

Philip: A Faithful Follower

Sovereign Grace Baptist Church

September 4, 2005

Luke 6:12-14

“And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. 13 And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; 14 Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip...”

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There are many surprises to be found in the *Bible* one of which is how little the New Testament speaks of the major figures of the early church. Philip offers a primary example. Though an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, Philip is rescued from historical obscurity by the gospel of John. What is recorded is not much but it is instructive. The *Bible* says that Philip came from Bethsaida in Galilee, which is the same town from which Peter and Andrew came (John 1:44).

Perhaps they knew each other as children and worked as adults in the same trade. It is possible that Philip was a fisherman though that is uncertain. What is certain is that it was to Philip that Jesus spoke the compelling words calling him to discipleship. Jesus said simply enough,

“Follow me!” (John 1:43).

“Lord, where are you going?”

“Follow me and see! Lord, will it be fun?”

“ Will it be easy to follow you?”

“No, not always. That is why you must count the cost.”

There are three reasons why it is not easy to follow Christ. **First, to follow Christ means to stop following the ways of the world.** Society does not like the new standards of living demanded by Christ. New attitudes and new responses are called for in practicing Christians as the Sermon on the Mount indicates. (Matt. 5:1-7:29; note 5:43-48) If the world finds pleasure in the philosophy and practice of hedonism, the Christian must not. And it is those differences, which challenges and convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. To follow Christ means to stop following the ways of the world.

Second, to follow Christ means to be at war with the Devil. In Revelation 13:7 we read of the Beast. *“And it was given unto him to make war with the saints.”* Satan does not give up his children easily to the Kingdom of God. He has many ways to hold them hostage. Many years ago the Puritan preacher Thomas Brooks wrote, *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*. Rev. Brooks wanted to arm the people of God against satanic trickery. He observed several of the ways that the Evil One tries to deceive the elect into sinning.

Satan presents sin with virtuous colors. More than one person has justified sin in various situations demanding that the moment defines true ethics not some arbitrary objective standard. In 1986, before a senatorial worldwide television audience a former Marine colonel proudly declared that he would trade lives for lies in a combat environment. The colors of virtue were flown high without any qualifications or recognition that sometimes the lesser of two evils must be chosen. Rahab the harlot offers one example as per Hebrews 11:31.

Satan suggests that sin is not offensive to God. The essence of God is viewed as being all of mercy. While God delights to show mercy, He is also a holy God who hates sin and will not let the guilty go free. There will be a payday, some day (Rom. 14:11).

Satan encourages sin by teaching that repentance is easy. Superficial repentance is very easy, but genuine repentance is another undertaking of divine grace for it works sorrow in the heart. The repentance of Peter and the repentance of Judas were quite different.

Satan promotes sin by taunting the soul to partake of the same activities that other individuals are openly doing. There is an unholy boldness in sin. (Rom. 1:27-32)

Satan enhances the inclination to sin by reminding the heart of the outward mercies that others enjoy while they walk in the ways of evil. The Christian looks around and sees a multitude of individuals with money, power, and success engaged in riotous laughter and behavior as if life were all a party (Psa. 73:16-18).

Satan offers comfort in sin by having people compare themselves with others who are more militant in outrageous behavior. The spirit of the Pharisee is present in every generation. There are many other devices of Satan for he is a very clever personality and very successful in the art of deceit, destruction, and the damnation of the soul.

Third, to follow Christ, means to be in conflict with the darker side of self. The Apostle Paul wrote about the great internal struggle that takes place in the heart of the Christian (Rom. 7:14-25). To follow Christ means to engage in open conflict with the inner man. Someone has to die.

Despite all of the difficulties associated with discipleship, Philip was given the privilege of hearing Jesus saying,

“Follow me. Follow me and fight the world.

Follow me and wage a noble warfare with the Wicked One.

Follow me and declare open hostility on your corruption.

If your right hand offends you, cut it off.

If your right eye offends, pluck it out.

Deal savagely and ruthless with inbreed corruption.”

And Philip said *“I will follow you, Lord and I will fight the good fight of the faith.”*

As we watch Philip in the service of the Savior, we learn bits and pieces about him from his brief cameo appearances. We discover that Philip was missionary minded. After Jesus called Philip to discipleship, the *Bible* says that he found his brother Nathaniel and said unto him, *“We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and in the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45).*

From a human perspective that was true. What Philip would later learn, from a divine perspective, is that long before he ever *found* Christ, Jesus had searched him out with an eternal love (Rom. 8:28-32). *“You have not chosen men, Philip, “*said the Lord one day, *“but I have chosen you and ordained you” (John 15:16).*

The difference is important to notice between individuals searching for God and God revealing Himself for the larger issue at stake is, *“Who will get the glory for the salvation of the soul?”*

The *Bible* teaches that salvation is of the Lord. Philip only *found* Jesus because the Lord had marked him out for special favor. Being predestinated to eternal life, Philip was effectually called to salvation and to service. Such matchless grace should be humbling to all that come to faith. With religious zeal in

his heart Philip immediately invited Nathaniel to make the same discovery he had made, but Nathaniel was skeptical. *Can any thing good come out of Nazareth*, he asked with a cynical smile. (John 1:46)

