

The Promise of Discipleship

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[0:00] together to the Gospel of John and to chapter 1, and we can read at verse 50. John chapter 1 and at verse 50. 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. As we read this first chapter in John, we see that it begins with great depths of theology about the teaching and about the life of Jesus, who he is and where he has come from. And from that, great depth of theology and teaching, we come immediately into the way in which Jesus and the

Gospel is going to impact the world around him. We read earlier on in the chapter that he came to his own people, but his own people did not receive him. But as many as received him, he gave them authority to be called the children of God. So we come from the high point of the teaching about the passion of Jesus to the high point of people being brought to salvation and putting their trust in the Lord Jesus. And we can notice in these verses that here we have the first expression of Jesus, of these words, amen, amen, or truly, truly, as we have them in verse 51. And 25 times in this Gospel, Jesus uses these words. They are unique to the Gospel of John, and they are there to remind us of the significance of what Jesus says in these great statements. And the fact that they are double, amen, or double, doubly, truly, they help us to remember that they are absolutely key to what God is doing in saving his people. Here we have the reference to Nathanael. And when Jesus uses these words, he does so with regard to religious people who are rejecting Jesus. He does so with regard to those who are already disciples to encourage them. And he does so with regard to those who are still lost. So the message of these particular statements are for everybody. Whoever you are tonight, truly, truly is for you. And I want to see the way in which these words are applied, especially to the life of Nathanael, because this passage is about making the first disciples. How do we become disciples? How do we come to follow Jesus? Let's see the way in which God works in Nathanael's life.

We want to see, first of all, that we have in the passage a pursuit. Somebody is looking for someone, and somebody is looking for someone, and eventually find someone. And we see the pursuit, first of all, coming to our attention in verse 45, where Philip, who has followed Jesus, and who is following Andrew, he comes and he finds Nathanael. There's a lot of finding going on. And that's absolutely central to the way in which God works. There is a finding, there is a purposeful exercise, where Jesus himself, and where his disciples are determined in what they're doing, and they're going out looking. And they're not just going looking anywhere, they are looking for people. And here is Philip, and he finds Nathanael. And in some way tonight, if we have come to know the Lord Jesus, we have come so because there has been a looking, and somebody has come to find us. And somebody in the name of Jesus has come to search us out. And just like Philip, there is a conversation. And the conversation is absolutely about Jesus himself. What does Philip have to say to Nathanael?

We have found him, of Moses and the law, and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth. Do you see the significance of that? What do we understand from what Philip is saying to Nathanael?

It is that Philip knew his Bible. It is that Nathanael knew his Bible. And it is that Philip and Nathanael were looking for the Messiah, for the one whom God had promised, and he was going to come.

[5:12] And let's allow our minds tonight to think of a Philip and Nathanael with their Bibles open somewhere, and they're looking at God's promise. And in all that Moses has said, and all that Isaiah has said, there is this prophet, there is this mighty God, there is the Son of God, there is Emmanuel, there is the servant of God, there is so many strands in the Bible that Philip and Nathanael would have been reading, and the focus of the reading was upon the Messiah who was to come. We have found Jesus of Nazareth.

So they're able to connect what was in their Bibles with a person of Jesus. And that's what captured Philip's own life. And here he is now saying to Nathanael, we have found the one spoken of in the law and the prophets. As if we were saying to him, do you remember our discussion over what Moses said and what Isaiah said?

Do you remember how we were looking for the Messiah, the promised one? And how we could see that God had promised? And we're now looking to find him if he's come. And Philip is saying, he has come.

So there is that movement of Philip in this pursuit of Jesus, of the passion of Nathanael, and he comes to a person who is already seeking, who is already searching.

And tonight, if you are here and you're not saved, I believe that you are here and you're someone who, in the same way as Nathanael, you know your Bible. And you yourself can go to moments and times when you read your Bible and when you listened to the Gospel and when you saw Jesus in that Gospel.

[7:08] And it was a moment in your own mind and in your own heart towards that Jesus. There was something about him that drew you to him. And you wanted to secretly discuss that with someone else close to you. And perhaps you can go to such a conversation that you had with someone close. And there you were looking for Jesus to be your Savior. And just like Philip perhaps, just like Nathanael perhaps, your Philip has gone and he's found the Messiah. And you're still without the Messiah. You're still looking at your Bible. And you're still looking at the Gospel. And you're still looking for Jesus.

And you're waiting for someone or something to come and tell you that they have found him. So that they will take you and take you to the Jesus that your heart is searching for. Is that where you find yourself tonight? Without Jesus as your Savior, longing to know Jesus as your Savior, and wanting to be found out. If only God himself would come and discover your desire, wouldn't that be a blessing?

