

“Spiritual Insight”

February 10, 2013

Text: John 1:46-51

As we have seen in John 1, Jesus’ outward appearance was unimpressive, but when people spoke w/ Him, they were often deeply impressed w/ His supernatural knowledge.

They discovered Him to be divinely omniscient (all-knowing).

* In today’s text, He will describe a man He had never met before named Nathanael, both as to his personal character, & what he did when no 1 else was around.

Nathanael will instantly set aside his doubt/skepticism and declare Jesus to be the Son of God, the rightful king of Israel.

* In Jn 4, Jesus will encounter a woman at a well whom He’s never met before, & describe her life to her, reminding her she had been married 5 times, & was now living w/ a man to whom she was not married.

She’ll leave her water pot, go into the city & tell all the men=> *“Come, see a man who told me all the things I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?”* (4:29).

* In John 21, X will meet with Peter, after His resurrection.

Jesus will ask him 3 times, *“Do you love Me?”*

After being asked that the 3rd time, Peter will then fall back on Jesus’ omniscience, saying=> *“Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You”* (Jn 21:17).

Although Jesus generally veiled His divine attributes, at times, acting in accordance w/ His Father's will, He displayed His divine omniscience.

Jesus had supernatural insight into people's hearts/lives, which gave them spiritual insight into His nature, as God in a man's body.

In today's text, a man w/ a spiritual blind-spot, perceives X's supernatural insight, gains spiritual insight himself into X's Messiahship, and is given a prophetic foresight.

This passage is full of words having to do w/ sight, most of which imply knowledge/insight.

Those words will include "see" (used 2 times), "saw" (3 times), "shall see" (once), and "behold" (once).

*** Nathanael's Spiritual Blind-spot**

[John 1:46]=> *"And Nathanael said to him [Philip], 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'"*

As we learned at the end of last week's text, Philip had just come to believe in Jesus, & had gone to find Nathanael, his friend.

As we saw last time in verse 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.'"*

It was in response to Philip's statement that Jesus was from Nazareth, that Nathanael had said=> *"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"*

This was Nathanael's spiritual blind-spot=> prejudice.

He was from Cana (another Galilean town, 9-10 miles north of Nazareth), & he didn't think much of Nazareth/Nazarenes.

In Jn 7:52, the Pharisees argued, "*Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee* [a whole region in northern Israel]."

Southern Judeans like them were prejudiced against Galileans in the north.

But even among some of the Galileans themselves, Nazareth must have been considered 1 of the lowest of towns in the Galilean area.

Nathanael (a Galilean) stumbled when he heard that Jesus had come from such a contemptible little village, which had never even been mentioned once in the OT.

In his mind, nothing good could come from Nazareth.

There was no likelihood at all that Messiah Himself would come from there.

In reality, Jesus was actually from Bethlehem, not Nazareth, and

He was the Son of the Most High, not Joseph of Nazareth.

Nathanael, in his hometown prejudice/pride, stumbled over ideas about Jesus taught him by Philip, that weren't even true.

But being so new to the faith himself, Philip didn't know they weren't true.

Thankfully, the honest imperfections of our testimony to others don't prevent God from saving souls.

And He can still bless our imperfect ministries, if we will simply give witness to the true Christ, as best we can.

The very frankness which reveals Nathanael's blind-spot, also reveals the honesty/sincerity of his character.

There was no hypocrisy/deceptiveness in Nathanael's heart.

He said what he thought, and he meant what he said—a no-nonsense kind of man.

He was a simple-hearted soul in the sense that he wasted no breath/time/effort shaping his words to make them acceptable to sensitivities of particular listeners.

He was an honest-hearted lover of truth, who really believed in truth, and was ready/willing to yield to it when confronted by the force of valid evidence.

He had been studying the Law/Prophets to learn about Messiah, hoping that He would come soon, & demonstrate Himself to be just as the OT had prophesied.

Philip's invitation to "*Come & see*" was all Nathanael needed.

Philip knew his friend well, & he knew his doubts would be satisfied and his questions answered if he could just meet Jesus personally.

Nathanael was earnest/sincere enough to investigate Philip's claims about Jesus.

He came to Jesus, not waiting for Jesus to come to him.

