

13. Philip the Evangelist

October 27, 2013

Many Christians wrestle with that little ten-letter word called 'evangelism.' Whether out of fear, intimidation, ignorance, or indifference, many followers of Jesus choose to declare themselves "silent witnesses" of God's work in their lives. Some who carry on the work of evangelism may end up offending listeners with an "in-your-face", occasionally even rude approach. Others may squeeze the life out of a living relationship with Christ by keeping matters entirely on an intellectual level.

But to some, evangelism is like breathing air. They do it so naturally, so effortlessly, before you know, the person who was witnessed, now is bowing one's head and praying a sinner's prayer. Philip was a case in point.

Philip illustrates the Biblical method of evangelism. He was, quite simply, a Christian who was on fire for the Lord. He had been summoned into Samaria, an area shunned by the Jews for racial prejudice and religious reasons, where he spread the Good News about Jesus Christ. And the results were incredible! God confirmed Philip's position among the Samaritans by performing many miracles through him in v6 and 7 of this chapter. Philip's approach to evangelism was neither vague, nor rude, nor mute.

We are going to learn how to evangelize directly from Philip the Evangelist. I find 6 things for effective evangelism.

A. GO SOUTH, YOUNG MAN

Acts 8:26-27a Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. 27a So he arose and went.

Let's make a word picture here. Let's say that the Lord chose to expand our church ministry 100 folds from a hundred some people of our congregation in a short time; new believers coming to the Lord every service; and all the ministries in our church are fruitful. Then out of nowhere, an angel of the Lord speaks to my heart and says, "Arise and go and start a small Bible study in a godless place. The address is 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C." Our instant reaction would be, "Why? This has to be from satan. He transformed himself into an angel of light to stop the move of God."

But not Philip. He was not only a faithful and effective preacher; he was also an obedient servant of God. Like his Master Jesus, he was willing to leave the crowds and obediently moved on to the next assignment from the Father.

1) Philip was sensitive to God's leading.

Here he was in the midst of an exciting crusade in Samaria, witnessing all sorts of bright new beginnings and hundreds of lives being changed – excitement that could only be generated by the Lord. But God called him out to the middle of a desert wasteland – and Philip had the sensitivity to go where God led.

Effective witnesses don't just suddenly arrive at the scene; they're led there as they meet regularly with God and seek His guidance and counsel from the Bible. Philip possessed this sensitivity through the biblical discipline, and the Spirit of God moved in him when the time was right.

2) Philip was available.

From Samaria to Gaza desert area was over 60 miles. I wonder what Philip was thinking while he was traveling to Gaza. It is not like he could jump in his car and get there in about an hour. It would have taken 2-3 days for Philip to get there.

Philip left immediately. Availability is sensitivity's twin. You can't have one without the other. Where was he going? Philip didn't know, but God did. We don't see a single question or objection from Philip to God. A great and godly attitude we must learn from him.

B. THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Acts 8:27b-33 And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 was returning . And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." 30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth."

This Ethiopia – much larger than modern-day Ethiopia – was the land where the Queen of Sheba came from, who saw the glory of Solomon's kingdom and professed faith in the God of Israel. It's possible that the Jewish faith were passed on through the centuries to men like this Secretary of Ethiopian Treasury Department of the queen.

Since he was a eunuch, he could not become a full Jewish proselyte according to the Mosaic Law; but he was permitted to become a "God fearer" or "a proselyte of the gate." He was concerned enough about his spiritual life to travel over 800 miles to Jerusalem to worship God; but his heart was still not satisfied.

This Ethiopian represents many people today who are religious, read the Scriptures, and seek the truth, even pray daily, yet do not have saving faith in Jesus Christ. They are sincere, but they are sincerely lost! They need someone to show them the Way to Christ.

I learned this from Billy Graham Crusade Ministry:

a. The Bible says that there is an essential gnawing emptiness and loneliness in every life without Christ.

All humanity keeps crying for something or someone to fulfill it, but they do not know what it is.

Romans 8:20-21 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God

b. The Bible says that people have a sense of guilt that cannot be erased with anything that the world offers except the forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

We are sinners by birth, by nature, and by choice. The reason people feel guilt is because God has given them a conscience and when they sin, they know it.

Romans 2:15 who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)

c. The Bible says that people have a universal fear of death without Christ.

Death frightens us. It is fear of the unknown.

Hebrews 2:15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Can you imagine this meeting in the middle of a barren desert? I am sure that this Ethiopian official was not traveling all by himself. I bet he had a great entourage including the Secret Service body guards who wore sunglasses, ear pieces, and talking to their shirt sleeves. Then, here comes Philip out of nowhere.

3) Philip was proactive. – v29

At the Spirit's leading he took the initiative and ran up to this man's chariot, not knowing what he would find. And here was this guy reading aloud from Isaiah 53 out of all the OT Scriptures he could read. Don't tell me God doesn't know what he's doing!

Isaiah 53 was the passage he was reading, the prophecy of God's Suffering Servant. Isaiah 53 describes our Lord Jesus Christ in His birth, life and ministry, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection. The Ethiopian focused on Isaiah 53:7-8, which describes our Lord as the willing Sacrifice for sinners, even to the point of losing His human rights. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of both the Old Testament types and the prophecies.

4) Philip was tactful. – v30

When Philip greeted the Ethiopian official, he didn't hit him with 17 theological positions on and 12 hermeneutical approaches to the text of Isaiah. He undoubtedly could have run intellectual and biblical circles around that politician at that moment, but his initial question was gentle and gracious: "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip gave a chance this man to answer.

I'd rather watch Fox News than the liberal lame stream media like ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, and MSNBC, because they are so biased for the current administration and their ungodly agendas. However, I don't care for some of the Fox News talk show hosts because they don't let their guests to answer by interrupting them constantly. That is plain rude.

C. IT IS ALL ABOUT JESUS

Acts 8:34-35 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

5) Philip was thorough and exact in his message about Jesus.

Philip told this politician about Jesus, plain and simple. He didn't talk about his work in Samaria, the financial conditions in Ethiopia, the latest football game scores, NASCAR qualification course or anything else. He simply presented the story of Jesus to this man who was hungry to learn more about Him.

We often shrink back from speaking boldly about Jesus, and the world lets us know we shouldn't talk about such things. But the world does not hesitate to push its own carnal and ungodly messages to us. We should be just as bold to the world about Jesus as the world is bold to us about accommodating their sins.

D. THE HAPPIEST DAY OF HIS LIFE

Acts 8:36-40 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water . And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" 37 Then 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." 38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. 39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so 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.

How did the Ethiopian eunuch know that believers were supposed to be baptized? Perhaps Philip had included this in his witness to him, or perhaps he had even seen people baptized while he was in Jerusalem. We know that Gentiles were baptized when they became Jewish proselytes.

6) Philip was decisive.

The eunuch saw water and must have thought to himself , 'That's what I need! I need to be baptized!' Philip saw the sincerity of the man 's commitment, and let the Ethiopian ordered the chariot to come to a stop and baptized him right on the spot.

We see the true story of a very empty man who met a very satisfied one. The former , an Ethiopian official, had everything this world could offer: power , wealth, influence, and fame. Yet there was a gnawing emptiness deep inside that sent him on a search for God.

The latter, Philip, had already found what the Ethiopian was searching for . He did not have earthly power, wealth, or fame, but he did have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And when these two men met, it became the happiest day in the Ethiopian's life. He went on his way rejoicing .

I don't know why God uses people to reach people. It is amazing to me. I don 't know why human verbal communication of His truth is the primary way God chooses to save men and women. It seems to me that it would be a lot easier if God were to just take us to heaven and perhaps raise up an army of angels, to go out and proclaim the Gospel. Instead, He has chosen to use flawed people like you and me.

Have you ever led anyone to Christ? I am sure most of us have shared our faith in some capacity. But have you ever said to someone, " Would you like to give your life to Jesus Christ right now?"

Sometimes you may think you are not getting through to people, but God is speaking to their hearts. They just may surprise you and want to believe. And then they , too, will go on their way rejoicing.

E. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit 's leading and make yourself available to Him.
- 2) Talk about Jesus and what He has done in your life.
- 3) Be sincere and be tactful.