

Ordinary to Extraordinary Week 8:
Nathanael aka Bartholomew

Baptismal service

This summer we are teaching through the 12 apostles...

- From ordinary to extraordinary **as individuals** as they learn and are transformed by Jesus.
- Also, **as a group** they went from a gang of misfits to the team that saw the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Judea/Samaria, to Asia, and then Rome.
- **How am I like _____ and can God do the extraordinary in and through me.**

Today we will look at **Nathaniel, or Bartholomew**, as he is called in some cases. **He came from Cana**, which was close to Nazareth in Galilee. Where Jesus did his first miracle.

Phillip brought him to Jesus, after Jesus sought out Phillip. They are **linked together** in scripture, church history, and legend. It is believed that they were **close friends**.

All of this took place in the wilderness as people were following John the Baptist. It is here that John says that **Jesus is the Lamb of God**. This was where **Andrew, John, Peter, and possibly James** were called by Jesus.

The beginning of the gospel of John is where we find out about Nathaniel. ⁴³ **The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come, follow me.”** ⁴⁴ Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown. ⁴⁵ Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.” ⁴⁶ “Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” “Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied. ⁴⁷ As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.” ⁴⁸ “How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.” ⁴⁹ Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰ Jesus asked him, “Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see

greater things than this.”⁵¹ Then he said, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.” John 1:43-51

1

If we are to see if there is **anything in Nathaniel that we can relate to and be challenged by**, we need to see what we can **observe about him from this passage**.

The first thing we can see from this passage is that...**He knew the scriptures** (truth).

So how can we say that about Nathaniel? **Does it really say that?** Look at verse 45. **Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.” John 1:45**

Why would you introduce someone to your friend as the one Moses and the prophets spoke of **if your friend wasn’t fluent in Moses and the prophets**. He didn’t say, **I met that amazing teacher** you’ve heard about. He didn’t say, **I met the guy who has done all those miracles** we have heard about? No, he specifically referred to the Old Testament scripture. **You don’t do that if your friend is going to say, “Cool, Moses, prophets, yes I’ve heard those guys were important but what specifically did they say about him and why should I care.”**

They came to the desert to hear John because of the interest in OT prophecy. And it is this guy who says, **“I’m not the one, but there he is, the Lamb of God who takes away our sins.”**

It was knowledge of God’s Word that drew him to the desert to hear this prophet speak about God.

There is a basic principle in play here. That principle is that **no one comes to God unless God is using his spirit to draw him or her**. We don’t come up with the **interest in scripture**, the desire to know more about Jesus and His

Kingdom or to **do the things that honor** and please God. **In other words, Jesus was drawing, wooing Nathaniel to go out into the wilderness with the idea of meeting and hearing John the Baptist, but really it was to meet and be called by Jesus.**

So we know he was interested in scripture and truth **but like most of us ordinary people, we are filled with contradictions.** Here's the second thing we can observe about Nathaniel. **He had some prejudice.**

Prejudice is a preconceived opinion that is not based upon reason or actual experience. Or, dislike, hostility, or unjust behavior deriving from unfounded opinions.

2

Does this sound familiar? **"Nazareth!" exclaimed Nathanael. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" "Come and see for yourself," Philip replied.**

- Nazareth was a **rough town, unrefined and uneducated.**
- **Judeans looked down on Galileans but other Galileans looked down on Nazareth.**

He wasn't surprised by Nazareth based upon his knowledge of the scriptures and prophecy. It was an emotional and bigoted response.

If there were a **theme verse to this series** it would probably be this one. **Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. 1 Corinthians 1:27**

The same prejudice caused most of Israel to miss who Jesus was. Jesus did no miracles because of his hometown's prejudice.

Prejudice makes you deaf and blind to what God is saying and doing. Because Jesus will bring something amazing from where we aren't even looking for it.

What is our prejudice and how do we see it affecting our lives and ability to do what Jesus asked us to do? Is there a kind of person who God can't work through to transform your life?

