

## **The Disciples' Testimony Concerning Jesus**

John 1:38-51

43-7

We come now to the Word of God, John chapter 1 and verses 38 to 51. This is on the surface a narrative portion of Scripture. And we'll see many of these as we engage ourselves with the gospel of John, as John tells the story of Jesus from His own perspective. But there's some wonderfully foundational things in this section, as we would expect at the beginning of the gospel of John. Let me begin reading and we might as well start reading at verse 35.

“Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples”—that’s John the Baptist--“and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, ‘What do you seek?’ They said to Him, ‘Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come, and you will see.’ So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which translated means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).

“The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus 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 any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ Jesus saw Nathanael coming to 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 and said to 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 and said to him, ‘Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree...you believe? You will see greater things than these.’ And He said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”

This is a very, very simple account of Jesus collecting His first followers. But it has great importance for the apostle John because John has a purpose in writing this gospel of 21 chapters, and he articulates that purpose in chapter 20, verse 31, “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” So as I said before, his purpose is both apologetic, that is to prove that Jesus is the Son of God, and the Messiah, the Savior, the Redeemer, and it is an evangelistic purpose so that you may believe that and by believing that have eternal life in His name.”

So what John does in these 21 chapters is amass evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, the

promised Messiah and the Savior. And he amasses all that evidence from every possible source that he can draw it. By the time we're at the end of the gospel of John, he has exhausted all the necessary sources of the proof that Jesus is the Son of God. Whenever a person comes to me and has questions about the identity of Jesus, through the years I have told them, "Read the gospel of John; read the gospel of John and draw your own conclusion, because it is written that you might know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that you might believe that, and in believing that have eternal life in His name." So John accumulates evidence concerning Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, the One who was God, was with God, and was made flesh--as he says early in the chapter.

Now he starts out with the testimony of the greatest man who had ever lived up until his time, John the Baptist, the last and greatest of all Old Testament prophets. The testimony of the last and greatest of all Old Testament prophets matters, and John was revered by the population of Israel as a prophet. And it is John then who points to Jesus and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" And we have the record of that declaration here in chapter 1 of John's gospel, verse 29. He repeats it again in verse 36, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

True Israelites, true Jews, believing Jews knew they were sinners. John's ministry was a ministry of repentance. His baptism was a baptism of repentance. Now remember, he is confronting a nation of self-righteous people who don't think they need to repent and don't think they need a Savior. That would be the dominant view. That was the view of the religious establishment. They were not looking for a lamb, or a sacrifice, or a savior, they were looking for a king. They felt they had already achieved status and acceptance with God by their religiosity and their morality. But John's message was, you are no better than Gentiles. You are outside a relationship with God, you need to repent and you need to be baptized as an outward expression of the desire for an inward cleansing, like a Gentile who is becoming associated with Jewish religion. In other words, you're outsiders, you need to repent or the wrath of God is going to fall on you. John preached wrath and he preached repentance, and then he pointed to Christ and said, "This is the Lamb and the sacrifice for your sins." True Jews understood that. They knew they were sinners. They knew they needed to repent and they knew they needed a sacrifice for their sin. And perhaps these men, this small group of fishermen, even understood the full impact of Isaiah 53. There was coming one who would be wounded for their transgressions, crushed for their iniquities. They would have understood the sacrificial system pointing toward a full and final sacrifice. And when John said, "Behold the Lamb of God," that may not have registered with the populace, but it registered with those who had a true understanding of the Old Testament and a true admission of their own spiritual and sinful condition.

So here in this section, verses 38 to 51, we meet a little group of Jews who were believers in the Old Testament and had a true interpretation of the Old Testament that had truly changed their lives, represented by the words of our Lord, "Behold"--that's a shocking realization--"a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit"--a real believer. So here is a little group of believers that we just read about--Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael--and John is also originally with Andrew in this. You can add James. You can throw in Thomas. And you have seven Galilean fishermen, seven Galilean fishermen who give testimony ultimately, although Thomas took him a long time till he finally said, "My Lord and my God." They start out to be the core of the...of the disciples of Jesus, who then become the apostles of Christ, the first great preachers and missionaries of the gospel that start what is still being finished and will be until Jesus comes. It's an amazing reality how the Lord chooses these insignificant people and He doesn't have to scour the whole country, He doesn't have to try to find the best guy in every city or every county. He can take four, five guys who know each other, that live in the same area, make their living the same way--catching fish--and He can turn them into world

changers. He can take anybody and do that, and that's what you see here.

