



Sunday, June 21, 2020

Clifford Baptist Church, Amherst, Virginia
Rev. Dr. Michael R. Fitzgerald, Senior Pastor

(Transcription from the Morning Service that was Streamed Live)

Sermon Series #7: “The Magnificent Son of Man” Scripture: John 1:43-51 (King James Version)

We’re taking another step forward in our study of the entire Gospel of John. People ask how long will this sermon series take; I really don’t know. It’s going to be a while because there are 21 chapters, and I’m finishing the first chapter today—seven sermons in the first chapter! This is such a deep biography of the Lord Jesus Christ and serves as a wonderful introduction to the Savior. My prayer and my goal is to produce a “boxed set” that can be given to people as an invitation to Jesus Christ so they can learn how the gospel was developed through John’s writing.

Look at the first three words of today’s Scripture: “The day following…” We have a time frame; depending on your translation it may say “the following day” or “the next day”—the next day from what? It’s a time table of four days in the life and ministry of John the Baptist. Remember, John the Gospel writer introduces us to the man who was the forerunner of Jesus, his cousin John the Baptist. Look back at John 1:19 “And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?” The first day of these four days we have a group of Jews who are “high-powered” in the faith and asking John the Baptist who he is. They saw and heard him as he preached in the wilderness; they knew he was a baptizer by water. John says I’ll tell you who I’m not—I am not the Christ, not the Savior, not the one who can give forgiveness of sin. I am a voice in the wilderness crying out. He doesn’t even name himself; he calls himself a “voice”—a representative, a witness of God. So on day one John defines who he is. The next day, day two, begins with John 1:29 as he sees Jesus coming toward him and makes this phenomenal statement to those with him: “...Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” Two sermons ago we talked about Abraham and him sacrificing his son, Isaac. As they’re going up the mountain, Isaac asks his father where the lamb for the sacrifice is. A lamb wasn’t given that day; a ram was that was caught in a thicket. That question goes unanswered for centuries, and John answers the question right here: “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” On day three of John the Baptist’s ministry he identifies Jesus as the Lamb with two of his followers, Andrew and though not named, I believe it is John the writer of this Gospel. He’s very humble about naming himself—sometimes he calls himself the man whom Jesus loved, the one who laid his head on Jesus’ chest. These two men peel away from John the Baptist, follow Jesus, and He turns and the outcome of that meeting is they go to where Jesus is and spend most of the afternoon with the Savior.

Today, we’re on day four. “The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee and findeth Philip and saith unto him, **Follow me.** Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith me, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him and saith of him **Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!** Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, **Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.** Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, **Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these.** And he saith unto him, **Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.**”

On this particular day Jesus goes to the region of Galilee, mostly inhabited by his own family—the Jewish people, the Israelites. He comes to a man named Philip and simply says “Follow me.” He was calling him to be one of the twelve disciples. Scripture tells us Philip grew up in the same hometown that Peter and Andrew came from—a little fishing town on the northern side of the Sea of Galilee called Bethsaida. Most likely Philip was a fisherman; the Bible doesn’t tell us that though. From these verses we can see from meeting Jesus, Philip immediately recognizes Him as the Savior, and he easily and readily in one moment’s decision steps into the role as a disciple of Jesus the Christ. There was no struggle, no question or hesitation—he didn’t have to go home and think or pray about it! He just said yes, Lord, I will follow You; he did this in sheer faith. From reading this passage, I think about the reaction to Jesus and the many children who have come to the Lord Jesus Christ in these three plus decades of time here at Clifford. I’ve baptized them and led them to their decision of faith in Christ and baptism in the Family of God. I ask them if they understand what it means to accept Christ, what it means to be a sinner, understand they need to be forgiven. I go through all the Bible verses and pray with them. Most of the time when I ask if they any questions 99% of the time a child will say “I don’t have any questions; let’s get on with this baptism thing! I’m ready; I want Jesus; I need Jesus; I’ve accepted Him—let me be baptized!” They come to Jesus so naturally, so easily, so readily—it’s amazing the way a child comes to Christ. Sometimes we adults overthink things! We have to pray, worry, be anxious—but a child just says “let’s get on with it!”

