

John 1:43-51

Epiphany 2, Supplement Series B, January 14, 2018

Theme: You will see greater things than that!
I. Great things are right in front of us
II. Greater things will be revealed

INJ If you wanted great things to happen on your weekend, what would it take? Attend a sporting event? Go to a live concert or a show? See a museum or a movie? What if you didn't just want something great to happen, but you needed something great to happen? Do you need to repair a damaged relationship? Do you need to get some rest and regain your health? Do you need to sort out your life? What great things do you need?

Think about worship and Bible Class or Sunday School. Would you say that the things that happen here are great? What are those great things? Do you want them or need them? God has great things in store for us today as we walk with Philip and Nathanael, following Jesus. Great things are right in front of us, and greater things will be revealed!

Let's start with the Bible History lesson. Jesus was just beginning his public ministry, and he was gathering disciples to follow him: Andrew and Peter; James and John. Now Jesus came to Philip, who was from the same town as Andrew and Peter. Jesus said to him, "Follow me."

Do you see any "great things" yet? Sounds like another boring day from the Bible? I beg you to look more closely with me and to see the amazing things that are right before your eyes. What kind of a person is Philip? We don't know a lot about him, but this is clear: he knew God's promise of a Savior from sin.

Isn't it amazing that God should reveal his plans to sinners? That he should let us know he would send a Savior? He didn't just speak in visions like he did with Samuel, but he inspired words to be written that give the details and show the way it happened! God put his thoughts down for us to know them! That is a great thing, isn't it? We might take for granted that we have the Word of God, but we need it more than we know. Right in front of us is a great thing: that we have God's saving word.

Through that word, people believe God's promises. That's pretty great. Think about the things God revealed in the Old Testament, things that Philip would have known. The Messiah would crush Satan's head, but his own heel would also be bruised. He would be a descendant of David, but would rule forever. A sacrifice would remove the guilt of the people.

This would be a suffering servant rather than a glorious king. Today, with the New Testament clearly revealed, some people still won't believe what it says. God used fewer details and moved hearts like Philip's to believe the promised Savior. If God didn't do great things we would be lost!

Keep going. Philip not only believed that a Savior was coming, but that Jesus was that Savior. John the Baptist had prepared the way. Philip listened and compared the Scriptures. He was a careful student of God's Word. He listened to what he heard, and when Jesus called, he followed!

It went a step further. Philip found his friend Nathanael and told him what he had discovered. Jesus of Nazareth is the One God promised through Moses and the Prophets. This man is the Messiah! People have waited since Adam and Eve, and he is here in our presence today! Isn't Philip's confession a great thing? Such passion to let everyone know!

Great things didn't stop there. Nathanael knew his Bible well, and he wasn't going to be scammed into some charlatan spiritual scheme. His first reply was to say the Bible never mentions Nazareth as a place to be looking for the Messiah. Bethlehem, yes. Jerusalem, a plausible place. But Nazareth in Galilee? "Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael's knowledge and awareness of Scripture is a great thing, too. Philip invited his friend to come and see. Check it out. Put Jesus to the test and see if he meets expectations. Nathanael came.

Here is where it really gets interesting. Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, "Truly, here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Nathanael answered him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered, "Before Philip called you, while you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Great things are happening right in front of us. Jesus made a connection with Nathanael, didn't he? He called him an Israelite in whom there is no deceit, a man who knew the promises well and who studied them intently. Jesus said he saw something under a fig tree. God used it to move a beautiful confession from the man who had just said nothing good was going to come from all this.

I don't know if Jesus used his divine power to know a personal detail about Nathanael. Some say that Jesus was making references to the things Nathanael was studying under that fig tree. What I do know is that Nathanael found that Jesus is who he says he is. "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Nathanael was given faith through the word he studied. He had a lot to learn yet, and his faith would be tested. It would mature, but what a

great thing happened! Nathanael trusted Jesus as his God and Savior.

