

Philip

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[0 : 00] The great composer Leonard Bernstein was once asked by a reporter, what is the most difficult instrument in the orchestra to play? Bernstein thought for a moment and then replied, the second fiddle.

I can get plenty of violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm, that's a problem.

And if we have no second fiddle, we have no harmony. Who would have thought it that the hardest instrument in the orchestra to play is the second fiddle?

In his diary for Thursday, September the 10th, 1850, the great Andrew Boner, who at the time was a minister in a small Perthshire village called Collis, wrote these words.

I spent most of the day in reading Dr. Chalmers' life. Thomas Chalmers was the founder of the Free Church. In the midst of my reading, a local man came in to ask me to go with him to settle a quarrel between him and his wife.

[1 : 12] The Lord does not use me like his servant, Dr. Chalmers, for great things. But my way of serving the Lord is walking three or four miles to quiet a family dispute.

The Lord shows me that he wishes me to be like one of the common Levites. Dr. Thomas Chalmers was the first fiddle of the 19th century Scottish church.

Boner was learning how to play the second fiddle. He wrote, Over the next few weeks, I want us to examine those who played second fiddle among the disciples.

Jesus' closest friends, as we know, were Peter, James and John. But what about the others? The names of which we struggle sometimes to remember, but without whom the gospel would have no harmony.

These men didn't engage in mighty evangelistic ministries like Peter. They didn't write inspired books of scripture like John. But they faithfully served the Lord in the way Andrew Boner did.

[2 : 41] Serving like one of the common Levites. Or as Bernstein says, it's so hard to find playing a second fiddle. The name Philip means a lover of horses, a lover of horses.

It was a very popular name in the Israel of Jesus' day. This was because the culture of Israel had been heavily influenced by Greek culture.

And of course, Philip of Macedonia was the father of Alexander the Great. The Alexander who represented the heights of Greek influence and conquest. There are different Philips in the New Testament, and we must be careful that we get the right one.

According to Acts, one of the deacons of the early church was called Philip. He was a powerful evangelist, and it was through Philip the Evangelist that the Ethiopian nobleman came to a living faith in Jesus Christ.

But he's not the Philip we're looking at today. The Philip we're interested in was one of Jesus' 12 disciples. He is named in every list of Jesus' disciples, and from what we can understand, was one of the first to follow Jesus as Lord.

[4 : 01] This man with the noble name, he is the first of the second fiddles of Jesus' great orchestra. A man whom Jesus does not use for great things, as we may understand greatness, but as a common Levite.

As you read through the Gospels, there is really only one word which perfectly describes Philip. Philip was a bringer. A bringer.

He wasn't the first to confess great things about Jesus, nor was he capable of great acts of power and wonder. Rather, he was a bringer of things to Jesus.

There is something in every one of these lesser apostles, as we may call them, which is worthy of our imitation. With Philip, it is this.

He brought things to Jesus. And it seems to me that as we read the Gospel, he brought two things to Jesus. He brought people to Jesus.

[5 : 07] He brought questions to Jesus. He brought people to Jesus, first of all. Philip brought people to Jesus. Now, just about everything we know about Philip comes from John's Gospel.

From John chapter 1 and verse 43, we learn that Philip came from the seaside town of Bethsaida in Galilee. Bethsaida was one of these little fishing villages around the Sea of Galilee.

Interestingly, both Peter and Andrew were also from Bethsaida. We don't know their ages relative to one another, but surely Peter and Andrew must have known Philip, or at least known of Philip.

All of Jesus' first disciples came from these fishing villages surrounding the Sea of Galilee. It gives, does it not, a new meaning to Jesus' command to both Peter and Andrew.

Come, follow me. I will make you fishers of men. And as you read through John's Gospel, you get this strong image of Philip as a bringer of things to Jesus.

[6 : 21] First of all, he brings his friends to Jesus. And then he brings strangers to Jesus. Have you ever brought anyone to Jesus?

Perhaps you are, as a parent, trying to bring your children to Jesus. Perhaps your friends, your workmates. Well, Philip is an example of this for you. Having himself followed Jesus, he brought others to Jesus.

First of all then, he brought friends to Jesus. He brought friends. No sooner do we hear about Philip than we hear about his friend, Nathanael.

