8. YOU WILL SEE GREATER THINGS (1:43-51)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

- 1. What reservations or questions did you have before coming to the faith? How were those issues resolved for you?
- 2. Are there people in your family, or close friends, who are resistant to the Gospel? How have you witnessed to them in the past, and what results did you have?

The account in 1:43-51 both parallels and contrasts the account in 1:35-42. In both sections, one disciple brings another man to Jesus using similar methodology. However, the first disciple is not sent by someone to Jesus like Andrew and the unnamed disciple were, but was called by Jesus, and the confessions of Christ build to a climax.

Before we look at the text itself there are some important matters to address regarding the locations and people involved.

SETTING THE SCENE

Verse 43 sets the scene for the events that follow – in the region of Galilee, which is to the north of the country (see map). Here is a timeline of events from when Jesus was baptised, through 1:19 to 1:51 to give you a bigger picture:

Day	Verses	Location (see map)	Events
		Bethany beyond the Jordan	Jesus is baptised
		Judean Wilderness	Jesus spends 40 days in the wilderness while John continues his ministry
1	1:19-28	Bethany beyond the Jordan	John the Baptist challenged by the Priests and Levites and tells all present that he is the one pointing to the Messiah
2	1:29-34	Bethany beyond the Jordan	John the Baptist points Jesus out to the crowd, calling Him the Lamb of God and testifies about His authority.
3	1:35-42	Bethany beyond the Jordan	John the Baptist points out the Lamb of God to Andrew and an unnamed disciple who follow Him. Andrew finds his brother Simon Peter and brings him to Jesus.
4	1:43-51	Somewhere between Bethany beyond the Jordan and Galilee	Jesus and his new disciples travel to Galilee and find Philip who then finds Nathanael and brings him to Jesus.

Let us first consider the location. Bethsaida is a town located just northeast of the Sea of Galilee (see map). Thirty years earlier it was re-founded by Philip the tetrarch and renamed Julius in honour of Emperor Augustus' daughter, Julia. Strictly speaking it is not in the region of Galilee, but in Gaulanitis, however, the common people refer to the areas east of the Sea of Galilee as part of the region. Bethsaida²⁴ is a fishing town, and archaeologists have discovered many fish hooks and other such equipment there.

²⁴ Bethsaida means "house of fishing" or "house of the fisherman".

Verse 44 tells us that Philip, Andrew, and Simon Peter are originally from Bethsaida. However, it appears that Andrew and Peter relocated to Capernaum, or perhaps had a second house there, although the latter is quite unlikely for the time (see Mark 1:29). According to Jewish tradition, although the groom's parents normally determined the new marital home, sometime the husband and the bride's father could determine it instead, especially if the groom's parents were dead. Given that Peter's mother-in-law seeks Jesus' healing in Capernaum (cp. Matt. 8:5, 14), implies that she was living there. Therefore, it is perfectly understandable that Peter and his wife would make Capernaum their home. There are also indications that Peter and Andrew ran a fishing business together (cf. Mat. 4:18), so perhaps Andrew followed Peter to Capernaum. So although the other gospels place the brothers as living in Capernaum, they were more than likely both born in Bethsaida.



Let us now look at the two new characters involved:

Philip: Philip is actually a Greek name (meaning "lover of horses") which has led some scholars to believe that he was not Jewish. However, this cannot be the case for two reasons. Firstly, most Jews had multiple names at that time, one Hebrew, and the other, Greek. Sometimes the Greek name was simply a translation of Greek form of the Hebrew – as we saw last time with Jesus giving Peter an Aramaic name, Cephas.²⁵ The second reason is that it is highly unlikely that Jesus would call a gentile to be one of His disciples so early in His ministry. If He had, He would have been criticised by His enemies, which is not seen anywhere in the gospels, or his disciples would have used it as proof for going to the other nations in the book of Acts, which they did not.²⁶ In fact, when Philip spoke to the Ethiopian Eunuch, he fully understood the Hebrew scriptures, clearly indicating his Jewishness.

