

# Speaking Greater Things to Others - Nathanael's Epiphany

by Michael Flowers

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*Michael Flowers explores Nathanael's encounter with Jesus to illustrate the importance of personal revelation and overcoming prejudices in our spiritual journey.*

**Duration:** 25:26

**Scripture:** Genesis 28:16, Psalm 43:3, John 1:39, John 1:46, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 1:18, 1 John 1:5

**Topics:** "Epiphany"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the encounter between Jesus and Nathaniel. The speaker emphasizes the importance of seeking and experiencing the light of God through Jesus Christ. Salvation is described as the restoration of communion between God and his creation, healing the separation between grace and nature. The speaker encourages listeners to lay aside spiritual blindness and embrace their true identity in Christ, emphasizing the need for daily renewal and seeking the light of God.

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## Transcript

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen. We're going to focus today on the gospel passage.

I'm going to consider Nathaniel and his encounter with Jesus in this, what's called the second Sunday after the epiphany. And in honor of Nathaniel's contemplation under the fig tree, I had figs for breakfast this morning. Figs, almonds, an egg, and some coffee.

So I was just kind of gearing up for this message this morning. I just thought, wow, I'm feeling it. I really am.

The figs make the difference. Epiphany is a word we've been saying that means appearing. It can also mean a manifestation.

And actually, the songs that were chosen this morning already preached the message of epiphany. Thank you so much, man. Those words are just so appropriate for this season.

Great songs, great lyrics. So it means manifestation. Let's think about that word today, because throughout John's gospel, as we've been going through, especially in the prologue, it's replete throughout

the gospel with little vignettes displaying the outworking of that prologue, describing who Jesus is and whence he came.

His true eternal origins within the womb or bosom of the father in all of the encounters today with Philip and Andrew and Peter and Nathanael. And we'll just look at Nathanael and Philip's encounter. There's no sense of his true origins being spoken of, even as he's described as the son of God, the king of Israel.

So was Solomon. So we can't jump to conclusions that Nathanael was actually seeing and saying that you are the preexistent son of God. But John, in 90 A.D., fast forwarding, this apostle is reflecting on who this word is, this logos.

And he lets us know in the beginning so that throughout the rest of the bumbblings of trying to figure out who Jesus is throughout the gospels, John's already given us a clue to who he truly is and where he truly came from. He came out of that womb, that bosom of the father that John talks about, that mystical place of communion, father, son and Holy Spirit. Yeah, the word became flesh, the word became a human being, the word became fully united to his creation, his creation in order that his creation.

And this is what salvation is all about. His creation of inestimable value and worth might be restored, might be redeemed, might be healed back to. And what is this healing? What is that? How do you describe what is the results of this healing of creation? It's healing the rip, the tear, the split between grace and nature, between God and his creation.

It's bringing us back into a full communion with God. That's what salvation is. Communion with God.

That's good news. Communion with God, the father and the son and the Holy Spirit. Now, without such epiphanies that we're looking at and we're contemplating without these personal revelatory encounters, we remain blind.

We remain blind to his true identity and present presence. Surely the Lord was in this place. He was present and his presence was present.

But I knew it not. I knew it not, said Jacob. One of the greatest theologians and writers in the New Testament, Saint Paul, shares his own personal searching need of this continual revelation in the prayers of Ephesians.

Prayers like open the eyes of my heart. I pray that the Lord will open the eyes of your heart. You ever thought about that? The eyes of your heart.

How do we see? We see far beyond what the physical eyes can actually detect. And this is what come and see that phrase that Jesus first used in the previous section. Where are you staying? They asked.

Come and see. Oh, they didn't realize what they were in for. They didn't realize who they were talking to and they didn't realize where he was from.

This is a very, very strange encounter that they're having. Come and see. Open the eyes of our hearts to this continuous, endless communion with God.

A life of epiphanies. You know, we'll see something and then it closes up. The eternal opens up to us and then all of a sudden we're back in the present, this present darkness, as it were, and we're screaming on the inside.

