

Introducing JESUS

“Jesus & A Straight Shooting Jew”
John 1:43-51

This morning we are going to be in the Gospel of John. Will you please join me in John, Chapter 1?

This morning we begin a summer series in the Gospel of John. We are calling this series, “Introducing Jesus.” As we read through the Gospel of John, we become aware that there are large chunks of material in this Gospel that record conversations Jesus had with the an assortment of individuals. In this Gospel we will find a whole gallery of different people who Jesus spoke and interacted with. They were people who were introduced to the Son of God while He was on this earth.

We find Jesus interacting with a straight-shooting Jew. This Jewish man was somebody who had the ability to say what he thought. Jesus also had a conversation with a confused minister who needed to be saved. He spoke with a desperate woman, and a grieving family. All of the people who Jesus interacted with and all of the conversations that are recorded in the Gospel of John carry out the purpose that the Holy Spirit gave to John so he could write about Jesus and that the readers might believe He is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing, that they might have life in His name.

Listen to what John’s testimony is in John 1:14:

¹⁴ “And the Word became flesh [that is the eternal Word who is God as revealed in John 1:1] and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . And from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace (John 1:16).”

John wrote about what he saw with his own eyes. He wrote about these interactions. He was a witness to the ministry of Jesus. He wrote so that we may do what he did. John said, “I have seen the glory of the Son of God.” John recorded these things so that we who are reading what he wrote can see the glory of Jesus Christ, and by the grace of God, we might have a spiritual vibrant life added into our souls so that we might live as ambassadors for the Lord Jesus Christ.

John wanted us to truly live and so he recorded these stories for us about God incarnate interacting with people He created and was sustaining. This summer we are going to be looking into these stories that are laid out before us.

This morning we are going to see how Jesus interacted with a straight-shooting Jewish man by name of Nathanael. It is interesting; when we read through Matthew, Mark and

Luke – the synoptic Gospels which are very similar – we don't find the name Nathanael in any of them. Then when we read in the Gospel of John, we don't find the name Bartholomew. The mystery is solved when we come to understand that Nathanael and Bartholomew are one in the same person. Nathanael, which means gift of God, was his first name. Bartholomew, or son of Tolomaius, was his last name. So when we read about Nathanael in the Gospel of John, that is Bartholomew as he is called in other Gospels.

Nathanael was a man from Cana in Galilee. Evidently, his parents were believers. They received him as a gift from the Lord. The prominent characteristic that rises up to us out of the text about Nathanael is that he was, in fact, a man without guile. He was a straight-shooter. He was a man who was willing to say what he thought. He was not a man who had to conceal what he was thinking because he was afraid of what people thought about what he was thinking. He was not a man who felt a need to measure every single word that he spoke because he feared people and how they might respond. He was a forthright, direct, honest person who said what he thought.

As we get into this passage of Scripture, what we see is that this straight forwardness was a characteristic that Jesus liked. Jesus commended him for saying what he thought. As we see how Jesus interacted with Nathanael, we are going to see that the Son of God, in human flesh, was also a straight-shooter. He was direct and said things that were bold. This story shows us how Jesus interacted with Nathanael and we see that He is, in fact, the omniscient Son of God. He knows everything. He knew Nathanael better than Nathanael even knew himself. Jesus made that very fact known to Nathanael.

We enter into the Gospel of John through the doorway of that great theological prologue in Chapter 1, verse 1:

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

He made everything that was created. Verse 14 states:

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

That's the entry way by which we go into all of these stories about Jesus in the Gospel of John. John wanted us to know that Jesus is God in the flesh. We are going to see His omniscience and omnipotence. We are going to see His power, grace, love, and truth. We will see these qualities of deity coming out as Jesus interacts with some of the people as God incarnate. So He was then, so He is now.

As we get into this passage of Scripture which talks about Jesus and His interaction with Nathanael, we will see that it comes to us in three parts. First, Nathanael is going to receive a report about Jesus. Secondly, he is going to have an encounter with Jesus. Thirdly, he is going to receive some encouragement from Jesus.

So first, Nathanael is going to receive what he thought was an untenable report about the Messiah. As we get into this passage we will see the report that he received. Let's read John 1:43:

⁴³ The next day [the day after Jesus called Peter and Andrew after they had heard the testimony of John the Baptist that this was the Christ] Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ 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." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Here we have classic Nathanael. This might be the statement that Nathanael is most known for. It's kind of a brusque. Nazareth? What good could come out of Nazareth? You've got to be kidding me. It occurred to me that the affect of Nazareth on the first century pious Jew was similar to the affect that an open bag of corn nuts might have on me. It is no secret around here that I reject the snack food of corn nuts. Whenever the bag of corn nuts is opened anywhere near me, there is this odor that emits from it that is foul. I can't take it. Don't like it; don't want to smell those things because a couple of times they have triggered the gag reflex in me.

