

Little Faith and Hasty Answers
by Dr. Lee Roberson

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? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.—John 6:5,6.

The name of Philip appears a number of times in the New Testament. In Matthew and John it appears, referring to Philip the Apostle. The Philip in the book of the Acts refers to one of the first deacons. This message concerns itself with Philip the apostle. He is listed with the other apostles in Matthew 10:3.

In John 1:43, Philip was called to follow the Lord: "The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

In John 1:45, Philip is portrayed as a soul winner: "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." Nathanael began an argument with Philip by saying, ". . . Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?.. ." Philip's answer was, "Come and see." Nathanael came and saw the Lord and confessed Him as the Son of God.

Turn, please, to John 12. Here we find certain Greeks coming to Philip, desiring to see Jesus. Philip found Andrew and told him of the Greeks request, and Andrew and Philip told Christ.

In these two narratives, we notice that Philip was very wise in pointing him to the Lord—first, with Nathanael when he said, "Come and see," and in dealing with the Greeks and bringing the problem to the Lord Jesus.

But in John 14, verse 8, Philip makes a strange and extraordinary request: "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." We are not sure what he was thinking about. Did he want the Lord Jesus to open up Heaven and let the invisible be made visible? Did he think that Christ could cause him and the others to fall into a trance and be transported to the third Heaven? It is an extraordinary idea that he presented to our Lord. But many people have wished to see God with their own eyes, to touch Him with their hands, and to hear His voice.

Christ made a very splendid answer to the request of Philip:

"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?"

For my part, I am glad that Philip made this request, for it gives us this plain word regarding the relationship of Christ to His Father.

We read now of the testing of Philip.

"After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. 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? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. "—John 6:1-7.

Christ was always concerned about others. The hungry multitudes stirred His compassion. At the same time, He was concerned to help one—Philip. Therefore, when Jesus lifted up His eyes and saw the great company of people coming to Him, He said to Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" The next verse tells us why He said this—to prove or test him.

Now, may we follow the story under three headings: first, the test; second, the answer; third, the result.

I. THE TEST

Our Lord is always testing people, testing in order to help. Philip needed his faith strengthened. Jesus knew that he was prone to look too much upon the material and temporal; therefore, He desired to prove him.

The Lord is also testing us. Sometimes it is by delays in answering prayer. We have prayed earnestly and long; but still the answer, the full answer, is withheld.

Sometimes we are tested by disappointments. Our minds have been set upon certain things; then when the entire matter fails, we are greatly disappointed. Disappointments test us.

We are often tested by the coming of death. When a loved one is taken from our midst, it is a time to see if we will lean upon Him.

Sudden emergencies come to test us. Sometimes it is an unusual financial situation; at other times, a problem tests our faith.

But you say, "Why does the Lord test us?" I can suggest three reasons.

1. *He tests us that we might know ourselves.* Simon Peter had to be tested before he could be greatly used of God. He had to discover his own weakness and learn to depend on the power of God.

Young people have to be tested in order that they may know themselves. I am constantly seeing young people announce their intention to go into the Lord's work, then when the first difficulty arises, see them fall away. God is testing to see if you mean business. Oftentimes I believe He is sifting out the weak and unworthy that His work might be done by those who mean business.

2. *He is testing to strengthen us.* If we pass the Lord's test, we are made ready for greater work. Philip was tested. He failed in his answer to the Lord; but after what happened, I am sure he must have been strengthened for greater work.

3. *The Lord tests us to destroy all self-sufficiency.* We are prone to look to ourselves and to our own resources instead of looking toward God.

May we learn to spread each difficulty before the Lord. May we remember that we are nothing, but He is everything; we are feeble, but He is strong; our resources are limited, but His are unlimited.

II. THE ANSWER

"Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little."

This answer by Philip was given in spite of all the demonstration of power on the part of Jesus. If we turn through the gospel of John, we note His miracles before this happening. He turned the water into wine at the marriage of Cana of Galilee; He dealt with the woman of Samaria and turned her and many others to the Lord; He healed the son of a certain nobleman at Capernaum.

At Jerusalem He went down to the pool and found a great multitude of sick people waiting for the moving of the water. A certain man was there which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. ~Jesus said, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The man said, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." ~Jesus said unto him, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." The man was healed. He took up his bed and walked.

These and many other miracles were certainly performed before this testing of Philip; yet notice what he said, with the Son of God standing by his side: "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little."

His answer was hasty. If he had taken more thought, he could have given a better answer.

His answer was self-sufficient. He was looking to his own resources and that of others around him.

His answer was faithless. No faith whatsoever was manifested in the all-powerful Son of God.

