

The New Creation (Days 3-5):

Filling the Earth

John 1:35-50

³⁵ **The next day** again John was standing with two of his disciples,
³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and **they followed Jesus**.

³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

³⁹ He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was **Andrew**, Simon Peter's brother.

⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).

⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are **Simon** the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

⁴³ **The next day** Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found **Philip** and said to him, "Follow me."

⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

⁴⁵ Philip found **Nathanael** and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

- ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"
- ⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these."
- ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

The People In God's Kingdom

What kind of people does God bring into his kingdom? What kind of people does he call to himself? What kind of people are you? Deep down I think you know the answer, especially if you know your Bible or have been in church for any length of time. Yet, I think we often forget. The temptation when we look at ourselves is towards delusion. That is, we often forget the sinfulness within. We minimize it. We side step it. We ignore it. We also put on a façade towards others. When Christians come around, the masks go up, which only contributes towards how other people view us. We have no one to blame but ourselves.

Thus, the temptation when we look around us towards other Christians, especially when we do not know them well, is the same. We idealize them. We make them better than they are in our minds. We especially do this with the

leaders of the church, puffing them up in our minds to be these perfect people that are morally superior to us.

For those who believe in [freewill](#) as the power that saves, I suppose this is natural. After all, it would make sense that those who are morally superior would be those who want to follow Christ. Too bad for those who aren't, huh? If the above scenario is true to any degree, then perhaps you can spot the irony. On one hand, we puff up our leaders, thus viewing ourselves in a slime hole of sin. And yet, we often forget about our own sin, thus puffing ourselves up as well. Freewill (as most people understand it) is a light that can make us blind to sin, be it in ourselves or in others. It has to be this way if we are really to suppose that people's choice of following Christ comes by their own power. Those not basically good would simply not choose to follow Christ.

Yet, Reformed people are not immune to these things either. We have a theology that should prevent such blindness to our sin and the sin of others. We say we believe in total depravity after all, not just in ourselves, but in everyone. We of all people should recognize who it is that God calls and uses people in his kingdom. Yet, because we too have the same sinful condition as our brothers who

disagree with us, this sin causes us to become blind as well. And we fall prey to the same kinds of false views of others and ourselves as anyone else. Such is **the deceit of sin** to distort the truth and mislead us.

New Creation Framework Cont: Filling Heaven and Earth

Today we are continuing a kind of mini-series in the last half of the first chapter of John's gospel. This series is woven together by a theme that John has intentionally chosen. This theme shows us in a theological way what the first week of Jesus' public ministry is all about. The theme is of **a new creation**. Jesus' public ministry brings about—in a way different from all earlier shadows—something that really is brand new. It is the inauguration of his eternal kingdom, a brand new creation, a creation that will never decay, never fall apart, never be ruined.

This creation begins with **a seven day week**. We have looked at the first two days of this new creation week, the week that starts Jesus' public ministry. Now we are in the middle of the week (approx. days 3-6). This framework is patterned after Genesis 1 and Moses' framework of creation.

Think of creation in terms of a stage upon which a great drama will be played out. David Wilcox is a contemporary folk singer who has a song called *Show The Way*. He sings, “If someone wrote a play | just to glorify what’s stronger than hate | would they not arrange the stage | to look as if the hero came too late?” How did God arrange the stage? What did it look like? What furnishings were put on it?

Early in the week, God separates heaven and earth. He separates land and water. He makes a garden grow out of the wilderness. The stage is lovely. The setting is marvelous. We’ve seen these similarities in the new creation week with original creation. John has told us about the Spirit hovering, the waters and baptism (*mikveh*), and a movement in the ministry from a wilderness to a non-wilderness as Jesus travels back to civilization after his baptism and so on. Thus, we’ve seen how the stage has been set in John’s gospel for the movie which is to follow.

Later in the creation week, God fills the stage with actors. He fills the heavens with lights. He fills the sky with birds. He fills the water with fish. He fills the land with animals and creeping things. These are the supporting cast of the great show to come. Each of these was given a role in the story. The lights were given as signs for seasons.

They were created to “rule” the day and the night. The **birds** and **fish** were created according to their kinds, as distinct creatures. They were told, “**Be fruitful and multiply and fill**” the sky and waters. The same charge was given to the living **creatures** on the earth.

The climax of this physical creation was **mankind**. God made Adam and Eve in his own image. They were charged with being fruitful, but they alone of all the physical creatures were to “**have dominion**” over all that lives in the sky and in the sea and on the land. This would be their part in the story.

