

A Sermon

On secret devotion

Preached in Richmond on Shockoe

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John I. \_\_ 48\_\_ When thou wast under the fig-tree. I saw thee.

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The divinity of Christ is one of the most essential doctrines of Christianity, ~~and~~ If this could be ^ disproved ~~xxxxdated~~ the whole system of the gospel would be subverted, and the Bible ~~would be~~ ^ become a book of contradictions. This important article ~~doctrine~~ of our holy religion is sustained ^ however throughout the word of God, by the most ample and unequivocal testimony. We find the works which none but god could perform ^ constantly ascribed to Jesus Christ . Hence it is said in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth & ~~but~~ ^ yet it is declared by St. Paul, that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature. For by him were all things created ~~that are~~ in heaven, and ~~that are~~ in earth, visible and invisible whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist\_ He therefore who ~~is~~ ^ was before all things, and who created all things, and who sustains all things must be God. We find ^ also ~~again~~ the same names of divinity which are given to Almighty God, given ~~also~~ to our blessed Lord\_ By the prophet Isaiah he is called the Everlasting Father & ~~the~~ In the Acts of the Apostles it is declared that Jesus Christ is Lord of all , and by St. Paul it is said that Jesus Christ is over all God: blessed forever. Now these are titles which ^ belong ~~are given~~ to none but God ^ alone but here they are given Christ consequently he must be God.

^ We find him ~~Jesus Christ~~ is also invested with the attributes of divinity. If eternity ~~an~~ ^ be attributes of God? Hear what Solomon says of ~~our~~ Christ, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old: I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was. If immortality ^ be an attribute of God-Jesus Christ ^ is the same, yesterday, today and forever\_ If omnipresence ^ be an attribute of god, Christ declares where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he will be in the midst of them. If omniscience ^ be an attribute of God \_ In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ~~The Divinity of Christ is also clearly set forth in our text by the attributes of~~ The attributes of divinity which belong only to God , are ^ also plainly set forth in our text as belonging also to Jesus Christ. When Philip ^ went with ~~introduced~~ Nathaniel to ^ see our Lord, just before they got to the Saviour, Jesus saw them ~~Nathaniel~~ coming and said of him ^ Nath'e behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile\_ ~~I expect~~ Perhaps this was the greatest compliment that our Lord ever paid ^ to any individual while he was in the world. Nathaniel said unto him ^ replied whence knowest thou me? Jesus ~~answered and~~ said unto him, "when then wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee. Although he had ~~never~~ never seen-^ Nath'l ~~him~~ before with his natural eyes, yet by the attribute of omniscience he

knew where he was; and although he ^ had been was concealed within the foliage of the luxuriant fig tree, yet the omnipresent eye of Jesus was fixed upon him, “When thou wast under the fig-tree [Nathaniel] I saw thee” Nathaniel ~~^and said unto him~~ ^then exclaimed Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. This declaration of our Lord’s at once convinced Nathaniel ^him that of the truth of his divinity\_ Jesus ^replied ~~^and said to Nathaniel~~, “Because I said I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these\_ ~~And he said unto him~~, verily, verily, I say unto you hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. This subject will lead^ now to consider,

