



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 1:43-51

“Angels Ascending and Descending”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] This morning we are turning to the last of the paragraphs in the 1st chapter in the Gospel of John, and our subject is the “Angels Ascending and Descending.” And we will be reading for our Scripture reading verse 43 through verse 51. John chapter 1, remember after the prologue the apostle gave the testimony of John the Baptist and now he is dealing with the gathering of the early disciples and apostles of the Lord Jesus and in this account we shall read of Philip and Nathanael and our Lord’s encounter with them. Verse 43 continues the story, this is the fourth of the days of testimony that John the Apostle is setting forth.

“The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, How knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King

of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou?”

Now those words, “Believest thou?” may be taken as a declarative statement rather than as a question, and I’m inclined to think that that is preferable. Although this is possible as well, and if it is the preferable rendering, then we should translate it this way, “Because I said unto thee, I saw Thee under the tree, thou believest. Thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you.” I’d like to stop just a moment. Some of you have the Authorized Version. You’ll notice that in the preceding statement he said, “Because I said unto Thee,” and now he says, “Verily, verily I say unto you.” That was the way the Authorized Version translators distinguished between the singular and the plural, and in verse 50 the statement is a direct address to a singular person, “Because I said unto Thee,” that’s singular in the Greek text. But now in verse 51 he says, “Verily, verily I say unto you,” that’s plural. Here after ye, plural, so what he is saying is now sent out to a wider audience than Nathanael alone. Let’s read it with that understanding. “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.”

Last night I was trying to find a stanza of the hymn “Beneath the Cross of Jesus,” and, not knowing it was the hymn to be sung today, but I had made a notation in my notes to see the second stanza of the hymn “Beneath the Cross of Jesus.” Well I don’t have every book in my library where I am now and so I went to two hymnals that I possess and looked up “Beneath the Cross of Jesus” and they had the three stanzas that we are going to sing in just a moment. But I knew that I had seen another stanza of this hymn that had a slightly different wording that fitted in very well with what we are going to be talking about this morning, and I knew I had seen it here in Believers Chapel. So when I got here this morning I looked at our own red hymnal and it was not there. And being of having a brilliant mind [Laughter] I thought well it must be in that other hymnal, and of course that’s where it is. Right in the middle of singing a hymn this morning, Mark, I walked down off the

platform. The audience probably thought I was sick and got one of these hymnals, and this is the second stanza which you won't be able to sing in a moment. “Oh, safe and happy shelter! Oh, refuge tried and sweet! Oh, trysting place where heaven's love And heaven's justice meet. As to the pilgrim patriarch,” that's Jacob, “As to the pilgrim patriarch That wondrous dream was given, So seems my Savior's cross to me A ladder up to heaven.” And the stanza of is built on this passage that we have just read here and is important for the exposition that follows.

Well, may the Lord bless this reading of his word and the antidote as well.

[prayer removed from audio]

[Message] The subject for today in the continuation of the exposition of the Gospel of John is the “Angels Ascending and Descending.” Two men in this paragraph, Philip and Nathanael identify themselves with the call of God, the call of the nature of God. When we speak of the call of this or the call of that we are referring to the nature of the one who calls. We speak, for example, of the call of the sea, and by that we mean that there is something within us that answers to the nature of the sea. The individual who grows up by the side of the Atlantic Ocean or the Pacific Ocean knows exactly what we're talking about when we speak of the call of the ocean. There is something in the ocean to which you respond. That's the call of the ocean. The call of the mountains, there are individuals who love mountains. There is something about the essential nature of a mountain that answers to their essential nature, the call of the mountains. The call of the great ice barriers or the call of football, there are some who when Saturday comes around they experience the call of football. There is something about it that they respond to. So, there they are sitting in front of the television or out at the field cheering on their favorite team. After Alabama lost the other day, I've given up football for twenty-four hours. [Laughter] But the next season will be here, I hope, before too long.

Isn't it interesting how people are? The elders of this church, you would think that they would be compassionate and friendly and nice and uphold an individual when he was in bereavement

[Laughter], but the game had hardly finished until my telephone rang and it was one of the elders asking me if I had seen the game. [Laughter] Being a graduate of the University of Texas he had no idea of course that I had perhaps seen the game. I said of course, “What game?” [Laughter] I said I left my hand in the family room on the TV and I'm back in my study right at the present time, but comfort, no comfort what so ever. Reminded me of the way in which they outsmarted Alabama. I agreed with them. They did, and that's the kind of comfort you get from the elders of the church at Believers Chapel. The call of football, it's too bad really that I have that nature that answers to football.

