

JESUS THE SON OF GOD, THE KING OF ISRAEL: THE WITNESS OF NATHANAEL

JOHN 01:46–49

Introduction

Nathanael's confrontation with Jesus was dramatic. Nathanael was a man of prejudice and strong feelings, yet he knew despair and hopelessness; therefore, it was difficult to lead him to Christ. However, despite all, his friend Philip persisted and refused to give up in witnessing to him. As a result, Nathanael was won to Christ.

- I. Nathanael's experience (v. 46).
- II. Nathanael's confrontation with Jesus (vv. 47-48).
- III. Nathanael's conviction: Jesus was the Son of God (v. 49).

JOHN 01:46–49 NATHANAEL

John alone mentions Nathanael. However, the other three gospels mention a disciple that John does not, Bartholomew. These two names probably refer to the same person. It is thought that Nathanael was a man's first name and Bartholomew was a man's second name. □

I. John 01:46 Nathanael's Prejudice and Philip's Witnessing

Nathanael's experience. Note three facts.

1. It was Nathanael's close friend Philip who shared the good news with him (Jn. 1:45). He had the privilege of hearing the gospel from someone who cared for him very deeply. He was so loved by Philip that he was the first one with whom Philip shared the most important experience of his life.
 2. Nathanael was a man gripped by despair and prejudice.
 - a. The despair is seen in his response to Philip. He rejected Philip's testimony and did it in a negative, skeptical, reactionary spirit: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" He struck out at what Philip had said. He questioned it; he would not accept it nor believe it. There was a sense of hopelessness, of despair and skepticism in his question. Apparently he was a man who had tried and followed so many voices in the world that he had just lost hope. Many in the world had promised so much, only to leave him still empty and searching. Why should he believe and follow another voice?
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Thought 1. So many voices in the world promise the path to life and fulfillment and joy and satisfaction. However, their claims are soon discovered to be false, and they still leave the human heart empty and wondering. A person caught up in despair wonders about the real purpose, meaning, and significance of life.

Job 10:1 “I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul.”

Psa 31:10 My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.

Psa 42:6 My God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon — from Mount Mizar.

Psa 73:2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.

Psa 73:16 When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me.

Psa 137:1 By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.

Isa 49:14 But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.”

Jer 2:25 Do not run until your feet are bare and your throat is dry. But you said, ‘It’s no use! I love foreign gods, and I must go after them.’

1 Th 4:13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

Eph 2:12 Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

- b. The prejudice of Nathanael is seen in his slur against Jesus because Jesus was from Nazareth (See *Nazareth*, Jn. 1:46). Nathanael was apparently a crowd follower. He had allowed himself to be influenced by the world’s foolish prejudices.

Thought 1. Prejudice has a great failing; it disregards the wrong within oneself and with one’s own place (city, home, business, church); it overlooks personal wrong, shortcomings, weaknesses and error.

Acts 10:34-35 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”

Rom 2:11 For God does not show favoritism.

Rom 10:12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.

3. Nathanael was still invited to follow Jesus. His sin, despair and prejudice did not discourage nor keep Philip from inviting his friend and neighbour to “come and see” Jesus. Note also that Philip did not argue with Nathanael. He simply led him to confront Jesus.

Thought 1. Note three things.

- 1) No matter what the sin is, we must still go and invite men to “come and see” Jesus. Because Philip went to his dear friend, Nathanael did come to Jesus, despite his despair and prejudice.
- 2) Think what Nathanael would have missed if he had...
 - let his prejudice against the people of Nazareth keep him from the One who was called Jesus the Nazarene.
 - let his wallowing around in despair keep him from coming to Jesus.
- 3) The way to lead a man to Christ is not by argument, but by making him confront Christ.

Acts 4:20 “For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Titus 2:15 These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

Psa 66:16 Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.

JOHN 01:46 NAZARETH

The town was an obscure village in Galilee. Galilee bordered Gentile or heathen nations; therefore, it was sometimes called *Galilee of the Gentiles*. The Jews were so deeply prejudiced against the Gentiles that they considered anyone or anything touched by a Gentile to be unclean in the sight of God. Nazareth was despised by the Jews because it was on the border of Gentile country and was so commercially touched by Gentiles. It was despised by the Romans because its citizens were a conquered people. □

II. *John 01:47–48 Jesus Knew the Guileless Man*

Nathanael’s confrontation. Two very significant things happened in Nathanael’s confrontation with Jesus.

1. Jesus knew Nathanael, his beliefs and character.
 - a. Jesus knew his beliefs. This is seen in Jesus’ calling Nathanael “a true Israelite.” He was the epitome of an Israelite, everything an Israelite should be. He *believed* the promises of God. He tried to live up to the covenant name, the standard God had set

for Israel, and he was looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the Messiah. Jesus Christ knew Nathanael's beliefs.

Thought 1. Christ knows the beliefs of each man, that upon which the man has set his heart. He knows both the good and bad beliefs, both the godly and evil thoughts of the human heart.

