**WESTMINSTER PULPIT SERIES 11 (UNPUBLISHED, PREACHED IN 1907) - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**05. CHRIST AND NATHANAEL by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*"Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him, of Whom Moses in the law; and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. "*

John 1:45

THERE IS practically no doubt that Nathanael and Bartholomew were identical. Matthew, Mark and Luke never mention Nathanael, John never mentions Bartholomew. In considering Christ's methods with this man we are confined to the story of his first coming to Jesus, and the glimpse of him as, one of seven, he stood by the lake on that wonderful morning when Jesus restored Peter from his backsliding and denial to confession and to service. Therefore in some senses our task is an easier one. Nathanael is at once described for us by Jesus Himself, and consequently it is not necessary for us to group together incidents as we have on other occasions.

As he came Christ spoke not to him, but of him. As he approached - quite evidently when he was near, for Nathanael heard what He said Jesus said, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." Christ evidently described him by allusion to another. What is an Israelite? Not a Hebrew merely. This word Israel came into use in the history of Jacob, a name which indicated the truth concerning the man in a very remarkable degree. It means supplanter. We read tonight the two stories about this man, allusion to which Jesus made in this description of Nathanael. The first allusion takes us to the story, that of the return of Jacob to his own country. Twenty-one years or more had passed since he left, and the man who started out with no capital other than his staff was returning a wealthy man. He was coming back to Esau, coming back to the wrong of twenty-one years before - every man comes back to it sooner or later. He was coming back to get possession of the land. He believed it to be his. He was a man of faith in God. Not the faith of Abraham - Abraham's faith was obedient faith; Jacob's was faith restless and manipulative, he being a man who thought it necessary for him to help God to accomplish His own ends. Something happened in the dead of night. "Jacob was left alone." All his arrangements made, his astuteness had done everything that could be done. "Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." Do not misread the story; do not say, Jacob wrestled with a man. A hand was placed upon him. At first it seemed to be the hand of a man, and the strong old man of ninety laid hold of the wrestler, determined to make as much out of this bargain as he could, as he had done with every other. As the hours passed he found that the hand laid upon him was stronger than his own. At last the wrestler said to Jacob, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." What did this man Jacob say? There is everything in tone, everything in emphasis here. If you would know what he said you must turn to the prophecy of Hosea, where you are told: "He had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication to him." It was with tears that he said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." It was not a victory of resolute will. It was a victory of broken will and broken heart, and tears and sorrow and anguish. That is how he won. He won as every man wins, if he fight with God, when he submitted. "What is thy name?" said the wrestler to Jacob. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed." The striving was the striving of submission. The victory was the victory of defeat. So much for the meaning of Israel. What is an Israelite? A prince of God.

Of Nathanael Christ said, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." An Israelite is a man of faith in a man of prayer, a man who has found his way into royal nature by submitting to the God to Whom he prays. Then and do not be startled if I put it this way - with a touch of gentle, tender sarcasm for old Jacob not the sarcasm that is cynical and bitter, but the sarcasm that plays like summer lightning and clears the air - "in whom is no guile." I venture to suggest to you, not that you may translate, but that you may interpret that statement thus, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no Jacob." What is this word guile? Translated plainly it means trick. Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no trick, no smartness, no double dealing, a man of faith, of prayer, of royal nature, in whom there is no guile, deceit, smartness, trick, Jacob. That was not true of Jacob, even after Jabbok. He did not come into possession of his royal nature at Jabbok. The word of the wrestler was a prophecy as was Christ's word to Simon. Jacob had to get back to Bethel to enter into possession. The estimate was indeed a remarkable one. Here is a man who is all God means His people to be. Here is a man fulfilling the ideal, who has come into the victory, who realises that upon which the heart of God is set. Said the lonely wrestler by Jabbok centuries ago to the cynical, astute, hard, cunning man, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel." Said the Son the new wrestler with men, of Nathanael, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." I do not need to argue for the accuracy of Christ's estimate, but I do ask you to notice the evidences of that accuracy. An Israelite was a man who was acquainted with the fact that it was necessary to go under the fig tree. In eastern life the spreading fig tree was used as a place of retirement for meditation and prayer. "When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." Nathanael had found a secluded place for devotion. I am personally inclined to believe that when Jesus said that to him He was referring not so much to a habit of his life as to a definite event in his life. I see thee whenever thou art under the fig tree. That is quite true, but Jesus said, "I saw thee underneath the fig tree." I would not build too much upon this statement, but I believe that Christ was referring to some definite hour full of spiritual significance in which this man also had come into possession of the royal nature and had become a veritable Israelite. "I saw thee underneath the fig tree." Notice the evidence of the guilelessness of this man. When Philip came to him and said, "We have found Him, of Whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph," the question of Nathanael was the question of a guileless man, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" I must put that carefully. It depends upon the man whether it is a question that marks guilelessness or not. There are some people who would blurt out a thing like that and it would be no evidence of guilelessness. Nathanael, however, was a gentle, courteous man, and for him to give vent to a narrow, foolish proverb shows his ingenuousness. It was a foolish prejudice which Jesus came to smash into a thousand fragments, that because Nazareth never had had an illustrious son it never could have an illustrious son. It was a popular, proverbial prejudice. This guileless man speaks it; he does not hide the thing. There is a courtesy that hides the truth, it is not the finest courtesy. Here is a courtesy that expresses the truth, the courtesy of absolute guilelessness. Then notice what Nathanael said in reply to Christ, "Whence knowest Thou me?" I think that is one of the finest evidences of guilelessness I know. There are people who, if Christ had said this to them, and if they had known there was a certain amount of truth in it, would have been likely to say, "I am not so sure about that!" But Nathanael said, How do you know? He was an absolutely honest man. You are looking as though you do not understand me. Let me explain. There is a mock modesty that is dishonesty. That is what I mean. There is the man who speaks about his humble way of doing things, and you never believe him when he says so. There is the man who does a kind, generous action - let me not rob him of the honour - who, if you tell him so, will say, Oh, no; it is nothing. That is not guilelessness. There is no guile in this man. Jesus said, "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile," and Nathanael knew it; knew that there was no twist in his nature, that he did not pretend to what he did not possess; and he at once admitted the truth of what Christ said. In that admission there was a remarkable evidence of the accuracy of the estimate.