- I. The character of Nathaniel.
- II. The place of his retreat &
- III. The divine notice which it attracted\_\_
  - I. We are to consider the character of Nathaniel\_ the individual referred to in our text\_ From all that we can gather ^ by searching the scriptures Nathaniel & Bartholomew were two names to ^represent the same person, because in the account of St. John, Bartholomew is never mentioned, so in ~~^records of the other evangelists~~ Nathaniel is ~~never~~ ^not mentioned\_ and as in ^St. John Philip & Nathaniel are mentioned together as coming to Jesus, so in the other evangelists Philip & Bartholomew are constantly associated together\_ And when our Lord exhibited himself on the sea of Tiberias after his resurrection Nathaniel is expressly mentioned among the other ^disciples ~~apostles~~ whereas Bartholomew is not mentioned\_ From these ~~above remarks~~ considerations it is very obvious, that Nathaniel was one of the chosen Apostles of our Lord, and is the same individual known by the name of Bartholomew in the other ~~evangelists~~\_ Gospels. ~~Of the main history character of Nathaniel there is but~~ the history of Nathaniel in the New Testament is very short\_ his name is not mentioned by any of the evangelists but John\_ At the close of John’s gospel, he is once mentioned with some other ^disciples ~~apostles~~ ; with this exception all that we know of ~~Nathaniel~~ this spotless Israelite is given in the chapter before us\_ We here learn that Philip had the honor of introducing him to the Son of god. When Philip ~~met with found~~ saw Nathaniel he on a certain occasion said ~~unto him~~, We have found him of whom Moses in the law & the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. Nathaniel ~~in replied said unto him~~ “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip ~~said with him expressed~~ said to him come and see\_ His objection shows that his knowledge was small, and that his prejudices were great; but his compliance proved that he was open to conviction, and willing to examine for himself. He immediately set out with Philip to visit our Lord to hear the doctrines which he taught\_ and to witness the miracles which he performed in proof of his divine authority. When Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him with all ~~the sincerity of his soul, & all the~~ & simplicity of his heart to ascertain if possible whether he was the long predicted Messiah who should redeem Israel \_ When Jesus saw him, thus approaching him, he expressed his moral character in the following words “behold

an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile"! this is all that is said of his moral character in the whole book of God; and it is enough to be said of the character of any individual\_ it was not said in flattery or falsehood, but It was spoken in candor and truth by him who knew all things, & is perfectly acquainted with the secrets of every heart\_ If we can live and die worthy of such a divine commendation as that bestowed upon Nathaniel we shall need nothing more ^ such a religious experience is would give ^ enjoyment ~~a rest~~ to all the temporal blessings of this world\_ It would spread a delightful influence in the social circle\_ It would sweeten the comforts of domestic life it would give a heavenly ? to the soul unknown to the carnal mind; It wd ^ impart the most patent resignation to every ~~allotment~~ dispensation of divine providence. It wd fortify the soul against all the fiery darts of the wicked one. It wd lift ~~our the~~ ^ our contemplation above this world and give us conversation in heaven \_ Such a religious character as that possessed by Nathaniel is worth more than the whole world\_ It will disarm death of all its terrors\_ It will gild the horrors of the grave with a halo of glory\_ It will skirt the closing scene of human life with the prospect of an eternal day. It will bear the saint across the tempestuous waves of Jordan into the city of the living God. Give me then the character of Nathaniel and I desire no more wealth may give us ~~a stand~~ ^ elevation above the powers of the world, but it cannot avert the storm of divine vengeance which is threatened against the wicked\_ Wealth may secure to us the luxuries of every clime, but it cannot give peace of mind and tranquility of soul\_ Honor many secure to us the applause of the multitude \_ a splendid funeral \_ a name to float down the stream of time\_ and the most profuse eulogy in the public prints \_ but it can extend no further\_ It can give no security ~~for~~ ^ to a better inheritance hereafter\_ It cannot appease the ^ displeasure ~~wrath~~ of God, and ^ entitle ? the soul ~~with its~~ glory, and honor, immortality & eternal life, it cannot save the rich and the honorable from the punishment of the wicked ~~perdition of the ungodly~~. Rob me then of every earthly comfort, but let my Lord say ^ of unto me behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile, & I possess a treasure more valuable than the whole world. By calling Nathaniel an Israelite indeed, the Saviour distinguished him from other nations, by calling him an Israelite indeed ^ in whom is no guile he distinguished him from his own nation, as a worth descendant of the patriarch Jacob, who worshipped God in spirit and in truth Deceitfulness was always the most distinguishing trait in the character of the Jews. To find a man living in the midst of so much corruption, walking in uprightness before his maker, was a subject worthy the attention of god himself\_ Behold this man said the savior! And while you see and admire imitate his conduct\_