I used to take high school students to Los Angeles to join Jesus in what he was doing in the city. After flying in, we went to a friend's house near the beach in a wealthy area of town. We were having a burger in Carl Jr's. I got into a conversation with an older woman about the places we would be visiting, like skid row and East LA. As we were leaving in our rental 15-passenger van, she rushed out and implored me not to take the children to those places. I can guarantee that she had never been there and would have said, "What good can come from skid row, East LA, South Central, or Watts?"

The answer to prejudice is serving and love. Relationships with people are the key. Nathaniel met a Nazarene named Jesus and that changed him.

Prejudice is subjective, feeling based. Scripture is objective.

3

So there's the contradiction. He loves truth and scripture, but is bigoted toward people in Nazareth. **This causes him to initially doubt Phillip's excitement.** But Jesus will work on this.

And now another contradiction, this man is prejudiced against people from Nazareth but...He had a sincere heart.

This is like ping-pong. He knew the scriptures, but he was prejudiced, but he had a sincere heart. I'm getting dizzy. The guy who just wanted to dismiss

Jesus because of where he grew up hears these words from Jesus. ⁴⁷ **As they**

approached, Jesus said, "Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity." 1:47

Jesus knows people's hearts. **No one needed to tell him about human nature,**

for he knew what was in each person's heart. John 2:25

Jesus saw Nathaniel with all his contradiction, but he knew that his heart was for God. **This is a very Jesus move. To let people know that he knows them and still wants to transform them and work through them.**

How can this be when he was prejudiced?

The word Jesus uses, **alethos**, means **truly or genuinely**. **This is about not being a fake or a hypocrite**. He was **all in as an Israelite waiting and looking for the Messiah** to come. **His heart was pure and focused.**

“For the most part, the Israelites of Jesus’ day were not real, because they were hypocrites. They were phonies. They lived life with a veneer of spirituality, but it was not real, and therefore they were not genuine spiritual children of Abraham.” Mac Arthur 238

Here’s how the apostle Paul describes what Jesus means by a true son of Israel. For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. (Sitting in the garages doesn’t make you a sports car) ²⁹ No, a true Jew is one whose **heart is right with God**. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, **it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit**. And a person with a changed heart **seeks praise from God, not from people**. Romans 2:28-29

Nathaniel’s heart was already being changed by God even before he met Jesus. Jesus was drawing him to himself. But there was more Jesus would do to transform Nathaniel. **He will work on his prejudices and wrong thinking but he knows he is prepared for this very moment.**

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It’s no different today. My dad’s response to people wanting to go back to **the ‘50s** when a high percentage of people went to church in America.

Listen to what Jesus is going to say 8 chapters later. **Jesus said to the people who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. John 8:31**

“O.K. Nathaniel you’ve been drawn, God has given you to me so are you going to let me lead. Are you going to follow by obediently doing what I tell you to do?” That moment where Jesus said those words to him meant nothing if he doesn’t follow.

²⁰ Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.²¹ “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘**Lord! Lord!**’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. ²² On judgment day many will say to me, ‘**Lord! Lord!** We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ Matthew 7:20-22

Here’s the thing; **Nathaniel was an ordinary guy** from a backwater town with no pedigree or education, **but he had the right stuff that Jesus could work with. Without a heart that is sincerely responsive to God and his word, Jesus won’t work with that.** What about your heart?

Are you sincere about your desire to know and follow Jesus? The question isn’t do you have contradictions and flaws.

Let’s add these things together. In Nathaniel’s case...**Knowing truth with a sincere heart quickly produces faith.**

Usually quick decisions are not good ones, but when you know what you’re looking for and your heart is not divided in that pursuit, then you recognize what your heart is yearning and act decisively.

It took me one date to know that I wanted to marry Robin Jones. She went from **a name that no one could misspell** to one no one could spell correctly. **Why? I’m not all that smart, nor was I good with the ladies.** I knew I wanted to serve God and I knew I wanted to do that with someone. That means I was looking for a woman who wouldn’t care that we wouldn’t make a lot of money and wanted to serve God too. It took about 5 minutes to figure her out. **Most women made skid marks when they heard my life plan.** They wouldn’t make it past the appetizer on a date.