But we see in this pursuit that there is resistance. And tonight if you are seeking the Lord Jesus and you haven't found him, there will be resistance in your heart. And as soon as Philip says that to Nathanael, you can hear Nathanael immediately putting his hands up. I'm not going there. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? I know what the Bible says about Jesus. And if he's going to come at all, it's going to come to Bethlehem. And he's going to be king in Jerusalem. That's the good thing that God has spoken in the Old Testament. And it's good with regard to God's plan. That's what the good thing is. The thing that fulfills God's purpose. The good thing. And as far as Nathanael is concerned, that good thing can never come out of Nazareth. He is Jesus of Nazareth. Philip had said to him, he is Jesus of Bethlehem. He is Jesus the son of David. Then he might have made a better connection.

But in the very announcement that he is Jesus of Nazareth, the shutters come down. And there is a resistance because the Nazareth is insignificant. It's not mentioned in the Bible with regard to Jesus coming. It's not mentioned in any way that that would cause people to be attracted to it for Jesus' sake.

Indeed, it is part of the offense that surrounded the coming of Jesus that he was mentioned to be from Nazareth. It was a stumbling block. Can anything good come out of Nazareth?

[10:14] And you tonight, you're seeking the Lord Jesus and you're wanting to find him where you think you're going to find him. And you've spent your time and you're not finding him where you thought you would.

And he's saying to you tonight, he is Jesus of somewhere else. Look at what's happening around you. Look at what God is saying. Look at where he is saying it. Why don't you look away from where you expect to find him and go to the place where God is going to show him to you? And in response to that, there is Philip immediately wanting Nathaniel to come to the very place where God is going to meet with him. And despite his resistance, let go of that stumbling block. And Philip says to him, come and see. Let's go and see. Come and see for yourself.

Listen to the gospel marvelous. Sometimes we think that God is not interested in saving us, that we are more interested in being saved than God is in saving us. And yet he comes, as he does tonight, and he comes to remind us that salvation is God's way and not your way. And as surely as the cross is the way that God saves, which was a stumbling block to many. So the means and the time and the occasion and the place will be very different to what you expected. But tonight, the pursuit is on. And God wants to find you where you are. And he wants you to come and see, because that's how he makes disciples.

Secondly, there is a persuasion. There is a pursuit that is ongoing, but that comes to be a persuasion.

And the persuasion comes because Nathaniel left where he was, and he went where Jesus was. And we can imagine it reminds us, this Nathaniel, he's walking along the road, and he's coming to meet with Jesus. And we read in verse 47, Jesus saw Nathaniel coming towards him.

[12:47] Can't we allow ourselves that there was joy and excitement in Jesus' own heart as he saw Nathaniel coming from where he was looking to the place where Jesus actually was.

Coming for the most important encounter of his life. Coming to where Jesus was. It immediately sparks in our minds the whole idea that Jesus knew Nathaniel.

As he knows you tonight, whoever you are, I know my sheep, says Jesus. I know whom I have chosen, he said to the disciples.

And he sees Nathaniel coming towards him. And as soon as he sees him, behold, a nistalite indeed in whom there is no guile.

What a statement. This is what Nathaniel needed to hear. Why? Because the statement that Jesus makes with regard to him says something about his new status and it says something about what is going on in his heart.

[14:03] And that's that's a remarkable thing tonight about the secrets of our hearts as we search out for God in the darkness that he knows.

And as Nathaniel emerges, he is an nistalite indeed. There are, says Paul in chapter 2 of Romans, there are nistalites and there are true nistalites.

Those who are changed in their hearts. And here Jesus sees Nathaniel coming and he's a true child of God. He's a true covenant child.

He is a true disciple. and as he sees him coming, he sees what is in his heart. In his heart there is no deceit.

He is not coming here for any other reason than because he is genuinely looking to find the Lord Jesus as a savior. Jesus recognizes the desire that there is in his heart.

[15:13] and if there is excitement in any way with regard to Nathaniel coming, not knowing what is before him, there is surely that sense of the joy of Jesus as he anticipates this new encounter with Nathaniel a true Israelite.

You remember Jacob at Peniel in Genesis 32 and there God gave him a new name because he was a different person from then onwards and he gave them that new name as somebody who had victory with God.

