

Philip, the Evangelist

Lesson Scope: Acts 8

References in brackets refer to Acts 8 unless otherwise specified

Lesson Focus

Since the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, not many years had passed. Yet, during this time, the church had grown rapidly. Philip the evangelist was one of the seven deacons ordained in Acts 6.

Normally Jews avoided Samaria but Jesus had told His disciples to witness in Samaria. Philip went there and found fertile soil for the Gospel message.

At His ascension, Jesus commissioned His followers to proclaim the Gospel in all the earth. Directed by the Holy Spirit, these followers seek to lead souls to a saving knowledge of Christ.

The subject of evangelism has at times been very popular among nominal Christians. Because of this, it can be challenging to stay focused on the God-approved methods and principles for going about this great work. But following God's plan is essential for us to be effective. Likely the most neglected aspects of evangelism are the place of baptism and the place of the church. We do well to remember that in the Great Commission, Jesus specifically mentioned baptism as well as teaching all that He has commanded. As we can see, evangelism involves far more than simply telling men to pray the sinner's prayer.

Of great importance is the fact that the primary means of man receiving the Gospel is through hearing. This is illustrated by the eunuch. He read the Scriptures, but he did not understand until he heard Philip preach the Word to him. Romans 10:13-15 explains this principle in detail. Seekers need to be taught, as the Great Commission points out.

The fact is that evangelism is God's work. He guides and directs in the time and place of the work. It is good to remember this when there are closed doors, when the work seems slow, and when the responses are few. Our preconceived plans may not always line up with God's higher ways.

Lesson Aim: To portray principles for effective evangelism.

Theme Verses: **Matthew 28:19-20.** Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Lesson Text

In the City

Acts 8:3-13

³ (KJV) As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison. ⁴ Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. ⁵ Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. ⁶ And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed *with them*: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. ⁸ And there was great joy in that city. ⁹ But there was a certain man, called Simon, which before time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: ¹⁰ To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. ¹¹ And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. ¹² But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

In the Desert

Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ (KJV) And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. ²⁷ And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Je-

rusalem for to worship, ²⁸ Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. ³⁰ And Philip ran thither to *him*, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readeſt? ³¹ And he ſaid, How can I, except ſome man ſhould guide me? And he deſired Philip that he would come up and ſit with him. ³² The place of the ſcripture which he read was this, He was led as a ſheep to the ſlaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his ſhearer, ſo opened he not his mouth: ³³ In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who ſhall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. ³⁴ And the eunuch answered Philip, and ſaid, I pray thee, of whom ſpeaketh the prophet this? of himſelf, or of ſome other man? ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the ſame ſcripture, and preached unto him Jeſus. ³⁶ And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch ſaid, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? ³⁷ And Philip ſaid, If thou believeſt with all thine heart, thou mayeſt. And he answered and ſaid, I believe that Jeſus Chriſt is the Son of God. ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to ſtand ſtill: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch ſaw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip was found at Azotus: and paſſing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

Questions for Study

In the City

1. How did persecution affect the church?
2. In this passage, what did the work of evangelism include?
3. How can negative circumstances today be used to further God's kingdom?

In the Desert

4. In what Ways did the Lord guide Philip?
5. Why was it important that Philip explain the Scriptures?
6. Why must the work of Christ be central in our message?
7. In what ways does the salvation of souls result in joy?

Analysing the Passage

Saul “made havoc of the church” (8:3), which means he tried to ruin or destroy it. He did this by haling (dragging) men and women into prison. Because of this persecution, the church was scattered, and Philip the evangelist went to Samaria.

Philip’s preaching was Christ centered. Three times it specifically refers to him preaching Christ: “Philip . . . preached Christ unto them” (8:5); “Philip preaching the things concerning . . . the name of Jesus Christ” (8:12); and “Philip . . . preached unto him Jesus” (8:35).

The eunuch in this passage was a high-ranking official under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. The name Candace is thought to be a title of office, similar to the title of Pharaoh in Egypt. Obviously, the Jewish religion had reached this country, because the eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship. Now with the eunuch’s conversion, the Christian religion would also reach Ethiopia. “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” (Psalm 68:31).

Principles and Applications

In the City

1. Persecution can provide new opportunities for evangelism (8:3-4).

Satan tries to destroy the church with persecution. Instead of allowing persecution to destroy the church, God can use it to increase the church. Many persecuted churches have discovered that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

God superintends through various circumstances to further His kingdom. We may be tempted with frustration when circumstances seem undesirable. Instead we should view these circumstances—whether it be government interference, limited financial opportunities, or physical illness—as new opportunities that God can use to further His kingdom.

2. The Gospel frees men from the bondage of sin and gives them power to live a regenerated life (8:12-13). Sinful man finds himself in ruin and despair. He is controlled by the flesh, the devil, and the world. He is helpless to save himself.

