**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**JOHN-009**. **THE FIRST DISCIPLES - PART 3: PHILIP by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow Me."*

*John 1:43*

The day following--we have a diary in this chapter and the next, extending from the day when John the Baptist gives his official testimony to Jesus, up till our Lord's first journey to Jerusalem. The order of events is this. The deputation from the Sanhedrim to John occupied the first day. On the second Jesus comes back to John after His temptation, and receives his solemn attestation. On the third day, John repeats his testimony, and three disciples, probably four, make the nucleus of the Church. These are the two pairs of brothers, James and John, Andrew and Peter, who stand first in every catalogue of the Apostles, and were evidently nearest to Christ.

The day followingof our text is the fourth day. On it our Lord determines to return to Galilee. His objects in His visit to John were accomplished--to receive his public attestation, and to gather the first little knot of His followers. Thus launched upon His course, He desired to return to His native district.

These events had occurred where John was baptising, in a place called in the English version Bethabara, which means The house of crossing, or as we might say, Ferry-house. The traditional site for John's baptism is near Jericho, but the next chapter (verse i.) shows that it was only a day's journey from Cana of Galilee, and must therefore have been much further north than Jericho. A ford, still bearing the name Abarah, a few miles south of the lake of Gennesaret, has lately been discovered. Our Lord, then, and His disciples had a day's walking to take them back to Galilee. But apparently before they set out on that morning, Philip and Nathanael were added to the little band. So these two days saw six disciples gathered round Jesus.

Andrew and John sought Christ and found Him. To them He revealed Himself as very willing to be approached, and glad to welcome any to His side. Peter, who comes next, was brought to Christ by his brother, and to him Christ revealed Himself as reading his heart, and promising and giving him higher functions and a more noble character.

Now we come to the third case, Jesus findeth Philip, who was not seeking Jesus, and who was brought by no one. To him Christ reveals Himself as drawing near to many a heart that has not thought of Him, and laying a masterful hand of gracious authority on the springs of life and character in that autocratic word Follow Me. So we have a gradually heightening revelation of the Master's graciousness to all souls, to them that seek and to them that seek Him not. It is only to the working out of these simple thoughts that I ask your attention now.

**I. First, then, let us deal with the revelation that is given us here of the seeking Christ.**

Every one who reads this chapter with even the slightest attention must observe how seekingand findingare repeated over and over again. Christ turns to Andrew and John with the question, What seek ye?Andrew, as the narrative says, findeth his own brother, Simon, and saith unto him, "We have found the Messias!"Then again, Jesus finds Philip; and again, Philip, as soon as he has been won to Jesus, goes off to find Nathanael; and his glad word to him is, once more, We have found the Messias. It is a reciprocal play of finding and seeking all through these verses.

There are two kinds of finding. There is a casual stumbling upon a thing that you were not looking for, and there is a finding as the result of seeking. It is the latter which is here. Christ did not casually stumble upon Philip, upon that morning, before they departed from the fords of the Jordan on their short journey to Cana of Galilee. He went to look for this other Galilean, one who was connected with Andrew and Peter, a native of the same little village. He went and found him; and whilst Philip was all unexpectant and undesirous, the Master came to him and laid His hand upon him, and drew him to Himself.

Now that is what Christ often does. There are men like the merchantman who went all over the world seeking goodly pearls, who with some eager longing to possess light, or truth, or goodness, or rest, search up and down and find it nowhere, because they are looking for it in a hundred different places. They are expecting to find a little here and a little there, and to piece all together to make of the fragments one all-sufficing restfulness. Then when they are most eager in their search, or when, perhaps, it has all died down into despair and apathy, the veil seems to be withdrawn, and they see Him whom they have been seeking all the time and knew not that He was there beside them. All, and more than all, that they sought for in the many pearls is stored for them in the one Pearl of great price. The ancient covenant stands firm to-day as for ever. Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.

But then there are others, like Paul on the road to Damascus or like Matthew the publican, sitting at the receipt of custom, on whom there is laid a sudden hand, to whom there comes a sudden conviction, on whose eyes, not looking to the East, there dawns the light of Christ's presence. Such cases occur all through the ages, for He is not to be confined, bless His name! within the narrow limits of answering seeking souls, or of showing Himself to people that are brought to Him by human instrumentality; but far beyond these bounds He goes, and many a time discloses His beauty and His sweetness to hearts that wist not of Him, and who can only say, Lo! God was in this place, and I knew it not. Thou wast found of them that sought Thee not.

As it was in His miracles upon earth, so it has been in the sweet and gracious works of His grace ever since. Sometimes He healed in response to the yearning desire that looked out of sick eyes, or that spoke from parched lips, and no man that ever came to Him and said Heal me!was sent away beggared of His blessing. Sometimes He healed in response to the beseeching of those who, with loving hearts, carried their dear ones and laid them at His feet. But sometimes, to magnify the spontaneity and the completeness of His own love, and to show us that He is bound and limited by no human co-operation, and that He is His own motive, He reached out the blessing to a hand that was not extended to grasp it; and by His question, Wilt thou be made whole?kindled desires that else had lain dormant for ever.