Jesus says in Lk 13, "*Strive to enter by the narrow door.*"

Not “Lay back in your Lazy Boy & wait for some to slide you through the door of the gospel.”

By God’s grace, those who find Jesus search for Him as for a treasure hidden in a field.

But they search-for/find Him in the Bible.

And those like Nathanael who truly seek Him, find Him—always.

When Nathanael heard Jesus speak, he was stunned by the divine omniscience revealed in His words.

Jesus could read his mind, & knew about all his private activities.

If you have some prejudice against the gospel of salvation by faith in the blood of Jesus X, be honest/sincere/earnest enough to give it a fair hearing, just as Nathanael did.

Don’t dismiss it w/o carefully considering its doctrines.

Let the power of its truths impress your mind, & win your respect/trust, as you ask God to open your spiritual eyes/ears so its message can truly impact your heart.

*** Jesus’ Supernatural Insight**

[Verse 47]=> “*Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!’*”

Jesus hadn’t even spoken w/ Nathanael yet, but He is already sizing up Nathanael’s character, w/ His supernatural insight.

Jesus read the heart/mind of Nathanael, and declared him to be an Israelite deserving of the name;

An “*Israelite indeed*”—a true/genuine Israelite.

What made Nathanael a genuine Israelite was the total absence of guile in his character—no dishonesty/duplicity/hypocrisy.

The word for “*guile*” in this text originally referred to the bait by which a fish is lured, then to a snare, and ultimately to deceit in general.

Nathanael’s lack of guile made him a moral standout in a day when the legalism/formalism of religion under the scribes/Pharisees, was replete/riddled w/ hypocrisy.

Psa 32 describes the character of a godly man, saying that, in his spirit there is no deceit—no guile (32:2).

He is a man like Nathanael, w/o deception.

He is what in today’s parlance, would be called a “straight shooter.”

He doesn’t need to hide his true desires/motives, because he is inwardly whatever he appears to be outwardly.

He is wholeheartedly committed to truth and to truthfulness in his own life.

Nathanael, in his single-minded sincerity & love for the truth, was willing to examine the claims of X open-mindedly.

He longed for the truth, and, if it was to be found in Jesus, he wanted to gain it from Him.

Jesus' assessment of Nathanael's character was exactly right, matching Nathanael's own knowledge of himself.

That impressed him, but X was about to impress him even more.

[Verse 48]=> *"Nathanael said to Him, 'How do You know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.'"*

"Sight" here is to be equated w/ X's knowledge of Nathanael.

Nathanael had come, willing to give Jesus a hearing, even though His credibility in Nathanael's mind was undermined by Jesus' having grown up in Nazareth, and prob. by His unimpressive appearance.

But suddenly Nathanael was confronted by something unlike anything he'd ever encountered before—a man who knew all about him, and could read his mind.

A Man who could see right through him.

And just as surprisingly, He thought well of him, in spite of the fact that He could read his mind.

Jesus' answer to Nathanael's question, *"How do You know me?"* was that He had seen him under the fig tree before Philip called him.

What kind of answer is that, to *"How do You know me?"*

It's an answer that implies absolute divine omniscience=>

Not only do I know your character, I know about everything you do/say/think all the time.

It would undoubtedly be unnerving to meet a person from whom you could keep no secrets, and from whom you could have absolutely no privacy at all.

Nathanael was addressing the same divine Person David had prayed to in Psa 139:1-4, “*O LORD, Thou hast searched me and known me. / Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost understand my thought from afar. / Thou dost scrutinize my path & my lying down, & art intimately acquainted with all my ways. / Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, Thou dost know it all.*”

Though Nathanael didn’t fully realize it yet, he was standing before his Creator, who knew absolutely everything about him, inside/out, better even than Nathanael knew himself.

Notice that Jesus used the word “*Before*”=> “*Before Philip called you... I saw you.*”

Jesus had been aware of Nathanael before Philip had even gone to him, inviting him to “*Come and see.*”

Philip’s doing that was not what had drawn Jesus’ attention to Nathanael.

I.e., what we learned w/ regard to Philip last time, was equally true of Nathanael=> Jesus found him, before he found Jesus.

Not only was X’s divine omniscience at work here;

God's sovereign choice of Nathanael, and His having given him to Jesus as one of His flock, had set it all in motion to begin with, long before then.

