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What's In a Name?

John 1:50-51

Intro: For several weeks, we've been looking at 3 important principles for effective witnessing as illustrated by the testimony of John the Baptist. John's testimony directly resulted in others believing his witness of Jesus, evidenced by their willingness to become followers of Jesus. It's worth noting that Andrew and John trusted in Jesus through the faithful preaching of John the Baptist. Peter (and later, James) would come to Christ through the compassionate personal witnessing of their brothers. Then, Jesus called Philip personally and Philip went and witnessed to Nathaniel and brought him to Jesus. Each man's experience was different because God uses various means to bring sinners to the Savior. The important thing is that we trust in the Lord and then seek to bring others to Him.

Now, we must specify that they didn't immediately forsake all and follow Him; that would come later. But, at the end of this 5th day, Jesus had 6 believing men who had trusted in Him and experienced His power. In the 3 and a half years that were to follow, they would grow in their faith and experience with Jesus, learn more about Him and His mission and eventually, they would take His place on the earth as heralds of the Gospel to all mankind. Of course, they didn't know any of this – they couldn't know it. But Jesus does give a brief heads-up on what's coming their way.

47- Behold! – Remember, Nathaniel was less than impressed with Philip's announcement that the Messiah had been found: "**Can anything good come out of Nazareth?**" Now Philip, just a new believer himself, didn't have all the answers – ok, he didn't have any answers. All he had to give Nathaniel was an invitation for him to come and check out Jesus for himself. Philip is giving him an opportunity to make a rational decision based on his own experience with Christ.

Imagine Nathaniel's thoughts as he walked to meet Jesus. Was he feeling a little put-out? "**Not another yay-who with a God complex!**" Maybe he was excited! "**He's not a celebrity (Nazareth) but He could be a Somebody!**" Whether he was dreading the meeting or anticipating it, imagine Nathaniel's surprise when, upon his arrival, Jesus greets him as if He knows him quite

well! This isn't just empty platitudes; Jesus greets him with glowing, enthusiastic praise!

What is Jesus actually saying here? I mentioned last week that there is a play on words in the original language. There is an OT character who had 2 names: one given by his parents (**Jacob**) and one given by God (**Israel**). Despite what the original etymology of Jacob may be, in the OT it was a name traditionally associated with **deceit**. We can divine this clearly from **Gen 27:35**. But here's the thing: **Jacob**, for all the over-reaching **deceit** associated with his name, had an experience with God that changed his character; thus, he was given the new name **Israel** to mark that change (**Gen 32:24-28**). Jesus' greeting to Nathaniel could be paraphrased as: "Look, here is a true son of Israel, one who is **all Israel and no Jacob!**" Why did Jesus say this? Because, despite the bad reputation that Nazareth held in Nathaniel's mind, his heart was still generous enough to make him come and see this Nazarene that Philip declared to be the One foretold in the Law and the prophets. He didn't let his own prejudice deceive him.

48-49- How? – Nathaniel is obviously taken aback by Jesus' comment: "We've never met. **How do you know me?**" Jesus then alludes to something that only He and Nathaniel could know. In doing this, Jesus helps Nathaniel understand that He knew more about him than he could ever have thought possible. We know this by his response:

Son...King – Whatever doubts or prejudices he was wrestling with vanished immediately! The One who displayed such intimate knowledge of not only his whereabouts but of the thoughts and intents of his heart must certainly be the One the ancient scriptures pointed to. He acclaims Jesus as Messiah ascribing 2 Messianic titles to Him.

Remember, when Philip 1st came to him, Nathaniel was prejudiced against Nazareth and incredulous that the Messiah would ever hail from there. Now, with just 2 short sentences from Jesus, his socks are blown off! He is shocked and in awe of this physical fulfillment of prophecy and answer to centuries of faithful, earnest prayer. But before he can begin to recover his wits, Jesus tells him: "You think that's exciting? Well, you ain't seen nothing yet!"

50-51- In this statement, Jesus actually gives Nathaniel and the other

believers 2 different and distinct promises.

1) *greater things* – (easy enough) We know the disciples will see some amazing things during their time with Jesus; from the wedding at Cana, up to and including the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Hindsight enables us to understand and comprehend this promise even if Nathaniel didn't, but it doesn't help us much with the 2nd promise.

2) *heaven open* – This is a little more difficult to nail down. This verse is clearly a promise, but a promise of what? To be more specific: when is heaven opened and when are these angels to be seen? What is Jesus talking about here?

This isn't just a puzzle for us – it's been a puzzle for scholars throughout church history. It not so much a problem of finding an explanation or reference to this verse but in finding an explanation that *deals with each part of the puzzle.*

There are 4 parts to this promise: **1)** a reference to the *future* you shall see; **2)** the fact that the *heavens will open*; **3)** a reference to *angels ascending and descending upon* Jesus; **4)** the title given by Jesus to Himself, "the **Son of Man.**" Any good explanation of the promise in this verse should explain each of the four pieces of this puzzle.

Many commentators tend to focus on only 1 puzzle piece. The most popular explanation in commentaries links this verse to **Gen 28:12**, where Jacob had a vision of angels ascending and descending on a ladder from heaven. The difficulty with this explanation is that this happened only twice during the Jesus' ministry, 1st time at the end of His 40 day temptation and 2nd in Gethsemane, and neither Nathanael, Andrew, or Philip was present on either occasion. Martin Luther points out that the heavens were opened on 2 occasions during Jesus' ministry as well: 1st at His baptism and then on the Mt of Transfiguration but only 3 of the disciple were there then & none were at His baptism.

