

Sunday 8th May 2022
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on John 1:35-51

Theme: “The Chosen: Philip and Nathanael”
“Philip, Nathanael, their stories, and what they mean for us”
**Series on The Chosen (5)*

Introduction:

So, have you been watching *The Chosen* in the last months, or the last year or so? What I love about it is that it brings me face to face with the Jesus that I know and love....

In the month of May, we are continuing a series of messages about some of the people who followed Jesus in his earthly ministry.... It is based on the Bible, *and the Gospels in particular*, but it also includes insights from the YouTube series, “The Chosen”....

What is “The Chosen” series? And what’s its aim? Well in a nutshell, the series aims to provide a back story for the characters in the Gospel so that you and I will get to know the characters better, and in the final analysis be driven back to Scripture to read for ourselves about the characters.

Let me read what one commentator has to say:

The Chosen is the first multi-season show about the life of Christ.... The Chosen tells stories of radical transformation among the followers of Jesus.... The Chosen spotlights the real-life men and women who knew Christ....

The Chosen includes scenes and dialogue directly from Scripture, but it also includes scenes and dialogue not in the Bible. Viewers learn on the opening scroll that it is “based on the true stories of the gospels of Jesus Christ”.

Some location and timelines “have been combined or condensed” and “backstories and some characters or dialogue have been added.

“However”, the scroll says, “all biblical and historical context and any artistic imagination are designed to support the truth and the intention of Scripture” (*Michael Foust, 4 Things You Should Know about THE CHOSEN on YouTube*).

Well, let’s continue our look at some of the followers of Jesus.... This morning we’re going to look at Philip and Nathanael, their stories, and what they mean for us....

Part 1: “A Biblical view of Philip and Nathanael”

Well, who were Philip and Nathanael? They are followers of Jesus, who we are introduced to *in our Bible reading for this morning from John, chapter one*.

First some background to the call of Philip and of Nathanael by Jesus.... John opens his Gospel with some stories about John the Baptist, and how he prepared the way for the coming of Jesus, God’s Son and His Messiah, *His King*, and confessed that Jesus was “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (*John 1:29*).

John *the Gospel writer* then goes on to write:

³⁵ The next day John was standing there again with two of his disciples, ³⁶ when he saw Jesus walking by. “There is the Lamb of God!” he said.

³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this and went with Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned, saw them following him, and asked, “What are you looking for?”

They answered, “Where do you live, Rabbi?” (This word means “Teacher.”)

³⁹ “Come and see,” he answered. (It was then about four o'clock in the afternoon.) So they went with him and saw where he lived, and spent the rest of that day with him (John 1:35-39).

Just a couple of points that I'd like to make here:

- * One of the two disciples of John who go with Jesus was Andrew.... We are told this a little later (1:40). But who was the second of these two? It is relevant to our discussion because *The Chosen* series has it that this man is Philip. But far more likely it is John, the Beloved Apostle, the Gospel writer himself. As Vic Pfitzner says in his commentary: **Why only one is...identifies while the other remains unnamed, is not clear. Yet one may surmise that the readers were expected to know who is meant: the witness behind the Gospel (John, p. 52).**

- * It is Jesus who takes the initiative with Andrew and John... Jesus says to them, “Come and see!”, when they are wondering about where he lives and who he is. We are reminded here, as we are again and again in our Bible passage for this morning that “faith comes from meeting Jesus”, *from coming face to face with Jesus and listening to him.*

Listen to how John *the Gospel writer* then continues. He writes:

⁴⁰ One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ At once he found his brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah.” (This word means “Christ.”) ⁴² Then he took Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “Your name is Simon son of John, but you will be called Cephas.” (This is the same as Peter and means “a rock.”)

You may have heard this, but a lot of Evangelism programs have been called “Operation Andrew” or “Project Andrew”. Why? Because of what Andrew does here....

After meeting Jesus, *and being convinced that Jesus is the promised Messiah*, he immediately goes and tells this news to the person closest to him, his brother Simon, *or Simon Peter as Jesus goes on to name him*.

Yes, once you meet Jesus and have your life changed by him, how can you not go out and share this good news with those around you, *particularly those who you are closest to*.

And this leads us on to thinking about Philip and Nathanael. Listen to what John tells us:

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come with me!” (⁴⁴ Philip was from Bethsaida, the town where Andrew and Peter lived.)

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, “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.” (1:43-45).

Here we are introduced to Philip and Nathanael. Philip is from Bethsaida, a town on the shore of Lake Galilee, *the same town that Andrew and Peter come from*. Jesus heads north towards Lake Galilee, and arrives at *probably* at Cana, *the town where Nathanael lived (John 21:2)*. Here he meets Philip, and calls Philip to follow him, and Philip does!!

