

The book of Acts is the history of the early church, and how the gospel spread in spite of all opposition. The Holy Spirit came first to those who were already disciples of Jesus. The gospel quickly spread throughout Jerusalem, then Judea, and, as we saw in our previous passages, throughout Samaria. The key people that God used in the growth of His church, so far in our study, are Peter and John, who were among the original twelve disciples, then Stephen and Philip, who we consider to be among the first deacons in the church.

After the Jews killed Stephen, Luke's focus switched to Philip's ministry. Philip fled the persecution in Jerusalem, and preached the gospel to the Samaritans. Beginning with Philip's witness, then confirmed and spread by the ministries of Peter and John, people throughout the whole region of Samaria received Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.

In tonight's passage we see the gospel's continued advance in the account of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. Let's see what insights we can gather as we read together, Acts 8:26-40.

In verse 26, Philip received a command from the Lord to go out into the desert to the Gaza road, and he went. Notice that God was in sovereign control of the situation, and Philip simply acted upon God's revealed will. This is Christianity 101. When God reveals His will to people of faith, we are to obey, so that He can do God sized things through us. We become a part of, and take an active role in, what God is doing in the world.

The bible says that as a result of his obedience, Philip came in contact with an Ethiopian Eunuch, who was a very important, influential, and powerful man. He served the queen, in her court, and was entrusted with the wealth of his nation. Candace had great authority and governmental powers to rule over the people. This Ethiopian Eunuch was her right hand man, and was also very powerful and influential over his people.

The bible gives us more insight by saying that he was in Jerusalem to worship, and was now on his way home. This makes him a God-fearer, which is a gentile who worshipped the God of the Jews. Being a Eunuch and a Gentile, he would not have been allowed to be an active part of Temple worship, but still, he had faith, and it was important to him to go to Jerusalem to worship.

The bible does not tell us, but we might speculate that he had either, seen or heard about, the events surrounding church, and the movement of the Holy Spirit, while in Jerusalem, so that God had already prepared his heart to receive the gospel when Philip shared it with him. Since he was in a chariot, and Philip was on foot, it could be that he left Jerusalem after Philip, and the entourage caught up with Philip out on the desert road. The custom was to read scripture aloud, so as the Ethiopian approached, Philip could hear him reading a passage from Isaiah, which showed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Philip made contact when the Holy Spirit said to go over and join this chariot.

The record of this event gives us insight into the spiritual dynamics of sharing our faith today. All Christians should understand that a part of God's will is that we will be His witnesses, but God alone can save. God goes before us to work in people's lives and circumstances to prepare their hearts to receive the gospel in faith. But in His sovereign will, he chooses us to be His mouthpiece, and equips us through His word, and through the Holy Spirit, to explain the gospel, so that people have a choice whether to receive Jesus Christ as Lord or Savior, or not.

If Philip had not obeyed the angel's command, and had not listened to and obeyed the Holy Spirit, the Ethiopian would not have been saved at this time while he was open, and his

heart was prepared to receive the gospel. If he chose not to believe the gospel, and he rejected Jesus as Savior and Lord, he would have remained lost in his sins.

But God wanted to save this man. He already had faith in God. While the bible does not say it here specifically, God had a plan and a purpose for this man's life. Through his position, he could influence many of his own people when he shared his faith with them. All of this shows how God spread the good news. We have records of how the early church grew and flourished in Africa, and we can surmise that the spread of the gospel in that area of the world began right here, with a disciple who was willing to be obedient to what the Lord spoke to his heart, and a man who became a disciple through Philip's witness.

Do you see how important it is that we be obedient and share our faith with others. We cannot see God's big picture, and we have no idea of the extent of what God might do as a result of our faithful witness. If we share Jesus and someone gets saved, it makes an eternal difference in his or her life. If that person becomes a faithful witness, we have no idea of how many people they might reach, or how God will use the believers that come after us.

Philip engaged the Ethiopian in a conversation and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" In order to be an effective witness, we have to engage the people we hope to reach. While prayer is essential to the salvation process, there also needs to be a personal contact, and a saved person has to be able to talk to others about their faith.

The Ethiopian said, "How can I understand unless someone guide me?" Sometimes when God reaches out to a lost person, and He prepares his or her heart, that person senses something that they do not understand. This is why God sends us, to explain His mercy and grace, and to share the good news of Jesus' sacrifice, and the forgiveness of sin in His name.

Notice in verse 31 that the Ethiopian invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Philip's witness was effective because this man was open, and wanted to know more. One reason why we sometimes struggle with our witness is that when God puts someone on our heart to reach out to, we don't know how to get started. We don't want to beat somebody up with the gospel message, but we can be effective when someone gives us permission to talk to him or her about the Lord.

