

The Cloud of Witnesses

Philip

Lesson 1: Philip – Followed Jesus

Reading

John 2:43-51.

Followed Jesus

Meeting Jesus is a life-changing experience.

Philip was going about his normal daily activities when Jesus approached him and said, “*Follow Me*”. There must have been something irresistible about that invitation. We don’t read of any hesitation – just immediate obedience.

It’s also interesting that he came from Bethsaida. The village that Jesus was later to lament over because of the unbelief of most of the inhabitants. Obviously Philip, like Andrew and Peter who also came from the same village, were exceptions.

Philip must have suppressed his questions and doubts in the belief that they would be answered in due course. He was prepared to follow first and allow God to reveal the answers he needed when the time was right.

Philip was so excited about his newfound rabbi that he went off and sought out his friend Nathaniel. The fact was Philip was now a follower of Jesus with an all-consuming passion, and because it was transforming his life and future goals, he couldn’t keep it to himself. What more natural thing was there for him to do than to tell his friend all about his good news? He didn’t know ‘you aren’t supposed to talk about religion or politics...’ – all he knew was that good news was for sharing with others.

Isn’t it interesting how we can spend hours discussing the latest All Blacks win, our new car purchase or the latest addition to our family but when it comes to telling others about our relationship with Jesus Christ, it all becomes too hard and embarrassing.

I love Nathaniel’s response – *Can anything good come from there?* (i.e. Nazareth) He wasn’t going to be as gullible as Philip. He wasn’t going to take Philip’s word at face value. But was Philip put off by the apparent rebuff? Not at all.

He showed that he was totally unthreatened by Nathaniel’s retort. “*That’s O.K. You don’t have to take my word for it – check Him out for yourself.*” I love that. It’s one of many things I have learned

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Lesson 1 continued: Philip – Followed Jesus

over the years – there is no need to feel threatened by people's response to the sharing of my faith. I've also come to realise that there is so much ignorance about true Christianity that most people respond from an uninformed position. However, there is no need for us to become defensive.

For example, if someone challenges me with the statement – *I don't believe in God*, I am able to reply – *Please describe to me the God you don't believe in – because I probably don't believe in that God either.*

We need to allow them to express their views and questions, and then, like Philip, encourage them to check Jesus out for themselves.

Philip would say to us today...

When we decide to follow Jesus, it is the most natural thing in the world to tell others about it. Regardless of who they are, Jesus can make a huge difference in their lives. Don't be put off by their apparent lack of interest – invite them to check Jesus out. They will not be disappointed when they do.

Prayer

Father, please give me more courage to share with others the joy and difference a personal vibrant relationship with You has made in my life.

Additional readings

Luke 8:26-39; John 4:28-39; Romans 10:9-17.

Questions

What does it mean to 'follow' Jesus?

How can we 'make' disciples?

Why did Philip go and tell Nathaniel about Jesus?

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Lesson 2: Philip – Saw Things As They Were

Reading

John 6:1-15.

Saw Things As They Were

Jesus was such a wonderful person to be with. There was always such a lot going on that we can only understand with hindsight. In fact, the writers of the Gospels say the same.

Jesus was such an attractive person and interesting speaker that people came from far and near to watch Him and hear Him. On this occasion 5000 were on their way when Jesus asked Philip how they were to be fed. John adds – that was to test Philip – because Jesus already knew what He was going to do.

That's the wonderful thing about Jesus. When He tests us, it is not so we will fail but learn a defining lesson through it. For us today we can keep the textbook – The Bible – open to make sure we get the correct answer.

God is not interested in our happiness, comfort or equilibrium. He wants to challenge us, change us and cause us to grow in maturity and faith. He will shake everything that constitutes our security until our security is found in Him alone. He will challenge our selfish motives until they are re-centred on the Kingdom of God.

He will cause us to experience discomfort, stress and frustration until we are prepared to do something about those things that dishonour God. He will make us face situations that are outside our understanding and beyond our resources to fix so that our faith in Him matures, and He can cause us to experience some of His almighty power.

