

John 1:43-51 (NIV). Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

I spent an evening in Heaven on Thursday! I was there with Jenny. It was not quite as I'd expected it to be! It was a sort of cross between a footy 5 a side pitch and a really smart hotel lounge. Drinks and canapes were served. Nobody mentioned the name of Jesus, yet His presence was there and His people were excited by the witness born to lives changed and hope restored. The fellowship of His churches were central, yet only got a passing mention.

Astonishingly we'd had to drive all the way to Manchester to reach heaven. Anyone want to guess where we were?

... We had to drive down Sir Matt Busby Way... any guesses now?

We were at Hotel Football located adjacent to the Man U stadium. The suite at the top of the building is called 'Heaven'. We were there to hear about the latest Street Soccer initiatives and to hear about what God is doing in the lives of some of the lads. We knew one of them as he was one of the guys that Lewis and Abby have had so much to do with. Things are still not perfect for him but the improvements in his life are quite fantastic and he is now holding down a job, living in Bolton (not Salford) and attends a Church there too. He had met with the people of God through Football. He has been drawn back from utter self-destruction; he'd met with

the Living God as demonstrated through the tough love of Street Soccer Academy and now was receiving one of 2 Awards on this evening of celebration. May God bless Chris as he moves on in his life.

This story is not a random one; it chimes with the story of people down the ages who have encountered Jesus through the words and witness of others. Some are people who step easily into the Kingdom without hardly noticing that they have; yet others who are full of questions and struggles and then others who resist that transformation until God suddenly breaks through to reveal his love, forgiveness, hope or whatever He chooses to use to Bridge the Gap. And here in John1 we find that Philip

and Nathaniel are meeting with that same God in Jesus. Let's check out Philip first.

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.

Wow – that's a pretty simple way into heaven! 'Follow me'. There is probably a little more to this story, but perhaps not much. It was like this for me in a way. One night at the age of 15 I was on an SU camp and my tent leader asked "Would anyone here like to become a Christian?" Suddenly I knew that I did –

he was asking me! “I do!” said I in my usual shy (yet slightly bold) way.

I do – that was it. That night was the start of my life in Christ. There was a lot more of that story to come – but it started there. We don’t have to make it very complicated, you know! We don’t need every question to be answered. We do not need to know much about what we are doing. We don’t need a reason. I just said “I do!” And I’ve never gone back on that statement.

I do!

I do!

So when the Spirit of the Living God engulfed me 3 years later I was astonished, but ready. Then it became

“I do!” followed by “Use Me!” You know what – it is all so simple. It was for Philip – it is for me – it can be for us all.

But in tonight’s reading we also have Philip’s brother Nathaniel:

Verse 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 truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”*

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^[a] because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” ⁵¹ He then added, “Very truly I tell you **all**,^[b] you^[c] will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’^[d] the Son of Man.”

It was a bit less easy for Nathe’ – he was a bigot! Nazareth! But Philip was not going to just give up on him – he

persevered... gently... come and see – hey, no strings attached – just come and see... He had already recognised that the all he was called to do was to make the introduction:

Jesus, this is Nathe'! Nathe', this is Jesus. The rest was between them. He kept it simple!

Then Jesus uses His intimate fellowship with the Spirit to speak out a miniature prophecy – it was nothing really, but it was enough. 'A man with no deceit!' What does Jesus mean? Perhaps he meant you are a bigot and you don't make a pretence of being anything else – a double edged compliment! I don't know! But it touched Nathe' where it mattered.

: - “Spirit of the Living God, infect us with that sort of insight. God in heaven, make us open to those moments of insight and give us the courage to speak them out with **perception and gentleness.**”

Then came the sealing of this conversation: *“I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”* To be known is so vital, such an important thing to all of us in this world where we are so unknown.

Nathaniel did not crave the things that we normally think of - love, forgiveness, hope – he desperately needed to be known for who he was, he felt like one of the crowd, like he was not an

individual, nothing special – just bigoted old Nathe...

Suddenly he was known to the great teacher!

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” Where had that all come from? Things were going to be so different for him from now on. So, so different.

For me at 15, what I craved was respect from others and those lovely blokes who ran that SU camp had shown that to me. And that is what brought me to that place on that summer evening where I declared “I do!” I am with Nathe’ too! That weedy teen who was Colin needed to know the truth – that I

was special! I needed to know that there was a lot more to me than I recognised, more than my school thought, more than my acquaintances disdained. I needed to see myself through God's eyes – and those blokes did!

There is so much in here for us to recognise for ourselves and for our outreach.

It is simple – don't make it too complicated. People turn to Christ for a huge variety of reasons, so let's not force them to use a formula of any sort. We just need to introduce them, to accept them.

We need to allow The Holy Spirit to inspire us in our conversations just as Jesus did – did something pop into your mind as you talked? Explore that gently – see if it chimes with them. The Spirit is gentle in these situations, so it will not be right to use it in the person's face – but listen to those little prompts as Jesus did. He said so little - 'A man with no deceit!' But it held so much more meaning than you'd imagine because the Spirit was prompting Him. Follow the prompts!

We need to see others with the loving eyes of the Father God who is right now running with arms wide open to engulf the sons and daughters who have strayed. The Father delights to bring

them home – and if we can be a part of that ... what a joy!

I want to be there as they step over the threshold into the eternity in which I live.

I want to be there when they make that great step!

I will not be doing much – it is God's work that matters... but I want to be there...

I do! I do!

Use me, LORD!

I just want to be there when God does stuff!

Healing, wholeness or new life In Jesus – I don't care!

I just want to be there!..... **Let us pray.**