

Grace Church
Roanoke, Virginia

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Lesson #19

ACTS
Philip and Saul
Acts 8:1b-8

How important is evangelism to you? Are you the type of person who has found salvation in Christ and are content to let the rest of the world go to hell? Or do you have a real evangelistic heart which longs to tell people about Jesus Christ who gives eternal life and the forgiveness of sins to people who are deep in sin and hopelessly lost? Do you make efforts to bring non-Christians to Christ by witnessing to them personally, giving them a tract, conducting an evangelistic home Bible class or bringing them to church so they can hear the truth about Christ and the wonderful salvation He gives to all who trust in Him?

Evangelism is not just something nice but it is necessary. It is an absolute must for every Christian and the individual Christian who is not evangelistic will soon grow cold to the realities of the Christian Faith. Evangelism is the very life blood of the church and without it Christianity will become heady and fall into dead orthodoxy.

In Acts 8:1-8, we are introduced for the first time to lay evangelism which was the key to the tremendous growth of Christianity in the first century. Evangelism was not carried on by ordained men but by plain, ordinary vanilla Christians who had a burden to be obedient to Christ and a concern for lost souls.

SAUL - Acts 8:1b-4

Persecution Because of Stephen's Testimony (8:1b-2)

“And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, . . .” -- The death of Stephen brought a horrible persecution against all Christians in Jerusalem. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned to death because the Sanhedrin was infuriated with his preaching of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and the only way of salvation. They would not tolerate the truth which Stephen spoke. The furious Jewish leadership and the angry mob decided to carry out their fury against the Christians by rounding them up and putting them into prison.

Persecution will be the lot of every true Christian. “And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (II Tim. 3:12). Persecution may be verbal, social, physical or end up in martyrdom. When Christians are faithful they will experience difficulty, opposition and trouble because the truth of Jesus Christ is offensive to the natural, unsaved mind. “But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (I Cor. 1:23, 24).

“And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, . . .” -- Even though Samaria was only about fifty miles from Jerusalem, this verse shows that the gospel was going forth according to the plan Christ outlined.

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

It is through this persecution that the gospel was spread in Samaria. Up until this time, the preaching of the gospel has been centered in Jerusalem. It was at least two years since the Day of Pentecost and the Hebrew Christians still had not preached the gospel beyond the confines of the city of Jerusalem. Perhaps they had become complacent and comfortable in Jerusalem. They were strongly attached to the city of their birth. Their roots and families were in Jerusalem. They were like the Jews of old who were at ease and not moving out for God. “Woe to those who are at ease in Zion” (Amos 6:1). God, in His sovereignty, allowed a persecution to come to the

Christians in Jerusalem to thrust them out of their ease and complacency and into other lands with the gospel. Perhaps these Christian-Jews would have never gone forth from Jerusalem in obedience to Christ to take the gospel to every creature unless God moved them. God saw to it that the gospel would spread.

Are you going through pressures, trials and difficulties at this time? These trials may not be the result of punishment for sin. It may be that God is moving on you to begin sharing the person of Christ with others. He may be telling you to get your priorities straight and get His heartbeat of evangelism first in your life. God loves us and He knows better than we that without evangelistic hearts we will dry up spiritually.

“Except the Apostles.” -- For some reason not stated, the Apostles did not leave Jerusalem. Some think the Apostles failed to catch the vision of world-wide evangelism. This is hardly the case. The answer probably is that this persecution was primarily against the Christian-Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem, of whom Stephen was a part. These Hellenistic-Christians (converted Jews who spoke Greek) were identified with Stephen and became the scapegoat of the persecution. The Apostles were Hebrew-Christians, born and raised in Palestine. Furthermore, the Sanhedrin probably knew to persecute the Apostles would cause more problems than they could handle so they persecuted the rank and file Christians. Furthermore, Jerusalem was still the home base for Christianity, and the Apostles would have stayed in Jerusalem for a smooth functioning of the church, for without a strong home base, there can be no real evangelistic, missionary activity.

