

Twelve Ordinary Men

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567

Today we are going to continue the sermon series on the Twelve Apostles by examining the life of Apostle Philip. Before I begin I want to acknowledge that the book “Twelve Ordinary Men” by John MacArthur was used as the foundation for this sermon series. Ever wonder how to reach the sceptics of this world, you know the ones who do not believe in absolute truth but at the same time believe in many gods and paths to heaven? Ever feel like reaching such people is beyond your abilities and as such evangelism should be relegated to the “professionals”? If that is the case then what does one do with 1 Peter 3:15 that says “WE” all should get prepared to give the reason for our hope that we have or Lord, Jesus Christ? When God sends a “seeker” to our doorstep whom better to witness to them than one whom lives the Word and has developed a relationship with them? After all, what skeptic would ever ask us about Jesus if they did not first see Christ’s word being carried out in our daily lives? In examining the life of Apostle Philip in today’s sermon we are going to find out that we as His ambassadors and royal priests have been given the power to witness to any seeker whom God sends our way!

Background on Philip

What little that can be known about Philip comes mostly from the Gospel of John.¹ Philip is a Greek name that means “lover of horses,” his Jewish name is not known.² Philip’s genealogy for instance is not given anywhere in the Bible or historically. Like Andrew and Peter, Philip was from the town of Bethsaida (John 1:44) where all of them probably attended the same synagogue.³ According to John MacArthur, Philip was most likely a professional fisherman along with Nathanael, Thomas,⁴ and the other four apostles Peter, Andrew, James and John (John 21, Mark 1:21, 29; Luke 5:10) who were fishing partners.⁵ Philip’s name is listed in fifth place in each of the lists of Apostles (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-18; Luke 6:12-15).⁶ Apostle Philip is not to be confused with Philip who was one of the seven deacons of the early church in Acts 6:5.⁷



¹ JoAnn Ford Watson, “[Philip \(Person\)](#),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 311.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 119.

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., 120.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “[Peter, The Apostle](#),” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1659.

⁶ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, 1675.

⁷ Taken from the following website: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Philip-the-Apostle>

After preaching in various areas, Philip most likely “settled in Hierapolis, a city of the Roman province of Asia, and died there, though whether his was a natural or a martyr’s death is uncertain.”⁸

Calling and Leadership Style

The day after Jesus called Andrew, John and Peter; Jesus found Phillip and told him, “follow Me” (John 1:43).⁹ Since Philip’s calling took place near Bethany, beyond the Jordan where John was baptizing (John 1:28); it is likely that Philip was one of his disciples.¹⁰ Philip, who had been seeking “the One Moses wrote about in the Law” (John 1:45), not only dropped everything to follow Jesus but also showed he had the heart of an evangelist by telling Nathanael, his friend “we have found” the Messiah!¹¹ From *Philip’s Calling* (John 1:43-51), the *Feeding of the Five Thousand* (John 6:1-14), the *Visit of the Greeks* (John 12:20-36) and *The Upper Room* (John 14:5-14); we learn that Philip was a “process oriented, by the book, practically minded” kind of guy that was so obsessed with “identifying reasons things can’t be done” that he often overlooked the miraculous.¹²



While Philip started out as a pragmatic and cynic, he later matured in the faith and through the power of the Holy Spirit “multitudes came to know Christ under his preaching.”¹³ The remainder of this sermon is going to examine each of the above stories and the evangelical lessons that can be learned from them.

Philip’s Calling – Lesson One: “Evangelising Your Friends” (John 1:43-51)

On his way to Galilee Jesus meets Philip and says “Follow Me.” Philip then went and found his friend Nathanael and told him that Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, was indeed the Messiah written about in the Law.¹⁴ Nathanael was skeptical to such a proposition! Since “Nazareth was not mentioned in the Old Testament, the Talmud, Midrash or contemporary

⁸ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, 1676.

⁹ John F. MacArthur Jr., 122.

¹⁰ JoAnn Ford Watson, 311.

¹¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., 123.

¹² John F. MacArthur Jr., 121.

¹³ John F. MacArthur Jr., 133.

¹⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 144.

pagan writings,”¹⁵ why would the Messiah be born in such an insignificant place?¹⁶ Not even the people in the synagogues of Capernaum (John 6:42) or Nazareth itself (Mark 6:1-6) believed that was possible!¹⁷ In response to



Nathanael’s skepticism, Philip chose not to try and win over his friend by argument but instead took Him to see Jesus.¹⁸ When Jesus predicted that Nathanael would become a person without deceit,¹⁹ Nathanael asked Jesus how He knew him? Jesus said “I saw you under the fig tree” which was either a reference to Hosea 9:10²⁰ or more likely a reference to one of Nathanael’s times of prayer, meditation or study at his home town.²¹ Jesus’ supernatural knowledge of Nathanael²² broke his skepticism and Nathanael immediately acknowledged Jesus both as the

Son of God and king of Israel. Jesus finished his discourse by promising Nathanael a vision, Jesus was the link by which the “realities of heaven will be brought down to earth” (John 3:13),²³ that would forever help him overcome “his disdain for the familiar and commonplace.”²⁴