And so in this story before us; He will welcome and over-answer Andrew and John when they come seeking; He will turn round to them with a smile on His face, that converts the question, What seek ye?into an invitation, Come and see. And when Andrew brings his brother to Him, He will go more than halfway to meet him. But when these are won, there still remains another way by which He will have disciples brought into His Kingdom, and that is by Himself going out and laying His hand on the man and drawing him to His heart by the revelation of His love. But further, and in a deeper sense, He really seeks us all, and, unasked, bestows His love upon us.

Whether we seek Him or no, there is no heart upon earth which Christ does not desire; and no man or woman within the sound of His gospel whom He is not in a very real sense seeking that He may draw them to Himself. His own word is a wonderful one: The Father seeketh such to worship Him; as if God went all up and down the world looking for hearts to love Him and to turn to Him with reverent thankfulness. And as the Father, so the Son--who is for us the revelation of the Father: The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. No one on earth wanted Him, or dreamed of His coming. When He bowed the heavens and gathered Himself into the narrow space of the manger in Bethlehem, and took upon Him the limitations and the burdens and the weaknesses of manhood, it was not in response to any petition, it was in reply to no seeking; but He came spontaneously, unmoved, obeying but the impulse of His own heart, and because He would have mercy. He who is the Beginning, and will be First in all things, was first in this, that before they called He answered, and came upon earth unbesought and unexpected, because His own infinite love brought Him hither. Christ's mercy to a world does not come like water in a well that has to be pumped up, by our petitions, by our search, but like water in some fountain, rising sparkling into the sunlight by its own inward impulse. He is His own motive; and came to a forgetful and careless world, like a shepherd who goes after his flock in the wilderness, not because they bleat for him, while they crop the herbage which tempts them ever further from the fold and remember him and it no more, but because he cannot have them lost. Men are not conscious of needing Christ till He comes. The supply creates the demand. He is like the dew which tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.

But not only does Christ seek us all, inasmuch as the whole conception and execution of His great work are independent of man's desires, but He seeks us each in a thousand ways. He longs to have each of us for His disciples. He seeks each of us for His disciples, by the motion of His Spirit on our spirits, by stirring conviction in our consciences, by pricking us often with a sense of our own evil, by all our restlessness and dissatisfaction, by the disappointments and the losses, as by the brightnesses and the goodness of earthly providences, and often through such agencies as my lips and the lips of other men. The Master Himself, who seeks all mankind, has sought and is seeking you at this moment. Oh! yield to His search. The shepherd goes out on the mountain side, for all the storm and the snow, and wades knee-deep through the drifts until he finds the sheep. And your Shepherd, who is also your Brother, has come looking for you, and at this moment is putting out His hand and laying hold of some of you through my poor words, and saying to you, as He said to Philip, Follow Me!

**II. And now let us next consider that word of authority which, spoken to the one man in our text, is really spoken to us all.**

Jesus findeth Philip, and saith unto him, "Follow Me!"No doubt a great deal more passed, but no doubt what more passed was less significant and less important for the development of faith in this man than what is recorded. The word of authority, the invitation which was a demand, the demand which was an invitation, and the personal impression which He produced upon Philip's heart, were the things that bound him to Jesus Christ for ever. Follow Me, spoken at the beginning of the journey of Christ and His disciples back to Galilee, might have meant merely, on the surface, Come back with us. But the words have, of course, a much deeper meaning. They mean--be My disciple. Think what is implied in them, and ask yourself whether the demand that Christ makes in these words is an unreasonable one, and then ask yourselves whether you have yielded to it or not.

We lose the force of the image by much repetition. Sheep follow a shepherd. Travellers follow a guide. Here is a man upon some dangerous cornice of the Alps, with a ledge of limestone as broad as the palm of your hand, and perhaps a couple of feet of snow above that, for him to walk upon, a precipice on either side; and his guide says, as he ropes himself to him, Now, tread where I tread!Travellers follow their guides. Soldiers follow their commanders. There is the hell of the battlefield; here a line of wavering, timid, raw recruits. Their commander rushes to the front and throws himself upon the advancing enemy with the one word, Followand the coward becomes a hero. Soldiers follow their captains. Your Shepherd comes to you and calls, Follow Me. Your Captain and Commander comes to you and calls, Follow Me. In all the dreary wilderness, in all the difficult contingencies and conjunctions, in all the conflicts of life, this Man strides in front of us and proposes Himself to us as Guide, Example, Consoler, Friend, Companion, everything; and gathers up all duty, all blessedness, in the majestic and simple words, Follow Me.