Filling the New Creation with Followers of Christ

Jesus, too, wanted actors to carry out a similar kind of task in his new kingdom in the new creation. The section of **John 1:35-51** is about the calling of the disciples. It is about Jesus filling his new creation with followers of Christ, so that they might perform the job and fill the role planned for them, in a way similar to Adam. We will not look at their tasks today, but simply at who they were.

Who were these men? Who were these disciples? What kind of people does God bring into his kingdom? What

kind of people does he call to himself? Have you idealized these people to the point where they all have halos over their heads and wings on their backs? Maybe you have, and maybe you haven't. As we go through the calling of the disciples mentioned by John, I am going to challenge you with how you have read this passage, especially when we come to last character, Nathanael.

Before we get to him, we want to look at the first disciples called. It starts off, “The next day” [this puts us into day 3], John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’” (vv. 35-36). John made this same pronouncement the day before, when we saw the account of Jesus’ baptism. It is a reference to Christ’s sacrificial death that will appease the wrath of God. Those who hear this message and accept it, by definition, know themselves to *not* be perfect people who should be idolized by others. But why have they come to this knowledge? How did they come to it?

Do not move too quickly over what occurs next. “The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus” (vs. 37). They heard the gospel and followed. What has always struck me about the calling of the disciples is how

immediate it all is. It is very much like the creation, where the Word speaks, and a thing is created. It is **instantaneous**. It is like those who hear the call are hearing **a bell ringing** in their heads. It used to be when a man worked in the field, the wife would ring the bell for dinner, and he would immediately put down his work and run into the house. He was famished. He had been waiting for that chime the entire afternoon. This is the power of the call of Christ through a preacher. This leads to an important point when thinking about salvation. We want to think about what it means to be “called.”

Two Callings

Notice, Jesus is not the one speaking (yet). Rather, it is John the Baptist. **John is the preacher**. He is the “**voice crying in the wilderness**.” God uses the preacher as the primary means of saving sinners. The preacher sends forth **a general call**, a call that goes out to everyone present, be they elect or not. It is a call offering the gospel sincerely to everyone. Our Confession speaks of all people as being “**called by the ministry of the Word**” and that God gives to all people “**some common operations of the Spirit**,” such as

conviction of sin, a conscience that accuses them, and the intelligence to understand what is being spoken (LBC 10.4).

Of this call the **Canons of Dort** say, “All who are called through the gospel are called seriously. For seriously and most genuinely God makes known in his Word what is pleasing to him: that those who are called should come to him. Seriously he also promises rest for their souls and eternal life to all who come to him and believe” (SD Points 3-4, Article 8). It adds that “many who are called through the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not brought to conversion” but this “must not be blamed on the gospel, nor on Christ, who is offered through the gospel, nor on God, who calls them through the gospel and even bestows various gifts on them, but on the people themselves who are called” (Article 9). This is what the Reformed have always believed and spoken about very strongly. When you hear the gospel, you are to respond immediately, and the only one to blame if you don’t is yourself.

Yet, there is another call that goes forth in the gospel. This is an **effectual call** that is heard by those God wants to hear it. This call creates life where there is no life, just as Christ did when he called the creatures into existence in Genesis 1. But this call presupposes a kind of deadness in

people that are physically alive. Therefore, it presupposes a very sinful condition. Effectual calling is not needed if people are basically good. It is needed if people are desperately wicked and would never heed the call on their own. This is where my questions at the beginning start to come into play. **Just what kind of people are those that choose to follow Christ?** Notice, I said that they choose to follow, but I did not yet say *why* they choose this. The text begins to unravel this thorny question for us by explaining in different ways more about this effectual call.

“Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, ‘What are you seeking?’” (vs. 38). Jesus does not deny that they are seeking, but notice at what point in time they are seeking. It is not before, but *after* the gospel of Jesus goes out. It is at this point that they begin to follow and seek after Christ, because you cannot seek Christ if you do not know about Christ. Faith can only come through hearing (Rom 10:17). No one knows about Christ as the Lamb of God until they hear about it. You can’t look within yourself or to the cosmos to discover that God would do this for you. You must be told, for it is an act of startling grace. God was not forced to do it.

