

AM Genesis 28:10-22 & John 1:35-51 Jesus and Nathanael

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 July 2023

Preacher: Rev Ronnie Christie

[0 : 00] at verse 10. Jacob left Beersheba and went towards Haran.

And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land in which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth. And you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.

And in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land.

For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it.

And he was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven. So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.

[1 : 49] He called the name of that place Bethel but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow saying, If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear so that I come again to my father's house in peace then the Lord shall be my God and this stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's house.

And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you. May God bless to us this reading. Now we're going to read in John's Gospel chapter 1 from verse 35.

Now John's Gospel chapter 1 is really a chapter of introduction as you would expect in most books they have an introductory chapter.

And here he is introducing the theological ideas that he's going to develop in the course of his book. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

And then he moves on to the testimony of John the Baptist and then to this idea of discipleship. And some disciples come from John's Word some comes by Jesus' invitation and some come by invitation of their friends or brothers.

[3 : 15] And then in the bit that we're reading there's certain titles given to Jesus that are important and they're going to be developed in the course of the book.

So he's introducing these subjects here. And we could perhaps bear that in mind as we read this. John chapter 1 from verse 35 Jesus calls the first disciples.

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples. That's John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples. And he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said Behold the Lamb of God.

There's the first title you see. The two disciples heard him say this and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them What are you seeking?

And they said to Rabbi which means teacher Where are you staying? He said to them Come and you will see. So they came and saw where he was staying and they stayed with them that day for it was about the sixth hour.

[4 : 20] One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him We have found the Messiah which means Christ.

He brought him to Jesus Jesus looked at him and said So you are Simon the son of John You shall be called Cephas which means Peter.

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him Follow me. Now Philip was from Bethsaida the city of Andrew and Peter.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph.

Nathanael said to him Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit.

[5 : 31] Nathanael said to him How do you know me? Jesus answered Before Philip called you when you were under the fig tree I saw you. Nathanael answered him Rabbi you are the son of God you are the king of Israel.

Jesus answered him because I said to you I saw you under the fig tree do you believe? You will see greater things than these.

And he said to him Truly, truly I say to you you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man.

May God bless to us this word too. Now we want to look at John's Gospel chapter 1 and the story of Jesus and Nathanael and really the climax of this story is in verse 51 Truly, truly I say to you you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man.

Now when we read this I said that this was introductory and I drew attention to the titles of Jesus in fact I pointed out the first one the Lamb of God but if you look at this you see there's quite a number of concepts about who Jesus is that are brought out in these verses he's spoken of as the Messiah he's spoken of as the one that Moses spoke about and one whom the prophets spoke about he's called a Rabbi and he himself calls himself the son of man so what we've got here are titles that refer to Jesus ways of looking at Jesus and these are introductory because he's introducing them here so that he can develop these ideas in the course of his Gospel I don't know if I've got this quite right but I look at this as an artist he's got a picture in mind that he wants to paint and he's got his palette and he prepares his colours and he gets the right shade of blue that he wants for the sky and the right shade of brown that he wants for this and the right shade of blue that he wants for that and he's got all his colours there ready made and then he takes them and begins to paint his picture that's what John is doing here

[8 : 05] I suggest he's laying out his stall you might see he's preparing his palette let's say and he's going to paint a picture of Jesus and that reminds us what this passage is all about you may say it's about Nathaniel oh yes it's about Nathaniel but it's not mainly about Nathaniel it's about who Jesus is and that's what we're looking at this morning who is Jesus and I'm not going to say anything new here not very new anyway and I'm not going to say anything very practical either I'm just trying to show you a picture of who Jesus is after all we have to live our lives looking to Jesus and even just a picture of Jesus painted before our mind's eye I hope that will be of use to us day by day as we seek to live our lives looking to Jesus so how do we see him in this passage there's three ideas we see Jesus despised because of his lowly background

