

Scripture Sketches

—*Christ: The Christian's Strength*—

A Meditation on the Life of Philip the Apostle

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Preface

The accounts of men and women recorded in the precious Word of God “...were written aforetime... for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). It is the blessed Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” Who “will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself...He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew [it] unto you” (John 16:13,14). He may take, according to His perfect time and will, each of these divinely inspired records and apply to the seeking heart, innumerable precious, vitally important lessons and applications for the blessing and spiritual growth of each of God’s dear children.

It is one’s desire in presenting the following ‘Biblical character sketches’ to consider some of the more obscure figures found recorded in the Word of God. Though we do not know much of them, what our God has seen good to record of their lives certainly contains vitally important lessons. May we prayerfully and humbly meditate a bit on their lives, seeking to learn and profit from these divinely inspired accounts. Moral lessons gleaned from these accounts, because they are part of the Divine Canon of Scripture, present infinite applications for our lives—applications which may only be made good to each individual and their personal circumstances by the blessed Holy Spirit.

May our blessed Lord Jesus be honored in all that is written and may all who read these pages find true “*edification, exhortation, and comfort*” (1 Cor. 14:3) in them.

Christ: The Christian's Strength
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Introduction

“...for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (2 Cor. 12:10).

“...for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9).

“He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30).

God’s Word does not give many details of the life of the Apostle Philip. Yet what is written is instructive and has surely been recorded for our blessing and learning.

It is interesting to note that though Philip is mentioned in all the gospels, we learn most about him in the gospel of John. The other three gospels (the ‘synoptic’ gospels) simply record his name as one of the twelve apostles the Lord chose (see Matthew 10, Mark 3, and Luke 6). In reading these three records of the Twelve Apostles, two seemingly insignificant (but important) things strike one about dear Philip. (1) He is always mentioned 5th when the Twelve Apostles are recorded. (He is also mentioned 5th in the list of Eleven Apostles recorded in Acts 1:13). (2) Philip’s name means ‘lover of horses’.

Morally, we may gather from these things that Philip, by nature, may have had a strong personality—perhaps he was even a physically strong man. And we may at least assume that ‘power’ and ‘strength’ were important to dear Philip. Believing as he did that the Lord Jesus Christ was indeed the promised Messiah, Philip, along with the others, naturally would have eagerly looked for the setting up of the Kingdom of the Israel in great power and glory at the appearance of the promised Messiah. How much dear Philip had yet to learn about his weakness and the true source of strength!

Perhaps Philip’s name always being recorded fifth in the list of the Apostles gives a hint of this, for the number five in Scripture speaks of *human weakness*. Learning that we are weak and have no power within or of ourselves—that all our strength comes from the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit—is a *lifetime learning experience* for all Christians. May we never try to walk the path of faith in our own energy and power, but rather recline in and count upon that divine strength available only through our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

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Learning Who Leads

“The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me” (Jn. 1:43).

In past eternal ages the Lord had purposed that Philip would be one of the twelve apostles. Now the time had come and the blessed Saviour who *was come to seek and to save that which was lost* began His journey of service to the Father. As He is about to depart into Galilee the *Lamb of God finds* Philip, calling him to follow Him. It may have been that Philip was a ‘natural leader’ before the Saviour called him. Now however, having been called to follow the Lord Jesus, he had to learn to put his confidence and trust in Another. The Lord’s call to Philip to follow Him began a journey in which he learned that the blessed Lord is everything—the source of all strength, wisdom and love needed for the pathway of faith. The Lord graciously showed dear Philip that following Him is learning, as the Apostle Paul wrote—*“...for when I am weak, then am I strong”*. This is surely a lesson that each of the dear redeemed need to learn—and surely too, it will be a lifetime learning experience each today.

Paul wrote to the Philippian believers: *“I have strength for all things in Him that gives me power”* (Phpp. 4:13, J.N.D. Trans.). He also declared that the Lord had promised him (and all believers) that: *“...My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Cor. 12:9). This, Philip would learn as well.

May believers find joy in realizing that it was when we were lost in sin, having no strength to do anything to please God or save ourselves that we learned: *“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”* (Rom. 5:6).

“Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (Jn. 1:45).

Dear Philip, obviously excited at having met (and by faith believed in), the promised Messiah, immediately seeks to tell another of Who ‘he found’. Philip surely was right in all he did in telling Nathanael about the Lord Jesus, but he had yet to learn that *“No man can come to*

me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Jn. 6:44). It was not Philip who found the Lord Jesus, rather the blessed Lamb of God found him.

So it is with each believer for we learn from Luke 19:10 that the blessed Lord Jesus “... *is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*” It was of no interest to us by nature that the Lord Jesus came seeking us. Morally we all are guilty of hiding our faces from Him (see Isaiah 53:3). We did not seek Him, but still in matchless, sovereign grace He, blessed Saviour, sought us—wretched, poor and hopeless sinners! We will praise Him for seeking us for all eternity!

