

## NATHANAEL AND THE FIG TREE

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A SERMON  
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*“Philip found Nathanael and said unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael said unto him, Whence know you me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. Nathanael answered and said unto him, Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto you, I saw you under the fig tree, believe you? you shall see greater things than these. And he said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”*  
*John 1:45-51.*

VERY often we address the Gospel to the chief of sinners. We believe it to be our duty to do this with the greatest frequency, for did not our Lord, when bidding His disciples to preach the good news in every place, use the words, “beginning at Jerusalem”? Where the chief of sinners lived, there was the Gospel first to be preached. But at the same time it would show great lack of observation if we regarded all mankind as being equally gross, open offenders against God. It would not only show a want of wisdom, but it would involve a want of truthfulness, for though all have sinned, and deserve the wrath of God, yet all unconverted men are not precisely in the same condition of mind in reference to the gospel. In the parable of the sower, we are taught that before the good seed fell upon the field at all, there was a difference in the various soils, some of it was stony ground, another part was thorny, a third was trodden hard like a highway, while another plot is described by our Lord as “honest and good ground.”

Although in every case the carnal mind is enmity against God, yet are there influences at work which in many cases have mitigated, if not subdued, that enmity. While many took up stones to kill our Lord, there were others who heard Him gladly. While to this day thousands reject the Gospel, there are others who receive the word with joy. These differences we ascribe to God's prevenient grace, we believe, however, that the subject of these differences is not aware that grace is at work upon him, neither is it precisely grace in the same form as saving grace, for the soul under its power has not yet learned its own need of Christ, or the excellence of His salvation.

There is such a thing as a preparatory work of mercy on the soul, making it ready for the yet higher work of grace, even as the plowing comes before the sowing. We read in the narrative of the creation that before the divine voice said, “Let there be light,” darkness was upon the face of the deep, yet it is added, “The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters,” even so in the darkness of human nature, where as yet no ray of living light has shone, the Spirit of God may be moving with secret energy, making the soul ready for the hour when the true light shall shine.

I believe that in our congregations there are many persons who have been mercifully restrained from the grosser vices, and exhibit everything that is pure and excellent in moral character, persons who are not maliciously opposed to the Gospel, who are ready enough to receive it if they did but understand it, who are even anxious to be saved by Jesus Christ, and have a reverence for His name, though as yet it is an ignorant reverence. They know so little of the Redeemer that they are not able to find rest in Him, but this slenderness of knowledge is the only thing that holds them back from faith in Him. They are willing

enough to obey if they understood the command. If they had but a clear apprehension of our Lord's person and work, they would cheerfully accept Him as their Lord and Savior. I have great hopes that the Lord of love may guide the word which is now to be spoken, so that it may find out such persons, and may make manifest the Lord's secretly chosen ones, those prisoners of hope who pine for liberty, but know not that the Son can make them free. O captive soul, abhorring the chains of sin, your day of liberty is come! The Lord, the liberator who looses the prisoners, is come at this very hour to snap your bonds.

**I.** In dwelling on this narrative, I shall first say a few words concerning NATHANAEL HIMSELF.

We are told that he was a *guileless man*, "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile," that is to say, like Jacob, "he was a plain man," and not like Esau "a cunning hunter." Some minds are naturally serpentine, tortuous, slippery, they cannot think except in curves, their motives are involved and intricate, and they are of a double heart. These are the men who look one way and row the other, they worship the god Janus with two faces, and are of the same practice, if not of the same persuasion as the Jesuits. They cannot speak a thing out plainly or look you in the face while they talk, for they are full of mental reservations, and prudential cautions. They guard their speech, they dare not send abroad their own thoughts till they have mailed them up to the throat with double meanings.

Nathanael was just the very opposite of all this, he was no hypocrite and no crafty deceiver. He wore his heart upon his sleeve, if he spoke, you might know that he said what he meant, and that he meant what he said. He was a childlike, simple-hearted man, transparent as glass. He was not one of those fools who believe everything, but on the other hand, he was not of that other sort of fools so much admired in these days, who will believe nothing, but who find it necessary to doubt the most self-evident truth in order to maintain their credit for profound philosophy. These "thinkers" of this enlightened age are great at quibbles, mighty in feigning or feeling mistrust concerning matters which common sense has no doubts about. They will profess to doubt whether there is a God, though that be as plain as the sun at noonday.

