

Getting Ready for the Kingdom
Son of God, King of Israel
John 1:43-51

Intro: We have visited Mt, Mk, and Lk in these sermons on Getting Ready for the Kingdom. Today we visit John. The fourth gospel differs in many ways from the other three. John enriches and expands our understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus by including events and teachings not mentioned elsewhere.

John alone records the call of Jesus to Philip and Nathanael.

I. FOLLOW ME

A. Jesus says, "Follow me." That is his standard address to the disciples, and that is what it means to be a disciple. He means to be taken literally with this invitation and command. Being a Christian means being a follower of Jesus. This is an accurate way to describe yourself.

B. Jesus reiterates this call after his resurrection to Peter beside the Sea of Galilee. A question arose in the mind of Peter as Jesus worked to restore him fully into his relationship and service. Peter was in such a mess after denying the Lord. Peter asked about John's future. Jesus told him it was not an issue: What is that you to? You must follow me (John 21:22).

***Blind Bartimaeus cried out to Jesus for mercy, and Jesus healed him. Then the Bible records, "He received his sight, and followed Jesus" (Luke 18:43).

C. QUESTION: WHO FOUND WHOM? Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." (John 1:43). Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one..."

1. "We have found the One." Philip says this joyfully:

I have found him, I have found him
Whom my soul so long has craved
Jesus satisfies my longing
Through his grace I know I'm saved.

Philip thinks that he has found Jesus, and in a way he has.

a. Philip has found "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." With these words Philip indicates that, although he is joyful, he has not yet understood his "find." Jesus is neither of Nazareth nor the "son of Joseph," as he was known. Nazareth is not impressive to Nathanael later on. Nathanael is a dedicated Israelite. He does not see how anything good can come out of Nazareth.

b. Philip found the one Moses and the prophets wrote about. That is, he has found the Messiah, he told Nathanael.

2. "Finding Philip..." John records that Jesus found Philip, and that is really what happened first.

a. Jesus found a wayward Israelite. "Philip" is a Greek name that was common among the Gentiles. This would indicate to some that Philip's parents were not strict and faithful Jews. But Jesus did not change his name as he changed Peter's.

b. He found him in Bethsaida, "The house of nets," because it is the abode of many fishermen.

c. He found him in a wicked place. "Woe to you, Bethsaida. If the miracles performed in you had been performed in Tyre or Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you" (Matthew 11:21-22).

d. Are you from a wicked place? You can still become a follower of Jesus even if you are from a place that rejects him.

D. Philip hears the call, "Follow me," and responds by finding Nathanael. This is the second instance in which one disciple immediately goes and finds another. It also happens with Andrew, who sees Jesus first and finds Peter.

We are followers of Jesus. He is making us fishers of men. He is changing our names, giving us new identities. Fishing for men is the primary, natural response to the call of Jesus. That URGENT call brings TRANSFORMATION and SIGNIFICANCE.

II. COME AND SEE. We do not invite people, "Follow me," as Jesus does. Instead, we invite them to "Come and see." Philip does this in part because he has no good answer for Nathanael's objection about Nazareth. But it is an invitation to come to Jesus and see with your own eyes who he is and what he is doing.

A. QUESTION: WHO SAW WHOM? Philip said, "Come and see" to Nathanael, who went to see Jesus. The next verse says, "When Jesus saw Nathanael..."

1. If you follow Jesus today, you will be thinking that you finally found him, the one you have looked for all your life. You will see this as the culmination of your journey of discovery. You will count it the best day of your life.
2. But what will really happen today is that Jesus will find you. He has been looking for you all your life. From the day you were born he has been seeking you. You are his lost sheep, and he will do everything, endure any hardship, to bring you into the fold. His search has taken him through the valley of the shadow of death. He has gone down under the executioner's cross for you. In all his sufferings, he has kept his eye on the goal—rescuing you.
3. Both things are true: you have been looking for him, the one who would make sense of your life, and he has been looking for you, the one he loves.

B. Jesus saw these things about Nathanael:

1. "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false" (John 1:47). Nathanael had questions about Nazareth as the town of the Messiah, and he voiced them. Jesus could have responded, "Can any good thing come out of Cana?" (John 21:2). He did not. He knew that Nathanael was a truth-seeker. He did not deal in falsehood. He was sincere. He complimented Nathanael. Jesus saw so much false religion, religion for show, religion to impress men rather than God, that seeing a "true Israelite" was a relief, and he said, "Behold," so that others would take note.

Nathanael is hesitant. That is good. Nathanael has embraced the faith of Israel with a whole heart. He is a TRUE Israelite, not one just in name. He already has a fine religion that he values greatly.

Sometimes when we hear the call to follow Jesus we see it first in tension with our current spiritual direction. We have given our energy and devotion in a certain way, to a certain system and structure, and we do not readily turn it over.

2. "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you" (John 1:48). Jesus reveals knowledge about Nathanael that startles him, miraculous in nature.

Jesus has seen you there, under the tree, in the corner of the room, thinking and praying. You have prayed in secret, but he rewards you openly. You, like Nathanael,

have meditated on eternal things. You have sought the Lord in the quiet of your own heart, and God has seen you. Today he is calling you out.

C. Nathanael saw these things about Jesus:

1. "You are the Son of God." The Apostle John starts right here with his gospel. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the birth narratives, the baptism, and the temptations of Jesus, John starts with a prologue that describes the deity of Christ.

John knew Jesus best among those who wrote his life story. Matthew knew Jesus, but he was not part of the inner circle nor was he the Beloved Disciple who sat beside Jesus at the Last Supper. Mark knew Jesus, but he was just a boy when these things we are reading about now occurred. Luke did not know Jesus. He wrote the memories of others under the inspiration of the Spirit.

We want to hear what this "best friend" of Jesus has to say about him. And John starts, not with the details of humanity by which we describe our best friends, but with the loftiest passage in the Bible about the deity of Christ.

2. "You are the King of Israel." Nathanael sees Jesus as the King. But he uses the term politically. They are not thinking, as Jesus will tell Pilate later, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Nathanael is thinking of earthly royalty. This is the Son of David, as Blind Bartimaeus will later shout. He is the "king of Israel," not the king of the universe.

These are revolutionary words not only spiritually but also politically. This very title will be used in mockery by some as he hangs upon the cross: "King of Israel" (Mark 15:32).

The disciples give Jesus the proper titles, but they do not know yet what they really mean. Kings do not die on crosses. They will soon learn what it means to follow such a Messiah as this, "wounded for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5).

D. Jesus tells Nathanael, You shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man (John 1:51). I hope you come to Jesus today, knowing that he is the one who fills the longing of your heart, that he is the one who is searching for you and finding you. But you "ain't seen nothin' yet," my friend. You will see things in Jesus that the Moses and prophets longed to see but never did. You will find in him the answer to your greatest need and the Savior of your soul.

Conclusion: The announcement of the kingdom should come like a beautiful new sunrise to every heart. Jesus is telling us that the mercy and kindness of God are intersecting our lives. The first priority is responding to this amazing announcement, seizing the opportunity, and coming into the Kingdom of God.

"Follow me," he speaks to us. Where else will we go? Jesus alone has the words of eternal life.