You know, the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 said, "Consider your calling, not many noble, not many mighty," remember that? The Lord has called the base and the lowly and the nothings and the nobodies and the insignificant. And that's how the gospel gets launched. The seed that's planted is John the Baptist; he's like the first testifier to Jesus. And then the next group is this group that's completely alien to the religious establishment. There's not a rabbi; there's not a priest; there's not a Sadducee; there's not a Pharisee; there's not a scribe--no one who is a part of the religious establishment which was apostate. No one is selected, but rather humble, rural fishermen become the first followers of Jesus--the first missionaries, the first preachers, the first witnesses--and they give an amazing testimony. In verse 41, one of them says we found the Messiah. In verse 45, another one says, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote." And in verse 49, another one says, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." And the reason for the story here is to declare those statements. We have found the Messiah who is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, who is the Son of God and is the King of Israel. This is not their calling to be apostles; that doesn't happen until a year and a half later. Half way through the ministry of Jesus, these men are identified as part of the twelve apostles. But at the start here, they're just common, insignificant, uninfluential Galilean fishermen who know each other, who along with James and John all live in the same place and make their living the same way. They may well have worshiped God together in the same synagogue. Amazing. But what they launch will go, and is still going, to the ends of the earth, the ends of the earth.

The truth of the gospel spreads in every generation since the first through humble people, through the unknown, the uninfluential, the powerless, the weak and the meek. That's how it's always spread--person to person to person; the kingdom advances one soul at a time, one soul at a time. Sure there are preachers who preach to groups, but the primary way the kingdom moves is from one person to another, to another, to another, and that's how it all started.

Now the challenge for them was immense, really immense. They were nobodies, absolutely nobodies, as given testimony to the fact that they were declaring Jesus to be the Messiah who Himself appeared to be a nobody, the son of Joseph from Nazareth. And everybody in Judea looked down on Galilee and the people in Galilee looked down on Nazareth. Talk about humble beginnings.

So as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, the advance of the gospel cannot be attributed to the power of the people. It can only be attributed to the power of God. And so, if you're going to boast, boast in the Lord because it's by His doing that you're in Christ. The Lord has turned His back on the religious establishment. People might have thought if He's the true Messiah, the rabbis will tell us, the scribes will tell us, the Pharisees will tell us, the priests will tell us. But all of them resented Jesus, resisted Jesus, rebelled against His message, and led to His execution. No, the message is going to come from some Galilean fishermen in the purpose of God. And it continues that way even today.

Right here in verse 38 we are at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Up to this time He's been in obscurity, living in Galilee; but these men don't even know Him, they don't know Him. Later on one of them says, "How do You know me?" Which is to say, "I don't know You." And in that little, small area of Galilee, thirty years Jesus has lived there and they don't even know who He is, which speaks to the fact that He had done nothing to draw attention to Himself. And He begins now to gather His followers, and John the Baptist fades out of the picture now and makes one small appearance in chapter 3. But now the story turns to Christ and He takes center stage.

Now as we look at verses 38 to 51, we'll split this into the natural way that John does it--it's two groups. The first really focuses on Andrew and Peter; the second focuses on Philip and Nathanael. Keep in mind that John is John the apostle, not John the Baptist--is embedded here as well but never likes to refer to himself. So let's look at group one.

We're still at this time in the location of verse 28 at a place called Bethany, beyond the Jordan, not the Bethany near Jerusalem, but another one across the Jordan out in the wilderness where there was water, where John had been preaching and baptizing. We're still there. This is day three. You remember on day one, John had told the people that were there. This is a three-day snapshot of John's ministry. Day one he said, "The Messiah is present. He's come." On day two he said, "There He is, behold the Lamb of God!" On day three he says, "Follow Him," and he turns his disciples from him to follow Christ. He doesn't want disciples following him, not John the Baptist. He wants them following the One he came to declare. So verse 37, the two disciples heard him speak--and that would be Andrew and John--they heard him speak and they followed Jesus. And that's where we pick up the story.

