

# "I SAW YOU, *nathanael*"

*"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 1:51 [NLT]*



Within the past few days, I have contemplated not publishing this post. Three out of four of the people who proofread and/or review for me thought there was 'something missing', or that it did not have my usual flow. And although I hardly would write to please anyone, it was important for me to reassess and be certain that I truly was not putting out there something that could have been better if I'd paid a little more attention.

I have chosen to publish anyway because it may be useful to some other persons who may have some questions or just may not have given much thought to how much more scripture has to offer if we looked a little closer. In humility though, I have reworded and restructured certain portions of the piece, and I sure hope that although it may not have a central theme like most of the other pieces here, it sparks within you a desire to seek out in the scriptures this young Nazarene who came and toppled the world over with His words and compassion.

Sometime around 30 A.D., a young Jewish man, who had prepared all His life for the next three years of life-changing events, set out to begin a journey of obedience to death.

Until this time, we had heard nothing of Him, except the voice of His cousin who insisted this man was the Lamb of God. The record of His disciple John, who thought himself to be specially loved by Him, was that one day as John the Baptizer stood with his disciples, this Lamb of God came passing by. John records that it was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, who had been the Baptizer's disciple who had followed Him home became one of, if not the very first friend of this Lamb John spoke of.

Not long after, Andrew's brother Simon joined the party. The very next day, this 'Lamb of God' called a man named Philip. John records that upon discovering Jesus, Philip found Nathanael and told him he had found the Messiah. Nathanael may not have known it, but his response was about to trigger the very first words Jesus would speak of Himself, at least according to John's record.

John records that Philip found Nathanael and told him; he had found the messiah Moses and the Prophets prophesied about, and He was from the little town of Nazareth. Nazareth! Nathanael was not amused. Nazareth was a tiny little town which had people of extremely modest living. They were so poor, the people were said to sleep in the same space as their livestock. It was little wonder thus that Nathanael was disappointed.

But John records that he followed Philip anyway. And while he approached this 'Lamb' who still had not quite said anything about Himself to any of the people He had called to follow Him, He said to Nathanael:

***"Here is an Israelite indeed [a true descendant of Jacob], in whom there is no guile nor deceit nor duplicity!"***

Nathanael, who may have been confused at this point asked the Lamb: 'How do You know me?' Without hesitation, Jesus answered:

***"Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."***

This must have startled Nathanael, because immediately he answered and said 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.'

Dallas Jenkins in a beautiful adaptation of the stories of the gospels tells a backstory that is not factual but brings life to this story. In his series 'The Chosen', Nathanael had, the day before he met Jesus been sitting under a fig tree weeping, repeating to himself the Lord's assurance to be with him in his days of distress and screaming in frustration, asking God whether He could see him in his frustration.

And although the scriptures provide no such backstory, it does bring life to John's record of the encounter.



We may not know the fine details, yet we cannot deny that it must have been something about Jesus seeing Nathanael under the fig tree that triggered the kind of reaction it produced. What Nathanael did not know was that there was more in store for him, for at that very moment the Lord said to him:

***“You believe this just because I said I saw you under the fig tree?  
You will see much greater things than that!***

***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 1:51 [NLT]***

These were the Lamb's first words about Himself. Everything John the apostle had told us so far in his record, everything we had known of and about this Lamb up until this moment had been John the Baptizer's testimony of Him as the Lamb of God. This Lamb had neither commented on the Baptizer's testimony nor told us truly who He really was, not until this very moment with Nathanael.

He had just described Himself to Nathanael in two ways – first, as **the Son of Man**; and then as **the stairway between heaven and earth** upon whom the angels of God ascended and descended.

This was not the first time I had read this scripture. Something about it struck me unusually though, this week. So I paid attention a little more, and boy did I find something amazing!

***“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.”***

Would this be the first time Nathanael and possibly Philip and other onlookers would be hearing about a stairway with angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth? Highly unlikely!

In **Genesis 28**, Jacob had been travelling from Beersheba toward Haran. At sundown, he stopped at a place he later called Bethel and slept. In a dream that night, he saw a stairway. A stairway that reached from earth up to heaven. He saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway. And at the top of that stairway was THE LORD GOD. He saw at the top, the Father, the Head of this 'stairway' that granted earth access to heaven. In this dream, the LORD God blessed Jacob with seven incredible promises that could only have been the handiwork of grace:

- 1. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants.*
- 2. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth!*
- 3. They will spread out in all directions – to the west and the east, to the north and the south.*

- 4. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants.*
- 5. I am with you.*
- 6. I will protect you wherever you go.*
- 7. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you.”*

The Jews did not joke with the promises of God to their ancestors. In actual fact, they had been so oppressed by Egypt in slavery, and so oppressed by the Romans in their own land that they held on religiously to the promises of rescue and blessing and redemption that the LORD had promised their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. History records that each suffering Jew held on to one hope each day – that a messiah was coming who would redeem them from Rome's oppression and release to them these blessings that the LORD had promised them through their ancestors.

