

Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church

John 1:43-51 | Who Found Whom?

Sunday October 4, 2026

WELCOME:

- Announcements:

REVIEW:

Open up your Bibles to John 1, as we continue our verse-by-verse exposition of John's Gospel this morning.

Last Sunday, we learned what it means to “follow Jesus.”

We saw how John the Baptizer pointed his disciples to Jesus as the Lamb of God, how Andrew brought his brother to Jesus, and how the Lord renamed Simon to Peter.

LW KEYPOINTS:

1. Christianity is simple—following Jesus.
2. The Disciples came and never left.
3. Peter was exactly like most Christians—simultaneously carnal and spiritual.

INTRODUCTION:

Today, we finish up chapter 1 in John's Gospel.

We'll meet two new disciples—Philip and Nathanael—with most of this passage focused on Nate.

We'll see Nathanael's skepticism, learn about his character and personality, and get a fun, intriguing glimpse of Jesus—and how He handles Nathanael's question.

What does this mean for you? Let's find out!

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

John 1:43—*The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. He found Philip and told him, "Follow me."*

John 1:44—*Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter.*

John 1:45—*Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth."*

John 1:46—*"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael asked him. "Come and see," Philip answered.*

John 1:47—*Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."*

John 1:48—*"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you," Jesus answered.*

John 1:49—*"Rabbi," Nathanael replied, "You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!"*

John 1:50—*Jesus responded to him, "Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this."*

John 1:51—*Then he said, "Truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*

May the Lord bless the reading of His Word.

PRAY:

Make your ways known to me, LORD; teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; I wait for you all day long (Ps. 25:4-5).

EXEGESIS:

John 1:43— *The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee.*

The next day refers to last week's passage, when Andrew and John left their mentor, John the Baptizer, to follow Jesus.

They are not church hopping or shopping—they are doing what John said would happen.

That the Messiah would come after him—and now would follow Him.

John 1:43— *The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee.*

Why is the Lord Jesus now leaving for Galilee?

Once the Baptizer had told his disciples that Jesus was “the Lamb of God,” it was now time for the Lord to gather more disciples.

Geographically and strategically, Galilee offered three advantages.

First, the Lord distanced himself from the Baptizer so that John could finish his ministry.

Although Jesus had arrived and the handoff had begun, we see some overlap between the two ministries.

Even with the geographic distance, we do read of a rivalry between John's disciples and Jesus' disciples.

Second, Galilee also gave Jesus space from Jerusalem, where most of the Pharisees lived.

Thirdly, this move fulfills prophecy about Galilee.

Isaiah 9:1 NLT—...the gloom of the distressed land will not be like that of the former times ... But in the future he will bring honor to the way of the sea, ...to Galilee ...

Isaiah 9:2 NLT—The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in the land of the shadow of death, the light will shine on them.

So all that to say that all four Gospel writers confirm that Jesus concentrated his entire ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing in and around Galilee.

John 1:43—He found Philip

Who is Philip? We don't know.

What we do know is that when Jesus called him, Philip was near the Baptizer.

So, Philip may also have been a disciple of the Baptizer with Andrew and John—but we don't know for sure.

Unlike last week, Andrew, John, and Peter were introduced to Jesus by another person—but now Jesus takes the initiative in calling Philip Himself.

What's interesting is that the way Jesus made disciples is counter-cultural to Jewish tradition and customary practice.

Usually, a disciple took the initiative to follow a rabbi.

Instead, Jesus takes the initiative.

Jesus told the disciples on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane.

You did not choose me, but I chose you (John 15:16).

Jesus choosing His disciples is consistent with the rest of Scripture.

God chose Israel—God also chooses the Elect.

God deliberately selects what the world deems foolish, weak, and insignificant to shame the wise and strong. (1 Cor 1:27–29)

John 1:43—*He found Philip and told him, “Follow me.”*

Jesus took the initiative, coming to Philip with a very simple command: “Follow me”—literally, “Keep on following me.”

John 1:44—*Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter.*

Here’s a big clue about Philip—he was from the same small fishing village as Andrew and Peter.

Bethsaida means “house of fishing,” “house of the fisherman,” “Fishertown.” It’s located on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee, not far from Capernaum.

Growing up in the same small fishing village of about 1,000 people, Philip, Peter, and Andrew undoubtedly knew each other well.

Philip was probably also a fisherman.

