

Twelve Ordinary Men How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness and What He Wants to Do With You

Chapter 7 - Nathanael (Bartholomew) The Guileless One
John 1: 43-51, John 7: 52, Romans 2: 28-29, I Corinthians 4:3-4

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I. Introduction

Nathanael is listed as Bartholomew in all four lists of the twelve disciples and is considered Philip's closest companion.

Nathanael means " God has given "

The 4 Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke ,John) and the book of Acts contain no details about Nathanael's background, character or personality.

According to John 21:2, Nathanael came from the small town of Cana in Galilee, the place where Jesus did the first miracle.

Nathanael was brought to Jesus by Philip immediately after Philip was sought and called by Christ.

Philip and Nathanael were apparently close friends, because each of the 4 Gospel writers link the names of Philip and Nathanael.

Virtually everything we know about Nathanael comes from John's account of his call to discipleship.

According to John 1:45, Philip found Nathanael. They were obviously friends and Philip knew Nathanael would be interested in the news that the long awaited Messiah had finally been identified.

Apparently Nathanael was found by Philip in or near the same place where Philip was found by the Lord.

The brief description of how Nathanael came to Jesus is full of insight into his character. From it we learn quite a lot about what kind of person Nathanael was.

II. Outline of Chapter 7

A. Nathanael- His Love of Scripture - Review pages 137-138

1. The truth of Scripture was something that mattered to Nathanael.
2. Philip told Nathanael about the Messiah from the standpoint of Old Testament prophecy which suggests that Nathanael knew the Old Testament prophecies.
3. Nathanael and Philip had a shared interest in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
4. Nathanael was an eager student of the Old Testament and already a seeker after divine truth.
5. Nathanael was able to recognize Jesus clearly and instantly because he had a clear understanding of what the Scriptures said about Him.
6. Nathanael knew what the promises said, so he recognized the fulfillment when he saw it.

B. Nathanael- His Prejudices-Review pages 138-142

1. Verse 46 gives us further insight into Nathanael's character. Although he was a student of Scripture and a searcher for the true knowledge of God; although he had strong spiritual interests and had been faithful , diligent , and honest in his devotion to the Word of God; he was human. He had certain prejudices. Here is his response: " Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"
2. The statement of Nathanael in verse 46 was not a rational or biblical objection; it was based on sheer emotion and bigotry. It reveals the contempt Nathanael had for the whole town of Nazareth.
3. It was inconceivable to Nathanael that the Messiah would come from a tacky place like Nazareth.
4. Prejudice is ugly. Generalizations based on feelings of superiority , not on fact, can be spiritually debilitating.
5. Nathanael lived in a society that was prejudiced by temperament . In reality , all sinful people are. We make prejudicial statements . We draw prejudiced conclusions about individuals, classes of people, and whole societies. Nathanael, like the rest of us , had that sinful tendency. And his prejudice caused him at first to be skeptical when Philip told him the Messiah was a Nazarene.
6. Fortunately Nathanael's prejudice was not strong enough to keep him from Christ. " Philip said to him, Come and see". That is the right way to deal with prejudice: Confront it with the facts. Prejudice is feeling based. It is subjective. it does not necessarily reflect the reality of the matter. So the remedy for prejudice is an honest look at objective reality- "Come and see" And Nathanael went. Fortunately, his prejudiced mind was not as powerful as his seeking heart.

C. Nathanael-His Sincerity of Heart- Review pages 142-144

1. The most important aspect of Nathanael's character is expressed from the lips of Jesus. The first words of Jesus upon seeing Nathanael were a powerful commendation of Nathanael's character. Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said of Nathanael. " Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit (John 1:47).

2. Nathanael was pure - hearted from the beginning. Certainly he was human. He had sinful faults. His mind was tainted by a degree of prejudice. But his heart was not poisoned by deceit . He was no hypocrite. His love for God and his desire to see the Messiah , were genuine. His heart was sincere and without guile.

3. Jesus refers to Nathanael as " an Israelite indeed." The word in the Greek text is alethos, meaning "truly, genuinely" He was an authentic Israelite. Jesus was linking Nathanael's status as a true Israelite to the fact that he he was without deceit. Nathanael was real. There was no hypocrisy in Nathanael.

4. Nathanael was a man whose heart was circumcised, cleansed of defilement. His faith was authentic. His devotion to God was real. He was without guile, not like the Scribes, and Pharisees. he was a truly righteous man-flawed by sin as we all are-but justified before God through a true and living faith.

D. Nathanael-His Eager Faith- Review pages 144-148

1. Because his heart was sincere and his faith real, Nathanael overcame his prejudice.

2. Nathanael's skepticism regarding Jesus was not based on his knowledge of Scripture but that a man from Nazareth did not seem to fit the picture of the Messiah.

3. Nathanael was trying to come to grips with a man from Nazareth who knew all about him.

4. When Jesus told Nathanael that " Before Philip called you , when you were under the fig tree , I saw you."-John 1:48, he suddenly realized he was standing in the presence of someone who could see into his very heart with an omniscient eye. In effect Jesus was saying, " **I know the state of your heart** because I saw you under the fig tree. I knew what you were doing. Jesus not only saw his location but He saw his heart as well. Jesus knew the sincerity of Nathanael's character because He saw right into him when he was under the fig tree. Nathanael knew that Jesus was the Son of God, the same truth his friend Philip did not quite grasp after 2 years of following Jesus- John 14:8-9.

5. His omniscience, his spiritual insight, and His ability to read the heart of Nathanael was enough to convince Nathanael that Jesus was indeed the true messiah.

6. Nathanael, like the other apostles , stands as proof that **God can take the most common people , from the most insignificant places, and use them to His glory.**

III. Question and Review-Chapter 7

1. Read and explain the meaning of Romans 2:28-29 and Romans 9:6-7.
2. How do we know Nathanael was a student of the Old Testament Scriptures ?
3. Can you relate to Nathanael's practice of spending time under a fig tree for prayer, meditation and worship ?
4. How do you explain Nathanael's devotion to Scripture and his tendency to be prejudiced ?
5. How could Nathanael confess that Jesus was the Son of God , the King of Israel , when after almost 2 years of following Jesus , Philip still did not recognize Jesus?
6. For whom have you been a Philip? In whose life might God use you in that role on their way to faith ?