Nathanael: One of the challenges with Nathanael is that his name is not mentioned in any of the other three gospels. This has led to much speculation as to his identity. Some have claimed that he is the unnamed disciple from the previous section, but that does not fit the flow of the story. Some have claimed that he is Matthew or Bartholomew who are both named in the other lists of apostles (see Mat. 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; and Acts 1:13), but are not named anywhere in John. The most likely candidate, however, is Bartholomew who is linked with Philip in the lists found in the other gospels. ²⁷ However, some have ruled him out because although people have multiple names, none has two completely different names. But this does not really rule him out, as Bartholomew means "Son of Tholmai". Therefore, Bartholomew could be the equivalent of a modern surname, in the same way that John and James

²⁵ There are several other examples in the New Testament: Paul (Greek) also known as Saul (Hebrew). Thomas (Hebrew) also known as Didymus (Greek).

²⁶ Keener, p480.

²⁷ Carson, p159.

are referred to as the sons of Zebedee (e.g. James is *Jacob Barzebedee* in Hebrew).²⁸ The name Nathanael itself means "God has given", so when combined with Bartholomew, his full name would mean "God has given a son to Tholmai".

Nathanael was also from the town of Cana (cf. John 21:2), and may also have been a fisherman. Perhaps it was a relative of his who marries in 2:1-12, and because of his connection to Jesus, why He and the disciples are invited to the wedding. Some scholars have even suggested that it was Nathanael's wedding, but these arguments have no firm foundation.

AN EXTRAORDINARY CALLING (VV43-44)

There are two kinds of finding. There is the casual stumbling upon something that you were not looking for, such as finding a coin on the ground in a parking lot, and there is finding something that you are intentionally looking for, such as a lost cell phone or car keys. It is the latter sense that is intended here.

Jesus does not accidentally find Philip along the way up to Galilee, but rather He goes to look for Philip and finds him. Jesus intentionally looks for him.

However, unlike Andrew who was obviously seeking the Messiah otherwise he would not have been with John the Baptist, Philip seems to not be too worried. But that does not stop him from responding to Jesus' call to follow Him. Because this is exactly what Jesus does. He calls people to Himself. But the amazing thing is, even when people are looking for Him, they are doing so because they are being drawn to Him (see 6:44, 12:32). Now some people may be a little more stubborn and slow in their response, or just need some additional evidence, such with Nathanael.

But to all who respond, the call is the same, "Follow Me". This is the first of twenty uses of this calling in the gospel of John. It is in the present continuous active tense, implying that it is not a one time event, but is something one begins and continues to do for the rest of one's life. But this is not a simple invitation to a short visit, but has, of course, a much deeper meaning – this is a call to be Jesus' disciple.

But what does it mean to be a disciple? There are seven characteristics taught in the New Testament.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

- 1. Read the following passages and identify each characteristic of a true disciple:
 - 1.1. Luke 14:26, 33 (two characteristics)
 - 1.2. Matthew 16:24 (three characteristics)
 - 1.3. John 13:35
 - 1.4. John 8:31-32
- 2. How do these seven characteristics challenge the common idea if what it means to be a disciple? How do they challenge you in your walk as a disciple?

²⁸ MacArthur, John. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 1-11. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. Electronic edition.

But what makes this an extraordinary calling?

Normally disciples were to seek their out their own teachers, as exemplified by Andrew and the unnamed disciple in the previous section. It was then up to the Rabbi to decide if the candidate was eligible to be one of his disciples. But things are different when it comes to Philip – instead of Philip looking for his Rabbi, the Rabbi is looking for His disciple.²⁹

AN EXTRAORDINARY QUESTION (VV45-46)

In the same way that Jesus seeks out and finds Philip, Philip seeks out and finds Nathanael, and like Andrew, Philip cannot keep the good news to himself. How Philip knows Nathanael is uncertain, but perhaps they met one another in Capernaum is it is larger town only a short walk from Cana. Perhaps Philip was Nathanael's fishmonger and had established a strong friendship. Either way, Philip is concerned that Nathanael comes to know Jesus too.

