

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Common Men, Uncommon Calling: Nathanael

Scripture: Luke 6:14

Code: 42-78

As you know, we are in a study of the gospel of Luke. We have come to the sixth chapter where Luke introduces us to the Twelve Apostles of our Lord Jesus. Let's open our Bibles again to Luke chapter 6, just briefly as we look at the listing of the twelve whom Jesus identified to be His official representatives.

According to verse 14, "There was Simon whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John and Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas the son of James, Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."

We have been learning in coming to know these men, five of whom we've already studied, that the Lord selects common men for uncommon callings. Being an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, the highest calling that any person could ever have, and yet they are such common people. This has given us great encouragement for the Lord's grace in our own lives.

Going backward into the Old Testament, for just a moment of introduction, two of the most honored men in Old Testament history, the two who really symbolized the Old Testament, the law and the prophets, are Moses and Elijah. Moses the great leader and law-giver of Israel, Elijah the great prophet of God, they are so singularly blessed as to have appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration as recorded in the New Testament account. They symbolize power. They symbolize preaching. They symbolize leadership. Really above all in the Old Testament, history.

There is Moses the great leader of Israel, commander-in-chief of the Exodus. He is the one who was leading Israel when the entire army of Egypt was destroyed. Moses, the receiver of the law of God, Moses who heard God speak to him personally in the burning bush, Moses who was on the Mount to see the glory of God, Moses who was given the tablets of stone upon which God had written with His own finger the Ten Commandments, Moses who wrote the first five books of Scripture called the Torah, the Law, the Pentateuch, Moses, the leader of Israel during the 40 years of wandering before they entered the land of Canaan, this man is identified forever with the Law of God and the people of God, Israel.

And yet, Moses was an orphan of slave parents in a foreign land. Moses had defective speech, so much so that he tried to tell the Lord he was a bad choice to be a leader. Moses feared his task. Moses was prone to anger. Moses had a flare for dramatic display. Moses was a murderer, like the

Apostle Paul. Moses sometimes doubted God, on occasion tempted to bring glory to himself. Moses was a man with flaws, the kind of flaws that all people have, who was, nevertheless, used by God uniquely and identified by God as Moses, My servant.

And then there is Elijah who represents the prophets. James says that he was the man with a nature like ours. He was, according to 1 Kings 17:18, a man of God. He was a preacher, one of the greatest ever. He was a miracle worker. He was one who could raise the dead, and did so. He called down fire on a hundred of King Ahaziah's men, he slew with his own hands 450 false prophets of Baal...a great prophet, a great man of power, supernatural ability.

And yet that great man demonstrated the most bizarre kind of fear and despair when confronted by a powerful pagan woman by the name of Jezebel who threatened his life. And he in response wound up running into the wilderness to hide in fear. He had a seriously over-stated assessment of his own uniqueness when he said, "I, only I," and didn't recognize there were thousands who hadn't bowed the knee to Baal in the land of Israel. He was a man who was so depressed, in such despair that he asked God to take his life, his faith had reached such a low ebb. And yet God didn't take his life, but rather he didn't die at all, God provided a private rapture for him and he was taken to heaven in a whirlwind.

Flawed? Sure. But after all, we're all flawed. We're all fallen. We all bear the mark of the curse and sin. And so God uses common men for uncommon callings. We are learning that about the Apostles, aren't we? Peter, James, John, Andrew, and last week Philip...common men.

Now remember, the disciples who became Apostles are divided into three groups of four. The lists of these twelve are in Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts. First name is always the same, Peter. And then everybody appears in the same group of four. the names may be mingled around but everybody stays in his own group. The name at the beginning of each group is always the same, indicating that each of the three groups had a leader and that Peter was the leader over all.

We've already met group one, Peter, James, John and Andrew. And last time we met the leader of group two, who was Philip. We found Philip to be skeptical, kind of the group bean counter. He wasn't too strong in faith with regard to the supernatural, tended to deal with material things, had to see it, wanted it in his hands. He was the one who was analytical, pessimistic, reluctant, unsure, slow to believe and trust. His faith tended to be limited by circumstances, money, rules and proof. But in the end, God by His grace overcame all of that in him and he became a great Apostle, ultimately dying, as we saw, as a martyr.

