

“CAN ANYTHING GOOD COME FROM NAZARETH?”  
TO SEARCH FOR THE KING 3  
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18, I Corinthians 6:12-20, John 1:43-51  
January 16 & 17, 2021

The last couple of weeks we have been looking at what it means to “Search for the King,” Jesus, in the midst of our lives. We have looked at a couple examples in Scripture of those who sought out the King, starting with the Wise Men who traveled a long distance to seek and find the One that the star proclaimed. Then we looked at the life of John the Baptist and his search for the fulfillment of his own call to be the standard-bearer for the Messiah. His ministry was calling the people to repent and prepare for the coming of the Lord. All of these men desired to find the One that God had prophesied and proclaimed would be the Savior for the world. And we have seen that in each case, God revealed the King to them so that they might become the witnesses of Him to the people of the world.

As we contemplate the lives of these men, a question comes to mind, “What does it mean for **US** to Search for the King?” When we look at this world and try to make sense of what is going on, when we find the emptiness of all of the world’s promises in our lives, what do we invest in to give our lives meaning and purpose? Are there things that bring us hope or lasting peace? Seeking the King of God may become a deep passion on our own hearts. Searching for the King becomes a yearning within us that draws us to develop an openness to hearing God’s Holy Spirit speak to us to enable us to find the fulfillment of our own search.

I like the way that John Piper says it. He says, “The cost of food in the kingdom [of God] is hunger for the bread of heaven, instead of the white, [processed] bread of the world. Do you want it? Are you hungry? Or are you satisfied with yourself and your television and your computer and your job and your family?”<sup>1</sup> Do we want more for our life, or are we content with the things of this world?

Today we look at the life of another person in the Bible who was searching for the King. In John’s Gospel he is named Nathanael. In Matthew, Mark and Luke he is called Bartholomew. I invite

---

<sup>1</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 138)

you to listen to his account of seeking and finding Jesus. This is John 1:43-51. (READ John 1:43-51)

Jesus travels from the Jordan River area up into the region of Galilee, around Bethsaida, and He is calling folks to follow Him. He is traveling around the Sea of Galilee. He had already asked Andrew and Simon Peter to go with Him (John 1:40-42), and James and John are probably tagging along, too. Andrew had been one of John the Baptist's disciples who heard John proclaim Jesus to be the "*Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (Jn. 1:29 & 36). Therefore when John announced that Jesus was the Promised Messiah, there was eager excitement among them.

Jesus comes upon Philip, and calls out to him, "*Come with me!*" (John 1:43). Philip is so excited about Jesus' invitation that he runs to find his friend, Nathanael, with the news, "*We have found the One whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about. He is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth*" (Jn. 1:45). Each of these men had grown up learning of God's Promised Messiah. They had longed for the day when God would fulfill His promise. They were simple men, yet they were devout in following the teachings of the Laws and Prophets. Not to the extent that the Pharisees were, mind you, but they lived within the guidelines of the Jewish texts and teachings.

But upon hearing Philip's news of finding the One long prophesied, Nathanael raises a huge question, "*Can anything good come from Nazareth?*" (Jn. 1:46). It seems that all the inhabitants of Galilee were **looked upon with contempt** by the people of Judea because they spoke a ruder dialect than the rest of Israel. We could associate them with what folks call today, "back-woods" country people. Their dialect would certainly be different than others. And these country folk were less cultivated than others because of their woodland practices, their rough existence, and their simple livelihood. These were not the well-to-do and famous folks. They lived off of the land, tended their flocks and cultivated fruits and vegetables. There was nothing sophisticated about them. And they were more exposed by their position in the country to be in contact with the heathen. They might have been largely influenced by the Gentiles who mingled with them. And this is what brought the scorn and contempt to the city. They may have been people of lower moral and religious character because of

those who influenced their town from other moral or religious standards. We tend to associate ourselves with the ones that we hang around, so if Gentiles were mingled among them, it would be natural to think that the Jews living in Nazareth would possibly begin to follow their ways.