The Gospel provides the answer! By faith in Jesus Christ, man can obtain freedom from the guilt and power of sin. Through repentance, God provides the grace to live a changed life.

3. Evangelism includes helping new believers to join Christ's body, the church (8:12-13). Philip was not content to simply preach the Word. He also helped his converts to the point of being baptized into Christ's body.

The evangelist's work is not done when a person responds to the Gospel message. In fact, his work has only begun. True evangelists are interested in developing long-term faithfulness in the souls they work with. They recognize the church as an integral part of evangelism.

In the Desert

4. Holy Spirit guidance is essential for effective evangelism (8:26, 29). "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1). The evangelist may have preconceived ideas for how to proceed with the work. But we must allow God to be in control.

God's Spirit leads through many ways. He may use the voice of the brotherhood to reveal His will. He gives differing gifts to various brethren, which in turn helps to determine their roles in the work. The opportunities we have before us are also given by God, whether it be an open door or a closed door.

5. Effective evangelists explain the Scriptures in a clear and simple manner (8:30-35). The Gospel message is found in God's Word. It is here that we find the Bread of Life to feed to the hungry souls of men. The evangelist may be tempted to lean on other sources, such as the writings of men, but his message needs to be based on the Word of God.

It is difficult for seekers to understand the Bible without someone to explain it. When Philip asked the eunuch if he understood the Scripture he was reading, the eunuch replied, "How can I except some man should guide me?" This is where the work of the evangelist becomes important. He opens the Scriptures so they can be understood.

6. The work of Christ must be central in our evangelistic message (8:34-35) Jesus Christ is man's only hope of salvation. This is the core of the Gospel message. "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5). "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Alternative messages will not solve man's problems. The health and wealth gospel will not end illness and poverty. Education and refine-

ment will not eliminate man's barbaric nature. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ will free man from sin.

7. Evangelism results in a joyous harvest (8:39). When the Samaritans responded to Philip's message, "there was great joy in that city." When the Ethiopian eunuch was baptised, "he went on his way rejoicing." There is also joy in the heart of the evangelist when his listeners respond and there is joy in heaven.

Important Teachings

1. Persecution can provide new opportunities for evangelism (8:3-4).
2. The Gospel frees men from the bondage of sin and gives them power to live a regenerated life (8:12-13).
3. Evangelism includes helping new believers to join Christ's body, the church (8:12-13).
4. Holy Spirit guidance is essential for effective evangelism (8:26, 29).
5. Effective evangelists explain the Scriptures in a clear and simple manner (8:30-35).
6. The work of Christ must be central in our evangelistic message (8:34-35).
7. Evangelism results in a joyous harvest (8:39).
8. God is able to cure the physical and spiritual ills of all mankind (8:6-7).
9. Effective evangelists give quality time and a listening ear (8:30-31).
10. The goal of evangelism is to lead seekers to a changed life and a full commitment to Christ (8:36-38).

Answers to Questions

1. How did persecution affect the church?
Persecution resulted in the church being scattered. The Gospel story was carried into the new places where they went. Instead of suffering, the church grew.
2. In this passage, what did the work of evangelism include?
Evangelism included preaching Jesus Christ. It included explaining the Scriptures. It included baptizing new believers into the body of Christ. Philip also ministered to the physical needs of his listeners.
3. How can negative circumstances today be used to further God's kingdom?

God can use physical illness to be a testimony to others of His grace and strength. Limited financial opportunities may leave more time for spiritual work. Government interference, if related to properly, can leave a testimony to the government officials involved.

4. In what ways did the Lord guide Philip?

An angel told Philip to go down to the desert. The Spirit told Philip when to go near to the chariot and join the eunuch. The Spirit of the Lord caught him away when he was done helping the eunuch.

5. Why was it important that Philip explain the Scriptures?

The eunuch could not understand the Scriptures by himself. The Scriptures needed to be explained. The Scriptures contain the salvation story. This is what the evangelist's message must be based on.

6. Why must the work of Christ be central in our message?

Christ alone is the answer to man's need. Education or better surroundings alone will not solve man's basic problems. Trying to help people without bringing them to Christ will result in failure.

7. In what ways does the salvation of souls result in joy?

There is joy in the heart of the one who receives salvation. There is also joy in heaven over each soul that repents. There is joy in the heart of the evangelist when he sees his efforts bringing forth fruit.

Summarizing the Lesson

God has shown us mercy in providing salvation. We in turn should seek to help others find this salvation as well. May we be faithful stewards of the Gospel.

Research Guide

1. Make a study of how the Jews related to the Samaritans.
2. See "Philip" in Unger's Bible Dictionary.