What’s interesting about Bethsaida is that Jesus later curses it in the Gospels.

Matthew 11:21—*Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago.*

Isn't that interesting? The town where all these disciples are from ultimately rejects them, rejects Jesus, and rejects the Gospel.

John 1:45—*Philip found Nathanael...*

It doesn't take long for Philip to make another disciple.

We saw a similiar thing happen last week when Andrew found Simon Peter.

We don't know whether Philip actively sought Nathanael out or ran into him.

Regardless, Philip immediately tells Nathanael about Jesus.

Nathanael means "God has given."

Fun fact/Bible Trivia—Nathanael is called *Bartholomew* in the Synoptic Gospels.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke never use the name *Nathanael*—just as John never uses the name *Bartholomew*.

An easy way to remember that is that "Nate and Bart" are the same person.

John 1:45—*and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets):*

We don't know Philip's tone here, but I'm guessing he was excited and elated.

So much so that he may be stumbling over his words

"We have found!"—Philip was probably referring to himself, Andrew, and Peter.

Philip doesn't call Jesus the Messiah, but defines Jesus as the Messiah.

John 1:45— *"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law..."*

Why is this definition important to a first-century Jew?

Because the Lord Jesus is the one Moses wrote about.

Jesus told the Pharisees...

John 5:39—*You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me.*

In Philip's enthusiasm, he says...

John 1:45— *Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth."*

In Philip's excitement, he completely bumbles who Jesus is.

Pause—Isn't that good news? That the disciples of Jesus weren't perfect evangelists?

Philip identified Jesus by his father's name and the village they came from.

This was normal protocol—however, this is not a normal introduction.

Philip was correct socially, but not theologically.

And theology matters.

Nathanael knows his Bible and catches his error.

And he knows that Nazareth is not mentioned in the OT.

Theologically, Jesus was from Bethlehem (not Nazareth), and God the Father is His Father (not Joseph).

John 1:46—“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael asked him.

Nazareth was only a few miles from Cana, which was Nathanael’s hometown.

Nazareth was a small town of no more than 2,000 people in Jesus’ day.

He knew the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

Micah 5:2—*Bethlehem...,
you are small among the clans of Judah;
one will come from you
to be ruler over Israel for me.
His origin is from antiquity,
from ancient times.*

As far as Nathanael was concerned, the Messiah and Nazareth don’t belong in the same sentence.

Second, evangelism matters.

John 1:46—“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael asked him.

Nathanael objects to the Messiah coming from Nazareth—and Philip can’t answer his question.

Philip doesn’t know the whole story yet:

- The angel Gabriel appearing to Mary
- The virgin birth
- How Jesus was born in Bethlehem

- How Jesus' parents had to flee to Egypt and then return to Nazareth

He'll learn those things as he walks with Jesus.

So what does Philip do? Did he give up?

John 1:46— *"Come and see," Philip answered.*

When we witness to others, we can expect objections.

How are we to respond?

Let's learn from Philip—Phil said the same thing that the Lord Jesus said to Andrew and John the day before—***"Come and see!"***

In other words, Philip *invited* Nathanael to come and see for himself.

KEYPOINT 1:

Evangelism is simply an invitation.

And with that invitation, Nathanael gets to choose for himself.

He said yes to the invite, because look what happens next:

John 1:47—*Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."*

To be called a "true Israelite" is a divine compliment from the Lord Jesus.

Nathanael was a true Old Testament believer, like Simeon and Anna, who was looking for God.

Here's the thing: The Lord knew Nathanael's character before he met him.

- What kind of character is the Lord talking about?
- What does it mean to be a "true Israelite?"

Psalm 32:2—*How joyful is a person whom the Lord does not charge with iniquity and in whose spirit is no deceit!*

Romans 2:28 NLT—*For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision.*

Romans 2:29 NLT—*No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God.*

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John 1:47—*"Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."*

Nathanael's heart is right with God—he's not perfect, but he's also not a liar, a deceiver, or a duplicitous person.

This verse could be translated, "Here is an Israelite in whom there is *no Jacob*."

What's going on? Jesus contrasts Nathanael's character with a famous OT patriarch known for deceit.

The patriarchs are Abraham and his miracle son Isaac—and then Isaac's son Jacob.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Jacob fathered the twelve tribes of Israel.

As the father of the twelve tribes, we might think this man was super righteous and religious—WRONG!

Jacob—a scoundrel who loved God.

Jacob was such a dirty rotten scoundrel that his parents named him “Deceiver.”

His name meant “grasping” or “deceitful.”

Jacob’s name came from the circumstances of his birth.

He was named Jacob because he grasped his brother Esau’s heel as they were being born. (Gen 25:26)

Jacob was appropriately named because he grasped for everything he could get through deceit.

Jacob and Esau’s relationship was like an episode of the Jerry Springer show.

- Jacob cheated Esau out of his inheritance.
- He then cheated Esau out of his father’s blessing, which carried spiritual authority.
- Jacob manipulated his uncle Laban out of money and the family business.
- Jacob was also more concerned about his own reputation than his daughter’s honor.

Is it no wonder this guy’s name means “Deceit”

However, God loved Jacob and wouldn’t allow him to remain a deceiver forever.

God worked in his life until, finally, God had to dislocate his hip to get his attention.

This was the moment of his salvation.

KEYPOINT 2:

Jacob was renamed Israel.

That's quite a transformation—the Deceiver gets named after the very nation that God chose to save.

So Jesus was saying here that Nathanael had no old Jacob in him, but only the new Israel.

The point here is that in this introduction, Jesus emphasized that Nathanael was a transparent, honest man.

Nathanael was taken aback—even shocked by Jesus' supernatural insight.

John 1:48—“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Tone: offended? Curious? Encouraged?

How would you respond if a stranger knew where you were just a few hours ago?

Here we're introduced to Jesus' omniscience—His divine attribute of all-knowing.

Psalms 139:1—Lord, you have searched me and known me.

Psalms 139:2—You know when I sit down and when I stand up; you understand my thoughts from far away.

Psalms 139:3—You observe my travels and my rest; you know all my ways.

Psalms 139:4—Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, Lord.

To know is the Hebrew term *yada*.

Yada conveys God's comprehensive, intimate awareness that penetrates every dimension of human existence.

God knows everything: every action is visible to Him, and He understands both strengths and weaknesses as well as intents and motives.

Nathan probably had this passage memorized.

He knew it (head)...but now he knows it (heart).

Jesus continues...

John 1:48—*"Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you," Jesus answered.*

Nathaniel is a no-nonsense, give-it-to-me-straight kind of guy, so Jesus does.

Jesus' direct, intimate knowledge of him must have surprised Nathanael.

The Lord reveals Nate's secret.

Jesus' words to Nathanael show that we may think we have found Jesus, but it's really Jesus who has found us.

John 1:48—*when you were under the fig tree,*

What exactly was Nathanael doing under the fig tree?

- Maybe he was napping.
- Maybe Nathanael was thinking about John the Baptizer.
- Maybe he was praying.

It's not specifically stated, but we do have a clue.

The fig tree is Israel's national symbol.

The phrase “under the fig tree” was commonly used to describe meditation on the Scriptures.

Rather than coffee shops, students studied under fig trees.

Here Jesus unveiled his omniscience to Nathanael.

John 1:48— *“I saw you,” Jesus answered.*

At this moment, something supernatural happened—we can’t see it in the passage, but think about what is happening.

The God of the universe looks into the eyes of Nathanael and says, “I saw you/I know you—I understand you—*Yada*.”

John 1:49—*“Rabbi,” Nathanael replied,*

It looks like the Lord got Nathanael’s attention—he calls him Rabbi, which is a far more respectful tone.

John 1:49—*“You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!”*

Today in our world and culture, Nathanael’s confession may seem like an overreaction to Jesus’ omniscience.

But Philip has told Nathanael that Jesus is the one the Law and the Prophets anticipated.

Nathanael makes a supernatural claim: that this stranger he just met is the very Son of God.

By doing so, Nathanael joins the Baptizer in proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah Israel has been waiting for.

He did a complete 180-degree turn in a matter of minutes—all because he had experienced God for himself.

John 1:50—*Jesus responded to him, “Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.”*

In other words, *Nathanael, because you know I am omniscient, you believe? You have not seen anything yet.*

Isn't that fun?

Though Nathaniel had come to know who Jesus was, he still had much more to learn.

Watch what Jesus does next.

John 1:51—*Then he said, “Truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*

This verse was the icing on the cake for Nathanael.

The Lord let him know that He not only saw him studying under the fig tree, but Jesus also knew the passage he was studying!

The secret is found in Jesus' wording—

John 1:51—*you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending...*

Where do we see this imagery in the OT?

