

### HOW JESUS DEALS WITH DOUBT!

***“The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.” “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.” Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.” He then added, “I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”***

The American Heritage Dictionary defines doubt as, 1. To be undecided or skeptical about. 2. To tend to disbelieve; distrust. 3. To suspect; fear. Sometimes doubt can be a good thing. If I told you that rubbing gravel in your hair three times a day will make your back ache go away, you would do well to doubt me unless I can prove it. Likewise, I have my doubts when science talks about evolution and billions of years. There is plenty of evidence that contradicts it. And I have irrefutable evidence. The Bible says God created everything in the span of six short days. Some doubt or skepticism can be a healthy thing.

But doubt can also get in the way. Then the Wright brothers would not have flown at Kitty Hawk amidst the jeers of the unbelieving crowd. Then there would never have been a man on the moon. Then the farmer would not plant the seed because there is always the possibility that he would not harvest the crop.

Today in our gospel reading we run into doubt. Nathanael doubted that Jesus could be the Christ. This was a bad doubt because it was keeping him from seeing Jesus as his Savior. So, let's see how Jesus deals with doubt.

#### *I. The sinner often doubts*

The first four disciples whom Jesus called, Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael were all from the same area around Bethsaida. Now, when he said, ***“Follow me,”*** it was not like some hypnotic trance or spell he cast on them. At least two of them studied the Scriptures and were looking for the Messiah. Philip was one of them. After meeting Jesus, he ran to Nathanael and said, ***“We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote-- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”*** Both he and Nathanael were looking for the Messiah. To that end they studied the Bible for any detail it would give them about him.

Yet, Nathanael doubted if Jesus could be the Messiah. He had trouble swallowing the idea that the Messiah would come from the small, insignificant town of Nazareth. Nazareth was in Galilee which was considered the backwaters. This proved a barrier to Nathanael. “Why would God send the Messiah to us from Nazareth of all places? Ridiculous. Bethlehem I would believe because it is mentioned in the Old Testament. Cana maybe because it is more prominent. But Nazareth? Never.”

Like Philip and Nathanael, we are Bible students. We have established a Sunday School in the hopes of opening up the Bible to our youth. Our ancestors started a day school so we can teach the Bible every day. We ask our young people to attend two years of Catechism instruction. When adults are interested in our church, we don't just receive them with a hand shake; we ask them to commit to a sixteen week Bible course. We don't just let Sunday worship be the source of our members Bible knowledge; we offer several Bible classes during the week. And we encourage that Bible study be done in the homes on a daily basis.

So, like Philip and Nathanael, we are Bible students. Yet, we often find ourselves doubting. Doubt is one of the chief tools of the devil. In Eden he sowed his seed of doubt when he asked, “Did God really say,” when it was clear that God did say it. I remember the man whose son was demon possessed. He asked Jesus IF he could heal his son. Jesus rebuked him. The man confessed, “I do believe, help me to overcome my unbelief.”

Don't be surprised if you find yourselves tripping over doubt. What thoughts may have come into our minds? Did Jesus really die for my sins? Is there really life after death? Is there really a God in heaven? Do I know for sure that the God in the Bible is the only true God?

How do you convince a doubter that the Bible and Christ are true? Learn from Philip. ***“Come and see,”*** is all he said. My friends, when you are trying to tell others about Jesus Christ, don't try to persuade them with all sorts of fancy proofs or eloquent arguments. Simply say to them, “Come with me and let's see what the Bible has to say about him.”

#### *II. How Jesus deals with our doubt*

So Philip did the right thing. He introduced Nathanael to Jesus. Let's see how Jesus deals with doubt. Shortly after this story, Jesus will perform his first miracle at Cana where he turned water into wine. In fact he is going there right now when he called Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael to follow him. But technically Jesus performed two miracles already in our text.

When he met Nathanael, he said, ***“Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.”*** We often compliment each other. It is just the thing to do. At first Jesus’ words to Nathanael seemed like a nice compliment. But it wasn’t. It was the truth. Jesus performed a miracle. He looked into a man’s heart.

Jesus had met so many fake Israelites, people who claimed to believe in God and follow him, but in reality they didn’t. Think of the “every week church going Pharisees.” Most of them were not true Israelites. They did not believe what they practiced. Nathanael was a true Israelite. If Jesus had said, “Here is an Israelite in whom there is nothing false,” that would have been a nicety. But when Jesus called Nathanael a “true Israelite,” Nathanael knew something supernatural happened. He knew Jesus had looked into his heart.

But that is not all. ***“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. ‘I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.’”*** This is before satellite images and drones. Jesus didn’t have binoculars, nor did he see fig crumbs on Nathanael’s robe. When it was impossible for anyone to know what Nathanael was doing before Philip came to him, Jesus knew. I wonder if Nathanael instantly thought of Psalm 139 where it says, ***“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.”*** Only God could have seen Nathanael lying down under the fig tree. Jesus, that hick from some backwaters town in Galilee, just proved he is God!

But Jesus doesn’t stop there. It is not enough to know that Jesus is God. It isn’t. Nathanael needs to know Jesus as his Savior. ***“You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.”*** He then added, ***“I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*** What Jesus did before was special. It was something only God can do, to see people from afar and to see into their hearts. But that is child’s play, and what good would that do for us eternally? Now Jesus promised him something really special. Nathanael, and so many others, will see a miracle beyond description. They will see heaven being opened up to them.

Does this description sound familiar? I hope so. Remember when Jacob stole the birthright from his twin brother, Esau, and how he had to flee for his life? Remember the first night on the run? He had nothing. He was forced to use a rock for a pillow. He began to reflect on his life. He messed things up. His brother hates him. He betrayed his father. He may never see his mother again. He was alone, broke, and on the run. He fell asleep, and what did he dream? A stairway to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it. Jacob understood that dream. In that dream God repeated the promise he made to Abraham, to Isaac, and to him, that of the coming Messiah and a great nation. He understood that all of his sins, all the trouble he brought on himself, did not ruin his relationship with God in heaven. That dream was gospel saying, “I forgive you. My promise of heaven is still yours.”

We should not have such dreams. We should not see heaven open to us. Heaven is locked to the sinner. Our sins separate us from God and we deserve only to hear his judgment of death. You want proof that Jesus is God? You want proof that he is the one who saves you? Come and see. You will see heaven open to you. Angels are ascending and descending on a stairway. But who is at the foot of that stairway? The Son of Man, Jesus’ favorite nickname for himself. He is the Messiah Nathanael had been waiting for. He is the one alone who can open heaven to us. The world will one day see Jesus raised up, not on a throne, but a cross. Because he suffered and died our death, heaven is opened wide to sinners like you and me.

Every day we face doubt. The devil tempts us to doubt God and his Word. False teachers sow their seed of lies in the world. Even our own flesh and weak faith doubts. You would think that the best thing God could do would prove his reliability. Why not make the Sun stand still? Why not let manna fall from heaven or let his voice be heard from heaven all over the world? Predict the lottery three days in a row, and if you can, tell us ahead of time. This will prove Jesus is God, but that would do us no good. You want proof, a proof that really helps us? Look at Jesus open heaven to you.

And what is the best way we can share our faith? Like Philip, tell others to come and see. Parents, we do that when we have devotions with our kids. We let them see. But don’t invite others to come and see. Since we are plagued by doubts, invite yourself. And what will you see? The Son of Man opening up heaven for you. INJ Amen.