

# Bartholomew

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[ 0 : 00 ] Bartholomew wasn't called Bartholomew. Peter, James, and John have very straightforward names, but the only Bartholomews I can think of are Bart Simpson from The Simpsons and Barry Allen from The Flash.

But then if you ever meet the disciple who's called Bartholomew, even he'll tell you, that's not my real name. In the Israel of Jesus' day, Bar meant son of, just like Mac for us means son of in Scotland.

So the man's surname was Son of Bartholomew, but his first name was Nathanael. He has a strong, full name, Nathanael Bartholomew.

Now virtually everything we know about Bartholomew or Nathanael is found in John chapter 1 verse 40 onwards.

He is mentioned later in the Bible as being present at the Lake of Galilee where the risen Jesus made breakfast and reinstated Peter, and being present in the upper room in Acts 1 verse 13 when all the followers of Jesus joined constantly in prayer.

[ 1 : 28 ] But what we really know of the man is found in John 1. If from the last time Philip is the bringer, Nathanael is the looker, the looker not in the sense of his own personal appearance, but in terms of what he does and what is done to him.

He sees Jesus. But more importantly, he is seen by Jesus. Now both of these, seeing and being seen by Jesus, are part and parcel of our growth in grace as Christians.

It's as Jesus sees us in our sin and guilt, and as we see him in his love and grace, that the gospel dynamic of discipleship and holiness and service and mission moves forward in our lives.

It's summed up almost perfectly in Charles Wesley's hymn we sang together, Jesus cast a look at me, give me sweet simplicity, make me poor and keep me low, seeking only you to know.

So Nathanael Bartholomew was both looked at by Jesus and looked at Jesus. Let's make this our prayer for today, that the gospel dynamic of Jesus seeing us and us seeing Jesus would move us forward in our own discipleship, whatever form that takes.

[ 3 : 08 ] First of all then, let's look at Jesus looking at Bartholomew. Jesus looks at Bartholomew. It seems clear that Jesus had been looking at Bartholomew for some time before Bartholomew looked at Jesus.

Jesus saw Bartholomew walking toward him, but before that, as we learn from verse 48, Jesus had seen Bartholomew sitting under the fig tree.

Jesus had been looking at Bartholomew for some time before Bartholomew looked at Jesus. Ever that has been the case for us as Christians, long before we ever started looking for Jesus and found him, he had been searching for us and had found us.

Like the shepherd who lost that one sheep and having left the 99 went looking for his lost sheep, Jesus looked for us.

Jesus found us where we were. How thankful we are for this fundamental truth, for if Jesus had not found us first, we would not even have begun to search for him.

[ 4 : 26 ] The masterful way in which John writes this story gives us deeper access into a truth about Jesus than we ever thought possible.

Namely, that not only was Jesus looking at Bartholomew, but Jesus was looking into Bartholomew. Not just was Jesus looking on the outside, but also on the man's heart.

In John chapter 2, verse 25, we read that Jesus knew what was in a man. You know, we talk about reading someone's eyes or their expressions, but Jesus read Nathanael's heart.

To him, it was fully exposed. And when Jesus looked into Nathanael's heart, he saw two things. First of all, he saw a true Israelite.

And secondly, a true disciple. He saw, first of all, a true Israelite. A true Israelite. We read in verse 47 that when Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false.

[ 5 : 44 ] The disciples of Jesus came from all different kinds of background. Some were fishermen. One of them was a tax collector. Another, a nationalist extremist. Religiously, some had been nothing.

Others had lived as righteous Jews. Righteous rather like Simeon and Anna, those two old saints who spent their entire lives in devotion to God and waiting for the coming of the Messiah. Nathanael was of the latter type. A righteous man who was devoted to God and as a result was eagerly awaiting the coming of the Christ.

There was nothing inauthentic or insincere about this man. We have an expression, what you see is what you get. And that fills Nathanael's shoes rather well.

When Jesus looked into Nathanael's heart, he saw a man who desperately wanted God to send a savior and king for Israel.

[ 6 : 47 ] So here we have Bartholomew and Nathanael, a true Israelite. So the mistake we make is to say about Nathanael, well, he was already halfway there to becoming a disciple of Jesus.

He's already halfway there compared to those who have no religion at all. We mistakenly believe that because we've been brought up in church or we know our Bibles, that we're halfway to being Christians.