There is a yet further evidence of the fact that he was a guileless man. He had come at the invitation of Philip with doubt in his mind born of that self-same narrow prejudice. When he stood confronting Christ he heard Christ say, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile," and he said, "Whence knowest Thou me?" He did not call Him Master. He was not yet convinced about Him. He wondered where He had been hearing about him, whether Christ's knowledge of him had been gathered from someone else. Jesus looked at him. "Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." In a moment the guileless man knew that this Man knew him of His own personal, intimate knowledge. His guilelessness was immediately manifested in the fact that he said, "Rabbi." Until he was convinced he was guileless, and there was no false title. The moment the truth possessed him and he knew that he stood in the presence of the actual Messiah for Whom he had been waiting, he named Him "Rabbi," and with intimate knowledge of the Messianic hope he indicated the Divine origin of the Messiah, "Thou art the Son of God," and the human exercise of Messianic power, "Thou art the King of Israel." It was a guileless confession.

As we see this man coming to Christ, we are inclined to say, What can Christ do for him? Christ's own estimate of him is that he is a guileless man, a man fulfilling the Divine ideal of the ancient economy, and that without any dishonesty in his nature, no trick, no guile. He first of all revealed to the astonished man the fact that He did know him. I do not think we need stay there very long. It is well that we should be reminded of it with almost monotonous reiteration. Nathanael's confession arose from the fact that he had discovered that Jesus knew him, and that at first hand. That was the first method of Christ with him. Philip had found him and called him. To Philip he had uttered the criticism of his narrow prejudice. Philip, the practical, slow man, unable to argue, had said to him, "Come and see." He had at once come, and now the first thing is that Christ revealed to him the fact that he was known. Not merely known as to what he was, but known in the events preceding the finding by Philip. It is a beautiful word, I always think, that Jesus said here, "Before Philip." He is always before Philip. Thank God for Philip as he went to bring his friend to Christ. Thank God for the disciple in whose heart there burns the consciousness of Christ as Saviour, and who hastens to tell it to his friends, but "before Philip" is Christ. Christ's knowledge of the man was knowledge of him as he was, and as that was expressed in the hour of his loneliness under his fig tree. "I saw thee" there, Nathanael, took thy measurement there, I placed against thee the standard of God's requirements there, when thou didst imagine thou wast alone, and that no eye was upon thee, I saw thee. My estimate of thee as "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile," is not an estimate which I have gathered from the testimony of thy friends, My own knowledge of thee in thy loneliness under the fig tree, when no eye rested upon thee. Oh, the suggestiveness of this. I stand in this pulpit tonight and look out upon this great congregation, and there is One in our midst may we hear His voice - Who is saying to you by name, When thou wast yonder alone, I saw thee. Before the call came that brought you here, before you sat in reverent patience listening to the message of My servant, I saw thee. It is a great illuminative word. It is a word full of searching, full of comfort, this word of Christ to Nathanael. Christ's estimate of a man is an estimate of him when he is alone. Ten years ago I was driving with Dwight Lyman Moody around Northfield, and he suddenly said to me, jerking it out as he did some of those bright things, Do you know what character is? I knew that he had a definition, and I asked for it. He said, "Character is what a man is in the dark." I have never forgotten it. What a man is in the dark when the lights are down, and there are no eyes looking, when there is neither necessity for nor possibility of keeping up appearances. Under the fig tree I saw thee, Nathanael, and took thy measurement. I know men for what they are in themselves, in the dark. That was what arrested Nathanael, that appealed to him, this Israelite in whom there was no guile. He knew he was in the presence of One Who knew him and Who had found out what he was when he was all alone. I want to put this superlatively, and so rather than as an advocate let me speak as a witness. Christ never measures me here when the eyes of the multitude are upon me. He measures me under the fig tree, when I am alone, in the actuality of my character. Thus he measures the thinking and desiring. There are some men here who say, If that is true let it not be told. Nathanael was such a man in the dark that when he came into the light Christ could say, "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." That was Christ's first method with him.

