

John 1:43-51 “Follow Me”

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.’

43 – Jesus is calling Philip. Not a Rabbi being chosen by a student, the other way around which was extremely uncommon.

44 – Philip from Bethsaida, and is also mentioned 14 other times in the NT; Mt. 10:3, Jn. 1:44-46, 6:7, 12:22, 14:8, Acts 1:13, 8:5,30-40. Peter and Andrew were also from Bethsaida. Jesus indicated that many of His miracles were worked there (Mt. 11:20, Lk. 10:13).

45 – Nathanael is the Hebrew version of the Greek name Theodore, and there is debate on whether ‘Nathanael’ is called ‘Bartholomew’ in other areas of the Bible (Bartholomew and Philip are often mentioned together, where Nathanael isn’t mentioned again). Clearly, Philip is saying Jesus is the Messiah here to Nathanael, as well as anchoring Him as being from Nazareth and with a human father.

46 – Nathanael’s opinion of Nazareth shouldn’t be overstated. It’s not as if Nazareth has an infamous reputation, more it is that it was considered a relatively insignificant rural village. Philip’s reply ‘Come and see’ was a phrase common in Rabbinical arguments, indicative of a provable solution visible through common investigation.

47 – the word translated here as ‘deceit’ (δόλος) is also used to speak of ‘bait’ as would be used to catch fish, and also has a stealthy or treacherous implication. Calling Nathanael ‘an Israelite in whom there is *no* deceit’ reminds us of the type of person Paul speaks of in Rom. 2:28-29. It is implied favourably, and indicative of a plain speaking person.

48 – Jesus’ response to Nathanael’s question of how He knew him is strange to us. Unfortunately it is only guesswork and conjecture as to why being seen under the fig-tree is important, but clearly it is to Nathanael. Most probably Nathanael was privately praying under the fig-tree. See also Mic. 4:4 and Zech. 3:10.

49 – Nathanael’s reaction to Jesus’ answer is significant; he names him as teacher, Son of God, and king of Israel. His extreme reaction to what Jesus has said to him indicates the level of secret intimacy Nathanael was involved in under the fig-tree.

50 – This is the first time recorded in John’s Gospel of someone who has believed and trusted in Jesus. This effectively marks Nathanael as the first ‘Christian’, according to John. The significance that Jesus has uncovered for Nathanael over what he had been doing was next to nothing as to what he would see later in his life. This ‘call’ is just the beginning.

51 – ‘very truly’ is the translation of the words ‘amen, amen’. The ‘you’ referred to here is to a group of people, most probably all the disciples gathered at the time, not just Nathanael. Therefore, Jesus is saying to all of them that upon their acknowledgement of who He is and their trust being placed in Him, they will all see clarification as to who He is and miracles performed in His name.

Consider these passages: Mt. 28:19-20, Lk. 7:30, Rom. 8:28, Eph. 2:10, 1 Pt. 2:9.

If Jesus is calling us to follow Him, how are we to respond?