Philip reminds me of that kind of a child. When he’s on board with Jesus, what’s his first act? John 1:45 “Philip findeth Nathanael and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” So immediately Philip finds his friend Nathanael. Let me point out that Nathanael and Bartholomew in your Bible are probably the same person. If you read lists of the disciples, you’ll find Bartholomew but not Nathanael. The reason for that is Nathanael is his given name; Bartholomew is a title. Whenever you see “Bar” in the New Testament, that means “Son of”—like Simon Bar-Jonah, Simon son of Jonah. So Bartholomew means Son of Talimais. Philip says to Nathanael “We have found the one who the Old Testament prophets have written about.” There’s only one life, one person, one Messiah, one Savior—His name is Jesus of Nazareth. He grew up in the household of Joseph. Most likely people knew each other in that general vicinity; perhaps Nathanael knew Joseph was nothing more than a carpenter in the City of Nazareth. But Philip says to Nathanael come with me and meet this Jesus of Nazareth. While Philip came to Jesus in simple immediate faith, old Nathanael was quite different. He automatically asks a question of doubt—it’s not bad or sinful, he’s just trying to logically get in his head that this really is the Savior. Nathanael says “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” I wondered if the Pulpit Committee asked themselves of me “Can anything good come out of Staunton, Virginia?!” Consider Nazareth—it’s just a small, backwater town; no one exceptional came from there. Can an important person come out of that little hick town?! Philip tells Nathanael you come see for yourself. I’m not going to try and convince you; you let Jesus be the one to do that. You come meet Him, and you’ll come to the same conclusion I came to. With this little shadow of doubt in the back of his mind, Nathanael goes. Now look at John 1:47 “Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him and saith of him **Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!**” As Nathanael approaches Jesus, the Lord said here comes a fellow Jew in whom there is no guile; there is no deceit in your heart. That’s why it was an honest question. Jesus pinpoints Nathanael as a good man.

From our study in Genesis, we met a man full of deceit and of guile—Jacob. God later renames him Israel; we see that renaming in Chapter 22. If you remember, Jacob started his life very deceptive and focused on himself to the point where he stole the birthright from his brother Esau for a bowl of stew, of all things. Jacob was dishonest, a trickster. He’s called in Genesis a “man of guile.” So when Jesus says to Nathanael I look at you as a man with no guile and knowing his Bible, he immediately thought of Jacob. Jesus says you are the opposite of Jacob; I find no deceit in you or dishonesty. That summation of his character surprises Nathanael. This is our first meeting—how could You know this about me? In John 1:48 Jesus says I know who you are. Long before you came to see me, I knew you. By the way, friends, that’s true for every one of us. No matter who you are, where you’re from, or what you’re doing right now, He

knows you and me. He knows us through and through. In Psalm 139, He knows every word that comes from our mouth before we speak it. He knows the number of hairs on our head. So with Nathanael he tells him He saw him standing under the fig tree. And the light comes on—this man knows all about me! There’s someone else in this Gospel who said the same thing—the woman at the well in Chapter 4. Nathanael realizes Philip is exactly right—this is the Messiah, this is the Son of God. I am seeing the very Son of God standing before me—the Savior, the King of Israel. Look at John 1:50 “Jesus answered and said unto him, **Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these.**” Jesus tells Nathanael you came to recognize Me as the Savior and Lord because I foreknew you were standing under a fig tree. You believe me because I know your past. I want you to know, Nathanael, that was a minor miracle. You stay with me; when you walk with Me you’ll see much greater things. You’ll be amazed when you see the power of God through Me as we minister together. John 1:51 “And he saith unto him, **Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.**” You need to put a star by this verse! Jesus continues talking to Nathanael about his future ministry. When He says “verily, verily” put a red flag by those two words! Jesus says what I’m saying now is extremely important. In Hebrew, the actual translated word is “amen.” Amen and amen—I’m going to tell you something very important. Jesus tells Nathanael as you follow Me in days ahead you’re going to see heaven open. Jesus implies that as a disciple, Nathanael will see some absolute miracles that can only come from the power and authority of God Almighty. He’ll see multitudes hanging on every word spoken by this Son of God. In a future day, Nathanael would be there to see five thousand people fed off just a bit of fish and bread. In days ahead Nathanael would see the Sea of Galilee move from a great tempest and waves coming into the boat when Jesus said “be still” and the waters became still. He’ll see a blind man who would leave the presence of Jesus seeing. Nathanael would see people who never walked in their life walking because Jesus healed them. People would go from lost sinner to child of God in days ahead. Jesus says “Nathanael you hang with me ‘cause you ain’t seen nothin’ yet!” Nathanael believed Jesus because He said He saw him under a fig tree.

Remember earlier in this Scripture when Jesus saw Nathanael and said here’s an Israelite with no guile—a reference to Jacob. I believe this passage is largely about Jacob. In Genesis 28:12 Jacob, the old deceiver, has a dream. “And he dreamed and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” We see this same image in John 1:51 but there’s one huge revelation in it! “And he saith unto him, **Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.**” JESUS IS THE LADDER!!! Isn’t that awesome!! He’s the access way to heaven. So when we read Genesis 28, He’s not identified there. But there’s the connection from Genesis 28 to John 1 that He is the ladder to heaven. Jesus implies that Jacob saw Me seventeen hundred years ago but he couldn’t give it a name. You’ll also notice here Jesus calls himself the “Son of Man.” That’s one of His favorite titles. It’s used 84 times in the four gospels; 13 times in the Gospel of John. “Son of Man”—that title pictures both the Son of God and Son of Man, the deity and humanity of Jesus, fully God and fully man. False theologians have said that Jesus was fully God and went to the cross and felt no pain. No! He was fully man—He felt the spikes, the thorns, the pain so we could be forgiven. He is the fulfillment of what Daniel saw in his vision, 7:13-14 “I saw in the night visions and behold one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” The Old Testament prophet Daniel in Babylon prophesying about the coming of Jesus the Christ—the one who would have dominion and authority for all eternity.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, this is the Son of God we bow before. I pray my meager words and stumbling tongue has brought you a message to understand that He is to be worshipped, to be followed, adored, and looked at with awe and thanksgiving that He came for us. Speaking just for myself, I see Jesus so often as my Shepherd, my Friend—the One

