

James Philip Thanksgiving Service - George Philip tribute

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Date: 19 March 2009

Preacher: George Philip

[0 : 00] Amen. Gathered here to give thanks to God for the life and ministry of James Philip, we all have our own treasured memories, which become more precious the older we get.

Some memories are just too personal to be made public outside the family. But some do need to be spoken about to honour the man we remember.

Buxburn, the village where my sister, brother and I lived, was a dull place. Our home was small, of poor quality, with seven people in three rooms, and for various reasons we were always short of money.

All of that created a variety of tensions which affected the three children. My brother hated the fact that often the coat or suit he wore was handed down from the son of the manse across the road from our home.

There are also, of course, many bright memories. Going back many years, I remember a concert in the village hall when Jim sang two solos.

[1 : 32] I was surprised at his composure on the platform. I was impressed with the quality of his singing.

It was so far back I can't remember if his voice had broken or not. But not only was I impressed, I confess I was a little envious.

Because to me it was another reminder that my big brother was good at everything. He always got prizes at school. When ready for secondary school, he won a scholarship to attend Robert Gordon's College, one of the best schools in the area.

He became a gifted musician. Years later, Jim told me how, as a teenager, he had played the church organ at a series of meetings held by the Church of Scotland Evangelist, Dr. Reverend D.P. Thompson.

And Jim showed me the decision card he signed, confessing Jesus as his Savior. After school came Aberdeen University, because he aimed to become a school teacher.

[2 : 50] It was there he met William Still, and that began a lifelong friendship. Few have recognized just what significant support, encouragement, and when needed, caution, my brother gave to William Still, right through his ministry.

While at university, Jim became persuaded of a call to the ministry, but as soon as he graduated MA, he was conscripted into the RAF. He served, not as air crew, until he was invalided home from Burma, suffering severely from rheumatic fever.

He then went on to complete his training in divinity in Aberdeen. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Aberdeen, and then went to Glasgow to be the assistant to Dr. William Fitch in Springburn Hill Parish Church.

And he was ordained there in 1948. There are people here today who benefited greatly from Jim's ministry in Glasgow, not least in the very large Bible class that was his responsibility.

In December 1949, he was inducted to Gardenstown, where he exercised a remarkable ministry. We tend to think of him mainly as a Bible preacher, expository teacher, and this he certainly was.

[4 : 22] From beginning to end, he stood firm on the inspiration and authority of Scripture, and on the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, and from this he would not be moved.

Neither would he be moved from the centrality and priority of preaching, supported by the prayers of his congregation. And his preaching was not a form of lecturing.

It was diffused with the warmth and earnestness of his own life of faith, his walk with God, and his love for his people.

All his preaching was done in the context of worship. It was not a formality that he began each service with the words, Let us worship God.

He was defining what the congregation was gathered for. Then after a psalm was sung came the words, Let us pray. Can you picture him often leaning forward on the lectern like that?

[5 : 41] That particularly earnest look on his face, and again that particular tone of his voice, as if he was saying to you personally, I shall lead you, come with me, right into the presence of God, join with me, speaking to God.

And such was the unction of God's Spirit, that at the end of the prayer, our hearts seemed to say, Amen, Lord, that's what we wanted to say.

James Philip, a great Bible teacher, was also a true evangelist. And heaven will reveal just how many were brought to saving faith.

Some from a churchy background, and some very different. In the Gardenstone Mans after one prayer meeting, Jim asked me if I had noticed a particular man's prayer spoken so earnestly.

Then he added, Last Hogmanay, that man wrecked the pub and was arrested. And a year later, praying the prayer meeting, in a way that moved my heart.

[7 : 09] Another memory there is of Gardenstone days, is our lovely Sunday, summer evening. As we walked down to church, we saw all the goss and other things, on the steep cliff at the corner of the bay, a light with smoke rising up into the air.

The sermon that Sunday evening was on the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah and the need to be saved. At the end, the preacher said so earnestly, When you leave the church, look over and see the smoke rising, and remember the day of God's judgment.

During one spell of his time in Gardenstone, such was the power, the working of the Spirit of God through the preaching, that Jim was worried that two Sundays had actually gone past without anyone actually being converted.

How we long to see God at work like that in our day. Of course, such ministry was not without cost. Far more than people realized, James Philip was a sensitive man, and in many ways a very private man. Even those of us close to him often were not sure just what he was thinking.

[8 : 44] He was a man with a heart of love. He was a man who could be trusted. If you confided in him, you could be quite sure that he would not betray your confidence.

And that is not true of all ministers. He was often deeply hurt by the scorn and criticism of ministers and others who had no sympathy with his doctrine or his preaching.

He was also hurt by and grieved over some he had helped greatly. who later became disaffected and critical. He was saddened when some of those called to the ministry under his preaching later compromised their commitment to the historic doctrines of the faith, at least in their preaching.

His years in Gardenstown were sore in many ways, not least in loneliness. Rich as his ministry there was, I always believed his place was in Edinburgh.

And in due time, he came to Holyrood. There are many applications of the verse in the New Testament that says, we have no idea and can't even imagine the range of blessings God has prepared for those who love him.

[10 : 13] One significant blessing was when Mary Muffet came into Jim's life. What a love affair that lasted a lifetime.

What a transformation and fulfillment in Jim's life. What a partnership in the service of God and the gospel. What a home.

What love parents had for children and what love and admiration the children had for their parents. What care they all showed for James right to the end.

What an example to us all of Christian marriage. At the farewell gathering at Jim's retirement, I had the privilege of giving an address.

I think it was the closing address. And I quoted from Hebrews chapter 13, verse 7. Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you.

[11 : 20] Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. It is little wonder that today we give thanks to God for the life and ministry of James Philip.