And here Jesus was, claiming to be the one thing that connected the earth to Heaven. Here He was, claiming to have access so much to the father that it was upon Him that the angels could ascend and descend from heaven to earth. Here Jesus was, telling Nathanael and his friends that this longing of theirs for the blessings of Jacob, who soon after became Israel, was only possible by Him! Here Jesus was, claiming that He was **that** stairway!

As though Nathanael had not heard enough to ponder on for one day, Jesus had also just left him with the title **“Son of Man”** to grapple with. This was not a title the Jews took lightly, much like the title **“Son of David”**. The Jews were so on the lookout for their messiah that they had at their fingertips the pointers to this messiah – he would be a descendant of David, and he would be as the Son of man, which the prophet Daniel had prophesied about. I will explain.

Jesus called Himself many other things during this lifetime on this earth. He however seemed to like the expression 'Son of Man' quite a bit, and the most common of such references was when He told a scribe who promised to follow him that *'foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.'*

For a long time, I had only understood Jesus to refer to Himself as the Son of Man in a way as to show His humility [**Philippians 2**] and neediness as a man [**Matthew 8**]...until this day during my Bible study when I decided to pay a little more attention.



What Jesus was doing with this statement was to attempt to show Nathanael that the Messiah had indeed come, even if He had come from the unattractive town of Nazareth.

The Prophet Daniel had seen a vision in **Daniel 7** - four beasts which rose up from the water. A lion with eagle's wings, a bear, a leopard and a beast with ten horns. Daniel records that the fourth beast was killed and its body destroyed by fire while the other three had their authority taken from them even though they lived a while longer. As Daniel looked on, he saw **one like the Son of Man** coming with the clouds of heaven **[Daniel 7:13 & 14]:**

*"He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. He was given **authority, honour, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world**, so that people of **every race and nation and language** would obey him. **His rule is eternal – it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed.**"*

When Jesus called Himself the Son of Man here's what He was telling Nathanael and his Jewish friends:

*I was and am the One who approached the Ancient One!*

*I was and am the One who was given authority, honour and sovereignty over all the nations of the world! Over every race and every nation and every language!*

*I was and am the One who will rule, and whose rule will be eternal!*

*The kingdom which will be incapable of being destroyed is mine!*

“ **I am Your Messiah!** ”

Daniel himself recorded that the Lord had explained that these four beasts were 'kingdoms that will arise from the earth.'

The first beast, the lion, was believed to be Nebuchadnezzar's reign in Babylon. The second beast, the bear, was believed to be Medo-Persia, the third, Greece, and the last the reign of Rome.

But as Daniel recorded, all these kingdoms would fall, and *"the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to the holy people of the Most High.*

*His kingdom will last forever, and all rulers will serve and obey him."*

And if the rest of the stories John and the other disciples recorded are anything to go by, we can safely assume that Nathanael and whoever else may have been listening understood what Jesus was talking about, because they followed Him even to the point of death!

But I do wish John the apostle had recorded their reaction, as the gospels did for those times when the Pharisees would flip when Jesus called Himself the Son of David. I do!

One thing I know though, as I conclude, is that the more I have sought to see this Jewish man for who He really was in the scriptures, the more I have found that there is so much more that I have yet to discover!

I have often wondered whether these truths which I have consistently found anew in the same scriptures I have read over and over again are only lost on me because of cultural context, or if they perhaps are deliberately hidden. I have wondered if they are God's own way of subtly ensuring that I am constantly searching and seeking Him out.

Does He choose the foolish things of this world to confound the wise merely for the sake of it? Or is it a subtle desire to be desired, to be sought out, to be pursued like a lover who tirelessly pursues the object of his love, and will every single time he finds her, discover something new that makes him fall a little deeper in love?

My hope is that this encourages you, as always, to keep pursuing Him as a lover. It really is only fresh breath/air that is able to stoke old, quenching fires back to life, and if truly this love will remain burning and endure to the end when He comes to redeem our mortal bodies too, then I cannot overemphasize the need to fall in love anew over and over again. And I truly hope this piece has somewhat done a bit of that for you too.

Until He appears and completes our knowledge of Him, keep pressing into Him.

*Love,  
Rad!*

