



Disciple-Ship

Week 3

Tonight's Text: John 1:43-51

Disciple Focus: Nathaniel (aka Bartholomew)

⁴³The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip 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."

⁴⁶And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

⁴⁷Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

⁴⁸Nathanael 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."

⁴⁹Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

⁵⁰Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹And He said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter^{al} you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

What’s in a name?

According to researchers Nathaniel was from the town of Cana, which scholars believe was located 5-10 miles north of Nazareth. Nazareth was the hometown of Jesus. Nathaniel means “God has given” or “Gift of God”. Cana was beautifully situated on a hillside, with many affluent families living there. Nazareth on the other hand was a city that housed an army base of the Roman Empire, whom many saw as a hated occupying force. Nazareth suffered from “guilt by association” among the Jewish people.

Q. Are Nathaniel and Bartholomew the same person in the four Gospels of the New Testament?

A. Most likely yes. Nathaniel was a friend of Phillip, and we read the story of how Phillip went to find him in our lesson text. Most Bible scholars believe Nathanael and Bartholomew were one and the same. The name Bartholomew is a family designation, meaning "son of Tolmai." Nathanael means "gift of God" or "giver of God." In the synoptic Gospels, the name Bartholomew always follows Philip in lists of the Twelve. In the Gospel of John, Bartholomew is not mentioned at all; Nathanael is listed instead, after Philip. Likewise, Nathanael's presence with other disciples at the Sea of Galilee after Jesus' resurrection suggests that he was one of the original Twelve (John 21:2).

Q. What are the Synoptic Gospels?

A. Of the Four Books of the New Testament that make up the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell very similar accounts of Jesus life and ministry. We call these three books the Synoptic Gospels or “Same” Gospels. John’s Gospel is substantially different from the other three.

John wrote his Gospel about 20 years after Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This is an important clue to why his Gospel takes a different look at the life and ministry of Christ. Tradition dates the writing of John's Gospel somewhere between 70 A.D. (the destruction of the Jerusalem temple) and 100 A.D., the end of John's life. In this longer time lapse between the events and John's record, John seems to have thought deeply about what things meant. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John contains more interpretation of the story, offering theology similar to the teachings of Paul. For reasons only John may have known, he leaves out several events found in the Synoptic Gospels:

- Jesus' temptation in the wilderness,
- Jesus' transfiguration,
- Narrated parables,
- The Sermon on the Mount,
- The Lord's Prayer,
- Casting out demons,
- Establishment of the Lord's Supper. (Communion)

John may have chosen to skim or skip some of the information already covered in the Synoptic Gospels, yet fill in important gaps (as he saw it) by providing new material. For instance, John devoted a great deal of text to describe the events surrounding the Lord's Passion Week before His crucifixion—a critical week, as we now know.

On the other hand, John's Gospel includes many things the Synoptic Gospels do not, such as:

- Jesus' early ministry in Galilee,
- The first miracle at Cana, turning water into wine,
- Jesus' two trips to Jerusalem before his arrest and death,
- Jesus and the woman at the well,
- Raising of Lazarus from the dead,
- Jesus' goodbye speech to his apostles.

Q. Pastor, I found similar stories in the Gospels that do not seem to agree on every detail. Does this mean that the Bible is untrue?

A. Critics of the Bible often complain that the Gospels don't agree on every event. However, such differences prove the four accounts were written independently, with diverse themes.

Matthew stresses Jesus as the Messiah.

Mark shows Jesus as the suffering servant and Son of God.

Luke portrays Jesus as Savior of all people.

John discloses Jesus' divine nature, one with his Father and the Holy Spirit.

Each Gospel can stand alone, but taken together they provide a complete picture of how God became man and died for the sins of the world. It is the collection of different people's account of the same story, some of it similar, some providing details others do not, that taken as a whole gives us a detailed picture of Jesus.

Q. What did Nathaniel accomplish as one of the Disciples?

A. Just as Andrew has the distinction of being the first person who answered the call of the Lord to become a disciple of Christ, Nathaniel has the distinction of being the first person who recognizes Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah of whom the Torah (Which books make up the Torah?) foretold. This was important because Nathaniel was a Jew of highest integrity who knew the Scriptures. Even though Nathaniel wasn't present at the Cross, along with most all of the other Apostles, he was present when Jesus revealed himself after the Resurrection.

Q. What can we learn from the few verses of Scripture that reference the Apostle Nathaniel?

A. Our personal prejudices can skew our judgment. But by being open to God's word, we come to know the truth. In Judaism, the mention of the fig tree is a symbol for the study of Law (Torah). In Jewish literature, the proper place to study the Torah is under a fig tree. Nathanael's story gives us an ideal example of how a true believer responds to Jesus Christ. Although, he had to fight off his own prejudice about those from Nazareth, he allowed the truth of who Jesus was to overcome any negative thoughts he had concerning where Jesus was from.

Q. Why is it important that each believer know what they believe about Jesus for themselves?

A. Group Discussion

Rumor has it...

Just as with the Apostle Andrew last week, other credible historical texts tell us that Nathaniel was crucified for his faith, but in an upside down position. Some historians believe that Nathaniel preached and evangelized the northern region of modern day India using a copy of the Gospel of Matthew. Rumor has it that he was crucified for preaching the Gospel in the country of Albania.

Apostles Challenge- Explore through prayer and thought what you believe about Jesus Christ and compare your belief to what the Bible says about Him. For further study, **read Mark 9:14-29**. How do you relate to this father? Ask the Lord to help in any area of your “unbelief.”