So this is the third day in John's chronology and that's another indication that John is present because he's so precise on the days, even down into verse 43, the next day. And he also makes the declaration in the end of verse 39 that it was the tenth hour. So he even remembers the time, which is good indication that John was the unnamed one there. So they follow Jesus as John the Baptist has instructed them at the end of verse 37.

Verse 38, we pick it up. This is group one. "Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, 'What do you seek?'"--"What do you seek?" Now keep in mind that there are two of them here, down later we find one of them identified in verse 41, one of the two who heard John speak and followed Him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. The other one is unnamed, but again that's a good indication that it's John because he will not name himself. Starting in chapter 13, verse 23 he calls himself the disciple who leaned on Jesus, "whom Jesus loved." And then he keeps referring to himself in ways like that, chapter 19, chapter 20, chapter 21. But he kind of fades out of the picture. He's the writer and his humility shows up, and he sort of fades out and tells the story of Andrew and his brother Simon Peter, as you know him.

So in verse 38 they're following Jesus. Jesus turns and says, "What do you seek?" What's your motivation? What do you want from Me? What are you looking for? They knew John the Baptist had identified Jesus as the Messiah. He had identified Jesus in the true biblical way as the Lamb of God rather than the reigning King. He was a king and they declared that at the end of this testimony. But initially He comes as a lamb; He comes as a sacrifice for sin. They have been listening to John's message of sin and repentance, and mark it please, they are disciples of John, verse 35, "John was standing with both of them and they were his disciples." And then verse 37, "The two disciples"--not disciples of Jesus, but of John the Baptist. So they had bought fully into John's message of judgment and sin and repentance and you need salvation, and the Lamb of God has come.

Now keep in mind, John's preaching for months. He's preaching day after day after day. He didn't just say "Behold the Lamb of God" over and over again. He no doubt gave a full explanation of the identity of Jesus Christ as the Lamb, connected with the Old Testament sacrificial system--maybe Isaiah 53 so that they knew exactly what His coming as a Lamb meant. These are men who heard that message and believed that message and had come to repent and to receive the One who would

be the sacrifice. They have a lot of questions, so they are asked, "What do you seek?" And they give an answer that is really very, very wonderful. They said to Him, "Rabbi." Rabbi was a common expression that students used to give honor and respect to their teacher. In fact, it became another word for teacher, as the note says, "(which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?" They're saying, "Look, we can't cover everything that's on our minds here. "What do you seek?" We need to go where you are and we need to sit down with you, we want to have a conversation with you. They show great respect and great honor, and you will find this...this address "Rabbi" repeatedly given to Jesus through the gospel of John, and one time even in chapter 3 the disciples of John the Baptist call him "Rabbi." So it was a title of honor from students to their teacher. And so now they have transitioned from John as their teacher to Jesus as their teacher, and they now say, "You are our new rabbi; You are our teacher; where are You staying?" And they know there is more than just a casual sound bite that they need to hear. They want time. They want conversation. They have questions. They have inquiries. They want to discover everything they can discover about Him.

Now remember, they're not made permanent disciples on this day. They're just beginning to examine Jesus. Later on they will become permanent followers and later after that they will become apostles and be sent to preach the gospel. The Lord's invitation is immediate. This is just a beautiful picture of condescension and invitation. Verse 39, He said to them, "Come, and you will see." Come with Me and you will see. This is like Matthew 11 where Jesus said, "Learn of Me," "learn of Me"; "come, and you will see." Come with Me. This is the accessibility, the availability, the condescension of our Lord Jesus.