However, He doesn't expect us to be stupid or reckless. That is why I love Philip's reply and how Jesus went on to respond to Philip's reasoning. I love God because He is real. Jesus didn't look at the crowd and say, "*Oh don't worry, Philip, there's only a handful and we can fix it.*" Nor did He cause bread to 'rain down from Heaven'. He moved naturally in the supernatural.

Yes, it was a miracle – no matter how people may wish to explain it away. The reality is that Jesus performed a miracle. We may not understand them – but isn't that why they are called miracles? The reality was that 5000+ people got fed that day from 5 small loaves and two small fish – and please don't forget the basket loads picked up full of leftovers.

Philip saw the crowd, made a quick mental calculation and realised there was nothing he or the disciples could do to help. They were totally out of their resources to fix the problem. He would have to return the problem to Jesus.

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Lesson 2 continued: Philip – Saw Things As They Were

When Jesus tested Philip, it was not to show Philip up as a mathematician, a manager, or totally inadequate. It was so Philip could understand the magnitude of the miracle. He wanted Philip to first judge the situation, realise the potential and seek God for the answer and solution.

That is what a life of faith is all about. It is not about making rash decisions or taking reckless actions and hoping God will come to our rescue. It is seeing the situation, evaluating the resources required and trusting God to meet them if ours are inadequate.

It's looking at the circumstances of life and inviting God into them. It's being aware of the state of affairs, analysing our position, considering what God might want done and asking Him for His help with the resolution.

God wants to invade our daily lives so people understand He is alive and the answer to their needs. As we become increasingly aware of His will and presence so we will be more able to receive His miracles.

Philip would say to us today...

Let God take the everyday situations of your life and make them extraordinary memory-making events.

Prayer

Father, I often look at the circumstances of life and wonder what the future holds. However, please help me, like Philip, experience the miracles You can do through them. Amen.

Additional readings

Luke 14:25-35; 2 Kings 6:8-23; Ephesians 3:14-21.

Questions

Why did Jesus ask Philip how they were to feed the 5000?

How did Jesus deal with Philip's realism?

Why does God expect us to be practical before He performs a miracle?

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Lesson 3: Philip – Was Not Afraid Of Gentiles

Reading

John 12:20-33.

Was Not Afraid Of Gentiles

The Jews had no dealings with Gentiles – they were unclean and untouchable.

The Gentiles had no right to experience the privileges of the Jews – they were the birthright of the Jews, which no one else could enjoy.

God, the Creator of the Universe, was exclusively the God of the Jews. He belonged to them alone. They were the chosen people, the privileged few and not to be contaminated with or by outsiders – Gentiles.

Fortunately, not all Jews acted that way and certainly God saw Himself as the inclusive God. Yes, God had chosen for Himself a special people, Abraham and his descendants, but that did not mean that everyone else was excluded from a relationship with Him.

Because the Gentiles held on to other gods it meant that they had deflected their focus from the One True God, but when they refocused back to God, He allowed them to develop a relationship with Him. Incredibly, even thoroughly pagan kings, like Cyrus, were used by God to accomplish great feats for the outworking of His plans.

Fortunately for these Greeks, there was a disciple amongst Jesus' followers whom they found approachable. I wonder how long they had been searching for someone who looked welcoming. Someone who was not totally absorbed in his own relationship with Jesus so as to exclude those who were desperately seeking Jesus too.

Philip obviously stood out from the crowd. I wonder why and how. Was it that he was comfortable with his own relationship with Jesus so he could be caring and watchful of those who were on the fringe? Was it that he had watched Jesus and seen how He always seemed to welcome those who were hurting, sick and unloved that Philip went searching for those people in order to allow them access to Jesus?

Or was it that Philip had been so blessed by Jesus that though he considered himself an outsider, he recognised in Jesus Someone who welcomed those thought to be outsiders? Or was it that having seen 5000 people fed he was always trying to get more and more people to come to where Jesus was so as to receive a miracle and so he had that welcoming smile on his face? Or maybe it was that quiet reserved confidence and joy that people saw in Philip that drew them to him.

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Lesson 3 continued: Philip – Was Not Afraid Of Gentiles

Whatever it was these Greeks sought him out because he was obviously approachable. They recognised in him someone who had contact with Jesus and who could arrange for them to have an audience with Him.