“And some devout men buried Stephen, and made a loud lamentation over him.” -- Apparently not every Jew in Jerusalem approved of the Sanhedrin's decision to kill Stephen by stoning. These “devout men” were religious Jews who, while not accepting the Christian way, still did not approve of deceit and mob rule which resulted in the death of Stephen. These religious Jews made “loud lamentation over him.” It was part of the Jewish funeral custom to wail and mourn at funerals. This wailing and mourning was done by unbelievers not true believers in Christ. True Christians have such of great hope of eternal life and resurrection there is no need for wailing and mourning. However, non-Christians wail, mourn and howl at funerals because they have no hope.

Christians have the three big questions about life answered. Where did I come from? I am a creature of God. What is my purpose for living? I am to glorify God. Where do I go when I die? I go back to be with God who saved me through Christ. Christians have real hope!

Persecution by Saul (8:3)

“But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.” -- This fourth persecution was headed up by the young, zealous Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus. He had heard Stephen preach. He probably even debated Stephen publicly and he hated everything Stephen stood for. Saul clearly saw that to accept what Stephen was preaching was to bring an end to the religious establishment of Israel. Perhaps Saul, later to become the Apostle Paul, had a tinge of conscience and was under conviction, and to cover up this conviction he became like an animal for the destruction of Christianity.

“And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him (Stephen) to death” (Acts 8:1).

“And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee. And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him’” (Acts 22:19, 20).

Try to picture young Saul, enraged over what he regarded as a heresy, trying to stamp it out with all the energy of his flesh, entering house after house, dragging men and women off and committing them to prison. This was the rage of a tortured conscience which tries, by zealous activity, to cover up its anxiety, emptiness and hurt. Yet, God had other plans for Saul of Tarsus. This man, in God's timing, would be converted. Saul of Tarsus the greatest adversary of the Christian Faith would become the Apostle Paul, the greatest evangelist of the Christian Faith. If God saved Saul of Tarsus, anyone can be saved, for he was the chief of sinners.

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into

service; even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all” (I Tim. 1:12-15).

Here we see God's sovereignty at work. God used Saul as an instrument to accomplish the purpose of getting the gospel to the world, and yet God will save this man through the gospel which he violently opposed. Only God is able to do the impossible. Often the least likely candidate for salvation from our human perspective is the one God moves on to save. God's ways are not our ways and they are past finding out.

Many listen, but heed not, Yet your task is crystal clear; Preach the Gospel, never doubting God will make His chosen hear!

Persecution Brings Proclamation (8:4)

“Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.” -- The result of persecution was an even more bold proclamation of the gospel. The Sanhedrin thought they were stopping the Christian movement by persecuting it. Instead, they managed to spread it. Furthermore, the Sanhedrin silenced the voice of Stephen who was upsetting the city of Jerusalem but without realizing it, they were awakening the voice of the Apostle Paul who upset the whole Roman empire. The Scripture says, “For the wrath of man shall praise Thee” (Psa. 76:10). God turns the tables on sinful, unbelievers and uses their activities to somehow further His own causes.

Notice carefully those who were scattered were not Apostles. They were just plain, ordinary Christians who went out spreading the good news of Jesus Christ wherever they went. God placed them in a pressure situation in order to allow them to develop their gifts and abilities in the area of evangelism.

The word for “preaching” here is ungelizo in the Greek and it means “the proclamation of a good message” or “the declaring of good news.” These were ordinary laymen who were “gossiping the gospel.” The message of Jesus Christ was on their lips. They were not preachers, Apostles, evangelists or ordained ministers, but laymen who knew Christ and wanted to make Him known to others. They were simply sharing about Christ and how He can change a life with all whom they came into contact. These early Christians understood the importance of getting the gospel out, for the gospel has a power within itself, coupled with the work of the Holy Spirit, to save men. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). These early Christians did not remain silent. They started “gospel fires” wherever they went.