One wonders if Andrew and Peter have been in Philip’s ear, and shared with him about their experience of Jesus and their conviction that Jesus was God’s promised King. Regardless, Philip immediately commits to following Jesus.

And not only that he immediately goes to tell his good friend Nathanael the amazing news that “we” have found the

promised Messiah, and that “he is Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth”.

And how does Nathanael respond? Listen to what John says:
46 “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” answered Philip.

Nathanael at first ridicules Philip’s comment that Jesus, son of Joseph *from Nazareth* is the Messiah. After all, there was nothing in the Old Testament that foretold that God’s Chosen One would come from Nazareth....

*By the way, Nathanael’s awareness of this points to the fact that he was a man of faith in God, a man who knew the Scriptures really well. It is probable as Barclay observes that: Philip and Nathanael had spent long hours poring over the words of Scripture, searching for information as to what the Messiah must be like and as to when he should come (Barclay, *The Master’s Men*, p. 112).*

Also Nathanael was from Cana, and Nazareth was a village just down the road from Cana.

So probably the rivalry between the two towns was also part of Nathanael’s utter disbelief that the Messiah was born and raised in the village nearby....

Philip was wise.... He didn’t argue the point with Nathanael. He simply said to him, “*Look, come and see for yourself!*”

What happened next? John tells us:

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, he said about him, “Here is a real Israelite; there is nothing false in him!”

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

Jesus answered, “I saw you when you were under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

49 “Teacher,” answered Nathanael, “you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Nathanael goes with Philip, and Jesus greets Philip with a comment that reveals the fact that Jesus could see into a person’s heart, *as John states a bit later (John 2:25)*. Jesus senses that Nathaniel is a man of complete sincerity, that he is “a true Israelite”, *unlike “the one first called Israel, the double dealing patriarch Jacob, a man who practiced cunning and trickery” (Pfitzner, John, p. 35)*.

What comes next is amazing in the extreme!

Jacob asks, “How do you know me?”, and Jesus answers:

“I saw you when you were under the fig tree before Philip called you” (John 1:48).

How did Jesus “see” Nathanel under a fig tree, before Philip went to get him? First, what was Nathanael doing under the fig tree? Well, the fig tree was leafy and shady, and it was a tree that people often sat under and meditated on God’s Word and prayed (*Barclay, John, p. 93*).

But more importantly, how did Jesus “see” Nathanael under his fig tree? To my way of thinking, there are only three possibilities:

- * **Jesus actually physically saw him as Jesus was travelling through Cana. Maybe, but not that likely, and it doesn’t explain Nathanael’s surprise and his immediate confession that Jesus surely was the Messiah.**

- * **Jesus could “see” Nathanael under his fig tree because he was God, and therefore could see this in his minds eye. This is the answer that *The Chosen* seems to take as we’ll see shortly.... But Jesus wasn’t**

God pretending to be a human being: he really was a human being (*cf. Phil. 2:5-11*).

- * **Jesus was given a vision by God of Nathanael being under his fig tree. This seems the most likely answer to my way of thinking** (*cf. Acts 9:12; 10:10*).

Whatever, Nathanael is astounded at Jesus' comment, and it convinces him that the only way Jesus could know this was because he really was the Messiah, as his friend Philip claimed.

Jesus finishes off by saying to Nathanael:

⁵⁰ **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!"** ⁵¹ **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 on the Son of Man"** (*John 1:50-51*).

Wow, Wee!! Jesus tells Nathanael that in the future, *as he follows Jesus*, he will see Jesus do "much greater things", and he will see Jesus in all his glory as God's Son, *when Jesus comes back again at the End of Time* (Pfitzner, p. 56).

Part 2: "Philip and Nathanael in THE CHOSEN"

Just a few things from *The Chosen*, and their portrayal of the call of Philip and Nathanael....

Remember that I said at the start:

The series aims to provide a back story for the characters in the Gospel so that you and I will get to know the characters better, and in the final analysis be driven back to Scripture to read for ourselves about the characters.

Well, the back story that they give for Philip is that he was "the other disciple" of John the Baptist that John refers to in the opening verses that we looked at (*John 1:35, 40*).

But remember that we said that is far more likely his other disciple is John, the Beloved Apostle, the Gospel writer himself.

Philip is portrayed as a caring, intelligent man, a man who is well versed in the promises of the Old Testament. His first encounter with Jesus is noteworthy. Here Jesus calls him to be a follower of his. Listen to the dialogue:

J: “I’m glad to see you here”.

P: “I’m Philip. Wait John told you”.

J: “No, I remember your face. You were standing with Andrew, the day I was baptised by John. How is my old cousin?”

P: “He sends me with a message. He wants to tell you something...on my behalf. It’s a very short message. It’s only two words.

J: “Mine is also just two words: ‘Follow me!’”