As we will see in the next verse, Jesus' mention of Nathanael being under the fig tree, will completely convince him that X is endowed with God's own omniscience.

All doubt/skepticism/prejudice will be swept aside, as Nathanael instantly acclaim Jesus as the Son of God & the King of Israel.

There must have been some great significance (in Nathanael's mind) associated w/ Jesus' seeing him under the fig tree. Realizing that, had totally turned Nathanael's whole mind/life around.

But what Nathanael was doing under that tree, no one but Jesus/Nathanael will ever know, and we have no way of discovering.

It had been for Nathanael a very private/secret moment, which he never suspected Jesus was somehow observing.

In fact, when Nathanael was under that fig tree, he didn't even know Jesus existed.

His discovery that Jesus knew all about it, left him stunned, but w/ a deep conviction that he was in the presence of God's omniscient Son.

Though we can never know for sure what Nathanael was doing under that fig tree, we can make some educated guesses, based on the dramatic/definitive nature of his reaction to X's words.

* He might have been praying/confessing some particular sin.

If he was pouring out his heart to God, tenderly confessing some guilt known only to him, Jesus' words "*I saw you under the fig tree*" would have meant=>

"I am fully aware of your secret burden, that burden with which you have been struggling."

* Beyond even that, he may have been praying like David=>

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; / And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way" (Psa 139:23f).

That's the kind of prayer those whose hearts are completely free of guile are prone to pray.

A man like this, in whom there is no guile/self-deception, can become brutally honest w/ himself, coming to the same conclusion as the Apostle Paul, that he is indeed the chief of sinners;

He usually finds that his sinfulness runs much deeper than he had ever suspected.

What a relief to realize he was looking into the eyes of that omniscient God to whom he had confessed, and what he was finding there was God's love/pity, not His condemnation.

* Then again, he might have been praying that God would fulfill all those OT promises of Messiah & His coming.

Imagine Nathanael's realizing minutes later, as he looked at Jesus, that God had now granted that request, for which he/his-ancestors had prayed for centuries.

* Another possibility, is that Nathanael had been deeply involved under the fig tree in some earnest request/supplication, & due to the urgency of his plea, the time/place of that prayer still stood out in his mind, as the Lord comforted/assured his heart.

I remember a time/place like that, of my own.

It was a hospital waiting room, and my dad had just suffered a stroke, during open-heart surgery.

Thinking I was going to lose him that night, I picked up a Gideon Bible that had been left there, and it opened to Psa 30=> *“O LORD, Thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol; Thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. / Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones, And give thanks to His holy name. / For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; Weeping may last for the night, But a shout of joy comes in the morning”* (30:3-5).

Can you imagine Nathanael praying such a prayer, then meeting the One he had been praying to, & being reminded by Him of that prayer.

Keep in mind that, if Nathanael actually was praying under that fig tree, his prayer was that of someone religious who, as yet, neither knew-about/believed in Jesus.

He hadn't even met Jesus yet.

Jesus had seen him under the tree, while he was still a non-believer in the Xn sense.

That means, even if you don't yet truly know X, He knows about you.

When you groan because there's a spiritual longing/hunger in your heart that cannot be satisfied, He hears it.

He hears your sighs when you think, "If only I knew Him."

You can be assured that, if you are sincerely seeking Him, He is encircling you w/ His imperceptible arms, and drawing you to Himself.

He knows all your sorrows/difficulties/fears, & if you are continuing to seek His face, your prayers are reaching His ears.

*** Nathanael's Spiritual Insight**

[Verse 49]=> "*Nathanael answered Him, 'Rabbi [teacher, but lit. "my master"], You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.'*"

Whatever had happened back there at the fig tree, Jesus' supernatural knowledge of it erased all Nathanael's doubts that Jesus was Messiah, the Son of God.

Nathanael burst out in acclamations about Jesus' Messiahship as the One whom God had promised would come to redeem sinners from sin, and to rule over Israel.

"Son of God" is a Messianic title going back to Psa 2:6-7=>

"I [God] have installed My King [Messiah] Upon Zion, My holy mountain. / I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee.'"

* Nathanael was also saying to Jesus, "You are the *"King of Israel"*— another title for Messiah used by Palestinian Jews.

