

# COMMENTARY ON JOHN

## LESSON NUMBER 18

*“JOHN 1:47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! <sup>48</sup> Nathanael saith unto Him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. <sup>49</sup> Nathanael answered and saith unto Him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.” .....John 1:47-49)*

### JESUS SPEAKS TO NATHANAEL

#### INTRODUCTION

Spiritual life, together with perception and insight, commences to develop when we confront the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. It does not begin with church-affiliation, or the formation of friendship with godly people. Andrew and John were both different before they met Jesus. They were godly, they were interested, they were disciples of John – but none of those conditions or contacts accomplished what contact with Jesus did. Faith, hope, and every other form of spiritual life, cannot be transmitted from one person to another – not even from John the Baptist, Peter the Apostle, or Paul the Apostle. No person aglow with the Spirit of God can confer that glory to someone else. The shining face of Moses could not cause the faces of any other Israelites to shine – not even Aaron or Joshua. No legitimate prophet became one because they were around another prophet. No one can confer life but Jesus, who Himself is *“the Life”* (John 14:6), and can therefore give life (John 6:33). We are witnessing this being lived out in our text. People are being brought to Jesus, and they will conduct their lives differently after they have been with Him. Peter and Andrew, and James and John, did not leave their fishing trade for John the Baptist – but they did for Jesus (Matt 4:18-22). Matthew did not leave the seat of customs for anyone except Jesus (Matt 9:9). Saul of Tarsus did not abort his malicious pursuit of believers for anyone but Jesus (Acts 9:4-9).

This is something that must be apprehended! The difference in people, where some aggressively live for Jesus and some do not, is not owing to personal discipline or natural aptitude. It is because some walk with Jesus, and some do not. Cleopas and his companion were different after they had walked and talked with Jesus (Lk 24:18-33). The disciples who huddled in fear after Jesus had died, conducted themselves differently after they were again with Jesus (Lk 24:33-45). O, it is so important that we all see this, take hold of it, and allow ourselves to spend more time in the presence of the Lord. This is what will make our gatherings more edifying and productive. We are growing in this matter, but we must continue to do so, and even at a more aggressive pace. The coming of the Lord is drawing near, as well as the beginning of a new year.

### JESUS SAW NATHANAEL COMING TO HIM

*“JOHN 1:47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”*

Jesus had *“found Philip”* (John 1:43), but Philip had now found Nathanael (John

1:45). This is the manner of the Kingdom. Those who are found by Jesus find themselves bringing others to Jesus. This is not the result of a law or commandment. Jesus did not tell Philip to find Nathanael, or anyone else. The "bring someone with you" requirement that is laid upon some people, is not one authored by Jesus. It is true that Jesus told His disciples to *"teach"* [make disciples] all nations, to baptize them, and to teach them *"to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"* (Matt 28:19-20). But He did not repeat this every time they went out. Further, after He was seated at the Father's right hand, there is no record of an apostle or anyone else delivering that commandment to someone else. There was a higher motivation in the people that was more consistent and persistent. Following Christ's exaltation, and the Spirit of God dwelling within them, they were *"joined unto the Lord"* (1 Cor 6:17), and, consequently had His mind (1 Cor 2:16). They did what Jesus said, going without question wherever they were directed. This kind of compulsion is being introduced in our text – part of John preparing the way for the Lamb of God.

**JESUS SAW NATHANAEL COMING TO HIM.** From one point of view, Philip was bringing Nathanael to Jesus. From another point of view, the Father was drawing Him to Jesus (John 6:44). From yet another view, Nathanael himself was coming to Jesus (Matt 11:28).

Now we see yet another view, that Jesus sees Philip being given to Him by the Father (John 6:39) – *coming to Him.* Speaking as a man, Jesus will assess Nathanael, searching Him as Scripture declares the Lord does. As it is written, *He "knows the secrets of the heart"* (Psa 44:21). The Lord testifies, *"I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings"* (Jer 17:10). Again it is written, *"the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins"* (Psa 7:9). Jeremiah saw this Divine trait and mentioned it in his prayers: *"But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart"* (Jer 11:20; 20:12).

The glorified Christ said to the churches in Asia, *"I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts"* (Rev 2:23). He did this when He assessed those seven churches to whom the Revelation was addressed: *"I know thy works and thy labor, and thy patience"* (Rev 2:2); *"I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works"* (Rev 2:19); *"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead"* (Rev 3:1); *"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot"* (Rev 3:15). That is the great Searcher, probing the heart and declaring what He has found.

**HE SAID OF HIM.** Now Jesus will look into Nathanael's heart, searching it, and will tell the man what He has found. This too is the Lord's manner – it is what He does.