Is this the explanation? Does it address all 4 parts of the verse? Not really. But there is 1 explanation that does. When Jesus gave this promise, He wasn't talking about anything that would take place during His life, Nathaniel's life or any of the other disciples for that matter. He was talking about something that's ***still future***, that's still to come. Though no one has seen the fulfillment of this verse yet, all will one day see it when Jesus

Christ returns.

When you take the verse in this sense, all 4 parts fall into place. “You shall see” is still the **future**, and not just for Nathaniel. The **heavens are to be opened literally**. Angels **will accompany Jesus**. And the phrase “**the Son of Man**” is defined for us in **Dan 7:13-14**. This explanation even makes sense of other verses in the NT (**Matt 16:27; 26:64**). If we’re to put this event in proper perspective we must understand that it is a time of great joy and rejoicing for those who follow Christ (**Rev 19:1-9**). All is triumphant! Heaven rings with the shouts of “Hallelujah!” The scene is one of great joy, for everything is prepared for the Lord’s appearing. The Lamb’s wife, the glorified church, is ready, clothed in fine linen, clean and white. But it won’t be a time of rejoicing for everyone. (**Rev 19:11-16**). This is the **fulfillment** of the promise Jesus made to Nathanael, and we’ll participate in it. We will praise Him and glory in His victories!

The title Jesus gives Himself here is heavy with prophetic meaning but this is only one of many titles (names) given to Jesus in this chapter. In fact, what’s seldom noticed is that **the titles have been arranged by John to show in chronological sequence** **who** Jesus is, **what** He **has** done, and **what** He is **yet** to do.

Names don’t mean much to us in our culture but in the East and in the Bible, names have very significant meanings. In the OT, Abraham received a progressive revelation of the character of God thru the names of God that were revealed to Him: **Jehovah – El Elyon (Most High) – El Shaddiah (Almighty) – Jehovah Jireh (the Lord will provide)**. Similar revelations were given to Jacob, Moses, David and the prophets. Each was a glimpse into His nature & glory.

In the same way, we catch glimpses of the glory of Jesus Christ thru the titles given Him in the NT. But the titles John gives Him provide insight to the entire sweep of Jesus’ ministry from beginning to end. This is John’s way of saying that Jesus truly is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end. It is the intention of John’s Gospel to reveal Jesus!

Word – refers to Jesus as **Creator** and as the One who, by being God, **reveals** God. Jesus is not only the **first** and **most complete** Word of God, He is also the **last** Word. No one will ever find God apart from Him.

Light – Light is a universal image for the illumination of the understanding through revelation. “I saw the light,” means I just “got it.” In this sense, light reinforces the idea of God’s revelation of Himself through Jesus Christ. But, there’s another perspective of Jesus’ being the Light. It’s in the contrast of light and darkness. Jesus is the Light, while men are in darkness because of sin and disobedience. They move out of the darkness **only** when they come to Jesus.

Lamb – the most important title (for sinners). Jesus is our sin-bearer, the Passover, the innocent substitute that died in our place. This is what Jesus came to do. He came to remove our sin by dying in our place as our substitute. Has he done that for you? Are your sins on Him? Has He borne your reproach? Has He suffered for your iniquity?

Son – It is as God’s Son that Jesus Christ reigns and exercises authority in the lives of those who come to Him.

Rabbi – Teacher! Is he your teacher? The greatest mistake you could ever make is to think that He can be your teacher before He has become your Savior. That was Nicodemus’ problem. He was impressed with Jesus & wanted to be instructed by Him. But that just won’t work - spiritually. You must **first** see Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Son of God before you can have Him as Teacher. He wants to be your teacher but He must 1st be your Savior!

Messiah, King, Son of Man – these refer to Christ’s future actions. The 1st & 2 refer to His ministry to the Jews. He is both Israel’s Messiah and her King and 1 day He will reign over Israel in Jerusalem as the prophets have foretold.

The last title (Son of Man) refers to judgment upon the Gentiles (**Dan 7:14a**). Thankfully, this scene of His judgment is still future. If you don’t yet know Him as the Lamb who takes away your sin, you have time to prepare for it. You don’t have much time, so I wouldn’t squander it – but you still have time – use it wisely.

What’s in a name? When it comes to the names of Jesus – a whole lot! They reveal who Jesus is & what He’s up to.

What words characterize the Lord Jesus Christ? **Eternal** - means He's without beginning or ending. He existed before time and will exist beyond it. He's completely independent of time. Length of days doesn't exhaust Him. **Immutable** - means He doesn't change and will never. **Omniscient** -there is nothing known or can be known that He does not already know! All our knowledge is simply our thinking His thoughts after Him. Because He's omniscient, there will also be no end to **our** own growth in knowledge as His children. He is perfect and inexhaustible in His love. Nothing will mar our experience of His love; nothing will diminish it. His mercy and righteousness and holiness will be a never-ending pleasure for all those whom He has redeemed. Do you believe these things? Do they have influence on your life? Let me assure you, if you walk in these truths – you will discover **greater things than these** about Jesus.

What can exhaust the inexhaustible? What finite mind can plumb the infinite? It is impossible. Certainly, at His right hand there will be "**pleasures forevermore**" (**Ps 16:11**).☺