Well the call of God is similar. It is the call that expresses the fact that there is something about the Lord God to which we in our own essential being respond. The Lord Jesus puts it in slightly different words in chapter 8 when he says in the 47th verse, “He that is of God hears God's words. Ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God. He that is of God hears God's voice.” So there is an essential identity between the individual who is of God and the words of God. Later the Lord Jesus says in the 10th chapter, “But ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.” So there is something about the call of God which answers to the individual's own basic nature. Now that is something that God gives a person. He gives a person that kind of nature which responds to the word of God. It's a gift of grace. Naturally no one of us has that. It is something that is given by him.

Now in this passage, we have two men, Philip and Nathanael who answer the call of God. They have been prepared by the Holy Spirit of God. They are ready for contact with him. And we have therefore a very beautiful picture of the seeking Savior and the call of God in this paragraph. The time connection is given in the opening phrase, “The day following.” These are the opening days of testimony which John the Apostle records in the beginning of his gospel. They answer in one sense to the final days before the cross near the end of this gospel when the events of the last days of our Lord's life are so fully described for us. The first person who answers the call of God is Philip. And we read, “The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip.”

Evidently all of this took place in the vicinity of Bethany beyond the Jordan where John had been baptizing, and Philip must have been somewhere near and as the Lord Jesus made his plans to leave Judea and go north to Galilee he found Philip.

Now Philip is a very unimpressive individual. He appears in the 6th chapter in the incident of the feeding of the five thousand. He also appears in the 12th chapter when the Greeks come seeking the Lord Jesus. He appears in the 14th chapter as one of the apostles, and he asks the Lord, “Show us the Father,” and the Lord replies, “Philip have I been so long time with you and yet hast Thou not known me? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, and how sayest Thou then show us the Father.” He’s a very unimpressive person, but there is one thing significant about Philip. He was a student of the word of God. The Scots like to speak of a person like this as a person who was slow in the uptake, but in spite of the fact that Philip was just an ordinary individual, he was a student of the Bible. When he finds Nathanael he said unto him, “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

So, Nathanael was a student of the Bible. He had studied Moses. He knew the Law of Moses and what it taught concerning the coming redeemer. He knew what the prophets said about the coming redeemer. He was actually looking for a coming redeemer. There are some individuals who like to tell us that the Old Testament saints did not have a concept of a personal redeemer, but that is not true. There were men who did and in fact the Lord Jesus said, “Oh fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written. Ought not the Messiah to have suffered these things and to have entered into his glory?” So he considered it a sinful thing not to be responsive to the things that the Scriptures spoke. Of course they didn't have the detail knowledge of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the events of his life from the Old Testament but they were looking. “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, and Philip was student enough of the Scriptures to know that. An unimpressive man, just an ordinary man, but a student of the Bible, and that of course is good.

We read here that Jesus, “Found Philip.” There are two kinds of ways of finding things. We may stumble over them. Last night I was looking for that stanza of that hymn, and this morning in effect, I just kind of stumbled upon it thinking well perhaps it’s in that other hymn book, or perhaps you got a few Christmas presents and as you unwrap those presents you took the little label that told you from whom the present came and you put it with the gift that you received but somehow or another it got misplaced, and you were looking around and you had this gift before you and you just could not remember from whom that gift came. Now it’s possible to stumble across it. Maybe a week or two later, you still don’t know whom to thank for that gift and cleaning out things you happen to come across that little notation about who the gift came from. Well that’s one way to find something to stumble over it. And then the other way is to seek it and find it. Well that’s the sense of “He found Philip.” It was not that he stumbled over Philip. He found Philip. And in finding Philip we have an expression of the sovereign prevalent grace of God. It was the Lord Jesus Christ following the directions of the Holy Spirit and finding Philip who would become one of the apostles. It was a magnificent meeting for Philip of course and he heard the Lord Jesus give him a very simple command. “Follow me.”