Jesus acknowledged because of his prophetic insight and Jesus communicating with heaven let's begin with Jesus despised because of his lowly background here's the way it begins it begins with Philip who has been called to follow Jesus and there is now some idea of who Jesus is and he comes to Nathaniel and I see him bursting with enthusiasm breathless with excitement and he says we've found him of whom Moses and the law and also the prophets wrote he's Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph that's what Philip thinks about him now we don't exactly I don't profess to know exactly what Philip had in mind here one of whom Moses and the law spoke well is he thinking about what was promised way back in Genesis 3 the seed of the woman that would bruise the head of the serpent or is he thinking about things that were said about the house of Judah and a king coming from that line or is he thinking about the sacrifices even so that he has begun to grasp that Jesus is the Lamb of God who fulfills all these sacrificial lambs that are mentioned in the law of Moses or there was this idea that Moses had foretold a prophet that was to come is that what he's got in mind and probably the last of these is probably what he's got in mind but there's a whole range of things that he might be thinking about and even when it comes to the fact of him being one of whom the prophets spoke you know there's a choice there as well there's the suffering servant of Isaiah or there's the branch that comes out of David's line the Messiah the king coming from David's line there's a choice there other ideas as well what's he thinking about well I think he's thinking about the Messiah probably so that probably what he's got in mind is the prophet and the Messiah were found him but the point

I want to emphasize is the big thing here is the scriptures have been fulfilled for hundreds of years they've been looking forward to this and now it's happened the prophets have spoken Moses has spoken in the law and that was thousands of years ago and now it's come to pass wonderful news extraordinary if you've been looking forward to something eagerly you don't know when it's happening and you've looked forward to it for a long long time and then it happens how excited you get how much more so when they had been looking for centuries for this the prophet God is no longer silent he's at work again he's bringing into being what he promised long ago that's the big message that Philip has now how does Nathaniel react to that he is as we are going to look at in a moment a godly Jewish man who presumably is looking forward to these things as well and he he views this in a rather negative fashion and so poor Philip bursting with enthusiasm and Nathaniel comes and pours cold water in his ideas can anything good come out of

Nazareth says Nathaniel now that sounds very very negative indeed and it sounds quite out of character with what we know of the man later but I would like to say it's not perhaps quite as negative as you might think because after all was Nazareth mentioned in the Old Testament in connection with any of the prophecies Nazareth isn't mentioned in the Old Testament at all it was from Bethlehem the king was to come and so Nathaniel perhaps is informed by his knowledge of the scriptures in part and he says well that's not mentioned in the Bible it doesn't conform to what we could reasonably expect but he goes a wee bit beyond that and says can anything good come out of Nazareth he's despising Nazareth and I don't think it's too difficult to see why he's despising Nazareth because many people nowadays in the cities might despise people from the country and Nazareth was from a hill village a way back at the back and beyond a backwater not the sort of place that a king is going to come from not a place that a leader is expected to come from the people there are living in a backwater that's the sort of idea that I think that Nathanael's got in mind and you see he's judging by outward appearance he's judging by human factors and he's despising the lowly background from which

Jesus came now that is not something unusual actually in the Gospels the people when Jesus was teaching said where can this man get these things what's the what is the wisdom given to him how are such mighty works done by his hands is not this the carpenter he's just a joiner he's not been trained he's not been raised in the right academic schools he's not a figure who has been associated with people of wisdom and understanding and insight he's just a joiner judging by outward appearances and it didn't fit in with their way of looking at things and they couldn't figure it out Jesus judged by his outward appearance Jesus judged by his background Jesus judged by things from a purely human perspective and people don't look kindly on him he was despised and rejected by men men looked at him and there was no beauty in him they looked at him and saw something outward and weren't attracted to him and so

[16:00] I mean I think Peter says Paul says this speaking about the offence of the cross we preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles Jesus crucified it doesn't fit it doesn't make sense according to human wisdom how can a crucified person give life how can a king suffer like that or as Muslims generally say how can he be a prophet God would never have let his prophet die on the cross or actually say it the other way around how could he have died on the cross if he was a prophet but the point I'm making is outward appearance Jesus has nothing from a backwater just a joiner put the death on the cross from the human perspective it doesn't make sense and he's despised because of his lowly background that's the sad picture that we've got him at the beginning from

Nathaniel ok remembering that then let's move to the second step and here we've got something completely different Jesus acknowledged because of his prophetic insight now the story goes on like this Philip very wisely says come and see that's the antidote to his that's the solution to Nathaniel's problems you don't think Jesus measures up to your standard because he comes from Nazareth which isn't mentioned in the scriptures and he comes from a backwater which isn't likely to produce a king you think that then you just come and see for yourself which is very sound advice so Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him and said of him behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit now this story this part of the story begins with Jesus assessment of Nathaniel and it ends with Nathaniel's assessment of Jesus so this is Jesus assessment of the man here is a true