However, Philip's confession of who Jesus is, is rather different when compared to Andrew. Where Andrew's was rather broad in simply calling Jesus the Messiah, Philip states that Jesus is "Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (v45). He also states it as "we have found", implying that he includes himself among Jesus' disciples.

Several things stand out from his identification of Jesus:

- 1. He states that Jesus is the one spoken of in Scripture. Here he is appealing to the authority of Scripture. In other words, Philip is not stating something he may have heard about Jesus from another party, or that he is going by any claim that Jesus may have made about Himself. Rather he is appealing to the words spoken about Him in the past. Words that can be verified. Another possible reason for referring to the Scriptures specifically is perhaps Nathanael has an intense love for the Word, not willing to believe that anyone is a Messiah unless it can be proven from Scripture. How Philip came to know this fact is not stated in the text, so we can only presume he is convinced by the words of Jesus or the other disciples before he left to find Nathanael, or simply by the revelation of the Holy Spirit.
- 2. Philip refers to Jesus as being from Nazareth. Here Philip is identifying the specific town that Jesus was from. However, what is striking is that he uses Jesus' name as if Nathanael already knows Him. But this leads to the question of how? If this is the beginning of Jesus' ministry, how can He already be known to Nathanael? The answer lies in the third statement by Philip.
- 3. The son of Joseph. Joseph was a carpenter who would have taught Jesus the trade as He was growing up. But we must not understand the word carpenter to refer only to those who work with wood. The Greek word used in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 to describe his occupation is *tekton*, meaning an artisan. This was someone who was skilled in all matters related to engineering. He would have been skilled in both masonry and woodwork. But artisans were not as readily

²⁹ The word "found" implies that Jesus sought out Philip and didn't just bump into him along the way.

available as they are today, and most of them had to travel to other cities and towns to earn a living. Joseph, therefore, more than likely helped with the building work in places other than Nazareth since its population was probably less than 300. He could easily have worked in Capernaum or Cana. And as was common practice, he would take his apprentice with him, in this case, Jesus. Therefore, it is highly possible that Jesus was already known in the area as the carpenter's apprentice, or son as he is referred in Matthew and Mark. And if Joseph did indeed do work in Cana, it is another possible reason why He and His mother are invited to the wedding in 2:1-12.

But what is the most surprising for Nathanael is the possibility that the one whom Moses and the prophets wrote about comes from Nazareth, as expressed in his question, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (v46). Why is he surprised by this? Is it because the name Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament? Perhaps. However, just because the name itself is not mentioned does not mean that someone would necessarily look down on the town. Is it because Nazareth is too small a town? Not really, as most towns in Galilee were small. In fact, in Galilee, only Tiberias and Sepphoris were large enough to be considered cities. Is it because Nazareth is known for its unrighteousness? Again, no. History tells us that the region was well known for its piety and remaining faithful to Judaism. In fact, Tiberias is considered worse than any other city or town in the region and no good Jew would ever step foot in there. The more likely reason is that of ethnic rivalry in the region, which according to ancient historians, was common. Nathanael's statement is similar to someone from Manchester asking, "Can anything good come out of Liverpool?"

But note how Philip responds? Like Andrew in the previous section, he does not enter into a whole debate as to who Jesus is and try to prove how good He is, Philip simply tells Nathanael to "Come and see". A personal encounter with Jesus accomplishes far more than an extended debate ever would. This is a characteristic of the entire gospel as John's descriptions of the events express a very personal perspective that draws the readers in. As John MacArthur points out, "idle speculation is no substitute for personally investigating Christ".

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

- 1. Charles Spurgeon once stated in a sermon: "Oh my brothers and sisters in Christ, if sinners will be damned, at least let them leap over our bodies, and they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay, and not madly to destroy themselves. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for".³⁰
 - How does this quote challenge your current attitude to evangelism?
- 2. Are the people in your life who are no longer with us that you regret not sharing the Gospel with? How does the reality of Spurgeon's words challenge your approach to others who are still alive that you have not yet shared the Gospel with?

³⁰ Spurgeon, Charles Haddon. 1860. "The Wailing of Risca". Sermon no. 349; delivered on Sabbath morning, December 9, 1860; at Exeter Hall, Strand.

