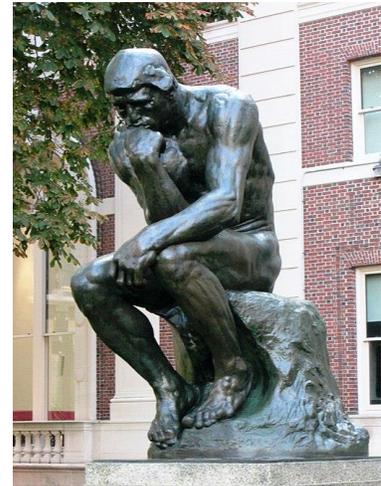


Sent Ones: Philip and Bartholomew - Men Who Thought Too Much
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”
By Phil Brainerd
Presented to Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ
On Sunday, January 30, 2022

Introduction

Thinking. Pondering. Those activities captured the mind of the artist Auguste Rodin in 1904. He felt led to create one of the most well-known statues of all time: The thinker. It pictures a man seated with his elbow on his knee, his hand curled under his chin, his head slightly bowed. He’s clearly in deep thought. What is he thinking about? No one knows for certain. But whatever he’s thinking about, it’s serious.



Thinking and pondering are some of the things that set humans apart from the animal world.

Some people begin to think, and as a result, they create art - Like the artist who created this statue, Auguste Rodin. Others think, and they move Science forward - Like Albert Einstein. Others think, and they make lots of money. Today we think of people like Elon Musk, one of the richest men in the world. In fact, in 2021, some placed him at the top of the list of the richest people - He edged out Bill Gates for the title. Others think, and different things happen - Smaller things, perhaps, but still very important.

Here’s a question: Is it possible to think too much? That’s something to think about!

We’re in our series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe.” We’re working our way systematically through Matthew’s book on the life of Jesus. We recently started a sub-series called, “Sent Ones”. Jesus had a message – a vital message for the world. He chose twelve special men, his apostles, his “sent ones”, to make sure his message would get off to a good start.

We’ve been meeting these men over the last few sessions. They have names like Peter and Andrew, James and John. We’ve found that these men had some things in common - Namely, none of them were perfect.

Today, we’re going to meet two more men: Philip and Bartholomew. These men had something in common. Like the other apostles, they were less than perfect. Among the ways that they are less than perfect, one flaw stands out: They were guilty of thinking too much.

Let’s find out why.

I. Philip

We'll look first at Philip. Philip is interesting because he is one of two apostles who does not have a Jewish name. He is named after King Philip the second of Macedon. Today, few people have heard about king Philip of Macedon. He lived three centuries before the time of Jesus. However, 2,000 years ago, back in the days of Jesus, there was reason to remember him. The name, "Philip" means "lover of horses", but that doesn't really describe the man. King Philip inherited a small, backwards country with a weak and undisciplined army. He molded that army into a formidable force. He did such a good job with his army that he was able to conquer the surrounding territories, eventually taking most of Greece. Upon his death, he handed a united and strong country, and a powerful military force to his son Alexander. Alexander then went on to conquer a major portion of the known world of his day.

Without King Philip, nobody would have ever heard of his son: Alexander the Great.

We don't know how much Philip the Apostle's parents knew about King Philip. They lived in a day when Israel had been conquered, first by the Greeks, and then by the Romans. When one country conquers another, the people who have been conquered have some choices. They can choose to admit defeat and begin to take on attributes of the people who conquered them. That's called assimilation.

Or, you can choose to resist. You can hang on to the qualities that make you and your culture unique. That can involve open fighting. Or it can be more subtle. It can be a stubborn refusal to let go of your culture.

Understand that this is all relative. If you're proud of your culture, as the Greeks and Romans were, you want other people to assimilate. Assimilation is not always a bad thing - It depends on who the dominant culture is.

If you're a Hebrew in the days of Jesus, and you've been conquered, you want to hang on to your religion and your culture. People who don't resist, in the minds of resisters, are not "assimilating". They're "selling out". They're "collaborators." Neither of those are nice titles.

Apparently, the parents of Philip fell into the assimilation group. In their minds, they wanted to show some respect for Greek culture by assimilating on some level. They did this by choosing a Greek name for their son.

Why would they do this? One of the qualities of Greek culture is their Philosophy. The Greeks had people like Socrates and Plato - Considered to be great thinkers. Maybe Philip's parents admired that? Maybe they wanted Philip to be a great thinker.

Whatever the intent of his parents though, Philip did not follow. We don't know what he knew about Greek philosophy. But we do know what he knew about the Hebrew faith.

Let's read:

43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." 44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 45 Philip found Nathanael and told 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." (John 1:43-45)

We can see here that Jesus looked at Philip and saw something special. In spite of Philip's Greek name, Jesus extends a call for Philip to follow him. This is not a call to be an apostle yet - This is a call to discipleship. But it was heavy-duty discipleship. This was a call to physically follow Jesus wherever Jesus chose to go.

Jesus is not Socrates. Jesus is not Plato. Who is Jesus? Philip knows. He's "...the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote." So, Philip knew who Jesus was - Jesus was the Messiah. That's whom Moses wrote about and whom the prophets also wrote.

How did Philip know that? Did he know that because he studied Greek philosophy? No. He knew that because he was a student of the Hebrew Scriptures. He studied the Hebrew Scriptures because he was looking for something. He was looking for the fulfillment of his faith: The Hebrew faith. Finding the fulfillment of his faith was a big part of Philip's life. This was not a young man who sold out and collaborated with the Greeks. He was a dedicated follower of his faith - In spite of the intentions of his parents.

And it wasn't just that he studied. When Jesus called him, he followed. And he did more than follow. After he discovered Jesus, he went immediately and found his best friend - A man named Nathanael. Nathanael is also known by the name, "Bartholomew". We'll learn more about him in a little bit.

Let's stop for a minute. We've said that the apostles all shared a common quality: They were all less than perfect. That's not to say that they lacked any good qualities. In the case of Philip, he was a faithful Jew. He looked for the Messiah. He studied the Scriptures. It may be that he even rebelled against his parents, who tended towards assimilation into Greek culture. And when he found the Messiah, when he found the fulfillment of his faith, He immediately followed - He immediately accepted the invitation to spend time with Jesus. And he immediately shared what he found with someone who was special to him.

We've been asking a question in this series, so let's ask again. How important is Jesus to you? Is he so important that you spend considerable time learning about him? Is he so important that you would drop anything to spend time with him? Is he so important that you can't help but share him with others?

Many of the people reading this value Jesus. And they have shared Jesus with their loved ones.

Sometimes, this results in loved ones accepting Jesus. Sometimes, sadly, loved ones don't respond right away. We'll be talking about that in coming sessions.

But there are those people who once highly valued Jesus, only to find later in life that Jesus has gone down in value. Other things have crept in the push Jesus down on their list of priorities. Do you know what to do if you fall into that group? Ask Jesus to help you! If Jesus has fallen down the list of important things in your life because some sin has entered in, ask Jesus to forgive you. He will!

Let's all ask Jesus to help us to be like Philip was when he first met Jesus - Someone who puts Jesus first.

Let's learn more about the Apostle Philip. Because Philip put Jesus first, his Greek name was actually useful at certain points. Let's read about that:

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." 22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. (John 12:20-21)

Here, we have some Greeks who happened into the crowd. The fact that they were referred to as "Greeks" meant that they were God-fearing gentiles - So much so that they wanted to join in worship of the one true God. They heard about Jesus, so they stopped in. After listening, they wanted to meet him. However, Jesus was a Jewish rabbi. Perhaps their ancestry might be an issue? So, they notice that one of the leaders of the group had a Greek name. Guess what? They went straight to him.