This is the New Testament pattern. The gospel is to be spread by every Christian. Every Christian is to be a witness. Every Christian receives power from the Holy Spirit to be a witness. The lay people are to spread the faith. This concept, as a whole, has been lost for so many years in the church, but in our day it is being recovered. Has it been recovered in your life? As a lay person, are you spreading the faith wherever you go? Are you sharing Christ and gossiping the gospel? If you are not, you are not New Testament in your thinking. What is the greatest thing that ever happened to you? When you became a Christian. What then is the greatest thing you can do for another person? Help him to find Christ.

These early Christians proclaimed or shared Christ. They had never been to a Lay Institute for Evangelism. They had no tract like the Four Spiritual Laws. They had no pat three minute presentation of the gospel. No, they had Christ and they gladly shared Him with others, for He alone could save them. Techniques and methods of evangelism are good, providing we have a heart for evangelism, but without a heart for Christ and a heart for evangelism all human aids to evangelism are worthless. The early Christians were so filled up with and occupied with Christ that they had to speak of Him. Beloved, does the love of Christ hem you in on every side so you must speak of Him? Are you aware of God's terror so that you persuade men? Are you all things to all men so that you by all means might save some? Are you willing to endure all things for the sake of the elect that they might obtain salvation? May it never be said of us as it was of the Corinthians, “For some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame” (I Cor. 15:34).

God wants us all to speak up for Christ. However, there are two great errors in witnessing: (1) speaking too little and (2), speaking too much. The great art of witnessing is to know when to speak and when to be silent. There is a balance and God will give that balance if we have a heart for evangelism.

Dr. C. I. Scofield, author of the Scofield Bible, was saved in an interesting way. A man went into the office of Dr. Scofield at that time a noted lawyer. He was never trained in theology. The man asked if he might talk quietly and privately with him for a few minutes, and then he brought up the subject of salvation. Mr. Scofield began with his arguments which he always had ready. The man said, "Mr. Scofield, I did not come to argue. I cannot answer your questions, but I have come to ask you if you will accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior." That broke Dr. Scofield down. No one had ever asked him that question before. And before that man left the office, C. I. Scofield had trusted Christ. This layman knew when to speak to Scofield.

Oswald Chambers had a Scottish friend, John Cameron. Chambers went to visit him one day and John Cameron said to him, "If you get a chance to witness to my ploughman, please do so." Chambers said to Cameron, "Why don't you talk to him yourself? He is your ploughman?" Awhile later, Chambers heard from Cameron that the ploughman had been converted. He was saved in the following way. The ploughman through a series of circumstances had an opportunity to work with Mr. Cameron and watch his life. Everyone in the community knew John Cameron was an active witness for Christ and he had personally led a number of people to Christ. Some came to know the Lord right in the presence of this ploughman. But Cameron never talked to the ploughman. Finally one day the ploughman blurted out in his presence, "John, for God's sake talk to me about my soul or I am going to hell." Immediately Cameron led him to the Lord. The ploughman said, "Why haven't you talked to me before this?" "Perhaps you know the answer to that better than I," said Cameron. The ploughman said, "Well, I did say to my friends down in the village that when John Cameron spoke to me about Jesus Christ, I would really tell him off." Cameron answered, "I did not speak because the Holy Spirit had not prepared your heart to listen." Cameron knew when to be quiet.

PHILIP - Acts 8:5-8

Honoring Christ (8:5)

"And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them." -- This is our first introduction to Philip. This is not Philip the Apostle but Philip the deacon. The only connection between Saul and Philip is that Philip was trying to dodge Saul as much as possible, for he was out to get every preacher of Christ. God did not send the Apostles but a layman, a deacon and probably a business man to head up the evangelistic work in Samaria. We know very little about Philip. He was a Hellenistic, converted Jew who was full of faith and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5). His godly life caused the Apostles to appoint him to the office of deacon in the local church at Jerusalem. Philip was also an evangelist and had four daughters who were prophetesses, so we conclude he had "born again" children and a solid home life (Acts 21:8, 9). Philip was a layman who was completely dedicated to Jesus Christ, serving to the glory of God and obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Philip proclaimed Christ to people. The word here is karusso in the Greek which means "to herald the message." Philip had some special preaching gifts and could herald the message and yet he was only a layman. He preached Christ, not church, not reform, not good works, not baptism, not confirmation, not church membership, but Christ, the only Lord of the Universe and Savior for man's sins. Christianity is Christ, not churchianity. Christianity is regeneration from God, not religion. Christianity is a personal relationship with Christ, not a commitment to man-made rules and regulations.