That brings us to number six in the list of the twelve. His name is given here in verse 14 as Bartholomew...Bartholomew. He is better known as Nathanael, also called Nathanael, as we shall see in the one passage where he is presented in the entire New Testament.

To see that passage, turn to John chapter 1. Let me just say a little about his name while you're turning there. He is called Nathanael in John 1. Nathanael means "gift of God," el, e-l, is the name of God. It is Elohim, a portion of Elohim. And so Nathan-el, Nathanael is a gift of God. Bartholomew literally means "son of Tolmai." "Bar" means "son of," barmitzvah, son of the law. And so he is Nathanael, son of Tolmai...Bar-Tolmai. It may have been that his father's name was Tolmai, that's probably the most likely.

But there's a secondary possibility. There was among the Hebrews a sect, they were called Tolmaians because their leader was named Tolmai. This sect was devoted to the study of Scripture. They gave much attention to the Scriptures. It may be that Nathanael, Bar-Tolmai was the son of a man named Tolmai, or some have suggested, though it's a bit more obscure, that it may mean that he was a member of a group called Tolmaians, he was there for a son of Tolmai, in the sense that he was a follower of the man who started the group, whose devotion to Scripture marked him uniquely. He is Nathanael anyway, son of Tolmai.

He came from the town of Cana...Cana in Galilee, really very, very close, in a short walking distance, from Nazareth. John 21:2 identifies him from Cana. He was brought to Jesus by Philip, and every time you see the listing of the Apostles, Philip and Nathanael...or Philip and Bartholomew are always linked together. So they were friends through the years of their journey with Christ. Not unlike Peter and Andrew who were together as brothers, James and John who were together as brothers, you find these two, not brothers, but close companions in all the listings of the Apostles they're identified alongside each other.

Now let's meet Nathanael Bar-Tolmai by looking at the first chapter of John, and verse 43. This is the only place where he's identified in the New Testament. Verse 43 picks up the story of Jesus in the time in which He was calling disciples. John the Baptist had pointed to Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The ministry of Jesus then officially began. Jesus called Simon and Andrew, in the prior passage to be His disciples. Later on they would become Apostles. At this point He just called them to be disciples. And then on the very next day after He had done that, He purposed to go into Galilee and He found Philip. And He said to him, "Follow Me." Philip is identified as from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter, probably knew them well, attended the same synagogue with them, knew them to be seekers of the true God, lovers of the true God, with a messianic hope they had very much in common. They were true believers of the true God and they were desirous of the coming of Messiah and they followed Jesus, hoping Him to be that Messiah to whom they had waited.

Now Philip, it says in verse 45, found Nathanael. They were acquaintances. We don't know what that acquaintance was about. We don't know whether it was a professional one, whether it was a family one, whether it was social, whatever it was, Philip found Nathanael. And the implication here is

that he knew him, that he immediately went and pursued him and got him because he wanted to tell him what he himself had discovered concerning the Messiah.

Nathanael then was found by Philip where Philip was found by the Lord Himself. Obviously God was sovereignly overruling any circumstances that would cause any other finding to take place so that what happened was His perfect will. And it was the will of God that Philip pursued Nathanael and bring him to Jesus, which is exactly what he did.

Now Philip's conversation with Nathanael gives us some introduction to what kind of a guy he was. "We have found Him of whom Moses and the law and also the prophets wrote." Now this is the first introduction we get to Nathanael. What matters to Nathanael is Scripture. Philip knows his friend Nathanael, he knows that Nathanael views things from the Scripture's standpoint. And so when he goes to him to introduce the Messiah that he has found, or has found him, he does so from the standpoint of Old Testament prophecy. This is to indicate to us that Nathanael and probably Philip together were students of the Old Testament. He doesn't say to him...I found a man who has a wonderful plan for your life. He doesn't say...I found a man who will fix your marriage. He doesn't say any of those kinds of things that might appeal to some other element of the personality of Nathanael. He hits him where he lives, "We have found the one who is spoken of by Moses and the law and also the prophets." The law and the prophets was simply a term to refer to the Old Testament.

This indicates to us that he was a searcher of Scripture. That he is a seeker after divine truth. And I really believe that with the exception of Judas Iscariot, all of the Apostles were to some degree seekers after divine truth. That is, their hearts were right before God. They were sincere in their love for God and their desire to know the truth and to know the Messiah. In that sense they were very different than the religious establishment which was dominated by hypocrisy. They were the real thing. And so Philip finds his close friend, Nathanael/Bartholomew and he tells him, "We have found the one about whom we have studied so long."