So they came and saw where He was staying. We don't know where that was, out in the desert somewhere, no doubt a humble place where Jesus was staying with some persons who had provided for Him a room or a bed. We know nothing more than that. "And they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour." By Jewish reckoning, which begins at 6:00 a.m., that would be four o'clock in the afternoon when they finally go to where Jesus is. So they're going to stay with Him, stay the day, stay the night. I can imagine if I started a conversation with the Son of God, sleep would be the last thing on my agenda. This must have gone through the night. They stayed with Him the remainder of that day because it was already about four o'clock evening. And this would have been in January, so the days are fairly short and the darkness had come.

I can only imagine what this must have been like. It's kind of an interesting parallel to the last meeting that Jesus had with the disciples on the road to Emmaus when they went in and sat down around the table and they asked questions and He essentially proved to them then the same thing He proved to these men here--that He was the One the Law and the Prophets spoke about. Remember in Luke 24 when He meets them on the way to Emmaus and they go in the house and sit down, He takes the Law and the Prophets and the Holy Writings and explains all the things concerning Himself. So He's giving the same lesson at the end that He was giving at the beginning. Again, that's a conversation that I would have loved to have been a part of. They spend the rest of the day and no doubt the night. Verse 40 simply notes that the two of them who had heard John the Baptist speak and followed him, one of them was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. Andrew will become known as "Simon Peter's brother" because Simon Peter is casting a big shadow. And by the time John writes his gospel, which would have been in the nineties, at the end of the first century, Peter would have been well-known and there wasn't a lot about Andrew. So Andrew would have had to spend his whole life being Simon Peter's brother. That would be the way he would be introduced.

However, if priority matters, Andrew is the first disciple called. He's the first disciple called and you

have the account of it here. Well, Andrew is called over that night to conviction that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. So he finds, first of all, his own brother Simon, which meant that he must have been around, which meant that he may have been a follower of John the Baptist as well, because, remember, they're not in Galilee where they live, they're down in the south, across the Jordan River, east of Jerusalem. He finds Simon and he says to him, "We have found the Messiah." Now that [Messiah] matters a lot to John, which translated into the Greek is "Christ." "Messiah" is a Hebrew word; "Christ" is a Greek word. It means "the Anointed One." And we'll see more about that tonight. But this is...John's point here; here is a first-person, eyewitness account by objective evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. Here is a reliable first-person testimony. "We have found the Messiah." No equivocation, no hesitation, no doubt, absolute certainty--"We have found the Messiah." The objective test of scrutiny, examining Jesus, asking Him questions, talking with Him the rest of the day through the night, and this is a joyful proclamation, joy beyond joy--"We have found the Messiah." And he brought him to Jesus, Simon Peter. He brought him to Jesus.

That's how the kingdom advances, isn't it? One bringing another. And so here comes Andrew dragging Peter to Jesus. Jesus looked at Peter and said, "You are Simon son of John," or Jonah, or Jonas--a lot of ways to transliterate that--"you're Simon, son of John." That must have caused Peter a little bit of shock. There's no indication that He was told that, but then He knows everything. He knows who he is. More than that, He knows who he will become. He says, "you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter)." "Cephas" is the Aramaic word, which was the common language they spoke. "Peter" is the Greek form of the word *stone*, or *rock*. And our Lord is predicting what Peter will become. It's going to be a tough journey getting him there, but he will become a rock. He will become a rock. Matthew 16, Jesus looks at him and says, "You are Peter," you are the stone. But on an even greater rock, the rock of your confession, I'll build My church. Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God--"on that rock bed [that *petra*] I will build My kingdom." But you're a *petros*, you're a stone. In fact, you're one of the foundation stones Ephesians 2:20 talks about, of the church. The Lord says, "I not only know you, but prophetically I know what you're going to become. You're going to be a rock. You're going to be solid. And he was from the day that the Spirit of God came upon him, and he stood up on the dais, if you will, on the Day of Pentecost and preached Jesus Christ and preached again. And preached through the first twelve chapters of the book of Acts in the foundation years of the church. He was the rock who proclaimed the truth on which the church was built. So Jesus must have startled Peter by knowing who he was and being able to prophesy what he would become.

I'm sure Peter was shocked and willing to accept the testimony of his brother Andrew, "We have found the Messiah." Men can't know what He knows. That's group one, Andrew and Peter.