Prior to this, these two men were disciples of John, and so they were clearly “spiritual” men. But you mustn’t equate this with **pagan spirituality** of the nations, as if all of these people could be lumped into a big vat called “seekers.” No. John had something of the good news simply by the fact that he was a prophet of Yahweh, and OT prophets knew something of the good news. These men were Israelites, who had been given the promises of Messiah to come.

So the Lord asks them what they are seeking. Now, notice the response. They ask him a question, “**Rabbi (which means teacher), where are you staying?**” This is strange. Why not just say “**We are seeking a personal relationship with God.**” Why do they answer with a question? I think it is here to show you that **they don’t really know what they are seeking!** Isn’t this the way of it! Yet, they are willing—now that they have heard that this man is the Lamb of God—to spend time following him to find out. **This is what it means to be a follower of Christ.** It is not a once-believe and then leave. It is not easy believism spouting in churches across our land today. Being a Christian means having a life-long attachment to the Teacher. It means wanting to follow him and to become his

disciple. It means wanting to learn about him, to obey him, and to serve him. This is what Christians do. This is what Christians want of their Rabbi.

Jesus then says, “Come and you will see.” He invites those who have heard the general call with a warm invitation. He does not cast them aside, but harkens them to himself. Even though they are sinful, he welcomes them! How comforting is the effectual call to those who hear it. How astonishing that the perfect man in whom there is no deceit would desire such a thing as this. He would have them come and discover all that he is. So, they spend the night with him, for it was late in the day, and this brings us to day four starting in **vs. 40**.

Andrew: Quick to Understand

One of the two who heard Jesus the previous day was a man named **Andrew**. All we learn about Andrew here is that he is Simon Peter’s brother. His name means “**manliness**.” Andrew is generally accepted as the first of Jesus’ disciples. (The other disciple, since he is not named, was probably John, because John does not like to talk about himself). Andrew seems to have quickly realized that Jesus

is the Messiah (**vs. 41**), yet he had only the most basic understanding of what they meant, as we all do. Messiah is a Hebrew word meaning “**anointed.**” Its Greek equivalent is “Christ.” **Jesus is the Christ.** Andrew’s swift understanding shows that when the gospel comes to a person, it allows them to quickly recognize the truth for what it is. This is the power of the gospel. This is the power of Christ.

Peter: A Change of Name

The main purpose of telling us about Andrew is to introduce us to **Peter**. Andrew and Peter were brothers. Peter, of course, is a major actor in the story that follows, so it is natural to introduce me to us. What we are told here is that **Jesus wants to change his name**. Jesus changes his name from Simon to Cephas, which is Aramaic for Peter. Simon means “**Hearing with acceptance.**” Peter means “**rock.**” John obviously tells us this story so that we will understand the origin of the name Peter, and so that we will see

symbolically that when Christ takes possession of us, he has the right to change our names.

The change of name reflects **a change of heart**. The call of the disciples is a call of men from darkness into light, from death into salvation. The same is true of us today. In the new creation, our names are now **Christians**. We bear the Name upon our breasts. This we do because he has called us by his powerful word. This he has done because he has seen us, hiding from God, hiding in our sin, running and scared of judgment. If anyone exemplifies remaining sin throughout the Gospels, it is Peter. So what must he and the others have been like prior to their conversion? What kind of people does Christ call to himself?

Philip: True Knowledge of the OT

The narrative moves quickly through Andrew and Peter to the fifth day (**vs. 43**). Here we read about two more disciples. The first is a man named **Philip**. **“The next day”** Jesus decided to go to Galilee. **Galilee** is a region with a great big lake in northern Israel. He appears to be traveling west, from the wilderness to a city, perhaps to **Bethsaida**, a beautiful little fishing village on the northern shores of the lake. All it says is that **“he found Philip and said to him**

‘Follow me.’” Philip was apparently an acquaintance of Andrew and Peter (vs. 44).

Again, it strikes me that Philip simply hears and follows. There is no resistance mentioned. Resistance is futile when Christ calls you. The word of Christ when sent out to save, saves. Jesus simply found Philip and told him to follow and that’s what he did. The Word of God is that powerful.

Yet, Philip too is a man with an understanding that remains incomplete throughout his life. He continues to sin. He is the main antagonist later in this gospel who can’t see Christ for what he is, and instead wants Jesus to show him the Father. This man is not the ideal perfect person, but a sinner. Yet, he also knows the Scriptures. His conversion allows him to read the Scriptures properly, with Messiah as its central focus.