Very likely together they had poured long hours over the Scripture. Very likely they had searched the law and the prophets to discern the truth about the coming of Messiah. And it was really because Nathanael was so well trained in Scripture, perhaps better than Philip, but it was because he was so well versed in Scripture that he was so immediate in his response to Jesus. He was able to recognize Jesus so clearly because he had such a clear understanding of what the Scripture said about Him. He knew what the promises said, so he knew what the fulfillment was. He knew Him of whom Moses and the prophets had written when He showed up. Not immediately upon the first introduction of Philip, but immediately upon the first introduction of Jesus he recognized Him.

So, Philip says to him, here's the amazing part, end of verse 45, "It is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph." Son of Joseph was how you identified people, that's where you get the name Josephson, or

Albertson, or any other of those kinds of names that find their way through Anglo language, which identifies someone as the son of someone else. Your second name is an identifying name with your family, it identifies you with your father. That's the idea, isn't it? I mean, there's an effort in feminism to change that, but historically since the beginning of time and memorial, if you will, people have been identified by the father's name. And so this man named Jesus which may have been a common name, Joshua really, same name, is the Jesus who is the Son of Joseph and from the town of Nazareth. And there had to be a certain amount of surprise even in the voice of Philip as he was saying, "You'll never believe this, this...it's the Son of Joseph, the man named Jesus up in Nazareth."

And verse 46 we get a little further insight into Philip (he meant Nathanael). He as a student of Scripture, a searcher for the true knowledge of God. That's right, his spiritual side was strong and faithful and diligent, honest, but he was human. And here's his response, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Now that, folks, is just prejudice...that's just prejudice. If it said, "You know, as I read the Old Testament, I read Micah the prophet, Micah says the prophet has to come from...where?...Bethlehem, not Nazareth." He could have said, "But, Philip, Messiah is to come from Bethlehem." Or he could have said, "But, Philip, Messiah is to be identified in Jerusalem because He's going to reign in Jerusalem." He could have said, "Philip, this is impossible, the Messiah can't come from Nazareth." But he's flawed just like everybody else. He jut flat says, "Could anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Oh come on, that is a general statement that manifests a prejudice. That's not rational, that's emotional. Now he didn't live in such a hot town himself, Cana, I've been there a few times. Unless you were looking for the house quote/unquote where Jesus turned water into wine, you wouldn't go there. Cana was in walking distance from Nazareth but it was off the beaten track and Nazareth was a crossroads. If you go north and south in the ancient world, you go through Nazareth. If you're going up the coastland of Israel, you eventually get into Galilee and you go through Nazareth as you head forward to eat, sleep and get supplies. And if you're going east to west, you're going to go through Nazareth, very likely coming from the east heading toward the Mediterranean, or the opposite. It was a crossroads, it was a rough town, it was an unrefined town, it was an uneducated town. It is still the same, much the same way. It's not, you probably think of it as a picturesque kind of place, it isn't. It has a nice setting on the slopes of the hills up there in Galilee, but it's...it's not a memorable town still and it wasn't in those days. There was an unrefined and uneducated lot that lived there. The Galileans even looked down on the Nazarenes and the Judaians looked down on the Galileans and really looked down on the Nazarenes.

And again, you get this idea that God finds some pleasure by not only using the commonest of people but having them come from the most despised locations so that essentially they have nothing going for them, except that they're used to transform the world and in the end the only explanation to that is God, so He gets all the glory.

It is inconceivable to Nathanael/Bartholomew that the Messiah would come out of that tacky place called Nazareth, the rough place, an evil place, a sinful place, corrupt place. Well that would have been okay if he had said, "It's an evil place," but to say, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" is just plain prejudice. A little bit of town jealousy maybe, cause Cana was certainly forgettable. And if Jesus hadn't turned water into wine there at a wedding, nobody would have ever given it a thought.