Lord, send out your light in your truth and let it lead me once again in thy light. The psalmist says, I see light. And so this cry, this quest for light, enlightenment, as it were, comes through Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man.

The eternal logos, the light that enlightens every heart has now become flesh. And this is the Jesus whom we see. This is the Jesus risen on the road to Damascus that lit up the road.

St. Paul fell to his feet and he recognized him in this light appearing to him. Paul got that revelation of the communion between the restoration of God, the risen Jesus being one united with his body. And we've read that today in first Corinthians six.

We have been united with Christ. Oh, man. As the disciples begin to gather around Jesus.

Philip finds Nathaniel and he says, this is so funny. We have found the Messiah. We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did right.

Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, Nathaniel's unpromising response. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Nathaniel is not alone in having this kind of unkind, bigoted, prejudiced attitude to other places and other people, as we've seen recently from the shameful encounters on Capitol Hill. But in the midst of that, pointing our finger at Capitol Hill.

There's plenty of things to point your finger at. At the same time, we have to realize that there's gross limitations to our ability to receive the least in the loss in our own lives. We have our own prejudices and our own images of what we think is worth and what we think is worthless.

Right. In Kansas City alone, I mean, just living east of Troost invokes this. Can anything good come out of east of Troost? Oh, brothers and sisters, we all know this, don't we? We know this attitude.

It's called classism, elitism, racism, sexism. All of these things are a part of the fallen, broken mess that we're being redeemed and healed out of. So that healing is a progressive thing, because I feel all of these things wanting to rise up in me, too.

We have to say no to these things in order to walk in the love and the mercy and the acceptance of the Father. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? It's interesting because the guy saying this, Nathaniel, he's from Cana, Galilee, and it's a small town, too. This gets worked into the way we live.

This is what we want to ponder. It's really amazing. There's two awesome responses here.

There's two reactions to Nathaniel's jadedness. I think you think Nathaniel could be suffering from acedia. Remember that in the Seven Deadly Sins? A couple of years ago, we talked about acedia, this sickness of heart, this like, you know, because he had longed and read the scriptures.

And then all of a sudden, you know, he's got this image of the one that he's longing and waiting for. And this person is surely not from Nazareth. It can't be Nazareth.

You know, yes, it can. It is. And here it comes.

OK, OK. Now I'm going to have to adjust my attitude. And so here's Nathaniel talking to Philip.

Philip gives the best possible reply that anyone sharing the mystery of their own faith can give. He doesn't say, wow, man, you've got to really get rid of that attitude. He just says this and he says this.

Come and see. There it is again. Now, Philip is mimicking what was told to the other disciples previously.

So he's following Jesus in actually finding someone else, because the text starts out in verse forty three. The next day, Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip.

Philip didn't find Jesus. Jesus found Philip. And so Philip changes the story a little bit here.

Right. He found Philip and said to him, follow me. And now Philip was from the city of Andrew and Peter.

And then he said, OK, now here's what it means to follow. Philip found Nathaniel. You see that Jesus immediately says, follow me.

And what's the next thing that he does? He goes after someone else that, in fact, is following Jesus. That is following Jesus being found, following Jesus and finding others. That's following Jesus.

Just keep that in the being found, following Jesus and finding others. That's following Jesus. And so Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, we have found not exactly.

We were found by the one that we've been looking for. That's basically what happened. Right.

We've been found by the one that Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, kind of a double identity there still doesn't get it completely right. He is Jesus of Nazareth and he is the adopted son of Joseph. But he's not really from Nazareth originally in his origins, right? He's from the bosom of the father.

John has already told us that. And he's the eternal word. He's fully divine.

But that has to be figured out long after the resurrection from the dead. We all need to resurrect. So the way we come to know Jesus in his resurrected state is exactly the way they came to know Jesus.

You know, their their time in the flesh could have been a hindrance when Jesus showed up in his resurrected his body because they didn't get it on the road to Emmaus. Right. Twenty four.