We may even believe the right things intellectually. 150 years ago, Charles Blondin crossed the 1,100 foot Niagara Falls on a tightrope.

Supposing he'd fallen off halfway across, would that have been okay? Not at all. Halfway across the Niagara Falls on a tightrope is no way at all.

There is no halfway to heaven for Nathanael, for a traditional free church adherent, not for you, not for me.

[ 8 : 01 ] For all that Nathanael was a true Israelite, he was not a follower of Jesus. If we think that being brought up in the church, knowing our Bibles and being good people carries us halfway to heaven, then we need to realize that unless we get the whole way, we fall into the raging Niagara Falls.

And the only way we can get all the way is by putting our faith and trust in Jesus to get us across. On that cross, he walked the tightrope above hell, and as we cling to him by faith, we get all the way across.

Faith in Jesus takes us the whole way, not halfway, which is no way. For all that Nathanael was a true Israelite in whom there was nothing false, he needed to abandon his own righteousness and trust in Jesus.

He was the true Israelite. But second, he was the true disciple, the true disciple. You know, from the moment Nathanael set his eyes on Jesus, he was devoted to Jesus.

More importantly, Jesus was devoted to him. This may have been a first meeting, as it were, but Nathanael was already in Jesus' heart and on Jesus' mind.

[ 9 : 41 ] Having confessed his faith in Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus says to Nathanael, you shall see greater things than that. You shall see greater things, Bartholomew, than that.

Whether Jesus seeing Bartholomew under the fig tree was miraculous or not, it is clear from what Jesus says here that he has plans for Nathanael. That what began in a moment is going to stretch to a lifetime and beyond.

This meeting in Cana, it may be a point in time, but even the longest of lines begins with a single point. Nathanael's discipleship begins here, but from here it's going to grow.

What he's seen of Jesus in the space of a minute has brought him to his knees in this remarkable confession of faith. What he's going to see of Jesus in the space of a lifetime is going to be altogether greater.

But here at least his discipleship begun. Jesus has cast a look on him, given him sweet simplicity, made him poor, and kept him low, seeking only him to know.

[ 11 : 01 ] From this time on, from the time Jesus cast a look upon Nathanael, his newest disciple, the horizons of Nathanael's understanding and worship of God will keep expanding.

Just like a person who looks up on a clear sky at night is first going to see the brightest stars in the sky, but then as he keeps looking, he sees thousands and thousands more stars.

Bartholomew has had his first glimpse of the glory of Jesus here in John 1. But as he goes on in life and discipleship, he's going to see greater things than these.

Yes, as we'll see in a moment, Jesus, the King of all. Perhaps today, you're not so interested in the church, but you are interested in the person of Jesus Christ.

You don't know why. He just fascinates you. And you've come here because you want to know more about him. That's good. You are seeking the truth as it is in Jesus.

[12:17] Do not give that up. Let me give you a piece of advice. Without Jesus' help, you'll never find him. Without Jesus' help, you'll never find him.

I'm not saying you should abandon your search, but that from now on, you should ask Jesus himself to help you find him.

I cannot tell you how glad he is to hear such a prayer and how willing he is to answer it. You will not find him without his help, but with his help, your discipleship will begin.

And like a line stretching far into the distance, will grow and grow. Jesus looks at Bartholomew. But secondly today, we want to see Bartholomew looking at Jesus.

Bartholomew looks at Jesus. We began this morning by talking of Bartholomew as the looker, not in the sense of his favorable appearance, but how the Bible talks about his actions.

[13:33] We also saw that he's a righteous man in the same sense as Simeon and Anna in the beginning of the Gospels. Righteous people in those days were all lookers in that they were all waiting patiently for the Jewish Messiah to come.

They were men and women who knew the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, and they spent much time praying earnestly for God to send the Messiah in their own day.

So all such people were lookers in the sense that they looked into Scripture and they looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. That's the kind of man Bartholomew was.

In John chapter 1 verse 41, we read that Andrew encouraged his brother Peter to come to Jesus with the words, we have found the Messiah.

In verse 45, Philip's invitation to Nathanael is far more deeply embedded in the thought world of the Old Testament.

[14:43] Verse 45 reads, we have found the one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph.