For the first century "pious" Jew, the city of Nazareth did not bring a positive connotation. They did not have a high regard for Nazareth. They actually had a low view of it. Nazareth was the place where there was a garrison of Roman troops, and from the perspective of many of the Pharisaic Jews and the people under their influence, that was a place that was crawling with unclean Gentiles and paganism. Nazareth had the reputation of being spiritually aloof and immoral.

But there was good in Nazareth, too. Mary and Joseph were there, but Nazareth was thought of as a foul place. This is evident by the way Nathanael responded. The Messiah comes from Nazareth? Nathanael didn't think so. You will notice that Phillip doesn't put up much of an argument. He told Nathanael that he understood but that he just had to come and see. Phillip knew it might be tough to accept but he still urged Nathanael to come and behold and interact with this Man.

With Phillip we receive some encouragement because the Lord calls us to go out and tell people about Jesus and invite them to hear the Gospel. We might interact with people that are resistant at first, but we need to persevere and press on with some people. We see that Phillip had some backbone because he didn't give up that easily. So we see this report that Nathanael received about Jesus. His first response was not a positive one.

We continue on and now we see that Nathanael is going to have a stunning encounter with Jesus. So we read in verse 47:

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

Jesus doesn't waste much time, does He? I think Jesus knew he was dealing with a straight-shooting and direct man. So Jesus is direct Himself, and before meeting him Jesus gives a public evaluation of Nathanael's character. Jesus directly commends him for something. "Behold, an Israelite indeed." This is how the Jewish people should be. Here is a quality that should be recognized, understood and practiced. Jesus said, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

Notice that word "behold." You see Jesus using that word. The word "behold" is used to draw our attention to something that is important. That word "behold" has been used twice so far in the first chapter of John. John the Baptist used it twice; once in verse 19, and another time in verse 36 to say, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." "Behold, the Lamb of God." John is drawing their attention to something important. Jesus uses the word "behold" to mean that here is a man who is a Jew in whom there is no deceit. That means that the quality of not having phoniness about us is something that is very important to Jesus. Jesus' point was not that Nathanael was a sinless man but that he was a sincere man. What you see is what you get. Jesus knew that Nathanael was going to tell Him what he was thinking. He didn't like Nazareth, but at least he was saying what he thought and was not giving a false impression. He was not being deceitful or phony. Jesus liked this quality, and He calls all of our attention to it.

I think that Jesus liked that quality so much in Nathanael because it was so distinct from what He had been seeing all of His years in the religious leadership of the nation of Israel. The Pharisaic leadership of Israel was hypocritical. They were phony. They put up false masks of piety while in the inside there was darkness and sin. So Jesus saw this in contrast, and He said that here is a man with no deceit.

Do you remember that story toward the end of the life of Jesus? Jesus was teaching and preaching with power in the courts of the temple. The elders and chief priests didn't like it so they came to Jesus and they interacted with Him and asked by what authority He did these things. Jesus said that He would tell them if they would answer Him one question. Jesus asked if the baptism of John was from heaven or was it from man. What did the chief priests and elders do? They scurried off and got into a corner by themselves and began talking it over. They said to themselves, let's think about this. If we say that it's from heaven, Jesus is going to ask us why we didn't believe it. But if we say from man we fear the people because they thought he was a true prophet. So they didn't know what to do. One of them spoke and said that they should go tell Him that they didn't know. They were full of guile and craftiness. And within a day Jesus was rebuking them, because they were phony and hypocritical.

Nathanael was coming, the one who said "Nazareth, what good comes out of Nazareth?" And Jesus said that he could work with a man like that, because he had sincerity about him. He was the polar opposite of the hypocrisy that Jesus was seeing all throughout Israel. So Jesus called attention to the quality of being without deceit, without guile, being without trickery; not being a person who is being misleading toward others.

I want to give you three applications in relation to not being a person who is deceitful. First, speak the truth. Isn't that the first application of this? Jesus commends a man without guile so let's be people who speak the truth. Are you a person who is honest with people or are you a people pleaser who measures what they might want to hear? Then in order to please them you say what you think they want to hear. Are you a people pleaser? Repent of that and ask God for strength so you can be honest with people.