Look, twenty four. He's walking. He's talking.

He's sharing the scriptures and their hearts burning and they don't know who it is until he disappears in the breaking of the bread. They find out, oh, wow, he is known in the breaking of the bread and then he disappears. We come to find him.

We come to know him in the same manner, not in the flesh, but in the spirit. Come and see. What does that mean? If you come.

If you start moving toward that pulling. Because no one can come to Jesus unless they're being drawn, pulled, opened. Right.

So as we come, we're placing ourselves in a posture of receiving more of who he truly is. We're placing ourselves in a posture in coming and receiving. Right.

We begin to receive and then come and see. We begin to experience. Seeing is experiencing his life.

Seeing is like that's metanoia. That means repentance. That means change your mind.

That means you've got a new mind when you see you could never go back and be happy in the dark. I mean, it's just the testimony of a Christian, a testimony of someone who has come into the presence and they have seen is that, oh, yeah, fall away. They can, but they won't be happy sinners anymore.

Right. I know a lot of sad, sad sinners who once followed Jesus and they're still in their muddling confusion and they're not really happy. They're still in their confusion, figuring out how to make it on their own.

But once you know, right, you can never go back and be happy. That's coming and seeing and experiencing what the embodiment, the embodiment of your longings. The word make flesh.

Jesus is the embodiment of your longings. Jesus is showing how to see others beyond their smoke screens. Does Jesus get offended? I mean, do you think Jesus knew the attitude that Nathaniel had when he walked up at him? I mean, can't you tell when, you know, you're around someone and they're not really, really happy to be in your presence? Right.

You're east of Proust. You know what I'm saying? And Jesus doesn't really address that. Says Nathaniel said to him, can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip says, come and see.

Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him and said to him, behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit, no guile. Wow. And so Jesus gets the upper hand by not speaking to his false identity, this Nazareth business.

Right. All of that is his false identity and a way of seeing and sizing people up. And he had lived that way all of his life.

Jesus is showing, by example, how to get beyond this, how to get beyond the prejudice of another person, how to look beyond the racism, the rejection, the sizing up of another person when they're in your midst and you begin to call forth the treasure in their lives. And this is powerful, you guys. This is walking in the spirit.

And we're not always good at it. I'm not always good at this. But man, this is what's going on.

And this is what Jesus is trying to encourage us to be and do in the midst of ridicule coming at us. And the more faithful we become, the more ridicule will come right through the culture who is blind and feels like we're the ones from Nazareth. Right.

Orthodox Christians. We're the ones from Nazareth. Now, are we going to do the culture war thing and start slinging back and start quoting scriptures that will never work? You guys.

Jesus is not doing that here. Jesus speaks to the heart of that person in the midst of the persecution, in the midst of the war, in the midst of the battle, you go like, let me tell you who you are, beloved of God. You know, let me tell you who you are.

And Jesus says you're an Israelite. That's the only word. That's the only time Israelite is used in John's gospel.

One time you're an Israelite in whom there is no doubt. What's he referring to? Right. He's referring to Jacob, who became Israel.

And Jacob means deceitful one. OK, that's old Israel. Now you're the new Israel.

You're an Israelite. You're a corporate Jacob in whom there is no doubt, no deceit. Really, can you imagine having a name that means deceitful coward? No wonder.

I mean, being named Jacob, that's not that's not a good deal. I mean, you know, your life can't go very well. And it started in the womb.

Right. He's grabbing on the heel of Esau. He's living out his name.

And then his name gets changed. Hallelujah. And in a sense, becoming a Christian changes our name and changes our character and changes our outlook and perspective because of metanoia, because of repentance, because of a changed, transformed mind that is a continual life in Christ.

Right. So Jesus appeals to the treasure, the logos, the light inside that enlightens every heart. John has already told us the light is there.

The light is in every person. Why? Not because they prayed the prayer of salvation, because they're created in the image and likeness of God. They can respond.