In John chapter 1, verse 43, Jesus, having found Philip, says to him, follow me. But no sooner does Jesus find Philip than in verse 45, we read that Philip finds Nathanael and tells him, We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Now, there's nothing earth-shattering here about what Philip said to Nathanael. There's no deep theological argument or appeal to Greek philosophy. There's just this wonderful personal testimony.

[7 : 46] We have found Jesus of Nazareth. Of course, Andrew had done precisely the same thing with his brother Peter.

And now Philip does it with Nathanael. Nathanael objects. Nazareth, he says. Nazareth. Had anything good come from Nazareth? I guess Nazareth didn't really have too good a reputation in the Israel of Nathanael's day.

He was sceptical. And Philip knew that he was outgunned. And so he said to Nathanael, Well, come and see. That's all.

He didn't try and argue the position. He said, Well, come and see. He didn't have apologetic arguments at his fingertips to use. And so he simply said to his friend, Well, come and see for yourself.

Jesus found Philip. And Philip found Nathanael. And Philip brought Nathanael to Jesus. It is highly significant that the first activity those who are called to follow Jesus engage in, in John chapter 1, is in calling others to follow him also, in bringing them to Jesus.

[9 : 08] Andrew does it with Peter. And Philip does it with Nathanael. If following Jesus means fishing for Jesus, then the first place to fish, listen carefully, the first place to fish is closest to the shore.

Among one's own family and friends. Andrew takes his brother to Jesus. And Philip takes his friend. We're going to be talking about Nathanael next time.

The Nathanael who is sometimes called Bartholomew. But today is Philip the bringer. He's brought his friend to Jesus. It didn't require bravery on his part as much as it did enthusiasm for Jesus.

If we are followers of Jesus, then our passion for him will naturally result in us wanting those we love most to meet him for themselves and come to know him.

Our family comes first. We fish closest to the shore. And then our friends. If you want to be like Philip, then think of who God is calling you to bring to him.

[10 : 22] Who is God calling you to bring to Jesus? Look at the ring on your finger. It's your wife. It's your husband. Look at the pictures of your children on your walls.

It's your sons. It's your daughters. Look at the contact list on your mobile phone. It's your friends. Or let's put it another way.

At Christmas time, we send and receive Christmas cards. Those to whom we send Christmas cards are those God is calling us to bring to Jesus.

Those from whom we receive Christmas cards are those God is calling us to bring to Jesus. We bring them first of all by bringing them to him in prayer.

Praying that God would open their hearts to the truth about who Jesus really is. And then we pray we'd have an opportunity to speak to them. And then without entering into any great apologetic argument or theological discussion, when the opportunity arises to speak to them, we say, I want to tell you about what I found which has made all the difference in my life.

[11:44] I want to tell you about Jesus of Nazareth. So he brought friends to Jesus. But second, Philip also brought strangers to Jesus.

Strangers. Over the years, we have been, we have had many people in Glasgow City Free Church who were bringers of others.

They brought others to church. We called them trawlers. After the method of catching fish, many around the world employ of dragging nets to the sea, catching all kinds of fish.

Historically, many of our Chinese students were trawlers. One came, then another came, and then another, and another to hear about Jesus.

Philip was the trawler of the disciples, the one who brought others to Jesus. So in John chapter 12 and verse 20 through 22, John 12, 20 through 22, we learn of a number of Greeks who would come to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of the Passover.

[12:58] Now, we don't know if these were ethnic Greeks or they were Jews who had adopted Greek cultures, customs, and mode of dress, and religion.

But whoever and whatever they were, they latched on to Philip. Perhaps because Philip had a Greek name and probably came from a family which admired Greek culture.

They could relate to Philip, and Philip could relate to them. And so they came to Philip with a request. Sir, we would like to see Jesus.

We would like to see Jesus. Many thousands of pulpits have this saying as a picture. A picture which only the preacher can see.

It's as if the congregations sitting before him are saying exactly the same thing. Don't tell us about yourself and your own problems. Don't even tell us about the world and its problems.

[14:03] Tell us about Jesus, preacher. Whenever you see one of these pictures, think of Philip who brought these Greeks to Jesus. Having told Andrew, both Philip and Andrew told Jesus.