No, Nathanael was neither credulous nor mistrustful, he was honestly ready to yield to the force of truth, he was willing to receive testimony and to be swayed by evidence. He was not suspicious because he was not a man who himself would be suspected, he was true-hearted and straightforward, a plain dealer and plain speaker. Cana had not within her gates a more thoroughly honest man. This Philip seems to have known, for he went to him directly, as to a man who was likely to be convinced and worth winning to the good cause.

In addition to being thus a simple-hearted man, Nathanael was an *earnest seeker*. Philip found him out because he felt that the good news would interest him. "We have found the Messiah," would be no gladsome news to anyone who had not looked for the Messiah, but Nathanael had been expecting the Christ, and perhaps had so well understood Moses and the prophets, that he had been led to look for His speedy coming. The time when Messiah would suddenly come in His temple had certainly arrived, and he was day and night with prayer, like all the faithful of the ten tribes, watching and waiting for the appearing of their salvation. He had not as yet heard that the glory of Israel had indeed come, but he was on the tiptoe of expectation.

What a hopeful state of heart is yours, my dear hearer, if you are now honestly desirous to know the truth, and intensely anxious to be saved by it! It is well indeed for you if your soul is ready, like the photographer's sensitive plate, to receive the impression of the divine light, if you are anxiously desiring to be informed if there is indeed a Savior, if there be a Gospel, if there be hope for you, if there be such a thing as purity and a way to reach it, it is well, I say, if you are anxiously, and earnestly desiring to know how and when and where, and determinately resolved, by God's grace, that no exertion shall be spared on your part to run in the way that shall be marked out, and to submit yourself unto the will of God. This was the state of Nathanael, an honest-hearted lover of plain truth, seeking to find the Christ.

It is also true that he was ignorant up to a certain point. He was not ignorant of Moses and the prophets, these he had well considered, but he knew not that Christ as yet had come. There was some

little distance between Nazareth and Cana, and the news of the Messiah's coming had not traveled there, if it had been bad news, it would have flown on eagles' wings, but being good news, its flight was slower, for few persons are so anxious to tell out the good as the evil. He had not therefore heard of Jesus of Nazareth till Philip came to him.

And how many there are even in this country who do not know yet what the Gospel means, but are anxious to know it, and if they did but know it, would receive it! "What," you say, "where there are so many places of worship and so many ministers?" Yes, just that. Ay, and in the very heart of our congregations and in the midst of our godly families, ignorance has its strongholds. These uninstructed ones may be Bible readers, they may be Gospel hearers, but as yet they may not have been able to grasp the great truth that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, they may never have seen what it is for Christ to stand in the sinner's place, and for that sinner by an act of trust to obtain the blessings which spring out of a substitutionary sacrifice.

Yes and here in this house where I have tried and labored to put the Gospel in short Saxon words and sentences that cannot be misunderstood, there may be some who are still saying, "What is this all about? I hear much of believing, but what is it? Who is this Christ, the Son of God, and what is it to be saved from sin, to be regenerated, to be sanctified? What are all these things?" Well, dear friend, I am sorry you should be in the dark, yet am I glad at heart, that though you do not know what I would have you know, yet you are simple-hearted, truth-loving, and sincere in your seeking. I am persuaded that light will not be denied you, you shall yet know Jesus and be known of Him.

In addition to this, however, Nathanael was *prejudiced*—we must modify that expression—he was somewhat prejudiced. As soon as Philip told him that he had found Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, Nathanael said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Here let us remark that his prejudice is exceedingly excusable, for it arose out of the faulty testimony of Philip. Philip was a young convert, he had only found Jesus the day before, and the natural instinct of every truly gracious soul is to try and tell out the blessed things of Christ. So away went Philip to tell his friend Nathanael, but what a many blunders he made in the telling out the Gospel! I bless God, blundering as it was, it was enough to bring Nathanael to Christ, but it was full of mistakes.