But it is not one of Judea, but of Galilee, who is making this distinctive and judgmental statement against Nazareth. Nathanael was probably a fisherman who lived in or near Cana of Galilee just north of Nazareth. He was probably converted by the preaching of John the Baptist, and may have worked right alongside Andrew and Simon Peter, James and John. So why would Nathanael come out with such critical words of the people of Nazareth? Certainly Cana was not much greater than Nazareth was. Certainly the people of Nazareth would have been much like those in Cana. Why would Nathanael have thought so harshly about the people of Nazareth?

Think about it this way for a moment. The Jews believed that, according to Micah 5:2, the birth of the Messiah would take place at **Bethlehem, and nowhere else**. Nathanael would have held the same opinion as his countrymen, and would have believed that the great "Good News" which they were all expecting could not come from Nazareth, but Bethlehem. This is probably what Nathanael meant. Because Philip had stated that the One they found was from Nazareth, Nathanael would have assumed that Jesus had been born and raised there as one of the common folks of Galilee, rather than of the royal line of King David and the house and lineage of those in Bethlehem. While there does not seem to be any evidence that the inhabitants of Galilee were in any respect inferior to any other people groups in Israel, or that any Galilean was held in contempt in the time of our Lord, it just didn't fit the prophecies of God that the Messiah should come from Nazareth.

But Nathanael's mind was changed as he received **the invitation by Philip** to go with him to see the One they were convinced was the One that Moses had talked about. It is interesting to me of the description that John's Gospel uses to tell us where Philip found Nathanael – "...*under the fig tree*" (Jn. 1:50). What was a fisherman doing under a fig tree? This seemingly insignificant point shows the depth of Nathanael's faith, and the hope that was within him.

You see, that spot could very well have been the place where he went to have his daily quiet time with the Lord God. The time he had spent under the fig tree, kneeling, no doubt, in silent prayer and communion with God, had brought to mind all the sacred hopes and aspirations of that hour. Well-worn may have been the path to that tree under which Nathanael poured out his heart in his search to find the King, the Promised Messiah of the Lord. Day after day he would go there, pouring out his heart to the Lord God, sharing his hopes and dreams, imploring God's intervention.

You see, with all of the oppression of the Roman occupation all around them, there would certainly have been the longing for the Lord God to fulfill His promise to bring a deliverer again who would set the country of Israel free from all oppression. Surely God had heard the cries and prayers of the people just as He had done when they were captives in Egypt, slaves in a foreign country. With the presence of the enemy came the hope of God's Savior to come release them again from captivity and establish the country once more under the mighty hand of a king in the appearance and authority of their ancestor David.

C.E. Orr, in his sermon, "How To Live A Holy Life," makes it real for us today. He says, "Many a devout one since that day has had their secret communion-place with God like Nathanael's fig tree. Perhaps it was in the woods on a mossy knoll, under an oak, on a grassy spot on the bank of a stream, or under a shade-tree that grew by the brook in the meadow. To these places of solemn silence they would retreat when the shades of night were falling or when the light of the morning was streaking the sky, and there from the fullness of their souls they would pour out their praise and thanksgiving to God. These were the dearest places in the world to them. It may be there are aged ones today who had such places in the earlier days of their lives. Though they are now far removed from those scenes, these are still sacred in their memory.

"There are those today who have their altars of prayer in some secluded place. There they meet God and tell him all their sorrows and cares. There they recount to him his loving kindness. There they implore his grace to sustain them through all their trying scenes of life. And there they worship at his

feet and bless his name! Beloved, have you a ‘fig-tree’? And are you often found under it? Have you a quiet nook somewhere which is hallowed by the presence of God?”