And so here is Nathaniel and Jesus saying he is a true Israelite. there is no deceit in him. He has my victory and he has that victory because he has striven with God, he has been pleading with God, he has been praying to God and now is this moment of this special encounter.

and tonight Jesus knows exactly what there is in your heart and if you're saying to your friends who witness to you that yes you are seeking the Lord and you're not then Jesus knows that that's deceitful but he knows also that if you're telling your friends that you would love to be saved and you're serious about that Jesus knows what's in your heart and he's seeing you walking along your own road the road that you're taking towards him and he takes great delight in you what do you expect Nathaniel to say how is he going to respond to somebody who knows him this well who knows even what's going on in his heart Nathaniel said to him how do you know me and here we have a serious question that's at the very center of the way in which

God works in making disciples how does he know where I am tonight how does Jesus know because he is the son of God because he is God of himself and he knows everything every detail of your life and mine every detail of this world he knows but his knowledge especially is taken up with the knowledge of his plans and his purposes and his work of salvation and that's the question that Nathaniel is asking how do you know me and what I'm thinking and what I'm desiring how do you know what I've been doing as I've been reading my Bible and looking for you and Jesus puts his finger on his private life and where he was alone with God when says

[18:43] Jesus before Philip called you when you were under the fig tree I saw you we could take it to be his home in the Old Testament the idea of the fig tree and the fruit offered was very much a symbol for where a person lived go home to your own fig tree and eat of the produce of your own land but also in Zechariah chapter 9 there is that picture of people inviting their neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree and that invitation takes place when the new age of the coming of the Messiah when it dawns the moment that this day dawns there is going to be a people and they're going to be gathering under the vine and they're going to be inviting their neighbors and their friends to gather under the vine with them and

Jesus is saying to Nathaniel when I saw you when you and Philip were discussing me what I was saying about what you were saying about me when you were searching for me in your Bibles I knew you then I saw you in that place of expectation in that place of longing and in that place of deciding that this day would dawn at last and that my glory would shine into your life I knew you then the long distant view of God his telescopic view of where you are wherever you are when you're seeking him there he knows and there he sees I knew you when you were under the victory aren't we thankful tonight that in all of our seeking God knows in all of our crying out after him he knows our tears in all of our longing out for his beauty and for his salvation and for the peace that comes through him in all of that he knows he's got his record he's got his account of everything that I've been doing and searching for him and then the encounter explodes into the exclamation of

Nathaniel's faith Rabbi you are the son of God you are the king of Israel teacher I know now exactly who you are you are the son of God proclaimed in the first part of this chapter spoken of by the way in which God in the Old Testament was promising to send his son in Isaiah 9 he will be amongst other things he is the mighty God he is the eternal father in Isaiah chapter 7 he is Emmanuel God with us and Nathanael who was reading his Old Testament suddenly all of these pieces of the jigsaw they fall together and he sees this humble man from Nazareth and despite his humility and the lack of glory in his appearance he recognizes immediately you are the son of God and tonight there is no salvation for me unless I come to the place where

I recognize that that's who Jesus is he is in the first place the son of God he was that before he ever came to be Jesus he is the eternal word who was with God who was God who was there from the beginning and before the beginning you are the son of God and along with that you are the king of Israel John the Baptist has said that Jesus has come in order to bring salvation to Israel and down through the old testament there is that expectation once more in the prophecy of Zechariah Hosanna blessed is the one who is coming in the name of the Lord the king of Israel and I go to

Jerusalem just before Jesus died and they are lining up the streets with palm trees and palm branches and they are singing that song because here is the king of Israel riding on a donkey as he goes to the cross on the way to his throne and Nathaniel here perhaps is saying more than he understood but he is saying that this is the king of Israel and that he is the child who was born to be king and that he is going to be crowned king because of all that God has promised to do in the old testament scripture you are the king of Israel and for us tonight there is no king without the cross and I come in my search for Jesus as my savior and I come to recognize in his identity as the son of

[24:30] God and I give thanks to God that that's who he is in the first place that's at the foundation of all that he's going to do for me and then I come and he is the anointed one that we read of in Psalm 2 I have said to my king on my holy hill anointed him from the manger to the cross to the tomb and raised up in glory to be king and that's the discovery of discipleship that we come to that place where we recognize who Jesus is and obviously for Nathaniel he didn't understand everything that he said and tonight don't be afraid because you don't understand everything that faith is saying there is no one here who understands fully what faith is saying but faith is saying it you are the son of

God you are the king of Israel you are the crucified Christ and you're my savior it's as simple as that and on your journey towards him here he comes with this encounter and it should leave you like Nathaniel persuaded at last that this is who you have been looking for and that you need look no further because everything that you need is in him where you didn't expect to find him and perhaps you did expect to find him under the ministry of the gospel in this church building but this is where God has come to meet with you tonight and to present to you his son as the king of Israel as the anointed conqueror the persuasion are you persuaded that that's who he is then what more are you looking for what else do you need but to be persuaded of that and the devil the enemy of her soul is an absolute expert at telling you that you will need something more than that and tell you that you are not this and you are not that and you are not able to embrace the salvation in this wholehearted way he will work overtime he will work day and night to make sure that he can try in every possible way to put something in your mind that will hinder you but the gospel is about persuading you and the gospel is about finding you and bring you but put your trust in him there is a pursuit there is a persuasion and there is a promise that's the kind of God we're worshipping that's the kind of God who saves us he always promises to give us more and in coming to

