

**WE HAVE FOUND HIM**  
**John 1:45-51**  
*(supplemented by Isaiah 9:2-7)*

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“Daddy, what time is the train coming?”  
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She must have posed that question literally 300 times. And every time, with patience that would have made Job jealous, her father responded earnestly to his little daughter, “I don’t know, baby. In just a few minutes, I hope. I don’t know, sweetie, maybe it won’t be long.”

My family had never been on a vacation as promising as this one before. We were going to the Land of the Big Rodent – the Kingdom of the Mouse – Disney World in Orlando, Florida. My father had planned carefully to make it a real adventure. We would drive our car two hours from Greenville, South Carolina, to the capital, Columbia. That two-hour ride seemed like a decade to this elementary-school boy. Then we would board a train to Florida. I couldn’t wait to get on the train. Riding the train promised to be as exciting as the Kingdom itself. I’d heard there were even restaurants on that train.

Clickety-clack. Clickety-clack. Clickety-clack. I had never ridden the rails myself before and was ready for the rhythm. But when we arrived in Columbia, we were told by the clerk at the station that the train was a little bit tardy. We were supposed to leave at 8:00, and they had already put up the word “Delay” and changed it to 8:30.

She was younger than I, but I was every bit as anxious as she was. Every thirty seconds, like a metronome, she clicked off the phrase, “Daddy, when is the train coming? Daddy, when is the train coming?”

She was tired of waiting, and I was, too. It was torture. About every 15 minutes the clerk would go to the sign and change the time once again – from 8:30 to 8:45 to 9:00 to 9:15. The goal of getting to the park, to the Kingdom, was outdistancing me. Even as I tried to wait out the torture, the goal was moving ever forward – beyond my reach.

I’d never been to the Kingdom before. It was a world that reminded us of the past – with jungles and river boats– and of the future – with spaceship rides. Though I’d never seen one, I’d heard that the bushes were carved in the shape of the Big Rodent himself. Even the popsicle packages were bulging with his big ears. Everything was in the shape of the Mouse.

But all I could do was wait at the station. And listen to “Daddy, what time is the train coming?” – for five hours.

**None of us like waiting. The hospital has taken certain tests, say, and how they will turn out, only time will tell. Your life may just depend on how they turn out. So you lie there in the dark straining to hear time’s tale ahead of time, because waiting time is always time strained, time searched and listened to, till past time, present time, future time all start to whisper at once – the past in all its preciousness and never more precious than now; the present in all its dark impenetrability; the future in whatever form it is to come. Morning will come at last, and with it the word you wait for will be spoken at last: the word that you hope for, long for, until you can all but hear it already, which is the word, of course, that gives you back your life again. (Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember*, p. 130)**

You want to get married, but it just hasn’t happened. Every prince turns out to be a toad. Funny, in the fairy tales it works the other way – every toad turns to Tom Cruise and every amphibian into Affleck. Ben, that is. And so, each date has ever-mounting tension and ever-escalating expectations. Seems like all your friends have gotten married. So you wait. Alone, or so it seems.

In our scripture this morning, Israel has been waiting for a very, very long time. The prophets had said He was coming – the Lord’s anointed, the Holy One of Israel, the One who will deliver God’s people. No one had ever waited like they had waited. The prophet Isaiah said, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (Isaiah 9:2). “For,” says the prophet, “unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulders, and his name will be called ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’ Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness, from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this” (Isaiah 9:6-7). These words of Isaiah had long been silent, but they were still waiting. Waiting and watching.

Yes, they had waited.

Faith waits sometimes. It waits until there is utter despair. Then, when you finally receive the news you wonder, “Can it really be? Is it possible?”

V. 43

Jesus found Philip. Maybe today, He finds you, too.

“Follow Me.” In each and every gospel, the invitation to follow is Jesus’ most often repeated call to be his disciple. It could be translated: “Be my student; join my group; or I’d like you to be one of mine.”

“Come and see.” Those are the words of Philip to Nathanael. “Come and see.” The proclamation of Philip was, “We have found him. We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote. Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

When you wait on the answer from God, you really expect a grander entrance than this. The expectations were enormous, yet the words of Philip were so meager. Jesus of Nazareth?

We don't know much about Nathanael. In fact, he's rarely mentioned in scripture other than later when we are told he's from Cana. His name means "God has given" and is equivalent to our Theodore.

The words were too good to be true. If, indeed, the Messiah had arrived, He surely would not have arrived from Nazareth. Even as Nathanael utters these words, we understand he is a man who could never conceive the Messiah coming from such an insignificant place. Being from Cana himself, perhaps there is even a tone of rivalry in his voice. "Can anything good come from that city?" Nathanael shrugs his shoulders.

Maybe there is a little neighborhood rivalry going on between close by Cana and neighbors in Nazareth. You might translate it this way: "Out of that place?" Nathanael is sure that nothing really good could come out of Nazareth.

Maybe Nathanael hadn't heard some really big fish can come out of some really small ponds. Singer/songwriter Lionel Richie is from Tuskegee, Alabama, population 9,125. Basketball legend Larry Bird is from West Baden Springs, Indiana, population 485. Country music star Carrie Underwood is from Checotah, Oklahoma, population 3,034. One-of-a-kind Willie (Nelson, that is) is from Abbott, Texas, population 300. Oprah Winfrey is from Kosciusko, Mississippi, population 7,128. And Taylor Swift is from a town of 4,496 – West Reading, Pennsylvania.

Philip doesn't rebuke Nathanael for disrespect. He didn't say, "Don't talk like that about the Messiah of God." He simply says, "Come and see." That's the way the church ought to do evangelism: invite questioning people to join us in close, honest investigation of the facts. "Let's study the New Testament together and see exactly what it says. Let's pursue your question. Come and see." (See v. 3a.)

We too shrug our shoulders. Can Jesus really be the answer? Is He really the one for whom I have been waiting? Is He really the one upon whom the ends of the ages have met? Does He fulfill the words of the prophets of old? Is He the Messiah who brings hope when there is no hope? Is He the Anointed One who brings freedom, when we've lived all of our life in chains and in slavery to sin?

You can't blame Nathanael for shrugging. Can anything that matters so much come out of anywhere that seems to matter so little – let alone something that matters more than anything else in the world? That's who Jesus is.

I don't blame Nathanael for shrugging his shoulders. And I don't blame you. There are some here this morning – you need to come and see. You need to come and see as we introduce you to Messiah, as we introduce you to the One that your soul has longed for so long. You're so weary of waiting for the answer, so weary of waiting for Him that you've grown numb from the delay. And now we declare this morning, "Come and see. He is here."

As Jesus sees Nathanael coming, He declares, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.” Your translation may say “in whom there is no deceit, no craft.” “Deceit” is the word used of Jacob before his transformation, while he is still conniving. Temple’s translation is so bold as to say, “Behold an Israelite in whom there is no Jacob” (cf. Genesis 27:35).

Nathanael knows who he is, and he knows that Jesus is right. He knows his own heart. “How did you know this about me?” he asked of Jesus. Jesus knew Nathanael, and Jesus knows you. Jesus knew Nathanael’s heart, and Jesus knows your heart (v. 48b). It’s hard to completely understand the text and what it is saying, but this thing is clear. Nathanael knows that Jesus sees beyond what ordinary men see. Nathanael knows now that Jesus, indeed, is Lord.

Who is the most famous person you’ve ever met? A president? Why, many of you have met George Bush. During my days, I’ve crossed paths with Michael Jackson, George Bush, Colin Powell, Patrick Swayze, James Earl Jones, and, although it won’t mean anything to you, N. T. Wright, the world’s premier New Testament theologian.

Who is it for you? Garth Brooks? Bruce Springsteen? Adele?

But this was more than that for Nathanael. He realized that he had come into the presence of the Son of God.

Look at verse 49.

Nathanael said to him, “Teacher, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

Given her music prowess, when you’re in the presence of Adele, you certainly owe her your respect, but you don’t owe her your allegiance, your devotion, your whole self. But you owe nothing less than that, Nathanael knew, to the Son of God. It is, as John has already told us in this Gospel, the very Word of God in the flesh that is before Nathanael. It is the Word of all words. It speaks out of the deepest mystery to the flesh and the blood of all of us.

He is here. He is here for Nathanael. And He is here for you. And He is here for me.

“Come and see,” says Philip. “We have found Him.”

We come the same way Nathanael came from underneath the fig tree.

**We make our way to where he stands beyond a little grove of trees, whoever we are – a retired schoolteacher half sick with boredom and loneliness, a young dancer at the peak of her career, a woman facing a mastectomy, a middle-aged couple trying to hold their marriage together, a boy and girl in love. And you and I come with them – like them, the bearers of secrets we have never told, the guardians of memories more precious than gold and sadder than an empty house. As we make our way through the trees, a figure comes into view. It is dusk, and he stands dark against the grey sky. At the sound of our footsteps, he glances our way. We stand for a moment with our eyes lowered, not daring to look up and see his face,**

**for fear both of what it may be and of what it may fail to be. We have waited so long. We have traveled so far. (Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember*, p. 134-135)**

As Nathanael looks up, he realizes that, indeed, he is not disappointed. He is finally here. The train has come into the station. There is no more waiting. “Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.”