Dear souls, if you know only a little about Christ, and if you would make a great many mistakes in telling out that little, yet do not hold it in, God will overlook the errors, and bless the truth. Now observe what Philip said. He said, "We have found Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph," which was our Lord's popular name, but was in no way correct. He was not Jesus *of Nazareth* at all, He was not a native of Nazareth, our Lord was of Bethlehem. He had dwelt at Nazareth certainly, but He was no more entitled to be called of Nazareth than of Jerusalem. Then Philip said, "Son of Joseph," but He was only the reputed son of Joseph, He was in truth, the Son of the Highest. Philip gave to our Lord the common and erroneous titles which the unthinking many passed from hand to hand. He did not say, "We have found the Son of God," or "the Son of David," but yet he uttered all he knew, and that is all God expects of you or me.

Oh, what a mercy it is that the imperfections of our ministry do not prevent God's saving souls by us! If it were not so, how little good would be done in the world! Mr. John Wesley preached most earnestly one view of the Gospel, and William Huntingdon preached quite another view of it. The two men would have had a holy horror of each other, and censured each other most conscientiously, yet no rational man dares say that souls were not saved under John Wesley, or under William Huntingdon either, for God blessed them both. Both ministers were faulty, but both were sincere, and both made useful. So is it with all our testimonies. They are all imperfect, full of exaggerations of one truth, and misapprehensions of another, but as long as we witness to the true Christ foretold by Moses and the prophets, our mistakes shall be forgiven, and God will bless our ministry, despite every flaw.

So He did with Nathanael, but Nathanael's prejudice rose out of Philip's blundering way of talking. If Philip had not said, "of Nazareth," then Nathanael would not have said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" If Philip had said that Jesus was of Bethlehem, and of the tribe of Judah, and that God

was His Father, then this prejudice would never have clouded the mind of Nathanael, and it would have been easier for him to have acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. We must therefore, try to avoid mistakes, lest we cause needless prejudice. We should so state the Gospel that if men be offended by it, it shall be the Gospel which offends them, and not our way of putting it. It may be that you, my friend, are a little prejudiced against Christ's holy Gospel because of the imperfect character of a religious acquaintance, or the rough manners of a certain minister, but I trust you will not allow such things to bias you. I hope that, being candid and honest, you will come and see Jesus for yourself. Revise the report of the disciple by a personal inspection of the Master. Philip made up for his faults when he added, "Come and see." And I would try to prevent mine from injuring you by using the same exhortation, "Come and see Jesus and His Gospel for yourself."

One other mark of Nathanael I would mention, he was in all respects a godly, sincere man, up to the measure of his light. He was not yet a believer in Jesus, but still he was an Israelite indeed. He was a man of secret prayer, he did not mock God as the Pharisees did by mere outward worship, he was a worshipper of God in his heart, his soul had private dealings with the God of heaven when no eye saw Him. So it is, I trust, with you, dear hearer, you may not yet have found peace, but you do pray, you are desirous of being saved, you do not wish to be a hypocrite, you dread, above all things, falling into formality, you pray that if ever you become a Christian, you may be a Christian indeed. Such is the character I am endeavoring to find out, and if it is your character, may you get the blessing that Nathanael did.

**II.** Now secondly, we have seen Nathanael, let us for a moment consider NATHANAEL'S SIGHT OF JESUS.

"Philip said unto him, Come and see," and so Nathanael came to see the Savior, which implies, that although he was somewhat prejudiced against this new Messiah, yet he was candid enough to investigate His claims. Beloved friend, to whom I have already spoken, if you have any prejudice against the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, whether it be occasioned by your birth and education, or previous profession of some other faith, be honest enough to give the Gospel of Jesus Christ a fair hearing. You may hear it in this house, you may read it in these pages. Do not dismiss it until you have thoroughly examined it. All that we would ask of you is now, knowing you to be honest, knowing you to be earnest, seriously to sit down and weigh the doctrines of grace as you shall find them in the Scripture, and especially the life of Christ, and the blessings which He brings to those who believe in Him.

Look these things over carefully, they will commend themselves to your conscience, for God has already prepared your conscience to judge righteously, and as you judge, you will perceive a peculiar beauty and a charm about the truths of the Gospel which will surely win your heart.

Latimer had preached a sermon against the doctrines of the Gospel, and among his hearers there was a holy man who afterwards became a martyr, who thought as he listened to Latimer, that he perceived something in his tone which showed him to be an honest opponent, and therefore, he hoped that if the light were brought to him he would be willing to see by it. He sought him out, obtained an interview with him, and his explanations entirely won honest Hugh to the Reformed opinions, and you know what a valiant and popular minister of the new covenant he became. So, my honest friend, give to the Gospel of salvation by faith in the precious blood of Jesus, a fair hearing, and we are not afraid of the result.