P: “I will!” *They are the two words that I came to tell you!*

But it is Nathanael’s call that is more powerful and more memorable. The back story given to Nathanael is that of a failed architect, who passionately loves God. Overwhelmed by feelings of failure and despair over the collapse of a structure that he is building for the Romans, Nathanael first goes to a bar to drown his sorrows where he talks to the barmen about a man who “loved God”.

He is talking about himself when he says:

N: “He loved God. He wanted to build synagogues eventually... One with colonnades that sing, parapets that practically pray, vaunted halls that draw the soul upwards to God. That’s what God made him for. Or so he thought”.

From the bar, Nathanael goes to a fig tree out in the middle of a field, with mountains in the background. There he holds up the architectural plans for the synagogue that he was planning to build for God, and cries out to God:

N: “This was done for you!”

He sobs and prays to God:

**N: “Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe.
Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God.
The Lord in one (*The Shema, Deut. 6:4*).
Hear my prayer, O Lord!”**

Then he burns the plans and cries out to God using the words of Psalm 102:

**N: “Hear my prayer, O LORD;
let my cry come to thee!
² Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress!
Incline your ear to me;
answer me speedily in the day when I call!”**

Then he cries out to God in anguish:

N: “Do not hide your face from me!”

And he shouts to God:

N: “Do you see me!?!? Do you see me...”

Later on we see Nathanael strewn out on his bed in despair. Philip knocks on Nathaniel’s door, and when Nathanael doesn’t answer, Philip climbs in window, and wakes up Nathanael and they chat about what has happened in their lives, and why Nathanael is so miserable. Then the dialogue goes like this:

N: “So what are you doing here?”

P: “John *the Baptist* sent me to someone new.

He’s not just anyone.... This is Who the Baptiser has be preparing us for. Nathanael, he’s the One....

The One who Moses foretold and the prophets said would come.... He is Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph.

N: “Nazareth?? (*Laughing*)

Can anything good come out of Nazareth??

P: “Come and see!” “Your whole life you’ve wanted to serve God, to meet the Son of God the King of Israel. O promise you will not regret it! Come and see!”

They go looking for Jesus, and find Jesus walking down the street towards them.

P: “This is my friend Nathanael” (to Jesus).

J: “Yes, the truth-teller. Israel began with Jacob who was a bit of a deceiver. One of the great things about you is *that* you are a true Israelite, in whom there is no deceit”.

N: “How do you know me?”

J: “I have known you long before Philip called you to come and see.... When you were in your lowest moment and you were alone, I did not turn My face from you. I saw you under the fig tree”.

Nathanael is amazed that Jesus knew his misery and his cries to God, “Do you see me!?” Nathanael responds by saying:

N: “Rabbi, You are the Son of God, the King of Israel...”

J: “Well, that didn’t take long. Because I said, ‘I saw you under the fig tree, you believe....

You are going to see many greater things than that. Like Jacob, you are going to see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

That’s me, by the way!”

Well, it’s a rather imaginative way of telling the story of the encounter of Nathanael with Jesus.... But it is powerful!

And remember, the aim of *The Chosen* is to provide a possible back story for the characters in the Gospel so that you and I will get to know the characters better, and in the final analysis be driven back to Scripture to read for ourselves. And above all, so that we will meet Jesus, and grow in our faith in him.

Part 3: What we are reminded of

That's the central thrust of our Bible reading for this morning, and which is echoed in *The Chosen*: the challenge to "come and see" Jesus. It is through meeting Jesus that we come to faith, and grow in our faith *in him as God's Son, who is Saviour and Lord*.

I will always remember the words of Pastor Rob Voigt in his farewell speech at the end of his term of being Bishop, *well President then*, of the SA/NT District. He said:

"Always keep your eyes fixed on Jesus!" (*cf. Heb 12:1-2*)

...Which is what the writer of Hebrews say, doesn't he!?

Remember what the writer says:

As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses around us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us. ² Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end.

So, I think that this is one thing that God is reminding us of this morning: to spend time getting to know Jesus better, so that we can "follow him more nearly" (*Godspell song, "Day by Day"*).

We do this how?

- * **By reading our Bibles regularly and often, particularly the Gospels**
- * **By worshipping regularly**
- * **By getting together with other Christians in Small Groups physically or online**

And the one other thing: to allow our family members and friends and acquaintance who don't know God through Jesus to "come and see" Jesus.

How do we do this?

- * **By living our life as a follower of Jesus, and by this pointing people to the One who leads us and inspires us**
- * **By letting our friends know about Jesus by the little things or the big things that we say (e.g., “You know, that reminds me of something Jesus said or did”)**
- * **By sharing the Good News of Jesus whenever we have the opportunity (Remember, “Witness = Our Story + His Story”, and we can share “His Story” by remembering the four points of John 3:16).**

Conclusion:

May God bless you and me, as we ourselves “come and see” Jesus, and as we allow those around us to “come and see” Jesus.