So Nathanael was obviously far more familiar with the Old Testament than Peter had been. And so for that reason, Nathanael bites back at Philip.

Nazareth? Nazareth? Nazareth? Can anything good come from there? It is commonly thought that Nathanael thought of Nazareth as either a godless or a run-down place.

I'm sure we can think of towns in Scotland which are rather like that. But I wonder whether it is perhaps more accurate to say that Nathanael doubted Philip's testimony for another reason.

Namely, that there is no mention in the Old Testament of the Jewish Messiah coming from Nazareth. Nazareth is in Galilee.

[15:51] If Nathanael is worth his salt at all as an Old Testament interpreter, he would have said, no, no, no, the Messiah, he's got to come from Bethlehem near Jerusalem.

Not Nazareth, hundreds of miles away. After all, that's what the prophet Micah had said. For that reason, I believe Nathanael was initially skeptical of Jesus being the Messiah.

Not out of some kind of middle-class prejudice, but from his understanding of the Old Testament. But you know how like Jesus it is to show us that all we have understood about him is wrong.

How like Jesus to blast our theological certainties out of the water and prove to us that he is greater than we ever could have imagined. And this is vital for us to grasp for ourselves as we grow in our faith in Christ.

But Bartholomew only came to a true knowledge of God and the Bible after he met with Jesus. It was only after Bartholomew met Jesus that he realized that his assumptions had all been wrong and that Jesus really is the Messiah.

[17:15] In other words, the search for Jesus and our study of the Bible will always be fruitless until we meet Jesus for ourselves.

And then and only then when our discipleship begins. May we study God properly and with understanding, affection, and worship.

As I said earlier, I don't know whether Jesus seeing of Nathaniel underneath that fig tree was miraculous or not. I rather suspect that it was because Nathaniel knew that Jesus was looking right

into his heart and Jesus saw there a true Israelite who was patiently waiting for the Messiah to come.

It's that insight which brought Nathaniel to his knees to make this remarkable confession. Rabbi, you are the Son of God.

You are the King of Israel. Like a key fitting into a lock, when Nathaniel approached Jesus, he recognized him as the Messiah.

[18:27] Do you believe in love at first sight? If there is such a thing, then perhaps we can call this discipleship at first sight.

Nathaniel knew for sure that Jesus was the Messiah. Others took a long time before they decided to follow Jesus.

But for Nathaniel, the decision was taken in a moment, like a key fitting into a lock. All his hopes came together in a moment of perfect recognition.

This Jesus is the one he has been waiting his whole life to meet. And so eagerly and so decisively he bows his knee and confesses Jesus as Lord.

And you know, perhaps there are some of you this morning who need to do that right now. Some of you who've been sitting on the fence for so long you need to make your decision for Jesus Christ right here, right now.

[19:45] Yes, there may be some who take many years to reason their way into the kingdom as it were, but that's not you this morning. Rather than use it as an excuse for delay, why don't you follow Nathaniel's example and right now turn off this internet feed, bow down on your knees before Jesus and confess him as your Lord and Savior.

Anyhow, we must move on to our climax, the climax of our study in Bartholomew, his looking at Jesus. He looked at Jesus and what did he see? Listen to his words.

You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel. Bartholomew instantly knew that Jesus was the Messiah and as such is the King of Israel.

Son of God was a title the Jews gave to the Messiah. Nathaniel's discipleship began, what ours must, with a big view of Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, who is the King of Israel.

I say a big view, a big vision because the glory and dignity of the King of Israel was to be greater than that of any Old Testament figure.

[21:14] Greater than David, greater than Moses, greater than Solomon, greater than them all put together. The Old Testament speaks of how the kingdom of this King is going to stretch from shore to shore and all the kings of the earth shall bow before him.

His kingdom is going to endure for as long as the sun shines in the sky and the moon rises. It will be a kingdom of righteousness and compassion of strength and of majesty.

And at the very heart of this kingdom shall be a throne and on that throne shall sit the King of Israel. How great then Nathaniel's confession, you see.

Standing before him in this small provincial town in Cana of Galilee stood the King of Israel before whom all the rulers of the earth will bow in homage, yes, even the mighty emperors of Rome.

But standing before him is a greater than David and Solomon. That's where his vision of Jesus begins with Jesus as the King of Israel. But for as big a vision as Nathaniel had, Jesus' vision was bigger still.