Secondly, do you experience the fear of man? Do you think that people are not going to like a certain thing you say so you adjust your comments based on what you perceive their reaction might be? That's another quality that we need to repent of, because the call upon the Christian is stated in relation to this in Ephesians 4:25:

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

This verse speaks to the family of believers. The first application is to speak the truth, right? The second application is to speak in love; speak in love. We don't get to go to the opposite extreme of this issue. This verse does not enable us to tell it like it is and if the person doesn't like it, that's just tough, because we're just going to say it anyway. This verse does not justify a cocky, arrogant attitude. The call upon the Christian is to be gentle, to be respectful, and to be kind. We can speak the truth in love, can't we?

A third application in relation to the area of not being deceitful is to respond with maturity when others tell you the truth. Because throughout the Scriptures, Jesus calls us to encourage, uplift, to love, to reprove, admonish, correct, and sometimes rebuke one another. How are we going to respond to one another when another brother or sister in the Lord does bring reproof or correction? Are we going to be like most people in the world and ask the person what right he has to say that to you? That's how people in the world respond to that kind of thing. Yet the Scripture tells us that we are to sharpen the iron of one another. We are to spur one another on toward love and good deeds, and sometimes that means telling the truth even when it hurts. In the book of Proverbs it says that the fool is the person who rejects reproof; who responds with anger; who responds with emotional manipulation to what people are trying to get across to them. Those are things that should not live in the heart of a person who is a Christian. We need to have these things cleansed from us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

At the same time Scripture says that a person who is wise will love reproof. Reproof is difficult to take, but accepting it shows that we are growing. If somebody has the boldness and love to come to us and tell us the truth even when that truth might be difficult to hear, accept it. So these are three applications. Jesus commands and points out the quality of being straight forward, and He said that this is a good quality in the people of God.

Let us return to this encounter. Nathanael, a straight-shooting man, questioned what good could come out of Nazareth, but he went anyway to check it out. Then Jesus went right up to Nathanael and He said, "Behold, a man without deceit." How did Nathanael

respond to what Jesus said? We continue on in verse 48. This is just classic to me if I am reading it correctly. I think I have the tone of it. Verse 48:

⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?”

I don't know that Nathanael is convinced yet. Jesus gave him a kind word but, if I'm reading this right, Nathanael wanted to know how Jesus knew who he was. How do you know me? There were lots of messianic claims coming out of Galilee in that day and age, and I don't think Nathanael is all too convinced yet. He asked Jesus how He knew him. He had a few more questions. So Jesus continued on in verse 48,

⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me? Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

I think that there is a huge, dramatic instantaneous turn around in the tone of this text that reflects the demeanor of Nathanael as Jesus sends a lightning bolt straight into his soul. He went from a guy who was questioning Nazareth to a guy who pronounced one of the greatest statements of worship found in the Gospels. Now Nathanael is worshipping King Jesus, the Son of God. It was an awesome thing. The question that comes to my mind is what was going on under that fig tree.

This week I was look at some pictures on my computer that were taken of my family several years ago during our last directory project at Bethel Grace. I sent some of the pictures to my dad. I was looking at these family pictures and especially the ones of my mom and dad together. I miss mom. We are doing okay, but I think about her every day. Those of you who have experienced grief know exactly what I'm talking about.

I was looking at those pictures of mom and dad that were taken right outside of the church building. I studied the picture to see where she was standing in relation to the trees. I went out and found the exact spot where mom stood with dad while that picture was being taken.

Then I began reflecting on mom and the entire experience got really deep as I communed with the Lord right there. I started appreciating the time that I had on this earth with my mother, appreciating the gift that I had in such of a Godly woman as my mother, and appreciating her for encouraging me in my faith. I thought about the times we shared out there and began thinking about her being in the presence of King Jesus. I had a strong sense of confidence that my mother is in the presence of God.

I praised the Lord for her with laughter, standing in awe of Him. I communed with the Lord as I thought about mom and the different blessings that are in my life. I prayed to the Lord that he would help me become the man that I know my mom was always praying that I would become. I asked for the Lord's help to be a Godly man who is filled with the Holy Spirit. There was a sense of His grace and His presence. It was a very

powerful experience for me. It didn't last a long time, but it was there. Communing with the Lord out by the evergreen trees was a great time.

I bring this up to say that in the case of Nathanael I think there was something significant that was taking place under that fig tree. I don't think he was out there taking a little nap in the cool shade. This is conjecture, and it is not stated in the text. But we can make the supposition that he was under that tree communing with the Lord, praying to Him, and pouring out his heart to the Lord.