If only Nathanael was the last of the skeptics when it comes to the Gospel message! We live in a culture that no longer believes in absolute truth and is very hostile towards organized religion. Reading about evangelists embezzling funds, married pastors having sex with church



members and priests having relations with little boys; has left many people sceptical of those who are trying to spread the Good News! Living in the global age of electronic connectivity has also led to Christianity being relegated to fringes of our society to “compete” as “one voice” amongst many. So, how do you reach a highly sceptical, diverse believing person? The same way that Nathanael was reached, through the witness of a friend who not only knows the word but has also puts it into action (James 1:22)! Until the

skeptic can “experience” the Gospel’s true meaning through the witness of a genuine believer

¹⁵ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 27.

¹⁶ Leon Morris, 145.

¹⁷ J. Ramsey Michaels, *John*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 40.

¹⁸ Leon Morris, 145.

¹⁹ J. Ramsey Michaels, 40.

²⁰ J. Ramsey Michaels, 41.

²¹ Leon Morris, 146.

²² J. Ramsey Michaels, 42.

²³ Leon Morris, 149.

²⁴ J. Ramsey Michaels, 42.

who walks on the righteous path through confession, they are unlikely to give up their familiar and pleasurable ways of sin to embrace Christ's gracious gift of salvation (Romans 5:15-21)!

Feeding of the Five Thousand – “Seeing with Heavenly Eyes” (John 6:1-14)

When Jesus crossed the far shore of the Sea of Galilee John chapter six tells us that a great crowd followed Him because they saw Him heal the sick (verses 1-2). The size of the crowd was about 5,000 but with women and children could have been upwards to 20,000.²⁵



When Jesus saw the crowd coming towards Him, He tested Philip by asking him “where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”²⁶ Philip who was a native of Bethsaida (John 1:44) and was most likely the “apostolic administrator” in charge of meals and logistics,²⁷ responded by telling Jesus that to feed so many people was impossible for not even 200 denarii’s worth of bread or eight month’s work of wages²⁸ would give each person a single bite of food!²⁹ It is at this point that Apostle Andrew brought forward a boy with five small barely loaves and two small fish.

Jesus instructed the disciples to get the people seated on the grass, gave thanks for the food and with the boy’s small lunch fed all of them until they ate as much as they wanted. This was no token meal but a feast in which 12 baskets of food were left over.³⁰ In light of this miracle Jesus had to withdraw from the people because they began to see Him as a prophet and desired by force to make this divinely accredited leader their king to lead them against the Roman government.³¹

Like Apostle Philip we often see life situations with “earthly” instead of “heavenly” eyes! There are many situations in life that we are like Phillip and can only see the “impossibility of the situation.”³² For example, if God told you this very day you are to quit your job, move your family to Africa and become a missionary, would not your first thoughts be that financially this is impossible? If God told you to acquire land that is not for sale, add a two-million-dollar addition to the church when there are only 40 people attending, would not your first response be that this is impossible? If God told you to lay hands on someone with cancer

²⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., 125.

²⁶ Leon Morris, 303.

²⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., 125.

²⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., 126.

²⁹ Leon Morris, 304.

³⁰ Leon Morris, 305–306.

³¹ Leon Morris, 306.

³² John F. MacArthur Jr., 126.

and through His power heal them, would not your first response be that this is impossible? Yes, for most Christians the natural laws of this world are so firmly implanted in our minds that we



can't see the truth that God's providence has no boundaries and as such through His power we can do anything He asks of us! I am not certain that Philip lacked faith that Jesus could perform another miracle so much as he lacked faith that through Jesus' power that he Philip could perform a miracle and feed the people. If we truly believe in Jesus' promise that we as His ambassadors and royal priests would do greater miracles than He did (John 14:12-14) then why are our visions and dreams of serving God in His kingdom not "big enough" to fitting of the Creator and sustainer of this universe (Colossians 1:16)?

When it comes to evangelism why are we so skeptical that we can reach the skeptics of this world when we have been granted the ability to speak in the power of the Spirit?

Visit of the Greeks – “What You want me to Evangelize” (John 12:20-28)

In this passage we are told that certain Greeks amongst those who came up to worship at the festival asked Philip if they could get an interview with Jesus.³³ While these Greeks might have been full-fledged proselytes to Judaism,³⁴ they were more likely part of a group of Gentiles called “God-fearers” who were attracted to the morality and monotheism of Judaism.³⁵ Philip



being overly concerned with methods and protocol was not certain if he should take them to Jesus who had said to “not go in the way of the Gentiles or Samaritans” (Matthew 10:5-6) but only to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24).³⁶ In his perplexity, he sought out the advice of Apostle Andrew and in the end both of them went and told Jesus of the Greeks' request.³⁷ While there is no mention of whether or not the Greeks got their interview,³⁸ Jesus responded to the larger question at hand: how would salvation come about and to who would it

³³ Leon Morris, 525.

³⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., 128.

