

Meeting Jesus

John 1:43-51

When did you meet Jesus? How did it happen? Who told you about Him? How did you come to believe in Him as the Lord and Savior of your soul? Wouldn't it be a wonderful experience if we took turns and let each person tell how he or she came to know Jesus? Each of our stories would be unique and special.

Some of you, like me, grew up going to church. My mother was a true believer in Christ and my father always went to church too and I believe he also later came to a personal faith in Christ.

I remember going to Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and church camp. I attended confirmation class and professed to have believed in Jesus Christ. I remember praying with my mom for Jesus to come into my heart at a young age. Was I saved then? Probably not, but these things laid the foundation for faith that would become real and personal for me in my college years. My later years of high school beginning of college were proof enough that my profession of faith was not real. My hidden sin and depraved heart became more open and unrestrained.

In my second year at the Air Force Academy a fellow cadet invited me to Bible Study at the Baptist Student Union in Colorado Springs. There I met some young people who were really living out their faith in Jesus Christ, like my mother had. They seemed to have the real thing, something I was sorely lacking. My sin became even more evident to me in that light. One night after hearing the BSU director, Don Gurney share the gospel message, my friend told me about how he had trusted Christ. That night, realizing my sin and my need for a Savior, I met Jesus for real. And my life was changed forever.

Others of you came from unbelieving homes, where the name of Christ was only used as a swear word. Perhaps you didn't know what love and kindness were. But someone showed you the love of the Savior, and told you about Jesus who gave Himself on the cross to redeem you from all your sins. You came to Him and found the love that you had never known. Your life was changed.

Probably some of you were going full-bore in sin. You lived to do whatever felt good at the moment. But there was always an emptiness of soul that these momentary pleasures could not satisfy. Someone shared with you about the lasting peace and joy that only Christ can give. You turned from your sin and asked God to apply the blood of Christ to your guilty soul and you were changed.

There are as many different stories as there are people here. But there will also be some things in common. One of those is that coming to know Christ personally changes you. Your desires and focus for life change. *Meeting Jesus personally will change your life forever.*

In the Gospel of John chapter 1 starting in verse 35 we see several men who meet Jesus and their lives are forever changed. Last week we saw Andrew and

John who heard the testimony of John the Baptist about Jesus. They left John and followed Jesus. Jesus asked them **“What do you seek?”** And invited them to **“Come and see.”** After meeting Jesus, Andrew was compelled to find his brother Simon telling him, **“We have found the Messiah.”** And he brought Simon to Jesus. And Jesus indicated the kind of change He would make in Simon’s life when He said to him, **“You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas” (which is translated, A Stone).**

Their lives were forever changed when they met Jesus. Today we see two more men whose lives were changed by meeting Jesus, Philip and Nathanael. We read their stories in John 1:43-51.

43 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."

1. Jesus Calls Philip

43 The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me."

This is now the fourth consecutive day in the narrative of John. On day one in verses 19-28 John the Baptist gives testimony about himself and about Jesus to the delegation from Jerusalem (John 1:19-28). On the second day John publicly introduces Jesus as **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,”** and he describes the events that took place at least 41 days earlier at Jesus’ baptism (John 1:29-34). On the third day in verse 35 John points out Jesus to

two of his disciples and they follow Him, spending the day with Him. Andrew brings his brother, Simon, to Jesus (John 1:35-42).

Now in verse 43 it is the fourth day. Up to this point, Jesus has been in the area of Bethany or Bethabara by the Jordan River where John has been baptizing. This is not the same Bethany that is near to Jerusalem. It is described as "Bethany beyond Jordan" (John 1:28). The Jordan River flows from the Sea of Galilee and winds its way south all the way to the Dead Sea. Bethany beyond the Jordan was probably located east of the upper parts of the Jordan River.

Here we find:

A. A deliberate encounter.

Verse 43 says "**The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee.**" The word, wanted, in that verse means that he determined or purposed to go there. Jesus has a definite plan as He purposes to go into Galilee. I don't believe that this meeting with Philip was just a chance encounter. Jesus had a very specific plan and purpose in mind when He went to Galilee.

B. A seeking Savior.

We read that "**He found Philip.**" Important as the theme of witness is in this chapter, Jesus is the true initiator. Jesus found Philip. Jesus will later say to His disciples, "**You did not choose Me, but I chose you.**" We sometimes talk about finding God as though He were lost and needed to be found. That is not the case. We were the ones who were lost. He does the finding. He has found you and He has found me, too. Jesus

C. A commanding call.

"Jesus ... said to him, "Follow Me." (John 1:43).

We are not told whether Jesus said anything else to Philip before He told him to follow. We are given only this simple command. I think there is a reason for this. It is because, even though we are each called in different ways, we are all called to do the same thing. We are all called to follow Jesus.

You may have been called in a church service, a revival meeting or crusade. Or it might have been in a home Bible study. It might have been when there were a great number of people around you. Or it might have been when you were alone.