Let me give you an example to get you thinking about this. Say you have a friend, or a family member, and your heart is burdened for their salvation. You pray for them, and look for opportunities to share the gospel, but you are afraid, because every time you try to talk to them about the Lord, they shut you down.

Rather than pushing Jesus on them so that they become defensive, allow the Holy Spirit to work, and when you see the opportunity, ask permission. When through the course of talking about life, and circumstances ask, "Can I tell you what the bible says about that?" or "Can I share with you how God worked in my life when I went through something similar?" Without first giving permission, a lost person may resent your interference, and think that you are judging them, but if they give you permission to talk to them about the Lord, they will be much more open to what you have to say. If they say, "No I don't want to talk about that," be respectful of their wishes, but still be their friend, and try to give them comfort. The strengthening of the bond between you will help them to be more open and trusting in future conversations.

The Ethiopian's question was not about life circumstances, but about his lack of understanding of God's word. Philip would not have been as effective a witness, had he not been able to explain the scriptures. In the case of this passage, the scriptures pointed to Jesus, but guess what, all scriptures point to Jesus.

In order to be an effective witness, we need to have at least a basic understanding of God's word, to the point that we are comfortable talking about what we find. But someone will

say, "Oh, Brother Greg, I don't know the scriptures like you do." You don't have to know the scriptures like I do in order to be a witness, but you do need to have a basic knowledge and understanding of God's word. I didn't know the scriptures like I do now thirty years ago, but I was still the Lord's witness. I didn't have as full an understanding of scripture a year ago as I do now. I am still growing and learning, and I pray that I will never stop so long as I am able to be of some service to the Lord.

Don't use your lack of biblical knowledge as an excuse not to share your faith with others, rather always be studying and applying God's word to your life. Why do you suppose that Brother Carl and I preach from the word of God, week after week? Why do we offer bible studies on Sunday morning, Sunday night, Monday night, Wednesday night, Friday mornings and at other times? Why do we encourage you to read the word of God everyday in a personal bible study and devotion to God? If you faithfully attend the opportunities for bible study in this church, you already know more than you think, and you have opportunities for a steady diet of biblical truth in the future.

Philip seized the opportunity. He explained the passage in Isaiah, used it as a jumping off point, and shared the good news with the result that the Ethiopian surrendered his life in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the result that we hope for when we share our faith, but our witness does not always bare the fruit we desire. If the Ethiopian had rejected the gospel, it would be on him, not Philip. Philip would have been obedient to the Lord, would have done his best, and would have still played an important role in God's plan, and this man's life.

Don't let the devil beat you up when you try to reach someone for Christ and they reject God's grace. That is between that person and the Lord. We are simply called to be His witnesses as we pray for the people we try to reach. Let's do our part, and let God do His part.

The Ethiopian's conversion experience left him with a desire to follow the Lord in believer's baptism, not so that he might be saved, but because he had been saved. This suggests that Philip disciplined him on baptism, and this man wanted to follow the Lord Jesus Christ in every area of life. Believer's baptism is an important step in our growing relationship with Christ.

The bible says that when they came up out of the water, the Spirit carried Philip away to Azotus. He preached the gospel to the people in that place, and as he went, he shared the gospel with people along the way until he reached Caesarea, where he apparently made his home and invested himself in ministry.

The bible is silent about the rest of Philip's life and ministry except in Acts 21 where we read that Paul and his companions stayed at Philip's house in Caesarea when they were on their way to Jerusalem. In that passage, the bible refers to him as Philip the evangelist. Philip had a reputation as being someone who was faithful in his witness, and consistently reached out to the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We tend to think that God would never use us in such a powerful way, but who knows what God might do with someone who is completely submitted to the Lord's will. In any event, Philip is a biblical role model for us all.

To this point in our study of Acts, the gospel has spread from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to gentile converts to Judaism, and beginning in our passage next time, we will see how God put His hand on Saul who later took the gospel to the outer most parts of the world.

The gospel spreads to lost people today in the same way that it spread two thousand years ago. If you are a born again child of God, you have good news to share with the lost world. We are all sinners by nature and by choice. Our sin separates us from God and the wages of sin is

death. But God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Jesus was God in the flesh, who came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. He won the victory over sin and death for us by His resurrection from the grave. All a person has to do to be saved is to confess and repent of his or her sins, and receive Jesus into their heart as Savior and Lord. If there is anyone here who has not done that, you can receive God's grace right now, in your pew. For those of us who believe, we are to be His witnesses. Who knows, perhaps God has raised us up for such a time as this.