The thrust of the Scripture shows us that New Testament Christianity was a lay-centered movement. The ministry was not carried on by a small group of professionals. The people were deeply involved in spreading the gospel.

Bill Bright of the Campus Crusade for Christ says that the modern church in relation to evangelism is like a football game. There are thousands of people in the stands, desperately in need of exercise, watching a handful of players

on the field, desperately in need of rest. The church must have the lay witness of its members or it will never effectively evangelize the world.

Heeding His Preaching (8:6)

“And the multitude with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs he was performing.” -- These Samaritans “gave attention” to what Philip had to say. There was a ring of truth to Philip’s message. There was a note of reality in the things he said. He spoke with authority, concern and love. As Philip preached, people stopped and listened. They said, “This man has something to say that is right on target.”

The mark of a genuine preacher is that he preaches the Bible and people stop and listen because there is a ring of truth in his message. The proclamation of the gospel always has about it the ring of truth and authority.

Healing the Sick (8:7)

“For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.” -- In Philip's ministry, there was a display of power. Apparently, Philip had the sign gift of healing which was given to him by the laying on of hands by the Apostles to identify Philip with the Apostolic ministry. Miracles were being performed which were freeing men of demonic spirits and physical ailments. Miracles, worked on the outside of men. were to portray the spiritual power of Christ which frees men from demonic influence and delivers the soul from the guilt and penalty of sin. Man is bound in the realm of the spirit by demonic activity and sin and they need to be set free from this bondage. Wherever the gospel goes it gives men liberty.

Happy City (8:8)

“And there was much rejoicing in that city.” -- The whole city of Samaria had heard about Jesus Christ and apparently many were genuinely saved. There was great rejoicing in Samaria, for wherever the gospel is received there is great joy. When people are set free spiritually, it always fills them full of joy. There was a tremendous revival in the city of Samaria. Salvation always causes a person to “rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8).

Most cities in America today are seething pools of human misery. Millions of people are living in squalor, poverty, filth and degradation. Their lousy external life is compounded with internal loneliness, depression and emptiness. What can help our cities? Better housing? No. More federal aid? No. Bigger and better social programs? No. People in our cities are sinners and unbelievers concerning Christ. Injustice and unrighteousness comes from the human, sinful heart, not from the environment. What our cities need is a massive turning to Jesus Christ who will give them an internal reason for living which in turn will have a drastic effect on their environment. The glory of the gospel is always that, wherever it goes, even though it may not immediately change the outward circumstances, it does fill people with joy and gives them a new motivation in dealing with environmental problems.

CONCLUSION

Are you without Christ? If you are, I want to remind you that Philip preached Christ to people. He did not preach taboos, man-made rules, legalistic principles, reformation or ethics. He preached Christ who supernaturally changes a life. Philip preached Christ, the God-Man, is Messiah. Christ bore the sins of sinners in His body and paid the price for sin in full. He bore man's curse, judgment and hell. He rose from the dead so men might share the eternal, resurrected life of Christ. He has been exalted to the right hand of the Father to be a Savior. All who come to Christ, surrender to Him and put their trust in Him shall be saved.

Are you saved? Have you trusted in Christ? Sin has separated you from God and you are alienated, empty, lonely and at the point of despair until Christ comes into your life. Christ alone can set you free from the shackles

of sin. Christ alone can cause your depressed heart to rejoice. What must you do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved!