

James Philip Thanksgiving Service - Philip Hair tribute

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Preacher: Philip Hair

[0 : 00] James Philip was inducted to Holyrood Abbey Church on the 15th of January 1958.

He was the 19th minister to be formally approached by the Vacancy Committee. In other words, in turning to James, they really were scraping the barrel.

Some barrel. Indeed, before asking him to be sole nominee, a previous sole nominee who had withdrawn at the last minute, said nothing will ever be made of a church in as poor a state as that. Now I wonder if James was tempted himself to believe that, because within a few weeks he was utterly convinced that in coming to Holyrood he had made the biggest mistake of his life.

It was actually a quite desolating time for him, and he was in a torment of spirit about it. Indeed, he told me himself one day that during this time he would go out some nights, and discouraged and dispirited, he would simply walk the streets until it was time to go home and time for bed.

[1 : 26] But then that day came when he made his way into Holyrood Park, and standing on top of the Salisbury Crags, looking over the city and down into the Holyrood Parish, God brought to his heart and to his mind the words he brought to an equally discouraged and dispirited gospel minister.

Remember, Acts 18 and verse 9, Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack you and harm you, because I have many people in this city. And many of these many people are here in this church today. You are the fruit of that promise of God.

And if not here today, then throughout the land, overseas, with many now in glory. And so James kept on speaking.

And in those days he was something of a lone evangel here in Edinburgh, at least in the Church of Scotland. But it wasn't long until people began to hear of this new man in the East End, of how he systematically expounded the Bible.

[2 : 57] Starving Christians began to fill the pews, and were fed and were satisfied Lord's Day by Lord's Day. And then the students began to hear of him.

And the gallery began to fill up. People were converted. Lives were changed. Lives were transformed. A midweek meeting began down here in the transept of the church.

And then a prayer meeting. And with Saturday night being the only night when nothing was going on in the building, so a Saturday night it was. And on that first night, such were the numbers.

But they had to use the hall and not the vestry, as had been intimated. And the many people kept on coming.

All this being said, what encouragements. The work here in Holyrood had its lonely aspects. And so God gave to James the gift of Mary Moffat.

[4 : 03] They first met during an Edinburgh CU evangelistic week in 1956. The one at which Neil McTaggart was converted.

And then again, two years later, when now in Edinburgh, James was the speaker at the annual IVF Scottish Conference in Largs. I have to tell you this, but Mary began to play hooky.

She belonged to Charlotte Chapel, but was to be increasingly seen sitting in the gallery here in Holyrood. As James himself told us, when he saw her sitting up there in the gallery, he knew that this was the woman he was going to marry.

Mind you, and I do need to be careful here, the man sitting behind me nearly ruined it all. When he spoke at a meeting in Charlotte Chapel, and in what he said at this particular meeting, he spoke about being loyal to your church.

Mary took it to heart and stopped attending Holyrood. And James was not best pleased with his brother. But it wasn't long before she was attracted back to Holyrood.

[5 : 27] And following her pre-registration year in Zambia, James and Mary were married on the 19th of November, 1960 in Gilcompton South Church by William Still.

They were to have two children, of whom they were to be so very, very proud, William and Jennifer, and six much-loved and hugely adored grandchildren, Joanna and Juliet, and Ruth and Rachel, Sam and Philip.

James' ministry here in Holyrood was marked by what can only be described as a seriousness and an earnestness. And of course, after all, saving sinners from hell and preparing believers for heaven is a serious business.

And this was seen, as George has already commented, not least in the way in which Lord's Day worship was conducted. from the very way he walked up these pulpit steps to the way in which he called us to worship.

And will we ever forget, having sung the opening praise, the way in which, with these palms opened like this, he would bend to the microphone and say, let us pray.

[6 : 51] And we were ushered, weren't we? Into the throne room of heaven itself to be given a glimpse of glory. Where do we begin in talking about his preaching?

Its depth, its clarity, profundity, simplicity, the passion, the zeal, the joy in it, and the tears.

I wasn't the only divinity student to walk out of this place saying, and I said it more than once, oh, to be able to preach like that.

And again and again, no matter what book he was expounding, he would bring us back to the great two-fold theme which marked his ministry here in this place, the two crosses.

The two deaths at the heart of the Christian gospel and the Christian life of discipleship. The cross on which Jesus had to die, the just for the unjust to bring us to God.

[8 : 00] And then the cross upon which we have to die, dying to self so that we might be raised to live for Christ. And it was this great theme that marked not only what he said, but how he himself lived.

In the words of George Muller, having been asked the secret of his success in gospel work and ministry, there was a day when I died, died to George Muller.

And that was James Philip. And that was the secret of his success. He was the clay jar of 2 Corinthians 4. He was a nothing in his own eyes.

And as I said here on Sunday morning, he wouldn't have crossed the road to hear himself preach.

And it was because of this, his humility, the self-emptying, that here in this place we were privileged to see something of the all-surpassing power of God in glorious demonstration.

Through his ministry, men were called to full-time ministry, with ministries being shaped and molded for the future. Many were called to service overseas.

