

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – Friday May 26, 2017
Gospel According to St. John – Part I- First Year

John 1: 43-51

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." ⁴⁸ "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."⁵¹ He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."

Cross References

Genesis 28: 10-17

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. ¹¹ When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. ¹² He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. ¹⁴ Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. ¹⁵ I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." ¹⁷ He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

The Gospel of St. John

Part I

- Prologue 1:1-14
- First Year 1:15 – 2:22
- Second Year 2:23 – 6:71
- Third Year 7:1 – 12:50

Part II

- The Last Discourse 13:1 – 17:26
- The Arrest and Trial 18:1 – 19:16
- Death and Resurrection 19:16 (b) – 21:25

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Matt 11:28-30 ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matt 16:24-26 ²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"

Romans 10:14-15 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Commentary John 1: 43-51

Following John's confession of Jesus, "Look, the Lamb of God", the first words that Jesus speaks in the Gospel of John are a question not only to the first followers but to every reader or hearer of the Gospel of John: "What are you looking for?". This question will be responded to throughout the Gospel as Jesus is revealed to us as the one we are looking for. Jesus' invitation and promise follows: "Come and you will see!" In John's Gospel these words of invitation ("*come*") and promise ("*you will see*") are spoken not only to the first followers but to everyone who hears these words. With this background in mind, we approach our text which continues the revelation of Jesus' identity.

Our text begins in Galilee with Jesus inviting Philip with the familiar discipleship invitation: "Follow me". A connecting link to other disciples is the note about Philip who is from the city of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip in turn finds Nathanael, who confesses to him who Jesus is, and links Jesus to representatives of the law and the prophets: "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph".

The identity of Jesus not only fulfills the expectation of the Hebrew scriptures, but he is also the son of his earthly father, Joseph, from the city of Nazareth in Galilee. The reference to Nazareth in the hill country brings forth Nathanael's questioning response: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip seemingly dismisses Nathanael's assessment of Nazareth's lack of importance with the invitation, "Come and see".

The story line continues with Jesus identifying Nathanael: "Here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!". Nathanael is a person without guile; his words speak the truth. The exchange between the two now takes place with Nathanael perplexed about Jesus' knowledge of him: "Where did you get to know

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me?" To which Jesus responds, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you". An interesting note about the fig tree reference is that it traditionally denotes a place associated where Rabbis study the Torah. As a rabbinical teacher himself, did Jesus intend his response to reflect this?

However we try to puzzle on this, as does Nathanael, it doesn't really matter. What does matter is the confession of Nathanael that follows: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!". As noted in the previous verse, Jesus is not only addressed as a rabbi by Nathanael but is a rabbinic scholar of the Torah. To his identity as a rabbinic teacher, Nathanael confesses Jesus to be the Son of God, the same confession of John: "I myself have seen and have testified, 'This is the Son of God'". Nathanael's confession continues as he identifies Jesus as the King of Israel. Jesus will be identified in the passion narrative as the King of the Jews by Pilate and the title he places on the cross.

Jesus returns to the fig tree identity and disarms any thought about his recognition of Nathanael under the fig tree with the promise that even greater things will be revealed: "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these". These words of promise are only spoken to Nathanael as denoted by the singular "you." I mention this because the English translation of the Greek pronoun does not distinguish between the singular and the plural "you."

The final verse brings to completion the invitation and promise of the first words of Jesus in the Gospel of John as we noted in the beginning of this study. Now the words of this verse are spoken to include you and all readers of this Gospel: "Very truly, I tell you, you will see the heavens open, and the messengers of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man". This is the promise of the Gospel of John for all! The ascending and descending ladder recalls Jacob's dream in Genesis, and the naming of the place, "Bethel," the house of God.

Jesus is the place where God dwells. Jesus is the Son of Man who will be lifted up on the cross. The cross is the new "Bethel" where Christ completes the work of the Father: "It is accomplished/completed/finished".

These opening verses of the Gospel of John lead us into the fulfilling promise of "Come and you will see" throughout the Gospel of John and to Jesus' death and resurrection.

Paul S. Berge

Application:

- Give some thought as to whom we follow today. If Jesus were to return and walk by us, would we drop everything to follow him?
- Who is the Andrew in your life? Who brought you to Jesus, and in what context?

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