Am I making too much of the details in this lesson? It is just a simple account of Jesus calling disciples to follow him. Why should we pay attention to these obvious and rather simple facts? I think because we overlook them too easily. Are the miracles of God so small that we don't need them? We have God's Word that reveals the Savior. God has brought us to faith. We gladly hear and learn the Scriptures. We make a confession about Jesus and we invite others to come and see. Jesus has made a connection with us and we know him. Are those just another boring day in our lives? I don't think so. God has done great things for us! Yet, as Jesus said to Nathanael, "You will see greater things than that!"

As Philip and Nathanael walked with Jesus over the next three years, they saw greater things. Things that we do well to pay attention to. You may ask, "What would be greater than that impressive encounter between Nathanael and Jesus where Jesus knew something special?" Isn't it greater that for three years Jesus proclaimed repentance and forgiveness to sinners? That is what they needed, right? Jesus went from village to town saying that the kingdom of God had come. God worked through the message so that people believed it. Not just one or two or twelve, but large crowds came to see Jesus. You will see greater things than that!

Jesus took Philip and Nathanael to a wedding. Cana was Nathanael's hometown. You know the account of Jesus' first miracle. The refreshments were running out, and Jesus turned water into wine. He showed his divine glory. Jesus is God! Like the other miracles the disciples would see (healing disease, driving out demons, calming storms, feeding thousands) the exercise of God's power led the disciples to put their confidence in him.

Those great things pale in comparison to the culmination of Jesus' ministry. What is greater than that "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us"? Jesus bore in his body on the tree the sins of the whole world. He was despised and beaten and crucified because you sinned, because I sinned. He died cursed by God and forsaken by him to pay the debt the world owed. God accomplished what we needed most. Jesus' final cry rings out the greatest message ever: "It is finished!"

Now, I would guess that when you think of great things, you don't usually go to the category of shame and suffering and pain and sadness. Great things are glorious and happy and we want to revel in the luxury of them, right? God would have us see greater things hidden in the trials and crosses of the Christian faith. God is faithful to his promises, even when we are hard pressed. God's strength is not weakened by our struggles, but he is shown to be stronger by them. When I am weakest, then my Savior is

greatest. You see, when we realize how great is our spiritual need, God delivers greater things. He forgives our sin!

Do you want to talk about the greater things Nathanael saw and that God reveals to us? How about resurrection from the dead! Jesus defeated death and exited the tomb on the Third Day. He proclaimed victory over Satan and assures us that nothing can separate us from his love. Nathanael was there to see Jesus living again after he had died. On the beach in Galilee Jesus prepared breakfast for his disciples. He assured them that he would be with them and that his word would work with power.

It was only a matter of weeks before the Holy Spirit demonstrated the gospel's power in a greater way. At Pentecost the disciples spoke in languages they had not learned and thousands of people were baptized. We think of that day as the birthday of the Christian Church. The Spirit is still working through the gospel today, even right now among us. All the world has heard the message of a Savior from sin. You will see greater things!

The Holy Spirit came to you in Baptism, washing you clean of all sin and putting faith in your heart. The Savior comes to you in the Supper, to assure you that you have peace with God. God's salvation is revealed clearly and it is proclaimed openly to you week after week at church and every day in your home. You have peace with God and the forgiveness of sins. Hasn't the Lord done greater things for you? St. Paul said: "Stand firm and hold on to the teachings that were passed along to you."

Greater things are still to come. Heaven is yours. No more sorrow or tears or tiredness or fears. No more sins or guilt or wondering what will happen next. Mansions are prepared for you in the presence of the Lord!

Jesus summarized all these greater things when he said to Nathanael in our lesson. "Amen, Amen, I tell you: You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." The Son of Man is the focus of every greater thing. God has opened heaven to us through him. All the angels serve so that Jesus is made known. These are the greater things God reveals!

If we want to experience great things on our weekends, then, like Philip and Nathanael, we search our Bible. Nothing is greater than to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We gather together for worship and Bible Class at church, and we gather our families for devotions at home to see God's greater things! They aren't just wants, but we need the forgiveness of God and his peace. We have the greatest thing, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Now we get to say to our friends, like Philip did to Nathanael: We have found the One! Come and see! SDG Amen.