Jesus Nathaniel here receives a great promise 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 he is son of God he is king of Israel but he is also identifying himself now as somebody who is the son of man and that son of man is the great end time figure to him is going to be given the government and the kingdom of God as we read in Daniel chapter 7 and all the nations of the world will come to him and he will then give his kingdom to the saints and Jesus himself adds to that understanding of the old testament by reminding them that as well as everything else he is the person who is coming at the end of the every element of

God's plan he is the son of man and the son of man the great promises that in the meeting in the encounter in that very encounter there is everything to do with God's plan of salvation and that's the connection that Jesus makes here he makes a connection with Genesis chapter 28 where Jacob is on his way and where he falls asleep and where he has this vision and there is the ladder heaven opened and God standing at the top of the ladder and the angels are ascending and descending upon Jacob in his dream as he is on his journey before God and Jesus here is taking that story and he is making it all about himself and if Jacob had a ladder in the

Old Testament Jesus is the ladder if God is present with Jacob in the Old Testament then Jesus is present in the New Testament and so everything that happens when God meets with Jacob is now fulfilled in a new way when Nathaniel meets with Jesus and when we read that story of Jacob there is a sense of the presence of God there is a sense of the protection of God and there is a sense of the supply of God everything that Jacob needs from then on God will provide for him there will be this heavenly traffic where there is a moment from where he is to heaven and back down again to ensure that everything that God has promised will be his but now we have Jesus and he is taking that story and he is telling it to them and he is retelling it to focus upon himself you will see heaven opened and in the story of

[31:13] Jesus himself we see that the heaven was opened at his baptism we see in Luke 24 and in Acts chapter 1 that the heaven was opened when he ascended up to heaven and we see again in Acts chapter 1 that the heaven is going to be open when he returns back into the world at the end of time to gather his people with himself heaven is open and that's surely a remarkable promise that for the rest of Nathaniel's days and for the rest of the life of the disciples that they are going to live their lives under an open heaven that Jesus has opened or that God has opened for Jesus and everything that they're going to see is what God has achieved in the person of Jesus and as they look up into that open heavens which

Jesus opened they're going to see him and they're going to see this traffic coming from where they are going up to heaven and coming back down again so that every step that they take on their journey of faith there is this constant provision this constant protection this constant presence of God with them and tonight there is fear with my faith because I don't know what's going to happen when I go out this door tonight I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow there is so much uncertainty in my life because as each door opens on every new day who knows what's going to happen but when I know as I open all of these doors that heaven is open above me then I feel secure I feel God is always not just looking down over me but that he is also supplying my every need and when he is doing that he is doing more than that he is giving me the fullness of his plan of salvation and when we go back to where

Jacob was and he saw this vision we see that God was speaking to him there and when God spoke to him he gave to him all of the promises that he gave to Abraham in other words he gave him the promises of the plan you will have my blessing I will be present with you I will give you this land that I promised to Abraham and you shall go on and you shall inherit it and you will do so every day knowing that heaven is open and at last when you arrive in the land you will find rest in the land and you will know that heaven is still open and for you and for me tonight that's a snapshot of all that Jesus is saying here with regard to the open heavens he is saying you will be blessed every day he will enrich your life with the good things that you need they might not come in the way that you expect but he will enrich your life he will give you blessing he will enable you to do the things you cannot do and you will journey on through life and the more that you do that the more you will become aware that there is a better place and that land promised to

Abraham is now the new heavens and the new earth that is promised in the new testament in 2nd Peter that place to which the people of God is going and moving along heaven opened and knowing that it's opened because God has at last purposed that you will enter in to that open heavens and you will go forward and you will live your life waiting for the open heavens from which Jesus himself will return from that greatest encounter of all time this says Isaiah 25 this is our God we have waited for him he has come to save us he has come to reach down to where we are so that we will be caught up together and be forever more with him isn't it marvelous that heaven is open for us tonight isn't it marvelous that heaven was opened by

Jesus for us isn't it marvelous that as we journey on all of the things that God has prepared for his people that they are ours as we put our trust in him persuaded to embrace him in that moment we have everything and we learn to understand everything better day by day and we learn the preciousness of everything day by day and we will wait until we see him as Peter says him having not seen you love and though now you see him not yet you rejoice with that joy that is inexpressible and full of glory if you met him once by faith you will never be satisfied until you see him face to face and what an expectation that is what a glorious anticipation in the hearts and lives of the people of God so let's tonight give thanks to

[37 : 43] God that he has come to find us let's give thanks that in all of our searching of him he is actually searching for us and let's give thanks that he comes to show us that heaven is open for us and that all we need will have in him and at last he will call us invite us all together to be forever more with him what a plan and what a purpose and we can be sure tonight that every detail of it will be accomplished before he comes at last to receive us to be with him may God bless us all let us pray