Nathanael came to Christ, again, with *great activity* of heart. As soon as he was told to "come and see," he did come and see. He did not sit still, and say, "Well, if there is any light in this new doctrine, it will come to me," but he went to it. Do not believe in any teaching which bids men sit down and find peace in the idea that they need not strive to enter in at the strait gate of truth. Nay, brethren, if grace has ever come to you, it will awaken you from lethargy, and lead you to go to Christ, and you will be most earnest, with all the activity of your spirit, to search for Him as for hid treasure.

It is a delightful thing to see a soul on the wing. The mass of our population are, as regards religion, down on the ground, and unwilling to rise. They are indifferent to spiritual truth, you cannot get them to give earnest heed to eternal matters; but once get a mind on the wing with a holy earnestness and solemn

thoughtfulness, and we do believe, with God's grace, that it will ere long be brought to a saving faith in Christ. "Come and see," said Philip, and come and see Nathanael did. He does not appear to have expected to be converted to Christ by what he saw with his natural eyes, his judgment was formed from a mental view of Him. It is true he saw the person of the Messiah, but he did not expect to see in the human form any lineaments that might guide his judgment. He waited until the lips of the Messiah had spoken, and then, when he had seen the omniscience of that mysterious person, and how He could read his thoughts and spy out his secret actions, then he believed.

Now I fear some of you live in darkness because you are expecting some kind of physical manifestation. You hope for a vivid dream, or some strange feeling in your flesh, or some very remarkable occurrence in your family, except you see signs and wonders you will not believe. Nay, but a saving sight of Christ is another matter, truth must impress your mental faculties, enlighten your understanding, and win your affections. The presence of Christ on earth is a spiritual one, and you will come to see Him not with these mortal optics just now, but with the eyes of your soul. You will perceive the beauty of His character, the majesty of His person, the all-sufficiency of His atonement, and as you see these things the Holy Spirit will lead you to believe in Him and live. I pray God that such a sight as this may be vouchsafed to every honest seeker who may hear or read these words.

### III. A far greater matter now demands our attention—CHRIST'S SIGHT OF NATHANAEL.

As soon as Jesus saw the man, He said, "Behold an Israelite indeed," which shows us that Christ Jesus read Nathanael's heart. I do not suppose that our Lord had ever seen Nathanael with His own human eyes, but yet He understood Nathanael's character, not because He was a great judge of physiognomy and could perceive at once that He had a simple-hearted man before Him, but because being Nathanael's Creator, being the searcher of hearts, and the trier of the reins, He could read Nathanael as readily as a man reads a book which is open before his eyes. He saw at once all that was within the inquirer, and pronounced a verdict upon him that he was free from falsehood.

And then to prove to Nathanael still further how clearly He knew all about him, He mentioned a little incident which I cannot explain, nor can you, nor do I suppose anybody could have explained it except Nathanael and Jesus—a special secret known only to them both. He said to him, "Before that Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." What he was doing under the fig tree we may guess, but we cannot know to a certainty. Perhaps it would be true of all to believe that the fig tree was to Nathanael what the Hermonites and the hill Mizar had been to David. David says, "I will remember you from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, and from the hill Mizar." What were those sacred recollections he does not tell us, and although we can form a shrewd guess, David and his God alone knew the full mystery.

So between Christ and Nathanael there was a common knowledge connected with that fig tree which we cannot hope to discover, and the moment our Lord mentioned that hallowed spot, its remembrances were to Nathanael so secret and so sacred, that he felt that the omniscient One was before him. Here was evidence which he could not doubt for an instant, for one of the most private and special secrets of his life, which he had never whispered into any human ear, had been brought up as by a talismanic sign. A red-letter day in his private diary had been revived by the mention of the fig tree, and He who could touch so hidden a spring in his soul must be the Son of God.