His answer was forgetful. He forgot what Christ had done in days gone by. He turned his eyes away from the Lord and began looking at the resources of men.

What is your answer in the hour of testing? Do you look to the Lord, or do you look to self? Do you look to Christ, or do you look to others?

In the hour of testing, it is a habit of most to look around for the assistance of others. Even before spending time in prayer, we search for the advice of man. Let us remind ourselves that our God can do miracles. He is not limited in resources. He can do the impossible.

George Mueller set out to build an orphanage. He did not look to man but to God, and the need was supplied.

Dr. Barnardo, moved with compassion for the poor children of England, began building homes for them. Before he died at age sixty he had rescued, fed, clothed, housed, educated and established in life 60,000 once destitute children. Today his homes have done the same for 150,000, and have given temporary help to over half a million.

The budget today for the Barnardo Homes is three million dollars per year, and 8,500 children are cared for annually.

Are you faced with a great need? Then count on God. He may be testing your faith to see if you mean business. If he sees you are in dead earnest, He will supply that need.

Philip forgot Christ. This is the very heart of his failure. The Lord was by his side; but he thought, not of the Lord's past performances, but of His present power. He was simply counting on doing the work of feeding five thousand with the resources of man.

III. THE RESULT

Philip made a faithless answer; and in verse 9 we find Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, making a faithless answer. As he was faced with the task of feeding so many, he said, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?"

Notice that Philip was disturbed that two hundred pennyworth of bread would only give a small portion to each one. Andrew was quite certain that five barley loaves and two small fishes would not go anywhere in feeding five thousand.

Unbelief is contagious. Andrew followed after Philip; likewise, both were blind to the glory of Christ. "What are they among so many?" is always the utterance of unbelief.

What matters the many when the Son of God is present? Andrew calculated without Christ. He saw only a hopeless situation. He could not see Christ because of the difficulty before him.

We must keep our eyes upon Him. When we do, the difficulty will not be seen. We are such frail, weak and unbelieving creatures in spite of all God has done. When the trial comes, we are doubtful and distrustful. Therefore, we must continually look to the Lord not to ourselves.

We must exercise care that our unbelief is not carried over to others. I have seen many churches be disrupted and hindered by unbelieving members. Even one faithless deacon can hinder the entire church. One penny-grabbing member, always looking at the pennies instead of looking at souls, can hinder the work of our Lord.

Let me repeat: unbelief is infectious. Don't let yourself be influenced by the faithless.

Now, with joy, we see what our Lord did. After the words of Philip and Andrew, „Jesus said, "Make the men sit down." Christ always chooses us to be seated when He is going to feed us. The number of men in this company was about five thousand.

„Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, then distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were seated. The bread and fish were given out. And when all were filled, He said unto His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."

"When they were filled. . . ." The Lord fully satisfies the hungry. No halfway measures with Him. He gives the fullness of His blessing.

Philip is concerned that everyone take just a little. Christ is concerned that people be satisfied by His grace. ". . . he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

Now it remains for us to see that our Lord is able to take just a little and make it into much. He did not scorn the loaves because they were few in number, nor the fish because they were small. Someone has given us this paragraph:

He used the tear of a babe to move the heart of Pharaoh's daughter.

He used the shepherd rod of Moses to work mighty miracles in Egypt.

He used David's sling and stone to overthrow the Philistine giant.

He used a little maid to bring the mighty Naaman to Elisha.

He used the widow with a handful of meal to sustain His prophet.

He used a little child to teach His disciples a much-needed lesson in humility.

So here He used the five loaves and two fishes to feed this great multitude.

Dear friend, it may be that God wants to use you. You have given your excuses. You feel your limitations. You do not consider your talents to be many. But God wants you. He is asking that you place yourself in His hands, even as the loaves and fishes were given to His hands. Be not faithless, but believing. Place yourself in the hands of the Lord, and let Him use you.

Perhaps you have tried so long to accomplish something, but it has always been in your own strength. Failure has marked your pathway. It is time to turn from your self-sufficiency and turn it all over to the Lord.

Faithless, failing Christian, let God have His way with you. Sinner, the Christ who fed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, can save your soul and feed you with heavenly manna. Come to Him now.

Oh, for a Faith That Will Not Shrink

Oh, for a faith that will not shrink,

Though pressed by ev'ry foe,

That will not tremble on the brink

Of any earthly woe!

That will not murmur or complain

Beneath the chastening rod,

But, in the hour of grief or pain,

Will lean upon its God;

A faith that shines more bright and clear

When tempests rage the while;

That seas of trouble cannot drown,

Nor Satan's arts beguile;

Lord, give us such a faith as this,
And then, whate'er may come,
We'll taste, e'en here, the hallowed bliss
Of an eternal Home