

FROM INQUIRY TO INSIGHT

John 1:43-46

"Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter." In that simple, matter-of-fact statement the Holy Spirit through John sums up all that was deemed necessary that we should know concerning Philip prior to the time of his call to the apostleship. This statement is more than a geographical note. It is a link in Philip's spiritual history. It gives the clue and the key to his religious development. The important part of the sentence is not that Philip was from Bethsaida, but that Bethsaida was the city of Andrew and Peter. It not only reveals to us the place of Philip's abode, but what is infinitely more important, the friendships that helped to shape and mold his character, and eventually led to his salvation and his call to be an apostle. It was Philip's good fortune to live in the same town and to count among his friends those two eminent servants of God, Andrew and Peter. It is indeed an unspeakable blessing to live in the same town with some people. Their mere presence in a town is a benediction.

When I consider what a blessing the presence of Andrew and Peter in Bethsaida proved to be to their fellow-townsmen Philip, as well as to many others, I am impelled to put this question to you and to myself: "Are we a means of blessing to the people who live on the same street or in the same town with us?"

Philip was fortunate in that he was born and reared on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, as was true of Andrew and Peter. It is most likely that he too was a fisherman because Bethsaida means "house of fish" or "fisherman's quarter." It is both possible and probable that Philip was a fisherman, since this was the chief industry of his locals, as well as the business of Andrew and Peter, with whom he later enjoyed an intimate association and valuable friendship as devoted colleagues.

It is possible that Philip, like many others, had listened to the faithful preaching of John the Baptist. The work of that God-sent messenger had been avowedly to prepare the way of the Lord, and not the least effective part of it had been done by impressing many with the conviction that the coming of the Messiah was at hand, and by opening their minds for the reception of the truth about Him. Andrew and Peter were avowed disciples of John the Baptist. These earnest and serious men were watching for the coming of the Messiah. From them there spread to others in Bethsaida a contagion of holy expectancy. Among those who caught this contagion and belonged to the growing class of devout souls who were "waiting for the consolation of Israel" was Philip. Whether or not he was an open follower of John the Baptist, along with some of the other disciples, we cannot say, but we do know that Philip belonged to that little company that waited and watched for the coming of the Lord.

Philip did not find Christ, but the Saviour found him. The same is true of all of us who are Christians. Without intervening human instrumentality, Christ sought Philip, found him and uttered to him that terse and constraining personal invitation, "Follow me." Our Lord wanted the services of this unobtrusive and thoughtful man, who was not likely to leap to conclusions hastily. A prudent, patient and humble man like Philip would be an invaluable addition to the ranks of the disciples. His thoughtfulness and circumspection would act as a corrective to the impetuous and the impressionable. He would not be unduly elated by success, nor easily daunted by failure.

When Philip heard the voice of Christ and looked into His eyes, he knew that he would never be the same again. Thoroughly convinced of the Messiahship, Philip quickly left all and embarked on life's greatest adventure, which is that of following Christ. His

obedience to Christ's call was genuine. He resolved that henceforth his life would be marked by persistent devotion to his Lord.

With his soul stirred to the depths by this sudden call to discipleship, and by the undreamed-of honor and opportunity which had come to him in connection therewith, Philip sought out Nathanael. When he approached his friend, with surprising suddenness for one who was so unusually prudent, Philip blurted out the news: "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Although he was sincere in making his statement, it revealed imperfect knowledge. Philip had not found Christ, but the Lord had found him. Philip had not traced the Saviour to Bethlehem, but to Nazareth. Moreover, when he referred to Him as the son of Joseph, he failed to acknowledge His divine parentage or deity. Nevertheless, Philip wanted Nathanael to know Christ and follow Him too. Consequently, he closely observed the face of Nathanael, wondering whether or not his own opinion would be confirmed.

Nathanael was reluctant to believe that the long-awaited Messiah could come from Nazareth, and unhesitatingly questioned the possibility of it. With considerable insight, the surprised and shocked, but practical and matter-of-fact, Philip replied, "Come and see." Having been fully convinced by the words and actions of Christ that He was the Messiah, Philip insisted that Nathanael come and see for himself what manner of man this Jesus of Nazareth was. Although Philip had a great interest in the ideas and life of Christ, he did not have any disposition to argue with his friend, but merely tried to get him to come to the Master and see for himself. Far too many people are fond of arguments. They seem to think that the only answer to an argument is a superior one, but the truth is the very opposite of that. The only answer to an argument is an achievement. The only real answer to propaganda is a performance.

For centuries men argued about the shape of the earth. The traditional belief was that it was flat, the sun revolving around it every twenty-four hours. What stopped the argument? Not a superior argument, but an achievement. Ferdinand Magellan, with five ships and two hundred sixty-five men, set his sails westward from Spain and, while Magellan was killed in the Philippines, eighteen of his men, three years later, returned to Spain from the east. That stopped the argument. At least eighteen men knew that the world was round.