[9 : 26] The first in 1959 was Malcolm Moffat. And so many, many more were called to dedicated service in the home, in the office, in the university, in the factory floor, in the shop, or wherever.

What a debt we owed him. All this being said, we have to say that he wasn't the perfect minister. Dare I mention it, but his children's addresses?

And I've actually scored out what I was going to say. But he wasn't at his strongest with children's addresses. Indeed, I'm ashamed to say it, but with my two flatmates and one or two others here in this place today who I won't embarrass, we used to give him marks out of ten each Sunday.

He rarely got above two. Although on one occasion telling us about a visit on holiday to Fountains Abbey, we did give him a five.

But what we truly remember about him in this place is that he was a man who had a passion for holiness. In him, we saw something of the image of Christ.

[10 : 48] He was a man with a zeal for God and his glory. A man with a burden for those who are without Christ. How he pled from this pulpit often with tears for people to come to Jesus.

He was a man with a love for the people under his pastoral care. He was a true pastor and a faithful friend. He was, in essence, a true man in Christ.

Now, James Phillips' ministry was to extend way beyond the walls of this place. And here, one must begin with the monthly Bible reading notes which went all over the country and all over the world.

For many, a minister like myself, these notes are still first port of call in preparation. The big question always is, begin with James Philip or end with James Philip.

Then there was the tape ministry with the Bible notes. They were the only feeding that many a Christian in a spiritually barren situation ever received.

[11 : 56] Manna from heaven as it was for missionaries in isolated areas. And then the number of books and commentaries and booklets which he wrote.

My own copies of Romans and Christian maturity are falling apart. And then this final work, the glory of the cross, a memorial to what was at the heart of his ministry, a distillation of his writing on and preaching of the cross.

And just to say that we have 700 copies of these here today and you will receive one as you leave. He had a vast correspondence with ministers, missionaries and those who had been touched by his ministry in different ways.

He was a conference and convention speaker. Port Stewart, my, how he loved Northern Ireland and how Northern Ireland loved him. Strithpeffer, Gairlock.

He did the Scottish CU circuit most years and was forever speaking at IVF conferences. He was a frequent speaker at the Creef Conference and so many other Bible weeks and theological and missionary gatherings.

[13 : 16] With a heart for overseas mission, James was for years on the OMF Scottish Council and for a time was its chairman. During his sabbatical, he visited Southeast Asia and even today, missionaries still speak of his ministry during that time.

He supported the work of Rutherford House from its beginning. He was a trustee and a council member and following on from Mr. Still, he was the chairman of the Creef Conference and there are many, many other areas of Christian work and witness that we could mention if we had the time.

In the Church of Scotland, though not a frequent speaker at presbytery, whenever he did, his intervention was always telling. At General Assembly, his voice was to be heard on such subjects as Sabbath Day observance, the Westminster Confession and women's ordination.

But most significantly of all, I do believe was his involvement in the Church of Scotland selection school procedure, firstly as an assessor, then as a director.

Though he was somewhat scorned for his theology, he was so very deeply respected for his sheer integrity in that he was honest and all was scrupulously feared.

[14 : 44] If there is one thing that leaves you open-mouthed in awe concerning James was his sheer capacity for work.

Two expositions on a Sunday, a midweek exposition, a word at the prayer meeting, plus the daily Bible reading notes, and all of this before other pastoral responsibilities and various local and wider church commitments.

If ever a man was focused on his work, it was him. And yet he still had time for his family and for other pursuits. He listened to music, the classics, often whilst he was preparing.

And he played himself expertly and he composed as well. He read avidly. There was always a pile of books beside his bed and he drove Mary to utter distraction by reading far into the night.

He played golf abominably. He loved visiting gardens, but like his successor, didn't know which end of the spade actually went into the ground. And he lived for his holidays in the highlands, Arrasag, Gerloch, where on the beach, reading Agatha Christie, it was rumoured that, though I still refuse to believe it, until I see the photographic evidence, it's rumoured that he took off his jacket and his time.

[16 : 13] James had a huge intellect. He had a warm and a compassionate heart. He was gracious, kind, and generous spirited. He had, yes, a serious nature and he was somewhat shy.

As George has said, he was sensitive and could be very easily hurt. But you know, he had a great sense of humour as well, and he could be enormous fun.

Ask Ali Keaton to tell you James' story of the operatic diva and the trampoline. You might not find it funny, but it killed him. But then James could be a contradiction in himself.

Not least when it came to patience. There must have been times, surely, when in sheer frustration, he wanted to wring your neck and mine.

But he was enormously long-suffering with us and so very understanding. But put a driver or a three-wood into his hand, and it was as if a demon had got into him.

[17 : 23] It was always a source of mystery to Tom Maxwell, Ali Keaton, and Alec Gilroy, why James was never taken up on a charge of manslaughter for driving off the first key at Moncton Hall when the foursome ahead was only 70 to 80 yards down the fairway.

He was always going at a million miles an hour, always in a hurry, even to the extent of bounding up the stairs at Willowbray Avenue, two at a time.