- II. We may notice how ~~In the second place we shall consider~~ the place of Nathaniels retreat\_ It was the Fig-tree. This tree was perhaps in the midst of a garden forming by its foliage a kind of natural alcove, It was chosen by Nathaniel, not only because its large leaves would screen him from the rays of the sun, but conceal him from human inspection. He retired to the fig-tree to be alone\_ There are many persons

in the world who are ~~never better-satisfied in any other~~ but when they are in company ~~situation but than when alone~~ \_ their chief ~~delight~~ principal employment is to exhibit themselves in the streets\_ to visit from house to house\_ to attend tea parties \_ to retail the passing events of the day\_ They are never contented but when they are continually mixing with company. But show me a man or woman of this description, & I will show you man or woman, who is not remarkable for ~~sense-~~intelligence or piety\_ the man of intelligence or piety find it necessary occasionally to retire from the bustle of the world, to spend some time in reading useful books that his mind may be stored with useful information\_ the woman of intelligence or piety will occasionally seek some solitary retreat where she can reflect upon the vanity of human life, and pour out her complaints to God in secret devotion\_ As to the place of retirement it is not a matter of importance\_ Owing to habit, and early prejudices, different persons prefer different places\_ some prefer the apartment of a room\_ Others prefer the wood, the field, the meadow and the garden\_ The Saviour went into a mountain to pray, Isaac resorted to the field at evening tide to meditate\_ Peter went up into the house\_ & up to perform his worship, but Nathaniel retire ~~to under~~ the shade of the spreading and beautiful fig-tree

2. But the question arises, what was Nathaniel doing under the Fig-tree\_ what was his employment there? This question is not fully answered in our text, but from the character which our Lord gave Nathaniel, his business must have been something of a religious nature\_ It was something that was instantly recalled to mind by the rare mention of the Fig-Tree \_ there is something very overwhelming in the power of association \_ There are events in the lives of all persons, which the xx are mention of one little circumstance X will bring the whole affair in review before the mind\_ This congregation perhaps deserves as little reproach as any that could be found, and yet perhaps there are persons here who have been guilty of things which they would not have come to light for any consideration whatever, and if I were to mention some little circumstance connected with their conduct , a jarring would instantly strike the conscience. But to the pious mind there are spots which are always recalled with the most pleasing remembrance and associations\_ Such was Bethel to Jacob which he declared was the very gate of heaven to his soul\_ Such was Patmos to John where he saw and heard unutterable things; and such was the fig-tree to Nathaniel where he retired to hold communion with God\_ by the eye of fancy, I can go back to the days of our Saviour, and see Nathaniel sitting ~~under~~ the shade of his fig-tree \_ some times reading the law & the prophets\_ sometimes reflecting upon some divine subject, and sometimes engaged in prayer, and sometimes mingling his voice with the charming notes of the birds which inhabited the surrounding trees, & sung his soul into a heavenly calm\_ “When there wast under the fig-tree Nathaniel, I saw the\_ I saw thy devotions, I heard thy prayers and thy hymns\_ This was enough for Nathaniel: He could no longer doubt whether any good thing could come out of Nazareth, but convinced of his Divinity, he exclaimed, Rabbi thou art the Son of god, thou art the King of Israel.

3. But although Nathaniel was fond of his fig tree, we cannot suppose for a moment that he neglected public worship, but in secluded devotion he found several advantages, to which I especially call the attention of the professing part of this congregation\_

1. the first regarded frequency Public services are comparatively seldom because they require ^ more ~~much~~ time & the seasons must be fixed and invariable for general accommodation\_ But opportunities for private devotion occur more frequently, and only require such time as we can most conveniently spare from business. Many cannot afford to devote two or three hours ^~~in the day~~ two or three times in the week to attend public worship, but such persons can always find short periods in the day for private devotion, if they will only redeem their time and improve it in this way\_\_

2. Another advantage which he enjoyed in secluded devotion was freedom there he could unbosom himself freely.

3. It also gave him a better test of his sincerity\_

III. In the third place, we shall ~~notice~~ consider the divine notice which Nathaniel's retreat attracted "When thou was under the fig-tree I saw thee"\_\_

1. Here was a divine observer\_ this we established in the commencement of our subject\_ Nearness and distance, darkness and light, publicity and secrecy are all the same to him who knoweth all things\_

2. Here was an approving observer\_ Much of what he sees he abhors, but his heart was with Nathaniel\_

3. Here was also an acknowledging observer. He not only saw and approved, but avowed his regards He still continues to acknowledge his people by the witness of the Holy Spirit\_

4. Finally we observe he avowed his regard in the presence of others\_