Now notice he says, “Follow me.” He does not say, “Follow the theology that you have been reading about in the Old Testament Scriptures,” although he could have said that. There are some people who like to say, “He said, ‘Follow me,’ not follow those things that you read about in the Old Testament.” Nothing could be more foolish than that. We cannot follow him if we do not know who he is and what he has done. Who he is and what he has done explained by propositions enables us to identify the person that we are to follow, the understand him. So when we read, “Follow me,” we’re not to think that this means simply forget all that you’ve read in the study of the Bible, all of your theology and just follow me. That’s foolish, foolish. But there are just people who do that constantly, and there are people who sit in the audiences like you and you let people get by saying things like that, just stupidity theologically. “Follow me.” It’s perfectly proper to say, “Follow me,” a person, not a proposition, but we do follow a person as he has set forth in the propositions.

The Bible as I've often said is just simply a collection of spiritual propositions from Genesis 1:1 on through Revelation chapter 22 and verse 21. That's all it is, a collection of statements about spiritual things.

Now Philip, “Follow me,” but follow me as you have been finding me in the word of God. And “Follow me” as you discover more about me from following me. “Follow me,” that is as I am revealed in Scripture. When a person says, “I don't follow the doctrines. I follow the Lord personally,” I always like to say to them, “Who is the Lord?” And immediately they begin to describe to me this person, and proposition after proposition flows from their mouth, but they have realized that they're now speaking about following him as he is revealed in propositions. Oh I hate to have to labor this, but every time I do this, it won't be another week, another week will not go by before I hear someone say, “Now God's not interested in theology. He's interested in personal things.” And the audience sits and says, “Wasn't that good? Wasn't that great?” And I want to stand up and say, “Wait a minute. That's heretical.” So I have to keep laboring the point, until finally when they lay me in the grave, you'll say, “He's the person who used to say, [Laughter] that to 'Follow me' without the propositions is wrong.” You'll remember me that way.

Now the Lord said, “Follow me.” I imagine that what he meant by that was life in its entirety. There is not explanation given to Philip. It's “Follow me.” Now of course Philip already had some concept of what following him meant because he has identified him as “The one of whom Moses and the one of whom the prophets wrote.” So, “Follow me,” it was a call for unconditional devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. I gather that Philip was already a believer, but now he is attached to the Lord as an apostle and as a disciple. The call of God is always an embarrassing thing because it presents us with sealed orders. We like to say, “Why? Where are you going? Why should I follow you?” We're like little children. Little children when you ask them to do something, they will say, “Why?” And you will say, “So and so and so and so, that's the reason.” “Why?” “Well, so and so and so and so.” “Why?” “So and so and so and so.” “Why?” Now you ought to encourage that because they're on the way to becoming theologians. [Laughter] Don't stop them. But there comes

a time when you just have to say, “Just go ahead and do it because I said it.” And grumpily then, they go ahead and do it, but they’ve learned a little bit of a lesson even there.

Now the Lord does not give any reasons. He does not give any explanations. He just says simply, “Follow me.” And so Philip is presented with sealed orders. He does not really know what’s involved in that. He’s like Abraham. Abraham when he was called went out to go to a land that he didn't know anything about. God didn't explain to him. He didn't give him a map of the land. He didn't tell him the kind of temperature that it had, the kind of topography, what he might expect there by way of people that were in the land, he just said, “Abraham you’re going to go out to a land of which you don't know and follow me.” And so, Philip is given sealed orders, but it’s a vast venture just like Abraham’s venture was so vast a venture that every believer after Abraham is a child of Abraham. So, Philip here is called upon by the Lord Jesus to follow him. It is a vast venture to follow the Lord Jesus and most exciting. A young person has no more exciting opportunity than to follow the Lord Jesus Christ not knowing where he may lead you particularly, what usefulness you may have in your life, but you can be sure it will be good and great and exciting. And Philip would certainly say if he were here, “Amen to that.” It was exciting.

Now what does a man do when he comes into contact with the Lord Jesus Christ, a vital contact. Well one of the first things the most of us do is to find someone else to tell them of the blessings that have come to us. And so we read of the finding of Nathanael in the next section. In the first section the Lord Jesus appears as a shepherd, here as a sovereign King. Godet says, “One lighted torch serves to light another.” “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.”