Yes, but you say, you have not answered your own inquiry. Why need that man come to Christ? What did he gain from Christ? First of all, Christ corrected his prejudice, enlarged his outlook, made it impossible for so good a man to be so narrow in outlook. It is a fine thing to have that done for any man. Nathanael had said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" and I think that before Christ had done with him Nathanael said, in his heart, if not audibly, Can any good thing come from anywhere save Nazareth? Christ taught Nathanael that no man has any right to live within the philosophy of a proverb, to cramp himself within the narrowness of prejudice. It was worth doing. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" "Come and see," said the wise, practical, slow man, Philip. He came and saw, and God broke upon his astonished vision. Immediately he went down in an act of obeisance before the Man from Nazareth, His prejudice was gone forever.

That is not the greatest thing, of course. What did this man gain when he came to Christ? He found all that was good in him fulfilled. You will at once see that that is not imagination, but exposition of the actual story. Listen, "An Israelite in whom is no guile." "Thou art the King of Israel." That was his answer. "In whom is no guile," and the guilelessness of Nathanael found its highest expression and had its deepest, profoundest answer when he found that whatever he might be that was good according to the measurement of Christ, he had found in Christ one higher than himself, and crowned Him, "Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." The Israelite, found his King. The inquirer found his Teacher. The devout soul found the Son of God. This man of high character and fine natural temperament who had come into Israelite nature perchance by some battle fought and victory won beneath the fig tree, stood in the presence of One and said, Whatever I am Thou art more. If I am an Israelite, Thou art my King. If I have been seeking God, Thou art the Son of God. If I have been inquiring after truth, Thou art Rabbi, Master, Teacher, King, Son of God. All the highest things in Nathanael's life found their fulfilment when he came to Christ.

What more did Christ for him? Flung the horizon back, so far back that Nathanael became awed and passed out into a great silence. Christ said, "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee underneath the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these ... Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Thou shalt see the Son of Man as the basis of communication between heaven and earth. Thou shalt come to understand that He Whom thou hast recognised is not merely Son of God, quoting the Hebrew conception of Messiah, but He is the Son of Man, the link of communication between earth and all its need, and heaven with all its resources. So He has taken him back to the ancient vision of the ladder with angels ascending and descending. Do not quote that backwards; do not say angels descending and ascending. Do not be mathematical enough to say they must have come down first. Catch the real poetry of it. God would teach this man that heaven's ministry is already here upon earth. God would teach old Jacob long ago that angels were all about him though he knew it not. He showed him that they had their access to heaven to bear messages of his need and bring back the resources of God's grace and love. Now, said Jesus, catching up the ancient poetic figure, and repeating the thing Jacob had seen in a dream, the Son of Man is on the earth, of the earth, belonging to it, and upon the basis of that common humanity linked to your own life, the way is open into heaven, and angels ascend and descend upon the Son of Man. It is a very interesting study, the study of the meaning of that phrase the Son of Man. You are constantly hearing it said that Jesus there borrowed from the book of Daniel, but you will discover that in Daniel the reference is never to "the Son of Man," but to "a son of man." You will discover, moreover, that this title is one that Christ made for Himself. It was His favourite title. Read the New Testament and you will find that no one ever called Him the Son of Man except Himself, except upon one occasion when men said in incredulity and unbelief. Who is this Son of Man? after He had claimed to be the Son of Man. It is His own title for Himself, the one He loved. Mark the movement. Said this man to Christ, "Thou art the Son of God." He replied, I am "the Son of Man." The horizon had been put further back for Nathanael. He had seen already that which he never could forget. Here was One Whom he recognised as Teacher answering his questions; as Son of God, feeding his spirit; as King of Israel, governing his life. Yet this was more, through Him, he and others could come into living fellowship with heaven, and heaven would descend into living and actual fellowship with them.

