



Philip, the Evangelist
Acts 8

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas
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A young guy in his late twenties came to our church and we met. He was confused about his direction in life and confused about problems in his new marriage, and needed someone to talk to. So I offered to meet with him. One meeting turned into a dozen meetings. When we talked about his marital problems, I had to be a counselor. When he asked me spiritual questions, I had to be an apologist. When he asked for career advice, I had to be like a father. But mostly, I was just a friend. And he loved hot wings, so we always went to Pluckers for lunch. After a lot of time, a lot of talking, and a lot of hot wings, he accepted Christ. Jesus was the key to all the issues he had in life. And all it took was me just being a friend.

Friendship is the key to so many people coming to Christ. A lot of time, a lot of talking, and a lot of hot wings. I don't know if they ate hot wings in the 1st and 2nd centuries, but there were a lot of friendships that led to the gospel which led to many people coming to Christ. Jesus befriended Andrew. And Andrew told Peter about Jesus. Peter told Cornelius. Ananias told Saul. Pantaenus told Clement. Justin told Tatian. Felix told Octavius. Origen told Gregory. And Philip told an Ethiopian. And the Ethiopian told his queen and his country about Jesus.

This morning, we're going to look at that story, of Philip sharing the gospel with the Ethiopian. The story is in Acts 8.

The book of Acts records the birth of the Church and the thirty-year period following the resurrection of Jesus. And it was the resurrection that sparked a movement. They believed He was the Son of God and that everything He said was true. They were convinced it was true, they were compelled to talk about it, and they were courageous to take a stand at great risk. These first Christians are our mentors, and we need their 1st century passion for our 21st century world. Our prayer is that their passion would revive our passion, that their courage would revive our courage. The story continues, and it's still about Jesus. The mission continues, and today, in our generation, it's up to us to take the gospel across the street and around the world.

Hopefully, as we look at Philip in Acts 8, we will learn several lessons about sharing our faith. The most important is *letting the Spirit lead us and give us the words to say*.

THE LIFE OF PHILIP

The number one excuse for not sharing our faith is fear. We're afraid of not knowing what to say. We're afraid of being ridiculed and rejected. But the greatest evangelist in the New Testament had more to fear than any of us.

Following the stoning of Stephen, "a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem" (Acts 8:2, NIV). Jewish leaders threatened Christians, "This is what will happen to you if don't stop preaching about Jesus!" Christians were dragged from their homes and thrown into prison. They were threatened and even beaten. Acts 8 says they "scattered" in every direction. Families were on the run for their lives, dragging their children behind them.

One of these men was Philip.¹ And yes, he was afraid, because he saw his good friend Stephen stoned to death. To us, this is a story with black letters on a white page. For Philip, his friend's body was lying in the dirt covered with blood. We fear we might offend someone. Philip feared he might be stoned to death. The greatest evangelist in the New Testament had more to fear than any of us.

“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said ... and they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and they were baptized” (Acts 8:4-6, 12, NIV).

Something deep within Philip allowed him look in the face of persecution and keep preaching anyway. What was it? The resurrection! The resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God and that everything He said is true. Just like Peter and John and Stephen, Philip was convinced it was true, he was compelled to talk about it, and he was courageous to take a stand at great risk.

LESSONS FROM PHILIP

As we walk through the story of Philip and the Ethiopian, there are several lessons we can learn. If you really believe the gospel is true, then ***Lesson #1 – Make up your mind to live on mission.***

Threatened by persecution, Philip fled to Samaria and, verse 5, “began proclaiming Christ.” Verse 25, he went about “preaching the gospel to many villages.” Verse 35, “He preached Jesus.” Verse 40, “He kept preaching the gospel to all the cities.” And twenty years later, when Paul and his team stayed at his house, the Bible refers to him as “Philip the evangelist” (Acts 21:8). Ironically, Philip welcomed into his home the same man from whom he fled twenty years earlier.²

Philip made up his mind. He made up his mind about Jesus. He knew what he believed, he knew what he would die for, and he decided what he was going to live for. He made up his mind to live his life on mission. And that's the decision that each of us has to make.

Jesus calls us “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). He said, “You shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8). Paul told Timothy, “Do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). Paul said “we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20). That's our calling. That's our job description. Every one of us has the responsibility, and the privilege, to testify to the reality of Jesus in our lives. So, if you really believe the gospel is true, then make up your mind to live on mission.

