

Epiphany 2
January 18, 2015

"Jesus' Call to Follow Him Is Amazing"

JOHN 1:43-51

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 is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."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 shall see greater things than that."⁵¹ He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

It is amazing. It is truly amazing. This past week two men finished climbing the face of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park with their hands and feet without using ropes to pull themselves up. There were ropes to keep them from falling, but they climbed the 3000 foot sheer wall by clinging to the sides of the rock wall and inching themselves upward.

We use that word amazing a lot, maybe even too much. We use it to describe some delicious food we have eaten or some impossible catch in football or some vacation experience. Today we want to use this word amazing to describe the way Jesus called his disciples to come and follow him. The way Jesus called you to come and follow him is the most amazing thing that has happened to you in your life.

Jesus calls us when we are lost

It is truly amazing how Jesus finds people who are lost and then makes them his disciples. "The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." It says that Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. The land of Galilee is described in the Old Testament prophet Isaiah as a land of darkness, a land of the Gentiles. How dark was this land? When Jesus drove the evil spirits out of a man who lived in the caves along the Sea of Galilee, the evil spirits went into a herd of pigs and sent them running over cliffs. Do you remember how many pigs were in that herd? 20? 200? or 2000? The people living in this area around the Sea of Galilee were living in darkness. They were hardly kosher. Yet it is here that the Old Testament prophet Isaiah predicted a great light would shine. It was here that Jesus called fishermen to leave their nets and follow him.

The Lord tells us in Isaiah his ways of reaching out to people are not our ways. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my way." Do you want evidence that Jesus picks strange people to come and follow him? Look at your own life. "Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me. It says that Jesus "found" Philip. Philip

did not find Jesus. Jesus found him. "Love that found me wondrous thought, Found me when sought him not."

Jesus says to Philip, "Follow me." The words of Jesus are so powerful they lead Philip to leave everything behind and follow Jesus. Philip knew the promises about Jesus that were embedded into the Old Testament. He told his friend Nathaniel, "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." Philip knew about Jesus from John the Baptist who said Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now he hears the words of Jesus, "Follow me." Jesus said, "My words are spirit and they are life." These words, "Follow me" convinced Philip that Jesus is the Messiah. He leaves everything to follow Jesus.

Think, my dear Christian, how the words of Jesus and the words of the Bible have changed your life. You have been led to believe that following Jesus is the center of your life. You did not find Jesus. He found you. In John 15 Jesus tells us he is the vine and we are the branches, He said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you."

Philip cannot keep this blessing of having Jesus to himself. "Philip found Nathaniel 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.'" That's what we do with good news. We share it. Philip could not contain the joy he had after learning about Jesus. He had to share it with his friend Nathaniel.

So what is Nathaniel's reaction to what Philip tells him? He is skeptical, a real tire kicker. "Nazareth, can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Nathaniel knew that the Lord had promised the Savior would come from Bethlehem, not Nazareth. He measured what his friend was telling about Jesus. He checked it out with what he had learned in the Scriptures. Jesus from Nazareth did not measure with what Scripture said of Jesus coming from Bethlehem. Oh, dear Christians, if only we would always evaluate what we hear and whatever we see going on in our lives and in the church with what we read in the Bible as Nathaniel did. Every pastor worth his salt loves to have people ask him, "Pastor, where do you find this in the Bible?"

How does Philip handle Nathaniel's doubt and skepticism? He simple says, "Come and see." Early in this chapter we see two of John the Baptist's disciples spending the afternoon with Jesus. One of those disciples, Andrew, immediately goes to his brother Peter and says, "We have found the Messiah." He brought his brother to Jesus. Is there any greater honor and privilege in life than helping other a friend or brother see what we have come to see in Jesus? If the Lord allows you to be a Christian parent, what a privilege it is to lead your children or your grandchildren to see Jesus.

This has been an amazing week for me because of the different opportunities given to me to help other people see Jesus. Youth confirmation classes, multiple Bible studies, intense discussions with college students, the baptism of a little baby, phone conversations, personal visits and giving people private communion. Jesus uses very ordinary people like you and me to lead other people to be with Jesus. In a violent world where people band together for support under the words, "I am Charlie" Jesus is calling people all over

the world who are lost in darkness to come into the light and follow him.

Jesus calls us to share in his glory

What happens to Nathaniel when he follows Philip and sees Jesus? "When Jesus saw Nathaniel approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite in which there is nothing false." Because Jesus is God from all eternity he is able to look into the hearts of people and see how honest they are. Psalm 139 says of the Lord, "You know my when I sit down and when I arise. You are thoroughly acquainted with all my ways." Everything that ever goes through your mind even for a split second is fully known to our God.

Jesus looked into the heart of Nathaniel and saw a man in whom there was no deceit and no duplicity. He saw him as someone who was honest in life, not someone trying to deceive and cheat others, and not someone playing a smoke and mirrors game with God as so many do. Becoming a Christian means that you become honest, real, and truthful about who you are. You know how far you have fallen from God's glory. Were you honest with yourself this morning when you started this worship service by confessing your sin before God? Are you still trying to cover up secret sins in your life? Are you holding on to things that you know are wrong? The Lord tells us in Jeremiah 17, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? God knows your heart and he knows mine. We cannot hide from him. How much sin can we get away with? The honest answer is none. Nathaniel was an honest man who knew he needed help. He wanted the forgiveness that only Jesus could give.

Nathaniel asks Jesus, "How do you know me?" Jesus says to him, "I saw you while you were under the fig tree before Philip called you." Whatever that moment was, and whatever thoughts he had under the fig tree, Jesus taps into them and says, "Nathaniel I saw what was going on inside of you." Nathaniel responds immediately by saying, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel." Only God could see the thoughts he was having under the fig tree when Philip came to him. Nathaniel concludes from what he has seen in Jesus that Jesus must be his Lord and God and Savior.

And then Jesus tells Nathaniel that he would see even greater things than these. "You shall see greater things than these.." "I tell you the truth, you shall see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." Jesus is taking Nathaniel back to the time when Jacob had a dream of a ladder going up to heaven with angels ascending and descending on that ladder. God had a message for this cheater Jacob who was troubled by his sin and by the damage he caused to his family. It was a message that heaven was open to him, his sin was forgiven and he had peace with God. Nathaniel would see heaven open to him during the time he had with Jesus. He would ever see the nail prints in his hands the night of his resurrection.

Amazing! Unbelievable. Fantastic. Words cannot begin to describe what your eyes of faith have been privileged to see. Jesus the little baby, Lord and God from all eternity. Jesus walking on water. Jesus feeding 5000 people with five barley loaves and two small fish. Jesus raising people from the dead. Jesus raising himself from the dead. Jesus taking the sin of the world on himself. Jesus giving you his body and blood with simple bread and wine. What great things we have seen. It is all so real for you because Jesus has come into your life and said follow me. It is Jesus who wants you to see his glory. He prayed, "O Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." Amazing. Truly amazing. Amen.