

"Encounters With Jesus" "Philip"

Jesus' earthly life will end in a matter of hours. He will be arrested, tried in a hasty, illegal trial, sentenced to death, and crucified. The Gospel of John records words that Jesus shares with His disciples in that setting, words often called the "farewell discourse" of Jesus. He tells them not to be troubled or afraid, to believe in God and believe in Him. He's going back to go to heaven, and He'll be preparing a place for them there also. And then He says this about our heavenly Father, "If you know me you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him, and have seen him" (John 14:7).

Philip, one of the 12 disciples, responds by saying, "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied" (John 14:8). *Stop there!* Think for a moment. Philip and the other 11 men there make up a select group of "disciples", or "students" who have followed Jesus around for the last 3 years. All this time He's been preaching and teaching about God: what the Father is like, what it will be like when His kingdom comes and He rules completely. They've even heard Jesus say, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Yet, after all this, Philip says, *Show us the Father*, and we'll be satisfied!

How does Jesus respond? Kind of like you would think: "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:9-11a). All this time, Philip, and you still don't get it! *The Father is like me!*

I wonder about the tone of Jesus' response? His body language. Was there anger in his voice? Was He sad - a sense of, "I just can't believe this"? Do you ever get frustrated with someone? Disappointed in someone? Well, our Lord Jesus experienced that.

Reading this, it's easy to think that Philip must have been the dumbest of the 12 disciples! The most dense. But I have a feeling he might have just been voicing a question that at least some of the other disciples had. Fortunately, this isn't the only reference we have to Philip in the Bible.

I'm continuing this series of messages from the Gospel of John, encounters various people had with Jesus. Today, we're looking at Philip. Let's back up to the Gospel of John, chapter 1. John 1:43 tells us: "The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.'" This is right at the start of Jesus' ministry. This life-changing event, where Philip becomes a follower, one of the 12 apostles, is described so briefly, without detail.

According to this, Jesus took the initiative in calling Philip to be one of the 12. Jesus must have seen something in Philip that would make Jesus want him in that select group. After all, Jesus wasn't going around, looking for the most stupid, incompetent people He could find!

Jesus issues this invitation to every one of us: "Follow me". Being a Christian is not so much a matter of our choosing this religion, or our taking the initiative to subscribe to this particular

faith – it's sensing the call of Jesus on our life: "Follow me". Jesus once said to His disciples, "You did not choose me but *I chose you*. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit" (John 15:16).

Have you ever sensed that call? When we do, and when we respond, that's where the life-changing power of Jesus comes into play - where our faith is not a *religion*, but a *relationship*! A relationship with the living Lord, Jesus Christ. This is true for me. I went to Sunday School as a child, went through confirmation class, but it wasn't until I felt the call of Jesus on my life, that my faith became real, and started to change my life. I've always been drawn to these Scriptures where Jesus says to someone, "Follow me", and they leave everything to follow Him!

Jesus calls each one of us to surrender our life and will to Him. He chose us to bear fruit, to be His witnesses in the world, to make a difference! Just as He must have seen potential in Philip, He sees the potential in us, if we'll only yield ourselves to Him!

John goes on with the narrative. "Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter" (John 1:44). Maybe Philip knew Andrew and Peter. Maybe they told Philip about Jesus, and that whetted Philip's appetite to get meet Jesus and learn more about him. What happens after Jesus says, "Follow me"? "Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth'" (John 1:45).

Right away, Philip tells someone about Jesus! This is the natural flow of how the gospel is spread: one person telling another person about Jesus. It's such a simple process. Something good happens to us, and the natural thing is to want to tell somebody! If we have really found life and joy and hope in Jesus, we don't want to keep it to ourselves! And yet, honestly, how many Christians, how many of us, never even give much thought to talking about Jesus, or sharing our faith with others.

Philip said to Nathaniel, "We've found the Messiah, the Savior, spoken of in the Old Testament! Look at Nathaniel's response: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46a). That often happens. If we dare to share our faith with someone, that person may not have a positive response at first. Expect that. In fact, Nathaniel is pretty sarcastic about things: This Jesus is from Nazareth? Little hic Nazareth? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? I love Philip's answer to that: "Come and see" (John 1:46b). He didn't take offense, or give up. He challenged Nathaniel to check Jesus out for himself.

If we read on in John, chapter 1, Jesus Himself approaches Nathaniel, and the end result is that Nathaniel becomes a believer! *Philip began to follow Jesus, and immediately invited someone else to do the same*. That simple process is how the good news of Jesus is shared and spreads today also.

Philip appears again in John's gospel, chapter 6. This is the story of Jesus miraculously feeding over 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish. A huge mass of people is coming to hear Jesus teach. They're not close to any town, and they're getting hungry. "When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to

eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do" (John 6:5-6).

Jesus asks Philip, "Where are we going to get food for all of these people?" I mean, put yourself in Philip's sandals! What a question? How is he to know? He answers: "Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little" (John 6:7).

Why did he ask Philip? We don't know for sure. John MacArthur suggests that Philip was the "group's administrator responsible for arranging meals and handling logistics." Well, maybe so, maybe not. I'm not sure where MacArthur comes up with that.

But it does say Jesus wanted to test him! Does Jesus ever test us? Does God ever test us? Yes! God tested Abraham (Genesis 22:1). God tested the Israelites: "Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, *testing you* to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments" (Deuteronomy 8:2). James 1:2-4 says this: "My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the *testing of your faith* produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing."

God tests us sometimes! It may be that He allows some kind of misfortune, or struggle, or disappointment. Why? Not to taunt us, or deliberately make us suffer. But to toughen us up! To teach us patience and endurance, to grow our faith, and *grow us* into a more mature as a follower of Jesus. So, don't despise these times! In fact, the Book of James goes so far as to say that when this happens, we should consider *all joy!* God tests us for good purposes!

Let's take a quick look at one more time when Philip is mentioned in John's gospel. "Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew, then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus" (John 12:20-22).

Some Greeks are in Jerusalem at Passover, and they come to Philip and say, "We would like to see Jesus." Why did they come to Philip? We can't be sure. He was from Bethsaida, and a lot of Greeks lived there. Maybe they already knew Philip. The name Philip is a Greek name. How does Philip respond? He goes and tells us Andrew, and then Andrew and he goes to tell Jesus. Point? Once again, Philip is introducing people to Jesus! *Wouldn't it be great if that could be said of us!*

So, we've looked at John's gospel, at those places where Philip is mentioned. He's also mentioned in the Book of Acts, chapter 1. Jesus has ascended back to His Father, and Philip is one of the followers of Jesus gathered in an upper room, praying, and waiting for Jesus to send the Holy Spirit to them.

One interesting fact is that in the other gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), the only mention of Philip is that he is listed as one of the 12 disciples. If we only had those 3 gospels, we would

know nothing about Philip.

But does that mean he's not important? Not at all! Some of the other disciples, too, are only mentioned in the list of disciples. But think of how important they were – that for 3 years they walked with Jesus, and had a relationship with Him no one else had. Many – if not all of these apostles – were martyred for their faith! And each one did his share of keeping the message of Jesus going and getting it out to the world.

Most Christian believers will never be mentioned in a history book about Christianity. Or get TV coverage of our life and work as a Christian. We won't be a familiar name in Christian circles, as are some Christian leaders today. But that doesn't mean we aren't important. Christ has something for each of us to do. And He will reveal that to us and give us the resources to do it, if we only surrender ourselves and our will over to Him!

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