We see this when Philip leaves to speak to Nathanael. He said, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (vs. 45). Philip makes the same sweeping generalization about Christ being in the entire Scripture as Jesus himself does after the resurrection on the Emmaus Road. Jesus is the “Best Actor”, the lead man in the story, not just in the NT, but throughout the Bible. He is the

perfect man, the second Adam, the climax of redemptive history, and the King of the universe. Now that he has met the man and heard the call, Philip knows that the promises are being fulfilled before his eyes.

Nathanael: A Dramatic Conversion

Yet, the story of Philip basically ends here. The rest of the chapter, and most of the play time in the passage, is spent on **Nathanael**. (Peter gets two verses. Andrew gets five, John gets two, Philip gets four, and Nathanael gets seven). Since this is the only place in the entire NT where Nathanael is mentioned,¹ we would do well to linger here. First the question should be **who is he?** He appears to be one of the twelve, but in lists of the twelve, his name is not given. However, Bartholomew is often mentioned with Philip (**Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14**), and so most scholars accept that Nathanael is Bartholomew. If this is true, then like Peter, this man gets a name change, thus reinforcing the point I made about how Christians really are new creations. The **change of name** reflects the change of identity and the change of heart.²

¹ Except for John 21:2 where he is said to be from Cana, the location of Jesus' miracle in John 2:1-8 in the very next story.

² Nathanael means "gift of God." Bartholomew means "abounding in furrows." Perhaps the change reflects the theology of a name change.

This is part of the effectual call. The promise was, “The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give” (Isa 62:2). The promise fulfilled is, “To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it” (Rev 2:17).

There are some very strange things said about Nathanael in this story. We read about Nathanael’s disparagement of Nazareth (John 1:46). We read about Jesus’ proclamation that Nathanael is a “true Israelite” “without deceit” (vs. 47). We read about a strange event happening under a fig tree (vs. 48). We read about how Christ’s words of the fig brought about a confession of faith from Nathanael (vs. 49). Then we read about how this event was seen miraculously by Christ, who says the man will see greater things than this (vs. 50-51).

Before explaining what I think is going on here, I want you to ask yourself what you think is going on here. Think about Nathanael’s words, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” What do you think of these words? Do you think them full of honesty, integrity, and hopeful searching?

Or do you think them laced with prejudice, rivalry, discrimination, and intolerance? I think most of us have been taught the later.

Now think about Jesus' words of reply, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" (vs. 47). How do you view what Jesus says here? Is it a good comment? Is Jesus telling Nathanael what a great person he is? I think this is what most of us think. I know it is what most of the commentaries say.

Now ask yourself a more basic question. Think about what these two things together. How does it fit to say that Nathanael is making a prejudiced statement against the hometown of Jesus, and yet Jesus says that this man has "no deceit?" Think further about how Nathanael responds to this, "How do you know me?" Is Nathanael—a man who thinks worse things of Nazareth than CU fans do of Nebraska—now puffing himself up by Jesus' proclamation about how great a guy he is?

And how does the fig tree fit into this story? How do you view this strange saying? Why is this fig tree even here? What was this man doing under the tree? I think most of us think it was something positive (in light of what Jesus has said). Perhaps he was reading the "Moses and the

prophets” just sitting there waiting for Messiah to come and call him so that he could follow him. What a great guy Nathanael was! Perhaps this is sort of like those old pole sitting desert fathers, who would erect a pole many feet off the desert floor, climb them, and live up there for 40 years to show everyone how pious and devout they were in their faith.

You see, none of this really makes any sense. In fact, I would argue that it actually **makes Jesus look like a fool** and does the opposite of what we think it does by showing us that Jesus doesn't really know anything at all about this man Nathanael. So here is how I read it, and the application I'll make from this really gets us back to my initial questions about how you view followers of Christ, about what kind of people Jesus wants in his kingdom, starting with the leaders of the church, including the very first leaders, the Disciples, and ending with yourself.

I think **the first statement about Nazareth** is to be read **negatively**. I think we have been taught properly about this. It is possible to read this comment as a kind of jest, perhaps sarcastically, where Nathanael doesn't really mean what he says at all, because in actuality he loves Nazareth and wants to build his dream vacation house in that town.

But that doesn't fit the facts. Nazareth was a dusty, dirty, smelly town far away from the pristine beauty of Galilee. It also does fit what God is doing in Nazareth. God chose this city to be the place where Jesus would be raised, because it was a good for nothing cow town. (Nazareth actually means "branch" and as such it predicts in its name that Christ would be from here). God chose the foolish things to shame the wise. So from outward appearances, Nathanael is right in that **we would not ordinarily think that anything good could come from here**; and so he is not jesting. There is no reason to conclude that Nathanael would want to be sarcastic here, at least none that I can think of.