AN EXTRAORDINARY REVELATION (VV47-49)

Like with Jesus' conversation with Peter in the previous section, Jesus also reveals Nathanael's character. However, in this case, instead of it being about who Nathanael may become, it reflects who he already is and will undoubtedly remain. Jesus reveals two attributes of Nathanael's character:

- 1. He is a true Israelite: This means that Nathanael is living in a covenant relationship with God as a true Jew. This implies at least three things about Nathanael: (1) He probably knows and studies the Hebrew Scriptures (this is further hinted at later in verse 51 where Jesus refers to an Old Testament event), (2) he is not like the other Jews who merely conformed externally but are not Jewish at heart (see Paul's indictment in Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-7), and (3) he is a true Jew culturally, that is, he is a descendant of Jacob, who God renamed Israel (cf. Gen. 32:28).
- 2. There is no deceit in him: The Greek word for "deceit" is used by earlier Greek writers for the bait used in catching fish and comes to signify "any cunning contrivance for deceiving or catching". The name Jacob means "deceiver", and so here Jesus is saying that although Nathanael is a descendant of Jacob, he is not like Jacob who deceived his father, Isaac (cf. Gen. 27:35), his brother, and others, and is even unlike his own people at this time. One of the qualifications for Israel's leaders was that they be men of truth (cf. Exo. 18:21), so by stating this about Nathanael Jesus is implying that he qualifies to be a future leader of the church.

But although Jesus reveals Nathanael's nature to himself and the other disciples present, Nathanael is still not ready to believe, and so challenges Jesus by asking, "How do you know me?" (v48). This question is not so much Nathanael agreeing with Jesus' description of him, but is an expression of surprise that Christ can even be able to make any kind of judgement about him. Did Jesus hear about him from someone else, perhaps Philip? So Nathanael asks this question expecting an answer which will show the origin of our Lord's knowledge.

Jesus answers, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you". This comment has stumped scholars. Several have suggested that He is speaking allegorically, but none of their arguments are convincing. One proposition is that it was under fig trees that people studied the Law, and so some scholars suggest that Jesus is pointing out to Nathanael that He saw him reading the law before Philip found him. However, although this argument has some plausibility to it, it is not conclusive as many other things were done under fig trees simply because of the shade they provide. Plus, copies of the law were not readily available at the time – they did not carry it around with them like we do Bibles today – and since he is not a priest who would have greater access to copies of the law, it is highly unlikely that he was indeed reading the law.

But what is ultimately important here, is not what Nathanael was doing under the tree, but that Jesus saw him while he was there. This shows Jesus' knowledge of both the internal and external condition of Nathanael, wherever he may have been. This is something that no-one could know about without being present, and since Jesus was not present, means that He has to have divine knowledge.

³¹ Liddell, H.G. and R. Scott. 1940. A Greek -English Lexicon. 2 vols. Oxrord. Sub. δόλοσ

The fact that Jesus also states, "Before Philip called you" suggests that when Philip called Nathanael he was no longer under the fig tree. This further shows Jesus' omniscience (all knowing) as it is something that Philip could not have told Him. As far as Nathanael is concerned, he is now convinced that Jesus is the Son of God. Something good has indeed come out of Nazareth.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

1. Read Psalm 139. This Psalm and the account of Nathanael highlight that even though we are not aware of it, God sees us and knows what we are doing. He knows not only what we are doing physically, but also our thoughts and attitudes. How does this knowledge challenge you? How should it affect how you behave and think as a Christian?

Nathanael is so convinced by Jesus that he cannot but state that Jesus is the Son of God, and king of Israel. Both of these are statements pointing to Jesus' deity and both are Messianic titles that are used of Him in Psalm 2:6-7 (see also Mic. 5:2; Zep. 3:15; Zec. 9:9). The former refers to His title, the latter to His office.³²

But the title "King of Israel" is an unusual expression that only appears four times in the New Testament (here and John 12:13; Mat. 27:42; Mark 15:32). In the Old Testament God is the King of Israel, and so Nathanael is honouring Jesus with the highest term he knows and acknowledges Jesus as his king, since he himself is a true Israelite. In recording this confession John is adding to the evidence already given in this chapter that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

John uses the term "King" sixteen times, and on almost every occasion it refers to Jesus the exceptions being at the trial when Pilate and the Jewish leaders both use the term. Yet even in these latter uses, the use is brought about solely because of Jesus' claim.