Now, there was another Apostle who also had a Greek name. That was Andrew. "Andrew" is based on the Greek name "Andreos". We didn't spend time on that when we discussed Andrew. Recall that Andrew and Peter were brothers. It looks like their parents might have split their bets when they named their children. To one child, Peter, they gave a very Hebrew name: Shimon, which we call "Simon." To the other, they gave a very Greek name: "Andreos".

We'll talk more about these names and why we pronounce them in different ways in a future session. For now, let's say that the parents of these men may have had a weak faith. They catered to Greek culture when they should have been faithful to their Hebrew ancestry. However, God used it for good. When people came from Greece, it looks like they were drawn to men with Greek names. And that helped these men to meet Jesus.

There's an important principle here: ***None of us are limited by the decisions of our parents.*** That's important. We should all honor our parents, but our parents are human. If they make bad decisions, it need not limit us. In fact, God can use mistakes for his glory.

As we said, Philip did have a problem. His parents may have wanted him to be a thinker like the Greek philosophers. It looks like he did pick up the thinking part. Let's read.

5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

7 Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" (John 6:5-7)

This story describes one of the times that Jesus fed thousands of people with only a few loaves and fish. He sees a big crowd coming. For some reason, he decides to turn to Philip. He could have turned to anyone. He could have turned to the whole group of disciples. But, he chooses Philip.

Philip has seen Jesus perform miracles. He has seen him calm a storm on the sea of Galilee. Philip saw Jesus turn water in wine - Enough wine for a big crowd. Knowing this, Jesus puts Philip to the test. He says, "Hey Phil – That's a lot of people. How are we going to feed them." Here's what Philip might have done. He might have said, "Well, Jesus – I saw you turn water into wine." "Surely you turn some things around here into food?"

Sadly, no. Philip starts to do what? Think. He starts to run the numbers. He estimates the crowd. He estimates the cost of food. He has an idea of what's in the money box. After he runs all the numbers he comes to the following conclusion: "We can't even give these people a snack!"

So, Philip has a problem: He thinks too much. Now, it's not a problem that he thinks. It's not so much a problem that he thinks a lot. It's just that faith had no place in his calculations. And that's a shame. Fortunately, Jesus used this as an opportunity to show Philip a better way to think.

Again, let's stop. Could God do that with us? Can God teach us to include faith in our plans?

- Faith in his power.
- Faith in his unlimited resources.
- Faith in his desire to provide for us and protect us.
- Faith in his desire to equip us to serve him.

The answer: Of course, he can! Let's pray that God will help us with our faith. Let's pray that God will teach us to include faith in our plans.

Even after all this, Philip continued to have a problem with insufficient thinking. Let's read about that:

8 Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? (John 14:8-9)

Picture this: Philip is a man who spent considerable time searching the Scriptures so that he could find the Messiah. The reason a person would look for the Messiah is that they’re looking for God. The Messiah appeared and called Philip to follow. Philip and the other disciples have followed Jesus for a time period measured in years. He’s heard Jesus teach. He’s seen Jesus show great miracles. He’s had personal access to Jesus. And yet, he still hasn’t figured out who Jesus is. *Jesus is God visiting the face of the earth.*

So, Philip makes what appears to be a sincere and innocent request. He’s spent his life wanting to see God. So, he asks Jesus to show him the Father. How does Jesus respond? Jesus has to correct Philip in front of the whole crowd. When you’ve seen Jesus, you’ve seen the Father. They’re one.

It seems there is a limit to what thinking alone can achieve. All the facts in the world, even facts about God, can’t help you to reach God on your own. At some point, you must open your heart to God’s Holy Spirit. Philip failed to do this. Once again, Philip failed to see the obvious.

So, Philip was a man whose parents intended him to be a thinker. Their intention may have been for him to think in the way the Greeks thought. Fortunately, God moved in Philip’s heart. Because of that, Philip eventually learned to include faith in his plans.

After Jesus went into heaven, Philip went out into the world sharing the gospel. One day, he offended powerful people. So, he was martyred for his faith. His faith was so great that he was willing to go to his death to share the message of the gospel.

Thinking, with God’s help and faith, produces great things.