How very precious to think of the Lord of Glory coming into this world seeking you, seeking me, seeking each soul. As another has said, in a coming day of glory when the saints are all gathered together in heaven, not one of the redeemed will be able to say, “I’m here because I chose to be here”. No, the Lord Jesus ‘found’ each one and drew each soul to Himself. We were alienated from God, enemies of His in our minds, proving our enmity by our wicked works (see Col. 1:21). Had He not *sought* and *found* us there would only be a Christless, hopeless eternity awaiting each wretched soul.

Oh! What love and condescending grace that He, knowing all about the natural hatred in man’s heart, would still come amongst His enemies, loving them—loving each of us—tenderly seeking each wayward sinner, with all of heaven rejoicing when one lost sheep was found. “*Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth*” (Luke 15:1).

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Learning To Speak As He Spoke

“And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see” (Jn.1:46).

Dear Philip, in the energy, joy and excitement of true faith, having been found and called by the Messiah to follow Him, immediately turns to an acquaintance—a Godly Jew named Nathanael to tell him the good news. *“Philip finds Nathanael, and says to him, We have found him of whom Moses wrote in the law, and the prophets, Jesus, the son of Joseph, who is from Nazareth” (Jn. 1:45).*

In the face of Nathanael's questioning and hesitancy, Philip did not debate or argue with him—true faith has no need to do that. Though still not realizing Who really found whom, Philip has at least learned that the assurance of the Word of God (*Moses and the law, and the prophets*) is enough for faith. He needs no other proof that this Carpenter of Nazareth was indeed the promised Messiah, Son of David and King of Israel.

Now he wants to bring others beginning with dear Nathanael, a godly Jew, to the Messiah—the Lamb of God. This ought ever to be the natural reaction of each redeemed soul—to desire to bring others to the Lord Jesus to learn to know Him as their Saviour too.

But now we find that dear Philip learns yet another needful and wonderful lesson—a lesson all believers also need to learn. First, as we mentioned, he did not debate or argue when Nathanael questioned how the blessed promised Messiah could come from Nazareth—a village of the poorest of the poor. How, wonders Nathanael, can any thing so good and glorious come from such a despised place? It is here that dear Philip learns to simply speak the Word of God and allow the Spirit of God use that living Word to convict and save souls. When the two disciples of John followed Jesus and were asked by the Saviour *“what seek ye”* they answered, *“Master, where dwellest Thou”*. The Lord Jesus said but three wonderful words of invitation—*“Come and see”*. Those two did and found blessing and joy for this life and for eternity.

Philip realized the way to convince Nathanael of what he now

knew by faith to be true would be to use the Word of God. He simply repeats those three words the blessed Saviour had spoken to others: *“Come and see”*. How infinitely powerful is the Word of God! *“For the word of God is quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Heb. 4:12). *“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven”* (Psa. 119:89). *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”* (Matt. 24:35).

Our blessed Saviour in His infinite perfection used but three verses from His Word to defeat Satan and his temptations when in the wilderness. Oh! How powerful is the precious Word of God. Our safety, strength, blessing, and joy lie in its pages for it is the full expression of the mind of our blessed God to mankind.

When Nathanael comes to the Lord Jesus and hears that the Messiah had seen him under the fig tree before Philip had even called him, Nathanael believes (Jn. 1:48, 49). By this dear Philip learned another wonderful lesson. Though our blessed God may graciously deign to use us in some ministry, it is He who has really done the work. To the blessed Lord belongs all the glory for each blessing given, for each soul saved. May we all be very humbled by this realization for the Apostle Peter declares: *“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble”* (1 Pet. 5:5).

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Learning Our Weakness and His Sufficiency

“When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” (Jn. 6:5).

“Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little” (Jn. 6:7).

Our blessed Saviour's questions always perfectly deal with the essence of what He is teaching those with whom He speaks. There was no question with the blessed Creator as to how food could be provided for this great company on which He had such tender compassion. One of the blessed objects of the Lord's question to dear Philip was that the apostle might realize that in himself there existed no resources to meet the needs of others. Doubtless another precious and wonderful object of the Lord in asking Philip this question was to display the glory of the Lord's infinite sufficiency to meet every need.

Dear Philip could only think in terms of *much* money (almost a year's wage for a laborer) that would be needed to buy bread—yet it would only buy a *little* which still could not satisfy the hunger of that great multitude. How much like the dear apostle we are! How often we fail to fully trust the blessed Creator and Sustainer of the Universe—the One who declared in Psalms 50:10-12: *“For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle upon a thousand hills; I know all the fowl of the mountains, and the roaming creatures of the field are mine: If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof”*.

That day Philip learned at least two vitally important lessons (May we learn them as well!). The One Who had said to Him, *“follow Me”* alone could provide for every need Philip would ever have. Secondly, Philip in his own strength was unable to meet even his smallest need. All provision must come from the blessed Lord of Glory.

So much more could be written of the perfect all sufficiency of our blessed Saviour, but Oh!, that each believer might learn and use these simple, precious lessons each step of the pathway of faith.

“... for without me ye can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). *“But my God shall abundantly supply all your need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus”* (Phpp. 4:19).

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Learning to Have Confidence in Him

“The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus” (Jn. 12:21, 22).

