceitful (δόλος; cf. Gen. 27:35–36 LXX; see Carson 1991: 161; Morris 1995: 145; Burge 2000: 78). Nathanael was free from such duplicity of heart (cf. Ps. 32:2) and thus prepared to consider whether the claims regarding Jesus were true or not. It is as if Jesus was saying, “Look, Israel without a trace of Jacob left in him!” (L. Trudinger 1982: 117). This attitude stood in sharp contrast not only with Jacob of old, but also with the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Matt. 26:4; Mark 14:1: δόλος), and Nathanael becomes “a symbol of [true] Israel coming to God” (R. Brown 1966: 82; cf. Brodie 1993: 170). Nevertheless, this does not yet make him a “true Israelite” (he cannot be described as an actual convert at this point), but rather a “certain kind of Israelite, an Israelite in whom there is no guile”³

- L. Nathanael replies to Jesus “How do you know me?” This is a major question to ask Jesus.

- M. Jesus did not say, “Well, I met Andrew and Peter who were from the same town as Philip who had mentioned you.”

² Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [*Exposition of the Gospel According to John*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 109). Baker Book House.

³ Köstenberger, A. J. (2004). [*John*](#) (p. 82). Baker Academic.

N. No, Jesus spoke to Nathanael not as the Son of Man but as the Creator God who knows beyond all-knowing. He said, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig-tree, I saw you.”

D.A. Carson

What Nathanael was doing under the fig tree is open to conjecture. In the Old Testament the fig tree is sometimes almost a symbol for ‘home’ or for prosperity (e.g. 1 Ki. 4:25; Is. 36:16; Zc. 3:10); occasionally in rabbinic literature its shade is associated with a place for meditation and prayer (SB 2. 371). But John’s chief point here is Jesus’ supernatural knowledge⁴

O. Nathanael’s world had to collapse when the living God stated, “I saw you.”

P. Nathanael confesses “You are the Son of God, the King of Israel.”

Q. Jesus calls Nathanael an Israelite when Jesus himself is the true Israel.

R. There are a lot of overlaps and innuendos pointing back to Jacob who was called Israel.

D.A. Carson

In the Old Testament, Israel is God’s son (Ex. 4:22–23; Dt. 1:31; 32:6; Je. 31:9, 20; Ho. 11:1), and certainly Jesus is presented in the Fourth Gospel as the successor of Israel, or, better, as the true Israel.⁵

S. Jesus then prepares them for more than just that. They will see Heaven and Earth overlap because of who Jesus is.

T. This preparation seems to be a reference back to Jacob, again referred to as Israel, in what is often referred to as Jacob’s ladder.

Genesis 28:10-13 ESV

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it

⁴ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 161). Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

⁵ Ibid.

reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac.

U. In this passage, the overlap of the Son of God and the Son of Man comes up. This is why as I have said before when studying about Jesus or reading about Jesus in a passage, we need to ask ourselves if Jesus is revealing His divinity or assuming His humanity within a given context.

CONCLUSION

This movement didn't begin in the halls of anywhere famous such as Congress or the Senate of Rome, but rather on the riverside, out under fig trees, by the Sea of Galilee, where ordinary people do ordinary things. In this case, ordinary people couldn't stay ordinary when in the presence of the extraordinary.

Charles Spurgeon

You cannot be Christ's servant if you are not willing to follow him, cross and all. What do you crave? A crown? Then it must be a crown of thorns if you are to be like him. Do you want to be lifted up? So you shall, but it will be upon a cross.

Billy Graham

When we come to Christ, we're no longer the most important person in the world to us; Christ is. Instead of living only for ourselves, we have a higher goal: to live for Jesus.

JESUS' MINISTRY IN PALESTINE

- # Numbered events of Jesus' ministry
- City
- ▲ Mountain

0 10 20 Miles
0 10 20 Kilometers