Lesson #2 – Respond to the Spirit's leading. “An angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ And he got up and went” (Acts 8:27). In Samaria, God used Philip to lead hundreds to Christ. Now, an angel directed him to a desert road. It probably didn't make sense, but Philip listened to the Holy Spirit. “He got up and he went.”

Paul said, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25, NIV).³ That's the key to sharing our faith. “Keep in step with the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit lives in

us and guides us and prompts us all the time. It could be in a restaurant, in your neighborhood, at school, at work, and you sense God prompting you to walk over to someone, to take the initiative, to open your mouth and say something. Let the Spirit lead you and give you the words to say.

Lesson #3 – Look for opportunities, and look for the person God is guiding you to talk to. Philip went, and “on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it’” (Acts 8:27-29, NIV).

This man was an Ethiopian, an African, a foreigner. He was a highly trusted official of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, in charge of the royal treasury. And he must have been personally rich because he owned his own scroll of Isaiah. And he was a eunuch, a castrated man in the queen’s service. Eunuchs could not fully participate in Jewish religious life because of their deformity.⁴ Yet, this man had been to Jerusalem to worship.

The meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian was a divine appointment. God arranges divine appointments all the time and places non-believers in our path. We just have to be on the lookout for opportunities and listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

At business functions, an African-American Muslim was often left standing alone in his predominately white profession. But at one function, there was an exception, when another man “walked across the room, stuck out his hand, and introduced himself.”⁵ This friendly man was a white Christian. The two talked about business, about their families, and had normal conversation. And surprisingly, the Christian asked the Muslim to explain *his* faith. The Christian listened with respect, and later the Muslim listened with respect as the Christian explained his faith. A friendship developed that night. Working in the same profession, their paths crossed several times, and there were more functions and more conversations. And months later, while alone in his home, the Muslim accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior. And it was because a believer in Christ sensed a divine appointment, and simply walked across the room and began a conversation.

Jesus said, “Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (John 4:35). Jesus said people are ready. Look for opportunities. Look around your neighborhood. Look around your school. Look around your workplace. Look for the person God is guiding you to talk to.

Lesson #4 – Initiate the conversation by asking questions. “Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked” (Acts 8:30, NIV). Now there are good questions and there are bad questions. Don’t start by asking “Have you been washed in the blood?” or “Are you prepared for the Great White Throne judgment?” Questions show you are interested. Questions are non-threatening. Questions give you insight into what a person thinks and help you guide the conversation to the gospel.

Here’s how I’ve used questions. When I meet someone I usually ask, “So, what do you do for a living?” And then, of course they ask me what I do. And when I tell them I’m a pastor, they usually walk away. No, I divert the conversation away from church talk. I jump to talking about their job, their family, about sports, about the weather. Why would I do that? To relieve them from thinking I’m about to pounce on them. But then I will come back around and say, “Yeah, I’m the

pastor of The Church at Canyon Creek. What kind of church background do you have?” And then depending on their response, I might ask, “Was that experience positive for you as a child?” If not, I might ask, “What turned you off from religion?” or “So what do you believe now?” I might say, “Well, at our church, we believe ... Have you ever thought about it that way?” And then I might offer, “Hey, I’ve really enjoyed talking with you. Would you be open to getting together for coffee to talk about this some more?”

Asking questions shows you are genuinely interested. And questions give you insight into what a person thinks and help you guide the conversation to the gospel.

Lesson #5 – Just sit down and talk to people. “The Ethiopian said, ‘How can I, unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him” (Acts 8:31, NIV).

I love simple phrases in the Bible that give snapshots of what’s happening. “He invited Philip to come up and sit with him.” You can visualize the Ethiopian reaching down and helping Philip into the chariot. You can see them squeeze together on the chariot’s bench. You can see them reading the scroll as the chariot bounced along the road. I love how this verse simply says that Philip sat with him. This is not a minor detail in the story.

Just sit down and talk to people. It’s about two people talking. Asking questions, answering questions. And the Ethiopian admitted what is true about every non-believer. “How can I, understand unless someone explains it to me?” Every non-believer needs someone who will sit down and explain it to them.

Lesson #6 – Open your mouth and say something. Again, don’t miss the simple phrases in Scripture. “Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:35, NAS). He “opened his mouth” and said something.

I believe it’s a cop-out to say, “I share my faith by the way I live.” Yes, God is honored when we live good lives. But no one becomes a Christian by observing how good you are. That’s not the gospel. The gospel requires words. And I love that this verse says, “Philip opened his mouth.”