Let's look at group two. Verses 43 to 51 is the second group--"the next day." This will be day four, "the next day He purposes to go into Galilee." And when He goes to Galilee, which you could walk in a good portion of the day--probably less than twenty miles--it would be a rigorous walk, but if you started early you'd get there. And he found Philip and He said, "Follow Me." It's very likely that Peter and Andrew were with Jesus and more instruction and more interrogation went on all day as they traversed the countryside back to Galilee. So they go back to find friends. Verse 44, "Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter." That's a small...that's not a city. Bethsaida is a small place, "house of fishing." It's a fishing village on the northeast tip of the Sea of Galilee. They were all from the same village. Later on, of course, we know Peter's house was in Capernaum because that's what we're instructed in Mark chapter 1, verses 21 to 29. So he was born and raised with these other two guys, Philip and Nathanael, in the little village of Bethsaida and later moved to Capernaum where he

had his house.

That would be similar to Jesus of Nazareth who lived in Nazareth but originated in Bethlehem. So we meet then two men who know Peter and Andrew very well because they were from the same village. And it was a very small place. So Jesus comes to Philip and says, "Follow Me." "Follow Me." That's a statement that Jesus makes again, and again, and again--twenty times He's going to say that to somebody. And He also says at other times, Luke 9, Matthew 8, Matthew 9, more times. You remember, "If any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross, deny himself, follow Me." This is the initial following. But His call is not to a momentary decision, but a life commitment--present tense, continuous action: "Follow Me." "Come after Me." Sure there's a moment in time in which that's a physical act, "Follow Me, follow Me, come with Me." And we don't know what happened in the conversation, but Philip follows. And whatever happened between the time Philip followed and verse 45 must have been an amazing experience because in verse 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We...found Him of whom Moses and the Law and also the Prophets wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." It doesn't even tell us the conversation, but the conclusion is enough, right? We have...first Andrew says we found the Messiah. Now Philip says, "We have found the one of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets"--the whole Old Testament--"wrote." We have found Him. We found Him.

What was Jesus doing in these times? He was explaining to them how He was the Messiah. How He was the fulfillment of everything the Old Testament said. So here you have a second testimony. You have the testimony of Andrew, "We have found the Messiah," based on a first-person eyewitness time with the Lord Jesus. You have the second first-person, objective eyewitness account of the testimony of Philip, who has spent time with Jesus and compared Him with the Law and the Prophets and declared that "we have found Him." We have found Him. And amazingly, it is "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Back to the beginning of verse 45, "Philip found Nathanael." Nathanael becomes an important part of the followers of the Lord and ends up being an apostle. He is referred to most often as Bartholomew. Only John calls him Nathanael. Bartholomew would be kind of his family name, Bar--son of Tholomew, Tolmai--so he is Nathanael, son of Tolmai; that's who he is. And by the way, he lived in another little village up there called Cana, Cana; another small village at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. And something very special is going to happen in Cana, in chapter 2, right? That's where there's a wedding and Jesus does His first miracle. The first sign, miraculous sign, is performed in the little village where Nathanael lived. The identification of Nathanael with Cana is made in John 21, verse 2.

So Philip says to Nathanael, "We have found the prophesied Messiah, and He is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And again, I just want to put in your mind that what must have happened in that time that they were together that day, is that Jesus did for Philip what He later did for the ones on the road to Emmaus. He went back to the Old Testament and showed how it was all fulfilled in Him--wonderful, wonderful reality.

Now, "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nazareth was a disdained town, and Joseph was absolutely nobody. He is the son of Joseph by family identity, although He is the Son of God by birth, right? Virgin born, Matthew 1; the Son of the Most High, Luke 1. He, Joseph, you remember, wanted to divorce his wife or stone her to death because she was pregnant and he had never known her. But the Lord declared to him through the angelic visitor that the Holy Spirit has placed the Son of God in