So Philip found Nathanael in his quiet spot, worshiping the Lord in his devotions. And it is there that he tells the great news of finding Jesus. From the manner of the invitation extended to him by Philip, it is evident that Nathanael was well versed in ancient Scripture, since he immediately recognized the context and the meaning in which Philip shared the words. And it showed the deep longing of his heart and the focus of his search. He shared the hope of Philip that the Messiah would be revealed. Even though he was probably a fisherman, Nathanael knew what Philip meant and deciphered that possibly God could have brought His Messiah to them at that particular time.

It would be understandable that the preaching of John the Baptist had assuredly aroused a certain expectancy in the people. John was openly saying that he was the one who had come to prepare the way for the Lord. John had proclaimed that there would be One who would come after him who would bring the Holy Spirit with fire. John expected this One to come soon, so the expectancy of His arrival was prevalent. And had Philip been hanging out with Andrew and the other followers of John, he would have heard him point out Jesus as the Lamb of God, too. I can only imagine the excitement of Philip as he was then called by Jesus to go with Him. Then, to have him come share this great news with his friend, Nathanael, it would have been quite the sight with Philip hardly able to contain himself.

So I am sure that Nathanael’s reply to Philip, “*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*” was prompted, not by any ill repute of the town itself, but by its petty insignificance and familiarity in Nathanael's eyes. Nazareth was not the place foretold of the Messiah’s coming; that was Bethlehem’s distinction.

To this question Philip made no direct answer, but simply replied, “***Come and see***” (Jn. 1:46). They could have started arguing about the details of the prophecies versus the fact that Jesus was from Nazareth. They could have gotten into a huge theological debate about what the Messiah would look like and where He would come from, but Philip decided that “come and see” was the answer best fitted

to the man and the occasion. That simple invitation piqued Nathanael's interest enough for him to accept the challenge to go find out for himself if what Philip said was true or not.

It also appealed to Nathanael's fair-mindedness and sincerity of purpose. He was just as ready as Philip was to find the Messiah. His expectation and hope for the King was just as strong as anyone else's was. He knew that Philip would not just be flippantly making up a story to get him all excited over nothing. Even if it didn't seem to fit into Nathanael's understanding of how God's prophecies were to line up, his search drove him to find the King.

So he responded nobly to the call of Philip and went with him to find Jesus. And on approaching Jesus, Nathanael was received with the words: "***Here is a real Israelite; there is nothing false in him!***" (Jn. 1:47). It was a tribute to that singleness of heart which enabled him to overcome his initial prejudice.

You see, Jesus was proclaiming in that one statement that Nathanael was a man of veracity, speaking the truth from his heart. He was not a man who would willfully lie to another, but always sought the truth. He could not tell lies in jest, nor could he lie in earnest with the best interest at heart. Nothing but truth was heard from his mouth.

Then, Jesus was saying that Nathanael was a man of sincerity, with truth and love guiding his whole life. Sincerity has no part of cunning, for cunning desires to deceive in order to achieve a selfish purpose. Sincerity tells the truth, simply and purposefully, bringing about wisdom in all occasions. Wisdom is the ability of discerning the best ends for all things, and the appropriate means of attaining them at the acceptable time. It is the sign of prudence and discretion in our life, which refers to our outward behavior being proper and fitting. It means, the ordering of our words and actions in ways that are always right for whatever situation we find ourselves in.<sup>2</sup>

Sincerity in truth and love guided Nathanael's whole life. The color of his character was defined by sincerity. He was free from all disguise and pretense. He had no reason to mask anything in his life

---

<sup>2</sup> (John Wesley, Sermon on Several Occasions – An Israelite In Whom There Is No Guile)

with anything false. He was open and direct, but only to the point of being truthful in his search for the King. He desired to maintain a very pure heart as he sought out the Lord's will and the Lord's ways.

Ah, that sincerity in truth and love would be active in our own world today, that people would be open with one another, seeking the best of God's ways for one another. Oh, that we could be people living with truth in our hearts, yearning to live and to do the things of God in our lives so that we might love each other enough to be pure in heart, and thought, and word, and deed. Oh, that sincerity with truth and love would influence all of our words and actions to the point that there is no cunning, or indiscretion, or falsity within us. Oh, the difference it would make in our world today if everyone spoke with truth and love, and lived their lives with prudence and discretion.