What about me? What about you? Do we care about those who don't know Jesus? Those who don't go to church? Those we consider outsiders? (Oh, we wouldn't call them that to their face, would we? We just treat them that way.)

How are people going to connect with Jesus unless those of us who claim to walk with Him show that we care? When we live that Christian life which is vibrant enough for us to be able to look away from being self-absorbed with Jesus to actually engaging with those who, as yet, don't know Him? Yes, we should be passionate about worshipping Jesus. Yes, we should be passionate about living with Jesus, but we should be equally passionate about encouraging others to experience a relationship with Jesus for themselves.

We need to be an attractive Christian and an all-welcoming Christian.

Philip would say to us today...

Be approachable, and then you will be able to introduce people to Jesus and learn even more about who Jesus really is and see how He can answer their needs.

Prayer

Father, please help me develop a love for those who feel outcast, lonely or despised. Help me display kindness and a gracious welcoming spirit to those who are from a different ethnicity to me. Help me see them as You do and do my best to be friend to them. Amen.

Additional readings

Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Ephesians 3:1-14; 1 Peter 2:4-10.

Questions

What is the root cause of racism?

How do we develop a healthy attitude towards those of other ethnic groups?

Why does God love those we consider foreigners?

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Lesson 4: Philip – Was Passionate About The Truth

Reading

John 14:1-21.

Was Passionate About The Truth

I love Philip because he was a real person who wanted real answers. He wanted to be sure of his faith and he was not afraid to ask the hard questions in order to get satisfactory answers.

Jesus had been talking to the disciples about the fact that He was about to leave them. He was going to return to the Father – God. He was going to die and then return to Heaven where He came from and where He belonged. He then said that He was going to prepare the place where they would be reunited.

At this point Thomas said he didn't know how to get there and Jesus responded by saying one of His most profound statements – *"I AM The Way, The Truth and The Life, no one comes to the Father except through Me."* Jesus was re-confirming that He was divine – He was God.

Philip replied that he knew of God but wanted to know Him as Father. He wanted Jesus to reveal Father to him. Jesus emphasised that no one could approach God or start a relationship with Him outside of accepting Jesus for who He is.

It is still true. We can know of God without Jesus – but we cannot know God as Father except through a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is impossible. Yes, a relationship with God is open to all human beings but it is only possible through Jesus Christ. The reason being that if we ignore Jesus Christ we ignore the fact that our selfishness, wrong thoughts and actions separate us from God. Only Jesus was perfect enough to die to pay the penalty of our sins. Ignore Jesus, and our sins separate us from God. Accept Jesus' death on our behalf and His resurrection and we have open access to God as Father – it's as simple and profound as that.

I love Christianity because it is real – it is the Truth. It is a fantastic joy for me to be able to have total confidence that what I teach people is Truth.

As Christians we do not need to apologise for the Truth. We don't need to alter the Truth or compromise the Truth – all we need do is expose the Truth and let others recognise it for what it is.

I love the analogy of gravity. It works at home, it works at work and it works on holiday. No matter where I am or go gravity is constant. It is as true for you as it is for me. I cannot say – *Oh gravity – it may work for you but it doesn't work for me. Or you may believe in gravity but I don't.* Gravity is true all the time for everyone regardless of race, age, gender or geography – painfully and expensively true sometimes! We should be very grateful – we could be hurled into oxygen-less space otherwise (or living down under just fall off!)

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Lesson 4 continued: Philip – Was Passionate About The Truth

So with Christianity. If it is untrue, then we should discard it but if it is true we need to embrace it. If it is true, it must be true for everyone. It is so important that we base our lives on Truth.

Philip would say to us today...

God doesn't mind being tested. Because He is True and Faithful we can express all our doubts to Him and He will give us the peace and confidence we need to trust Him for our present and our future.

Prayer

Father, thank You for being the Truth. Thank You for the fact that we can know the Truth and use Your Truth as the foundation for our lives and consequently know joy, peace, freedom and hope. Amen.

Additional readings

John 1:1-18; Colossians 1:1-20; Hebrews 1:1-4.

Questions

Why is it important to know the truth?

Where do we find truth?

How does knowing the truth affect our lives?