her womb. So Joseph is only the father by virtue of family identity. And this is, this is obscure; this is a nothing guy; this is nobody; this is a common man. This is a lot to swallow. We have found the Messiah; we have found the One prophesied in the Prophets and the Law of the Old Testament. And oh, by the way, He comes from Nazareth. That doesn't seem to work. Maybe if they had given the city in which He was born, Bethlehem, because at least that's a city of David; or maybe Jerusalem would be acceptable because that's a place where everything that's religious ceremonially happens. But Nazareth? And the son of a common man, Joseph? We're not surprised then when Nathanael says in verse 46, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" That's a little sort of civic rivalry there. We don't know whether at the time Nathanael had much of a perspective, but he had inherited a disdain for Nazareth, and he didn't have a lot to brag about--he came from Cana. Cana was a dinky little place, short walk from Nazareth. But I guess the people in Cana didn't think much of Nazareth. So he says, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Philip said to him, "Come and see." "Come and see." Same as verse 39, "Come and you'll see." John is giving us the testimony of eyewitnesses--objective, first-person, firsthand, who met with Jesus, asked all their questions based on the Old Testament promises, and came to the conclusion that He is the Messiah, He is the Son of God, He is the King of Israel, He is the One prophesied. And Nathanael is told by Philip, "You come, you ask your questions." So they head for Jesus, verse 47. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him to have his questions answered in the same way that Andrew and John and Peter and Philip had earlier, and here comes Nathanael. And Jesus says to him, verse 47, "Behold"--shocking, startling, stunning--"an Israelite indeed" [*alethos*, a true Israelite, a true Jew]. Paul says in Romans 2, a true Jew is one who is a Jew inwardly, a true believer in the true God, a saved man in Old Testament terms, a penitent believer in the true God in whom there is no deceit--no guile, no hypocrisy, no duplicity, no phoniness. Wow! This is rare in a nation of apostates, in a nation of hypocrites, in a nation of supposedly self-righteous people who exalt themselves. Here is an honest, true-hearted man, a genuine believer, a true believer, no hypocrisy--integrity, rare in Israel. I love the fact that the perfect Son of God, the sinless Son of God, the holy One could say of any man, "Here's a true Israelite in whom there's no deceit."

Does that mean he was perfect? No, but he had been made acceptable to God by his faith. And he was the real thing. He was the real thing--*alethos* ("genuine," "true"). What is happening here is Jesus is reading his spiritual condition supernaturally, supernaturally. And Nathanael's response is obvious, "How do You know me?" "How do You know me?" How do You know anything about me? How do You know that about me?

Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Well, you say, maybe He could see the fig tree. No, He couldn't see the fig tree. Before Philip had gone to have that conversation, and maybe that conversation happened under the fig tree, but before Philip ever went to find Nathanael, which verse 45 says, Philip found Nathanael: "I saw you under the fig tree." I not only know you on the inside, I know you on the outside. I not only know who you are, I know where you are. I saw you when My eyes couldn't see you. I can see your heart and I can see your body. Wow! It doesn't really matter where the fig tree was, it just matters that Jesus saw him there without seeing him physically. Omniscience.

There's an old tradition that John Gill writes about (the Puritan writer), and he says that there's a Syriac tradition that stated that when Jesus said "I saw you under the fig tree," He was referring to the fact that this is the old Syriac tradition that Nathanael happened to be born at the time when Herod was massacring the babies and in order to save Nathanael from Herod's massacre, Herod's

mother hid him under a fig tree and that Jesus is really saying, "I've known you since you were born." It's kind of interesting, but I don't know if that works since Herod was killing people in the south, and he was living in Galilee. Nice idea. I think the simplest understanding of it is: I see you wherever you are and I saw you before Philip ever found you.

This is pretty overwhelming, pretty overwhelming. When Philip found Nathanael, he gave him this message, "We have found the One of whom Moses and the Prophets have written." And he must have explained that. And in the time that they head toward Jesus, further explanation comes, which is confirmed by the omniscience of Christ who knows who he is and knows where he is. Verse 49, he's convinced. Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, great one, You're my teacher. You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel."