So Jesus' judgment statement of Nathanael's character takes him by surprise, as is evident by his question to Jesus, "*How do you know me?*" (Jn. 1:48). You would expect an introduction to have taken place, with Philip explaining to Jesus who Nathanael was, but to have Jesus comment about his character without that introduction opened Nathanael to the understanding that here was One who read on the instant, the inmost secrets of his heart. Jesus knew Nathanael without being introduced, without getting to know him personally.

That is one attribute to the Lord God as we heard in Psalm 139. The psalmist reflects upon how God knows each one of us, reminding us, "*Lord, you have examined me and You know me. You know everything I do; from far away You understand all my thoughts. You see me, whether I am working or resting; You know all my actions. Even before I speak, You already know what I will say...You created every part of me; You put me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because You are to be feared; all You do is strange and wonderful. I know it with all my heart. When my bones were being formed, carefully put together in my mother's womb, when I was growing there in secret, You knew that I was there – You saw me before I was born. The days allotted to me had all been recorded in Your book, before any one of them ever began.*" (139:1-4, 13-16).

This was exactly what he would expect from the Messiah. It perfectly matched what Nathanael

was seeking and it drew from him the confession, "*Teacher, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*" (Jn. 1:49). Nathanael suddenly realized that despite the questions he had about Jesus, He could certainly be the Promised One, the King whom he had been searching for. His eyes had been opened and He now recognized Jesus as the Son of God, the King of Israel.

However, Jesus doesn't allow the moment to slip by just with Nathanael coming to know He is the Messiah. "*Jesus said, 'Do you believe just because I told you I saw you when you were under the fig tree? You will see much greater things than this!' And He said to them, 'I am telling you the truth; you will see heaven open and God's angels going up and coming down o the Son of Man''*" (Jn. 1:50-51).

Recognition of who Jesus is, the Son of God, opens the door for us to grow in our relationship with Him. He then gives us spiritual sight to witness the great things that God is doing through Jesus. As we come to understand that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah of God, God's only begotten Son, our search for the King is completed, but our journey of life with Him is just begun.

You see, belief leads us to vision to see the truth of God. With our eyes opened to knowing that Jesus is the Christ, He enables us to see beyond our own physical abilities to see the supernatural all around us. Like Jacob being able to see the ladder going up to heaven at Bethel, where God promised that He would be with him and would protect him wherever he went (Genesis 28:12-15). Like Elisha seeing the hills covered with the angelic forces protecting him when the Syrians came to capture him (2 Kings 6:13-17), belief in God's truth opens our eyes to see the might things at work all around us.

And once we are able to see the wonders of God's love to us, that vision leads us to a lifestyle of faithfulness where we might begin to live according to all of God's commands. Once we see that Jesus is truly "God with us," our Messiah and King, our life's direction changes and we follow Him in all our ways to His glory.

And then, when we begin living a lifestyle that proclaims Jesus as Lord of our lives, that lifestyle leads us to witness for Him to the whole world. And then we can tell the whole world about the Great Good News of the One who came from Nazareth to save the world, Jesus, our Lord and Savior.



Let's pray: Father, it is easy for us to ask, like Nathanael, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" We can even say that about Sheboygan, or even Fountain Park UMC. Yet, in the middle of our own search for King Jesus, help us to see that when we truly see Jesus as our Messiah, our Savior, we begin our journey closer to You so that You might use us to take that great Good News to the world. It certainly changed Nathanael's life! And may it also change ours, too, so that we may be faithful believers for the rest of our lives. Give us eyes to see You at work among us so that we might be people of veracity and sincerity, speaking and living in truth from our heart. Then we can begin to love one another as You first loved us. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.