

John 1:43-51

Theme - He convinces the unconvinced!

1. By his Person
2. By his Promise

When I was a kid, my best friend told me with total sincerity, "My dad can kick a soccer ball to the moon." I have to admit, Dave Schmiel is pretty awesome, but I was skeptical. What are you skeptical of? In some circles skepticism is a noble thing. In others it's frowned upon. But really we're all skeptical in one way or another. Have you ever bought a used car, either on Craigslist or from the lot? You're skeptical that the owner or dealer is telling the whole truth. Maybe you get a Carfax report or bring a friend who's more mechanically inclined along with you. Maybe you're skeptical of climate change or global warming... unconvinced. In universities, we are trained to be skeptical, to asking questions, to find new solutions. We're skeptical. Our culture is especially skeptical of religion. How can there be only one path? Who are you to tell me what to believe? Maybe there are parts of the Bible that you have read that you are still wrestling with, unconvinced. Or we're skeptical of the power of the Word of God to convince the unconvinced. Today we see Jesus as he convinces the unconvinced, by his person and by his promise.

⁴³ *The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."*

⁴⁴ *Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ 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."*

⁴⁶ *"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.*

⁴⁷ *When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."*

⁴⁸ *"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.*

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

⁴⁹ *Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."*

⁵⁰ *Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." ⁵¹ 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."*

Picture Nathanael, sitting under the fig tree with its shade and low branches. What's he doing? Skipping work? Is he taking a nap? Pondering the promised Messiah? Suddenly his relaxation is interrupted. "Nathanael! There you are! I've been looking all over. We... we've found him. The one we've been waiting for, the one our fathers and mothers and ancestors have been praying about, the one Moses promised would come, the one Isaiah wrote about. He's here!!" Nathanael's eyes light up - "What? Who? Who is he, Philip?" "It's Jesus, from Nazareth, Joseph's son." And you can see Nathanael's shoulders slump and the excitement drain from his face? "Nazareth? Nazareth? No Philip, the promised Messiah, doesn't come from Nazareth, arrh, can anything good come from Nazareth?" But Philip's eyes are still just as intense, just as convinced. He takes Nathanael's shoulders. How can he convince him? How can he explain it what he knows to be true? He met the Savior! "Come and see."

Can you relate to Nathanael? Do you have questions about the Christian faith? Because of sin, we are all naturally skeptical of Jesus. We don't want to take his word at face value. We ask, is that really what God said? But at the same time, it's good to ask questions and to wrestle. That's ok, come with Nathanael and see Jesus.

Or maybe you relate more to Philip. You've gotten fired up about sharing Jesus and you do, and then you've been met with skepticism or rejection. "That's fine for you, but it's not the path for me." Kinda takes the wind out of your sails. For some, it turns into an argument to win, to point out all the evidence to convince the unconvinced. But that's not what Philip does. He wasn't convinced by fancy arguments. He was convinced by his Savior. A real person, who had found him, and called him with real words, powerful life-giving words. He pointed to himself in the Scriptures, and... well... he believed him.

As the two men approach, they see Jesus in the distance, and he calls out, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." A true Israelite, not just someone who is related to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob by blood, but someone connected to them by faith. Trusting that the Savior would come. Yeah that's me, Nathanael thinks. Wait, "How do you know me?"

"I saw you while you were still under the fig tree, before Philip called you." You saw me?? I know you weren't there... how did you know?... Nathanael's eyes are opened. All the skepticism disappeared. The unconvinced was convinced. There is only one explanation for how you can know what you know. You are God. Nathanael looks at Jesus and he sees God himself, seeing things he shouldn't see, knowing things he couldn't know, fulfilling all his hopes and desires just by calling out to him. He believes.

Transition: You've heard it before, "I'll believe it when I see it." Philip and Nathanael saw him. They believed. But what about today? How are the unconvinced convinced when we don't have the benefit of have Jesus calling his followers directly, when we can't see his miracles and verify that he is the true God? It's really by faith in the promises of God's Word right?

Jesus goes on to proclaim a promise that his followers would only see through the eyes of faith. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Philip knew that Moses had written about Jesus, and Jesus reveals another way he was pictured in the Old Testament that it still true today. Jesus alludes to the story of their ancestor Jacob. He had been skeptical that he would receive a blessing from his father, so Jacob had just stolen a birthright and blessing from his older brother Esau. Esau is not happy about it, he was ready to kill his brother. So Jacob runs for his life. On the way, he falls asleep and has a dream where he sees a ladder, a stairway, reaching from heaven to earth, with angels ascending and descending on it, and the LORD standing at the top. When Jacob wakes up, the first thing he says is, "Surely the LORD was in this place, and I was not aware of it!"

I bet Nathanael felt a lot like Jacob that day. "Surely the LORD was in this place and I was not aware of it." The Lord Jesus, God himself, reveals a promise, a mystery - I am the ladder to heaven, the one stairway connecting heaven and earth, the way to eternal life with God.

The skeptical world looks for a ladder to heaven too doesn't it? But not this kind of ladder. The ladder we naturally look for is more like a ladder that we had in my high school gym class. A wall with peg holes in it going straight up, where you had to pull yourself up, one

notch at a time. We all naturally look for a religion or a lifestyle where we are in control, where we strain and work to pull ourselves to the top with our performance and our accomplishments. But really... isn't that kind of life exhausting? The rest that Jesus offers in the gospel is the perfect antidote to the pressure of a life where everything depends on you.

Yet... I wonder sometimes, if we are the skeptical ones too. Why don't we run to our friends to invite them to church to come and see Jesus and to hear his promises? Are we skeptical of the power of the gospel? It's true, the message of Jesus isn't flashy, and it can be broken down into the simplest of terms - Jesus died to take away the sins of the world. So we worry about rejection, or embarrassment. But the Word does work. Take the example of Philip and introduce people to Jesus, the person and the promises, then get out of the way. Let the Holy Spirit do his work.

I ask you to look closer at this promise of Jesus, to understand who the stairway to heaven is and why it is so radically different from everything else. God himself, all powerful and all glorious, able to read the thoughts of people, to be everywhere at the same, able to see our doubt and our skepticism, he comes down to us. He comes down from his throne in heaven to be the Son of Man. A person exactly like we are, except without sin. He came in humility and weakness to rescue the weak and lowly. He came in perfection to save the imperfect. He came in confidence to convince the skeptical. He came with a powerful, saving message to empower the testimony of the shy, the reluctant, the fearful.

The message of Jesus is the one message that the skeptical world needs and longs for more than anything. It is a message of free and full forgiveness in Christ. A message of God himself descending to earth to gather his children, to keep all of God's requirements, none of which we could fully obey. Jesus took our sins, our inadequacies, and our skepticism, and he carried them to the cross where he died to forgive it all. There is no ladder climbing, no trying to impress. There's just Jesus, bridging the gap between the creator and his creation. Heaven is wide open. Listen to his patient, gracious invitation. "Follow me."

Conclusion - When Nathanael met Jesus, his skepticism melted away. He was convinced. He saw God. The message of Jesus is powerful. The call of Jesus through the gospel is strong. It convinces the unconvinced. So be bold and confident as you share Jesus with people. You don't have to have all the answers or the best arguments. Just share the promises, invite people to come and see Jesus.

Amen