Israelite in whom there is nothing false this reminds us of the way that Paul spoke there are sons of Abraham after the flesh and there are sons of Abraham after the spirit you can inherit the genes of Abraham or you can possess the faith of Abraham so Paul could say not all those that are Israel are of Israel or something of that nature there's two ways of looking at things you can look at them according to the flesh or you can look at them according to the spirit and what Jesus is saying here if you could use that idea at least he's saying he's a true Israelite he's not just one genetically he's not just a descendant of Jacob of Israel genetically he's a true Israelite one that has got the faith of Jacob one that has got the faith of Israel this is a truly godly man this is a righteous man this is a man that appreciates covenant blessings this is a man that rests upon the promises given this is a man of faith he's not just an Israelite in name he's an

Israelite indeed he's one of God's people indeed not just nominally so that's what he's speaking about here and he says he's one in whom there is no guile there's nothing deceptive about it it's not that he goes through an appearance of worshipping God an appearance of religion the reality is there it's not that he's got outward form and that's all that there is to it he's got the real thing what you see is what you get in the case of Nathaniel so it's a pretty high recommendation that is given here it reminds me of what was said of Simeon the man that met Jesus in the temple he was righteous and devout or it makes me think that he's got the mindset of Anna who's connected with that story too she worshipped with fasting and prayer night and day Jesus is saying that's the sort of spirituality that's the sort of true religion that this man has got he's a genuine

Israelite in the highest sense of the word now it's obvious that Jesus says this as Nathaniel approaches but Nathaniel hears what he says and so Nathaniel said to him in verse 46 how do you know me and Jesus tells him before Philip called you when you were under the fig tree I saw you now there's two fairly different ways of interpreting this I've heard it said that Jewish men for the sake of peace and quiet went under a fig tree to do their devotions there was shade there from the sun there was quietness that there might not be in the home and the leaves of the fig tree might to some extent give them privacy and therefore doing your devotions under a fig tree was I'm told quite normal and that's what Jesus is saying

[21 : 40] I saw you when you were doing your devotions and the idea that some people have is that he didn't see them with the physical eye because he's God he saw when he was praying because he heard his prayers as God and that's one way of interpreting this the other way is quite matter of fact compared to that which is quite supernatural the other way is simply that he had passed by that way before he had seen Nathaniel under his fig tree and he had remembered him and when he sees Nathaniel coming to meet him he has insight to know what sort of a man he is and he says I saw you when you were under a fig tree you indeed are an Israelite in whom there is no guile it's quite natural that way he had seen him before he remembered him he had this insight into character as we see in other cases as well and that's what is given expression here now for myself

I tend to go to that second position nowhere in the Old Testament do you find the fig tree as being a place where people did their devotions maybe it is so it hasn't left its mark on scripture in fact what is said about the fig tree in the Old Testament is very much that being under your fig tree was a sign of domestic happiness and security Judah and Israel lived in safety from Dan even to Beersheba every man under his vine and under his fig tree that means everybody felt secure in their own home they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree and no one shall make them afraid to be under the fig tree in the Old Testament is to be at home in your backyard sheltered by a fig tree with your family your children around you in security and happiness and that's the way I like to think about this so Jesus says I was passing by before and I saw you in your yard under your fig tree he was maybe conversing with others maybe playing with the children whatever he saw him there and he recognises him when

Philip brings him and with his special insight which we know operates he was able to see what sort of man he was and that's the way I think we should think about this so he's Nathaniel therefore is Nathaniel is taken by the prophetic insight of Jesus and that's what moves him to say what he does say and what he says is this Rabbi you are the son of God you are the king of Israel and there you see he's the Messiah he's the king that's promised he's the one that serves God acting like a son to him he's the king of Israel and you see his opinion is completely changed now you may say and I said it to myself how did this saying of Jesus I saw you when you're under your fig tree make him change his mind so radically and completely just like that well I don't think it was just like that

