

Sermon – 28/03/2004 am

Call of Philip

Study Text: John 1:43-46

As a believer you want to be witnessing, telling others the gospel. You want them to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But what happens when you start to share the gospel? You have prayed and the opportunity comes. You take that opportunity but you come away saying why did I say that, why did I get tangled up in what I was saying. You wonder if you have helped or hindered that person in coming to Jesus Christ.

Well in this passage today we see Philip saying the wrong things as he witnessed to Nathaniel. He caused Nathaniel to stumble for a moment. But God gave him the right words – simple words from his heart as he said to Nathaniel *come and see*.

We also see in the call of Philip himself that the Lord is sovereign in calling people to himself. Follow me he said to Philip. Andrew and John, as we have seen, sought Jesus out at the direction of John the Baptist. Andrew shared with his brother Peter and brought him to Jesus. Philip was called directly by Jesus. Sought, brought or called – they all became disciples of Jesus. It is not for man to make the rules about coming to Christ. Christ is sovereign in election and salvation.

Philip Called

We come to the next day in this momentous week. Some think that if Andrew (and John) followed Jesus at 4pm then it would have been the next day when he found Simon. This day when he found Philip would then be the 5th day. But as we read the text it is the 4th day of this week, the week that began with Jesus entering the scene there at the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Jesus wanted to go to Galilee. Galilee was the region west of the lake. The precise location of where John was baptizing is not known but to go to Galilee they had to go through Bethsaida so it appears. Bethsaida was a fishing village on the northern edge of the lake. It was the home of Andrew and Peter – and Philip also.

Again it is not clear just where Jesus found Philip. Some think it was in Bethsaida as they were on the way, but he may well have been out listening to John the Baptist with the others. He may have been a friend of Andrew and Peter.

Anyway, the important thing is that Jesus *found Philip and said to him follow me*. And he did. This call reminds us of the call of the other disciples by the lake – they left their nets and followed him (Matthew 4). But that later call was more specific. Jesus said *Follow me and I will make you fishers of men*. That was Andrew and Peter, James and John, so there is no conflict between the gospel accounts.

In the Synoptic gospels Philip appears only in the list of the apostles. In John we find him being questioned by Jesus about where to get bread for the 5000 (ch. 6), and again being

approached by the Greeks (ch. 12). On both occasions Philip seemed overwhelmed by the situation and it was Andrew who stepped in to help. In John 14 Philip asked Jesus *show us the Father, this is sufficient for us*. Maybe they all wanted to ask such a question but it was Philip, a bit like the slow kid in the class, who asked the question – and got a gentle rebuke from Jesus. But how glad we are that he asked that question!

Is it not comforting to know that Jesus calls all sorts of people – including just ordinary people like Philip – and you and me – to be his disciples. Jesus does not look on the outside as man does. He does not look at your CV or your bank balance. He looks on the heart. *He knew all men ... for he knew what was in man* (2:24, 25). He did not call the rich and powerful to be his apostles, but people like Philip, fishermen and tax collectors. Why? Because he knew what was in man.

Why is it then that churches today love to parade the rich and famous across the stage – on TV, on radio and in print? Why is there such great rejoicing when a celebrity or sports star comes to believe in Jesus (of course it hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven!). I understand from the Bible that in heaven the rejoicing is the same for any person that is saved. And then books are written about famous people who are Christians, and next thing they themselves are writing books about the Bible. This is not exactly the way we see Jesus operating here is it.

I have been reading a history of the Presbyterian Church in NSW. The author concluded that ‘Presbyterianism at the end of the 20th century could still produce great and talented ministers but not denominational leaders’. This appeared to be something to lament. But I say praise God for those great and talented ministers who faithfully preach the Word of God. The very history this man wrote showed how the so-called great leaders of the church almost destroyed the denomination.

No – the church does not need denominational leaders; the church does not need superstars or celebrities to promote it. What it needs is faithful men and women who will follow the Lord Jesus Christ and declare him to others, just as we see here in this chapter.

One might wonder if Jesus himself would get onto the stage of many churches today as we turn to see the reaction of Nathaniel upon learning that he was from Nazareth.

Nathaniel

Can anything good come out of Nazareth exclaimed Nathaniel when Philip told him that Jesus was from Nazareth. Why this disdain for Nazareth we are not sure. Nazareth was a town up in the hills of Galilee. It was the place where Jesus grew up but not where he was born and so not where he was from.

Nazareth was not a big city for sure but neither was Cana where Nathaniel was from. It may simply be that there was some inter town rivalry between these two places – like Taree and Wingham! There was also the expectation that the Messiah would be a royal figure, the son of David. And Nazareth had no connection with royalty.

Philip found Nathaniel after he himself was found and called by Jesus. The spread of the good news continued in this week we are looking at. The one who was found, followed, and went to find another.

Philip told Nathaniel in essence that he had found the Messiah. He said *we have found Him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote*. Most Jews at that time were looking for the Messiah. Expectation was high. They knew from the Scriptures that Messiah was coming. Here we find that all Scripture, the law and the prophets, were understood as pointing to the coming One, the anointed One. The rabbis we are told found as many as 456 passages in Scripture that speak of the Messiah.

Philip witnessed from the Scriptures and from what he had seen. But he also added information that was not from Scripture and was not what he had seen – it was hearsay. It was hearsay and it was not true. Jesus was not from Nazareth but from Bethlehem. He was not the son of Joseph – note how Luke writes – *being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph*. Philip did not qualify what he said in this way – he just spoke what was told him by someone or something he heard.

Whilst Philip is not condemned for speaking what was not true, we do see that this added information led to Nathaniel stumbling in his belief. And we can learn from his mistake – if we have not already learnt from our own mistakes in this regard. We must rely up the word of God in our witness. It is the living and active word that pierces the heart of man (Hebrews 4:12).

Too often we get caught up in arguments and start to defend the gospel with the words of men. Or we may try to evangelise through some topical event. We see later on how Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman. He did not get sidetracked about the place to worship. Let us stick to the heart of the gospel and let us stick to the Word of God. As Paul commanded Timothy preach the Word, the word of God not the word of man. Preach the whole counsel of God – not the counsel of men.

Of course you must know the Word of God in the first place. Philip did and he did use it. But he added hearsay, the ideas of men. Take the Bible, open it and read it to your friends and family. Don't talk **about** the Bible but speak what it actually says. It is living and active. It alone has the power to convert human hearts (II Corinthians 10:4-6).

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon