

Introduction: Somebody's watching you! He knows you, and the extent is far greater than you realize. He sees you in your front yard or when you call your friend. In fact, He's observing your every move. No, I'm not talking about Twitter, nor its Big Brother Facebook. Somebody's watching you, just like He was watching Nathanael "*under the fig tree*" (1:48b). It's a miracle really, that Jesus knew Nathanael without ever having met him. Nathanael responds with amazement, eyes wide, telling Jesus: "*You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*" (1:49). But having somebody watching him was not the best thing Nathanael saw. For he indeed went on with Jesus, to see greater things: The Son of Man would heal and forgive, teach and resurrect. The kingdom of heaven opened, for all to see God's flesh and blood on the wooden posts.

Jesus watched Nathanael and knew His character: "*Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!*" (1:47). Flabbergasted, Nathanael responds: "*How do you know me?*" (1:48a). Jesus said, "*Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.*" (1:48b). To American eyes, the phrase "*under the fig tree*" is curiously detached, but Nathanael understood the reference. The Galileans would each have grapevines or fig trees in front of their homes, just as you might see a porch in front of each person's home in our neighborhoods now. Like a small garden.

But for faithful Israelites like Nathanael, there's a double meaning: A reference to a much older garden. In the Old Testament, prophets like Micah and Zechariah used the phrase, "*under the fig tree,*" to describe the blessedness of those under God's protection. Some claim that the tree of knowledge was a fig tree, and so Nathanael sat "*under the tree of the knowledge of God and His Word.*" Nathanael watched and waited for the coming Messiah, rightly confessing: "*You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*" (1:49).

Philip finds Nathanael to say "*Come and see! We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote*" (1:45-46b). The apostles and Nathanael trusted the prophetic witness of men like Moses, Isaiah, and Samuel, and so Nathanael's comment: "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" is one of wonder, not skepticism (1:46a). It's as if Nathanael said: "Oh! A small town? Who'd have thought? I would've expected the king of Israel to come from a big city, like Jerusalem!"

Nathanael confessed Christ as the watchful Son of God, but "*Jesus answered him, 'Do you believe because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree'? You will see greater things than these'*" (1:50). Nathanael, along with the apostles Philip, Andrew, and Peter, would go on to see Jesus' miracles and suffering. The Lord had called them to witness both His smallest miracles, like seeing Nathanael, and His greatest: His crucifixion and resurrection.

Nathanael saw the King of Israel and marveled, but many kings of this world see Jesus in a different way. With sinister intent, they ask “How can anything good come out of Nazareth? How could a little, nonessential church in Basehor, matter?” While we Christians look to Christ crucified with unwavering trust, earthly kings look on Christians with distaste. They want to watch everything we say and do from their high platforms, not at all like Christ watching Nathanael. Christians ask “How do you know me?” but these kings don’t know, and don’t like what they see. They will accuse you of hate-speech when you say “*Flee from sexual immorality*” or when you confess “*your body is a temple*” (1 Cor 6:18-19). They will tax you for continuing to hear Christ’s forgiving words. Ban and censor you for true confession of God’s design: “*Male and female He created them*” (Gen 1:27). Such kings would rather you look at their progressively worsening posts, rather than to see the posts that Our Lord hung upon.

We become victims of such kings that wish to cancel Christ and His church, but let us not get caught up in the opposite problem either: For good kings are also not to be worshiped. “*You shall have no other gods*” (Exod 20:3). Kings and princes will not save you, whether they take your free speech away or give it back to you. Let us not fear, love and trust in any earthly king, good or bad, but in Jesus alone, the King of Israel.

You will certainly see suffering, suffering because you see Jesus. And you should! Come and see Him! Listen to the words of the prophets like Moses, priests like Samuel, Apostles like Philip, and pastors like Weinkauff. They proclaim what you hear today: “*You will see greater things than these*” (1:50). Greater than your disappointment at how things are going. Greater than your failures to love your neighbor. Greater than your sufferings.

Come and see! “*Truly, truly, I say to you, [you have already seen] heaven opened*” (1:51). At His Baptism: The Holy Spirit like a dove: the Father saying “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased*” (Matt 3:17). The heavens opened at His Transfiguration, when “*His face shone like the sun and His clothes became white as light,*” just as they did at His Resurrection (Matt 17:2, 28:3).

Conclusion: We believe Jesus Christ is true God, not merely because He sees us as He saw Nathanael, not because He “watches over us” in an off-in-space abstract kind of way, but because He opened the kingdom of the heavens for us by His cross. When you see His manifest figure on the wooden posts, you see the glory of heaven opened. He is greater than all kings, miracles, and sufferings. And you will see the heavens opened again, on the last day, when he brings justice to all people. To those who have refused to see His cross, He will judge into eternal punishment, but to those receiving His flesh and blood, He will deliver His eternal righteousness. **Come and see the heavens opened, the greater things for you. Amen.**