³⁵ Leon Morris, 525.

³⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., 129.

³⁷ Leon Morris, 526.

³⁸ J. Ramsey Michaels, 223.

apply? Jesus tells the crowd and yes even the Greeks,³⁹ that His mission had now reached a climax⁴⁰ and as such this Kernel of wheat would soon die as a substitutionary sacrifice for the entire world and that all believe and dedicate their lives to serve Him⁴¹ would in turn receive eternal life.⁴²

From the above passage we learn the importance of always being ready to tell others about the Good News. While do not know if the Greeks got a chance to speak with Jesus directly or not, they were probably in the crowd and heard Jesus explain the Gospel message was



for everyone!⁴³ Peter tells us to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:15). One can always be like Philip and think of excuses to not speak the truth concerning Christ, after all it is not easy to “stick out one’s neck” and tell a sceptic that their broad path they are living is leading to their destruction! While it is easier to relegate evangelism to the “professionals,” it is not always better for friendship with a person who has shown they practice what they preach is often heard and received better than from a stranger, even when they are a

polished speaker. Even if you don’t have the gift of evangelism be ready to share the Gospel message for the Spirit will lead the way and ensure the words you speak will not be your own but will be spoken from Him and in His power!

The Upper Room – “There is but One Way” (John 14:5-14)

Our final glimpse of Philip is in the Upper Room on the eve of Christ’s crucifixion. The disciples knew that their formal training was ending, and that Jesus would soon go back to God the Father in heaven.⁴⁴ Even though Jesus said, “do not let your hearts be troubled” “I am going to prepare a place for you” (verses 1-2), Thomas asked the question that all the apostles were thinking: “how can we know the way?”⁴⁵ Jesus told them that He was “the way, truth and life,” “no one comes to the Father except through Me” (verse 6). Jesus was the “Way because He is the truth, i.e., the revelation of God, and because the life of God resides in Him.”⁴⁶ Jesus was the only Mediator and means of reconciliation between sinner and a holy God!⁴⁷ Philip

³⁹ J. Ramsey Michaels, 224.

⁴⁰ Leon Morris, 526.

⁴¹ Leon Morris, 527.

⁴² J. Ramsey Michaels, 225.

⁴³ John F. MacArthur Jr., 130.

⁴⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., 130.

⁴⁵ Leon Morris, 569.

⁴⁶ George R. Beasley-Murray, 252.

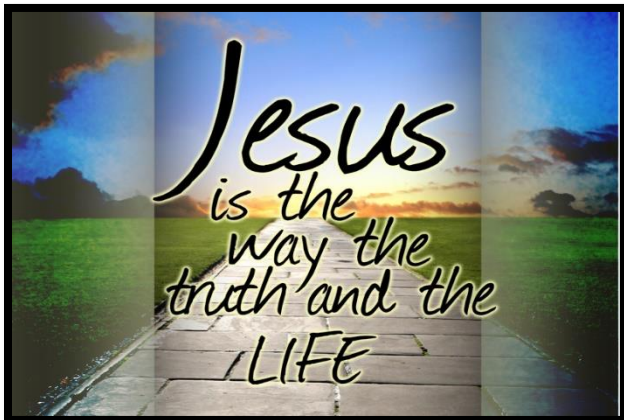
⁴⁷ Leon Morris, 569–570.



responded by asking for a theophany, “show us the Father and that will be enough for us (verse 8)!”⁴⁸ Jesus responded by asking Philip how it was possible that He spent three years with the apostles and yet had not learned that He and the Father are of the same essence,⁴⁹ of the same will and do the same works?⁵⁰ Jesus then assured the apostles that His departure did not mean the end of the works of God, for if they asked anything in the name of Christ, He will do it for them!⁵¹ It was not the formula “in Jesus name” but asking in accordance with His

will that Jesus promised to grant them their requests and continue to do miracles!⁵²

From this final passage we learn how that Jesus is the only way to get to heaven! Living in a digital age where everyone is interconnected and proclaiming their own version of god and pathway to paradise, it is no wonder so many people have given up on the idea that absolute



truth concerning our Creator can be known! To reach a modern-day sceptic who is fully entrenched in the pleasures of their sins and whom has made “self” their god, one must not give up in defeat by identifying reasons they cannot be reached but instead offer them the bread and water of life and watch the Spirit lay a hold of and transform them before our very eyes! For this to happen the people of this world need to hear that there are not many paths to their Creator but only One! It is not through their good deeds or tolerance of many beliefs that gets them to

paradise but their faith in the One, risen saviour named Jesus Christ! Those who know the way to heaven are responsible not for the salvation of others but merely to revere Christ and be ready to give the reason they have hope which is that Christ, who died for all, offers salvation to all who believe in His atoning sacrifice! Will you not tell them of this Good News?

⁴⁸ Leon Morris, 571.

⁴⁹ John F. MacArthur Jr., 131.

⁵⁰ George R. Beasley-Murray, 254.

⁵¹ J. Ramsey Michaels, 261.

⁵² Leon Morris, 574.