It is evident that most of these men were fishermen in Galilee. They knew the Scriptures. They were walking with the Lord, and they were looking for the Messiah just as John the Baptist was preaching. I think that Nathaniel was under the tree calling on the Lord; perhaps consecrating himself to the Lord – saying, “Here I am, use me.” Perhaps he was praying like David did at the end of Psalm 139:

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
24 And see if there be any grievous way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting!

I believe this kind of communion was going on with the Lord underneath that tree. Then Nathanael said to Jesus, “How do you know me?” and Jesus said, “When you were under that fig tree, I saw you.” I perceived you. That's the meaning of that phrase, “I saw you.” I was looking inside of you, and once again it was like a laser beam that went deep into the soul of Nathanael and he reacted in a wonderful way, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” That response was awesome. It took two years before Peter made his great confession, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” It was three years before Thomas was finally able to stick his finger in the hand and the side of the risen Jesus and say, “My Lord and my God.” Here we have perceptive Nathanael right with an immediate, awesome statement of worship to King Jesus, divine in nature, Son of God, the one who searches me and knows me, King of all, the real one.

I had to change my thinking because whenever I thought of Nathanael I thought of verse 46 where he said, “Nazareth – can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Now when I think about Nathanael I think about the worship that is being released from him. John said that we have seen the glory of Jesus. John, the author of this Gospel carried by the Spirit, wants you to see that glory of Jesus. As He was then so is He now still able to see deep inside us and to know us intimately and completely.

There was a period of time where Nathanael was under that tree and he didn't know that Jesus was there. He didn't know that Jesus was searching Him. He didn't know it. Then came the moment where Jesus made it known to him. It is kind of like life for us. In this life we don't see and touch and feel Jesus. It's like Nathanael under that fig tree. We don't see Him; we can't touch Him, but understand on the basis of God's authoritative word what's revealed here is for our good. Jesus is searching us. He knows us, and that's an awesome thing to remember.

Whether you are in a bed soaked with tears; whether you are in the middle of hectic lifestyle that feels like you can't keep up; whether you are at the bottom of a bottle; whether you're in a house that's lonely – wherever you are, you need to know that Jesus, the Son of God, sees you and knows. If you are a person that believes in the love of Jesus Christ and the all surpassing power of Jesus Christ this is going to add tremendous grace to your life because wherever you are there is Jesus, too. His power will enable you to do the will of God whatever your situation. Whether it is something that is easy for the flesh or difficult for the flesh, He will empower us to walk in the way that is right and good, that pleases the Lord, and that is good for us.

I was reading this passage and thinking about the time when Jonathan was almost a year old and went into respiratory distress. He had bronchiolitis and a collapsed lung. He was in the hospital for several days, but it felt like an eternity. We were praying, reading Scripture, and calling upon the name of the Lord asking for help. We were not sleeping. We were crying and thinking about our little guy. We were concerned for his life. I remember that it got to the point that my emotions were absolutely worn down, and I was raw. I was exhausted. I had been praying all week and I felt drained in every possible way. I was several days without sleep, and I was at my wits end and began loudly beseeching the Lord for help. I was casting my anxieties upon Him. "Help!" I cried.

The Lord doesn't always do this, but not too long after I was praying to the Lord, a respiratory therapist walked in. She saw the Bible on our table and asked if she could sing a song to Jonathan? I said sure, why not? She began singing "Who am I that the Lord of all the earth would care to know my name, and care to feel my hurt." Talk about Nathanael having a lightning bolt sent into his soul. I had a lightning bolt sent into my own soul from Jesus. There in that place my heart started saying, "King Jesus, Son of God." It doesn't always turn out like that. Sometimes those dry spells go on and on, but we have this experience from Nathanael so that grace might be added into the lives of all of us who have come to faith in Jesus.

If you are here and you haven't come to faith in Jesus, I pray that you read this passage and that you will be drawn into faith in Jesus so that you can have the same relationship with Him that we are talking about. He is the omniscience Son of God. Just like in Psalm 139, David said, "Oh, God you have searched me and you know me. You know my going out. You know my laying down." God knows public and private activity. Going out is public, but crawling into our beds and lying down is a pretty private moment. David said that, "Before a word is on my tongue, You know it completely, O, Lord." David said that he could not flee from God's presence. If I go up to the heights, He is there. If I go down to the depths, He is there. I go to that side of the earth, He is there. He is everywhere. David had this awareness of the presence and knowledge of God. This is what he said after that, "You hem me in behind and before. You lay Your hand on me." Such knowledge is too lofty for me to attain." I think what David meant in Psalm 139 is he is a sinner, but he is a contrite sinner as evidenced in his Psalms of confession. David said that God knew everything about him and because of His grace,

when His hand comes toward him it's not in anger. Instead, He gently lays His hand on him.