Prejudice is an ugly thing. It's uncalled for generalization based on feelings of superiority, not based on fact. But prejudice is very effective in cutting people off from the truth. In fact, I suppose in one sense we could say that the whole nation of Israel rejected their Messiah because of prejudice. They didn't believe their Messiah should come out of Nazareth either. They didn't believe their Messiah and all of His Apostles could come out of Galilee. And they mocked the Apostles as uneducated Galileans. They didn't like the fact that Jesus spoke against the religious establishment. And from the religious leaders on down to the hoi polloi, the people sitting in the synagogue, it was their prejudices that caused them to reject Him, even in His own town as we learn in the fourth chapter of Luke. Jesus went into the synagogue, His own synagogue where He grew up in His own town of Nazareth and He went in there and He preached and they hated His message. They were so filled with prejudice against Him and against what He said that after He preached the sermon they tried to take Him out a cliff on the edge of town and throw Him off a cliff and kill Him.

It was really this prejudice that skewed their view of the Messiah. And you have all the scribes and Pharisees, all the religious elite who were whited sepulchers, that is they were hypocrites, wretched on the inside and white-washed on the outside. They were filled with prejudice against Jesus because He unmasked their wickedness, because He told them what the truth was about themselves, about God and about Himself and about salvation. It was their prejudice against Him as a Galilean, prejudice against Him as an uneducated person outside the religious establishment, prejudice against His message, prejudice against Him every way that literally shut them off from the gospel. They refused to hear Him because they were prejudice against Him.

John Bunyan understood this and when he wrote his famous allegory, The Holy War, which pictures God coming down to conquer a soul, he tells about Immanuel, that's God, and the forces of Immanuel coming to the town of Mansoul. And the forces of Immanuel coming to the town of Mansoul are coming to bring the gospel to Mansoul. And they direct their assault on Mansoul at the Eargate because faith comes by hearing, so Bunyan understood that in his allegory. But Diabolos who was the enemy of Immanuel and His forces and wants to hold Mansoul captive to hell, decides to meet the attack by stationing at the Eargate which is the gate in which Immanuel's forces come, stationing at the Eargate old, Bunyan writes, "Old Mr. Prejudice, an angry and ill-conditioned fellow," he writes, "and Diabolos put under his power 60 men called Deafmen." And the gospel in Bunyan's view was stopped by prejudice. Very vivid.

Men's ears are often closed to the gospel by prejudice, racial prejudice, social prejudice, religious prejudice, whatever. And this effectively caused the Jewish nation to remain deaf to the Messiah. Diabolos had stationed at the Eargate of Israel the deaf. That is why when Jesus came into His own synagogue and spoke the truth, they were deaf to it and tried to kill Him, throw Him off a cliff.

It's still that way today. Moving from deafness you could borrow the vivid imagery of Paul, "The god of this world has blinded their eyes." Deaf and blind by their prejudice against the truth, against righteousness they missed the message.

Was Nathanael influenced by that? Sure. He lived in a society that was prejudicial by temperament, nature cause all sinful people are...tend toward being prejudice. We all make prejudice statements. We all draw prejudicial conclusions about certain people and certain classes, certain societies. And we make these crazy generalizations which are sinful.

And so he was like all the rest of us, but his prejudice had expanded a little bit and attached itself to a whole town. So he was prejudice, at least at that point.

But, Philip said to him, verse 46, "Come and see." You know, that's the way you deal with prejudice cause prejudice is not objective, it's subjective. It's not based on fact, it's based on feeling. It's not based on reality, it's based on sense of superiority. And Philip knew that the solution to his friend's prejudice was, "Come and see...Come and see." You don't need to have this prejudice, you can have reality. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Come see.

And he went. A prejudice mind, but I think a seeking heart and his seeking heart overpowered his prejudice mind. And now we learn about him. The most important thing and we hear it from the lips of Jesus, can't imagine a more wonderful thing than to have one's commendation come out of the mouth of Jesus. Verse 47, "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him and He said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile.'"

What a statement. It would be one thing that at the end of your life, you know, you hear this at a funeral, somebody dies and the preacher says, "Well, they're going to heaven where they're going to hear, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'" That's a nice epitaph, how would you like that at the beginning?

This man was pure from the outset. Oh sure he was human, sure he was flawed. We're all flawed and one of his flaws was he had prejudice. But it was also true of him that he was an Israelite indeed, for real, alethos, genuinely, truly an Israelite.