When God called Moses to confront Pharaoh and demand that the Hebrews be released from Egyptian slavery, Moses begged the Lord, “Please, don’t send me. I’m not eloquent. I wouldn’t know what to say. I get tongue-tied. Please Lord, not me.” But God said, “Who has made man’s mouth? ... Is it not I, the Lord? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say” (Exodus 4:11-12, NAS).

And He will do the same for us. Just open your mouth and say something. Let the Spirit lead you and give you the words to say.

Lesson #7 – Focus on Jesus. “Philip ... preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:35, NAS).

Non-believers are going to challenge you. They are going to complain about hypocrites in the church. They are going to complain about religion in politics. They are going to challenge your belief in creationism. They are going to call you homophobic and narrow-minded. And you need

to be ready to respond. But most important is focusing on Jesus. I believe it's the love of Jesus, the sacrifice of Jesus, the forgiveness of Jesus that eventually melts a person's heart, and makes all those other issues fade away.

Verse 32 reads, "The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture (from Isaiah 53), 'He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth' ... Then eunuch asked Philip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?'" (Acts 8:32-34, NIV). Isaiah 53 is about Jesus, and Philip told him about Jesus.

Tell people how much Jesus loves them. Tell them that no matter what they have done or who they have become, Jesus is willing to forgive them of everything they have ever done wrong. Tell them that Jesus sacrificed His life on the cross for them, that He paid the penalty for their sin. Tell them that "there is salvation in no one else" (Acts 4:12, NAS). Tell them Jesus is "the way, and the truth, and the life," and that no one comes to the Father but through Him (John 14:6, NAS).

Lesson #8 – Make sure a person understands what it means to make a decision for Christ.
In this divine appointment, Philip explained that Isaiah's prophecy was talking about Jesus. Then the Ethiopian said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him" (Acts 8:36-38, NAS).

Some of versions of the Bible don't include verse 37. If have a Bible other than the NASB, verse 36 skips to verse 38, there is no verse 37. The reason is that Greek manuscripts from the 9th-12th centuries include verse 37, as I have it on the screen, and the NASB includes it. As we have discovered much older manuscripts, dating as far back as the 2nd century, these manuscripts do not contain verse 37. So, the consensus of scholarship is that verse 37 was not in the earliest manuscripts of Acts. This is one of a few copyist issues that exist through the generations, none of which alter the meaning of the text.

However, the point of verse 37 is consistent with the rest of the New Testament. Belief before baptism. Baptism does not make someone a Christian, faith does. Baptism is not necessary to become a Christian.⁶ Baptism is symbolic, an outward sign of an inward reality. The Ethiopian's eagerness to be baptized was not so he could be saved, but because he had been saved during that chariot ride.

The point is to make sure a person understands what it means to believe, to put their faith in Jesus, to accept Him as their Savior and Lord.

Verse 27 referred to the man as an Ethiopian and as a eunuch. He was a foreigner and a eunuch. If Philip explained Isaiah 53 to him, it's probable that he also explained Isaiah 56 to him. Which says, "No ***foreigner*** who becomes a follower of the Lord should say, 'The Lord will certainly exclude me from his people.' The ***eunuch*** should not say, 'Look, I am like a dried-up tree.' For this is what the Lord says, "For the ***eunuchs*** who observe my Sabbaths and choose what pleases me and are faithful to my covenant, I will set up within my temple and my walls a monument (to them) that will be better than that of sons and daughters ... As for ***foreigners*** who become followers of the Lord and serve him, who love the name of the Lord and want to be his

servants ... I will bring them to my holy mountain. I will make them happy in the temple where people pray to me. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar ..." (Isaiah 56:3-8, NET). When the Ethiopian read that, he would have surely said, "That's me! God accepts me!" Irenaeus wrote about the Ethiopian over 100 years later. Names him Simeon Bachos and writes, "This man went into the regions of Ethiopia, to preach what he had himself believed."⁷ History shows that he was the first convert in Africa and that the gospel spread through him.

Lesson #9 – Make your life about the mission. "Philip ... kept preaching the gospel to all the cities" (Acts 8:40, NAS). Earlier in Acts 8, what was Philip doing? Preaching the gospel. When he met the Ethiopian, what did Philip do? He shared the gospel. After this divine appointment with the Ethiopian, what did Philip do next? He "kept preaching the gospel to all the cities" (Acts 8:40, NAS). And twenty years later, the Bible refers to him as "Philip the evangelist."⁸

Somewhere along the way, Philip made up his mind. He made up his mind about Jesus. He knew what he believed, he knew what he would die for, and he decided what he was going to live for. And that's the decision each of us has to make.