I think he changed his mind because he was a true Israelite here's Simeon in the temple he knows he's not going to die until he sees the Christ and this family comes in and there's maybe 20 other families coming in as well and people milling around in the temple how does Simeon know that that baby was Jesus he just knew because he was a righteous man and he had insight through the Holy Spirit and he knew that that was the child that had been promised how did Anna know the same reason she just knew because she was a child of God and she knew the things of God and God showed her what was what how did Nathaniel know this because he was a true Israelite and to true Israelites the will of God is known he just knew when he heard Jesus say that his doubts fled away he just saw things as they were and he said you are the

Messiah you are the expected king of Israel and that's the second picture that we've got of Jesus here Jesus acknowledged because of his prophetic insight and you might think that's great can we go any higher than this isn't this what we should be looking at that he's the Messiah that was promised the great king can you go further than that and that leads us to the third thing you see because here Jesus says yes you can go much higher than that he's not denying that he is the king of Israel he's not denying anything that's been said about him but he's saying there's something greater because I said to you I saw you under the fig tree do you believe you will see greater things than these and that leads us on to Jesus communing with heaven truly truly I say to you you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man now what does that mean well firstly

[27 : 30] I think we have to see quite clearly if you're looking for a literal fulfillment of that I think you're really going to look in vain okay we can bring in accounts of angels in connection with the life and ministry of Jesus but I don't really think you can prove that this happened literally Jesus spoke in figures he constantly spoke in imagery and I think that's what he's doing here angels are basically messengers and he's speaking about messages going back and forward from heaven to Jesus from Jesus to heaven and he's saying you'll see messages going from Jesus to heaven and from heaven to Jesus you'll see Jesus communing with heaven and if you think about it you see that that of course was the case in his life now I'm sure there's much more to it than this but I'm just limiting it to this just think about the way that

Jesus prayed and the way that answers were given to his prayer and Luke is the one of course that tells most about Jesus' prayer life but when John talks about his prayer life he does it in a quite distinctive fashion and I've got a couple of cases here where what is emphasized is Jesus sending his message to heaven and heaven sending a message back to him there's this case of Jesus when he had raised Lazarus from the dead now that was a significant event in Jesus' life in ministry and it was a remarkable thing at any level and what does Jesus think about the matter well we're told in the aftermath of that Jesus lifted up his eyes so here's this heavenly Luke Jesus lifted up his eyes and said father I thank you that you've heard me I knew that you always hear me but I said this on account of the people standing around that they may believe that you sent me so here is Jesus saying I'm always in touch with you and you're always in touch with me and I'm letting this known to people so that they might believe who I am and it seems to me that that is a fulfilment of the basic idea of what Jesus spoke about in John chapter 1 a message has gone up a message has come back people reckon see it and are meant to believe in him accordingly a chapter later there is another important event in Jesus life

Greeks come up to the feast and they want to see Jesus now that's a big thing because Jesus in Matthew's gospel he says I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and that was so at that time but later on he said go and make disciples of all the Gentiles so this is a big thing in his ministry although immediately the Jewish people are particularly in mind ultimately the whole world comes into view and that's what's happening here the Greeks come to Jesus in fact they don't come to Jesus the Greeks come to Philip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee and they asked him sir we wish to see Jesus and Philip released the message to Jesus and Jesus is overwhelmed by this and begins speaking about his death and so on and quite an elaborate speech he gives there and then he addresses God and he says now is my soul troubled and what shall I say father save me from this hour but from this cause

I came unto this hour father glorify your name so here he is communing with heaven publicly so that all can see communing before Philip of all people to whom this original saying had been given and there is a response to that message that he sent up to heaven and it's a message that comes back from heaven then came there a voice from heaven saying I have both glorified it and will glorify it again so a messenger as it were has gone to heaven a messenger has come back from heaven Jesus communing with heaven and what do the people think about this the crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered others said an angel has spoken to him well that's the sort of thing I think that Jesus had in mind and that's I was going to say more but I'll leave at that that's the basic idea that we've got here

Jesus is saying okay you acknowledge me as the messiah you know but there's something greater than that if you want to see me in my full glory you have to see me communing with heaven what a status I've got what an authority I've got what a mission I've got me being constantly in touch with heaven a two way traffic I speak he answers I speak he answers I make my prayer a voice comes from heaven that's the way you have to look at me that's who I am not just the messiah but something greater it was the same way when later on in the other gospels Peter confesses Jesus as the messiah you're the son of the living you're the christ the son of the living god and Jesus immediately goes on and says I'm going to suffer and I'm going to die and be raised from the dead so