What's He talking about? He's talking about his descent from Abraham? No, not in the physical sense. He's not talking about his blood, his genetics. What do you mean he's a true Israelite? He's an Israelite who is true because in him there's no guile. That's what defines it. Guile is deceit, deception.

What Jesus is saying is, you know, for the most part the Israelites are not real...not real. Romans 9:6 says, "Not all Israel is Israel." Romans 2 the end of the chapter, Paul says, "A Jew is not a Jew who is one outwardly, a Jew is a Jew who is one inwardly."

Here was an inward Jew. Here was one who worshiped the true and living God. This is the real thing. And Jesus said in John 8, later one, "If you obey My Word, if you follow My Word, if you do My Word, hearing My Word and applying it, you are My real disciple." He used the same term. You're My true disciple. This was a true disciple from the start in whom there is no deception. There was no hypocrisy and this is very unusual. When Jesus indicted the religious establishment of Israel, He indicted them as hypocrites. In Matthew 23 you have that amazing diatribe against them in which He calls them hypocrites from every possible perception. And here was a non-hypocritical Jew. The synagogues were full of hypocrites. He found that out in His own synagogue when He preached and they tried to kill Him because He had unmasked the true condition of their hypocritical hearts.

Here was a man who was a true Israelite and a true Israelite is one who is an Israelite on the inside. He had his heart circumcised. What does that mean? Romans 2 says, "Circumcision of the heart." What does it mean? His heart's been cleansed. This was a...this was a justified man. This was a righteous man. This was a man who knew the true God and loved Him and served Him. Flawed, of course, because everybody is. But he was the real thing. He wasn't like the scribes. He wasn't like the Pharisees and most of the rest of the people. He was trustworthy, genuine.

Well, the response of Nathanael...Nathanael, verse 48, said to Him, "How do You know me? How do You know me?" Now let's assume that...I realize you can interpret things a lot of ways, but if you put yourself in the context, what do you think he's saying here? He's questioning whether this man can be the Messiah that Philip says is the Messiah, he's questioning it. Not that he questions Philip, Philip is his friend. It's not that he questions the Scripture, it's just that this man from Nazareth doesn't seem to fit the picture, son of a carpenter, a no-name, non-descript guy named Joseph who comes from a town that has no connection to prophecy, doesn't even exist in the Old Testament, so what's the point? He just can't believe it.

He shows up and Jesus says to him, "Ah, an Israelite indeed in whom there's no deceit." I think he read it this way...he said, "How do You know me?" with this kind of incredulous thought, "Are You just flattering me? How do You know me? Are You just trying...are You just trying to...is this Brownie points?" you know to borrow the teen-age vernacular. "Are You just trying to add me to Your followers by this flattery? How can You possibly say that? That's a pretty...that's a pretty

straightforward come on. I mean, how in the world could You say that about me?"

This...I think he sees it as a just a little smoozing of Him to bring him into the group. And Jesus answered and said to him, "Well before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Oh...now this is a whole different deal. Now we're not talking about flattery, we're talking about omniscience. "Before Philip ever came to find you, I saw you under that fig tree."

Well, Jesus wasn't there, Nathanael knew that. I saw you there. I saw you under the fig tree. This is omniscience. And I think there may be a little more in this. All the little things in Scripture make it fascinating to me. Poor people lived in a one-room house, for the most part in Israel. And you did everything in a house and the house could get full of smoke and it could get stuffy and also was very hot. And one of the ways you cooled off was to plant trees around a house, close to the house. And one of the favorite trees to plant was a fig tree cause it provided wonderful fruit, it grew to a height of about 15 feet so you could get under it and it spread to, I suppose, a diameter of maybe 30 feet. So this would make a wonderful shade tree, a way to get out. So you could leave the house, the closeness of the house, the heat of the house where they did all the cooking and everything. This would be a wonderful place to go. They also had a little patio on the roof but in the heat they wouldn't go up there. And so this was a typical place to go. It became kind of a private room for poor people. It became a kind of a place to go and sit and meditate.

And I think Jesus is saying not just...I knew your geography, or I knew your physical location. But I saw you out there under the fig tree. One writer says this, historian, "In Palestine the houses of the poor people because they had only one room led to the people seeking quietness to pray and meditate outside the house beneath the shade of a fig tree."