At the root, this is simply a **biased, prejudiced, generalization**. It is **racism** in the form of **tribal disdain**. Yes, even the tribes of Israel didn't like each other (this goes all the way back to Jacob's 12 sons who hated their brother Joseph). It is **discrimination** and **intolerance** against many people he has never even met. Basically, Nathanael just didn't like Nazareth and so he is just like us today, we who make judgments based on skin color, clothing, hair length, or places where others live (like Nebraska), etc. This is a **statement of deceit**. It is a **misleading distortion** of the truth and its only purpose is to make the one speaking it feel

superior. Thank God that Philip his friend was patient with him and told him to come and see any way! Is this how you are with your friends who sarcastically deride and mock your faith? Or are you just as intolerant with them as they are with you and your faith?

When you are biased against individuals without even meeting them, there is only one word for this: Sin, pure and simple. Basically, anyone who is different from me can't be as good as me. Nathanael is showing clear signs of **total depravity** through arrogant self-pride. I am a Reformed Christian, and so this interpretation fits with my theology on the deeply imbedded sinfulness of *all* people on planet earth. If we know anything about our Bibles, such things shouldn't surprise us at all.

I'm not saying Nathanael is *only* full of this. He is probably a very good man by outward appearances. He is probably very religious too. There is something in him, even before he hears the gospel, that at least makes him heed Philip's words to follow Jesus. But in this sense, at this point, he is really not any different from the Pharisees, or to bring it closer to home, any of us prior to God's call on our lives. Have you ever stopped to think of Nathanael (and the

other 11) in *this* way? As I said before, maybe you have and maybe you haven't. Maybe it's a little of both.

Now what about the next verse where Jesus says “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” If Jesus is being serious here, if he is making a proclamation about the inherent goodness of this man, then he knows less than what we the readers know about Nathanael! From what we learn, the two had never met (Nathanael asks, “How do you know me?”). Is it really plausible that Jesus would know less about this man than we do? Could Jesus be deceived about the sinfulness of Nathanael? Had this man been able to pull the wool over the eyes of the God of the universe? How does this fit with God? How does this fit with the context, where Nathanael seems to think Jesus knows all about him?

Thus, I read what Jesus says as a jest or a kind of sarcasm towards Nathanael. Read it this way for yourself. You can see a motive for why Jesus would speak this way, because it seems to catch Nathanael off guard. “How do you know me?” might now mean, “Excuse me? Who are you? Why are you making a sweeping generalization about me? What kind of a prejudiced comment is that to make about someone you've never even met?” See the irony? With the

sarcasm, Jesus is using his words to mean the opposite of what they say in order to reveal a secret to this man.

“But,” you say, “Jesus would never use sarcasm. Sarcasm is sinful.” Indeed, sarcasm is often used sinfully, and it can be a poisoned arrow on the bow of an angry person. But it is not inherently sinful. **Elijah used sarcasm** in a godly way, when he mocked the prophets of Baal asking them if maybe their god didn’t hear them because he was in the bathroom (**1 Kgs 18:27**).³ Jesus used sarcasm with Peter from time to time, for instance when he tells the man “**he who has been forgiven little loves little.**” As one person writes, “**It’s impossible to forgive ‘little.’**” That’s the point of the sarcasm. I don’t think most of us think that way about what Jesus said, because we think that sarcasm has to be snide, rude, and malicious. But sarcasm can simply mean “**a way of speaking in which what is said is the opposite of what is meant.**” It can be a way of catching someone’s attention or of making a point in a non direct way.

So what are we to make of **Jesus’ answer** to the question “**how do you know me?**” Jesus responds, “**Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.**”

³ A great translation to get the point across is the Complete Jewish Bible, “Around noon Eliyahu began ridiculing them: “Shout louder! After all, he’s a god, isn’t he? Maybe he’s daydreaming, or he’s on the potty, or he’s away on a trip. Maybe he’s asleep, and you have to wake him up.”

Most people have no idea what to make of this. If they even deal with it at all, it is very speculatively. People will run with metaphors of the fig and how it is used in other places. But figs can be used positively or negatively. It is better to keep reading in the context of the creation story, for figs and trees come up here in the fall.