who walks with me. I talk to Him, and He talks to me in everyday language. Sometimes I make Jesus “too little.” What this Scripture teaches me is that He’s an awesome, mighty, wonderful Savior. Today, wherever you are, can we bow our heads and if possible, fall to our knees, and say “Jesus, thank You that You came for me. Thank You that You’re the Way, the Truth, the Life. Thank You that You’re the Door, the Light, that You teach us You’re the one who gives forgiveness for all eternity. Thank You that You are the Ladder to Heaven! I can only get to God the Father by the Ladder of Jesus Christ the Son of God.” We need to bow before Him, pray, and thank Him as we come before Him as the Savior who loves us so much He died on the cross for us and rose from the grave that we might have life everlasting.

What powerful verses today! I pray we’ll bow before Him, brothers and sisters, and rededicate our lives in serving Him and showing Him to a lost and dying world. If we’ve ever lived in a time in history where we see a lost and dying world and walking away from God, it is right now. You have to have your head in the sand if you don’t see a lost world these days! This world needs a Savior more than it needs a good government, political power, weapons, or social programs. This world needs a Savior today! My prayer is we will represent that Savior. I listened to a sermon this week by Alistair Begg, a Scottish man. He said I don’t preach so much about abortion, changing the government, or families in trouble—I preach the gospel because the gospel will change every one of those problems. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ that brings change! It’s the salt this world needs. Friends, you and I need to walk out these doors today as servants and witnesses to be true, strong, and courageous for this Savior! The world largely sees the Savior through us! Rededicate your life to that powerful Savior—the Light, the Door, the Ladder.

If you’re not yet a believer (here in the church or by media) and don’t know Jesus as Lord and Savior, today you can come to Him. Go back to today’s passage in John—you’re either a Philip or a Nathanael. Philip just came—no questions, no hesitations. You can be a Philip and trust that Jesus Christ will meet you where you are. You don’t have to be perfect or a Bible scholar, you just need to come and say Lord Jesus, change me. Come to live in my heart, be my Savior, let me walk with You, grow to be like You, worship You, serve You. Be a Philip and come today. Nathanael, on the other hand, had his doubts, concerns, and questions about Jesus. No matter who you are, no matter your questions or doubts, when you really meet Him you’ll know He’s the real deal! There’s no one like Jesus. He loves you, went to the cross for you, took your sin and my sin upon Himself and died for us. He’s earned the right to be your Savior, the ladder, for all eternity. That ladder will get you to heaven; that’s the promise. I will meet you there. All the believers will meet you there. If you’ve never put your heart in His hands, you come. You don’t have to doubt, think about, or wait a couple of months—today He is worthy! He’s the answer to every question; He alone is sufficient. He’s the Way, the Truth, the Life. No man will come to the Father except by Him. You come.

Let us Pray: Father God, thank You for these moments and these words from the first chapter of John. Philip and Nathanael—Philip came so easily. Maybe there’s a “Philip” listening today who says Lord, I need You; I’m coming right now; I trust You. Perhaps there’s a “Nathanael” listening today who’s studied and questioned the Bible over the years and has doubts and reasons for never coming to church. Coming to church won’t save you; Jesus will. Father I pray that one will put all doubts aside and step out and come to Jesus and know Him as the “real deal.” Just like Nathanael found out Jesus. will say you walk with Me and you’ll see more miracles along the way. Father, bless that one who needs you. Bless us as believers, Lord. What a wonderful thing to see the church filling back up in these days. I know some are compromised and need to be home and however someone wants to worship, I understand. Thank You for the church coming back to life, that we’re under Your reign of glory and blessing! Thank You for teaching me this week of the picture in Jacob’s dream as to what Jesus says to Nathanael that He is the ladder Jacob saw seventeen hundred years before Jesus was born in a manger. It’s amazing to me! Bless us this day, Lord. Bless believers as we rededicate our lives. The world is in a sorry shape; we need so many things—the most important is that Jesus is the Son of God. Help us to represent You well this week and not to be a stumbling block for someone to see the Savior. Amen.