If you wanted to escape the noise of the house, the hustle, bustle of the house, and it was warm, you would go out under the shade of the fig tree. And in effect, that may be what Jesus is saying...I know the state of your heart because I saw you under the fig tree and I knew what you were doing. That was your private room. That's where you would go and study. That's where you would go and pray. That's where you would go and meditate. I saw you in your secret place. I saw you in the private place. I saw you in the place of meditation. I knew what you were doing.

So, Jesus not only saw his location, but he saw his heart. I knew the sincerity of your heart because I saw right into you when you were under the fig tree.

Well, that was enough for Nathanael. Verse 49, "Nathanael answered Him, 'Rabbi, teacher, master, You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.'" John's whole gospel is written to prove that Jesus is the Son of God, that's how it begins, right? "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God," and he goes on to talk about in the Son was God manifest. And here in the very first chapter he gives the testimony of Nathanael to add to the thesis of the

whole gospel that this Jesus is the Son of God. And that term "Son of God" always is used to refer to sharing the same nature. It is to say He's deity. He is of the same essence as God. By the way, this is something three years later Philip hadn't yet understood because three years later Philip, as we saw last time, says to Jesus, "Show us the Father." And Jesus says, "Have I been around so long and you still don't get it? If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." Philip didn't get it till the end. His friend got it at the start.

This man knew the Old Testament. This man knew what the prophets had said. This man knew who was coming. And regardless of the fact that He came from Nazareth, His omniscience, His spiritual insight, His ability to read the heart of Nathanael was enough.

John makes a point of this at the end of chapter 2. When Jesus was in Jerusalem after this, it was the Passover, His first Passover there in His ministry time during the feast. It said, "Many believed in His name." That sounds good, beholding His signs or miracles which He was doing. "But Jesus on His part was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men." They were believing in Him but He made no commitment to them, no connection, verse 25, because He didn't need anyone to bear witness concerning men for He Himself knew what was in man. And He knew what was in them was not the real thing. They believed superficially, they wanted to make a connection. He never allowed that to take place because He knew that they weren't Nathanaels in whom there was no deceit...no guile, no hypocrisy. He knew the real thing when He saw it and He saw it in this Israelite named Nathanael.

Nathanael knew He knew his heart. He not only knew his physical location, but He knew his spiritual condition. And he said, "That's enough for me, only God knows that, therefore You are the Son of God." That is to say You have the same nature as God, You are one with God. And that is, I think, clearly indicated on a number of occasions in the Old Testament that the Messiah would be the Son of God, if no other place, certainly Psalm 2. He got it right, You are the Son of God...that's the first thing, the deity of Christ. Second, You are the King of Israel, Messiah, anointed one who will fulfill all the promises made to Abraham and David. He got the message, omniscience was enough, it convinced him. This man knew my physical location, and this man knows my heart.

He was like Simeon back in the second chapter of Luke, remember, when Simeon lifted up the baby and said, "This is the Son of God, this is the one we've been waiting for." They were looking for the consolation of Israel, looking for the comforter, looking for the Messiah. And I believe Nathanael was one of those deep students of Scripture, one of those true Jews who waited for the Messiah and knew when He came He would be Son of God and King. He was never one of the half-committed. He went all the way to total understanding and total commitment on day one.

"So Jesus...in verse 50...answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe.'" There's no question mark here in the Greek, it's better a statement than a

question. The NIV translates it as a statement and I think that's a better rendering, so that it reads, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, you believe." You believe because of omniscience...Jesus says...I affirm that, I affirm that.

Then He adds, "You shall see greater things than these." You think this was something? You haven't seen anything yet. All it took was omniscience. One incident of omniscience, seeing what no man could see physically, knowing a heart that no man could know spiritually, that was enough to convince Philip (he means Nathanael) this was the Son of God and the King of Israel. That's all it took. He didn't need a lot of proof, just one thing. Then the Lord said to him, "You haven't seen anything yet, greater things than these shall you see."

And you know what He's saying to him? "Nathanael, from here on out everything you see is just going to enrich your faith, enlarge your faith." The other disciples, the things that they see, they're going to struggle with. They're not going to understand. And even Philip...Lord, show us the Father...they're going to be struggling. Not you, everything you see is going to enrich what you already know to be true.

