

Two More Disciples are Called

John 1:43-51

John 1:43-51 - *"The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ 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."*

⁴⁶ *And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"*

Philip said to him, "Come and see."

⁴⁷ *Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"*

⁴⁸ *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."

⁴⁹ *Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"*

⁵⁰ *Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."*

Background Notes

In John 1:44 we learn that the disciple Philip was from the town of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Bethsaida was located on the north end of the Sea of Galilee, near the spot where the Jordan River enters the Sea of Galilee. It was one of the three towns in the Galilee that were condemned by our Lord for rejecting Him after seeing so many miracles: "Woe unto you, Capernaum ... woe unto you Chorazin .. woe unto you, Bethsaida." Archeologists are currently excavation Bethsaida, and its ruins can be seen today.

When Nathanael learned that Jesus was from Nazareth, he asked, *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"*(v46). What did he mean? Sometimes when I tell people that I teach at Emmaus Bible College in Dubuque, Iowa, I have gotten this humorous response: "Can any good thing come out of Dubuque?" They usually mean, "Oh, Dubuque – that small town out there in the boonies!"

However, that's probably not what Nathanael meant. The more we learn about ancient Nazareth, the more it looks like Nathanael meant Nazareth's reputation. It seems that Nazareth didn't have a positive reputation in the Galilee area. It would be similar to telling someone in another country that you're from Chicago. Many people in other countries think of Chicago's past reputation as a town full of mobsters from the Al Capone era, and they would wonder if any good thing can come out of Chicago!

Although we don't know why, it appears that Nazareth had a negative reputation. It couldn't have been the size or location of the town, because Nathanael was from nearby Cana, which was an even smaller town. Maybe a Roman military garrison was located there. Something must have given Nazareth a bad reputation.

Nathanael was probably the same disciple as "Bartholomew." Matthew, Mark and Luke mention Bartholomew right after Philip in their lists of Jesus' disciples, and since John doesn't mention Bartholomew, probably Bartholomew was another name, or the surname, of Nathanael.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Jesus had the divine attribute of omnipresence.

We have already seen in this chapter that Jesus is fully God. There is no mistake about it: John 1:1 says, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" Now God possesses the "Big Three O attributes," right?

Omnipotence – He is all-powerful.

Omniscience – He is all-knowing.

Omnipresence – He is everywhere at the same time.

Jesus is fully God, so He must possess all of these attributes - right? Yes, that is true!

You may say, "I can see Him being all-powerful - after all, He did many miracles. And I can see Him being omniscient, or all-knowing - just think of the predictions He made. But omnipresent? How can you say that Jesus was omnipresent?" The problem is that if you strip Jesus of His attribute of omnipresence while He was here on earth, you take away His deity. God is omnipresent, and if Jesus is fully God, He has **all** the attributes of God, including the attribute of omnipresence. The doctrine of the omnipresence of God is defined as "all of God, in all places, at all times."

It is true that the Lord Jesus voluntarily gave up the use of His divine attributes at certain times while He was here on earth. Those times were predetermined in the eternal counsels of the Godhead. And it is true that the material body of the Lord Jesus was only in one place at one time. But the eternal Son of God retained His attribute of omnipresence when He became incarnate – and He retained His attribute of omnipresence all the way through.

I think we catch a glimpse of that attribute right here. In verse 47: "*Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"*" Now you might say that this verse demonstrates the Lord's omniscience. He knew all about Nathanael, just as He knew all about Peter's character and what Peter would become (v42). But in verse 48, when "*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.” Although you might think that is another instance of the Lord’s omniscience, I think that it is more. Notice that the Lord didn’t say, “I knew you were under the fig tree” - He said, “I **saw** you.”

“Under the fig tree” may be figurative for a place of meditation, or it may have been a literal fig tree, but the important point is that the Lord not only knew all about Nathanael, He **saw** Nathanael. Jesus **saw** where Nathanael was, and what he was doing. Jesus had the attribute of omnipresence.

Another Scripture along this line is John 5:19: “*Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”*” I think that verse gives us another indication of the omnipresence of our Lord. Even when He was here on this earth He never relinquished that attribute, because He is - and always was - fully God. Jesus had the attribute of omnipresence.

Is Jesus omnipresent today? We would say yes, He is omnipresent! Does Jesus have a literal, material body today? Yes, He does - He was resurrected and He ascended with a literal, material body. The eternal Son of God was omnipresent before the incarnation and after the incarnation. He is **eternally omnipresent**. There was never a time when the eternal Son of God didn’t possess the attribute of omnipresence. He is God. Jesus had the attribute of omnipresence.

2. Jesus is the Bridge between heaven and earth.

In view of what the Lord said to Nathanael about the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (v51), most likely Nathanael had been thinking or meditating about the event in Jacob’s life. It’s recorded in Genesis 28. Jacob was running away from his brother Esau’s murderous anger, and he stopped to sleep at Bethel. There he had a dream. In the dream he saw a ladder, or staircase, that reached between heaven and earth, with angels going up and down on it. The dream meant that God was still willing to communicate with Jacob. Even though Jacob had done wrong in stealing the blessing from Esau, God was still at work in Jacob’s life. The bridge between heaven and earth was still there for Jacob.

The Lord told Nathanael, “*Most assuredly I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.*” He revealed that that the He Himself would be the Staircase, or the Bridge between heaven and earth. Communication and peace between God in heaven and man on earth is only possible because Jesus, the Son of Man, is the Bridge. As I Timothy 2:5 says, “*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*” Jesus is the Bridge between heaven and earth.

Practical Application

When in doubt, check it out!

Maybe you have some doubts about the Christian faith. When in doubt, check it out! Maybe you have some doubts about the Lord Himself. Don't turn away! The Lord invites you to check Him out! In verse 39, when the two disciples of John the Baptist wanted to ask Jesus some questions, what did the Lord say to them? "Come and see!" Check it out!

In verse 46 Nathanael said, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" What did Philip say to him? "Come and see!" Check it out! If you really check the Lord Jesus out, you'll find that your doubts will disappear. When in doubt, check it out.

Some people come to Jesus without any doubts. Look at Philip. As far as the record goes, when the Lord called him, he had no doubts. He became a believer and a disciple of Jesus. He had some questions later, but at the time of his conversion, he had no hesitation about becoming a disciple and following the Lord. Straight on, when the Lord called him, Philip followed.

But not so with Nathanael – and most of us are like Nathanael. When someone close to us, like Philip, tells us about Christ, we may have had some questions. And even after we decide to trust in Jesus, we may occasionally still have some doubts. What should we do? Do exactly what Nathanael did: when in doubt, check it out!

Although Nathanael said, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" he still came and checked Jesus out. Nathanael had honest doubts. The Lord said to him, "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!*" So his doubts were **honest** doubts, and the Lord respected that.

Nathanael came to the Lord and had his doubts cleared up. And that is what we should do as well. If you are not convinced that Jesus is God, and the only Way to heaven, or if you are not convinced about the Christian message - don't turn away! Keep checking it out. When in doubt, check it out!