Testimony is mounting. Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael--first-person, eyewitness accounts; we can tuck John in there even though he doesn't refer to himself--"You are the Son of God." That's a Hebraism referring to being of the same nature; son of Belial is of the same nature as Satan. Son of God bears the same nature as God. That's a Hebraism. John and James were called sons of thunder because they bore the same nature as thunder--they were thunderous, outrageous kinds of people. So that was a Hebraism. What he's saying is You have the same nature as God. In John 3, that wonderful, familiar 16 to 18 repeats the idea that Jesus is the Son of God--again and again and again and again. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son of God. Then it refers to the Son of God, the Son of God, the Son of God--and all the way through John's gospel. That is to say that He bears the same nature as God; He is God the Son. "Rabbi, You are the Son of God." You are deity, and "You are the King of Israel." You are the Messiah, the Anointed One, the One who's come to reign. Now the testimony is complete. We have found the Messiah, the One promised in Moses and the Prophets who is the Son of God, who is the King that was promised.

John has then taken from this little group of guys that knew each other and caught fish on the shore of the Sea of Galilee--this collective, first-person testimony from the commonest of people, the most unexpected sources to carry this truth. Jesus answered and said to Nathanael, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, you believe." Jesus is affirming that the reason you believe is because I've demonstrated My omniscience to you.

That's good. That's good. But that might be fragile. So you will see greater things than these. The fact that I knew you on the inside to be a genuine believer, a true Israelite in whom there's no hypocrisy; the fact that I saw you when you were invisible to My physical eyes--that brought you to believe. But I will show you far greater things than these. That's not going to be enough.

So what did the Lord mean by that? The rest of the time that you follow Me over the period of three years, I will show you miracle upon miracle upon miracle upon miracle upon miracle. And that's then what He means in verse 51. He said to him, "Truly, truly," that is very familiar, 25 times in the gospel of John we're going to read that. "Truly, truly," and always from the lips of Jesus, to refer to something not only truthful but solemn and amazing and compelling. "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." What is that? Now remember, they knew Moses, the writings of Moses, the Pentateuch. They knew the Law. They knew the writings of the Old Testament. They knew the Messianic prophecies. They now know Jesus squares up with all of that. They know He's the Son of God because He's evidenced His deity. They've got the full picture. And they would have a wonderful familiarity with Genesis and the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis. And in the twenty-eighth chapter

of Genesis we read what is one of the most interesting of all the accounts in the lives of the patriarchs, and it had to do with Jacob. And you remember it.

Let me read a few verses of Genesis 28. Maybe we'll start at verse 10, "Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. Came to a certain place, spent the night there, because the sun had set...took one of the stones of the place, put it under his head, lay down in that place"...a stone for a pillow..."had a dream. Behold, a ladder was set on the earth." Actually a staircase would be better than a ladder, the Hebrew term. There was a staircase. The staircase started on the earth and the top reached to heaven "and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending." He saw this staircase, the angels of God going up and down, "And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, you will spread out to the west, the east, the north, the south; in you and your descendants all the families of the earth will be blessed. Behold, I am with you, I will keep you wherever you go; I will bring you back to this land; I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'"

What an amazing dream. And what's the dream about? God is saying, I am going to take you, you weary traveler, you weary pilgrim, I am going to take care of you, I am going to fulfill My promises to you and your people, your family. I am going to fulfill the Abrahamic promise. I'm going to develop your nation. I'm going to bless your nation. I'm going to bring salvation to your nation. I'm going to open up heaven and make sure the angels go back and forth to protect you and care for you and your people until that covenant is fulfilled. That's what Genesis 28 is talking about. And Jesus borrows that here in the last verse of chapter 1 and says, "You're going to see heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man." You're going to see heaven's power unleashed in My ministry, that's what He's saying. Son of Man is a Messianic title from Daniel 7:13-14, Jesus used it about eighty times to refer to Himself. This is a graphic dream given to Jacob to assure him that heaven was paying attention to him and that God was going to make sure the angels fulfilled their role in being the means by which God keeps His protection on His people. And He says to Nathanael, "You're going to see in a metaphoric sense, you're going to see heaven open up and angels come and go in My ministry. I will do supernatural works, no doubt mediated in some ways by angels."

