

## CHRIST, THE KEY TO THEOLOGY

A Sermon by D. A. Delafield  
Retired from the General Conference  
and the Ellen G. White Estate

When Philip brought Nathanael to Jesus, the Saviour recognized Nathanael even though he had never seen him before. "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee" (John 1:47, 48 KJV). So Jesus first saw Nathanael with the eyes of a Seer rather than with physical eyesight.

Nathanael had listened with rapt attention as John the Baptist preached at the Jordan River. With amazement he had heard John identify the carpenter of Nazareth as "the Lamb of God." But apparently he was not impressed by his first glimpse of Jesus. Perplexed, disappointed, and doubtful, he resorted to the seclusion of a fig tree, and knelt down to pray for light on the matter. How could this humble carpenter from Nazareth be the Messiah?

Now with Philip by his side Nathanael listens as Christ describes accurately his prayer session "under the fig tree." He is startled at Jesus' disclosure. Here certainly is an answer to his prayer for light. He is seized with the conviction that the carpenter is the Messiah after all. "Rabbi," he exclaims, "thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel" (vs. 49).

Jesus' foreknowledge and prophetic vision brought Nathanael to conviction. However, the Savior's disclosures had hardly begun. Because other remarkable revelations were in store for this guile-

less man, Jesus said to him, "Thou shalt see greater things than these" (John 1:50).

Christ pointed Nathanael to Himself as the ladder upon which angels of God ascend and descend—for He is the prime Revealer of God and of the realities and mysteries of heaven and earth. When Dr. Strong wrote the preface to his eighth edition of *Systematic Theology*, first published in 1886, he made this observation,

That Christ is the one and only Revealer of God, in nature, in humanity [p. vii].

Because He had become a dependent human being, Jesus' mind was illuminated by angels and inspired by the Holy Spirit. "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (John 3:34).

Jesus' revelation to Nathanael was just the beginning of what Nathanael and the other disciples were to learn during the next few years about this amazing young man from the carpenter shop of Nazareth.

### How Jesus Received Knowledge from God

As we explore the avenues by which Jesus received knowledge from the Father, we stand in awe. At times, the Saviour was instructed by His Father's audible voice. At least twice the voice that identified Him as Son sounded from heaven, placing the Father's signature on the personal ministry of Jesus and on their inseparable relationship. At His baptism (see Matt 3:17) His Father's voice brought courage to Jesus. Again just before His crucifixion, as recorded in John 12:28, 29, Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify Thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him."

Jesus' words in John, chapters 5 through 9, open mysteries concerning the nature of inspiration-revelation in His own life. Our Lord was a Seer as much as Samuel, David, John, or any of the other Bible prophets were. He was shown the heavenly realities in vision. He could truly say "I saw" or "I was shown."

In John 8:38 Jesus said, "I speak that which I have seen with my Father." In verse 28 He added, "I do nothing of myself; but as

my Father hath taught me, I speak these things." In verse 26 He said, "I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him." Jesus did only those things He saw or heard the Father do. Because He was dependent upon the Father for His miraculous works and for the wisdom with which He spoke, it must be that He either perceived in mind and heart, or saw in vision, the very acts that God was to perform through Him in His public ministry.

Long before Jesus began to labor in a public way He came to understand how He was to function under specific circumstances. So intimately was Jesus' life and experience intertwined with the Father's that He explained His actions, miracles, teachings, and healings as being the fruitage of the Father's work. Because He made such statements, His enemies sought to kill Him. In John 5 we read about Jesus performing a miracle of healing on the Sabbath day. When He was criticized for Sabbath breaking, He explained that the Father had shown Him what to do. "My Father worketh hitherto," He said, "and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (vss. 17, 19).

Jesus responded to their accusations by stating, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do. For what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise, for the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and He will show Him greater works than these, that ye may marvel" (vss. 19, 20).

### The Greatest of All the Prophets

Christ occupied the role of prophet, being the greatest of all prophets. Indeed He was "that prophet" foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18, 19. According to Numbers 12:6, the Lord said to Moses, "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision and will speak unto him in a dream."

It is evident that Christ had visions that enabled Him to see in advance people and events that He would encounter during His ministry. For example, when "his disciples came to Jesus saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the Passover?" (Matt 26:17), Jesus sent two disciples to make the

arrangements, explaining that as they went into "the city . . . there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him" (Mark 14:13). Then He described in detail how the man with the pitcher of water would enter a certain house. In that house they would be welcomed by a second man who would show them "a large upper room furnished and prepared" (Mark 14:15). It happened exactly as described in advance by the Lord.

How did Jesus obtain this remarkable knowledge? How do we explain His prescience when He gave two of His disciples directions for finding the "foal of an ass" upon which He was to ride triumphantly into Jerusalem? How do we explain His ability to describe ahead of time the circumstances surrounding their being able to appropriate it for His use?