The reason why God doesn't have to be angry with us is because Jesus took the wrath of God for our sins as He hung on the cross. God took the wrath for our sins. In Christ we never experience God's wrath, instead God holds us up. But God's wrath is what we deserve for our sins. If you don't repent and turn to faith in Jesus the time is going to come when you pass from this world. You are going to see God the judge. I don't want you to experience that. Throughout this life and into eternity I want you to get God's mercy, grace, and love instead of God's justice and wrath. Turn to Jesus and believe in Him.

For those of you who are Christians, when you think about what Jesus experienced you better not take your sin lightly. You better call upon the name of the Lord and say, "Lord, help me to live a clean life that will glorify Your name and exude Your love. Help me to have a grateful heart for what Jesus has done for me.

There is one more part to this. Nathanael experienced the encounter with Jesus where Jesus said that He knew him. Nathanael received encouragement from Jesus. As we look at what it says in verse 50. Nathanael already gave his amazing statement of faith and now Jesus is going to respond to that in verse 10:

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." ⁵¹ 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."

Wow, what do you do with that? Little Ryan Wesley, our little mellow fellow, is developing quite a vocabulary. This week he learned to say the word "wow." He says it over and over again, but he keeps the structure of his little mouth the same when he finishes saying wow. Wow is how I feel when I look at when Jesus told Nathanael he would see heaven open. Sometimes I wrestle with text the way Jacob wrestled with God in the Old Testament. What is Nathanael going to see? I don't want to delude it or spiritualize it. Jesus told Nathanael that he would see the heavens opened. Nathanael will see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. My tendency is to say that is something spectacular. I don't know when Jesus followed through on that promise whether it was in this life or in glory, but there was a promise made. I think by now Nathanael has seen it. Nathanael had a high view of Jesus. He said, "Son of God, King of Israel." Jesus took that high view of Himself and elevated it even more. He was seeking to encourage Nathanael and instill courage within this man because in Nathanael there was a straight-shooting Jew in the midst of Pharisaic Israel who had a high view of Jesus and who had no guile and was going to say what he believed. That's a recipe for hardship in first century Israel.

Nathanael proclaimed that he believed in Jesus as the Son of God and King of all, and that he was going to proclaim Him and pray that whoever heard him would turn to faith

in Jesus. That's a type of thing that got the disciples in deep trouble. Jesus is encouraging them. He is putting steel in Nathanael's backbone. Jesus was telling him that he knew who He was. Nathanael had that moment back under that fig tree where he didn't see Jesus but Jesus was there. Then he had that moment where he saw Jesus give him something that sent that bolt of electricity into his soul and he responded and worshiped.

Right now we are living and we don't see Jesus. His Spirit is within us so we have joy as we are abiding in Him and we are killing sin and walking in the truth and these flows of joy will come into our soul. We don't see Him. We don't touch Him, but the time is going to come when, like Nathanael, we will see Jesus and we will be able to touch Him. We are going to worship Him. We are going to rejoice forever in His presence. We are going to laugh and sing and eat at the wedding supper of the Lamb. It's going to issue forth in eternal glory full of joy. Knowing what eternity has in store for us is what puts spine in our souls as the Spirit, who is our paraclete and helper, abides in us with His supernatural presence.

The New Testament says over and over that in this world we will have suffering and hardship. We're not in heaven yet. The Scripture gives us every reason to believe that life in this world is going to be hard, sometimes excruciatingly hard. Sometimes in the Bible, the word agony is used to describe the Christian life. But He promises that He is right there with us every step of the way. If we are those who are truly regenerated by His Spirit, He is going to see us through hard times. He is going to see us through. The time is going to come when you are going to live forever in the Kingdom of the Son of God. Then you are going to be saying; "Okay; now I see not in a mirror dimly, but face to face." That's what we need to be looking forward to.

If you are trying to live this life in a way where everything will be perfect, it's never going to happen, because Jesus said that we will have trials and tribulations in this world. We will have trouble, but take heart He has overcome the world. I pray that the Lord will give us delight at the ongoing presence of Jesus in our lives and that we will be conformed to His image.

Let us pray.