Recall that Adam and Eve **covered themselves in fig leaves** (**Gen 3:7**). Recall also that they **hid themselves under the trees** of Eden (**3:8**). They, too, were under a tree, just like Nathanael. Perhaps there is some comparison being made between Nathanael and Adam here. But our first parents are here because of what they **had done against God**. A few commentaries have suggested that the figure of the being under the fig had become a standard saying in a court of law.⁴ In the Apocryphal addition to Daniel called **Suzanna** (51-59), two scoundrels accuse the beautiful girl of impropriety. Daniel comes to their aid and asks them “**under which tree**” did it occur? They give different answers and prove themselves to be liars.⁵ In other words, Jesus is pronouncing a judgment upon this man. There is

⁴ C. F. D. Moule, “A Note on ‘Under the Fig Tree’ in John 1:48, 50, *JTS*, N.S. V (1954): 210-11; C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Cambridge, 1976), 310; J. Duncan, M Derrett, “Figtrees in the NT,” in *Midrash in Action and as Literary Device* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1978), 163, n. 2.

⁵ See also The Talmud (b. Sanh. 41a) where a man kills another under a fig tree and the setting is a legal trial.

precedent then, for seeing Jesus' statement as an incitement against something Nathanael had done, but which he thought no one had seen! This is why he is so astonished. This is why he confesses Christ as Lord and King. It isn't because Jesus puffed the man's ego up, but because he knocked it down. This is no *mere* teacher. This man sees our actions and knows our hearts. We cannot hide from him. Christ's words cut him to the heart and **brought about Nathanael's repentance.**

Jesus says (sarcastically) that this man has no deceit. The idea of deceit also fits the Genesis story, doesn't it? There are several Hebrew and Greek words used directly or comparatively for the deceit/guile of Satan. One of them is the Greek word *dolos*. **Acts 13:10** for instance says, "**You who are full of all deceit (*dolos*) and fraud, you son of the devil.**" This same word (*dolos*) is used here of Nathanael (**John 1:47**). Given the comparison, this would be a stinging indictment against his sin.

With this reading, I am finally able to identify with how sinful the disciples actually were, so that I will not elevate them to the level of mystical gurus who lived above sin. And now I can see the tremendous grace of God in accepting them and forgiving them. How powerful this can

be in my own life. This is seen in Nathanael's response to Jesus. **Unlike the Pharisees** who were hardened when Jesus was sarcastic with them for their sin, Nathanael repents. He confesses Christ. **Vs. 49, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"** The effectual call of Christ in the pointing out of his sin has had a softening effect on the man, because it was combined with the good news of the Messiah that Philip had told him about. Christ touched his heart of ice and it began to melt. This is how the law and gospel are supposed to work. One destroys. The other creates life.

We know that this is Nathanael's conversion, because Jesus tells us as much. **"Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree.' Do you believe?" "You will see greater things than these" (vs. 50).** We will look at the meaning of the "greater things" next week. For now, we need to wrestle with those God wants in his kingdom in the first place. **These disciples are the first of Christ's new creation actors.** They are the figures who begin the filling of the earth with followers of Christ who will carry out the Name of Christ throughout the earth until the day when he returns in power to rule his kingdom. But they are sinful people.

These are the kinds of people Christ—for some reason—brings into his kingdom. Not the self-righteous, but the sinner. Not those already good enough for God. But those who are humble, who know their sin, who know they have nothing to offer God except their sin. These are the bruised reeds and dimly burning wicks God brings into his kingdom. Unlike Adam, he does not cast them away from his presence, but in Christ he now brings them near to himself by his unfathomable grace. This is the good news you, a sinner, are to accept in awe and wonder, for this is the good news come to you!

Coming to this recognition of your own sin is not difficult, if you will humble yourself. Too many want to hold onto the pride of their own goodness; and it causes them blindness, pride, and a great fall. This is a lesson from the original creation and the deceit of Satan and the deception of our first parents who hid under the tree and tried to clothe themselves in their own figs leaves.

But seeing your sin, understanding how far you have fallen, being honest with your own prejudices against Christ and that *he had to find you* ... this leads to conversion, liberation, freedom, and peace. If you do not know Christ this day, start off a new year by entering into a new

creation. God is still setting the stage of his great drama. Repent like Nathanael, receive a name change like Peter, follow Christ anywhere like Andrew, and do it immediately like Philip who knew that all of Scripture pointed to Christ. Do not hesitate. Today is the day of salvation.