Let me pause here, and if I could say just a particular word to Joanna and Juliet, and Ruth and Rachel and Sam and Philip sitting down here, look around the church this afternoon, there are so many here, I wonder how many you think are here, maybe after the service you can count, and here's a thought, most of these people are related to you, that's absolutely right, they're related to you, a relation as a member of your family, your mum, your dad, your brother, your sister, your gran, your grandpa, your aunt, your uncle, your cousin, and so on, well so many of the people here are related to you, in that your grandpa was their spiritual father, even their spiritual grandfather and great grandfather, what do I mean?

didn't your grandpa tell you about Jesus? And didn't you learn from him what it means to love Jesus? Your grandpa was my spiritual father, in that through knowing him and listening to him, he taught me as he did you and your mum and dad, he taught me about Jesus, and what it means to love Jesus and obey Jesus and serve Jesus and live for Jesus.

Isn't that amazing to have such a big family? We just loved your grandpa to bits and we respected him and we always did what he said.

[19 : 47] And do you know this? If you wanted to get married, you had to ask your grandpa. grandpa, I'll always remember the Sunday morning, Lynn and I walking through to the vestry to see your grandpa.

We were wanting to get married. And I turned round to Lynn and I said to her, you know, it's one thing for the Lord to say that we can get married, but this is the big one.

And when we got into the vestry, he just smiled and hugged us.

After preaching through Romans for one last time, Eleanor Robertson and I worked out that in preaching and writing, he had gone through Romans and Holyrood at least seven or eight times. He retired, his last Sunday being the 24th of October 1997. And so James and Mary left Holyrood, but they were soon to return and of course they returned because this was their home and we their family.

[20 : 58] And here his presence in church was simply a benediction to us. Just to say that if the words of the psalmist were true of anyone, they were true of him, they will still bear fruit in old age.

And he did. And he had an ongoing ministry here in this church. In September of 1999, he was made minister emeritus of Holyrood Abbey.

We honoured him as the Lord would have wanted us to honour him. In January of 2002, marking his 80th birthday, serving the word of God, a celebration of his life and ministry was published and presented to him at an informal gathering at Creef Hydro.

we'll always remember that night. As we sat and concentrated on the food that we were eating, he could but look at this book. And every page he turned, he seemed to say, this is actually about me. James had his first major stroke in August of 1998. He broke his hip in 2002. That was a Saturday night, getting ready to come to the prayer meeting.

[22 : 12] And it was about then that we began to see something of a deterioration in his physical and mental capacity. And it's true that as the physical and mental deterioration progressed over the coming and following years, he never but ever complained.

Not only that, but in all of his frailty and forgetfulness, the one thing that he never lost, next to his love for and dependence on Mary, and how we pay tribute to her today for her faithfulness and steadfastness and caring for James with such loving devotion.

But what he never lost was his memory of God's word. I will always remember one evening going to the Astley Ainsley and we sat together and I took his Bible.

I daren't read from the NIV, but I took his Bible and we turned to Romans 8 and I read the first half of the first verse.

He completed it. I went on to verse 2. He completed it. And we did the whole of Romans 8 faultlessly.

[23 : 24] Other evenings we did Ephesians 2, chunks of the Sermon on the Mount and a number of Psalms. Last Thursday James was looking as well as he had ever been for some time.

He was alert and responsive. And so in the evening the family went home. Later on in the evening the staff nurse in the ward went in to see him and did what she did each night and read him the evening portion of daily light.

He was rested, calm and at peace. 15 minutes later she went in again and he had gone home. Though absent from the body he was present with the Lord he loved and adored and served all the days of his life.

And that we would never grudge him. And so we say today echoing the words of the Lord, well done good and faithful servant. and we would always also say as James would want us to say, to God be the glory, great things he has done.

Let's pray together. Our great and our gracious God, the Lord of hosts and the King of glory, we bow our hearts before you today as we bring to you in Jesus' name.

[25 : 00] These are praises and thanksgivings, blessing you, magnifying and adoring you, not only for all that you are in your sovereign majesty and holiness, and in your amazing and abounding grace and mercy in the gospel, but for all that you have revealed yourself to be as this God through the life and ministry of your servant, our father in the faith, our pastor, our brother, our friend, James Philip.

We bless you for all that he was in Christ, for his coming to faith, for his growth in grace, for his call to the ministry, for your leading and guiding of him to Gardens Town and then to Holyrood, for his faithfulness in ministry, for his care as a pastor, for his wisdom and counseling, for his compassion in times of grief and despair, for his goodness and his kindness, for all that he was as an example of holiness, for his zeal in preaching, for his steadfastness in the face of ridicule, for his heart burden for the lost, for his love of your church, and for his jealousy, for your honor, reputation and glory.

We bring to you our thanks. We pray very especially today for Mary and ask, O God, that you would draw near to her and that you would be her comfort, her refuge and her strength in time of trouble. God, we pray for William and Rebecca, Joanna and Juliet, Jennifer and Nigel, Ruth, Rachel, Sam and Philip.

We pray for George and for Moira up in Aberdeen. And pray that in these days, O God, that they might prove the sufficiency of your grace and that you would bring to them a new and afresh all the promises of your glorious gospel, that you are the resurrection and the life.

[27 : 28] O God, continue with us now and bless us in our worship. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.