But what was Nathanael doing under the fig tree, according to our best surmise? Well, as devout Easterns are accustomed to have a special place for prayer, this may have been a shadowy fig tree under which Nathanael was accustomed to offer his devotions, and perhaps just before Philip came to him, he may have been engaged in personal and solitary *confession of sin*. He had looked round the garden, and fastened the gate that none might come in, and he had poured into the ear of his God some very tender confession, under the fig tree shade. When Christ said to him, "When you were under the fig tree," it brought to his recollection how he poured out his broken and his contrite spirit, and confessed sins unknown to all but God. That confession, it may be, the very look of Christ brought back to his

remembrance, and the words and look together seemed to say, "I know your secret burden, and the peace you found in rolling it upon the Lord." He felt therefore that Jesus must be Israel's God.

It is very possible that in addition to his confession, he had under the fig tree made a *deliberate investigation of his own heart*. Good men generally mingle with their confessions self-examination. There it may be that this man who was free from guile had looked into the tendencies of his nature, and had been enabled with holy surprise to see the fountains of the great deep of his natural depravity, he may have been taken like Ezekiel from chamber to chamber to see the idols in his heart, beholding greater abominations than he suspected to be there, and there humbled before the Lord, beneath that fig tree he may have cried with Job, "I abhor myself in dust and ashes." This also Jesus had seen.

Or under the fig tree he may have been engaged in *very earnest prayer*. Was that fig tree to Nathanael what Peniel was to Jacob, a spot wherein he had wrestled till the break of day, pleading with God to fulfill His ancient promise, to send the promised One who should be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel? Was it so? We think it probable. That fig tree had been to him a Bethel, no other than the house of God and the very gate of heaven.

And what if we should suggest that perhaps in addition to his prayer, Nathanael had *vowed* some solemn vow under the fig tree—if the Lord would but appear and give to him some sign and token for good, then he would be the Lord's, and spend and be spent for Him, if the Lord would but send the Messiah, he would be among His first followers, if He would but speak to him by an angel or otherwise, he would obey the voice. Jesus now tells him that he shall see angels ascending and descending, and reveals Himself as the Messiah to whom Nathanael had solemnly pledged himself. It may be so.

Once more, it may be that under that fig tree he had enjoyed the sweetest *communion* with his God. Beloved friends, do you not remember well certain hallowed spots? I have one or two in my own life too sacred to mention. If my memory should forget all the world besides, yet those spots will evermore be green in my memory, the truly holy place where Jesus, my Lord has met with me and showed me His loves. One time it was "the King has brought me into His chambers," another time I got to "the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense." Once He said "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; and let us lodge in the villages," and anon He changed the scene and said, "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards."

Have we not sometimes had special festivals when He has broached the spiced wine of His pomegranate? When our joy has been almost too much for the frail body to endure, for our joyous spirit like a sharp sword has well-near cut through its scabbard? Ah, it is sweetly true, he has baptized us in the fire of His love, and we shall forever remember those secret spots, those dear occasions. This then was a token, a secret token between Christ and Nathanael, by which the disciple recognized his divine Friend and future Master and Lord. He had met the Messiah in spirit before, and now he meets Him in very flesh and blood, and by this token does he know Him. In spirit the Lord set His seal upon Nathanael's heart, and now, by the sacred signet the Israelite discerns his King.

Thus we see the Lord had seen Nathanael in his previous engagements, before he became actually a believer in Jesus. This fact suggests that each of you who have been sincerely seeking to be set right, and to know the truth, have been fully perceived in all your seekings and desirings by the God of grace.

When you let fall a tear because you could not understand the word, Jesus saw that tear; when you groaned because you could not get satisfaction of heart, He heard that groan. Never true heart seeks Christ without Christ's being well aware of it. Well may He know of it, for every motion of a trembling heart towards Himself is caused by His own love. He is drawing you, though you perceive not the hands of a man which encircle you. He is the hidden loadstone by which your heart is moved. I know it is night with you, and you grope like a blind man for the wall, but if your heart says, "O that I could but embrace Him! O that He were mine! If I could but find rest in Him, I would give all that I have." Then be assured that Jesus is close to you, your prayers are in His ear, your tears fall upon His heart, He knows all about

your difficulties, all about your doubts and fears, and He sympathizes in the whole, and in due time He will break your snares, and you shall yet with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation.

This truth is full of consolation to all who seek with sincerity, though as yet in the dark. Before the minister's voice spoke to you, when you were under the fig tree, when you were by the bedside, when you were in that inner chamber, when you were down in that saw pit, when you were in the hayloft, when you were walking behind the hedge in the field, Jesus saw you, He knew your desires, He read your longings, He saw you through and through. Even from of old He has known you.

