

Title and Scripture: *The Disciples: Nathanael Bartholomew* (John 1:46-49 and selected Scriptures)

Theme: Bartholomew (Nathanael) knew the Hebrew Scriptures and makes an early profession of faith (John 1:49). We must also profess Christ and be devout followers of His Word.

When Sadie was born, on her second night post birth, which was our third night in the hospital, she had a rough night and so did we. Most of that second day Mercedes didn't want to sleep. She was fussy and for new parents, as we were, it was rough. Her first night she slept quite well and so did we. But, as I said, her second day she was fussy. It was somewhat embarrassing to me that as people visited she wouldn't settle down. Then after everyone left, when it was about 7:30 or 8:00 she just was terribly unhappy. She would cry and even scream. We even learned and heard the painful high pitched scream. You know what scream I am talking about, the scream that makes you feel bad for the baby and want to plug your ears at the same time. We called the nurse and she tried to get her to feed more, thinking that Mercedes was unhappy with the change in the breast milk. But this made her scream even more. I remember thinking, "Oh no, we have a strong-willed child, we need to buy books." I remember wondering what the next few years are going to be like considering this is only the second night. We eventually realized, with just a little help from the nurse, that she was unhappy when we made her sleep on her back. Mercedes had gas and she needed to be laid on her side. This meant no more milk or cheese pizza for Meagan. But, the thing is, these days you are not supposed to let a baby lay on her side or stomach unsupervised. So, we had to watch her and stay awake while she was on her side. We eventually got Mercedes to sleep on her back. We then slowly, carefully and gradually, took her down to the hospital nursery. Meagan and I then slept for about two hours until the nurse came back in with Mercedes stating that she was hungry. Mercedes didn't eat much, she was having more gas. Truth be told, I believe the nursery couldn't handle her and she was kicked out of the hospital nursery. So, for the rest of that night Meagan and I stayed up watching Mercedes as she slept on her right side. We slept a few winks and that was all. It was an extremely long and rough night. Mercedes would sleep while on her side and then if we moved her to her back she would wake up crying. But we got through it. The next night we were home and it was better. With each day and week we learned how to take care of Sadie's needs. We became learners of Sadie. We learned that Sadie is a little strong willed and can make her needs known quite well.

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The point of that whole story is that parents end up studying their children and that is what we did. We learned how to make her sleep, how to feed her and what the different cries might mean.

In another way it has been said that a husband needs to be a studier of his wife.

We are detectives in a way, not unlike Sherlock Holmes, MacGyver, James Bond, Jack Bauer, James West, Mr. Spock and any other detective. We are researchers not unlike someone really working on a PhD, or some life long study.

Now, today we are going to look at Nathanael Bartholomew. He was a disciple of Jesus. Nathanael was likely his first name and Bartholomew was likely his last name. For the rest of this message I will call him Nathanael. Nathanael was a learner in a different way. He was one who knew the writings which we know as the Old Testament. Also, just as we study our spouse and study our child, just as we try to be devout parents and husbands or wives, Nathanael was a devout Jewish man. Nathanael knew the Hebrew Scriptures and made an early profession of faith. We also must study the Scriptures and profess Christ. Please turn with me to John 1:43-51

John 1:43–51 (ESV)

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you

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will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

- I. In verses 43-46 Philip invites Nathanael to meet Christ. In these verses we see the importance of the Old Testament Scripture to Nathanael.
 - a. This is John chapter one and Philip had just met Christ and was excited about his faith. He was so excited about his faith in Christ that there in verse 45 he invites Nathanael to check out Christ.
 - i. This is called invitational evangelism and we all must be a part of this.
 - ii. Jesus was such a happy thought for Philip that he just couldn't keep it in, he had to share Jesus. We will come back to this when we actually talk about Philip on a Sunday.
 - b. But verse 44 also shows that for Nathanael and Philip they must have known the Old Testament. They must have studied the Old Testament. They must have been learners, and they must have been detectives.
 - i. Why would Philip say that Jesus is the One Moses wrote about in the law and that the prophets wrote about unless they knew the law, they knew the books of the prophets, they knew our Old Testament.
 - ii. I picture Nathanael being like the Bereans were in Acts 17. The Bereans studied the Scriptures to see if Jesus was the Messiah. They searched the Scriptures. They were detectives.
 - iii. The Scriptures are still important and we also must search the Scriptures and study the Scriptures so we know what is of God. Suppose you have a friend that invites you to hear some great speaker, how do you know what is of God and what is not?
 - iv. It appears that Nathanael studied the Old Testament as parents study their child.