Historian Michael Green writes about the passion of the early Christians. "They were passionately convinced of the truth of the gospel. They were persuaded that men and women were lost without it. (The gospel was) the key to eternal life, without which they would perish. They shared in God's love (and wanted) to pour it out on a needy world. They (embraced) the Great Commission. They sought to penetrate society with the gospel which had such a profound effect upon them ... It affected everything they did and everyone they met ... In the early days, the quality of their lives was blazingly distinct."⁹

Michael Green's research reveals their "enthusiasm to evangelize," how they were "so convinced" and "so sure."¹⁰ And what motivated them? Their sense of gratitude. "They did it because of the overwhelming experience of the love of God which they had received through Jesus Christ."¹¹ Their sense of responsibility. "They lived their lives under the eye of God, and they were determined to please him in all they did."¹² Their sense of concern. They lived with an "awareness of the peril of those without Christ ... They really believed that those without Christ would suffer eternal loss, and this thought drove them to reach others with the gospel."¹³ And Michael Green ends his research declaring that evangelism was "the Church's first priority. Evangelism was the very lifeblood of the early Christians, and so we find (in Acts 2:47), that 'day by day the Lord was adding to their number those who were being saved.'"¹⁴

CONCLUSION

We can learn a lot from Philip, and I hope you will keep these lessons in mind. And pray through these lessons until they become part of your life.

But most of all, like Peter and John and Stephen and Philip, may we be convinced it is true, compelled to talk about it, and courageous to take a stand at great risk. I ask you again, as I asked you last week, which circle are you standing in? Most of us stand in the circle of conviction. We really believe Jesus is the Son of God. We are convinced that it's all true. But are we compelled enough to talk about it. Do we have a sense of urgency to share the gospel? Many of us need to

move from being convinced to being compelled. And some of us will face more challenging situations, and will need to be courageous to take a stand, even at great risk.

I want to ask you to do something. I want to ask you to stand up if you know and care someone who does not currently know Christ, someone you long to come to Christ. As you stand up, you are representing that person before God, and all of us are going to pray with you, taking that name to God. I also ask you to stand up if you are willing to be used by God, if you are willing for God to bring people into your life with whom you can share the gospel. So let's pray.

NOTES

¹ “Philip the evangelist” (Acts 8:5, 21:8) is not to be confused with Philip the apostle (John 1:45). He was one of the seven men chosen to serve the Greek widows, highly respected and spiritually mature (Acts 6:1-5). Twenty years later, Paul and his team lodged at Philip’s house, along with his four daughters (Acts 21:8-9).

² See Acts 8:1-3, where it describes Saul’s personal persecution of Christians.

³ See also Romans 8:14.

⁴ There were regulations regarding eunuchs in Deuteronomy 23:1. “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.” Eunuchs could not fully participate in the religious life of the Jewish community due to their deformity.

⁵ Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), page 23.

⁶ Does a person need to be baptized in order to be saved? After Peter preached that first sermon of the new church, the people “were pierced to the heart” (Acts 2:37). In fact, they were so convicted that they begged Peter, “What shall we do?” Peter said, “Repent, and let each of you be *baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins*” (Acts 2:38). At first glance, these verses seem to suggest that a person must be baptized in order to be saved. But that’s not true. When Peter said “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins*” he was actually saying “be baptized *because of the forgiveness of your sins.*” Why must this be so? Because ceremony does not have the power to save. This is proven by the salvation of the thief on the cross who died beside Jesus. He asked Jesus, “Remember me when You come in Your kingdom.” And Jesus replied, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:42-43). Was this thief baptized? No. Did he have a chance to come down from the cross and make restitution for his bad deeds? No. He did not do anything except ask Jesus to remember Him. And for that, he was promised a place in heaven. So, is baptism necessary for salvation? No, it’s not. But that’s not the purpose anyway. The purpose of baptism is public declaration. It is an outward symbol of an inward reality. Peter said, “Baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience” (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism by water does not save. Baptism says that you have appealed to God for mercy. It depicts you as a mercy-seeker and a grace-recipient.

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.12.8.

⁸ See Acts 21:8.

⁹ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970, 2003), pages 17, 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, page 273.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, page 274.

¹² *Ibid.*, page 282.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pages 293, 382.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, page 388.