Philip brought these strangers to Jesus and told them all about him. Philip told Jesus what they had said.

Sir, we would like to see Jesus. Hudson Taylor brought strangers to Jesus. Adonai and Judson brought strangers to Jesus.

George Verwer is still bringing strangers to Jesus. In our own day and generation, tens of thousands of missionaries are bringing strangers to Jesus.

They're trawling as fishers of souls. We admire them, we support them, we pray for them. But we also want to be like them.

[15:07] Sometimes you know it is easier to speak to a stranger about Jesus than it is to speak to someone close.

Stranger on a plane on an hour's commute flight. Stranger on a train on our commute into work in the morning. Philip was a bringer.

I think we get the idea. He brought those he knew to Jesus, calling them to come and see for yourself. He brought those who were strangers to Jesus, those who said, we would like to see Jesus.

Philip never wrote a gospel. Philip never preached a sermon at Pentecost. He never performed a great miracle. Well, not that we know of anyway. But Philip did what he could for Jesus.

He brought others to know Jesus for themselves. That's his legacy to us. And it's a good legacy indeed, is it not?

[16:10] Good enough, perhaps, to imitate. Philip brought people to Jesus. Secondly, Philip brought questions to Jesus.

He brought questions to Jesus. The only other two times we read about Philip in the Gospel of John are in the context of the questions that he asks Jesus.

Questions which reveal that Philip, rather like us, was not the finished article and didn't have all the answers. The important thing about him was, however, that he brought his questions to Jesus.

There were many things he hadn't grasped and didn't understand. But he didn't allow those things to gnaw away at him and keep him away from Jesus. That's what we sometimes do, is it not? We allow our problems and our questions to keep us away from Jesus, rather than bringing them to him. We think that somehow, if we tell Jesus that we are struggling to believe and understand, that he'll be angry with us.

[17 : 27] Or that he won't be able to answer them. The truth is that the Psalms are filled with the questions that godly men and women have been asking for thousands of years and continue to ask today.

Questions like, why do bad things happen to good people? And where can I get the strength to keep going? And what do I do when no one understands me?

Philip was just like this in the questions he brought to Jesus. We too must imitate him if we want to prosper at all as Christians. That we bring our doubts and our questions to Jesus in prayer.

The two questions we read of Philip bringing to Jesus are a sufficiency of grace and a sufficiency of understanding.

Enough grace, enough understanding. First of all, the first question concerns a sufficiency of grace. Is there enough grace in Jesus for me?

[18 : 44] You know, the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels is his feeding of the 5,000. It is only in John 6, 35 through 37, however, that Philip is mentioned.

So Jesus sees this large crowd coming toward him and he asks Philip, Philip, where shall we buy bread for all these people to eat? And of course, Philip is as clueless as the rest of us.

And he answers, well, eight months wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite. Philip's answer is as much a question as it is anything else.

Jesus, we don't have enough money to buy bread. So where on earth is it going to come from? Now, of course, Jesus already knows the answer.

Because as we learn from John 6, 36, he had already planned what he was going to do. But such knowledge was beyond Philip at this time. He has not yet appreciated that the grace and the power of Jesus is sufficient to overcome every issue, every problem we face.

[20 : 01] There isn't enough bread for 5,000 people. There's enough money for it. Where then will it come from and how will they be fed?

Where is it going to come from, Philip asks? That's the question he brings to Jesus, a good question. A question I'm sure many of us are asking today. Perhaps someone very close to us passes away.

And we wonder to ourselves, where am I going to find the strength to get through this? Or perhaps we begin to show the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

And we wonder to ourselves, where am I going to get the strength to get through this? Or perhaps there's trouble in our marriage.

And we wonder to ourselves, where am I going to find the strength to get through this? Where am I going to find the strength to get through this? You know, like Philip, we look around and we realize that unless Jesus does something for us and in us, there is no way we're going to keep our heads above water.

[21 : 16] And so we go to him with the questions. Will your grace be sufficient for me? I don't have any inner resources of strength.