We can be there, too, though we’re not without guile. But we, too, declare His presence. He’s finally here, the Son of God.

Make no mistake about what Nathanael says. In the Old Testament, God is the king of His people, and to call Jesus the King of Israel is to do nothing less than to call Him God. Nathanael is using the most lofty terms available to him to describe the One who stands before him. “We have found Him; come and see.”

Jesus seems to indicate, “You haven’t seen anything yet, Nathanael. You’re going to see wonderful things. Great things. You’re going to see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” The one in whom there was no deceit, the one in whom there was no Jacob is going to have Jacob’s vision, as Jacob saw the angels ascending and descending from the ladder – the ladder that bridged heaven and earth, the ladder that brought God to men. (Jacob’s ladder, Genesis 28:10ff.)

And now Jesus Himself, the Son, has become that ladder that connects heaven and earth. He is the link between God and man. And now, all the hope of heaven is available to us because He is here.

Jacob was a schemer and a twister. Even in the womb he was grabbing his brother’s heel, trying to trip him up. He tricked Esau out of his birthright and stole his father’s blessing.

The tables were eventually turned, and Esau is out to kill Jacob. Jacob has to leave in a hurry – take the shirt on his back and flee. And while he was running away, he saw a ladder in a dream, with its foot on the ground and its top reaching to heaven. God’s angels were going up and down on it, ascending and descending. The Lord Himself stood beside Jacob and promised him that He would bring him back to this land in peace and prosperity.

Jesus is telling Nathanael that he and the other disciples (the “you” in verse 51 is plural) “you’ll see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and down.”

The point of Jacob’s ladder, of course, is that God was there with Jacob, in that place. In fact, Jacob called the place “Bethel,” God’s house. It became one of the ancient great sanctuaries of Israel. A place to worship. The idea was that if you worship God in that house, God was really present, with His angels coming and going to link heaven and earth.

A great deal of John’s Gospel has to do with the way in which Jesus fulfills the promises made concerning the temple. And this Gospel even goes beyond those promises, pioneering the new way in which the living God would be present with His people. The Word, we’ve already been

told last week in v. 1:14, has become flesh and dwelt among us. It's a word for a worshipping place, a tabernacle, putting up one's tent. The idea of a tent in which God lives would certainly bring the Jewish minds back to the tabernacle in the Wilderness at the time of the Exodus. And from there to the temple in Jerusalem where God's presence was promised.

But you see, like Jacob's ladder, even the temple itself was pointing like a sign post. "If you follow Me, you'll see what it looks like when heaven and earth are open to each other. You'll not necessarily see the angels themselves, but you'll see things happening which show that they are there all right. (N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone*)

Isaiah the prophet said, "The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on them has the light shined." They waited for their light, and we have waited for that light. Nathanael says it's here. He's here. Finally. The Wonderful Counselor. The Mighty God. The Everlasting Father. The Prince of Peace.

Some of you here this morning need to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You need to declare openly, with Nathanael, "Behold, this is the Son of God, the King of Israel."

I don't know what your hurt today is – your pain, your hope. I don't know the longing of your heart. There are hundreds of people here in this room, waiting on a hundred different things. Yet, we must realize that even as we recognize and find Him, the greatest wait of all is over. Somehow, somehow you know that you've found the Son of God – and all the other waits of the world, though not easy and though I don't belittle or minimize them, but there is some way in which all the other waits of the world are at least bearable.

- Waiting on those tests at the hospital.
- Waiting for that baby.
- Waiting for that husband, that wife – that special one in your life.
- Having that job interview and waiting by the phone for the call. It seemed to go so well for you, but having to wait.
- Waiting as you mail an application to graduate school – they're only going to take three out of thirty. Waiting on the reply.
- Waiting on that phone call from that wayward son or daughter that you don't even know where they are.

Waiting.

Yes, there are hundreds of you here this morning who are waiting on a hundred different things. And I wanted you to hear that one day Nathanael was waiting, too. One day, all of Israel was waiting – waiting for the hope of the ages, waiting on the light of the world that would shine forth in the darkness, waiting on the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father. And the word to them was, "We have found Him. Come and see." And on that day, and in that way, the greatest wait of the world is finally over.

“Daddy, when’s the train coming?” The train has just pulled into the station. Philip tells Nathanael: “We have found Him.”

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Sources:

Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John*.

Tom Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 1*.