**IV.** So we have seen Nathanael's sight of Christ, and then Christ's sight of Nathanael, now the fourth thing is, NATHANAEL'S FAITH.

I must go over much the same ground again under this head. Nathanael's Faith. Note *what it was grounded on*. He cheerfully accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and the ground of his acceptance lay in this, Jesus had mentioned to him a peculiar incident in his life which he was persuaded no one could have known but the omniscient God, thereon he concluded Jesus to be the omniscient God, and accepted Him at once as his King. This was very frequently the way in which persons were brought to confidence in Christ.

The same thing is recorded in this very Gospel a few chapters further on. The Lord sat down on the well and talked to the Samaritan woman, and there was no kind of impression produced upon her until He said, "You have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband." Then it flashed upon her, "This stranger knows my private history! Then He is something more than He appears to be, He must be the Great Prophet," and away she ran with this on her tongue, because it was in her heart, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" The same was the case with Zaccheus.

You may perhaps think, however, that this mode of conversion was confined to the days of our Lord's flesh, and the age of miracles, but it is not so. The fact is that at this very day, the discovery of the thoughts of men's hearts by the Gospel is still a very potent means in the hands of the Holy Ghost of convincing them of the truth of the Gospel. How often have I heard inquirers say, "It seemed to me, sir, as if that sermon was meant for me, there were points in it which were so exactly like myself, that I felt sure someone had told the preacher about me, and there were words and sentences so peculiarly descriptive of my private thought, that I was sure no one but God knew of them. I perceived that God was in the Gospel speaking to my soul." Yes, and it always will be so.

The Gospel is the great revealer of secrets, it is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Jesus Christ in the Gospel knows all about your sin, all about your seeking, all about the difficulties which you are meeting with. This ought to convince you that the Gospel is divine, since its teachings lay bare the heart, and its remedies touch every spiritual disease. The knowledge of human nature displayed in the simplest passage of the Gospel, is more profound than the productions of Plato or Socrates. The Gospel, like a silken clue, runs through all the windings and twisting of human nature in its fallen state. O that its voice may come home personally to you, may it by the Spirit convict you of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and bring you to lay hold on eternal life.

Nathanael's faith, it must be mentioned, was peculiar not only in its ground, but *in its clear and comprehensive character*. He accepted Jesus at once as the Son of God, He was divine to him, and he adored Him. He also accepted Him as the King of Israel, He was a royal personage to him, and he tendered Him his homage. May you and I receive Jesus Christ in this way, as a real man, but yet certainly God, a man who was despised and rejected, but yet the man anointed above His brethren, who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

I admire Nathanael's faith again, because it was so *quick, unreserved, and decisive*. "You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Christ was glorified by the decision, the quickness of this faith. Delay in believing Him dishonors Him. O honest heart, O sincere mind, pray you that you may as quickly come into the light and liberty of true belief. May the Holy Ghost work in you a ready satisfaction in the atoning sacrifice and divine person of the ever blessed Immanuel.

V. This brings us to the last point of consideration. We have shown you Nathanael and his sight of Christ, and Christ's sight of him, and then the faith that Nathanael received, now notice NATHANAEL'S AFTER-SIGHT.

Some persons want to see all that there is in Christianity before they can believe in Jesus, that is to say, before they will go to the elementary school they must necessarily clamor for a degree at the university. Many want to know the ninth of Romans before they have read the third of John. They are all for understanding great mysteries before they understand that primary simplicity, "Believe and live."

But those who are wiser and like Nathanael, are content to believe at first what they are able to perceive, namely, that Christ is the Son of God and the King of Israel, shall go on to learn more. Let us read our Lord's words, "You shall see greater things than these. Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter shall you see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." To full grown disciples Jesus promises, "Greater things than these shall you do," to young converts He says, "Greater things than these shall you see." He gives promises in proportion to our ability to receive them.

The promise given to Nathanael was a most fitting one. He was all Israelite indeed—then he shall have Israel's vision. What was the great sight that Israel or Jacob saw? He saw the ladder whereon angels ascended and descended. Precisely this shall Nathanael see. He shall see Jesus Christ as the communication between an opened heaven and a blessed earth, and he shall see the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. If you bear the character of Israel, you shall enjoy the privileges of Israel. If you are an Israelite indeed, you shall have the blessing that made Israel glad.

