

“The Twelve Disciples”

Sermon # 7

“Philip: A Man Out of His Element”

In all three biblical lists of the twelve apostles (Mt 10:1-4, Mk 3:14-19, Lk 6:12-16), Philip is the fifth on every list. This apparently signifies that Philip was the leader of the second group of four (Philip, Bartholomew (Nathanael), & Thomas). Philip is a Greek name that means “lover of horses” and although Philip is Jewish we are never given his Hebrew name.

We do need to make the distinction between Philip the apostle and Philip the deacon we meet in Acts 6. Philip the deacon became an evangelist and led the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. But Philip the apostle was a completely different individual.

The apostle Philip was from Bethsaida, which was also the home of Andrew and Peter (John 1:44). Everything that we know about Philip we find in John’s gospel account.

We will see from the four brief sketches of the character of Philip found in John, that he tended to be pragmatic and analytical.

His Call – (John 1:43-46)

We first meet Philip in John 1:43, the day after Jesus first called Andrew, John and Peter. “The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, “Follow Me.”

So it can be stated that Philip was the first one whom Jesus physically sought out and the first one to whom Jesus actually said “follow me.” All the other’s who are identified in John 1 have come to Jesus either on their own accord or were brought by their friends. Only in the case of Philip is it stated that Jesus took the initiative and “found” him.

This is interesting because all the other seem to be “larger than life.” Simon Peter was destined to be a great man and probably would have been a leader in whatever setting he found himself. Andrew, his brother, although not so bold, is constantly bringing people to Jesus. Even Nathanael, who we will look at next time, is identified as a man completely without deceitfulness. Yet it was not any of these that Jesus sought out. It was Philip, a completely ordinary man, who every time we see him seems to be completely out of his element. He was a humble ordinary man who most of us can identify with.

Philip’s first reaction was to go to his friend with the news of Jesus, we are told in verse forty-five, “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

But Nathanael is not impressed and he replies in verse forty-six, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Why was Nathanael's opinion so poor of Nazareth? The answer probably lies in a rivalry between Nazareth and Cana. It would be much like someone from Greenbrier saying, "*Can anything good come out of Vilonia.*"

Whatever the reasoning was, how can Philip meet a question like that? In fact Philip doesn't even try to answer but simply counters with the invitation "come and see" (v. 46). I like the fact that it is not necessary to be able to answer every possible Biblical and theological question that any one can devise, before we can deliver acceptable and fruitful service to Jesus.

That is the same offer that Jesus had earlier made to Andrew and his friend when they had sought to question Jesus about who he was and where he was going Jesus said, "Come and see" (John 1:39). It also was the response of the Samaritan woman who was saved by the well, she invited her friends, "Come and see a man who told me every thing I had ever done" (John 4:29) It is the same invitation given by the angels to the two women at the tomb, "Come and see the place where he lay." (Matthew 28:6)

It has been the invitation of Christ down through the ages, "*come and see. Come with me and see for yourself.*"

It is still the invitation of the church. "*Come and see! Come and see what Jesus is all about!*"

Christianity is about knowing Jesus. Not just knowing details about the life of Jesus, but KNOWING Jesus.

Feeding the Five Thousand – (John 6:5-7)

Philip was a man of faith, yet like us, sometimes it was a weak faith. He had a habit of running everything through his mental calculator.

"Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" (6) But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

Sometimes Philip was too analytical for his own good. John 6:10 says that were five thousand men present, so with women and children the crowd could have been as large as fifteen to twenty thousand.

Jesus asks Philip a question not in order to find out information but John tells to "test him." (v. 6) But it would seem that by the time Jesus asked the question, Philip already had his calculation prepared. For in verse seven he says, "Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."

Philip's calculations went something like this, "If we had a lot of money (which we don't) and if we could spend it all on bread (which we can't), then there would not be enough to give everyone a little taste." I have no doubt that Philip's analysis and calculations were correct, as far as they went. What do I mean "as far as they went?" I mean that his calculations were incorrect because they do not take God into account.

His calculation that it was impossible was his sole contribution to the solution of the problem. Once again we see Philip completely over his head. He seemed to have no idea how the problem could be solved.

The Visit of the Greeks – (John 12:20-22)

In John 12 a group of Greeks came seeking Jesus. "Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. (21) Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

These men were either God-fearing Gentiles (people interested in the Jewish faith) or full-fledged converts to Judaism.

Why these men chose Philip to approach with their request is unclear. It could be they had chosen him because of his Greek name. But regardless of their reasoning they wanted Philip to help them in their quest to "see" Jesus.

When they spoke of a desire to "see Jesus" it was obvious that they had more in mind than just catching sight of him. It was not difficult for anyone to see Jesus as he moved about through the country-side. The Greeks wanted more than this. They wanted an interview with Jesus and looked to Philip to arrange it.

Philip was naturally cautious and proved too hesitant when he had to make a move that he was unsure about. Could he, should he, bring Gentiles to Jesus? There was no precedent for introducing Gentiles to Jesus. He was presented with a problem that he did not know what to do with, so he took the case to the man he considered his mentor in the faith, Andrew. In verse twenty-two we are told, "Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus."

It all ended well, but once again Philip is shown as being out of his depth.

The Upper Room – (John 14:1- 11)

We get one more glimpse of Philip in John's Gospel. Philip is along with the other disciples in the upper room. As they take their last meal together Jesus is attempting to comfort their hearts over his imminent departure. Jesus says in John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. (2) In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare

a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (4) And where I go you know, and the way you know." (5) Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" (6) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (7) "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." (8) Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."

In all fairness to Philip, he is asking for more than we realize. Probably when he made this request, he had in mind the Old Testament examples of when individuals saw a vision of God. Moses was one. He had asked to see God glory and God replied that he would make his glory pass before him (Ex 33:19). Isaiah was another. His vision of God was of God high and lifted up and seated upon a throne (Isaiah 6:1). Perhaps this is what Philip had in mind with his request, that would grant some such vision and it would clear away all of their difficulties.

I feel a little bit sorry for Philip at this point, and I can almost feel Philip wince when Jesus replies in verse nine, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip?" Can you remember attempting to answer a question in class when you were in school, only to realize that you did not understand the question? I think that Philip must have felt this way. I think that Jesus is saddened by Philip's dullness and his words imply it. Jesus responds to Philip by saying, "*How can you ask this Philip? Where have you been for the last three years?*"

Jesus continues with his response in the second part of verse nine, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (10) Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. (11) Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves."

Instead of granting Philip's request or even attempting to explain why his desire is unwise or impossible, Jesus began to teach what it really means to see God. Jesus in his response makes it clear that what is needed is not a demonstration but a comprehension.

Conclusion

Tradition tells us that as ordinary as he was Philip was greatly used of God in the spread of the early church and was among the first of the apostles to die for his faith. By most accounts he died in Heliopolis (lies northeast of the present day city of Beirut in Lebanon), a mere eight years after the death of James.