It is a call at the least to accept Him as a Teacher, but the whole gist of the context here is to show us that from the beginning Christ's disciples did not look upon Him as a Rabbi's disciples did, as being simply a teacher, but recognised Him as the Messias, the Son of God, the King of Israel. So that they were called upon by this command to accept His teaching in a very special way, not merely as Hillel or Gamaliel asked their disciples to accept theirs. Do you do that? Do you take Him as your illumination about all matters of theoretical truth, and of practical wisdom? Is His declaration of God your theology? Is His declaration of His own Person your creed? Do you think about His Cross as He did when He elected to be remembered in all the world by the broken body and the shed blood, which were the symbols of His reconciling death? Is His teaching, that the Son of Man comes to give His life a ransom for many, the ground of your hope? Do you follow Him in your belief, and following Him in your belief, do you accept Him as, by His death and passion, the Saviour of your soul? That is the first step--to follow Him, to trust Him wholly for what He is, the Incarnate Son of God, the Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and therefore for your sins and mine. This is a call to faith.

It is also a call to obedience. Follow Mecertainly means Do as I bid you, but softens all the harshness of that command. Sedulously plant your tremulous feet in His firm footsteps. Where you see His track going across the bog be not afraid to walk after Him, though it may seem to lead you into the deepest and the blackest of it. Follow Himand you will be right. Follow Himand you will be blessed. Do as Christ did, or as according to the best of your judgment it seems to you that Christ would have done if He had been in your circumstances; and you will not go far wrong. The Imitation of Christ, which Thomas a Kempis wrote his book about, is the sum of all practical Christianity. Follow Me!makes discipleship to be something more than intellectual acceptance of His teaching, something more than even reliance for my salvation upon His work. It makes discipleship--springing out of these two--the acceptance of His teaching and the consequent reliance, by faith, upon His word--to be a practical reproduction of His character and conduct in mine.

It is a call to communion. If a man follows Christ he will walk close behind Him, and near enough to Him to hear Him speak, and to be guided by His eye. He will be separated from other people, and from other paths. In these four things, then--Faith, Obedience, Imitation, Communion--lies the essence of discipleship. No man is a Christian who has not in some measure all four. Have you got them?

What right has Jesus Christ to ask me to follow Him? Why should I? Who is He that He should set Himself up as being the perfect Example and the Guide for all the world? What has He done to bind me to Him, that I should take Him for my Master, and yield myself to Him in a subjection that I refuse to the mightiest names in literature, and thought, and practical benevolence? Who is this that assumes thus to dominate over us all? Ah! brethren, there is only one answer. This is none other than the Son of God who has given Himself a ransom for me, and therefore has the right, and only therefore has the right, to say to me, "Follow Me."

**III. And now one last word. Think for a moment about this silently and swiftly obedient disciple.**

Philip says nothing. Of course the narrative is mere sketchy outline. He is silent, but he yields. Ah, brethren, how quickly a soul may be won or lost! That moment, when Philip's decision was trembling in the balance, was but a moment. It might have gone the other way, for Christ has no pressed men in His army; they are all volunteers. It might have gone the other way. A moment may settle for you whether you will be His disciple or not. People tell us that the belief in instantaneous conversions is unphilosophical. It seems to me that the objections to them are unphilosophical. All decisions are matters of an instant. Hesitation may be long, weighing and balancing may be a protracted process, but the decision is always a moment's work, a knife-edge. And there is no reason whatever why any one listening to me may not now, if he or she will, do as this man Philip did on the spot, and when Christ says Follow Me, turn to Him and answer, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.

There is an old church tradition which says that the disciple who at a subsequent period answered Christ, Lord! suffer me first to go and bury my father, was this same Apostle. I do not think that at all likely, but the tradition suggests to us one last thought about the reasons why people are kept back from yielding this obedience to Christ's invitation. Many of you are kept back, as that procrastinating follower was, because there are some other duties which you feel, or make to be, more important. I will think about Christianity and turning religious when this, that, or the other thing has been got over. I have my position in life to make. I have a great many things to do that must be done at once, and really, I have not time to think about it.

Then there are some of you that are kept from following Christ because you have never yet found out that you need a guide at all. Then there are some of you that are kept back because you like very much better to go your own way, and to follow your own inclination, and dislike the idea of following the will of another. There are a host of other reasons that I do not need to deal with now; but oh! brethren, none of them is worth pleading. They are excuses, they are not reasons. They all with one consent began to make excuse--excuses, not reasons; and manufactured excuses, in order to cover a decision which has been taken before, and on other grounds altogether, which it is not convenient to bring up to the surface. I am not going to deal with these in detail, but I beseech you, do not let what I venture to call Christ's seeking of you once more, even by my poor words now, be in vain.

Follow Him. Trust, obey, imitate, hold fellowship with Him. You will always have a Companion, you will always have a Protector. He that followeth Me, saith He, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. And if you will listen to the Shepherd's voice and follow Him, that sweet old promise will be true, in its divinest and sweetest sense, about your life, in time; and about your life in the moment of death, the isthmus between two worlds, and about your life in eternity--They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the sun nor heat smite them; for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them. Follow thou Me.