No matter what the circumstances, you were still called. The call is the same for all. It is a call to follow Jesus. It is interesting that in the Gospel of John it is only Philip to whom Jesus says, "**Follow Me.**" In the other Gospels Jesus issues that same call to Simon and Andrew (Matt. 4:19), to James and John (Matt. 4:21), to Matthew (Matt. 9:9) and to several others. Later in this Gospel Jesus will say "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27). And 26 "**If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me,**" (John 12:26).

A disciple of Jesus is one who obeys the call to "**Follow Me.**"

Verse 44 tells us “**Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.**” The Bethsaida is a Hebrew name that means "the place of fishing." It was located on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Why is Philip’s town mentioned? It is to let us know that he was from the same town as Simon and Andrew. In a small town of that size, they would have known each other. Maybe those two brothers played a part in Philip’s becoming a follower of Jesus.

2. Philip Witnesses to Nathanael

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."

A. A motivated search

Whatever happened between the time Philip followed and verse 45 must have been an amazing experience because when Philip began to follow Jesus, he got excited. He got so excited that he wanted to tell someone else about it. Some people seem to think that Christianity should be a private experience that we should keep to ourselves. That is not the kind of Christianity that Philip had. He wanted others to meet Jesus too.

How can you tell a baseball fan? It is because he is always talking about baseball. He cannot get enough of it.

How can you tell a real Christian? It is because he is always talking about Christ. Nobody has to tell him to do it. He cannot help himself. When you listen to him, it is obvious that he is excited about the Lord. That was Philip.

Can you imagine the scene? Jesus and His new followers are walking along the northern road to Galilee. Philip runs on ahead. He is going to find someone who he can bring to Jesus.

B. An amazing testimony

Meanwhile, there is a young Jewish man named Nathanael who is relaxing under the shade of a fig tree. I don’t know what he is doing there. Perhaps he is meditating on a portion of Scripture from the Old Testament. In any case, Nathanael is interrupted as he looks up to see Philip approaching. Philip does not hesitate to share with Nathanael the good news. He says, “**We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.**”

I can imagine Nathanael perking up as Philip begins to tell him how they have found the One promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. Nathanael realizes the implications of this. Philip is describing the Messiah. Both Philip and Nathanael

men who studied and believed the scriptures. Maybe that is what made them so open to believing in Jesus.

Verse 45 reminds me of what Jesus said to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection in Luke 24, "**And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.**" Maybe Jesus had been teaching His new followers these things here as well and that could be why Philip said that they had "**found the One of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote.**"

Then Philip names the One. He is **Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.** Nathanael senses that something is wrong. The Messiah is not supposed to come from Nazareth. The prophet Micah was very specific in his prophecy. The Messiah must come from Bethlehem, the city of David (Micah 5:2). In fact, Nazareth is not even mentioned in the Old Testament. No prophet came from Nazareth, much less the Messiah.

Nathanael was from the neighboring village of Cana (John 21:2). Perhaps Nathanael felt that Nazareth was too close to home. Messiah's don't come from next door.

Jesus said the same thing when He said that no prophet is honored in his own country (John 4:44).

C. A great Invitation: *Philip said to him, "Come and see." (1:46).*

Philip is a brand new believer. He has just met Jesus earlier that day and he has just come to faith. He has not yet taken a course on apologetics. He doesn't have six reasons why Nathanael's objection can be answered. Yet he knows within himself that Jesus really is the Messiah and so, he invites Nathanael to come and see for himself.

There is a lesson here. You cannot convince men of the validity of Christianity on the basis of reason or logic. That is not to say that our faith is unreasonable or illogical, but those means will not, in themselves, convince anyone of anything. Our faith is rooted in a person. Our faith is rooted in Jesus Christ. It is not until a person meets Jesus that he begins to really believe.

I fear that there are many who have believed a set of facts about God and think it is enough. A set of facts cannot save you, even if they are true facts. Only the person of Jesus can do that. You need to come and see Him. Believe in Him as the Son of God who came to save you from your sins.

3. Nathanael meets Jesus

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!"**

We do not know how far ahead Philip had gone to find Nathanael. I would imagine that it had been some distance away. Furthermore, Jesus and His disciples were still where Philip had left them.

As Philip and Nathanael draw near, Jesus speaks to His disciples. But His words are nevertheless intended for Nathanael to hear.

A. Jesus' Accurate Assessment (1:47).

The word "deceit" means falsehood or fraud. It is a word that brings to mind a con-artist. It is a word that would have described the character of Jacob in his younger days. Indeed, the Septuagint uses this same word in Genesis 27:35 where Isaac speaks of how Jacob came "*deceitfully*" to steal the blessing.

We would not be too far out of line in translating the words of Jesus: "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no Jacob!*"

Do you see what Jesus is saying? "Here is an honest Israelite! Here is a man who is the descendant of Jacob, but who is the very opposite of Jacob."

A couple of things should be said at this point. First, Jesus does not say, "Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no sin." Nathanael is a sinner, like every other man (except our Lord). Also Lord's words somehow accurately appraise the character of Nathanael, as though our Lord could look into his soul and evaluate him without even knowing him personally. This is what seems to impress Nathanael.