However, although Jesus is indeed the king of Israel, what the disciples do not know yet is that at His first coming, Jesus does not come as the conquering king, but as the suffering servant (cf. Isa.). Nathanael's statement can, therefore, be read two ways:

- 1. He, like the rest of Israel, is looking for the one who is to rid them of their oppressors, the Romans, and assume His rightful role as the King of the Jews (see 12:13). Jesus challenges this expectation throughout His ministry on earth and His accomplishing this is even alluded to with the sign placed above His head on the cross in 19:19.
- 2. He is looking forward to the final consummation of the kingdom and is pointing to Jesus as the divine king (cp. Rev. 17:14; 19:16) as opposed to the earthly king Herod or the Roman Emperor.

It is difficult to reject Nathanael's confession of Jesus since he was first very sceptical. He was not seeking to be involved in something like this. But when Jesus confronts him, shows him his heart and reveals His

³² Brown, David. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary of the Old Testament: John, p3060.

deity, Nathanael can do nothing but exclaim these truths. Like will later happen with Thomas in chapter 20, disbelief is turned to belief, when they have an encounter with the Son of God.

AN EXTRAORDINARY PROMISE (VV50-51)

Although Jesus commends Nathanael for believing on the basis of Jesus' testimony about him, Jesus promises that He will provide much more. As the writer puts it, "You will see greater things than these". The Apostle John frequently uses the word "greater" to compare how God or Jesus is greater than others (e.g. 4:12; 5:20, 36; 8:53; 10:29; 13:16; 14:12, 28; 15:13; 19:11). As chapter 2 begins, this promise immediately starts to be fulfilled as Jesus' first recorded miracle occurs in Nathanael's home town, in Cana.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

- 1. Review the list of signs covered in lesson one to refresh your memory of the greater things that Jesus' disciples will see. What do each of these signs teach you about the greatness of Jesus?
- 2. We often use the word great in general conversation to refer to a person's or object's quality or size. How does the greatness of Jesus compare to the normal understanding of greatness? Is it a quality that can be ascribed to men or objects in any way?

However, as great as this promise may be, Jesus makes an even greater promise in verse 51, as He shifts from speaking to Nathanael only, to speak to all present (the "you" is in the plural in the Greek text). He promises that His disciples will see the heavens open and provides the only explanation in the Bible of an event in the Old Testament.

Jesus begins with the words, "Truly, truly" – a statement used twenty-five times in John. This is the ESV's way of translating the Greek "Amen, Amen", which is the transliteration of an Aramaic or Hebrew word that means "to confirm". This is a term that was used to indicate a person's agreement to a prayer or statement, as if to make it their own (cf. 1Co. 14:16), as in how a congregation responds to a prayer voiced during a church service. Rarely in the history of Israel is it used as the conclusion to one's own prayer (e.g. Tobit 8:7-8), when it had the nature of a wish. In the Gospels it is only used by Jesus, and always as a prefix to significant statements to highlight their truth and importance. In the other gospels the word always occurs singly, whereas in John it is always doubled.

But what follows His "Truly, truly" is rather extraordinary and is a paraphrase of Genesis 28:12 which He ascribes to Himself. Therefore, to understand what Jesus is promising here, we need to look at the original context and meaning.

Read: Genesis 28:10-22.

In his dream, Jacob sees a ladder (Literally "staircase" in Hebrew) that extends from heaven to earth. Angels use the ladder to move between the two realms. Above the ladder stands God. In this dream God promises Jacob that He will fulfil His promises that He made to Abraham and Isaac — that He will give them a land, be a mighty nation, and that all nations will be blessed through them (cp. Gen. 18:17-18;

22:17-18; 26:4). This ladder is the means for all communication between God and earth in fulfilling that promise. Additionally, this is God's promise to Jacob that He is going to take care of Jacob and be with him.