Will you strengthen me with your grace? Let's cut to the chase. Perhaps there is someone here this morning in Glasgow City Free Church who knows, that as a follower of Christ, but as a follower of Christ, you cannot continue with a certain relationship you have.

But as a professing Christian, it is not right for you to keep going in this sinful course. This wrong relationship is not known to anyone else on this screen, but to you only.

But the reason you don't want to give up that relationship, that sinful course of action, is that you don't think you'll be able to. You enjoy that other person too much.

You are, shall we say, addicted to them. You can't give them up. Can I ask you to bring Philip's question to Jesus and ask it for yourself?

[22 : 38] Lord, I know that I need to stop this sinful relationship. I know I need to cut off this sinful course. But I can't.

I can't. I don't have the strength. I don't even have the will to do it. Lord Jesus, will you multiply your grace to me, even as you miraculously fed those 5,000 people?

And will you give me your strength to want to and to pursue holiness? Bring your question about grace to the fountain of grace himself, to Jesus.

You will not only receive an answer, you'll receive fresh grace to help in your time with me. A sufficiency of grace.

Secondly and finally, a sufficiency of understanding. He didn't understand enough, so he came to Jesus with a question. Sufficiency of understanding.

[23 : 49] John 14 tells the story of part of what happened in the upper room on the night before Jesus died. It was in that upper room that Jesus told his disciples that he was going away, that he would come back for them.

He told them that he is the way, the truth, and the life. And it really was the most intimate of settings, and it must have stayed with Philip for the rest of his life. But it was in this setting that Philip asks a question which reveals how little he really understood about who Jesus was and why Jesus had come.

In verse 8, he asks Jesus, Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us. Show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.

Now Jesus has told him that there is no other way to the Father except through him, because to know him is to know the Father, and to see him is to see the Father. It's in this context that Philip asks, well, Lord, show us the Father, that will be enough for us.

Philip, dear Philip, have you not been listening to what Jesus just said? That to know him is to know the Father, that to see him is to see God.

[25 : 14] Philip, don't you understand that Jesus is the face of God? That Jesus is the Word who is God, who became flesh and made his dwelling among us?

You can see here that even at this late stage, though Philip has been with Jesus for three years, by asking this question, Philip is demonstrating just how little he really understands about who Jesus was and why Jesus had come.

And interestingly, Jesus so patiently answers Philip, don't you know me, Philip, even after I've been with you for such a long time?

And then proceeds to reinforce the point he made earlier, but to see him is to see the Father, to hear him speaking is to hear the Father speaking, to watch him working is to watch the Father working.

Even though he'd been with Jesus such a long time, Philip does not really understand and appreciate who Jesus is. He doesn't understand how it can be that Jesus is God in the flesh and that as God in the flesh, Jesus will suffer and die on the cross.

[26 : 39] But look, he takes what he does not understand to Jesus in the form of a question, a question Jesus patiently answers.

He takes what he does not understand to Jesus in the form of a question. There are many of us here who have been Christians for decades and yet we feel that we understand less about God now than we did the day we first believed.

The more we know Christ, the more we know how little we know and how much more there is to know about Christ. And we want to learn.

We want to know Jesus better and so we take our questions to him. Questions that we should have known the answers to years ago but always have been afraid to ask because we didn't want to admit our ignorance.

questions. We ask questions about how it's possible that Jesus could be God and man at the same time. How it's possible that he as God man could die on the cross to take away our sins and about why he chose us and not other people to be his beloved children.

[27 : 57] We take what are perhaps the most fundamental and basic questions of the Christian faith to Jesus. and you know he's not angry with us. Rather he delights in our coming and our asking.

We don't use these mysteries of the faith these things that we don't understand as excuses to stay away from Jesus. Rather we take these things we do not understand to Jesus and we ask him about them.

it may be that in this life he will not give us all the answers we want but he will give us the answers we need and the contentment to rest in what he has already shown us about himself that Jesus is always with us and he'll always be with us.

you know there are many advantages in being a Philip as opposed to being a Peter of being an Andrew Boner as opposed to being a Thomas Chalmers of being a second fiddle as opposed to being first violin Philip was a bringer bringing others to Jesus and bringing questions to Jesus God give us the grace to be a loving of horses just like Philip that means that that God God love nothing even a