And that's the way it was. He was doing miracle after miracle, raising the dead, healing the sick, creating food, walking on water, everything He did, everything He said, all the supernatural elements of His life, casting out demons, and you could just see Nathanael nodding it and the faith in his heart getting enlarged and enlarged by it all. How wonderful to see someone so trustworthy and trusting from the very beginning so that the whole three years with Jesus was just this unfolding panorama of supernatural reality.

And He added in verse 51, Jesus did, "Truly, truly, for certain I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." What's that? That's just...it's just a sort of metaphoric or symbolic way to say...you're going to see heaven come down on Me, angels, supernatural revelation, supernatural power, you're going to see it and you're going to understand it.

Of all the Apostles, Nathanael seems to me to be the one who gained the most from his time with Jesus, because at the outset he knew exactly who He was. And everything was an enrichment. And maybe Jesus was kind of playing off that familiar Old Testament passage in Genesis 28 where Jacob dreams about a ladder from heaven and revelation coming down that ladder. And Jesus says to Nathanael, "I'm the ladder and heaven is going to come down and you're going to see the power of the angels, divine revelation, supernatural miracles are going to come down and go back up from the Son of Man." Which is His own expression to describe Himself used over 80 times in the New Testament.

Well, in the end then, Nathanael enjoyed the fullest and richest and most complete blessing from his time with Jesus. Judas, he got nothing. What a stark contrast. Missed the point of everything. But on the other hand, there was Nathanael who got the point of everything. He knew it was heaven coming down on the Son of God, the King of Israel.

That's all we know about him. But that's really enough. There are two others in group two, Matthew and Thomas. Next time, which will be a while because I'm going to get a little vacation here, next time we'll look briefly at Matthew because we already considered him in chapter 5 here in Luke and we'll look at one of everybody's favorites, Thomas. And I'll try to explode the myth of doubting Thomas. Don't go anywhere, I have something to say to you particularly.

You know, I'm thankful as I read a lot of material on the Apostles, as I read about the people that God has used. You know, I've been reading a lot of biographies and I'm consistently amazed at how God has always used weak people, how He can go into the gutter and into the horrible pits of the world and find the worst, the lowest, the most degraded and save them and then make them the means of somebody else's salvation. I'm sure we could all understand why Paul said, "I'm the chief of sinners, but Jesus died for me." The Savior can make an Apostle out of a Publican, He can make a woman of virtue out of a prostitute as He did in the case of Mary Magdalene. I mean, all through history God has been using flawed, sinful people. And we've seen it in these men.

But what about your own life? I'm sure in the congregation this morning as in the first hour, there are some man or some woman, some young person who feels that their life is broken and disreputable, and maybe even scandalous and that their heart is dirty and their mind is full of corruption. Maybe even you feel a little sort of self-conscious being here, if the truth were known. Well I want you to know, you're just the kind of person the Lord can use mightily because He is glorified when He picks up the lowly, the base, the common, the humble and transforms them. As long as you can cry, "Lord, have mercy on me," that's all He asks, like the Publican who beat on his chest. And of that man, Jesus said, he went home justified.

If you are available, willing, the Lord can change you and use you to change the world. That's what He's been doing. And He's still doing it. One of the greatest preachers in America in the...after the turn of the century, was a man who was a drunken alcoholic who spent all his family's money on his booze. Didn't feed his family. Eventually had a little baby girl who died. She died of malnutrition. He went in a drunken stupor to the funeral, and the story goes, and after the service was over, he stole the clothes off her dead body to exchange for a drink. That's when he stumbled into a mission, was converted, was used to bring many others to Christ.

I mean, that's just one among millions of stories of what God can do, and will do for those who are willing.

Father, we thank You for Nathanael. We thank You for those who believe from the start fully, who aren't skeptical and pessimistic and doubting and distrusting. We thank You for the fact that among this amazing array of personalities there is someone like all of us that You can use mightily and You receive the glory for what You accomplish through Nathanael. One thing, Lord, we regret, we don't have any record of how he died. Tradition doesn't tell us anything, Scripture doesn't tell us anything. In fact, we don't have any more information about his ministry. But we look forward to meeting him in heaven and asking him how it went and how it ended. But we do know that he was faithful to the end because he was faithful from the start. Everything from there built his faith stronger. We would love to be like him. Give us that kind of trust so that everything we see, everything we experience enlarges our faith and our worship in our Savior's name. Amen.

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