Now Nathanael is a different kind of person. He is a person who is evidently a very frank kind of person. There is no guile. There is no descent in Nathanael’s make up. That does not mean as we shall see in a moment that there was nothing wrong with Nathanael. It just simply means that he was one of those direct kinds of people, like the elder who called me yesterday right after the game, very frank; just spoke and said, “What did you think of that game?” Well Nathanael

immediately when Philip says to him, “We’ve found the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph,” he said, “Why can anything good come out of Fort Worth?” [Laughter] Well, now Nathanael was from Cana of Galilee, whereas of course Nazareth was also in Galilee. So Nazareth and Cana both in the same tribal territory, they naturally had a bit of rivalry. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Well, Philip is a good apologete. He says, “Come and see.” That’s really the best way to propagate Christianity is to simply proclaim it. This is the simplest and profoundest system of apologetics that one may have. “Come and see.” And in fact in the proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ there is the simplest expansion of Christianity taking place.

I know that some of you have often wondered how it is that Billy Graham finds the blessing of the Holy Spirit in his preaching because, as Billy, himself, admits, and as many I’m sure would say, he’s not the greatest preacher in the world. His messages are relatively ordinary messages. They are not filled with very carefully reasoned doctrinal teaching. The doctrinal teaching is relatively simple. Mr. Graham is a man of great integrity, of skill, and he is a great evangelist, but if you will listen to him carefully what he does is proclaim Christianity. He doesn't reason Christianity. He’s not qualified to do that. He does not really have theological education. He never went to theological seminary. He went to a Christian school. He had a fine Christian father and mother. I knew them personally, a very fine man, an elder in an independent Presbyterian church in Charlotte, North Carolina. One thing that Billy does that is outstanding is he proclaims the truth. That’s the best system of apologetics and that is in my opinion one of the reasons that God has blessed this man of God. A man of integrity, a man who boldly proclaims the gospel message, and he relies upon the truth. He preaches very simply, but the gospel comes forth and there is no apology for the gospel.

I always think of a learned discourse that was once preached by a bishop in a large congregation in which he sought to prove the existence of God at the end of which a very simple old woman who had not followed his reasoning out very intelligently thinking that he had really spoken about something else said at the end, “Well for all he says, I can't help thinking there is a God after

all.” [Laughter] Well, Philip said to Nathanael, “Come and see.” That’s what we do. That’s what Billy does. He simply proclaims the word and says in effect, “Come and see.”

Well, now in Nathanael is on his way to see the Lord Jesus, Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him. That incidentally tells you that he was not under the fig tree at the time. When he saw him coming to him, he said, “Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile.” Now what can we say about Nathanael? Well he probably was a disciple of John the Baptist. He was acquainted with all of these. They were very closely connected with one another. He probably was a believer because he was sitting under the tree and in a moment we will try to show that he was probably meditating on the word of God there, and he understood some of the things that are found in Holy Scripture already.

Furthermore he was meditating on Genesis chapter 28 and Jacob’s unusual dream that he had there. And I think that probably like Jacob and probably that was the reason he was meditating on that passage, he was struggling to come to a deeper knowledge of the Lord God. In those days men had time to sit and think about spiritual things and these men were doing that. And so here is Nathanael, a believer, a disciple of John the Baptist meditating on the Scriptures, meditating specifically on the life of Jacob, and Philip interrupts him and says, “We’ve found him.” And Nathanael now is on his way to meet Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, and he hears this man say to him as he approaches him, “Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile.”

Now if you’ll remember Genesis 28, which records the vision of the ladder which obviously it seems to me Nathanael had been reading, immediately preceding in Genesis chapter 27 reference is made to the fact that Jacob was a man of deceit and had so deceived Esau that his life was in danger, and Rebecca and Isaac had sent him off to Uncle Laban to get away for him and to get away from Esau. So he had been fleeing from Esau and had fled one full day or so and had this vision.

Now Jacob was a man who was known for his crookedness. In fact some have thought even that that’s what his name means. So when the Lord Jesus saw Nathanael coming, he said, “Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is (no Jacob) no guile.” Now of course he does not say

that he was sinless. He said he was guileless, very frank and open. Now Nathanael recognized that this was something that was true of him. He said, “How knowest Thou me?” How have you become acquainted with me? He uses the Greek expression for knowledge which suggests acquaintance. How have you come to know me? And there was brought to his inner inmost being a conviction that the Lord had insight into the unclenching of his soul before God, guileless. Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.” Not only do I know about you Nathanael, I know where you were.