They can actually respond when we appeal to that, when we appeal to the image of God in them, not the marred, fallen image. And when we start like fighting back and pushing back and quoting Scripture at people and arguing and fighting, we're appealing to the fallen part. We'll never win those battles, you guys.

That's why, you know, in my writings and my preaching, I'm not big on just preaching against stuff all the time. And there's plenty of stuff to be against. But that's not the way we do warfare in your anger.

Do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Come in the opposite spirit of what's coming at you.

Violence, anger, resentment, bitterness, all of these things coming at us all the time throughout life. Hopefully it's not on a weekly basis, but we all experience these things if we live long enough. Jesus is showing us how to speak to people who would ridicule us, speak to the true self, the image of God in that person.

And it may even be very, very difficult to see. That's why we need revelation. That's why we need an epiphany.

An epiphany has taken place. Something whole and complete has been disclosed in a single glance to see and be seen for Nathaniel is enough. It's an example in the gospel of a sudden awakening in Nathaniel's heart, a direct pointing to reality, which some people think is only associated, say, with Buddhism, right? Enlightenment.

When we start using words like enlightenment, that's a Christian word. Paul used it and said, I pray that your heart may be enlightened. But here it is.

And then Jesus alluding subtly to Nathaniel's mention of Israel promises that this is just the beginning of a greater epiphany. You're going to see greater things. Nathaniel is an Israelite indeed, and Jesus points to

the key epiphany in the life of Israel when he was still called Jacob, the epiphany in which he saw the ladder connecting heaven and earth.

Jesus says, and it's here's the literal translation on men on men, you will see greater things because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree. Do you believe that you will see greater things than these? He said, man, I'm in truly, truly, I say to you, but note here the word you is not singular. It's second person plural, which is speaking to the audience is speaking to the readers.

John is wanting us to get this. We, those who come and see right and follow Jesus, we'll see greater things. And what is that? You plural will see heaven open.

What's already opened at the baptism of Jesus, right? This is the second epiphany of the heavens opening and the angels of God ascending and descending, not on a ladder, not on a stairway to heaven, right? Which Led Zeppelin has made a lot of money off that image. It's right out of Genesis 28, right? We plunder the Egyptians and the Egyptians plunder us, right? Is that what that is? Yeah. We plunder the Egyptians.

They took all the gold and silver and all of the jewels out of Egypt when they went into the promised land, right? The ladder that Jacob saw, it was a prophetic image. You see, he was dreaming it now. Nathaniel is standing in front of it.

The ladder is an embodiment. The ladder is the word made flesh. The ladder is the one in becoming flesh connected heaven and earth.

It's the flesh of Jesus now risen and ascended that truly is this ladder that heals the split between heaven and earth. This is Christianity. This is the message.

We've been united with the eternal. We've been reunited with God. We've been healed and are being healed.

That's for sure, because it's not over yet. We're still in the wilderness awaiting the second return of this uncreated light in embodiment form. Jesus Christ, he is uncreated light coming after us in a risen body, and we will all simultaneously be raised from our graves.

And Jacob's ladder will have a lot of dancing, ascending and descending upon the son of man. He will return with all the holy angels, and he will come to greet us. And it's one of those things that's better than a fairy tale.

We'll live happily ever after. We'll live eternally throughout the marriage supper of the lamb. We're going to live married to God, reunited where God will be all in all.

That's new creation. Blows your mind, right? And so in this intimate exchange of Nathaniel. Nathaniel has seen with his waking eyes what his ancestor had only seen veiled in dream and symbol.

And so as we close today, I would say, let us lay aside. What feeds and contributes to our spiritual blindness so that we may come and we may see and lay aside that can anything good come out of that jaded as a sedia of the soul. And let us receive our true identity.

Anyone is in Christ. He, she knew creation and learn once again that daily our life in Christ is coming and seeing. And we have all the prayers in the Psalms.

Send forth your light and truth. Let it lead me. The Lord is my light in my salvation.

God is light. And in him, there is no darkness. You are the light of the world.

In the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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