

Expository Tracts, No. 110.

PHILIP AND NATHANAEL.

BEING

THOUGHTS ON JOHN I. 43-51.

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JOHN I. 43–51.

43. The day following, Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow Me.
44. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.
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.
46. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.
47. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!
48. 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.
49. Nathanael answered and saith unto Him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel.
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.
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.

LET US observe, as we read these verses, *how various are the paths by which souls are led into the narrow way of life.*

We are told of a man, named Philip, being added to the little company of Christ's disciples. He does not appear to have been moved, like Andrew and his companions, by the testimony of John the Baptist. He was not drawn, like Simon Peter, by the outspoken declaration of a brother. He seems to have been called directly by Christ Himself, and the agency of man seems not to have been used in his calling. Yet in faith and life he became one with those who were disciples before him. Though led by different paths, they all entered the same road, embraced the same truths, served the same Master, and at length reached the same home.

The fact before us is a deeply important one. It throws light on the history of all God's people in every age, and of every tongue. There are diversities of operations in the saving of souls. All true Christians are led by one

Spirit, washed in one blood, serve one Lord, lean on one Saviour, believe one truth, and walk by one general rule. But all are not converted in one and the same manner. All do not pass through the same experience. In conversion, the Holy Ghost acts as a sovereign. He calleth every one severally as He will.

Let us observe, also, in these verses, *the good advice which Philip gave to Nathanael*. The mind of Nathanael was full of doubts about the Saviour of whom Philip told him. "Can there any good thing," he said, "come out of Nazareth?" And what did Philip reply? He said, "Come and see."

Wiser counsel than this it would be impossible to conceive! If Philip had reproved Nathanael's unbelief, he might have driven him back for many a day, and given offence. If he had reasoned with him, he might have failed to convince him, or might have confirmed him in his doubts. But by inviting him to prove the matter for himself, he showed his entire confidence in the truth of his own assertion, and his willingness to have it tested and proved. And the result shows the wisdom of Philip's words. Nathanael owed his early acquaintance with Christ to that frank invitation: "Come and see."

If we call ourselves true Christians, let us never be afraid to deal with people about their souls as Philip dealt with Nathanael. Let us invite them boldly to make proof of our religion. Let us tell them confidently that they cannot know its real value until they have tried it. Let us assure them that vital Christianity courts every possible inquiry. It has no secrets. It has nothing to conceal. Its faith and practice are spoken against, just because they are not known. Its enemies speak evil of things with which they are not acquainted. They understand neither what they say nor whereof they affirm. Philip's mode of dealing, we may be sure, is one principal way to do good. Few are ever moved by reasoning and argument. Still fewer are frightened into repentance. The man who does most good to souls, is often the simple believer who says to his friends, "I have found a Saviour; come and see Him."

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, *the high character which Jesus gives of Nathanael*. He calls him "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

Nathanael, there can be no doubt, was a true child of God, and a child of God in difficult times. He was one of a very little flock. Like Simeon and Anna, and other pious Jews, he was living by faith, and waiting prayerfully for the promised Redeemer, when our Lord's ministry began. He had that which grace alone can give,—an honest heart, a heart without guile. His knowledge was probably small. His spiritual eyesight was dim. But he was one who had lived carefully up to his light. He had diligently used such knowledge as he possessed. His eye had been single, though his vision had not been strong. His spiritual judgment had been honest, though it had not

been powerful. What he saw in Scripture he had held firmly, in spite of Pharisees and Sadducees, and all the fashionable religion of the day. He was an honest Old Testament believer, who had stood alone. And here was the secret of our Lord's peculiar commendation! He declared Nathanael to be a true son of Abraham,—a Jew inwardly, possessing circumcision in the spirit, as well as in the letter,—an Israelite in heart, as well as a son of Jacob in the flesh.

Let us pray that we may be of the same spirit as Nathanael. An honest, unprejudiced mind,—a childlike willingness to follow the truth, wherever the truth may lead us,—a simple, hearty desire to be guided, taught, and led by the Spirit,—a thorough determination to use every spark of light which we have,—are possessions of priceless value. A man of this spirit may live in the midst of much darkness, and be surrounded by every possible disadvantage to his soul. But the Lord Jesus will take care that such a man does not miss the way to heaven. "The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way" (Psalm xxv. 9).