Now he knew that nobody else was around him because at that moment he knew that this person was no ordinary person, and so he replies in verse 49, “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God.” That’s why John wrote his gospel that men might come to know him as the Son of God, the Messiah and that they might believe in his name. So he said, “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.” And so the Israelite indeed has acknowledged his King of Israel and Christ has captured the soul of Nathanael. How? Well there was a message that came from Philip. There was an invitation, “Come and see,” and there was the response of personal contact. The faith of Nathanael will never possess anymore than it possesses now. Although it will possess the knowledge of him much better as time goes on. After this if you ask Nathanael, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” He would say, “The only good thing came from Nazareth, the Lord Jesus Christ,” such is the difference that the Lord Jesus makes.

Now the final words of this chapter are most exciting words to me. Jesus answered and said unto him, “Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, you believe? You shall see greater things than these.” That’s a great promise, and Nathanael would be the first to admit that he saw greater things than these. Incidentally the term Israelite, some have thought the term Israel comes from three Hebrew words, “ish,” “raeh” “el” “ish raeh el.” And that really means something like a man who sees God. So here is an Israelite indeed. He’s studying Genesis chapter 28 and he’s studying about Jacob, and Jacob is the one who saw the ladder on which the angels ascended and descended.”

Now he goes on to add to this, “Verily, verily, I say unto you,” and now the word of our Lord broadens out to include a wider company, inclusive of all it would appear, “I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” What is referred to here? Angelic visitations in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, “You shall see greater things,” “You shall see heaven open,” “Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” Does he refer to that incidentally in the Gethsemane account where the angels came and ministered to him? Does he refer to the ascension when the angels addressed the disciples afterwards? Does he refer to other events in our Lord’s life? Does he refer to the continual intercourse that the Lord had with the Father, being the revealer of the Father? Does he refer to that? Or does he perhaps refer incidentally in this gospel to the signs that John has collected which reveal the Lord Jesus as the one true mediator between God and men, such as, “I’m the bread of life;” “I’m the light of the world;” “I am the door;” “I am the resurrection and the life;” “I am the way, the truth, and the life;” “I am the true vine.” All of those miracles associated with those great statements may be included, “You shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

But now notice something that has happened here and in order to do this I’m just going to briefly remind you of Genesis 28. Now in Genesis 28 Jacob has been sent out by mama who is so concerned that Esau might do damage to Jacob. And so Jacob is sent off to acquire a wife, but he’s also sent off in order to escape Esau. He was afraid of Esau. Esau said I he got hold of him he was going to kill him. And so he fled with dispatch and he got out and was fifty or sixty or eighty miles away from his home and night had come and gods in those days weren’t like our concept of God today. We have great concepts of God because of the spread of Christianity. But in those days they had local deities. There was the god of Fort Worth. There was the god of Dallas. There was the god of Houston, and there was the god of Austin, and there was the god of Waxahachie.” He was not a big God, [Laughter] but...

In other words, they had gods of all of these territories. All the Baal's were associated with some particular place. Now this was a question in Jacob's mind, you see? Here I am now away from home where God, my God, Yahweh gave the promises to Abraham and to Isaac and does the power of my God prevail when we get this far away from home because those gods had local territories, and so here he is. He's fleeing and no doubt he was troubled and disturbed and wondering what the future held. The future held some interesting things. He's going to find old Laban's is going to Gentile him out of seven years or fourteen years of work in order to get those ladies.

But nevertheless here he is, so he collects some rocks. He puts them on the ground. He puts his head down and no doubt he's wondering about the situation and when he does he has a dream. And in this dream that he has, he sees a ladder, and this ladder is one set up on the earth. Its top reaches to heaven, and the angels of God are ascending and descending on it. And then the Lord stood by the side of that ladder. Now the Authorized Version text says “above it,” but it's likely the Hebrew means “by the side of it,” for later Jacob will say, “Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not.” Now listen to the things that God tells him. God says to him,

“I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (He reiterates the promises made to his grandfather and to his father.) “And, behold, I am with Thee.”