**THOU ART AN ISRAELITE INDEED.** Other versions read, *"true Israelite,"* <sup>NIV</sup> *"truly an Israelite,"* <sup>NRSV</sup> *"true son of Israel,"* <sup>BBE</sup> *"genuine Israelite,"* <sup>CEB</sup> *"real Israelite,"* <sup>MRD</sup> *"genuine son of Israel,"* <sup>NLT</sup> *"a right Israelite,"* <sup>PNT</sup> *"a real man of Israel,"* <sup>IE</sup> *"a true descendant of our ancestor Israel."* <sup>CEV</sup>

A *"true Israelite"* is a member of the special body of people that reside in a larger body of people. Therefore it is written, *"For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called"* (Rom 9:6-7). Confirming that this condition still exists, Paul goes on to say, *"That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed"* (Rom 9:8). He does not say the uncounted people are not Israelites (as some allege), but that only certain of them are *"counted for the seed."* Under the Law, the bloodline was important, but not the **most** important thing. The difference is found

in what is discovered in the heart – whether or not they have faith. In our text, there were many people who were really Israelites by natural birth. Yet, Jesus said to some of them, *"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do"* (John 8:44). He even told some of them they could not properly be traced back to Abraham: *"If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham"* (John 8:39). There is a spiritual generation that transcends fleshly associations. Nathanael was a member of it – and Jesus saw it.

**IN WHOM IS NO GUILF.** Other versions read, *"no deceit,"* <sup>NKJV</sup> *"nothing false,"* <sup>NIV</sup> *"who is sincere,"* <sup>GWN</sup> *"There is no duplicity in him,"* <sup>NAB</sup> *"a man of complete integrity,"* <sup>NLT</sup> *"an honest man,"* <sup>LIVING</sup> *"one you can trust,"* <sup>ERV</sup> and *"not a false bone in his body."* <sup>MESSAGE</sup> This is a trait of those approved by God. They do not misrepresent themselves, or attempt to convince others they are something that they are not. They know that the eyes of the Lord searches their hearts – in fact, they want Him to do so (Psa 139:23-24). In our day the necessity of this posture cannot be overstated – particularly in a religious setting. There are too many people in the Christian community that are pretending – guile is found in them, and it is not acceptable.

### **WHENCE KNOWEST THOU ME?**

<sup>48</sup> *Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest Thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee."*

As we peruse this text, we must keep in mind that we are being acquainted with the Lord Jesus, and some of the ways through which He seeks and saves that which was lost (Lk 19:10).

**WHENCE KNOWEST THOU ME?** Jesus has said Nathanael is a real Israelite, in whom is no guile or pretension. In his answer, Nathanael confirms that this is, indeed the case. He did not fall under the weight of *"voluntary humility"* (Col 2:18), or *"false humility,"* <sup>NKJV</sup> or *"self abasement"* <sup>NASB</sup> – responding that this was not really the way he was. Jesus knew he was not feigning humility, but was guileless. The point here is that Nathanael knew this is the way he was, because it was intentional. He deliberately lived in a way that did not misrepresent who and what he really was. Now, he is amazed that anyone has properly assessed him. Perhaps you have experienced someone assessing you the way you really are, and it has astounded you that this was the case. Admittedly, Satan will attempt to use this to condemn people, but the truly guileless will not be snared by him. One of the rewards for being godly is that one is freed from pretension and hypocrisy. Praise the Lord for that!

**BEFORE PHILIP CALLED THEE.** Jesus tells Nathanael that He had seen him before Philip had found him and called him. This was not mere happenstance, but gives us some insight into how people are actually brought to Jesus. Jesus first finds them, then sends a messenger to them. This is not a human conclusion, but is actually stated quite clearly. *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. **How** then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and **how** shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and **how** shall they hear without a preacher? And **how** shall they preach, except they be **sent**? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and **bring** glad tidings of good things!"* (Rom 10:13-15).

This is how every conversion happens. Here a specific instance is given. Jesus is beginning to assemble His disciples, for employment in the building of His church (Matt 16:18). He Himself first finds them, then employs one of His servants to go to them,

bringing the message for which He has prepared them. This is what happened with Cornelius: He was first found, then Peter was sent, and those who heard Peter at Cornelius' house believed (Acts 10). It is what happened with Lydia and her companions. Jesus first found them in Macedonia, then sent Paul and company there, and Lydia and her household believed (Acts 16:9-15). It happened with the Ethiopian eunuch. Jesus first found him, then sent Philip to preach to him, and the eunuch believed (Acts 8:29-39).

This is the process of which Paul spoke when he reminded the Corinthians that they should not be glorying in men. *"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?"* (1 Cor 3:3-5).

Think of it this way. The eyes of the Lord are continually scanning the earth, looking for a certain kind of people – seekers, desiring ones, those who are ready to receive the truth. He sees them where they are, and moves someone to go to them, and reap the whited harvest. This is what happened when the Holy Spirit called upon the church in Antioch to separate Barnabas and Saul for a work He had for them (Acts 13:2-4).

How do you account for the rapid spread of the Gospel in those early years? The answer is not found in a particular strategy they developed. Rather, the messengers were sent by Jesus to fields ready to harvest. Today, workers are sent out to fields that are not white unto harvest, and thus there are diminishing returns.