During Jesus' Triumphal Entry, the Jews of Jerusalem would welcome Jesus as Messiah, calling Him *"the King of Israel"* (12:13).

Whether Nathanael also understood this as David's divine descendent, whom God had promised would forever rule on David's throne, we can't be sure.

The Jews of that time had some mistaken notions about Messiah, thinking of Him primarily as a political figure.

But it's clear, Nathanael was declaring Jesus to be Messiah, and beyond that, God's omniscient Son, as well.

It's doubtful any of the disciples fully understood the meaning of these titles yet.

But Jesus' followers would repeatedly use them of Him over the next 3½ years, constantly growing in their

understanding of their significance, and how they applied to Jesus.

To whatever extent Nathanael understood them at this moment, he thought of Jesus not only as the Messiah (Son of God) and the King of Israel; but also as his own personal God/King/Savior as well.

This was an expression of Nathanael's faith in Jesus, as his Savior/Lord.

This was the moment when Nathanael became born again.

Though Jesus is no longer here in the flesh to impress us with His omniscience, His Word still serves in that capacity.

At times it seems as if it could read our thoughts, & people have often made comments like that, after they've heard God's Word read or taught.

Heb 4—*“For the word of God is living & active & sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul & spirit, of both joints & marrow, & able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart”* (4:12)

In the hands of the H.S., the Word is the great revealer of things we've kept secret from ourselves.

It is the discerner of our hearts' thoughts/intentions, laying them open/bare to our own eyes.

May it do that for you, through the Spirit's illumination of His Word.

*** Jesus' Prophetic Foresight**

[Verse 50]=> *“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.’”*

Many commentators feel the 1st sentence in this verse should be translated as a statement, rather than as a question.

Whether it’s a statement/question, Jesus is taking note of the fact that Nathanael had believed in Him because of Jesus’ display of omniscience;

But that Nathanael would see Him do even greater things, that would seal his belief in Jesus as the Son of God.

We will see 1 of those *“greater things”* next time—Jesus’ first miracle, in which He turned water into wine.

Now Jesus opens up Nathanael’s thinking about what those “greater things” will teach him about X Himself.

[Verse 51]=> *“And He said to him, ‘Truly, truly [for sure], I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”*

“Heavens opened” is a perfect tense verb=> opened up and staying open ever afterward.

The 2 occurrences of the pronoun “you” in this verse are both plural—Jesus was talking to whatever disciples were there w/ Him, not just Nathanael alone.

It’s difficult to understand exactly what Jesus meant here.

He seems to be alluding to Gen 28, where Jacob had a dream about a ladder set up on earth, whose top reached to heaven.

Jacob saw angels ascending/descending on the ladder (or staircase) in Jacob's vision.

Verse 13=> *“And behold, the **LORD stood above it** and said, ‘I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants.’*

Verse 15=> *“‘And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, & will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’”*

Jacob's vision was an assurance to him that God would surely accomplish all His sovereign purposes, and would fulfill all His covenant promises to His people, including Jacob himself.

His own angelic messengers would continue to carry out His will, by their supernatural power, steering history in whatever direction He chose.

Jacob needed this assurance, because at the moment, he was on the run from his brother, Esau, whom he had deceived/cheated/supplanted.

Whereas, in Jacob's vision, the Lord is seen standing above in heaven, sending angels back/forth to earth; X seems to picture Himself as having come down to earth, attended by heavenly angels, who came down upon Him.

I believe Jesus is saying to Nathanael, “I'm here now in the flesh, carrying out God's will on earth Myself, as one of you (not only as the Son of God, but also as the Son of Man).”

Because Jesus is still a man and always will be, heaven will always be open to us through Him—our human Mediator. The curtain in the Temple is permanently torn open. After Jesus' great temptation, we see an example of the angels attending Jesus, in Matt 4=>

*“Then the devil left Him; and behold, **angels** came and began to **minister** to Him” (Mt 4:11).*

Ultimately, the vision, as Jesus described it, will be fulfilled when He returns to earth in power/glory, subduing all evil, and completing God's redemptive plan/covenants. During the Millennial Kingdom, under Jesus' rulership, God's will shall be done, on earth as it is in heaven, assured by the almighty presence of God's Son, ruling w/ a rod of iron, adored by all His people, and faithfully served by His angels.