[22:33] As we read in verse 51, Jesus says to him, I tell you the truth, you shall see the heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Nathaniel thought of Jesus purely in terms of earthly dominion. He's the Messiah of Israel. He's for Israel only. But Jesus himself is bigger than any vision Nathaniel may have.

Not only is he the King of Israel, he is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Divine Son of Man to whom all authority has been given and to whom belongs the host of heaven and the armies of angels.

Jesus, you know, the more we get to know one another, the more we may like one another, but the more we recognize each other's weaknesses. That person who you thought had it all together, really on the inside, he's a bit of a mess.

For all his bluster, he's really rather a shallow person and rather insecure. But Jesus, but Jesus, the more we get to know him, the more glorious and loving we recognize him to be.

[23:56] Our vision of his majesty grows with the looking. The more we look, the grander it becomes until we almost forget ourselves and are wholly absorbed in him.

the longer a person goes on in their discipleship in following Jesus and looking at him as they should be, the bigger their vision of him grows.

The more they realize how glorious he is, how saving and how sufficient his death on the cross is, how conquering, how celebratory his resurrection is.

When I was a boy, the invitation to follow Jesus was couched in these terms. Will you have Jesus as your personal savior? I think we all know what was meant by these well-intentioned words, but the truth is that the longer we go on in our Christian lives, the more we realize that Jesus is greater than we ever had imagined him to be.

And the language of him being my personal savior comes nowhere close to doing justice to the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable majesty of his love for us.

[ 25 : 31 ] Nathanael looked at Jesus here in John 1 and what he saw forced him to his knees in humble confession. Three years after this, Nathanael, in a room locked for feet of the Jews, the risen Jesus appeared to Nathanael and the other disciples.

and then after Nathanael saw the risen Jesus ascending into the heavens, his vision of the glory of Jesus grew the more he went on in his discipleship.

The longer a person goes on in following Jesus, the bigger their vision of him becomes and the more reliable they find him to be. they've been through the thick and thin of life with Jesus.

They've seen Jesus being with them when no one else is and comforting them in their griefs.

They've learned that however great the problems of this life may be, the grace of Jesus is greater still.

The mature Christian can rest in that big vision of Jesus, not as king of Israel, but as king of all and everything.

[ 26 : 52 ] Brothers and sisters in Christ, look then at Jesus. Look at him full in the face as you meet him in the pages of the Bible and as you meet him in communion with prayer.

Look at Jesus in the freedom of the gospel. Look at him in his humility and majesty and his power and love. Look at him in his look and more. Look at him in your sin and doubt.

Look at him in your weakness and despair. Don't look into yourselves for strength to go on to get through this increased lockdown. Look at the Jesus who said, I am with you, you, always.

The end of the age. There may be some of us here today who are falling away from our faith in Jesus. We're to use an old-fashioned term, backsliding.

And we're falling away from our faith, not really because of intellectual difficulties we face, but because there's a private sin in our lives we enjoy indulging.

[ 28 : 03 ] We know that this private sin, whatever it might be, is inconsistent with our Christian profession, but we love our sin so much and are so addicted to it that we'd rather give up on Jesus than give up on it.

Maybe you're secretly drinking to excess. Maybe you're looking at internet sites you really shouldn't be looking at. Maybe you have a relationship with someone that you know to be wrong.

Maybe you are resentful because you think your Christian profession is holding you back in your career. Maybe you enjoy gambling in secret, whatever it is. Whatever the problem, you're backsliding because you're enjoying the sin in which you're indulging more than you enjoy Jesus.

Nathaniel is for you because he was a looker. The way ahead for you is to turn your eyes back to Jesus.

Look again at him through his word and in prayer. See a greater glory and enjoyment in Jesus than in any private sin in which you may indulge.

[ 29 : 24 ] Yes, as the hymn says, and we'll sing it in a moment, turn your eyes upon Jesus. Turn off your computer. Put your mobile phone onto silent or airplane mode and pick up your Bible, yes, the paper copy, and read through John's gospel.

And then turn what you read into how you pray. Look again at Jesus and look again at Jesus and I'm confident that he will give you the strength you need to turn away from your sin and to turn back to him.

but please remember always to pray. Jesus, cast a look on me, give me sweet simplicity, make me poor and keep me low, seeking only you to know.