[33 : 38] Peter has made a great confession you're the messiah but it's not the final word there's something more than that and that's what Jesus is speaking about here too don't just see him as the messiah see him in his intimate relationship with the father and all that is implied in that so what's this story about it's don't look at Jesus from a worldly point of view don't assess him by what the eye sees by his background by his lineage by his outward situation don't judge him by outward appearances this is what Paul did he said once I knew Christ according to the flesh meaning I only looked at him in an outward way and I didn't understand really who he was and looking at Jesus in an outward way led to him persecuting his people to see

Jesus according to the flesh is a non-starter so if you only look at Jesus as somebody that was a baby born in Bethlehem or a man that came from the outback from the back of beyond in Nazareth if you only see him as somebody that suffered and can't understand why he suffered if you only see and analyze him with the human mind and from a human point of view you're far from the truth that's a non-starter you haven't to look at him in that way says Jesus you can look at him as the Messiah and that's a great way to look at him he's fulfilled the scriptures he's the great revealer therefore who's brought revelation to its climax he's the great king of David's line he demands your allegiance because he is king he demands your obedience because he's the great revealer fulfilling the old testament scriptures by all means look at

Jesus in that way submit to his teaching recognizing that the human mind is insufficient to grasp the things of God and that you need a revelation from above and that that's found especially in the life of Jesus look to him as a sinner that has strayed who needs guidance and help and support look to him as the king and give your life to him and yield yourself to him but above all this passage is saying look to him as the one that communes with heaven so that when he prays heaven answers now you may think that that's a wee bit weak and I do acknowledge that it lacks a practical dimension that I'm not able to give but I would suggest this that my natural reaction people's natural reaction that are

Christians we say well where does the cross come in in all this you know it's Christ crucified that we're meant to look at especially this matter of him communing with heaven and heaven speaking to him where does the cross of Christ come in in that picture well I would just like to finish with this idea that it fits in very well because in the lead up to the cross Jesus prayed he said let this cup pass from me if it's possible if it's be your will on the cross he said my God my God praying to heaven why have you forsaken me on the cross he said into your hands I commit my spirit so that on the cross he was communing with the father at a certain level certainly even when he said why have you forsaken me that was his look as he lifted his eyes to heaven literally from time to time so he lifted his heart to heaven constantly even in the run up to his crucifixion and in the crucifixion itself were these prayers heard well yes

Hebrews tells us this during the days of Jesus life on earth he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death and he was heard because of his reverent submission now when did he offer up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears unless it was in Gethsemane in that sort of set up so he was praying to God aware of the anguish that he had to undergo he was praying to God in the midst of his anguish with loud cries and tears and he was heard and that's why we sang Psalm 21 I should have apologised beforehand that we had to sing that in an old version the new version has got a strange tune that I reckon we couldn't sing and anyway the old version is much more familiar to me than the new one but I apologise for the old fashioned language but really it's very very important that

[39 : 12] Psalm if we can keep it in mind when he desired life of thee thou life to him didst give even such a length of days that he forevermore should live did Jesus pray on the cross yes was he answered yes when he desired life it was given to him even such a length of days that he forevermore should live the answer to Jesus when he prayed in anguish when he prayed on the cross was a deed it was the resurrection from the dead the father raised him from the dead I know Christ rose from the dead but some passages say the father raised him from the dead God raised him from the dead and that's true because it was the response of heaven to the prayer of Jesus in the garden on the cross it was heard he was communing with heaven and heaven responded and so if we think of the cross as being the centre of the gospel why not we can combine that with this idea keep this in mind

Jesus constantly communed with the father and the father responded in a fitting way sometimes he did it inwardly we might say at other times he did it outwardly so that people heard him speak thought it was an angel indeed and sometimes he did it by the act of raising Jesus from the dead so there's no conflict between looking at Jesus as the great one that communes with heaven and heaven communes with us because on the cross that's what happened too and that's the thing we've got to have in mind before us look to Jesus as the saviour as the one that died for us as the one that was raised from us that's the Jesus that we have to have before us and looking to him in that way we will discover this that we will commune with heaven and heaven will answer us because Jesus is seated at the right hand of the father and he's praying for us still he's communing with heaven still and his prayers are still being answered the prayers that he offers up for us so look to

Jesus in this way and we can live our lives in a fitting way looking to Jesus may God bless to us his word you