Philip was well aware, believing in Jesus as the promised Messiah, that He had come to His people Israel, not to the Gentiles. The Greeks (Gentiles) who evidently had become Jewish proselytes came up to the feast to worship according to Jewish custom. This presented a problem to dear Philip for which he had no answer because He did not fully know the heart of Christ, nor the mighty work He came to accomplish to the glory of God.

Apparently these Greeks had heard of Jesus and the miracles He had done and wanted to see Him and to know if He was indeed the promised Messiah of Israel. Philip seemed unsure whether he should put the Lord in contact with the Greeks. He seemed unsure if the Lord would even allow the Greeks to come to Him for the Jews had no dealings with the Gentiles. He did not understand sovereign grace nor what the Lord Jesus must do that both Jew and Gentile would find blessing, not in the law, but in God's grace through His sacrifice at the cross. Philip did not yet understand the heart of Christ—the divine love and grace that was there.

It is striking to note that dear Philip was from the very same town as Andrew and Peter—Bethsaida—which means ‘the house of fish’. Here certainly was an opportunity to ‘catch fish’. Sadly, Philip's lack of understanding the heart of the Lord held him back. He didn't realize yet that *“grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”*. Instead of having full confidence in the Lord's love, he did something that we also (who lack confidence in His love) often do in similar circumstances. He looked to find support in man. Rather than going directly to the Lord Jesus, he goes to Andrew whom he had grown up with evidently feeling the need of Andrew's support when they approach the Lord Jesus with the Greeks' request. In doing so, dear Philip displays more confidence in Andrew than the blessed Lord.

Both Andrew and Philip came to Jesus and told Him of the Greeks' desire. Their lack of confidence in the blessed Lord's love and tender compassion opens the door for the Saviour to reveal the glorious and wonderful work He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. "*And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*" (Jn. 12:23, 24).

What a precious harvest of *fruit* the *corn of wheat* which fell into the ground and died—the death and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ—brought forth. A countless myriad of sin-stained, lost mankind all made *a new creation* by faith that gave the gift of eternal life, the very life of Christ! What infinite blessings and glory has our Saviour won in His death and resurrection at Calvary!

The Greeks would 'see' Jesus too but it would be in a far more wonderful way than they first desired when they came to Philip. Those that truly had faith in Him will not only see Him in His glory in that soon coming day, but they will be part of that happy and blessed heavenly throng that will spend an endless eternity in glory worshipping Him and singing His praises.

Philip (or any of the other apostles) did not yet understand these glorious things, but the time would come when the Lord Jesus would graciously say "*unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures*" (Luke 24:44,45).

What confidence, joy, and power that gave the dear apostles as they went about preaching the gospel to all nations—the very Words and Works of the Lord Jesus after he had gone back to heaven.

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Learning His Person

“Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” (Jn. 14:8,9).

Dear Philip! He had walked with the Lord and watched this blessed Man, very God, in divinely perfect pathway. He had heard His words, seen His works and still there was a sad lack of understanding with the dear apostle. He did not know the Father. Yet every Word and Work of the blessed Saviour was in perfect, divine harmony with the Father's will. The Lord Jesus, in every act, revealed the Father to the Jews. But even the apostles whom He had called missed seemed to have missed this glorious point—to see Jesus, to watch Him, to hear Him, to see His miracles and tender, loving compassion was to see the full expression of the Father revealed. All that could (can) be known of the Father has been perfectly revealed in the blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

For Philip, learning the intrinsic Godhead glory of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ who told them that *“I and My Father are One”* was perhaps the most important lesson of all (perhaps for all of us to learn). The Lord Jesus, in coming to put away sin and destroy him who had the power of death, was the full, complete revelation of the Father. *“For in him all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell”* (Col. 1:19; 2:9, JND Trans.). How dear Philip's question must have grieved the blessed Lord as we consider even but a few of the things that the Lord Jesus Himself declared to them of His Father.

Without further comment, let us reverently consider these following blessed passages from God's Word—testimonies of the Father revealed through the Son. In doing so may we realize that our strength, *made perfect in* [our own] *weakness*, is the perfect strength of our blessed God, revealed in His beloved Son when we have no strength in ourselves. May we learn deeply and well the source of the Christian's strength. All is found in the glorious Person of our Lord Jesus Christ who perfectly revealed the Father to faith that we might

say with confidence; *“I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me”*. It is His life in us acting—not anything of ourselves.

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (Jn.1:18).

“Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him” (Jn.5:18:23).

“I and my Father are one” (Jn.10:30).

“And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak” (Jn. 12:50).

“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9).

One would add just one more note regarding the dear Apostle Philip. The last mention we find of the Apostle is found in Acts 1:13. All we learn there is that the Apostles (Philip still mentioned fifth in the list of names) met in Jerusalem in the upper room with a small company (about 120 together), obediently and quietly doing nothing but waiting for the *promise of the Father* as the Lord had commanded them. Surely this is a wonderful example of obedience and is the key to true Christian strength which Philip had wonderfully learned. May we, one repeats, learn these same precious lessons well!



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