John 2:25 *He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.*

1 Cor 1:30 *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

1 John 3:20 *Whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.*

1 Sam 2:3 *“Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed.”*

Psa 69:5 *You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from you.*

Jer 17:10 *“I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”*

Psa 69:5 *You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from you.*

- b. Jesus knew his character. Nathanael was a man “in whom there [was] nothing false” (dolos). This means he did not deceive, bait, or mislead people. He did not hide what he thought; he said what he thought and acted as he felt. He was straight-forward, open and honest, not deceptive or hypocritical. This trait had just been demonstrated in his response to Philip. He would not hide his true thoughts (v. 46).

Thought 1. One of the great tragedies in the legacy of persons is that they are full of guile or false traits. Many deceive, bait, and mislead others. Few are straightforward, open and honest, free of deception and hypocrisy.

Mat 5:8 *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”*

2 Pet 3:14 *So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

Rev 14:5 *No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.*

Psa 32:2 *Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

Psa 24:3-4 *Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.*

2. Jesus knew Nathanael's innermost being, all things about him (See *Fig Tree and Worship*, Jn. 1:48).

Thought 1. Jesus knows everything about every man. Nothing escapes His watchful eye, not even a single thought.

- 1) This offers great hope to the man who will cast himself upon Christ. Christ can help him by meeting his need and giving purpose and direction to his life.
- 2) This is a great warning to the man who goes his merry way, thinking his sin is hidden and will not be judged.

Luke 12:2 *There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.*

1 Cor 4:5 *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.*

Job 10:14 *If I sinned, you would be watching me and would not let my offense go unpunished.*

Jer 2:22 *"Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me," declares the Sovereign LORD.*

Jer 16:17 *My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes.*

Hosea 7:2 *But they do not realize that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before me.*

Amos 5:12 *For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.*

JOHN 01:48 FIG TREE AND WORSHIP

In Palestine the fig tree stood for peace, security, rest, and worship (1 Kng. 4:25; Mic. 4:4). Very often a man would seek solitude and worship under his fig tree. No doubt this is what Nathanael had been doing. When Jesus told Nathanael that He had seen him under his fig tree, He was telling Nathanael that He knew everything about him, even the deepest longings of his heart. Jesus knew Nathanael's despair and sense of hopelessness; He knew his longing for peace and release and freedom. That was enough to cause Nathanael to give his life to Jesus forever. □

III. *John 01:49 Nathanael's Confession*

Nathanael's conviction. He confessed that Jesus was the Rabbi (Prophet), the Son of God, the King of Israel. Note two things:

1. How readily Nathanael confessed Jesus as His Lord.

Mat 10:32 "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."

Luke 12:8 "I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God."

Rom 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

1 John 2:23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

1 John 4:15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.

2. How clearly Nathanael grasped who Jesus was.

- a. He was "Rabbi," the great Teacher or Prophet promised to Israel. Jesus is the Godly heir — He was qualified to be the Messianic Prophet of God Himself. Jesus Christ Himself proclaimed what the Messianic Prophet of God was to do.

Luke 4:16-21 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

- 1). The Messianic Prophet of God was prophesied.

Deu 18:15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.

Isa 9:2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

Isa 11:1-4 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of

understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD — and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth: with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

2). Luke 03:38 Jesus Christ was the Messianic Prophet of God (see above statement of Christ, Lk.4:16-21).

Mat 21:11 *The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*

Luke 7:16 *They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.”*

Luke 13:33 *In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day — for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!*

John 3:34 *For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.*

John 6:14 *After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”*

John 7:40 *On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.”*

John 8:26, 28 *“I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.” So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.”*

John 9:17 *Finally they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet.”*

b. He was the Son of God (Jn. 1:34).

What did John mean by “the Son of God”? Note the definite article. Christ is the Son, not a son of God. He is...

- the *only* Son
- the *one and only* Son
- the one and only Son who came from the very *side* of God, that is from the deepest part, from the most intimate place, from the most honourable fellowship of God.

Christ was coexistent. He was and is face-to-face with God forever. The word *with* (pros) has the idea of both *being with* and *acting toward*. Jesus Christ (the Word) was

both with God and acting with God. He was “with God”: by God’s side, acting, living, and moving in the closest of relationships. Christ had the ideal and perfect relationship with God the Father. Their life together — their relationship, communion, fellowship, and connection — was a perfect eternal bond. This is exactly what is said: “*He was with God in the beginning*” (Jn. 1:2).

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

1 John 1:2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

c. He was the King of Israel (See *Jesus Christ, King of Israel*, Jn. 1:49). ■

JOHN 01:49 JESUS CHRIST, THE KING OF ISRAEL

Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.” John 01:49

Jesus was declared to be the Messianic King. God had given to David and his seed (the Messiah) the promise of eternal government (2 Sam. 7:12; Psa. 39:3f; 132:11).

Note how often Jesus was called the son of David. (Mt. 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; Acts 2:29-36; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 22:16.) It was the common title and popular concept of the Messiah. Generation after generation of Jews had ached and looked for the promised deliverer of Israel. The people expected Him to be a great general who would deliver and restore the nation to its greatness. In fact, they expected Him to make the nation the centre of universal rule. He would, under God, conquer the world and centre the glory and majesty of God Himself in Jerusalem; and from His throne, the throne of David, He would execute *the Messianic fire of judgment* upon the nations and peoples of the world (Mt. 1:18; 3:11; 11:1-6; 11:2-3; 11:5; 11:6; Lk. 7:21). □