Also, where did the carpenter obtain the great wisdom expressed in the Sermon on the Mount? Did the Holy Spirit disclose to Jesus in vision the truth so wonderfully disclosed in that sermon—the greatest sermon ever preached?

When the Saviour called the eleven disciples other than Nathanael, did He perceive the character of each in the same way He did Nathanael's? And did He call each to discipleship in spite of a clear understanding of his faults?

When He peered up into the tree in Jericho to see little Zacchaeus, had He seen him before? Did He know in advance what He would say to the diminutive tax collector?

When Nicodemus, the honored member of the Sanhedrin, visited Him at night seeking the light, did the ruler appear as a stranger to Jesus, or did Jesus know about him beforehand? Did the Saviour understand what He should say to Nicodemus because the Father had previously revealed it to Him?

It is clear that at the well of Sychar Jesus already knew the personal life of the woman He talked to there. He indicated to her that the man she was living with was her paramour and that she already had had five husbands. In amazement she exclaimed, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet" (John 4:19). When and how had He gained His information?

### The Vision in the Wilderness

One of the most illuminating insights into Jesus' inspiration is given in the Ellen G. White comments in Volume 5 of the

*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. When the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by the forty-day fast and the temptations of Satan, Ellen White says He was shown in vision the great work that He was about to begin for God.

He sought for strength to meet the foe, for the assurance that He would receive grace to carry out all that He had undertaken in behalf of humanity. The thought of the warfare before Him made Him oblivious to all else, and His soul was fed with the bread of life, just as today those tempted souls will be fed who go to God for aid. He ate of the truth which He was to give to the people as having power to deliver them from Satan's temptations. He saw the breaking of Satan's power over fallen and tempted ones. He saw Himself healing the sick, comforting the hopeless, cheering the desponding, and preaching the gospel to the poor, doing the work that God had outlined for Him; and He did not realize any sense of hunger until the forty days of His fast were ended.

The vision passed away, and then, with strong craving Christ's human nature called for food. Now was Satan's opportunity to make his assault. He resolved to appear as one of the angels of light that had appeared to Christ in His vision [p. 1080].

Ellen White described this communication from heaven in the wilderness as both "the vision" and "His vision." Jesus could see His future actions being played out ahead of time. He saw Himself healing the sick and preaching the gospel, doing the work that God had outlined for Him.

When the fierce conflict was over, the Saviour left the wilderness to begin His public life, but memories of the vision lingered in His mind. That which had been revealed to Him prepared Him for His public work. The instruction He had received in the visions served Him in good stead. He was prepared for the exigencies of a thousand incidents and interviews.

### Spiritual Perceptions Gained at the Moment of Encounter

Christ's insights were complete. He did not commit Himself to the Jews at the Passover because "He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John 2:24, 25). Doubtless some of His insights were spiritual perceptions gained at the moment of encounter. For example, at the healing of the paralytic in the home of Peter's mother-in-law, the Pharisees



reasoned in their hearts that Jesus was a blasphemer because He forgave sins. "When Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?" (Mark 2:8).

So impressed were Christ's disciples as they observed Him at work that they said, "Now we are sure that thou knowest all things and needest not that any man should ask thee. By this we believe that thou camest forth from God" (John 16:30).

Jesus was pleased that His disciples said they believed in Him, but He was not satisfied that they had a clear understanding; so He asked, "Do you now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:31-33).

The apostle declared, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb 1:1, 2). If in the apostle's time the last days of an old dispensation had arrived and the necessity had arisen for God to address people through His Son, it is equally important, if not more so, that today we should listen to the voice of Jesus as it comes to us through the Bible in the writings of the prophets and apostles. It is also echoed in the writings of Ellen G. White.

### The Way to Victory

Ellen White applies the lesson of the trial and the victory which came to Jesus in the wilderness of temptation to us who live in an age of great temptation and great victory:

We may learn that there is no conquest without combat. Remember that this temptation came to Christ immediately after the heavens had been opened, and the Spirit of God, like a dove of burnished gold, had rested on Him. In the wilderness He had had a close communion with God. Then the storm of temptation fell on Him. Is it not thus with us? After the Lord has bestowed upon us the richest blessings, does not some sore trial come to us to darken our souls and cause us to doubt God's goodness? Let us at such times, remember that Christ was tempted in all points like as we are tempted, and that in His

strength we may overcome. Let us by prayer and fasting draw near to God [Letter 159, 1903].

We may not have visions and dreams, we may not hear the audible voice of God, but we have the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy to guide us and to show us the way to the life of victory. And we remember that the Spirit of Prophecy is the "testimony of Jesus," the witness of the One who is the Revealer of God and the Key to theology.