Though Nathanael had referred to Jesus as the “*Son of God*” (which He is), X referred to Himself as “*the Son of man*.”

His great accomplishment of God's purpose for creation would take place through His manhood.

* He would suffer/die as a man.

As the eternal Logos in heaven, He could never have done that, because eternal God cannot die.

* As a man, having come to earth, He would suffer/die, as the Substitute for men, atoning for men's sins.

- * As a Man, He will rule for God over all other men, in fulfillment of Dan 7:13f=> *“One like a Son of Man was coming, & He came up to the Ancient of Days & was presented before Him. / And to Him was given dominion, Glory & a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations, & men of every language Might serve Him.”*
- * As a Man, He would be able to serve as our sympathetic H.P., and as our Mediator w/ God (the Man X Jesus—I Tim 2:5).
- * As a Man, He will someday judge all men, having walked in our shoes, and entrusted w/ that final judgment, by God.

Nathanael certainly couldn't have understood all this yet, but he chose to believe about Jesus whatever he did understand.

A principle we find in Mt 13 took hold in his case=>

“Whoever has, to him shall more be given, & he shall have an abundance” (Mt 13:12).

Nathanael had faith in whatever had been revealed to him.

Now X was promising far greater revelation.

We too, like Nathanael, must be people w/o guile/deceit, who are open to believe whatever God's-Word/the-H.S. teach us about X.

Whatever has been revealed to us, whatever we understand, whatever doubts we overcome...

If we believe it, shall become to us an abundance of spiritual blessings/blessedness.

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Text: John 1:46-51

1. Jesus’ outward appearance was unimpressive, but when people spoke with Him, they were often deeply impressed with His supernatural [20 knowledge].

Jn 4:29; 21:17

In today’s text, a man with a spiritual blind spot perceives Christ’s supernatural insight, gains spiritual insight himself into Christ’s Messiahship, and is given a prophetic foresight...

*** Nathanael’s Spiritual Blind-spot**

[John 1:46]

Jn 1:45

2. This was Nathanael’s spiritual blind spot: He was from Cana, and he didn’t think much of [18 Nazareth] or Nazarenes.

Jn 7:52

3. The very frankness which reveals Nathanael’s blind spot also reveals the [16 honesty] and sincerity of his character.

Lk 13:24

*** Jesus’ Supernatural Insight**

[Verse 47]

4. Jesus read the heart and mind of Nathanael and declared him to be an Israelite deserving of the name—an “Israelite [14 indeed].”

Psa 32:2

5. Nathanael in his single minded sincerity and love for the truth was willing to examine the claims of Christ [10 open] mindedly.

[Verse 48]

Psa 139:1-4

6. What we learned with regard to Philip last time was equally true of Nathanael: Jesus found him [14 before] he found Jesus.

7. Though we can never know what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree, we can make some guesses based on the dramatic, definitive nature of his [18 reaction] to Christ’s words.

Psa 139:23-24; 30:3-5

8. Even if you do not yet truly know Christ, He knows about you; when you groan because there's a spiritual hunger in your heart that cannot be satisfied, He [12 hears] it.

* **Nathanael's Spiritual Insight**

[Verse 49]

9. Whatever had happened at the fig tree, Jesus' supernatural knowledge of it [14 erased] all Nathanael's doubts that Jesus was Messiah, the Son of God.

Psa 2:6-7; Jn 12:13

10. This was an expression of Nathanael's [12 faith] in Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

Heb 4:12

* **Jesus' Prophetic Foresight**

[Verse 50]

11. Jesus is taking note that Nathanael had believed in Him because of Jesus' display of omniscience; but that Nathanael would see Him do even [16 greater] things.

[Verse 51]

Gen 28:13, 15

12. Jacob's vision was an assurance to him that God would surely accomplish all His sovereign purposes and would [16 fulfill] all His covenant promises to His people.

Matt 4:11

13. Christ referred to Himself as "*the Son of man*"; His great accomplishment of God's purpose for creation would take place through His [16 manhood].

Dan 7:13-14; I Tim 2:5; Matt 13:12

14. We too like Nathanael must be people without guile or deceit, who are open to believe whatever God's [10 Word] and the Holy Spirit teach us about Christ.