A goodly number of you have been to Dearborn Village outside the city of Detroit. There you have seen the original laboratory where Thomas A. Edison made his many experiments in the invention of the electric light. After testing some seven hundred types of filament in a vacuum tube, he turned finally to his helpers and said, "We've got it, boys." The Edison Mazda light bulb became a reality.

In 1834 Marcus Whitman, a medical missionary, rode on horseback with other pioneers from New England to Oregon. One of the first men to see the possibilities of the Pacific Northwest, he returned in a wagon to Washington to ask President Tyler for assistance in the settlement of the valuable territory. The president listened with interest but, imagining the incredible hardships of such a journey, said that while hardy men could make the trip on horseback, it would be impossible to make a settlement, since it would require women and children and wagons loaded with equipment. He concluded by saying, "You can't take a wagon over those mountains." Whereupon Whitman replied, "Mr. President, I have taken a wagon over those mountains." The president said, "That being so, you may have the wagons." In six months eight hundred settlers started out on the Oregon Trail. One achievement changed the course of history.

This method of "come and see" is an essential of the Christian faith. Few people, if any, have been won to Christ by argument. The propagating power of Christianity is not by

eloquence of argument, but by the eloquence of achievement. We are not Christians because we ferreted our way through the maze of theological dogmas, but because we met a person or people who personified in their lives the Christian graces and convinced us that they had something which we lacked and needed.

How shall we meet the criticisms of our insistent warnings against the use of intoxicants? Let the critics observe the lives of a hundred alcoholics and the lives of a hundred sober, Christian gentlemen. It will not be difficult for them to note in which group are the real "men of distinction."

A little girl in Crimea saw Florence Nightingale going from one sickbed to another bringing a triumphant smile and a word of good cheer to each wounded soldier. One day she asked Miss Nightingale, "Are you kin to Jesus?" Her question should strike home to all who wear the Christian label. Only a few will take the time to read the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but your best friends cannot keep from reading the gospel according to you. It is sobering to know that there are those among us who will be either attracted to or driven from our Lord by the kind of gospel we preach day by day.

Edgar Guest put it like this:

"I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear.

.

I soon can learn to do it if you'll let me see it done;
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.
And the lecture you deliver may be very wise and true,
But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do;
For I might misunderstand you, and the high advice you give,
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live."

Knowing that he could not argue Nathanael into the family of God, Philip merely challenged him to come to Christ and see for himself.

Our next glimpse of Philip was that day on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, when more than five thousand men, besides the women and children, were listening to Christ. With the passing of the hours, Philip felt some misgivings about the apparent indifference of Christ to the fact that the people were getting hungry and did not have anything to eat. To a practical man like him, the best solution of the problem would have been to send them home and get rid of them, but that was not Christ's method.

In order to test Philip, Christ turned to him and said: "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Philip answered: "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." It was as if he were saying, "A year's pay would not buy enough to give each one in this crowd a tiny morsel." Philip's eyes were dimmed to Christ's sufficiency and all he could see was their lack; not Christ's ability, but their poverty. He had remained ignorant of Christ's power, even though miraculous proofs of it had been given lavishly.

Our Lord knew how cautious and deliberate Philip was, and how little he had shown himself able to make any of the bolder efforts of faith. He wanted him to rise from the manifest inadequacy of the existing material resources to the unseen powers which Christ had at His

command. So, He turned from Philip to Andrew, who was standing there with a little boy at His side. This boy had a little lunch basket containing five barley loaves and two fishes. With those loaves and fishes, which He multiplied, Christ fed the whole crowd. Philip was shamed to the very depths of his soul because he had looked at the problem, but forgot all about the power of Christ. What a pity that anybody would fail to take Christ and His power into consideration! Let us never fail to take Christ into consideration when we set out to do the work of the Lord.

On another occasion a number of Greeks, who saw in Philip a man of quiet manner and brotherly sympathy approached him and, without interrupting the Master's teaching, said, "Sir, we would see Jesus" (John 12:21). Instead of promptly complying with their request by conducting these inquirers straight to Christ and introducing them to Him, Philip recoiled from the acceptance of personal responsibility and decided to ask Andrew if he thought it would be all right for Gentiles to have access to the Saviour. After asking for Andrew's opinion on that subject, Philip stood back while his colleague enthusiastically and joyously introduced them to Christ. Surprised but relieved, he listened to the exulting words with which Christ welcomed these foreigners. I can well imagine that Philip must have felt a pang of regret that he had given away the privilege, the joy, the honor and the reward of introducing these Greeks to the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the last evening that Christ was with His apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, He spoke very frankly to them about the impending events. He talked to them about His Father, about Whom He had spoken to them many times before, and told them that He was going to Him.

Slow to understand and slow to believe what he could not see, and desirous of proof in the form of a visible demonstration Philip said, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us" (John 14:8). His request elicited from Christ that memorable answer: "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?" That night Philip learned what all of us should learn and remember always, namely, if you want to know God and what He is like, then you must look at Christ and know Him. Have you looked to and at Christ? Have you believed on Him? Do you know Him as your personal Saviour? If not, receive Him now and be saved.