

## **Nathanael Believes**

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Reading: Gen 28, John 1

Study: John 1:47-51

Psalms: 139:1-6, 139:7-12, 32:1, 2, 5, 32:6-8

First it was Andrew and John who followed Jesus. Andrew found his brother Peter and brought him to Jesus. Philip was called directly; then he went and found Nathanael. This was an action packed week and a very special week in the life of these five men – not to mention John the Baptist who initially pointed them to Jesus.

Four of these men were later called by Jesus to be apostles – and probably Nathanael also. His name does not appear in the list of apostles in Matthew 13 or Luke 6 but most think that Bartholomew was the same person as Nathanael. Bartholomew means son of Tholomew so is not a personal name. He is named along with Philip in the lists given. Also we do not find Nathanael in the Synoptics nor do we find Bartholomew in John's gospel.

In addition to this encounter with Jesus here in chapter 1 we come across Nathanael again in chapter 21. He was with the apostles when Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection.

### **Witness of Philip**

Philip was the one who found Nathanael. He told him that he had found the Messiah. Nathanael, like most Israelites was expecting the Messiah. They read of the 'anointed one', the 'coming one' in the Scriptures. There were differing ideas as to what Messiah would be like and what he would do, but the expectation was there nevertheless.

Nathanael was initially put off when Philip told him Jesus was from Nazareth. He was quite skeptical. But he agreed to go with Philip to see Jesus. He would see for himself who Philip was calling Messiah. And so we come to this amazing encounter between Jesus and Nathanael, between the supernatural and the natural, between God and man.

### **Jesus Sees Nathanael**

Jesus saw Nathanael. He saw him coming toward him. He saw into his heart to tell him what sort of person he was. He saw him when he thought he was alone under the fig tree. Nathanael was coming to see Jesus for the first time but learns that Jesus knew all about him already. The omniscience of Jesus shocked Nathanael. He was so struck with awe that he blurted out *Rabbi, you are the Son of God!*

Psalms 139 reminds us that God is omniscient. He knows when we sit and when we rise, He knows everything we say and even our very thoughts. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me* says the Psalmist – and Nathanael thought so too. What ever he expected the Messiah to be like before, he was now convinced by this supernatural knowledge – indeed personal knowledge – that Jesus had about him. Nathanael believed. There was no more skepticism, no more questioning, just believing.

We are reminded of another person who encountered this omniscience of Jesus. This time it was a woman – the woman at the well. She was struck with awe and fear when Jesus revealed the secret of her heart – *you have had five husbands* he said her (4:18). She tried to escape this penetrating gaze of Jesus by changing the topic of conversation. But it was this knowledge of Jesus, this man *who told me all I ever did*, that was too wonderful for this woman as it was for Nathanael. She also believed in Jesus, the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Have you ever thought that Jesus knows all you ever did? Have you ever thought that Jesus knows where you are when you think you are in secret? Do you know that Jesus knows the thoughts of your heart? Or do you think that you will be able to carry your secrets to the grave. Well you can I guess but they will be revealed one day. There is a day when all your secrets will be revealed. *The day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the gospel* (Romans 2:16).

Such knowledge is indeed too wonderful don't you think. What is more wonderful is that even with such knowledge, even knowing everything about us Jesus still accepts us. He accepted Nathanael. He accepted the Samaritan woman. And he will accept you even knowing the secrets of your heart. That is the grace of Lord Jesus Christ.

That grace of course is only available in this earthly life. It is by grace through faith that we are forgiven and accepted by Jesus. Have you encountered Jesus in this way, realizing he knows everything about you? You will do so as you read his Word and as you pray. Do not be a fool and try to hide things from him – *confess your sins for he is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1).

Nathanael had been less than complimentary in his remark about Jesus coming from Nazareth. The woman certainly had a lot to hide about her past. But when they met Jesus they realized that it was futile and foolish to try to hide these things. They knew that they were standing before the all seeing and all knowing Son of God.

Beware of deceit. Don't deceive yourself in this matter. Jesus commended Nathanael as an Israelite in whom is no deceit/guile. The word here is that used to refer to bait or a snare. In fishing people use bait to trick the fish and capture them. Deceit is the snare of the devil.

Jacob was very fond of deceit. His very name meant grasper or deceiver. God met him at Peniel and struggled with him all night. Finally he blessed Jacob with a new name Israel. He was no longer the deceiver. Nathanael knew this story. So Jesus called him an Israelite not a 'Jacobite'. He was not a deceiver. He was an honest God fearing man. Nathanael wondered how Jesus knew this about him. How do you know me he asked?

Jesus revealed more about Nathanael to himself. Clearly Nathanael thought he was alone under the fig tree. He may have been meditating or praying. He was alone but Jesus saw him as he prayed. If he saw him, he probably heard him also. Was this the One who heard his prayers? How awesome to meet the One who heard his prayers. We may be speculating somewhat, but this helps explain the great wonder of Nathanael as he concludes that Jesus is the Son of God, the King of Israel.

These titles were associated with the Messiah. Jesus has already been called the Son

of God by John the Baptist (1:34). King of Israel was an appropriate title that Jesus did not deny, but he avoided it because of distorted messianic views. King of the Jews was of course written on the sign nailed to the Cross.

A feature of this first chapter of John is the number of titles given to Jesus. Go though and count them some time. To these two given by Nathanael Jesus adds his own. He refers to himself as the Son of Man (1:51). This was probably derived from Daniel 7:13. It was messianic but avoided misconceptions regarding the Messiah.

### **Jesus Reveals More**

Nathanael was struck with awe at the supernatural knowledge Jesus displayed. He believed when Jesus told him in effect *all he ever did*. But Jesus told him this was not all. He would see greater things than this. Jesus was not just all-knowing. He was not just a miracle worker. Jesus had something greater to reveal.

With the background of Jacob's vision at Bethel, a story well known to Nathanael, Jesus tells him that he will see *heaven open and angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man*. Jacob's vision is fulfilled in Jesus. Nathanael has not met just a miracle worker but the *Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. He has encountered One who has come from heaven and who will reveal to man the truth about heaven – and hell also.

John the Baptist saw heaven open and heard the voice from heaven when he baptized Jesus in the Jordan. Stephen looked up as he was being stoned to death and saw heaven opened and Jesus standing at the Right Hand of God. Jesus on earth – Jesus in heaven.

*Amen, Amen* said Jesus as he proclaimed this solemn truth. He proclaimed it not just to Nathanael but *to you plural*, to all who will listen and believe. Jesus is talking about himself and his work of redemption. He came down from heaven and will return to heaven. He is the only one who can tell us the truth about heaven. He is the only one who knows the future, for he not only knows all things but determines all things.

He is the way to heaven. He came from heaven; he died for our sins that we might be made righteous and fit for heaven. *I go to prepare a place for you* he told his disciples (14:2). He has indeed opened heaven for the elect, for those who believe. To know Jesus is not only to know a miracle worker, one who can heal your sickness and provide your daily needs. It is to know Him who is the way the truth and the life – life eternal. That was what Jesus told Nathanael and tells you also.

*Heaven came down and glory filled my soul  
When at the cross my Saviour made me whole  
My sins were washed away and my night was turned to day  
Heaven came down and glory filled my soul.*

Amen.

*Rev. Dennis K. Muldoon*