

## John 1:48-51      Jesus revealed

In our verses Nathanael came to believe Jesus is the Messiah. After Philip found Nathanael to tell him about Jesus, Nathanael exclaimed, *can anything good come out of Nazareth?* (John 1:45-46). What was wrong with Nazareth? It is possible it was an ideological centre of the Jerusalem based sect, the ruling religious elite, the Jews, in Galilee. Although Jesus was also a Jew, he was rejected by his own (John 1:11, and see Luke 4:14-30). Nathanael was scathing about Nazareth because he did not associate himself with the religious hypocrites. It is also noteworthy that Jesus called Nathanael an Israelite (John 1:48) rather than a Jew. Likewise, Nathanael called Jesus *king of Israel*, rather than *king of the Jews* (John 1:49). This seems to indicate that John had the wider community of Israel in mind (in the Diaspora, including the Samaritans,) when he wrote his gospel.

Nathanael was surprised by Jesus' penetrating discernment when he described him as *a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit*. Who was this man who seemed to know Nathanael so well? Nathanael asked how Jesus knew him? Jesus replied, *Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you*. Then Nathanael had a eureka moment: *Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!* (John 1:49). Son of God and king of Israel were both Messianic terms, with roughly the same meaning.

What is going on in this conversation? Yet it is not only we, but also Jesus, who seemed somewhat surprised, *Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these* (John 1:50). In the next verse, Jesus indicates the greater things he had in mind: *Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man*. This all seems curious to us!

But it becomes clearer when we realise that *under the fig tree* was a Jewish idiom which means the study of the Scriptures (especially messianic prophecy). The phrase comes from a prophecy in Micah concerning the Messianic era, *but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken* (Micah 4:4). Men used to sit under literal fig trees and meditate on the Scriptures, and pray. This is what Nathanael was doing when Philip called him. In the light of this we can see how appropriate it was for Philip to say, *We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph* (John 1:45). This should remind us the importance of a daily quiet time, preferably in the morning, when we read and study the scriptures, and pray.

Nathanael was very different to the religious men of His day (the Jews). Jesus said to the Jews, *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life* (John 5:39-40). It is possible to study the Scriptures but to be blind to their message. Some Christian leaders believe that too much Bible study is bad for you, because it is the dead letter, but the Spirit gives life! However it is only dead if our hearts are dead in our trespasses and sins. We are dependent on the Word, because *faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17). Nathanael wasn't like the 'Jews'. He was a sincere seeker after God, like the Bereans, who diligently searched the Scriptures to find the truth about the Messiah.

I Know not why God's wondrous grace  
I know not how the Spirit moves,  
Convincing men of sin;  
Revealing Jesus through the word,  
Creating faith in Him.

Yet this doesn't completely explain why Nathanael was so quick to recognise Jesus as Messiah. One suggestion is that when Nathanael was under the fig tree, he was reading Isaiah 53:9, *he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth*. So when Jesus said, *Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit*, He was dropping a big hint – of course there is really only One, *in whom was no deceit*. This is interesting, but its only speculation. Whatever happened, Nathanael had a eureka moment, a revelation, that Jesus was the Christ (cf Matthew 16:16-17).

I received an encouraging testimony from a lady from our previous church this week. She said, "God decided to well and truly shake me out of my comfort zone." As a result of a time of considerable distress and suffering, she realised she was still holding on to her life. The Lord was challenging her to fully surrender her life to Him. Although she had been a Christian for many years, she had always resisted baptism. She was baptised, but most importantly she has a new vitality and relationship with the Lord she didn't have before. It is the kind of change that only God can bring about.

Even though Nathanael had his eureka moment, Jesus followed this up by saying, *You will see greater things than these* (John 1:50b). What were these greater things Nathanael would come to understand? In a nutshell, the work and ministry of Messiah. In John 1:51 Jesus said, *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 *you's* in this verse are plural, so Jesus is now speaking to all his disciples. *Heaven open* means to have a revelation or vision or supernatural understanding of heavenly realities. At Jesus' baptism heaven was opened and the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove (Matthew 3:16). By this it was revealed to John the Baptist Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:32-34). (See also Acts 10:11, Revelation 4:1).

Jesus is referring back to Jacob's dream, where Jacob had a revelation (Genesis 28:10-22), *And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!* (Genesis 28:12). Jesus was saying the He is the Ladder that bridges heaven and earth, the true mediator between God and man (1Timothy 2:5). Christ would reconcile man and God through his death and resurrection, something the disciples did not at this point understand.

But there is more. God repeated to Jacob His covenant promises, first given to Abraham, *in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed* (Genesis 28:14) – Jesus is the promised Offspring through whom all nations have been are being blessed. After the dream, Jacob called the place *the gate of heaven* (Genesis 28:17) – Jesus is the gate (John 10: 7,9). Jacob took one of the stones he was using as a pillar, anointed it with oil, and said, *The Lord shall be my God and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house* (Genesis 28:21b-22a) – Jesus is the anointed cornerstone of God's holy temple, which you are (Ephesians 2:21).

The Samaritan woman asked Jesus, *Are you greater than our father Jacob?* The answer is a big YES! After wrestling all night with God (Genesis 32:22-32) Jacob was called Israel. Jesus is greater because He is the true Israel (John 15:1). Nathanael was a sincere God seeking man, but his was an old covenant understanding. But the revelation of God now coming through the Son was much greater (2Corinthians 3:7-8). The book the Hebrews is an exposition of the greater glory of Jesus (see Hebrews 1:1-3).

Is your life surrendered to Him? Are you holding anything back to prevent you sharing in this greater glory?