**WHEN THOU WAST UNDER THE FIG TREE.** We have no idea of the details of this reference, and, indeed, we do not need any more details. The point is that this was something Nathanael would recognize as miraculous. I do not doubt that under that tree he was having some extended thoughts about what John the Baptist had preached, and the coming Messiah. His thoughts must have been so personal, he had not shared them with anyone else. But Jesus saw him, and searches his heart and reigns discovering things no one else knew.

**I SAW THEE.** This was not a casual glance. As used here, the word *"saw"* means, "TO PERCEIVE, NOTICE, DISCERN, DISCOVER; TO ASCERTAIN WHAT MUST BE DONE ABOUT WHAT IS SEEN." THAYER Jesus saw as a Shepherd would see – a Savior, a Deliverer, and a Teacher. What he saw was someone ready to learn more, see more, comprehend more. He saw a hungering and thirsting soul, a seeking soul, and a longing soul. It is important that we know Jesus is such an one. There may be times when you particularly long for more from the Lord. He will see you, and will see to it your longing is answered. That is His nature.

### **THOU ART THE SON OF GOD**

*"<sup>49</sup> Nathanael answered and saith unto Him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel."*

Nathanael's response will confirm that he is precisely what Jesus said he was. It will corroborate that he has been thinking about right things, and has had extended thoughts about the Messiah.

**RABBI.** The vast majority of the versions read *"Rabbi."* Other versions read, *"Sir,"* LIVING *"Teacher,"* ERV/WILLIAMS *"Master,"* PHILLIPS The word itself is a transliteration of the Greek word "rabbi." As it is used in the Scriptures, it means "Teacher," which office the Hebrews held in high regard. Our culture holds athletes, entertainers, business tycoons,

and religious professionals in high regard. How different from the God-ordained culture of the Hebrews! This is how Jesus was known as He went about doing good and healing all who were possessed of the devil (Acts 10:38).

**THOU ART THE SON OF GOD.** When Gabriel told Mary she was going to conceive a miraculous child, he said *"He shall be called the Son of God"* (Lk 1:35). This is the fact that Satan challenged (Matt 4:3,9). During His prodigious ministry, demons *"came out of many, crying out and saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of God"* (Lk 4:41). John the Baptist said, *"And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God"* (John 1:34). Martha said to Jesus, *"I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God"* (John 11:27). Peter confessed what God had revealed to him, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God"* (Matt 16:16).

As you can see, when He walked among men, there were not many that affirmed He was *"the Son of God."* Some of the Jews sought to kill Him because He said He was *"the Son of God."* *"Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God"* (John 5:18). Actually, those enemies of Jesus saw more of the implications of that truth than many professing believers see.

The perception and belief of this fact is what enables believers to overcome the world. As it is written, *"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"* (1 John 5:5). The implications of that God-breathed statement are most arresting. It explains why professing Christians do not overcome the world – they are not believers! They have set their focus on the wrong thing, or the wrong one. Further, believing this is not something that is academic or merely mental acquiesce. When someone like the Ethiopian eunuch say, *"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God"* (Acts 8:37), they are not consenting to a creedal statement. This is a confession that will lead a person to do anything the lord commands. They will have a *"What wilt Thou have me to do"* attitude (Acts 9:6; 2:17; 16:30). Those who fail to do what Jesus says must endeavor to answer His poignant question: *"And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* (Luke 6:46). Jesus went on to say, *"But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great"* (Luke 6:49). That is the person who does not believe that Jesus is the Son of God!

There is such a weakness in the professing church on this point that it boggles the mind. With rare exceptions, Christ being the Son of God is viewed as a creedal point to which men must subscribe if they are going to be a member of a church. Men rarely associate this confession with overcoming the world, or unfailing obedience to Jesus.

Through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, God Himself has declared Him to be *"the Son of God with power"* (Rom 1:4). That *"power"* is *"all power in heaven and on earth"* (Matt 28:18), and where men do not submit to it, and obey it, they cannot be saved. To deny the Son will result in the Son denying that person. Thus it is written, *"But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven"* (Matt 10:33). He also added, *"But he that denieth Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God"* (Luke 12:9) – and the angels are *"the reapers"* (Matt 13:39).

**THOU ART THE KING OF ISRAEL.** This was the One to whom the government would be given (Isa 9:6). He was referred to by Micah as *"Ruler of Israel"* (Mic 5:2). Zephaniah referred to Him as *"the King of Israel"* (Zech 3:15). During the Triumphal entry

into Jerusalem, when, as Zechariah prophesied Israel's *"King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation . . ."* (Zech 9:9), the people *"took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the **King of Israel** that cometh in the name of the Lord"* (John 12:13).

Nathanael saw Jesus of Nazareth differently than the multitudes. He associated Him with the prophets proclamations of the coming Messiah. Jesus not only came to save, but to rule; not only to deliver, but to spoil the foes, casting them down to the ground. Before history concludes, Jesus will be known as *"the King of all the earth"* (Psa 47:7). Israel is too small for Jesus to be only their King. Therefore it is written, *"And He said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth"* (Isa 49:6)