

“Why do I Believe?”

John 1:43-51

Here in John’s Gospel, we read about the calling of one of the lesser known disciples: St. Bartholomew -- also known as Nathanael. I referenced Nathanael at Christmas when we were talking about Jesus’ home town of Nazareth and how that little town was one of the least likely places for the Messiah to come from. Nathanael sums up the general perception of Nazareth when he says, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”

Other than this account of his being called into the office of apostle, the only other time that Nathanael’s name is mentioned in the Bible is when the names of all of the disciples are listed.

Not much is known about Nathanael. We know that he lived in the same town as Peter, Andrew, and Philip. And from the other Gospel accounts, we know that James and John were also residents of Bethsaida. But other than growing up in that town we don’t know anything about him, except that Christ saw him sitting under the fig tree, and Christ chose him to be one of His disciples.

And we know that Nathanael believed, because upon hearing of the Christ and then hearing Christ Himself, Nathanael confesses his faith by saying “you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

That may be all that was ever written about Nathanael. And this one event of Nathanael’s life is certainly the most important event of his life up

to this point. But why is this story so important that it is recorded for all generations to hear? It is important, because just like Nathanael, you were chosen by God, before you knew Him, to be His faithful disciple. Scripture tells us that God knew you before the foundations of the world were put in place. He has always known and loved you.

Nathanael is convinced of who Jesus is when the Lord tells him that He saw him underneath the fig tree. Now, in the Bible, the fig tree is a rather prominent plant. The Bible refers to fig trees 40 times. In the Garden of Eden, God provided garments of fig leaves to hide Adam and Eve's nakedness. And in the days leading up to His crucifixion, Jesus cast judgment on the fig tree that did not bear any fruit, and immediately that fig tree withered and died.

There is no direct connection between the calling of Nathanael and the withering fig tree or the fig leaf loin cloths of the Garden of Eden. However, without Christ calling Nathanael to be a disciple, Nathanael would have been as spiritually withered, and dead, and unproductive as the withered fig tree; and as spiritually naked as Adam and Eve after the Fall.

Even though Jesus says about Nathanael, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." Even though Nathanael was a model citizen, without Christ calling him, he was spiritually withered and dead. He needed to be clothed in Christ's robe of righteousness.

Being a model citizen is not what gave salvation to Nathanael. Being called to faith by the Son of God is what gave him spiritual life. If Nathanael would have ignored the words of Philip who said

to him, “Come and see.” If Nathanael would have stayed under the fig tree, Nathanael would have withered and died. Without Christ, there is no true life within anyone.

Like Nathanael, God chose you from the beginning. Nathanael believed because Jesus said to him, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

A question that you may ask yourself is “Why do I believe?” It is not just because you were born into a certain family or raised in a certain way. All of us have somewhat different backgrounds, but all of those different influences have led us to this one, common place. We all have had different experiences, but each one of us has been led to this same faith in God.

And even with those different backgrounds and experiences, we are all here for the same reason. We are here for the same reason that Nathanael confessed his faith and said, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.”

The reason that we are all here is because, like Nathanael, we have heard the Word of God. That is the one thing that we all have in common. We have heard the Word of God, and we have received that Word in faith.

Someone in your past spent some time with you and brought the Word of God into your life. Most likely, not too many of you were sitting under fig trees just before you came to faith. But God could say to each one of you, “I saw you while you were still...”

somewhere. That “somewhere” was different for each of you. However, God said, “I saw you, and because I love you, follow me, remain in me, and your soul will never wither or die.”

God has called each one of you to follow Him. Just as Philip went to Nathanael and told him about Christ, God has sent people into your life to share with you that Good News of salvation.

Now, Nathanael did not only follow Jesus, but he told others about Christ, about the gift of salvation, the gift of eternal life.

Being a follower of Christ means that we share that fantastic message of life in Christ with others. God has richly blessed us, and He has given us an opportunity to be a blessing to others. Each of you has the opportunity to give another person the great gift Philip gave to Nathanael.

You can be like Philip, who said to Nathanael, “Come and see.”

Someday, perhaps a friend or neighbor, or your child, or your brother or sister will ask himself or herself, “Why do I believe? The obvious answer is, of course, that it was the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. But the further question is, “what person did the Holy Spirit use to make an impact on my life? Where did I first hear about Christ? Where did I hear that Word of God.” And in giving glory to God, perhaps one of the people that they will thank God for sending into their life is you. Amen.