⁴⁸ “How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.” ⁴⁹ Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!” John 1:48-49

Can you see his mind working? He’s got his **knowledge of scripture**, he’s got **his good friend** who also is looking for the messiah to tell him that this is the one and **his heart is focused on God**.

He recognized Jesus as king because this probably came to mind. **Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey’s colt. Zechariah 9:9**

And quickly he sees these words. **“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” Micah 5:2**

He’s adding it all up and then and the realization comes. Only the messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel could both know my heart and my actions. The whole Nazareth thing just fell to the side. **Jesus could have been from anywhere** at that point and it wouldn’t matter.

When Nathaniel recognizes Jesus as the one who was promised to be both his King and the Son of the Living God that translated into faith. I will attach myself to Jesus and I will trust in him.

He came into the very world he created, but the world **didn’t recognize him**. ¹¹ He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. ¹² **But to all who believed him and accepted him**, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³ They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. John 1:11-13

Nathaniel “believed and accepted”. That word **“believe”** cannot be

translated as intellectual agreement. **It is to believe something to the point of putting one's trust in it.** It is “**allegiance**”. If Jesus is both King and Son of God, then recognizing that fact isn't what this verse is talking about. **This belief affects behavior. To accept someone as king means** that you respond to them as if he is your king, the authority in your life. What he says goes.

Yes, he's a contradiction but he's Jesus' contradiction. He knows God's Word, he's prejudiced, his heart is undivided in its loyalty to God in faith. **But this faith he has just expressed is just the beginning. We think**

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when people make a faith statement that this is the end zone or finish line. This is the point where it gets really good. **Faith prepares him to see greater things.**

⁵⁰ Jesus asked him, “Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen **you** under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” ⁵¹ Then he said, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.^[p]” John 1:50-51

What Jesus is saying to Nathaniel is that because he has recognized Jesus as the point where heaven meets earth, he's going to see angels up and down. He's going to see the power of God's throne in heaven revealed in Jesus. **He is the ladder, the bridge between heaven and earth. Nathaniel won't have to look anywhere else to see the Kingdom of God coming on earth as it is in heaven.**

The Kingdom of God is what Jesus is going to teach Nathaniel and the gang for the first year or two of his ministry. He was teaching them that he is the one where the kingdom begins. He is the one who will bring the restoration of God's loving rule over all things. **It will be over governments, pretenders, injustice, bigotry, brokenness, economics, nature, and all of the things that are broken. Nathaniel gets to see that. We still get to see that.**

- Baptism.
- Racial reconciliation.

- When people who weren't obeying Jesus start obeying Jesus.

Can you relate to Nathaniel, aka Bartholomew? Are you a contradiction sometimes? That's everyone. You and I are ordinary people who have contradictions.

What is the state of your heart? Meaning is your allegiance set or is it divided. I want some Jesus/God blessings, but I still want to set my own agenda. **Don't you think he had some plans? Well that day they ended and the only plan was to watch Jesus.**

Steps of Obedience: You and I won't recognize that kingdom coming, the things that Jesus is doing around us unless we put on the lens of scripture. There was extensive research done by the barna group into what really transforms people into the likeness of Jesus. What makes them look like a follower of Jesus? What are the inputs?

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#1. **Reading the Bible**...the tipping point is 4 days a week. That is where you see an effect on your life. #2. **Confession or transparency.** #3. **Participation in a faith community.**

1. Read John 1. If you don't know where to start, don't out think this. Just read through John chapter 1 4 times this week. **How are you speaking to me through this?** What is one thing that I can do to align my life with this verse? And finally..."Whose help do I need to do this? Start a Youversion bible study.

2. Pray daily Psalm 51:1-13. That's the lens now we need to look at our hearts. The best way I know also begins with scripture. Pray this verse daily this week.

I'm going to read this with some emphasis. Then we are going to pray it together. **Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within**

me. ¹¹ Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit^[d] from me. ¹²

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,

and **make me willing to obey you.** ¹³

Then I will teach your ways to rebels,
and they will return to you.

Yes, you can teach the rebels around you God's ways. **If a regular ordinary guy who didn't like people from Nazareth can, then so can you and I.**