Genesis 28—And guess who is the main character of this passage?

Jacob! The deceiver! The scoundrel who loves God!

Genesis 28:10—*Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran.*

This road trip is 550 miles. Jake's been on the road for more than a month.

This is like us walking from here to Santa Barbara.

Genesis 28:11—*He reached a certain place and spent the night there because the sun had set. He took one of the stones from the place, put it there at his head, and lay down in that place.*

Why is Jacob tired enough to sleep on a rock?

Because he's running from his brother Esau!

He stole his inheritance, and Esau wants to kill him!

Genesis 28:12—*And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground with its top reaching the sky, and God's angels were going up and down on it.*

Genesis 28:13—*The Lord was standing there beside him, saying, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your offspring the land on which you are lying.*

Genesis 28:14—*Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out toward the west, the east, the north, and the south. All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.*

Genesis 28:15—*Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.*"

Genesis 28:16—*When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."*

As a sidenote...*isn't that tragic?* That Jacob didn't know the Lord was with him?

It's also the tragedy of today's church.

But the point is that Jesus both subtly and miraculously told Nathanael that:

- He saw him under the fig tree studying
- He knows (*yada*) everything about him,
- AND now tells him the exact passage that he was studying under the fig tree!

Nathanael studied:

Genesis 28:12—*And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground with its top reaching the sky, and God's angels were going up and down on it.*

Jesus said this:

John 1:51—"Truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

It's as if Jesus answers Nathanael's question about this passage that he was studying!

Maybe he was wondering what the stairway was for.

This passage teaches that the gate of heaven is now open to us—if we believe like Nathanael.

How so? Through “the Son of Man.”

The first chapter of John reveals Jesus is the Word, the Light, the Lamb, the Son of God, Rabbi, the Messiah, the King of Israel.

These titles culminate in the Lord’s favorite designation for Himself—Son of Man.

It emphasizes Jesus’ dual natures.

Jesus has a human nature, which enabled Him to die for His people.

Jesus also has a divine nature—because only God can forgive sin.

So what Jacob saw in his dream and what Nathanael studied is that Jesus is the stairway/ladder that bridges Heaven and earth.

The book of Hebrews says that Jesus is the link between heaven and earth, the “one mediator ... between God and men” and the mediator of a new and better covenant.

In other words, Jesus says, “Think back to your story, Nathanael. The ladder you were reading about is Me.

I am the stairway between heaven and earth. I am the Way to eternity.

APPLICATION:

- *He first found his own brother Simon* (v.41)
- *He found Philip* (v.43)
- *Philip found Nathanael* (v.45)
- *We have found the one Moses wrote about* (v.45)

There’s been a lot of “finding” here in the last two weeks.

Here's my question: "*Who found Whom?*"

"I found the Lord."

Here's another question: "*Was it the Lord who was lost?*"

By God's grace, it's the Lord who finds us—because, truth be told, we don't want to be found.

We're not alone—it all started in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve.

After they sinned, they covered themselves and hid.

We've been doing the same thing ever since—hiding.

Did Adam and Eve go searching for the Lord? No, it was the Lord who came to them.

Just as the Lord Jesus has come to us—"Stepped down off his throne in Heaven."

God came to us because He knew we couldn't come to Him.

Since God came to *you* and has chosen to save *you*, love *you* and sanctify *you*—He won't let you go either.

If we are the ones who choose God, then when life gets tough—we'll unchoose Him.

But because God has made a promise—a covenant—not based on our works, but based on His name—

He promises to never leave you. He will never forsake you.

He will never abandon you.

Do you believe that? Even in the midst of your darkest days?

God doesn't promise a pain-free life—in fact, He promises that you will have pain.

But He also promises to be with you in the pain.

Do you believe that?

Do you believe that God loves you that much?

One of the many struggles that many of us have is that we say and agree that God loves us, but I'm not so sure we really believe it.

Here's the question for this week:

How would you live if you truly believed that God loves you?

- What fears would start to vanish?
- What lies would be exposed?
- What baggage would you leave behind?
- How much more peace would you experience?
- How would your worry turn into worship?
- How much more joy would you have?

Who Found Whom?

Next week, we'll experience the very first miracle from Jesus.

It's no coincidence that Jesus' first miracle is at a wedding.

Why is it not a coincidence? Come back next Sunday to learn more!

PRAYER:

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