However, in John, Jesus tells His disciples that He is the ladder – He is the fulfilment of this dream. Of the three promises made to Abraham, the first two were fulfilled in the Old Testament, but not the third. It is only through Jesus that the third promise is fulfilled, for through Him, all nations are blessed.

How? Through His death on the cross and resurrection the nations will be blessed and can be reconciled to the Father. The greatest miracle, the greatest sign one can see that shows man who Jesus is, is the conversion of a person who is lost and is a cause of great celebration in Heaven (cf. Luke 15:7).

Jesus as the staircase further implies at least three truths about Jesus: (1) that He alone is the mediator between God and man (cf. 1Ti. 2:5), (2) He is the only One who can reveal the Father (cf. 1:17; 14:6; Eph. 4:21), and (3) He is the mediator of a new and better covenant (cf. Heb. 8:6; 9:14; 12:24). Interestingly, Jesus builds on this ladder image in 3:13 where He declared to Nicodemus that, "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man". Some commentators further suggest that as Jacob's ladder, Jesus is also Bethel – the name Jacob gave to the location where he had the dream – and God's house (Gen. 29:19), an image that naturally connects with Jesus as the new temple (cf. John 2:21).

THE PEOPLE OF SALVATION

When we combine this section with the previous, we have a picture of the people and processed involved in a person's salvation:

Person	Action	Examples from the Text
Sinner	Seeks God (Jer. 29:13) but only if one	1:37 - The two disciples follow Jesus
	is drawn by God and told by others	1:42 - Peter follows Andrew to Jesus
	Acknowledges sin and the Saviour	1:47a - Nathanael follows Philip to Jesus
	Physically follows	1:49 - Nathanael confesses Jesus as the Son of God
Saviour	Seeks and draws the sinner to	1:38-39 - Jesus turns to speak to the two disciples. Tells them, "Come and see"
	Himself (John 6:44)	1:43 - Jesus finds Philip and tells him, "Follow Me".
	Gives the sinner a new identity	1:47b-48 - Sees and reveals Nathanael's heart
Saint	Unless a preacher is sent, the sinner	
	will not hear about the Saviour (Rom.	1:35-36 - John the Baptist points to Jesus
	10:14)	1:40-41 - Andrew finds Peter and tells him about the Messiah
	Receives a new identity	1:45-46 - Phiilip finds Nathanael and tells him about Jesus
	Then goes and tells others	

SEVEN SIGNPOSTS TO JESUS' IDENTITY

As chapter 1 closes, let us remind ourselves of the signposts (words) used by John the Baptist and the first disciples to identify Jesus in 1:29-51. Here we are presented with yet another group of seven:

- 1. "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (vv29, 36)
- 2. Son of God (vv34, 49)
- 3. Rabbi, meaning "my teacher" (v38)

- 4. Messiah (v41)
- 5. "Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote" (v45)
- 6. Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (v45)
- 7. King of Israel (v49)

John the Baptist and the disciples each identify something about the person of Christ through these statements. But this passage ends with Jesus making one final statement about Himself that brings ir all together – He calls Himself the Son of Man. Jesus is using the title for Himself from Daniel 7:13 – a passage that clearly speaks about the Messiah. This is the first of thirteen occurrences of this title in the gospel. It is a term that is associated with His suffering and death (3:14; 8:28; 12:34), His provision of salvation (6:27, 53), and His authority to judge (5:27; 9:35, 39). Once His work is finished, He will receive the kingdom from the Ancient of Days (cp. Dan. 7:13-14; Mat. 26: 64; 28:18; John 17:1-2; Phi. 2:9-11). In using this term, Jesus is confirming that each of the above statements John and the disciples make about Him are correct – He is the One promised in the Old Testament who has been sent by God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR STUDY

- 1. How has your thinking and attitude about evangelism been changed by this study?
- 2. Identify an unsaved family member or close friend whom you have failed to share the Gospel with. What steps are you going to take to speak to them about Jesus?
- 3. Spend some time in prayer for your unsaved family, friends, and colleagues.

³³ MacArthur.