As a town, Nazareth had a terrible reputation. For many today it would be like asking, *Can any thing good come out of Bourbon Street in New Orleans, Louisiana?* Philip shows tremendous wisdom in religious restraint. He did not begin a debate with Nathaniel concerning Christ. Philip had the weight of the Law and the Prophets on his side. Philip could have said many things but he said simply enough, *Come and see!* Sometimes that is still the best way to witness. Debates are not at all profitable. To the person who questions the Church or Christ or Christianity the best invitation is still, “*Come and see.*”

As Philip was practical in bringing souls to the Savior, he was a very practical man in other matters as well reflected in the feeding of 5,000 men plus women and children. The story is told in John 6. Jesus had been preaching to a large multitude. The hour grew late and the Lord decided He would have His the people stay for something to eat. Turning to Philip the Lord asked an astonishing question. “*Philip, where shall we buy bread that these people may eat?*”

The Lord had no intention of buying bread; He just wanted to test Philip’s reaction to a potential crisis. Philip searched the sea of surging humanity spread out before him, made a quick calculation, and came to a definite conclusion: the

situation was hopeless. There were too many people for the limited resources of the disciples. A year's pay would not buy enough bread to feed this crowd, even if everyone only ate a little (John 6:5-7). From a human perspective, Philip's assessment of the situation was accurate. The disciples had no resources. The crowd was very large. It would take a year's wages and more to feed everyone, even if everyone ate very little.

Philip is not selfish. He has a warm heart. He wants to feed the people. But what can the disciples do? The correct answer is, "*Nothing!*" The Disciples can do nothing on their own and it is at that point that the Lord wants them to learn time and again. There are several occasions when Christ brought together circumstances beyond the control of the disciples in order to teach them one of the greatest of all spiritual lessons: without the Lord we can do nothing in life. We cannot live well, we cannot think well, we cannot love well or lead well. We cannot work well or win souls to the Savior without Christ.

Without doubt, as the Lord tested His first disciples, so He will test the rest. From time to time, the Lord will allow the pressures of life to mount against us in order that we might be totally dependent upon Him. We will find ourselves hopeless and helpless in a great and grave situation. This divine technique has been used time and again. It was used with Moses at the Red Sea. It was used with David against Saul. It was used with Joseph in the dungeon. The Lord knows how

to humble His people so that they do not constantly rely upon their natural resources. The Lord knows how to focus the attention of His children upon Himself so that He receives honor and glory while faith is increased.

Sometimes professing Christians fail the test of genuine faith. They turn back to the world, the flesh, and the devil (Matt. 13:1-9; 13:18-23). For some, if God does not help resolve a situation in a predetermined manner then He does not care. But that is neither true nor fair. The faith of God's true children rises to the challenge. Faith triumphs and cries with Job, "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him*" (Job 13:15). Philip was willing to trust the Lord. We know this, for when Christ began to give instruction as to what should be done, Philip did his part in the preparations. Then he stepped aside to see what God in Christ might do—and the true Bread of Life fed the people from heaven. (John 6:10-13)

As Philip looked and wondered at the performance of the mighty miracle, his faith grew and a determination was made. "*Whatever the situation, I will bring it to Jesus,*" vowed Philip.

Therefore, we are not surprised to discover that when a group of Greeks had come to Jerusalem wanting to visit he found a way to bring them to Christ (John 12:20-22). That the Greeks should first approach Philip about Christ is not unusual. Perhaps the Greeks thought they found in him a contact for Philip is a Greek name

meaning, “*Lover of horses*”. Though Philip was a Jew, he had a Greek name. A bit of speculation suggests how that came to pass.

History records that about ten years before the birth of the Christ, there was a local king in the province of Ituraea called Philip the Tetrarch. For political reasons he raised the status of Bethsaida and made it the capitol of the province. Perhaps Philip the apostle was named in honor of the Tetrarch who had done so much for the region in which he lived.

Regardless of his name, when the Greeks contacted him, Philip was ready to help the best he could. He would bring them to Christ but first he wanted counsel and so he told Andrew about the situation. That was good for it is not wrong to have others help in making an important decision. When a person is aware of their own weaknesses and seeks help, that is wisdom.

Philip had wisdom in the form of common sense and he also had something else: a longing to know God intimately. This facet of Philip’s faith is manifested in the Upper Room, the night of the Last Supper with the Savior. Jesus was sharing how He would soon be going to the Father. Philip was confused and said simply, “*Lord, shew it and us the Father, will sufficeth us.*”

And Jesus responded to Philip by saying, “*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*” (John 14:8-9).

Here is the heart of Christianity: Jesus is God. The attributes and essences of God are the attributes and essence of Christ. To see Jesus is to see God. If we want to know God the Father, all we have to do is to look at God the Son. It is as simple—and profound—as that.

While there is nothing more said about Philip in the *New Testament*, many fantastic legends arose about him in the early church. According to one story, Philip went to Athens where three hundred philosophers gathered to meet him. The Athenians were always interested in hearing something new. After the gospel was preached, the philosophers asked for three days to think things over. In the discussion that followed it was decided that an appeal should be made to the Jewish high priest at Jerusalem for clarification about Christ.