B. Nathanael's Surprised Response: (1:48).

Nathanael is surprised. Here stands One who has only just met him and yet who seems to know that he is like. He realizes that Jesus has made a correct evaluation, but he cannot understand how that could be.

Nathanael had a habit of speaking his mind. He did so when Philip said that the Messiah was Jesus of Nazareth. Nathanael could have been polite and smiled and nodded while thinking to himself, "This fellow doesn't know what he is talking about." But Nathanael was not like that. He wasn't very good at playing poker. There was no deceit in him. He said what he thought.

Only he hadn't had the opportunity to do so in front of Jesus. So how did Jesus know this quality about Nathanael?

C. Jesus' Supernatural Awareness: (1:48).

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."

Jesus makes a reference to Nathanael while he was under the fig tree. That doesn't mean a lot to you or to me, but it carried some special significance to Nathanael. Something had happened under the fig tree. Something that

Nathanael had not told anyone. Something about which we can only guess, for we still don't know what it was.

Only Nathanael knew. But Jesus also knew. He realizes that Jesus is saying in effect, "I knew you before you ever met me. I knew you before you ever laid eyes upon me."

Here is a special truth. It is that God knew you before you ever knew Him. He knew you before you knew anything. Before the foundations of the world, He knew you and He loved you and He sent His Son to die for you.

D. Nathanael's Confession of Faith: (1:49).

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

This is a man who had been a skeptic. He had been convinced that Jesus could not possibly be the Messiah because Jesus was from Nazareth and Messiahs don't come from Nazareth. Suddenly that does not matter any longer. He has not been told that Jesus was really born in Bethlehem. It is not necessary to his faith to have that additional piece of insight. Nathanael is convinced quite apart from such details. As a sign of his newfound faith, he ascribes three titles to Jesus.

- Rabbi: This is the Hebrew word for "teacher." It literally means "great one." Nathanael realizes that this is One who is able to teach him about the Lord.
- Son of God: Nathanael realizes that this kind of supernatural knowledge comes only from God.
- King of Israel: Philip had already declared that Jesus was the One promised in the Old Testament. Therefore, He could be none other than the promised Son of David, heir to the throne of Israel.

Nathanael probably means: "You are the Messiah. You are the long-expected Jewish ruler that will bring deliverance for Israel and establish God's rule over the nations." Both the term Son of God and King of Israel were references for the Messiah.

For example, in 2 Samuel 7:12–14, God says to David the king of Israel,

I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

Now at one level, this refers to David's son, Solomon. But at another level, it refers to the final "Son of David," the Messiah, because verse 13 says, "I will establish his kingdom forever." There would come a descendant of David whose reign would never end. When Jesus was born, the angel said to Mary in Luke 1:32–33, "The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will

reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” In other words, 2 Samuel 7:13 was fulfilled in Jesus.

But notice that 2 Samuel 7 not only calls him a king (he will reign), but also says that he will be the “Son of God.” Verse 14: “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son to me.” So from the time of David on, the Messiah was known as “the Son of God” in a unique way. So the angel goes on to say to Mary in Luke 1:35, “The child to be born will be called holy — the Son of God.”

So Son of God and King of Israel were linked in the Old Testament as twin titles for the Messiah. You can see it again in Psalm 2:2–7,

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed [that’s the word for Messiah]. . . . Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.”

So here we have Messiah, King, and Son all referring to the same person. That’s the background for Nathanael’s outburst in John 1:49 — “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” He means, “You are the one expected in 2 Samuel and Psalm 2. You are the Messiah.

E. The Promise of a heavenly vision (1:50-51)

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."

Nathanael is the first man in John’s gospel who is said to believe in Jesus and he is the first to receive a promise from Christ.

Jacob had once seen a vision of angels ascending and descending a ladder that reached from earth to heaven. That ladder had represented the connecting link between God and man. It had bridged the gap between earth and heaven. It had crossed the gulf between God and man.

Jesus uses the same words that described the experience of Jacob in the Old Testament to promise a future vision. This future vision also is one of a gulf being bridged between God and man. Again, we see angels ascending and descending. But there is also a difference. This time, it is not a ladder that spans the gulf between God and man. This time, it is the Son of Man who spans the gulf.

Jesus is the fulfillment of Jacob’s ladder. He is the ladder that spans the gulf. He is the intermediary who brings man into fellowship with God. If you have been trying to reach God apart from Jesus, then you have failed. There is a

fundamental exclusiveness to Christianity. Jesus did not say that He is "a" way. He is not one of many different paths to God. He said that He is THE way.

Jesus was saying to Nathanael, "If you follow me, you are going to see far greater manifestations of my divine glory than what you just saw. I am the final, decisive link with heaven. Both upward and downward." When we move heavenward, we move on the Son of Man. When God moves earthward, he moves on the Son of Man.

Each of these men met Jesus and He changed their lives drastically for time and eternity. Whatever your personality or background, if you will come to know Jesus personally as your Savior and follow Him as Lord, He will use your life for His eternal purpose.