

# The Stairway to Heaven – *John 1:35-51*

**Introduction** – The Word of God, through Whom all things were made (v3), is alone the One who has the power to make a pathway between heaven and earth. Pointing to that Way, the Lord Jesus, is the goal of John’s ministry. He shows Jesus to be the One that all his followers should follow. And in this passage, we have the first interactions of Jesus with those who would follow Him. To the first He says, “*What do you seek?*” and will give an open invitation, “*Come and see.*” And to all who have ears to hear, Jesus would simply say, “*Follow Me*” for He is the New Jacob, the New Israel, the New Bethel, the true Son of Man and the true Stairway to Heaven. “*Come and See.*” But watch carefully, “*Cause you know sometimes words have two meanings*” – Robert Plant.

**The Players** – The Evangelist introduces us to several disciples in this passage.

**John the Baptist** – He did not simply make a theological declaration in v29. His intention was to send his own disciples to follow the One he had been proclaiming. Jesus is the Lamb of God, go after Him (vv36-37). John points to Christ’s strength, not ours. His goodness, not ours. His righteousness, not ours. His message is, “*you need Him – go.*” Jesus would make this clear as well (Mark 2:17). We need the Lamb of God. We are sinners and He is the sin-remover.

**Andrew** – The first disciple, according to church tradition, whenever Andrew shows up in the scriptures, he is bringing someone to Christ. That’s a pretty good reputation. Church history says he ministered in what we call Eastern Europe and up into Russia and later Greece, where he was martyred.

**The Other Disciple** (v35, 40) – Whoever was with Andrew remains unnamed here. It may have been John (the Evangelist) who seems to avoid naming himself throughout the gospel (13:23, 18:15, 21:20, 24, along with his letters).

**Simon** – Andrew’s brother, Andrew goes and announces to him, “*We have found the Messiah*” (v41).

**Philip** – Jesus, having been baptized and then tempted in the wilderness, is ready to return to the region of Galilee where He was from. Philip is from another city in Galilee and is the first disciple simply commanded to “*Follow Me*” (v43).

**Nathanael** – He is from Cana (21:2), a rival city with Nazareth but both cities are in Galilee. He may be making a general statement about the region or the specific city (v46, 1 Kings 9:10-14). He also may be Bartholomew in the list of apostles found in the synoptics (a surname meaning “son of Tolmai”).

**Overview** – John points out “*the Lamb of God*” to two of his disciples who turn and follow Jesus (vv35-37). Jesus asks them “*What do you seek?*” and they end up staying and remaining with Him that day (vv37-39). Andrew brings his brother Simon to Jesus, Who gazes upon him (who will become one of his closest friends) and renames him “*The Rock*” (vv40-42). The next day, planning to return to Galilee, Jesus calls Philip who is from that area to follow Him (vv43-44). Philip goes and gets Nathanael exclaiming they have found the One the OT had promised and that He is from Nazareth (vv45-46). But Jesus finds this one from Galilee to be a true Israelite, one with no deceit (v47). Nathanael questions “*how do you know me?*” and Jesus answers by saying he saw Nathanael when he was under the fig tree (v48). John doesn’t tell us how or why, but this convinces Nathanael that Jesus is the real deal (v49) and when he says that, Jesus refers to another OT story where the heavens were opened (vv50-51).

**Names, Identities, Destinies** – All of us receive names from someone else. We are named. It used to be strange when someone unilaterally changed their name. Now we live in a day where folks think they can change their identity. But Jesus is Lord of your name and only He can change your identity. He does so with Simon (v42). Jesus says he shall be called Cephas. Later, recorded in Matthew 16, Jesus says, “*you are Peter*” (16:18). This is not only a name change and Peter is not given a say in the matter; He is determining Peter’s destiny. In the gospels, Peter does not strike us as rock-like. But after the Holy Spirit falls, he becomes what he has been named.

Jesus “*found Philip*” which implies He was looking for Him and Philip is identified as a follower of Jesus. Jesus chose Philip. Not that we do not have to choose Jesus, but Someone else is truly in charge of our destinies (John 15:16, 6:37, 44). He is Lord of our destiny, our identity, our name. In fact, we all are given a very personal name by Jesus, intimately connecting each one of us to Him. “*To him who overcomes (and remember, the power that overcomes is faith – 1 John 5:4) I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it*” (Rev 2:17). As we see and follow Jesus, we begin to become who we were always going to be.

To be a Christian is to follow Jesus. There is no Christianity apart from a personal relationship with Jesus in which we become His disciples, His followers. But this is the good work that He begins in you, not that you begin in yourself. And He who has begun that good work (think destiny) will complete it (Phil 1:6). Let me jump back as well to v39 where it says that the disciples “remained” with Jesus. The word, *meno*, is also translated “abide” and is used all through John’s gospel – “Abide in me and I will abide in you” (15:4). “Abide in my love” (15:9). To follow Jesus is to abide in Him and He in you.

And notice the names/identity of Jesus brought forth in these verses. He is the Lamb of God. He is Rabbi. He is the Messiah/Christ. He is the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. He is Jesus of Nazareth. He is the son of Joseph. He is the Son of God. He is the King of Israel. And finally, He is the Son of Man.

**The Stairway to Heaven** - Jesus knew Nathanael before Nathanael knew Jesus. When Jesus reveals this, both inwardly (a man of no deceit) and outwardly (under a fig tree). Both sayings are cryptic and probably mean much more than on the face of it. Fig trees represent Israel and fig trees had become a place of prayer and meditation (*ancient extra-biblical teachings*). Nathanael is a man in whom there is no deceit (*dolos*); he is a new Jacob who did act in deceit (Gen 27:35). Later, Jacob had a dream where he saw the heavens opened and a stairway to heaven with angels ascending and descending (Gen 28:10ff). In that dream, the LORD gives Jacob great promises (vv13-15) and Jacob names the place “Bethel” (God’s house) because the LORD was in that place.

Jesus instructs Nathanael (actually, all His disciples, for the “you” in v51 is in the plural “y’all”) that He is that place. Jesus is that stairway, that ladder, that Way to heaven. He is God’s house, the place where God dwells, God in the flesh. He is the new Israel (Jacob was re-named by God, Israel).

**The Son of Man** – Nathanael had declared that Jesus was the “Son of God...the King of Israel!” Jesus calls Himself the “Son of Man.” This is not a downgrade. Jesus, the Son of God, came to take the office of the Son of Man that Daniel prophesied (Dan 7:13-14). And so all the promises given to Jacob are the New Jacob’s (Gen 28:13-15) and the Son of Man now rules over all the world (Dan 7:13-14). Jesus is on the throne now. He is subduing the nations now. He is the Savior of the world now. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world now. This world is becoming everything the Lord of this world intends for it to become. In these chaotic times, this must be preached and remembered.

And Jesus knows you now. He knows you and, if you abide in Him (by faith), He will give you a new name, finishing the work of the new identity and destiny that He always has intended for you and that everything He is doing in your life is working towards. In Christ, we are becoming who we are destined to be and His destiny is more glorious than anything we could ever ask or imagine (Eph 3:20-21). Jesus would ask you, “*what do you seek?*” Do you want to dabble in religion, or do you want to follow Him?