Nathanael had owned Jesus as the Son of God, here he is told that he shall see Him in His glory as the Son of Man. Note that last word of the chapter. It is not so much that Christ humbly called Himself the Son of Man—though that is true—as this, that to see the glory of Christ as God is a simple thing, bit to see and understand the glory of Christ as man, this is a sight for faith, and probably a sight which, as far as our senses are concerned, is reserved for the day of His coming. When He shall appear, the very Man that suffered upon Calvary, upon the great white throne to judge the quick and the dead, if you believe in Jesus as the Son of God, you shall yet see Him in His glory as man swaying the universal scepter, and enthroned as King of all the earth. He had called Jesus the King of Israel, if you remember, now he is to see his Lord as the King of the angels, to see the angels of God ascending and descending upon Him.

Believe, my dear brother in Christ, as far as you know Him, and you shall know more of Him. Open your eyes but to the candle light of the law and you shall soon behold the sun light of the Gospel. The Lord is very gracious to fulfill the Gospel rule, "To him that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance." If you do acknowledge the King of Israel, you shall see Him as the Lord of Hosts before whom archangels veil their faces, and to whom seraphim are servitors. The great sight, I suppose, Nathanael did see as the result of his faith was not the transfiguration, nor the ascension as some suppose, but a spiritual view of Christ in His mediatorial capacity as the great link between earth and heaven. This is indeed a sight transcending all others.

We are not divided from the invisible, we are not separated from the infinite, the mortal has communion with the immortal, the sinner speaks with the Holy One, prayers climb up to heaven, and benedictions descend by way of the Great Substitute.

Can you see this, O soul? If so, the sight will make you glad. You are not exiled now, you are only at the foot of the stairs which lead to the upper chamber of your Father's house. Your God is above, and bright spirits traverse constantly the open gangway of the Mediator's person. Here is joy for all the saints, for this ladder can never be broken, our communion is abiding.

No doubt, to Nathanael's view, the promise would be fulfilled as he perceived the providence of God as ruled by Christ Jesus, who orders all things for the good of the church. Was not this intended in the figure of angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, that is, all agencies whether living or material, all subject to the law and the dominion of Christ, so that all things work together for good to



them that love God. Do not go fretting to your homes and say, “Here are new doctrines springing up, and new gods that our fathers knew not, and ministers are slipping aside from the faith, and bad days have fallen upon the church, and Romanism is coming up, and infidelity with it.” All this may be true, but it does not matter one fig for the great end that God has in view. He has a bit for the mouth of leviathan, He can do as He wills with His most powerful enemies, He rides upon the wings of cherubs, and rules the storm, the clouds are but the dust of His feet. Believe you never that providence is out of joint, the wheels of this great engine may revolve some this way and some that, but the sure result will be produced, for the great Artiste sees the final result to be secure. God’s glory shall arise from it all! Angels descend, but they as much do the will of God as those which ascend. Some events seem disastrous, and even calamitous, but they shall all, in the end, prove to be for the best, for he—

*“From seeming evil still educeth good,  
And better still, and better still, in infinite progression.”*

Until the crown shall come upon the head of Him who was separated from His brethren, and all the glory shall roll in waves of mighty song at the foot of His throne, may you and I continue to see this great sight more and more clearly. Until the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the trump of the archangel, and the voice of God, and once and for all shall we see heaven and earth blended, may we continue to see angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

All this matchless glory will come to us through that little window by which we first saw the Savior. If we will not see Him as our Lord until we can see all the future, we shall perish in darkness. If you will not believe, neither shall you be established, but if, with simple and true hearts you have been seeking Jesus, and now come and accept Him as the Lord, the King of Israel, then greater things than these shall be in store for you, your eyes shall see the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off, and the day of His pompous appearing, when heaven and earth shall hang out their streamers for overflowing joy, because the King has come unto His own, and the crown is put upon the head of the Son of David, then shall you see it, and see it all, for you shall be with Him where He is, that you may behold His glory, the glory which the Father gave Him before the foundation of the world.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 97 & 98, JOHN 1:35-51.**

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Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at [www.spurgeongems.org](http://www.spurgeongems.org).