Let’s move on to the next person in our story.

II. Bartholomew

Let’s learn now about Bartholomew. We don’t know much about Bartholomew. He’s also called Nathanael. It may be that Nathanael is his first name, and Bartholomew is his last. Bartholomew in the original language means, “Son of Talmai”. Talmai means, “Plow man”. So, this man comes from a family of farmers.

We don’t normally think of farmers as thinkers, but Bartholomew (a.k.a. Nathanael) was one. We just read that Jesus called Philip. And Philip went straight to Bartholomew. Let’s see how that worked out by continuing on in that passage:

45 Philip found Nathanael and told 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.” 46 “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip. 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” 48 “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” 49 Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” 50 Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” 51 He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending’ on the Son of Man.” (John 1:45-50)

What a story! Let’s break this apart. Philip, as we said, went and found his friend. His friend is skeptical. More on that in a minute. Even though he’s skeptical, Nathanael (let’s use the name that appears here) agrees to meet Jesus. Jesus, as it turns out, is no ordinary man. He knows all kinds of things about Nathanael.

He knows that Nathanael is a very sincere person: “...an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” How could Jesus know that? That’s what Nathanael wants to know. “How do you know me?”, Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree...” Why would this man be sitting under a fig tree? He’s from a farming family – why would he not be in the field working?

Here’s why: Fig trees produce shade. They also produce privacy. You can go there and not be seen easily by others. It’s the kind of place you would go if you wanted to do some thinking. It’s quiet. It’s peaceful. It’s private. Only someone who knows you well, someone like a close friend, would know where to find you if you were in seclusion under a fig tree.

Jesus saw Nathanael thinking under that fig tree. And that said something to Nathanael. It said that Jesus was all-seeing - And only God is all-seeing. Nathanael recognized that. That made him go from skeptic to believer in an instant. He said, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

That would be a perfectly good place to stop, but Jesus is not content to leave things there. He goes deeper. He says, “You think that’s good?” Jesus told Nathanael that he would see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

There is a story in the book of Genesis about Jacob, one of the patriarchs of the Hebrew faith. While he was travelling through the wilderness, he was given a vision of angels ascending into heaven and coming back. Some say that Nathanael may have been reflecting on that story. Jesus is saying, “Not only did I see you, I knew exactly what you were thinking about.”

So, Nathanael was a thinker. He thought about the Scriptures. That enabled him to recognize the Son of God when they met. But Nathanael's thinking was not always perfect. If we look back earlier in the story, we see Philip inviting his friend to meet Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth. Look at how Nathanael responds:

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46)

It seems Nathanael had a problem: He was a bigot. He didn't like Nazareth, or the people who lived there. Why not? We don't know! That's an interesting part of bigotry. Often times, people have reasons for looking down on others, But if you go back years later and try to find why, most people have forgotten.

We'll talk more about this topic at a later time, but for now, let's learn a lesson.

Being the best thinker is no good if you start off with bad assumptions.

What is a good way to defeat bigotry? Let people meet the people they hate. Spend time together. Fortunately, when Nathanael met Jesus of Nazareth, he was changed by the facts of who Jesus was.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

In this session, we've met two more of the “sent ones”: Philip and Bartholomew, also known as Nathanael. Both had a problem, they were thinkers, but something was wrong with the way they thought.

Philip couldn't include faith in his thoughts, and that led him off path on several occasions.

Bartholomew was a thinker, but some of his thinking was based on bad assumptions, which made him a bigot. Fortunately, God replaced his bad assumptions with better ones.

Can God teach us to include faith in our plans and in our thoughts? Sure. That's what he did with Philip.

Can God teach people to replace bad assumptions about others with better ones? Yes! That's what he did with Bartholomew.

And God can teach us those things, as well. Let's pray and ask God's help as we grow in our faith. Let's ask God to approach people with love, not bigotry.

Let's ask God to help us as we learn more about his apostles, his “Sent ones.”

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:
PeaceWithGod.net