When Ananias the high priest heard that Jesus was being preached, he led a force of five hundred men to destroy Philip. Philip smote them all with blindness and then ordered the earth to open and consume Ananias to the knees. Rather than repent, Ananias pronounced everything as witchcraft. So Philip ordered the earth to take Ananias up to the waist.

Still Ananias was not repentant and so the earth swallowed him up to the neck. And still Ananias refused to yield the point. Finally, Philip ordered the earth to consume Ananias complete, which it did. His high-priestly robe flew away where it has not been found to this day. It is an interesting story though it never

happened. Philip's moral life came to an end at Hierapolis at the age of 87. By ministering in Lydia, Parthia, and Gaul, he was one of the great spiritual leaders of Asia. (Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 3, 21)

Before he died by cruel scourging and crucifixion (c. 52 AD), according to legend, Philip made an unusual request that his body should be wrapped, not in linen, but in papyrus, for he was not worthy that even his dead body should be handled in the same manner as the Lord's. *"And they buried him as he directed. And a heavenly voice said that he had received the crown of life"*.

In the sixth century, Pope John III (AD 560-572) acquired the body of Philip from Hierapolis and re-interred it in a church in Rome. Today, so it is said, a traveler can see the large marble sarcophagus where the bones of the apostle Philip rest. In the end, Philip was faithful unto death. The life Philip lived, and the death he died, should serve to encourage all believers to be a faithful follower of Christ.

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I. Life's Little Surprises

II. Three Reasons why it is not Easy to Follow Christ

- To follow Christ means to stop following the ways of the world
- To follow Christ means to be at war with the devil
- To follow Christ means to be in conflict with the darker side of the soul

III. The Practicality of Philip

- A man with common sense
- A heart for God

IV. The Making of a Legend

Doctrine of the World

1. The term *world* is used in Scripture in various ways.
 - ◆ It has reference to the geographical earth (Job 34:13)
 - ◆ It has reference to the various nations on the earth. (Matt. 28:19,20)
 - ◆ It has reference to the material goods of this earth. (Matt. 16:26)
 - ◆ It has reference to the normal inhabitants on the earth (Psa. 9:8)
 - ◆ It has reference to a certain portion of the people. (Luke 2:1)

 - ◆ It has reference to the unregenerate that oppose Christ. (Matt. 18:7)
 - ◆ It has reference to the prevailing philosophy of the unregenerate. (1 John 2:15)
 - ◆ It has reference to a future new order of nature. (Matt. 5:32; Luke 18:30)
2. Christians are considered by Christ to be the true light of the world or the guiding influence in the moral darkness into which sin has brought all things. (Matt. 5:14)
3. The cares or interests of this world can destroy any spiritual sensitivity of the soul (Matt. 13:22)
4. If a person owned everything in the world and yet lost his soul, the material possession would be of no avail. (Matt. 16:26; Luke 9:25)
5. Jesus pronounced a judgment upon the world of His day. (Matt. 18:7)
6. The gospel is to be preached in the entire world. (Matt. 28:20)
7. The world had a beginning (Gen. 1:1; Matt. 25:34) and it shall have an end as it is now known.
8. When Christ came into the world, people did not know Him as Creator and Lord. (John 1:10)
9. Jesus came to take away the sin of the world. (John 1:29; John 4:42)
10. Christ came into the world because of the love of God the Father. (John 3:16)
11. Christ did not come the first time to condemn the world but to save it. (John 3:17; 12:47)
12. Christ is the True Light that has come into the world. (John 3:19; 8:12; 9:5)
13. Jesus cast out the prince of this world (John 12:31) having judged him. (John 16:11, 33)
14. The world will hate Christians as they have hated Christ. (John 15:18,19)
15. While they are in the world, Christians shall have many troubles (John 16:33) because they are not like the world. (John 17:16)

16. Christians are the elect chosen out of the world to be conformed into the image of Christ. (15:19)
17. The power of the gospel turned the world of the Jews and Gentiles upside down. (Acts 17:6)
18. Everyone in the world is guilty before God of transgressing His law. (Rom. 3:19; 4:13; 5:12,13)
19. The Christians, having been redeemed, must not be conformed or pressed into the mold of this world any longer. (Rom. 12:1,2)
20. The gospel makes the wisdom of this world appear foolish. (1 Cor. 1:20)
21. Christians are mocked by the world. (1 Cor. 4:9)
22. Christians are to be crucified to the world (Gal. 6:14) so that they do not love it. (1 John 2:15) If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not present in his heart.
23. There are demons of darkness which rule over a spiritual part of the unregenerate world's system. (Eph. 6:12)
24. Since men bring nothing into this world, they can take nothing out. (1 Tim. 6:7)
25. The world is hostile to God. (James 4:4)
26. Those who are born of God are destined to overcome the world. (1 John 5:4)
27. Though the present world lies in the Evil One (1 John 5:19), one day, the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of God (Rev. 11:15).