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- c. Verse 46 is a sarcastic reply on Nathanael's part. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Now, I find this funny, mainly because I think this about certain cities myself, well, maybe just a little. There was competition between cities back then, but also Nazareth was a small town.
 - d. Regardless, Philip simply says, "Come and see."
- II. So, in verses 47-51 we see the exchange between Jesus and Nathanael.
- a. Jesus sees Nathanael and says: "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."
 - b. That is quite a statement. What if someone saw you, what if Jesus saw you and said, "Here is a true Christian" What would you think? That is what this is saying.
 - c. "No deceit" is a contrast compared to Jacob the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham in Genesis who was quite deceitful and quite treacherous.
 - d. A few years ago I was talking with a woman who had an absent father and she said something like this about a man in the church, "He is a good dad, I often wonder what it would have been like if I had a dad like him." That is quite a compliment. That person is a great learner of his child or children and quite good with his grandchildren. He is a detective, he's working on the PhD and that was a compliment about his devotion to parenting.
 - e. In this case, Jesus gives Nathanael quite a compliment to his devotion as a true Jewish man without treachery or deceit.
 - f. Now, as we might expect, Nathanael is caught off guard, "How do you know me?"
 - g. Jesus responds: "Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

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h. Fig trees were a place of study. John MacArthur says the following:

Basically in Palestine fig trees were planted around houses as well as places where they would be harvested as a crop. And a fig tree would grow to a height of fifteen feet and spread its branches out as far as twenty-five feet. It would be like a very great shade area and it's very hot there, you know. And in many of the poorer homes there was only one room and there was little breeze very often and so you could go out under the fig tree and you could find shade and comfort and coolness.

But beyond that, a fig tree became the only place you could go to get away from the house and the hustle and bustle of what was going on inside. And so it became a place of retreat. It became a place of respite. It became a place to be alone. It became a place of prayer and a place of meditation and a place of contemplation, a place of communing with God, a place of searching the Scripture, a place of quietness. And it may well be that Nathanael was out under the fig tree, as so many Jews did, and he was meditating and he was praying... the quietness and the solitude, away from the activity of the house. He was seeking God in the privacy of the shade of the fig tree.

- i. So, Jesus likely saw him under this fig tree and saw his actions meaning that he is a devout Jewish man, studying the Scriptures, seeking a relationship with God.
 - ii. But Jesus also knew all people. Later on, in John 2:24 it says that Jesus knew all people. Jesus had a spiritual inner knowledge of people and this convinced Nathanael to react.
- i. In verse 49: Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”
 - i. This is a faith statement. You are the King of Israel. This means that Nathanael is recognizing the prophecies of this great coming king are fulfilled in Jesus.
 - ii. Now, Nathanael would not know this if he hadn’t searched the Scriptures beforehand, he wouldn’t know this if he didn’t study.

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So, now Jesus responds: ⁵⁰ *Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.”* ⁵¹ *And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*

- iii. This is a spiritual enlightenment that Nathanael will receive, but this is also a contrast. You see Jacob way back in the Old Testament saw a vision of angels going up, like on a ladder to heaven. The ESV study Bible says this: **See heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending** recalls the story of Jacob in Genesis 28 (see esp. v. 12). Jesus will be a greater way of access to God than the heavenly ladder on which angels traveled between God and Jacob (Gen. 28:12; cf. Heb. 10:19–20), and wherever Jesus is, that place will become the “New Bethel” where God is revealed.
 - iv. So, Nathanael made quite a faith statement and Jesus responded to his faith statement. Jesus agreed with him and said, “Yes, I am Immanuel. Yes, I am God in the flesh and the angels, they serve me, and they descend to me.”
 - v. Now, that would give him a happy thought. That would just blow him away. That must have been quite amazing.
 - j. Early church tradition says that he ministered in Persia and India and took the gospel as far as Armenia. There is no reliable record of his death. One tradition says that he was tied up in a sack and cast into the sea. Another tradition says that he was crucified.
- III. It still should be amazing to us as Christ followers. Where is your faith?
- a. Is Jesus God? Is Jesus your King?
 - b. How about your devotions? Where is your fig tree? Do you have a place to commune with God? Do you have a place of solitude to study and pray?

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- c. Once I heard of John Wesley's mother, she had several children and so you can imagine the noise and commotion. Yet, she trained her children to not interrupt or bother her when she was sitting down with her apron covering her face because that was her prayer time.
- d. Sometimes we must be creative in finding solitude.

At one point when Mercedes was a baby I was rocking Sadie for an extensive time period trying to get her to sleep and then Meagan said, "Put the blanket by her face." I did that and she went to sleep. Meagan had studied Sadie a little more than I have. Meagan knew how to help her get to sleep at night. This comes through devotion and time and experience and we still have a long way to go.

It is quite clear that Nathanael studied the Scriptures so that he was able to recognize Jesus as the Son of God and Jesus recognized him as a devout Jewish man. I ask you to work at emulating his example.

Prayer.