How did Jesus live His life? According to the will of the Father by the Holy Spirit, mediated by angels. It was angels that announced to Zacharias that the forerunner would be born. It was angels that spoke to Mary. It was an angel that spoke to Joseph. It was a chorus of angels that announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds. It was angels who came in Matthew 4:11 and ministered to Jesus at the end of His temptation. It is angels that are at the tomb. It is angels that surround Him in His ascension. He even said, "Look, if I wanted to, I could call a legion of angels." So that we don't have them described throughout His ministry, this is a wonderful insight. Jesus does what He does by the will of the Father through the power of the Spirit by the means of the angels.

So He says, "Nathanael, I'm glad you believe because of My omniscience. You're going to see greater things than that, you're going to see greater things than that. You're going to see heaven open up and things happen that are supernatural and divine." And they start in chapter 2 and go to the end of the ministry of Jesus.

Now that's the introduction. Now let me give you the message. (laughter) I have a three-point outline (laughter) Here you have a microcosm of how salvation works. I'm just going to let you think about it.

I could say a lot more. Here's a microcosm of how salvation works. There must be a seeking soul. There must be a seeking soul, verse 38. Jesus turns and sees Andrew and John and says, "What do you seek?" "What do you seek?" Verse 39, "They came and saw where He was staying...they stayed"--that's more of that evidence of their seeking. Verse 45, Philip, "We have found Him," again indicating that he was a seeker. "We have found Him." "We have found Him." Verse 47, Nathanael is coming to Him. Salvation requires a seeking sinner, a seeking soul. "If you seek Me with all your heart, you'll find Me," right? "Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened." You know all of that.

Prompted by a sense of sinfulness, prompted by a heart of repentance, prompted by faith in the Scripture, the seeking soul comes. But salvation also requires a seeking Savior, and that's illustrated here. It is Jesus who initiates things. Verse 38, "What do you seek?" Verse 39, "Come, and you will see." Verse 43, "Jesus says to Philip, 'Follow Me.'" Verse 47, "Jesus sees Nathanael coming to Him, and says, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there's no deceit!'"

There's no possibility for the sinner to be seeking unless the Savior is seeking. Jesus said, "You have not chosen Me, but"...What?... "I've chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bear forth fruit."

But there's another element, too. Salvation requires a seeking soul, a seeking Savior, and a seeking saint. What does that fit in? "How will they hear without a preacher?" "Faith comes by hearing the Word."

So you have John the Baptist telling his disciples, verse 37, "Follow Jesus." You have verse 40, Andrew; verse 41, finding his own brother and telling him we found the Messiah. And then in verse 42, bringing Peter to Jesus. And then you have Philip, verse 45, finding Nathanael to bring Nathanael to Jesus.

Here at the very start, as the Holy Spirit moves John, to lay out testimony to the identity of the Lord Jesus Christ, we see the elements of salvation. It requires a seeking sinner, a seeking Savior, and a seeking saint to bear the message. So much more, but we'll see it all unfold as we go through the gospel of John. Let's pray.

Again we are overwhelmed, our Father, with the rich treasure of Holy Scripture. We...we're in awe of it. It is so obviously supernatural and divine, and at the same time so accessible, believable, precious to us. Thank You for this revelation again of the identity of our Lord Jesus. We have come together because we can make that confession. We have found the Messiah, the One of whom the Old Testament speaks, the One who is the Son of God, the King of Israel. We have found the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. All that He is, the Lamb, the Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, the Son of God, the King of Israel, the King of kings, all laid into this testimony of these humble men who had no religious motivation other than their own heart love for the true God and the Scripture and a desire to be obedient, penitent believers. And it was to them that you revealed the truth, and it's their testimony that we cherish. Thank You for it. Thank You for making it a living testimony that has the power to quicken our own hearts from death to life. Do that, we pray, in some hearts even today.

Now, Father, we go from this place with a new responsibility, a new level of accountability because

You have given us this glorious truth, not as an end, but as a means to proclaiming it to others. May we be like Andrew who found Peter, and Philip who found Nathanael. May we spend our lives finding others and declaring the truth of Christ to them. Use us in that way, and we'll thank You and praise You in Your Son's name. Amen.

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