Then what? Nothing else, save that Jesus presently sent him out with Philip, the slow man, as an apostle. As to where they went, all is silence. One glimpse more on that glorious morning when Jesus was restoring Peter. And yet once more, Yes, the name of Nathanael is upon a foundation in the city of God. That is the last place.

What has all this to say to us tonight? First, this. Christ knows you, as I have attempted to show, and knows you for what you are. I am very desirous to say this next thing quite carefully. There are some people who in dealing with souls act as though their first business was to tell them they are guilty sinners. Christ did not tell this man so. I do not mean by that to say that he was not a sinner. By no means. "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God," is a declaration of the inspired writer which flashes in awful light on all human history. If it be true, however, that you are a guileless man, Christ knows it and recognises it, and names it, and sets the proper value upon it. Young man, I say this to you with all my heart, Let no man persuade you that there is any value in prodigality and vulgarity. The last words of John B. Gough were, "Young man, keep your records clean." Let no man persuade you that there is no value in a clean record. Thank God for it, and remember that Christ estimates it at its true value, and reckons it worthwhile mentioning. "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

Yet remember this. All that is high and noble, the best of you, can only come to its full and final fruition as you find your King. Nathanael had walked in the light he possessed until that moment, but when fuller light shone he answered it, and went forward in submission, in devotion to the Son of God, in loyalty to the King of Israel. There is the difference between you and Nathanael if you are not careful. The light has come to you. We will not deal with the past days. Let the past days be past days for this last five minutes. You cannot undo them ... They are gone. Begin now. Have you so far walked in the light as it has come to you? Have you found your difficulty in getting to Christ to consist in the fact that you have no vulgar sins to confess? There are such men, scores of them. Let me say this to you. Do not try to force upon yourself a consciousness and confession of vulgarity which in itself would be dishonest. Say as did the young ruler; "All these have I kept from my youth," if it be true. I say to you, my brother, We have found Him for Whom all the world is waiting, we have found the embodiment of everything that is high and noble, of Whom Moses in the law with its revelation of the ethical, and the prophets in their proclamation of righteous life, spoke. We have found Him, the Master, the King, the Fulfiller of our highest aspirations. You say, Who is He? Jesus of Nazareth. You ask the question tonight, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" It is very late to ask it, almost too late for me to imagine that any man can ask it, yet in some twentieth century sense you are asking it. In differing tones and emphases I find it everywhere today. Why are you not a Christian? Why have you not confessed yourself a follower of Christ in your business house? For the moment you are absolutely guileless and honest, and you say, the fact is, I am a little ashamed. That is what I do not understand. I know men who will be content to stand alone and defy a crowd of opposing politicians and defend their political view, and yet blush to confess that they belong to Christ. I remember twenty years ago travelling in a carriage full of medical students. At one station a young fellow entered the train whom they all seemed to know. One of them said to him, I say, Charlie, someone told me you were a Wesleyan Methodist. Well, no, said the young fellow, not exactly that, I have a sitting in a Methodist Chapel! That is what I mean. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" You think there is something weak, anemic about being a Christian; you would not care to mention it.

"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" "Come and see," man. Have done taking your estimate of Jesus from Church or preacher. Get to the Christ of the New Testament, of experience. Stand confronting Him honestly, the great mystic spiritual presence, infinitely more real than any material thing upon which my hand may rest. Yield to Him with the honesty and guilelessness of Nathanael, and you will see the heaven opened and angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, and for you the horizon will be flung back and the finest things in your lives - the things that are of value - will find their fulfilment only when you have crowned this Christ. There tonight I leave you with Him, but I beseech you as this congregation shall break up, and you pass on your way, find some five minutes somewhere under the fig tree and bare your soul silently to the one Who sees always, and give your life to Him. I do not ask at first for the assent of your intellect to the creeds and doctrines of Christianity. I do ask for the abandonment of your will to the peerless Christ Who is the Saviour of the world. Let us lay before Him all we have, and He will fulfil the highest and best in us, and we shall find our King.