No matter how far away you get from home, I am no local tribal deity, Jacob. I am Yahweh. “I am the Lord thy God. I will keep thee in all places to which thou goest and I will bring thee again into this land for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” In other words, he is a God who perseveres and who accomplishes all his intentions. As we say in the New Testament, “The same God who has brought us to the knowledge of Jesus Christ will confirm

us unto the day of Christ. If he has begun a good work in us, he will finish it.” And so here, “I am going to be with you Jacob until I have done what I have told Thee about.” And Jacob awakened out of his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not.” How awesome is this place and this is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.

Now I submit to you that the meaning of this essentially is that there is communication between heaven and earth, the latter suggesting that, that there is communication between the Lord God, Yahweh in heaven, and Jacob his servant on the earth, and he may expect that no matter where he goes there is communion between the true God and his great patriarch Jacob. That was the message to Jacob. It was intended to comfort him, encourage him, to give him strength for what he was doing. But now when the Lord Jesus refers to this and I think that that is precisely the passage that Nathanael was meditating upon under the fig tree. The fig tree, incidentally, was known in Jewish rabbinic literature as a proper place for meditation. That’s why I planted a fig tree last spring. It’s this high right now. It’s not so big at the moment and I can hardly get under it, but you’re going to be amazed at the spiritual revelation that will come from me when that thing grows high enough for me to sit under it and get some spiritual meditation, spiritual truth.

Well anyway, Nathanael is under the tree and he’s reading this particular passage. I’m sure he’s reading this passage because the Lord said, “I saw you under that fig tree and he couches his words in language taken from Genesis 28, but notice the thing that he does that is different. He says, “Verily I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending (not upon the ladder but) upon the Son of Man.” So he has substituted for ladder, which is the place of contact between earth and heaven, the means of contact, the mediating thing. He as substituted the Son of Man, for he is the mediator between earth and heaven.

Now he claims then to be the ladder. This is really one of the great concepts of the Gospel of John. He is the one mediator between God and men. He is the one revealer of truth. “No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.” He’s the contact that we have with heaven. He’s the ladder. And so in effect he’s

saying I am the revelation of divine things. Jacob’s ladder has become Nathanael’s Son of Man. And the movement of the angels is the certification of contact between the earthly and the heavenly. And if we wanted to be somewhat symbolic in exposition we could talk about the rungs of the ladder, for the rungs of the ladder are just simply the exposition of what the Son of Man came to do. Rung number one, incarnation, rung number two, the temptation and its significance, rung number three, etcetera, transfiguration, death, burial, resurrection, this is God’s mediator between heaven and earth, and it’s the way by which we come to know the truth, the Lord Jesus Christ as the revealer of God. So, Nathanael you shall see and the others with you, “The angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Finally it is the cross by which we have life.

Now let me conclude for our time is up by just commenting upon the fact that there are three titles given to our Lord in this section. One is a title suggesting deity, Son of God. One is a title that includes his humanity, Son of Man. One is a title that represents his royalty, King of Israel. And isn't it interesting that Christ desires the unimpressive. Philip is an unimpressive man, but the Lord Jesus captures his soul and he will enroll him in the city of God. On that great city are the names in the foundation of the twelve apostles and there is the name of Philip. So from this we learn that Jesus Christ measures us when we are under the fig tree. I would imagine that probably the last thing that Nathanael had in his mind was that the Messiah of whom he was speaking might be looking at him at that very moment, but he was. No matter where we are, we are being measured by the ladder, the Son of Man, the King of Israel. Oh the terror of being measured by the Lord God at those times when we least expect it, but oh the wonder of it, and oh the comfort of it as it meant to Jacob and it ultimate meant to Nathanael to know that a sovereign God had us in his eyes.

And finally God’s blessing comes to those who are at the foot of the cross. Like Jacob at the foot of the ladder and we at the feet of the Son of Man. If you are here this morning and you’ve never believed in Christ, we invite you again, invite you very simply today, “Come and see.”

“Angels Ascending and Descending” by S. Lewis Johnson
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[Prayer] Father, we are grateful for these magnificent descriptions of encounters with the Lord Jesus with simply unimpressive men whom he made apostles of the Lamb of God. O God continue Thy work and today take of us unimpressive men and women, and...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]