



Benefice of Atworth with Shaw and Whitley

The Disciples of Jesus: Nathanael

21st June 2015

2 Corinthians 4: 1 – 6 John 1: 43 - 51

In essence:

- Nathanael was a friend of Philip, from Cana. He is also sometimes called Bartholomew which was probably effectively his surname. Other than appearing in the lists of disciples in the Bible there is limited information about him. There is some detail of his first meeting with Jesus and he was also present when the risen Jesus cooked breakfast for some of the disciples.
- Nathanael displays considerable prejudice when first told about Jesus when he says “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” However he is prepared to accept Philip’s invitation to “Come and see”.
- When Nathanael meets Jesus, he is greeted by this remarkable statement from him: “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” Intrigued, rather than just flattered, Nathanael asks Jesus how he knows him. It is Jesus’ response about seeing him under the fig tree before Philip called him that changes Nathanael’s life forever.
- Nathanael’s knowledge of scripture enabled him to understand what Jesus was saying. Rather than thinking Jesus’ comment was some party trick Nathanael realised that Jesus was able to see not just where he had been, but what he had been doing and even his personality. He was able to instantly accept Jesus for who he was and (using good Old Testament phraseology) affirmed Jesus as “Son of God” and “king of Israel”.
- Nathanael clearly had good scriptural knowledge. John MacArthur suggests, in his book *Twelve Ordinary Men*, that Nathanael probably sat under the fig tree praying, studying and reflecting on scripture. Homes were small, hot and possibly smoky, noisy and crowded. The shade offered by a fig tree would have been a perfect place to spend time understanding more about God.
- Nathanael was one of the chosen disciples who changed the world. However it was his scriptural knowledge and understanding that meant he was well prepared for when he met Jesus in person and equipped him to continue to serve him.

For Reflection:

1. Do you have prejudices that you know are not helpful?
2. Do you have a place like Nathanael’s fig tree? Perhaps a favourite armchair, where you go to pray, to study scripture, to reflect?
3. Do you think it is important to devote time to getting to know God better? Do you think you devote enough time to prayer?
4. How confident are you of using your knowledge of the bible to help others on their spiritual journey?
5. Will you be ready when you meet Jesus in person, like Nathanael was?